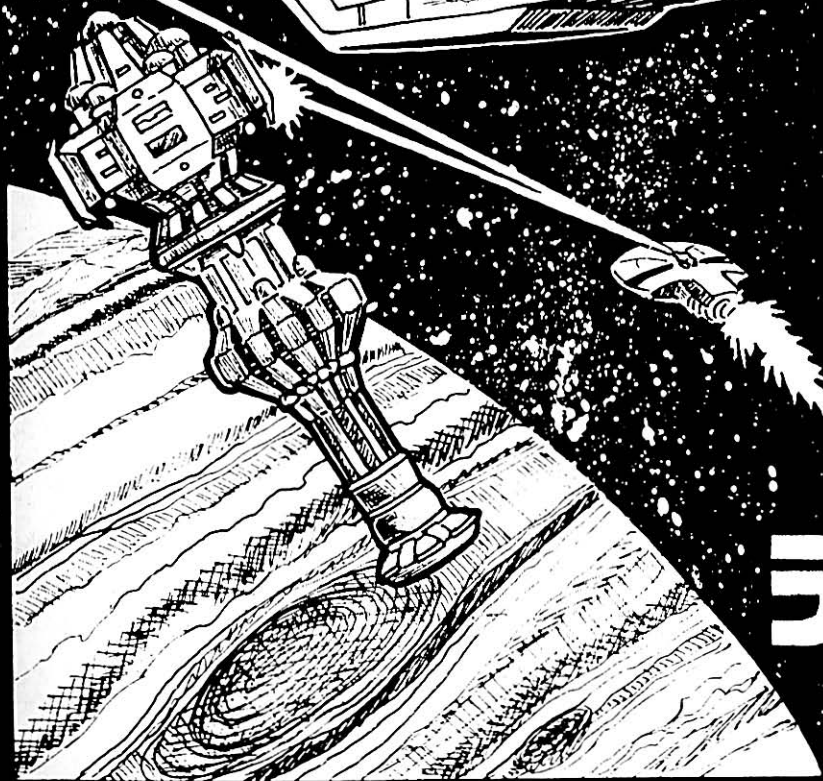


THE TRAVELLER CHRONICLE

\$3.50



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The Traveller Chronicle

**A Magazine
Devoted To
Traveller In All Of
Its Forms**

Issue #3 \$3.50US
Jan/Feb/Mar 1994

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Submissions: We are looking for good articles and illustrations for T.T.C. When submitting manuscripts and artwork enclose a stamped and self-addressed envelope with appropriate postage for return. We also would appreciate that submissions be presented on IBM compatible diskettes along with the hardcopy.

The Editor Speaks...

The third issue of The Traveller Chronicle is here and we are going strong!!! Four distributors, Armoury, Wargames West, Everything Unreal, and Liberty Hobby Distributors, picked up TTC with the second issue. That and the word getting around means that we have managed to sell over 300 copies of issue two. (For those of you reading TTC for the first time, we do still have a few copies off issues one and two left, but you had better hurry!)

Traveller itself has picked up with articles in *Challenge* covering the New Era, the *TNE Player's Forms*, *Fire*, *Fusion*, & *Steel*, *Deluxe Traveller* coming out from GDW, and RAFM finally releasing the line of starship miniatures. I also received the final copy of the Traveller Navigator and it is very nice! I had wanted to write up an impressive review of the Navigator, but space constraints didn't allow me to. If you have Windows™, get this product!

Sword of the Knight is working on a magazine swap with Jae Campbell of Signal-GK. Signal-GK, for those of you unaware of this product, is a British fanzine detailing Dagudashaag sector. Its forty plus pages are chocked full of interesting and informative articles. Additionally, Jae almost always throws little extras in. We are planning on trading for 50 copies of Signal-GK, so let us know if you are interested. Single issues will run \$4.00US with a 3-issue subscription running \$12.00. It's a good 'zine, check it out...

Lastly, in issue two, I promised there would be a new contest and here it is. I want you to send me something little that can be put in the magazine. A fake classified ad (like the one in this issue), an ad for an item in the Traveller universe (like the Zilan Eiswein ad in issue two), an identification badge, whatever! Be creative. You don't have to be a major artist or writer to come up with something witty or funny. Just try. The prize is a grab bag of old, odd Traveller tidbits, including the Cardboard Heroes from Steve Jackson Games, the Traveller Badge Set from that company 'down under', and more! So send in those entries. I'm looking forward to seeing how creative you can be!

Happy Travelling! From those of us Behind the Claw...

Kevin Knight

News Flash!!!

I just came across a pile of the old folio adventures that the Keith brothers did way back when! They include *Fleetwatch*, *Salvage Mission*, and *Flight of the Stag*. Hmmmm... what should I do with these? How about give them away! The first thirty people to subscribe or renew their subscription will receive a free copy of EACH one of these adventures! Please, no pushing or shoving! Later daze...

The Far Frontiers

States of the Far Frontiers

(continued from Issue 2)

The Protectorate:

The Protectorate is the most powerful pro-Imperial state in the Far Frontiers sector. Covering a large area of the Taemerlyk and Inverness subsectors, it is composed of twenty-nine stellar systems, which, in combined defence and singleness of purpose, have maintained their independence in the face of Zhodani expansion. The Protectorate is governed by a loose political body called the High Council. The Council is composed of one representative from each member planet, and has striven to retain the policy of isolationism set down when the Protectorate was formed in 536 Imperial.

Self-sufficiency is the primary aim of Protectorate planning. Accordingly, many items that were almost exclusively imported in the past (usually from the Imperium) are now in the intermediate stages of being produced domestically. This is particularly apparent in the Protectorate

shipbuilding industry.

Headquartered in the orbiting construction yards of the planet Wa-Lu/Taemerlyk, government subsidized warship and merchantman construction has reached a level second only in quality to the nearby independent planet Freedonia.

The Protectorate ended its neutral stance and became a supporter of Imperial policy in the year 788. At this time, a Zhodani-inspired insurrection took place in the neighboring Union of Garth, a region originally settled by Protectorate colonists and always a close ally. This rebellion resulted in the formation of the Four Worlds, a state which has maintained pro-Zhodani sympathies since gaining its independence from Garth. This situation continues to cause considerable danger as all three powers involved maintain naval squadrons along their borders, and incidents occur with frightening regularity.

The Protectorate government is composed of a number of agencies. The Protectorate Naval Administration operates as a local peace-keeping force in times of calm, but when activated to full alert status it serves as the central cadre for the combined Protectorate Planetary Navies. Based on Calamain/Taemerlyk, the PNA keeps its main fleet units in reserve and only activates them in time of emergency or for training cruises.

Another major governmental agency is the Internal Security Force. The ISF is responsible for the maintenance of order within the interstellar community; composed of the Combined Services Contingent (undercover agents)

Taemerlyk Subsector

Subsector K of the Far Frontiers

Name	Hex	UWP	Bases	Trade Codes	TPBG	AI	Stellar
Morlay	0102	D798542-4		Ag Ni	G824		G9 V
Fenner	0103	A230335-D	B	Ni Po	G704		A2 V MD
Excaped	0104	D300513-A		Ni Va	G414		G9 V M8 V
Eshaar	0206	E6C4839-3		FI	G120		F8 V
Zishilicti	0208	BAA6698-A		Ni FI	A124	W	K7 V
Fafris	0210	B6B49A7-9		FI	G910		F6 V
Bindar	0303	B6A3654-A		Ni FI	G601	P	F4 III
Uldor	0308	A787A98-B	N	Ca	A424	W	F7 V
Dloshl	0309	B697998-A		In	A822	W	F7 V
DiCule	0310	C695643-5		Ag Ni	G304		G4 V
Bigg's World	0401	A797A99-9		In	G201	P	F7 V
Zyra	0404	A9878D9-B			G500	P	F7 IV
Hearth	0407	B456798-A		Ag	A670	W	G4 V
Ulint	0408	B543885-A	N		G920		F2 V
Jacobi	0502	X610000-0		De Un	G002	P	M7 III MD
Amanamanim	0505	A574A46-B	N	In	G101	P	G6 IV
Agravaine	0507	A5006A9-A		Na Ni Va	G705	U	M2 V MD
Rellon	0509	B880666-6		Ni	G613	U	G0 V
Bummer	0601	ACCA489-B		Ni FI Wa	G202	P	M8 V
Wa-Lu	0604	A372513-B	S	Ni	G211	P	G6 III
Quitalos	0605	A667889-B	N	Ri	G923	P	F2 V MD
Garth	0608	A669753-B	N	Ca Ri	G422	U	F0 V MD
Pshtajitlatl	0702	A795974-B	S	In	G204	P	F0 V
Yakutz	0703	A885889-B	S	Ri	G803	P	K5 V
Bloemtol	0708	E7C3657-A		Ni FI	G304	U	M0 II
Caractacalla	0802	A793AC9-C	B	Ca In	G103	P	G6 V
Calamain	0804	A000460-B	B	As Ni	R211	P	M4 V
Kintara	0805	A454679-9		Ag Ni	G101	P	A3 V
Numicta	0808	D9A7A69-6		FI	G901	U	F9 V

The Taemerlyk subsector contains 29 stellar systems with a total population of 67.6 billion. The highest population is 24 billion at Caractacalla; the highest tech level is D at Fenner. Note that all naval bases within the Protectorate, with the exception of Calamain, are for the respective planetary navies. Some planets still retain their ancient Vlazhdumecta name, but most have been renamed by the early human settlers. Worlds labelled "W" belong to the Four Worlds; those labelled "U" belong to the Union of Garth; those labelled "P" belong to the Protectorate.

and the Para-military Arm, the ISF also doubles as the cadre of the Combined Protectorate Army in time of crisis. The ISF is headquartered on the frozen

planetoid Titus, in the capital system of Caractacalla/Taemerlyk. The last major government department is the Protectorate News Service, responsible for the

THE FAR FRONTIERS

MAP LEGEND

World Type

- Water Present
- No Water Present

Asteroid Belt

- ☄ Asteroid Belt

Travel Zones

- ⤴ Amber Zone
- ⤵ Red Zone

Population Key

- PRINUS Plus One Billion
- Secundus Minus One Billion

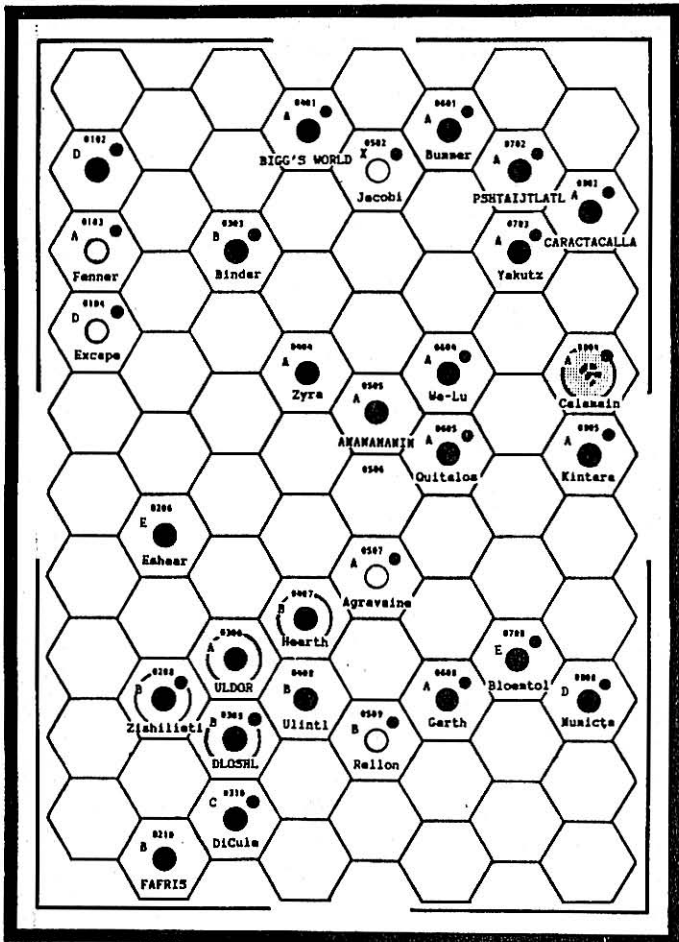
Gas Giant

- ☉ Gas Giant
- ☾ Tertius

Starport Type

Subsector Grid

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P



CAERMERLYK

Inverness Subsector

Subsector L of the Far Frontiers

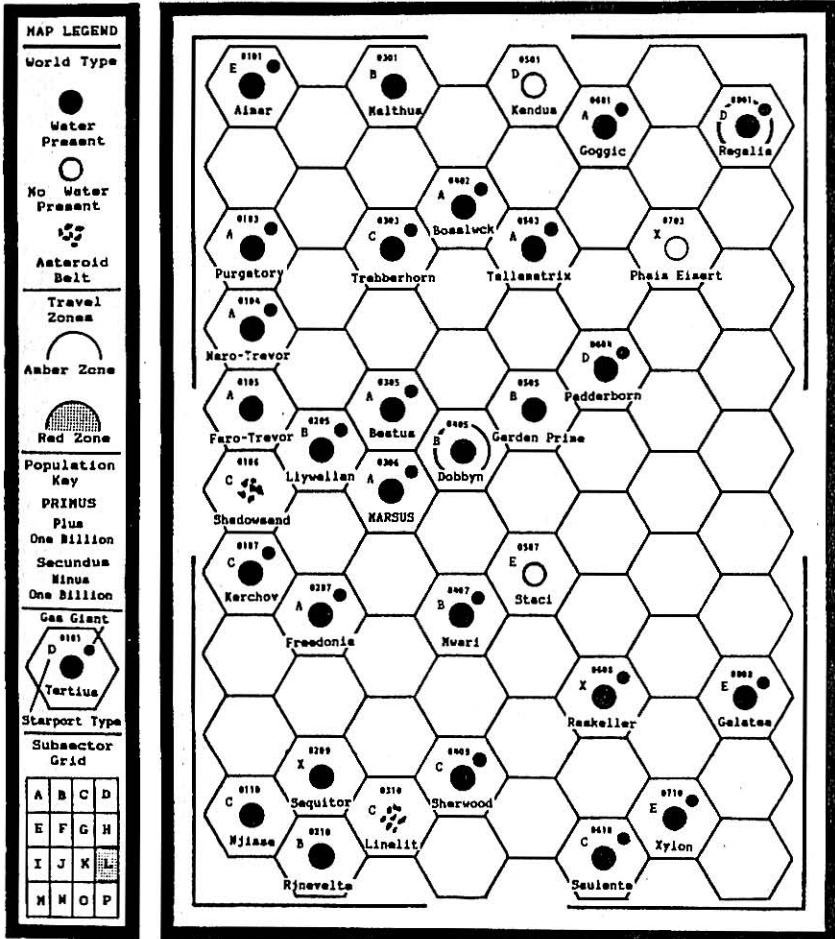
Name	Hex	UWP	Bases	Trade Codes	TPBG	AI	Stellar
Aimar	0101	E972678-3		Ni	G801	P	F4 III
Purgatory	0103	A7A9301-B		Ni FI	G111	P	K3 V
Naro-Trevor	0104	A655524-9		Ag Ni	G101	P	K8 V
Faro-Trevor	0105	A767745-8		Ag Ri	G200	P	K8 IV
Shadowsand	0106	C000419-B		As Ni Mi	G510		G4 V
Kerchov	0107	C257567-D		Ag Ni	G704		F4 V
Njisse	0110	C755352-A		Ni	G900		F5 V
Llywellan	0205	BA6A788-B		Ri Wa	G424	P	F4 V MD
Freedonia	0207	A7686C0-F	N	Ag Ni	G804		F3 V
Sequitor	0209	X566459-3		Ni	G200		F9 V MD
Rjnevelte	0210	B626557-D		Ni	G500		G9 V
Malthus	0301	B323501-9	S	Ni	G420	P	G2 V
Trebberhorn	0303	C6587D9-8		Ag	G103	P	G3 V
Bestus	0305	A685621-B		Ag Ni	G125	P	F9 V
Marsus	0306	A9989B9-A	N	In	G102	P	F3 V
Linelit	0310	C000310-7		As Ni	G900		M9 V
Bosslwck	0402	A7958A9-B	N		G903	P	G3 V
Bobbyn	0405	B976775-8		Ag	A600	P	F5 V MD
Mwari	0407	B444411-A		Ni	G702		G7 V
Sherwood	0409	C584574-5		Ag Ni	G203		F4 V
Kendus	0501	D500889-7		Va	G400	P	F4 V MD
Tallamatrix	0503	A593853-A	N		G402	P	G2 VI
Garden Prime	0505	B1314D9-B		Ni	G420		F3 V MD
Staci	0507	E300579-5		Ni Va	G520		M5 V
Goggic	0601	A694610-B	S	Ni	G301	P	K7 V
Padderborn	0604	D444466-7		Ni	G103	P	G3 V
Raskeller	0608	X928440-6		Ni	G704	M	K4 V
Saulente	0610	C868755-B	S	Ag Ri	G912	M	F4 V MD
Phais Eisert	0703	X210000-0		De Un	G125	P	M0 V MD
Xylon	0710	E6A2426-4		Ni FI	G603	M	G6 V
Regalia	0801	D521200-7		Ni Po	A902	P	F0 IV G3 V
Galatea	0808	E689600-5		Ni	G502		F3 V MD

Inverness subsector contains 32 star systems with a total population of 36.5 billion. The highest planetary population is 8.7 billion, on Marus. The highest tech level is F, on Freedonia. Note that all naval bases within the Protectorate are for the respective planetary navies. Worlds labelled "P" belong to the Protectorate; those labelled "M" belong to the Mnemosyne Principality.

gathering and distribution of interstellar and planetary news. Programs are produced and transmitted from PNS office studios

or from other private communications systems. The PNS also operates an interstellar shuttle service with a number of leased

THE FAR FRONTIERS



INVERNESS

Wulfek Subsector

Subsector M of the Far Frontiers

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hex</u>	<u>UWP</u>	<u>Bases</u>	<u>Trade Codes</u>	<u>TPBG</u>	<u>AI</u>	<u>Stellar</u>
Echocha	0104	C443457-9		Ni	G504		G6 V
Follette	0108	D2525A9-7		Ni	G500		F5 V
Hrilopar	0202	E622300-6		Ni Po	G912		M1V M3 V
Reseca	0206	C465997-A			G603	C	G7 V MD
Ort	0207	D66A669-7		Ni Wa	G920	C	F4 V MD
Velpore	0210	EA99422-8		Ni	G700		F8 V MD
Charon	0302	X442000-0		Un	G220		G8 V
Ralcoan	0304	A782788-9	S	Ni	G324	C	F3 V
Onada	0310	B7676B5-9		Ag	G700	C	F6 V MD
Zherlicka	0404	A876939-E	N	In	G124	C	F9 V MD
Zephron	0405	B631939-C		Na	G314	C	G9 V
Mamnon	0406	B583898-C			G420	C	F3 V MD
Thara	0409	A678773-A			G624	C	G7 V
Endomin	0410	B765899-B	S	Ri	G825	C	F3 V
Emorie	0503	E650520-3		De Ni Po	A503		F5 V
Sherzade	0504	BA92654-A		Ni	G204	C	F6 V MD
Aemelius	0507	C311543-9		Ic Ni	G404	C	G4 IV
Jellicoe	0601	B7748D9-B			G304		F0 V
Rondomin	0604	B221751-9		Na Po	G920	C	M7 V
Domitar	0606	D443400-8		Ni	G101	C	F3 V
Meruritom	0608	CBA0511-A		Ni	G613	C	K3 V
Balin	0610	B000300-B		As Ni Rs	G600	C	A7 V G7 V
Dingus	0702	E776500-4		Ag	G902		G7 V
Ichita	0704	C282799-A			G923	C	F6 V MD
Hectalus	0706	D324555-8		Ni	G713	C	M1 IV M4 V
Dunkel	0708	C8664B6-C		Ni	G400	C	F4 V MD
Osmice	0710	B432885-B		Na	G705	C	M3 V
Wulp-PQ	0802	X582000-0		Ni	G512		F8 V MD
Endus	0804	D778973-C		In	G721	C	F1 V MD
Magnias	0806	B685697-A		Ri	G902	C	F4 V MD
Polletus	0807	B7B1559-B	S	Ni FI	G314	C	K7 V
Allegrim	0809	C465410-A		Ni	G503	C	F7 V MD

There are 32 worlds in Wulfek subsector, with a total population of 12.6 billion. The highest population is 3.4 billion on Zherlicka, and the highest tech level is E, also at Zherlicka. Worlds labelled "C" are part of the Colonade Administration District.

scoutships.

The Protectorate is a stabilizing influence in the Far Frontiers. Interested in continuing the status quo, the Protectorate can be relied

upon to maintain its domination of interstellar affairs in the Taemerlyk and Inverness subsectors.

The Four Worlds: The only pro-

THE FAR FRONTIERS

MAP LEGEND

World Type

- Water Present
- No Water Present
- ☄ Asteroid Belt
- ⌒ Travel Zones
- ⌒ Amber Zone
- ⌒ Red Zone

Population Key

PRIMUS
+ One Billion

SECUNDUS
+ One Billion

TERTIUS
+ One Billion

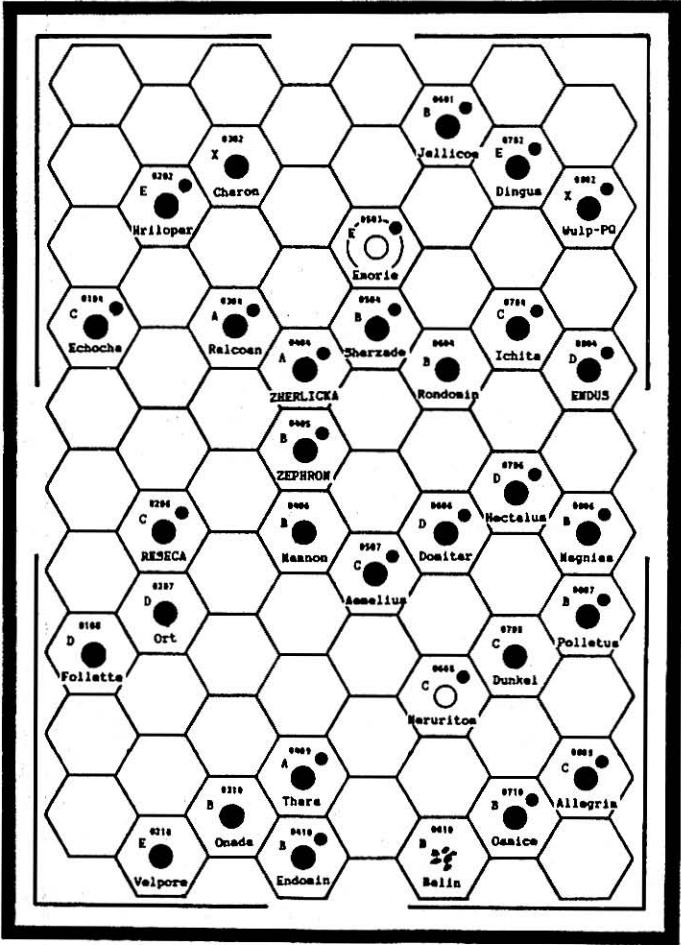
Gas Giant

○ D Tartina

Starport Type

Subsector Grid

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P



WULFEK

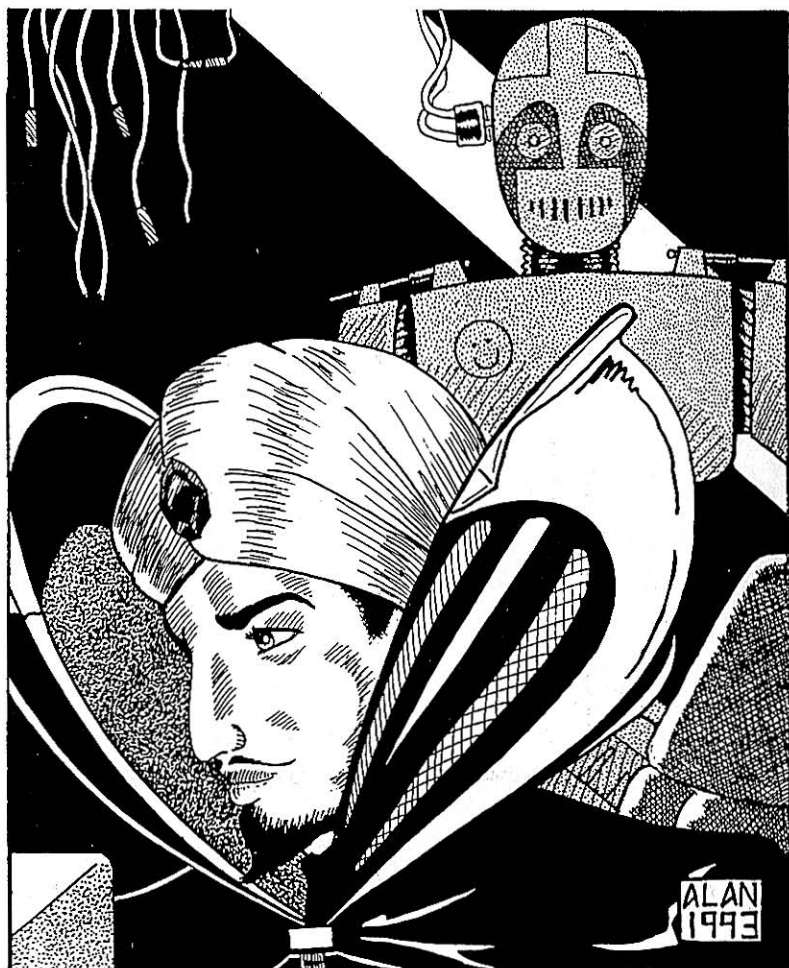
Zhodani stat in the Taemerlyk subsector. The Four Worlds rebelled from the Union of Farth during a Zhodani-supported insurrection in 788 Imperial. Throughout their membership in the Union of Garth, the Four Worlds were never satisfied with the kind of representation they received in the Union's Parliament of Industry. These four planets felt that the other members of the Union considered them backward and made a secret pact with the Zhodani Consulate in 785 Imperial, leading to covert military

and economic aid for an agreement that Zhodani ships and personnel could use any port facilities in the Four Worlds. This culminated in the successful revolt of the Four Worlds from the Union of Garth long

before they or their stronger ally, the Protectorate, could react. After a strong warning from the Zhodani not to interfere, the chance of recapturing the Four Worlds was lost.

The Four Worlds are ruled by an impersonal bureaucracy headquartered on Uldor. Most of the population is satisfied with this arrangement and have no qualms about their friendship with the Zhodani.

The area remains a major trouble spot in the Far Frontiers, and all



Four World systems have been rated as Amber Zones.

The Union of Garth: A pro-Imperial state in the Taemerlyk subsector, the Union was originally settled by citizens of the Protectorate over five hundred years ago. Granted independence in 695 Imperial, the Union of Garth quickly became a strong supporter of the Protectorate, accepting military and economic aid. This situation continued until 788 Imperial, when a Zhodani-supported insurrection of the four Union worlds of Uldor, Dloshl, Hearth, and Zishilict threw the Union of Garth into civil war. Some rumors that this was due to the equal status given to Vlazhdumecta in relation to human settlers have never been proven. In any case, the Four Worlds allied themselves in a secret pact with the Zhodani, who sent lend-lease warships and weapons for future treaty considerations. In a well-coordinated assault, all Union installations on the four planets were captured and the Four Worlds broke free from the Union.

To ensure that no attempt at recapture would be made, diplomatic messages were sent to the Union of Garth and the Protectorate from the Zhodani, advising them of the wisdom of noninterference. Both governments were unprepared for war, and were forced to heed the warning (but not before the Protectorate was invaded by a squadron of Zhodani colonial cruisers in a show of force). This caused the Protectorate and the Union of Garth to abandon their neutral stance and become Imperial supporters. Since that time, Imperial and Zhodani interest in the

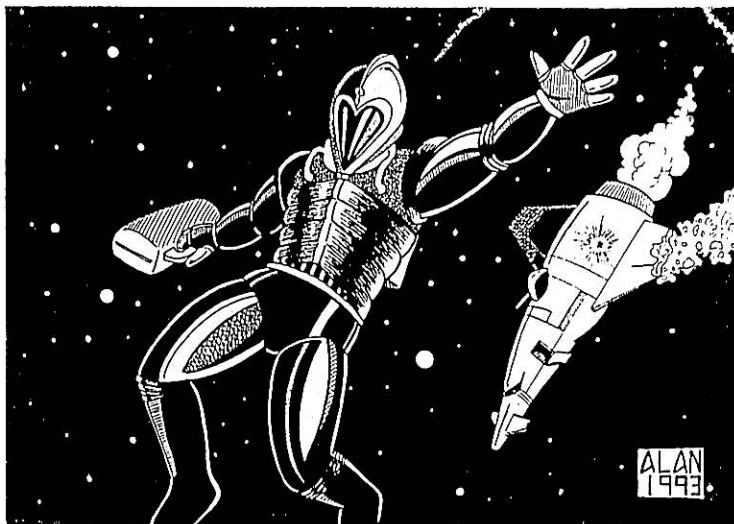
area has diminished and little is seen of those powers save for various diplomatic missions.

The Union of Garth is ruled by King Bors XXIX, as of 1101 Imperial. Every ten years the King comes up for reappointment by the Parliament of Industry on Garth. This governmental body is composed of the various planet's leading merchants, technologists, and corporate executives.

Besides passing laws and raising taxes, the Parliament insures the continued advance in technological levels of the various Union planets.

Colonade Administration

District: A pro-Zhodani state extending into the Wulfeck subsector of the Far Frontiers sector, and the Issoudun and Andwella subsectors of the Vanguard Reaches. The region was originally settled by Vlazhdumecta who acquired starfaring technology from the Zhodani. The arrival of Imperial colonists, between 400 - 600 Imperial, found the inhabitants of the area more reluctant to deal with outsiders than most Vlazhdumecta worlds. With their technical superiority, however, the newcomers were able to convince the inhabitants of the wisdom of cooperation. The Administration District was formally established as a loose federation of worlds united by bonds of trade and mutual defense, by a treaty dated 576 Imperial. At this time, the District included signatory members from as far away as the Antideluvia and Cabala subsectors. These areas, and all of Wulfeck, Issoudun, and Andwella subsectors, were claimed as Colonade space.



distant human state in the Far Frontiers from the Imperium, the Colonade government naturally thought it had more in common with the nearby Zhodani. In

In the period 576-750 Imperial, the District adopted a policy of friendship and assistance to incoming settlers. There were a number of undeveloped worlds within the District and the Colonade government was more than happy to have settlers establish themselves there, providing they swore allegiance to the CAD.

In 753 Imperial, the Colonade worlds in Antideluvia subsector became increasingly restive under District authority. They declared their independence from the District and enforced this declaration in notable victories over Colonade forces at Atlantis and Arbelletia in the Antideluvia subsector. The Colonade at length agreed to recognize the independence of what some historians have called the "Splinter Worlds". These systems soon reorganized themselves into the present day Salinakin Concordance.

During the continuing tensions between the Third Imperium and the Zhodani Consulate, the Colonade Administration District became a staunch supporter of the Zhodani cause. Being the most

873 Imperial, the first of several mutual assistance treaties between them were signed. Some Zhodani aid has arrived in the District over the years since, but these treaties' merit is highly dubious at the present time. This has not seemed to diminish the loyalty the Colonade Administration District has for the Zhodani. In fact, the Colonade world of Zherlicka (Wulfbeck 0504), an important terminus on the jump route to the Consulate, is often called "Little Zhodane," due to the highly visible Zhodani presence there in the form of diplomatic and trade missions of larger than usual size.

The Colonade Administration District is one of the most powerful Zhodani client states in the Far Frontiers. Although very little actual aid gets through from the Consulate (as is the case for the other states in the Far Frontiers), the Colonade government remains a possible staging area for any future operations the Zhodani might wish to conduct in the Rimward Reach of the Far Frontiers.

-- Dale Kemper --

A Bonnie Mess

SETUP

This adventure is for two to eight characters. There is no restriction on type, but some of the characters should have space skills: pilot and engineering are required for the job.

Dates: All dates in this adventure correspond with the Imperial calendar. The starting date for this adventure is 132-1120. Although this adventure is set during early 1120, TNE rules are used. Since Vargr in the 1200's are not much different than those in the 1120's, this could easily be converted for use with a Regency Campaign.

Place: The adventure begins on the world of Enope/Regina/Spinward Marches. The characters were travelling from Feri to Moughas by mid passage and got bumped here at Enope. Regardless of the funds the characters have, transport off the world is scarce because of increased Vargr activity at this end of the sector. As the adventure opens, the characters have found a job offer which could get them to where they want to go.

Motivation: One or more of the characters should have a deeper motivation for going on this mission and ultimately investigating Stanwyk's activities. Some suggestions are: one of the former crew of the *Bonnie Venture* is a friend or relative of the character; the characters have friend, relatives or business contacts on Beck's World which are endangered by the fighting there; the characters have

friends or relatives who were wounded in the fighting on Beck's World by an Imperial weapon in Vargr hands; or the character(s) have been hired to investigate Stanwyk's activities.

Playtesters for this adventure: Victor Jones, Kerry Harrison, and Kate Lebherz Gelinaz.

SUMMARY OF NUGGETS

The characters are hired by a patron to perform a routine repair and delivery job on his yacht. Part of the problem comes from the increased Vargr activity in the area. While performing their mission, they uncover some questionable dealings. What they do with what they find out is up to them.

The following summaries tell you what each nugget covers.

- 1. A WAY OFF THIS ROCK (key):** The characters contacted Simon Stanwyk about an advertisement for work. Unwilling to discuss the details over the com line, he arranged for them to meet him at the Silver Stallion. He will discuss the details with them in that place.
- 2. ON THE WHITE LIGHTNING:** The *White Lightning* is the vessel Stanwyk chartered to carry the characters to the *Bonnie Venture*. During the flight, they can learn something about their patron, the situation at Beck's World, and/or about the *Bonnie Venture*.

3. OUT ON A LIMB: The characters arrive at the ship that they are to repair. As soon as all personnel and supplies are transferred, the *White Lightning* leaves for Beck's World. The characters then are on their own and have to set up housekeeping on the ship.

NOTE: Nuggets 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 form a "Nugget Block". They can be performed in any order. However,

Nugget 6 must be performed before moving to Nugget 10. Both Nuggets 6 and 7 must be performed before moving to Nugget 14. Otherwise, the characters can freely leave this "Nugget Block" and return for more repairs/investigation at a later time.

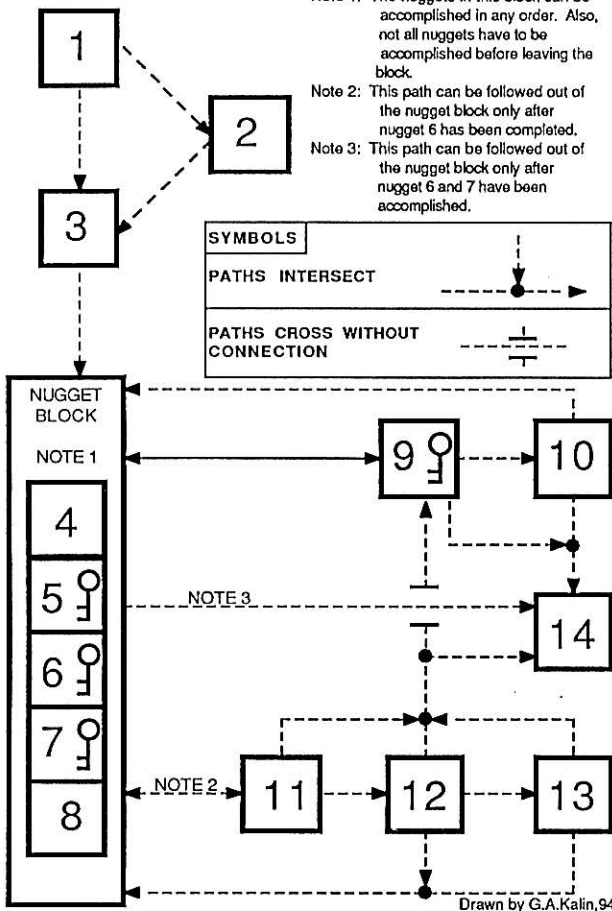
4. VARGR HAIR ON THE CARPET: The first time a character enters the lounge, a dead Vargr will be found. This was the Vargr Captain who had come to pay Stanwyk for the weapons. The Vargr's presence here gives some credence to Stanwyk's story.

5. WHAT'S THIS DOING HERE? (key): There is a hole in the cargo bay door which must be repaired before the cargo bay can be repressurized. One of the cargo containers was damaged by shrapnel and shredded paper from that container is floating in the cargo bay.

6. WE NEED POWER NOW! (key): The characters have entered engineering section to repair the power plant and restore life to this floating hulk. With power,

A BONNIE MESS NUGGET FLOW DIAGRAM

- Note 1: The nuggets in this block can be accomplished in any order. Also, not all nuggets have to be accomplished before leaving the block.
- Note 2: This path can be followed out of the nugget block only after nugget 6 has been completed.
- Note 3: This path can be followed out of the nugget block only after nugget 6 and 7 have been accomplished.



Drawn by G.A.Kalin, 94

they can get it moving again, restore life support, use sensors, and, if necessary, use the weapons.

7. AND WHO MIGHT THIS BE?

(key): The characters performing repairs on the fuel tank discover a body stuffed inside. It is the former engineer of the *Bonnie Venture*.

8. LAIR OF LUXURY: Whether to learn more about their patron, or to live in luxury while they have a chance, the characters have entered Stanwyk's suite. They are met with an unusually rich comfort and perhaps a few surprises.

9. WE'VE GOT COMPANY! (key):

The character's job is complicated by the return of the Vargr trying to obtain the weapons in the *Bonnie Venture's* cargo bay. To increase tension, you might want to conduct this Nugget before the characters complete Nugget 6.

10. LET'S TALK THIS OVER: If fought to a stalemate, the Vargr offer to let the characters leave peacefully if they surrender the cargo which they purchased from Stanwyk.

11. GET IT ON DOWN: Although not required by Stanwyk, the characters may wish to recover the *Bonnie Venture's* ship's boat. To do so requires the characters get to the world's surface. Since the *Bonnie Venture's* contra-grav is destroyed, they will have to find another means.

12. WHICH WAY DID THEY GO?: The characters might think that the

former crew of the *Bonnie Venture* may still be on Beck's World. If the situation has aroused the characters' curiosity, they may wish to find them.

13. SOMETHING DOESN'T JIVE

HERE: The characters have caught up with the former crew of the *Bonnie Venture*, and have persuaded them to tell their story.

14. SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?:

Although the main thrust of the story is the discovery and prevention of the gun smuggling plot, the story doesn't stop there. Once the ship is repaired and the characters are aware of the plot, they will probably want to do something about it.

1. A WAY OFF THIS ROCK

Characters meet with a patron.

Location is Enope.

Scene: As the characters enter the Silver Stallion, they must pause to let their eyes adjust to the darkness, for the only light is from the dim globes on each table and above the bar. Screeching synthesized tones radiate from a live band's amplifiers, while dancers attempt to synchronize their motions to the jangling rhythm. Since this is a spacers' hang out, most of the customers' vessels can be identified by patches on their clothing, except for one man in a metallic blue jumpsuit, and accompanied by two young women. That must be the patron they came to see.

Action: Stanwyk has a problem. He has a disabled ship in a system one

parsec away. The original crew is on a world in that system, but he doesn't want to use them, because they would ask questions he doesn't want to answer. He feels it is better just to leave them stranded there, figuring that they will probably be killed by Vargr sooner or later.

What Stanwyk offers the characters is CR 10,000 each and passage to one world within four parsecs of Enope. All characters who wish to accept the passage must be going to the same destination.

To negotiate with Stanwyk for a better deal is an Average Carousing task.

The job has basically three phases. The first is travel to Beck's World, where his yacht, the *Bonnie Venture*, is drifting in space. He has arranged transport aboard the *White Lightning*. The second is to repair the *Bonnie Venture*. Stanwyk will supply the parts he thinks it needs, and some other basic items the group will require to accomplish this task. The third part is to deliver the *Bonnie Venture* to him here at Enope. He will supply a code to let them access the computer for routine operations. The computer was set to fly to Enope on its next jump. This program has a second access code which Stanwyk will not provide. The *White Lightning* will stop back by the *Bonnie Venture* after one week to check progress, and pick up the characters if they are unable to repair that vessel.

If asked, Stanwyk will provide the following story to the characters of the events leading to the disabling of the *Bonnie Venture*:

He was travelling to Beck's World to visit a friend, and carrying some grain as cargo. After arriving in the system, they were attacked by Vargr. The Vargr ship hit and disabled the power plant. The engineer was blown out into space and lost. The rest of the crew mutinied and abandoned ship, taking the ship's boat with them and leaving Stanwyk on board alone. Several of the Vargr boarded and started searching the ship. Stanwyk managed to kill one of them just as a lot of commotion was coming over broadband radio. The rest of the Vargr left the *Bonnie Venture* in a hurry and the reason soon became apparent. A Imperial Naval vessel happened to be in the neighborhood and noticed the attack. As they approached, the Vargr panicked and left. Stanwyk prepared the ship's computer, tapping off some emergency power, and convinced the Naval commander to give him a ride to the planet. The Navy placed a beacon on the *Bonnie Venture* to prevent salvage jumpers from claiming the ship (the beacon is still there). Stanwyk transferred to the *White Lightning* in orbit and has been chartering the ship since then.

Stanwyk will fabricate the name of the Imperial Naval Ship and its commander if asked. If he gave the real names, there would be a possibility that the characters might encounter that ship and ask embarrassing questions. If ex-Navy characters think they should know whether Stanwyk was naming a real ship and commander, remind them that even the ships in the Domain of Deneb run into the thousands, and it is unlikely that most characters

would know all their names and commanders. If that doesn't work, remind them that they have been out of the service for awhile, and things change.

Stanwyk's jumpsuit is actually a tailored ballistic weave body suit. If you want to raise suspicions early in the scenario use the following scene. Just after business is concluded, two Imperial Marines enter the bar, looking like they are on official business. Stanwyk will send his companions to distract the Marines while he slips out of the bar. The Marines are on duty, but

they are only here to make sure that off duty Marines are not getting into trouble. They are not looking for Stanwyk. If questioned about it, Stanwyk will pass it off as coincidence that he left as they arrived.

2. ON THE WHITE LIGHTNING

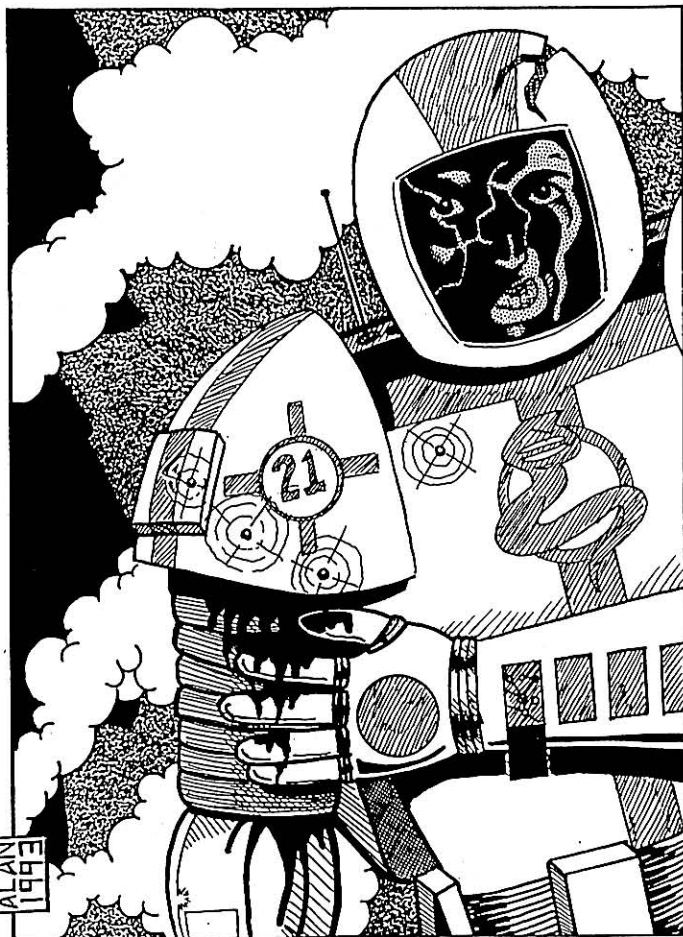
Characters travel to the job.

Location is the trader *White Lightning*.

Scene: The atmosphere in the lounge is jovial as the crew sits around playing cards. A multi-

colored pile of gaming chips is in the middle of the round table. There are extra seats at the table, and the characters are invited to take a seat and join the game.

Action: The characters will have several opportunities to interact with the crew of the *White Lightning* as they travel to Beck's World. During their conversations, they may learn information which may



Location is on the *Bonnie Venture*.

Scene: As the characters enter the darkened ship's lounge, a shadowy movement catches the corner of their eye. As they turn their lights in that direction, they see a figure in a Vargr style vacc suit.

Action: The dead Vargr is in an advanced stage of decomposition, having been here five weeks.

To determine when the Vargr was killed is a Difficult Medical (Diagnose) task.

The body is sealed up in the vacc suit, which is why the smell of decay did not permeate the ship. Characters who are inclined to shoot first and ask questions later will release the smell to the ship's atmosphere if they penetrate the suit.

A close examination will show a laser burn through the chest of the vacc suit right above where the Vargr's heart is located. Because it barely penetrated,

the Vargr's TL-13 vacc suit sealed.

The Vargr has a snub pistol in a

holster on his belt. The weapon has a full magazine, and the extra magazines in the belt's pouches are also full. This should indicate to the characters that the weapon was not

fired while its owner was on the *Bonnie Venture*. Furthermore, a hostile intruder would likely have had his weapon draw.

After Stanwyk killed the Vargr with a single laser shot through the heart, he shut the vacc suit's visor and left him to float to give support to the story he was devising.

5. WHAT'S THIS DOING HERE?

Characters go to repair the cargo bay.

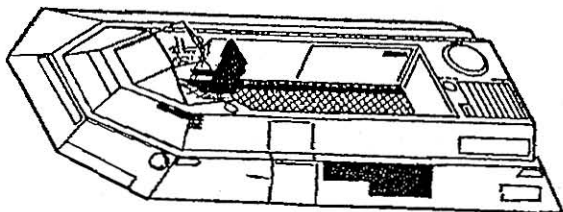
Location is on the *Bonnie Venture*.

Scene: The door to the cargo bay slid open. Vision is largely obscured by stringy white bits of material floating around the cargo containers. The scene is reminiscent of snowfall.

Action: The cargo consist of a number of standard 4 kiloliter pressurized cargo containers. The cargo manifest states that there is grain in these containers, but that is obviously not grain floating throughout the cargo bay. If the

characters investigate, they will find that the ruptured cargo container has several wooden boxes in with paper packing. If they open

the top of this (or any) container, they will indeed find grain, down about .5 meters to a false bottom. Under that false bottom are cases of TL 5 rifles and submachineguns



with ammunition for them. It should be obvious to the characters that someone, probably Stanwyk, was involved in gun smuggling.

The retreating Vargr vessel had time to fire one shot at the *Bonnie Venture* for revenge. It hit the cargo bay and a piece of shrapnel burst some of the "grain" containers.

To repair the cargo bay door is a Average (Mechanical + Vacc Suit/ 2)

6. WE NEED POWER NOW!

Characters go to repair the power plant.

Location is on the *Bonnie Venture*.

Scene: In the darkness of the engineering, there is a patch of brightness as stars shine through the hole in the hull. However, now is not the time for sightseeing, the vacc suits filters can take care of the odor, but the sweat and grime are starting to build up, and there is nothing it can do for that. Once the power is back on, life support can be restored, which means a long hot shower.

Action:

To repair the power plant is a Difficult Ship's Engineering task.

To start the power plant after repairs is an Average Ship's Engineering task.

There are important clues here. First, the hull plates curve **OUTWARD** indicating that the explosion started inside. Hits from starship weaponry would curve the hull plates **INWARD**.

Also, the damage to the power plant does not look like it was caused by a laser or missile hit.

To recognize that damage was not done by ship weapons is a Difficult Ship's Engineering task (uncertain). If any characters has served terms in the Navy, they may use the number of terms as a die modifier. The rationale is that the longer a character was in the Navy the more likely it is that character saw damage by starship weapons. (Merchant Terms or Scout Terms)/2 may be substituted for Naval Terms. If the result is TOTAL TRUTH then reveal that the damage was done by an explosive device.

When the device on the power plant exploded, a piece of the detonator was trapped by a cable way, so it was not blown out into space with the rest of the debris.

To recognize that a fragment is not part of the plant is an Impossible Ship's Engineering task (uncertain). Note: The difficulty of this task is due to the small size of the fragment. If the character is actively looking for something out of place, lower the difficulty by one level.

To identify a fragment as part of a detonator is an Impossible (Combat Engineering or Intrusion) task (uncertain) REFEREE: On SOME TRUTH, reveal that it is part of a detonator, on TOTAL TRUTH, reveal that it is part of a remote detonator.

The characters should be able to figure out what happened without

this clue, but it will let the demolition types do something besides blow things up. The explosive device caused minor damage to the power plant (damaging fuel lines and power output lines), which shut the plant down. When the characters go to repair the hole in the hull, use the task under **WHAT'S THIS DOING HERE**.

7. AND WHO MIGHT THIS BE?

Characters go to repair the fuel tank.

Location is on the *Bonnie Venture*.

Scene: A lazy trail of hydrogen crystals streams from the hole in the fuel tank. Just as the characters repairing the fuel tank are lowering the metal piece into place, they spot a non-linear shape inside the fuel tank full of linear baffles.

Action: The hole in the fuel tank is forward and to the side of the hole in engineering.

To repair the fuel tank is an Average (Mechanical + Vacc Suit/ 2) task.

It is improbable that after being blown out of the ship, the engineer's body should get trapped in the fuel tank. That should be clue enough that all is not as presented.

To identify the engineer from his dental record is an Average Medical (Diagnose) task (uncertain)
Note: The engineer's medical record is stored in the ship's computer, until that is available, this task cannot be accomplished.

Identifying the body as the engineer's may be difficult. Retina, facial features, and fingerprints were largely destroyed by decompression. The characters may simply accept the identity for what the name tag on the coveralls claims it to be: Sloan. If the characters want further verification, the dental record is a possibility. Even with advances in preventive dentistry, cosmetic surgery, tooth loss, tooth and jaw shape, prosthesis, and the occasional filling all serve to make each set of teeth unique.

To determine the real cause of engineer's death is a Formidable Medical (Diagnose) task (uncertain)
Note: The most immediate impression of a cause of death is explosive decompression, which makes determining the real cause of death formidable. On **SOME TRUTH**, reveal that death occurred before decompression, on **TOTAL TRUTH**, reveal that death was by a laser shot.

Determining that the cause of death was a laser shot makes Stanwyk a prime suspect because the dead Vargr was armed with a snub pistol.

The Vargr charged with disposing of the engineer's body thought it would be funny to stuff it into the fuel tank. Part of their humor was defying the human (Stanwyk) who ordered them to dispose of it, and part was something about serving the engines which once served him.... But then, does anyone really understand Vargr humor?

8. LAIR OF LUXURY

Characters enter Stanwyk's Suite to investigate.

Location is on the *Bonnie Venture*.

Scene: As the door to Stanwyk's Suite slid open, an aura of opulence seemed to pour out. There is nothing artificial in the suite: no synthetic, no plastics. It was furnished with the finest woods and cloth that money could buy, and even the air seemed fresher in there.

Action: Stanwyk has expensive tastes. This is evident by the decor of his suite. From the Groatle bedspread to the Kian fur rug to the gold trimmed Howood fixtures, this room is well appointed. This decor would also appeal to most Vargr, which the characters might find curious.

There is an open, empty briefcase of Vargr design in here also, haphazardly lying in a corner. While it may have reached that position when the characters restored gravity, it is suspicious that

it is not secured like everything else. This was the briefcase that Captain Kasdhaerso brought the payment for the weapons. Stanwyk insisted on cash since it is harder to trace.

To open Stanwyk's safe is a Formidable Intrusion task.

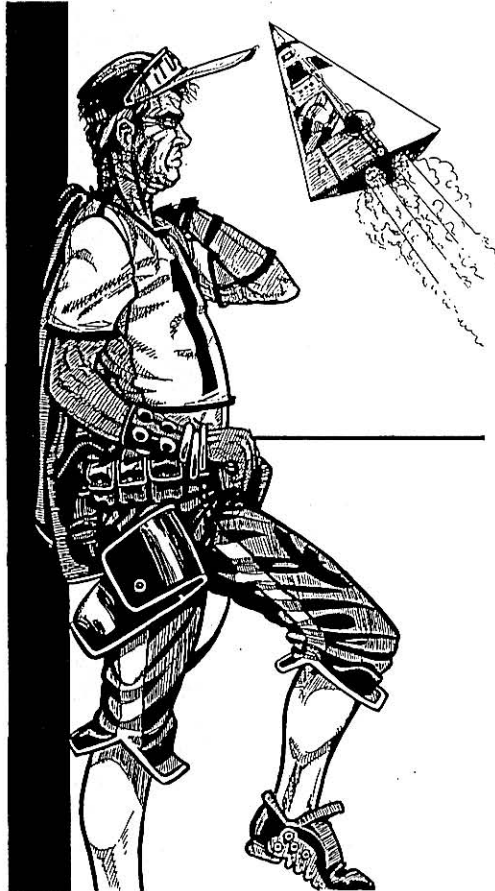
Note: The use of more forceful means to get into the safe will destroy its contents beyond recognition.

9. WE'VE GOT COMPANY!

Characters are threatened by the arrival of the Vargr.

Location is in space in the Beck's World System.

Scene: A glint of light catches the eye of a character working outside the *Bonnie Venture*. As the character takes a closer look, the outline of a small ship emerges against the backdrop of stars. An airlock on the ship slides open emitting light and several suited figures.



Action: The crew of the *Gharval* returned to Beck's World once before trying to recover the weapons from the *Bonnie Venture*. An Imperial close escort was roaming the system at that time, so they had to leave. They refueled their vessel and returned for one more attempt. The referee can handle this encounter a variety of ways, or not use it at all if a simpler scenario is desired. One option is to have the Vargr arrive before the power plant on the *Bonnie Venture* is operational. This would probably involve the characters in a firefight in zero gravity. Another option would be to have the Vargr arrive after the ship has power. This would allow the characters to detect the *Gharval* at a much further range, and probably result in a running space battle.

A third option, which would be a little difficult to coordinate would be to have the Vargr arrive just as the characters were about to start the power plant. This could produce a race to get the plant started before the Vargr boarded (or during a firefight after boarding) and then a running space battle as the *Bonnie Venture* attempted to escape.

The *Gharval* is armed with only a single pulse laser and a single missile launcher, so an active *Bonnie Venture* would out gun it. This is potentially balanced by a lack of gunners on the *Bonnie Venture*. At the moment, the *Gharval* has a crew of eight. Only six will attempt to board the *Bonnie Venture*; the Captain and his gunner will remain behind for support. The Vargr are armed with Snub Pistols and Accelerator Rifles.

Captain Tsarghar will not let the

TL-15 Portable Fusion Generator 120 liters 120 Kilograms 20,000 Cr

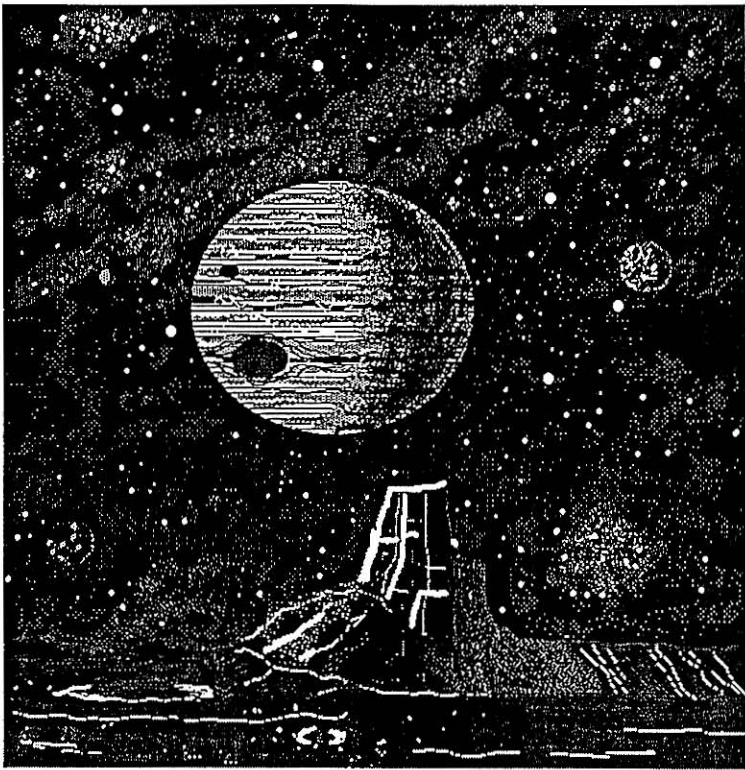
The term "portable" is somewhat misleading. One cannot simply pick the generator up and carry it around. However, as it is not affixed to a vehicle, it can supply power to a camp or wherever a temporary power supply is needed. The generator produces 600 kilowatts of energy. Its internal fuel supply lasts one year, however, once started, it must be allowed to run for one hour in order to recharge the supplies batteries. The batteries can also be charged from an external source in the same time. The batteries are required to ignite the fusion generator.

Gharval be damaged beyond repair or captured, even if he has to abandon some of the crew to save the ship. If things look bad, he will move the ship out of range and attempt to negotiate (see LET'S TALK THIS OVER).

If things look bad for the characters, the referee can have the *White Lightning* intervene. As that ship moved away, it detected the *Gharval* entering system and Captain Winthorpe felt that the characters might need some help. So, he changed course to return to the *Bonnie Venture*. If the characters are doing well, the referee can time the arrival of the *White Lightning* after things are concluded. After all, if the characters don't have operational sensors, how are they to know where the *White Lightning* is?

10. LET'S TALK THIS OVER

Characters receive an offer to negotiate from the Vargr.



Location is in space in the Beck's World System.

Scene: A communicator beeps, and when answered, a Vargr voice speaking Galanglic come over. "Humans," the Vargr begins, "Let us be reasonable. . . ."

Action: The Vargr, although stalemated, still want the weapons that the *Bonnie Venture* has in its hold. They will attempt to negotiate with the characters for them.

The Vargr will state that they purchased the weapons on the *Bonnie Venture* and really just want what is rightfully theirs. Since only Kasdhaerso knew that Stanwyk was the arms dealer, the Vargr can't reveal that. However, their claim should be another important piece of evidence. If necessary, the Vargr

will bluff saying that they have a missile, which they will say that they really don't want to use, but

To see through the Vargr bluff is a Difficult Liaison task (unskilled ok, uncertain) (Average: Language (Gvegh) to enable if a video image is available).

If the characters refuse, and the Captain of the *Gharval* doesn't have a clear advantage, the *Gharval* will fire a missile to occupy the characters while it escapes. The missile is not nuclear, but rather a surface support tac missile. However, the characters will not have any way of knowing that. If the *Bonnie Venture* cannot yet maneuver, the missile will hit it. The missile has a penetration value of

20.

Remember, Captain Tsarghar will not hesitate to abandon the rest of his crew to save the ship. However, if the ship is not in danger, he will attempt to negotiate their release if they are captured.

11. GET IT ON DOWN

Characters travel down to the surface of Beck's World.

Location is close orbit above Beck's World.

Scene: Stepping out of the air/raft and stretching, the characters are glad to be able to stand up and move about. After removing their helmets, the characters feel the touch of dense, moisture laden air and smell the unique scents of a living world. After the long flight, they are thankful that they don't have to take an air/raft to a world's surface every day.

Action: There are a few ways for the characters to get to the world's

surface. The *White Lightning* might still be in system, and the characters might convince the Captain to transport them down. Another ship might be available in system, roll on the encounter table, but apply a DM -2 to reflect limited traffic. Most likely, though, the characters will have to use the *Bonnie Venture's* air/raft.

To fly the air/raft to the surface of Beck's World is a Average Pilot (Interface/Grav) task.

Since the air/raft is not equipped with life support, the characters will have to use their vacc suits. Depending on what type of PLSS and oxygen tanks they have, they may need to take extra oxygen along.

12. WHICH WAY DID THEY GO?

Characters seek the former crew of the *Bonnie Venture*.

Location is on Beck's World.

Scene: The bar's name was the Driftwood, but it looked like the only sea it had ever drifted on was the sea of dust surrounding the place. Once inside, the contrast was amazing. Very clean with a cool breeze coming from the ventilators. No wonder the former crew of the *Bonnie Venture* liked to hang out here.

Action: Since coming to Beck's World, the



former crew of the *Bonnie Venture* have decided to lay low. They think that something was peculiar about Stanwyk's actions and now fear that he may try to silence them. They discussed the merits of joining in the world's civil war on the human side, but decided against that. They have remained in the starport area hoping to get hired by a passing merchant. So far they have not had any luck.

To locate the former crew of the *Bonnie Venture* is a Difficult Streetwise task (uncertain).

They will be suspicious of the characters at first, especially if the characters make it known they work for Stanwyk. The crew spends a lot of time at the Driftwood, a spacer bar at the outskirts of startown.

13. SOMETHING DOESN'T JIVE HERE

Characters listen to the crew's story.

Location is on Beck's World.

Scene: Three grim faces look at the characters from across the table. In the background a soft melody fills the air. "This is the way we saw things. . . ." the pilot begins.

Action: The former crew of the *Bonnie Venture* was not in on the plot. Nevertheless, as eye witnesses to the events surrounding the disabling of the *Bonnie Venture*, they may be able to provide the characters with valuable clues.

To convince the crew to tell their story is a DIFFICULT Carousing task (uncertain).

These clues may not necessarily be anything the characters have not discovered themselves, but may serve to tie the events together. This is their story:

They say that Stanwyk claims to have a friend on Beck's World, but they have never met this person. Yet the *Bonnie Venture* has travelled several times from Enope to Beck's World and back. Each time, they have carried a small cargo of grain with them. Two runs ago, the *Bonnie Venture* was stopped by an Imperial warship which was inspecting cargo on incoming ships. To the ship's medic, Stanwyk seemed unusually nervous when the *Bonnie Venture's* cargo was examined. When they returned to Enope, he disappeared for a

while, even his usual companions didn't know where he was. Then he reappeared, and got ready for another trip to Beck's World.

The trip to Beck's World went without a problem. Shortly after arriving in system, the engineer showed up on the bridge to repair a problem. No problem was apparent, and after a quick look, none was found. Shortly thereafter a ship attacked. They took one hit in the fuel tank, and as the gunner prepared to take a shot, the power went out. Stanwyk came around and ordered everyone to the ship's

**"This is the way we saw things. . . ."
the pilot begins.**

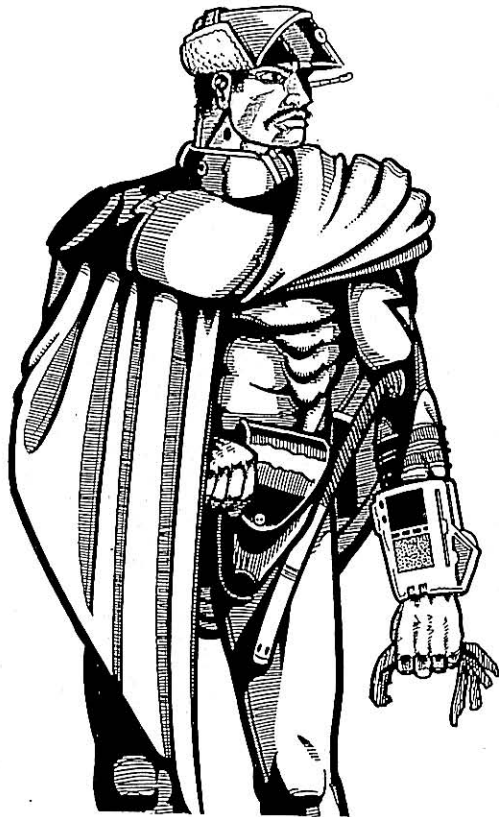
boat.

They waited a few minutes for the engineer to arrive. When he didn't show, Stanwyk, in an uncharacteristic display of concern insisted to go look for him. Stanwyk reported that engineering was in vacuum and that he would have to suit up to go in to see if the engineer had managed to get into a rescue ball. Sensors on the ship's boat showed that the Vargr were closing with the disabled ship. They urged Stanwyk to hurry back to the ship's boat so they could leave, but he insisted that he would not leave until he had learned about the engineer. He later reported that he had entered engineering and the engineer had apparently been blown out into space.

Then, they say, Stanwyk shouted that the Vargr had boarded, and he was cut off from the ship's boat, and they should leave at once without him. They started to go after him when the carrier signal from his radio went out. They tried to raise him, but could not, and assumed that he was dead or captured by the Vargr. Knowing they could not do anything else for him, they left.

While they headed to the planet, they monitored the radio, and heard a lot of communications in Gvegh, but one sounded like it was made with a human voice. They heard the Imperial Warship approach, but

didn't want to get caught in a crossfire, so they continued to the planet. They later heard through starport rumors that Stanwyk had escaped, and had left for Enope on the *White Lightning*. They say he made no attempt to contact them.



The former crew is suspicious of Stanwyk, and feel that he is involved in some misdeed, but are not sure of its nature. They suspect it may have to do with the cargo of grain, but do not know that it has weapons hidden under it. They might speculate that the grain is poisoned, or is chemically treated with an illegal substance, or some such thing. They are afraid that Stanwyk may try to kill them, but

Stanwyk feels that by branding them as mutineers, he has eliminated them as a threat. He has, however, demonstrated that he is capable of murder.

14. SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

Characters consider their options.

Location is anywhere in the Beck's World system.

Scene: The characters have entered the lounge of the *Bonnie Venture* to have a meeting. After several minutes of silence, one speaks up, "Well, what do you think we should do?"

Action: If they want to keep the guns from the Vargr, they should be able to do so. The Vargr vessel is smaller, and has fewer weapons. If the *White Lightning* is in the area, they increase their chances of driving the Vargr away once more.

The yacht will not jump anywhere but to Enope, unless the access code is bypassed.

To override Stanwyk's lock on the computer is an Impossible Computer task (uncertain).

If the characters do succeed in getting the *Bonnie Venture* to work for them, Stanwyk will eventually find out and will hunt for them.

The characters may want to confront Stanwyk. Even though he believes that all is covered, he has contingency plans. Characters opposing him will find several angry but capable opponents on

Stanwyk's side.

If the characters succeed in confronting Stanwyk, they may want to take him to Beck's World for trial. After all, the guns were brought by him for delivery to that world on the Vargr side.

Perhaps the best thing for the characters to do, and possibly the most rewarding, is to turn the evidence over to the Imperial Navy. Although they will initially confiscate the yacht, they may eventually turn it over to the characters as a reward for turning in a traitor. Of course this is entirely up to the referee.

BECK'S WORLD

Library Data

(2204 Regina D88349D-4 Lo Ni 701
Im M0 V M2 D)

This is a backwater world near the coreward end of Regina Subsector. Most of the population lives around Wentworth Sea, the only major body of water on the world. A repressive government and limited trade have both served to keep the Tech Level of this world very low.

Beck's World has two claims to Fame. One is the fact that there is an ancient site on the world, which is being excavated by the University of Regina. The University has only partially excavated this collapsed warren of interlocking caverns.

The other major claim to fame is the Battle of Beck's World, which happened on 122-1109 during the Fifth Frontier War. In that battle, Admiral Elphinstone destroyed the last remnants of the Vargr fleet from



Yorbund. This major victory was instrumental in breaking the Vargr resolve and eventually winning the war.

What many people do not know is that the Vargr prisoners from that battle were quartered on Beck's World until after the war. Many of the Vargr chose to remain on Beck's World after they were released, and have since become Imperial citizens. About one third of the planet's population now is Vargr. The prison camp where they were held was torn down as a gesture of friendship between the two races.

A PERFDIOUS PLOT

(Referee's overview of the events on the *Bonnie Venture*) Stanwyk is the source of advanced weapons for the Vargr on Beck's World. Recently, however, the Navy has come close to discovering his operation. He decided to make one more run, but avoid transporting the cargo to the world.

Stanwyk's original plan was a simple one. He would buy the weapons and place them in special smuggling containers. When he arrived in the system of Beck's World, the Vargr would fake an attack. Rather than have the weapons really hit his ship, Stanwyk planted some explosive devices which he could detonate to simulate battle damage - they would do a lot less damage and were a lot less random than the real thing. He would order the crew to man the ship's boat in preparation to abandon ship. When the Vargr boarded to "steal" the cargo, he would pretend to be cut off from the ship's boat, and order it to leave. He would then receive the bulk of his

payment from the Vargr. The Vargr, "not being able to repair the yacht," would leave, and Stanwyk would get his crew to return and repair the damage. He would tell them that the Vargr were too interested in getting the cargo on their ship to be searching the whole ship for him, and thus he was spared.

Of course, things don't always work out the way people plan them. The first part was easy enough, he bought the weapons and planted an explosive device on the hull of his vessel over a fuel tank. He couldn't plant the ones in engineering until just before the attack because the engineer would be very likely to find them.

Shortly before the attack was to have taken place, Stanwyk had the engineer go to the bridge to check out a "problem." When the engineer left, Stanwyk entered the engineering spaces to place the explosive devices on the power plant and the hull. When the engineer returned unexpectedly and caught him in the act, Stanwyk killed him with a small, three shot, laser pistol he carried. Stanwyk then dragged him out of easy sight.

At about that time, the pilot announced that they were under attack. The Vargr fired their laser and a dummy missile at the *Bonnie Venture*. Using a radio command, Stanwyk detonated the explosive device on the fuel tank. Just as the gunner was setting up to take a shot, Stanwyk detonated the devices in engineering, shutting down ship's power. He had hoped that the breach in the hull would carry the engineer's body out into space, but his belt caught on some equipment and that kept his body in the ship.

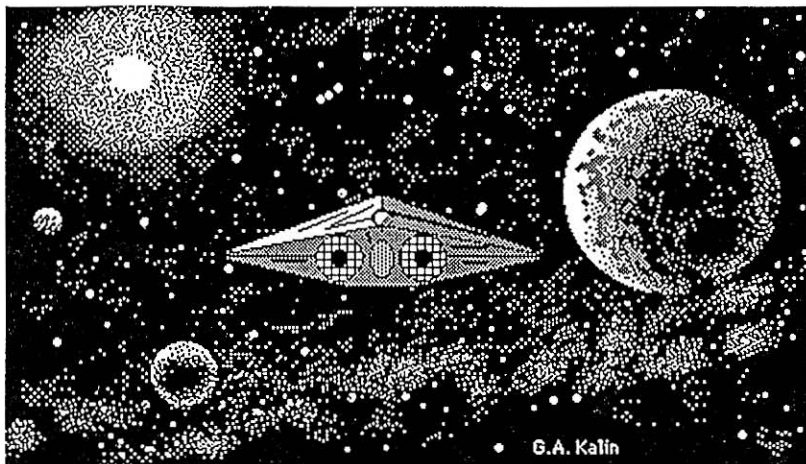
Stanwyk thought that he could still implement his original plan. With the power out, he told the crew the situation was hopeless, and to prepare to abandon ship. When they expressed concern that the engineer hadn't made it to the ship's boat, Stanwyk insisted that he go look for the engineer, explaining that he was responsible for their being in the system in the first place. He reported that engineering was in vacuum and that he would have to put on a vacc suit to enter, hoping that the engineer had gotten into a rescue ball in time. Stanwyk took his time suiting up, and by that time, the Vargr had arrived as he hoped. He ordered the crew to leave, and went to the lounge to meet Captain Kasdhaerso and get his money. He also had Kasdhaerso's crew check to make sure the body was out of engineering, and if it was not, to dispose of it in space. Stanwyk only spoke Gvegh over the radio, in case anyone on the ship's boat might be monitoring the radio channels. That's when things really started to go wrong.

The Vargr had just started to get the cargo bay open when the *Gharval* reported that an Imperial Close Escort was approaching rapidly. Captain Kasdhaerso's last words were to order his crew back to the *Gharval*. Seeing things come apart, Stanwyk knew he couldn't leave a witness, so he shot Kasdhaerso before the Vargr knew that he had a weapon.

When the crew of the *Gharval* couldn't contact their captain, they assumed that Stanwyk had killed him, so they departed the system rapidly. As they left, they fired a shot at the *Bonnie Venture*, to pay Stanwyk for his treachery. Since they were not trying to miss this time, they hit the cargo bay door doing the damage described elsewhere.

Stanwyk used the time that the Escort took to reach the *Bonnie Venture* to prepare the yacht for his departure. The rest of the situation is as described in **A WAY OFF THIS ROCK**.

— Mark Gelinas —



• G.A. Kalin

Non Player Characters for

A Bonnie Mess

Simon Stanwyk Millionaire Playboy (Rogue)

Age 40 5.5 Terms Veteran NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapon, Energy Weapon

Other Assets: Language (Zhodani) 13, Language (Gvegh) 13, Intrusion 13, Carousing 11, Streetwise 11, Computer 10

Motivation: Simon Stanwyk likes to make money and he is not too particular how he makes it. He made his fortune during the Fifth Frontier War, and sees no reason why he can't add to that during this present difficulty.

(Crew of the White Lightning)

Jonathan "Windy" Winthorpe Free Trader Captain

Age 34 4 Terms Trained NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapon, Armed Martial Arts (Small Blade)

Other Assets: Astrogation 11, Pilot (Interface/Grav) 11, Sensor Ops 9, Streetwise 9, Music (Keyboard) 9, Communications 9

Motivation: Captain Winthorpe has managed to do fairly well in the Free Trader business. He built up a good clientele by his sense of fair play. He also has an abiding sense of responsibility to his crew, his ship, and his passengers.

Willoughby "Will" Smith Free Trader Engineer First Officer

Age 48 7 Terms Trained NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapon

Other Assets: Ships Engineering 13, Computer 11, Streetwise 9, Environment Suit 9, Gambling 13

Motivation: A long time friend of "Windy," "Will" Smith is the cost conscious member of the crew. He does, however, enjoy a good game of chance, and is particularly good at it, but will stop before he loses too much. Smith is partially bald, but does not mind.

Shirley Umdar Free Trader Medic Second Officer

Age 28 2.5 Terms Novice NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapons

Other Assets: Medical (Diagnosis) 11, Music (Wind) 9, Sensor Ops 11, Ground Vehicle (Wheeled) 9

Motivation: With her skill, Shirley could have had a lucrative practice on her homeworld. Her desire to travel and see different places led her to join the merchant service. She enjoys playing a wood flute and will often "jam" with the Captain.

Eneri Jones Free Trader Steward/Gunner Third Officer
Age 22 1 Term Novice NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapon

Other Assets: Gunnery (Beam) 11, Computer 12, Carousing 12, Service 11, Environment 9, Ground Vehicle (Wheeled) 9

Motivation: Jones has only been with the *White Lightning* for a short while. Although not a violent man, he is not afraid of violence. He also tends to let money be a primary motivator in his life, which may eventually cause him to be released from service aboard the *Lightning*.

(Crew of the Bonnie Venture)

Ivan Wilcox Ex-Merchant Third Officer Pilot
Age 30 3 Terms Veteran NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapon

Other Assets: Astrogation 13, Pilot (Interface/Grav), Carousing 11, Environment Suit 9

Motivation: Ivan all but washed out of the merchant service due to an unsavory nature. Stanwyk saw some qualities he liked in Ivan, and hired him to be the Captain of the *Bonnie Venture*. Having his own command has tempered Ivan somewhat, teaching how better to deal with people.

Benjamin Sloan Retired Merchant Fourth Officer Engineer
Age 38 5 Terms Trained NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapon

Other Assets: Ships Engineering 11, Mechanical 11, Electrical 9, Gambling 9, Computer 9, Music (Strings) 9, Environment Suit 8

Motivation: Sloan is a very private man, and, coming from a low population world, doesn't like crowds. Although his homeworld had a high tech level, population grouping was all but tribal. Sloan's most valued possession is a jewelled amulet on a beaded thong. Sloan always wears this amulet.

Jennifer Brian Ex-Doctor Medic
Age 34 4 Terms Trained NPC

Combat Assets: Energy Weapons

Other Assets: Medical (Trauma Aid) 11, Streetwise 11, Computer 9

Motivation: Jennifer was studying medicine, but her lack of education hindered her. She did manage to learn a fair amount at technical school, and was happy for a chance to work in her chosen profession. Jennifer was Stanwyk's lover for awhile, but terminated the relationship when it was evident that Stanwyk would not be content with only one woman. Stanwyk allowed her to continue her position, but she is usually tense when he is on board, and has considered leaving the *Bonnie Venture*.

Homer Pidgyon Ex-Rogue Steward

Age 24 2.5 Terms Trained NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapons, Unarmed Martial Arts

Other Assets: Streetwise 11, Carousing 11

Motivation: Teased about his name as a child, Homer grew up hard and quick with his fists. Stanwyk rescued him from a tight situation and uses Homer as an extra set of ears on the street. Homer is grateful to Stanwyk, but Stanwyk doesn't entirely trust Homer.

(Leaders of the Vargr Corsairs)

Kasdhaerso Former Captain of the *Gharval* Ex-Scout

Age 34 4 Terms Trained NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapons, Unarmed Martial Arts

Other Assets: Astrogation 9, Pilot (Interface/Grav) 9, Ships Engineering 11, Language (Galanglic) 9, Environment Suit 7, Ground Vehicle (Wheeled) 7

Motivation: Kasdhaerso was born on Dentus and joined the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service after his schooling. He served with honor during the Fifth Frontier War, but after several engagements, and after seeing how his kind were treated by the Imperials, he wondered where his loyalties should lie. The war quickly ended, and his doubts remained dormant. After leaving the Scouts, he was allowed to serve detached duty and was given a scout ship. When the current crisis arose, he rallied to the Vargr side, and until he was killed, used the scout ship to run supplies to the Vargr rebels struggling to conquer Beck's World. Kasdhaerso believed that Stanwyk was a friend who understood the Vargr.

Tsarghar Current Captain of the *Gharval* Ex-Scout

Age 26 2 Terms Trained NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapon

Other Assets: Streetwise 9, Intrusion 7, Communication 9, Computer 9

Motivation: A brother, from a younger litter, and fellow scout of Kasdhaerso. When the latter left the service, Tsarghar naturally followed his brother. Kasdhaerso trusted his brother and Tsarghar rose quickly to become second in command. After a brief charisma struggle following Kasdhaerso's death, Tsarghar emerged with the command of the *Gharval*.

Uvuereksan 2nd in Command of the *Gharval* Ex-Rogue

Age 30 3 Terms Trained NPC

Combat Assets: Slug Weapons

Other Assets: Streetwise 9, Intrusion 7, Communications 9, Computer 9

Motivation: Captain Kasdhaerso found Uvuereksan during his many journeys, and took him on as crew. While not necessarily the most skilled of the *Gharval*'s crew, he did have some skills useful to Captain Kasdhaerso. Uvuereksan has long been a rival of Tsarghar, and still smarts from the recent loss of a charisma battle to him.

Lady Charlotte

Class Yatch

General Data

Displacement: 200 tons **Hull Armor:** 14 **Length:** 42.5 meters
Volume: 2800 m3 **Price:** MCr 80.759 **Target Size:** Small
Configuration: Wedge SL **Tech Level:** 15
Mass (Loaded/Empty): 1443/772

Engineering Data

Power Plant: 180 MW fusion power plant (180 MW/hit), 1 year duration
G-Rating: 1G (100 MW/G), Contra-Grav lifters (20 MW)
G-Turn: 41 (63 using jump fuel), 12.5 m3 of fuel each **Maint:** 37

Electronics

Computer: 3 x TL-15 St computer (.55 MW each)
Commo: 1000 AU radio (inf, 20 MW) **Avionics:** TL-8+ Avionics
Sensors: Passive EMS fixed array 90,000 km (3 hexes; .06 MW), Active EMS array 30,000 km (1 hex; 6 MW)
Controls: Bridge with 2 x workstations, plus 1 other workstation.

Armament

Offensive: 1 x TL-15 150-Mj Laser Turret (Loc:10, Arcs: 1,2,3: 2.2 MW; 1 Crew) 1 x Missile Turret (Loc: 10, 2 ready MsIs; .15 MW, 1 Crew)

Accommodations

Life Support: Extended (.56 MW), Gravitic Compensators (6G; 14 MW)
Crew: 6 (2 x Maneuver, 1 x Engineer, 2 x Gunner, 1 x Steward) Gunners and Steward operate ship's vessels.
Crew Accommodations: 6 x Large Staterooms (single-occupied; .005 MW each)
Passenger Accommodations: 6 x Large Staterooms (single-occupied; .005 MW each) 1 x Double Sized Stateroom (owners) (single-occupied; .005 MW)
Other Facilities: Sickbay (.08 MW)
Cargo: 153 m3, with 1 large cargo hatch
Small Craft and Launch Facilities: 30 Ton Ship's Boat with launch port, Tracked ATV with internal hanger (Minimal) and launch port, Air/Raft with internal hanger (Minimal) and launch port
Airlocks: 2

Notes

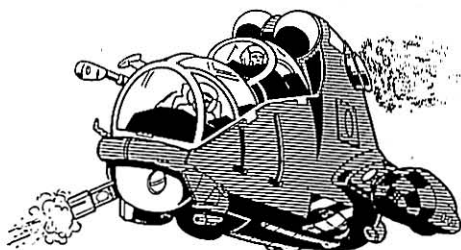
Additional crew may be added as desired.

On the Bonnie Venture, the owner has forfeited the tracked ATV for an additional 84 m3 of cargo.

Fuel scoops and purification machinery (1.3 MW) sufficient to purify 1033 m3 of fuel in 24 hours.

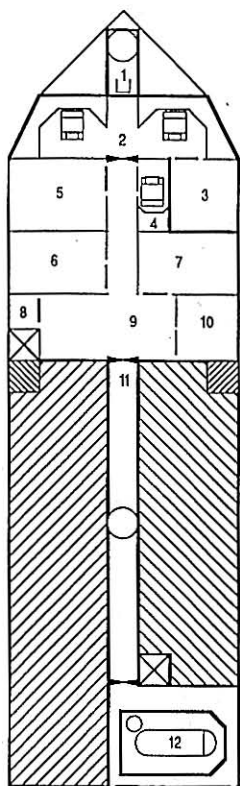
DAMAGE TABLES

<u>Area (1D20)</u>	<u>Surface Hits</u>	<u>Internal Explosions</u>	<u>Systems</u>
1	Ant	1-8: Elec, 9-20: Qtrs	JD - 1H
2-6	Ant	Qtrs	PP - 1H
7	1-2: AL	Qtrs	MD - 2h
8	1-18: LP	1: Qtrs, 2-20: Hold	CG - 1H
9		Hold	FPP - 1H
10		1-6: LT, 7-12: MT, 13+: Hold	LT - 1H
11-16		Hold	MT - 1H
17-18	LP	Hold	
19	1-10: LP	1-11: Eng, 12-20: Hold	
20		Eng	



UPPER DECK

1. **ACCESSWAY**- This space provides access from the bridge to sensor space which is in the forward end of the middle deck.
2. **BRIDGE**- The control center of the ship. Two acceleration couches occupy this space, one for the astrogator and one for the pilot. The astrogator's station has repeaters for engineering controls, and the pilot's station has the ship's communications equipment and primary sensor readouts. These two can call up whatever sensor readings are needed, or computer images based on compiled sensor readings.



3. DAY CABIN/FIRE CONTROL- This particular class of yacht comes unarmed, but some owners like to arm them, and this is becoming more prevalent during the current crisis. On unarmed versions, this space is used for the captain's day cabin. On armed versions, the fresher is removed and fire control equipment is placed in this room. This is a departure from the standard which has the fire control station with the mount.

4. COMPUTER ROOM- The central portion of the ship's computer is located here. There is also a console for routine maintenance operations on the computer.

5. STATEROOM- This is a crew cabin, and not as luxuriously appointed as the ones for the passengers. However, serving on a yacht does have its benefits, and these staterooms are decorated more like passenger staterooms on regular vessels.

6. STATEROOM- Same as 5 above.

7. STATEROOM- Same as 5 above.

8. SHIP'S LOCKER- The main secure storage area for ship's equipage and small arms.

9. CREW'S LOUNGE- A place where the crew can get together, relax, and eat. The ship's main lift shaft is located on the port side of the lounge. It connects all three decks of the yacht.

10. STATEROOM- Same as 5 above, but somewhat smaller. Usually the junior crew member is assigned this room.

11. PASSAGEWAY- Connects the forward end of the ship to the Air/Raft Bay. A iris valve on the deck leads to the aft end of the passenger section. A small lift shaft lets the crew travel to engineering without passing through the passenger section. The bulk of fuel storage is to the port and starboard of this passageway. The ship's fuel scoops are located at the forward end of these tanks, and are extended when refueling operations are in progress.

12. AIR/RAFT BAY- Garage space for the ship's air/raft. The *Lady Charlotte* class comes equipped with a open topped air/raft.

MIDDLE DECK

13. SENSOR BAY- The ship's active and passive EMS arrays are in this area which can only be entered from the deck above. Normally, the only time this space is entered is for maintenance purposes.

14. OWNER'S SUITE- A luxurious double sized stateroom for the owner of

the yacht. This space is frequently partitioned off to form a sitting area and one or more bedrooms areas. The owner has access to the office without going through the reception area.

15. OFFICE- An office area for use by the yacht's owner. A small communications console allows the owner to communicate without having to go to the bridge.

16. RECEPTION AREA- This area can serve a variety of functions. Usually, this is where the ship's steward will greet embarking passengers and direct them to their staterooms. Being near the main lounge, it can serve as a reception area for formal functions. A fold-away desk can be set up for use by a secretary/receptionist for the owner's business functions.

17. MAIN AIR LOCK- Most of the ship's access and egress is conducted through this air lock when the ship is docked at high port or with another vessel.

18. MAIN LOUNGE- A richly appointed multi-purpose room. A area of the deck is covered with natural wood making it suitable for dancing. Other functions include dining and entertainment.

19. GALLEY- The upper class nature of this vessel's normal passengers mandates a place where gourmet food can be prepared by a steward. This space has cooking facilities and equipment beyond those found on ordinary starships.

20. STATEROOM- A passenger's stateroom with a standard of luxury far above the ordinary starship's high passage staterooms.

21. STATEROOM- Same as 20 above. Outside this stateroom is the main liftshaft which leads up to the crew's area and down to the lower deck.

22. STATEROOM- Same as 20 above.

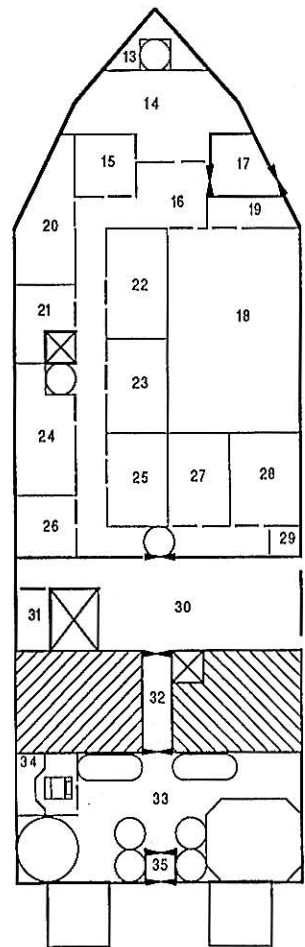
23. STATEROOM- Same as 20 above.

24. STATEROOM- Same as 20 above. Outside this stateroom is an iris valve on the deck which leads to the lower deck.

25. STATEROOM- Same as 20 above. The iris valve on the overhead aft of this stateroom leads to the passageway on the deck above.

26. SICK BAY- A small room for the treatment of passengers. In an emergency, an operating table can be set up in this room. When not occupied, the door is set on crew open, meaning that it is locked, but any crew member can open it.

27. STATEROOM- Same as 20 above.



28. STATEROOM- Same as 20 above.

29. SECURE STORAGE- An area with a heavy door in which sensitive items may be locked. The ship's steward controls access to this space.

30. CARGO BAY- The ship's 154 kiloliters of cargo space is located here. The cargo can be loaded from a bay door on the starboard side, or from a cargo lift on the port side. The iris valve to the passenger area is normally set on crew open.

31. CARGO OFFICE- Designed to serve as an admin office, this space frequently serves as storage for cargo handling tackle.

32. PASSAGEWAY- A connecting corridor from the cargo bay to engineering. The lift shaft off the forward end leads up to the passageway on the upper deck.

33. ENGINEERING- The ship's drives are located in this space. Port and starboard of the forward iris valve is the ship's life support equipment. In the starboard aft corner is the ship's fuel purification plant. Jump drive capacitors stand on the port and starboard sides of the aft air lock while the fusion power plant is in the aft port corner of the space. The maneuver drives are external to engineering on the port and starboard sides of the air lock's external iris valve.

34. ENGINEERING CONTROL ROOM- The ship's main engineering controls are located in this space. The engineer usually controls the ship from this area during maneuvering and jump space entry. During jump, the engineer will often make routine checks of engineering operations at the engineering control repeaters on the bridge.

35. ENGINEERING AIR LOCK- A small air lock designed to allow exit from the ship for engineering maintenance work.

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LOWER DECK

NOTE: This lowest deck is 4.5 meters in height in order to accommodate the ship's boat and the ATV.

36. ATV RAMP- Clamshell doors open at the forward end of this deck and this ramp allows the ATV to exit the ship. Since the standard ship's boat, such as the one this ship carries, cannot hold the ATV, the vehicle can only exit this way.

37. ATV BAY- This space is the garage and maintenance space for the ship's ATV. This vessel comes equipped with a class tracked ATV. The ship's forward landing legs are on the port and starboard sides of this bay's exterior. It is not uncommon for the owner to sell the ATV and use this space for more cargo which significantly increases the vessel's cargo capacity.

38. ASSEMBLY AREA- The entry point into the ship from the ship's boat. A mating collar allows passengers to move from the ship's boat to this area without passing through vacuum. The ship's main lift shaft is in the forward port corner of this area, and the iris valve in the overhead leads to the passenger section.

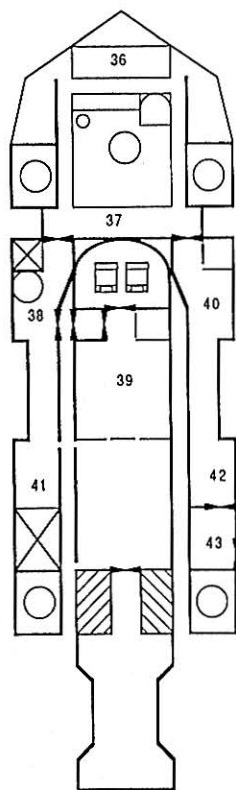
39. SHIP'S BOAT- The yacht is equipped with a standard design 30 ton ship's boat.

40. SHIP'S BOAT MAINTENANCE AREA- A storage locker in the forward end of this area hold tools and spare parts for the ship's boat. There is a workbench and metal working tools in this area. Because of these items, the engineer frequently uses this area for repair of the ship's systems as well.

41. CARGO TRANSFER AREA- A sealed connection allows transfer of cargo to the ship without exposing it to vacuum. The cargo lift leads directly to the cargo bay. A sliding barrier must be in place on the forward end of the lift before it will operate. When folded away, the crew has ready access to the lift which is useful for moving cargo onto the lift. A landing leg is located aft of the cargo lift.

42. EVA EQUIPMENT STORAGE- Racks of vacc suits are stored here and other EVA equipment such as long range thruster packs and tools.

43. LOWER AIR LOCK- This air lock is used for access and egress if the ship is on the ground, or for maintenance work on the ship's boat's exterior. A landing leg is located aft of this air lock.



-- Mark "Geo" Gelinas --

Mercury Quest

Silently, the Intrepid glided through the blackness toward Mercury. The fusion engines of the system defense boat flared briefly settling it into a high orbit above the barren, brown and tan surface. Guarding against detection, the active sensors of the Intrepid were quiet. The activity on the bridge was vastly different.

Lieutenant Clark examined her computer monitor closely. "I've got a tie-in with the traffic management system at Mercury Station One. They can't trace our coded entry, and the Intrepid isn't showing up on their scanners." One of the data monitors flickered to life. The computer generated image of Mercury and a dozen spacecraft orbital plots flashed in yellow and green lines. Another dozen plots displayed ships approaching and leaving the planet. Coded identification data surrounded each circle that indicated a spaceship or space station.

Commander Ridpath looked up from his hand computer. "Good work. Maintaining our present ECM posture should keep us hidden from most sensors." He stared at the image of the first planet on the main view screen. Mercury was still a busy mining world for the solar system as it was 118 years ago. He could imagine the then Captain Vladimir Grechko and his squadron of 24 Thunderbolt fighters as they approached the first planet. The Imperium had been making probing

attacks at the outer planets in preparation for the main attack of the Sol system. They planned to sever Terra's main supply of high-grade ore. The operation hinged on a lightning fast raid on the mines and stations of Mercury. The light carrier, Nartor and her two escort destroyers jumped in high above the ecliptic. With her two escort in tight formation, Nartor approached Mercury cloaked with a black globe generator. They didn't expect to find a squadron of Thunderbolts as they dropped their force field. Captain Grechko's defense of Mercury was one of the few shining moments in the bleak later years of the Solomani Rim War.

Shaking her head, Lieutenant Commander Larson leaned back in her flight chair and gazed at the monitor. "Nothing special about any of the ships in orbit. They all have proper clearance and identification transponders. It's a good bet that the Imperial ship is disguised."

Orson rubbed his chin. "Excellent observation, Mr. Larson. As long as you're in a betting mood, how many of those ships do you wager could not possibly be a covert vessel?"

Neda felt as if she was back in her Academy microbiology class without her homework. "You can rule out the sublight ships."

"Really?" Ridpath stared at his first officer as knots formed in his stomach. A secret mission to find Imperial agents was not the time to get sloppy and assume too much. "They couldn't be using a sublight

boat and have their starship waiting somewhere else?"

Larson felt the hair on the back of her neck tingle. She hated it when the commander destroyed her best answer with his logic. "Uh, that's very true, Skipper."

"That's why you're going to do a passive scan and a visual on each and every craft in orbit, approaching, and leaving Mercury."

Larson pointed at the monitor. "Skipper, those ships are all showing up on the scan as typical. What are we looking for that Mercury Traffic Control missed?"

Ridpath punched his seat restraints release and stood: "Anything out of the ordinary, Lieutenant Commander. Extra antennas, more

weapon turrets - that sort of thing. You may get lucky and find them before they find the Nartor."

Involuntarily, Larson rolled her eyes. "That could take weeks with that many ships."

"It may. Which one of the crew has the best rating with computer systems?"

Larson turned back to her console and typed on her keyboard. The crew roster flashed on a monitor. "Lieutenant Clark, sir."

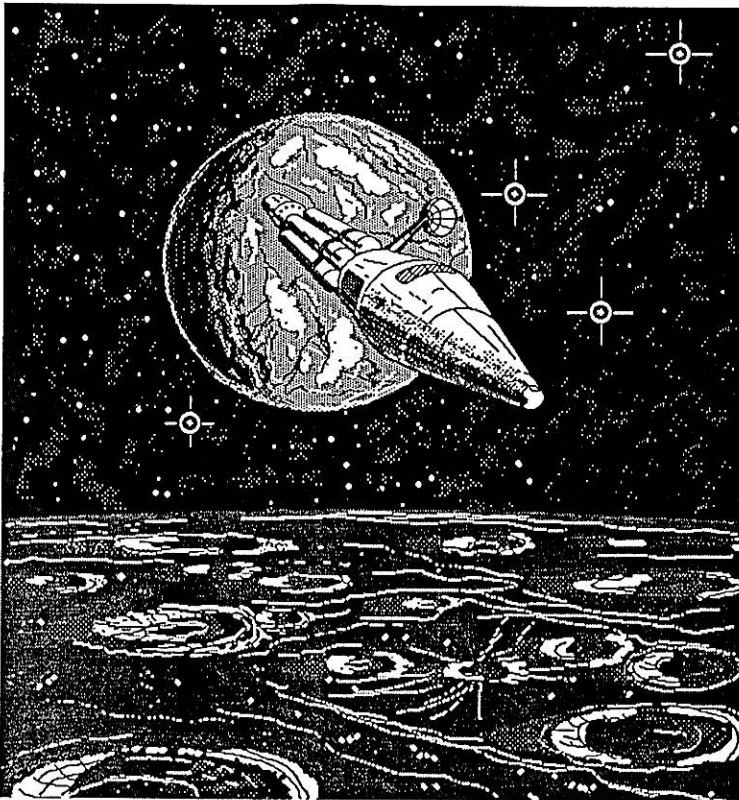
Ridpath nodded to his first officer. "Very good. Lieutenant Clark and I are going down to the surface to check on a hunch."

"A hunch, Skipper?" Neda questioned.

Ridpath's eyebrows lowered in irritation.

"Yes, a hunch. We shouldn't be gone more than six hours. You're in command. Contact us immediately if you find the covert vessel. Do not take any action until I return. Is that completely clear?"

"Yes, sir." A chill ran down Larson's back as



she watched Ridpath and Clark leave the bridge. She had never seen the commander so cold before.

A short time later, the Intrepid's launch vectored away. The small, triangular landing craft darted toward the sun baked surface.

The merchant ship settled to the rocky surface. The jagged craters and rounded mountains stood in stark contrast under the blazing sun. The green hull of the disguised Imperial starship was a splash of color on the dull, brown landscape. On the bridge, Stovel got up from his flight chair and faced the commander. "Team One and I will go to the crash site and retrieve the flight recorder from the wreck. Maintain condition three while we're gone."

Moments later, Stovel and two others in heavy, insulated spacesuits stepped from the airlock. Each had a bulky case slung from their shoulders and Stovel held a laser rifle. Their boots sunk little in the hard, crusty surface as they stepped from the shadow of the ship. Stovel checked the data display on his helmet visor and motioned for the others to follow. Cautiously, they climbed over a low ridge and out on a smooth lave bed. Off in the distance, an object of red and white glinted above a deep furrow in the ground. As the trio approached, it took shape. The bent and scarred wing of a Thunderbolt fighter jutted over the edge of the furrow it had made when it crashed. Carefully, they climbed down and surrounded the stubby winged fighter and peered into the cockpit. Dark spots of dried blood stained the flight chair.

Stovel brushed a fine layer of dust from under the raised cockpit canopy. "Captain Vladimir Grechko, squadron commander - this is the one!"

Quickly, the two technicians climbed into the cockpit and began plugging their equipment into the control consoles. After several minutes, one of the pair looked up. "Flight recorder data transfer complete, sir."

Stovel jerked his thumb toward their ship. "Move!" They climbed out of the furrow. "Go ahead," he ordered the technicians, reaching in a pouch on his waist. He retrieved a hand grenade and armed the detonator. He tossed it into the cockpit and rushed away. He stopped at the airlock and waited. Thirty seconds later chunks of metal and rock burst skyward. The debris settled to the surface in a slowly drifting cloud of tan dust. "Phase two complete."

Stovel didn't notice the small, white spot glinting on a distant hilltop.

"Imperial scum," Ridpath muttered, watching Grechko's Thunderbolt explode on his helmet visor display. In anger, he gripped his pistol tightly. He wanted to dash down the hill and confront them, to see if they were really Imperial agents. His better judgment convinced him that he and Clark would be no match against the crew of that starship if they were the spies. He memorized the ID number of the merchant starship as it lifted off and climbed toward orbit.

Switching off the display, Orson slowly edged up the hillside and retrieved the small holo camera and tripod. Quickly, he rushed down the hill and entered the airlock of the launch. He stepped from the airlock

into the cramped interior and made his way to the nose of the craft. Filtered sunlight from the forward viewport illuminated the two flight chairs and console.

Lieutenant Clark looked up from the computer monitor. "Was it the spies, Skipper?"

Releasing the latching ring, the commander lifted his helmet off. "They seemed to be. Good thing we got the flight recorder data first. They blew up the Thunderbolt to cover their trail. I've got it all on crystal." He sat down in the flight chair at the pilot station. "Did you have any luck?"

Clark nodded. "Captain Grechko had a good sensor lock on the Nartor." She pointed at the monitor. "Here's where the missiles impacted. You can see the carrier isn't making any new vector changes and the laser fire stopped. He lost lock on the carrier passed below the horizon."

"Too bad Nartor's fighters swung back. Grechko's force could've finished her off with no trouble. Extrapolate Nartor's point of impact."

Clark's fingers moved over the keyboard with precision. A moment later a series of coordinates flashed on the monitor. "It's no wonder everyone thought they used Mercury's gravity to boost away for their jump. If they would've had any of their main drive thrust, they could've held orbit." A diagram appeared on the monitor. "If they had no other thrust, they would've impacted on the edge of the Caloris Basin near Crater March."

Ridpath took a deep breath. "I read over the battle reports, and they found no wreckage or point of

impact."

"Their angle of attack was very shallow. With a little luck, they should've been able to make a belly landing."

Ridpath leaned back and stared at the diagram. "You're right. Even with maneuvering thrusters they could've made it. Hmm, Crater March is in the middle of the Caloris Mountains."

"Should I get a channel to the Intrepid?"

"Not just yet." Orson sat forward and began powering up the launch for flight. "Right after graduation, my first assignment was as a cutter pilot flying out of Mercury Station Three to the mines at Haystack and Goldstone Valleys. This old cinder has a few oddball features. I want to check out one thing first before we contact Intrepid." He studied a map that came up on his monitor.

A short time later the launch was moving several thousand meters above the moon like surface. Ridpath watched the infrared monitor closely. "I don't want us to look like anything but a typical boat."

Clark shook her head. "It'll be a real stroke of luck if we find them without better sensors, Skipper. Eastern Caloris Mountain chain coming up." Nodding, Ridpath guided the launch downward in a turning spiral. Smiling, he scanned the rugged terrain through the viewports. "The Caloris Mountains brings back some, well, interesting memories." Grinning, Clark glanced at the commander. "These miners have a welcoming ceremony that..." Blushing, he gazed out the viewport. "Never mind."

The Caloris mountain chain rose on

all sides before them. Skillfully, Ridpath maneuvered between the towering peaks. His eyes were riveted to the navigation monitor. The estimated point of Nartor's impact was a flashing red dot on the screen. The computer beeped as they passed over the location. Sheer cliffs lined the narrow, rock strewn valley. There was no indication of any ships having ever been there.

Staring at the rugged valley, Clark shook her head. "Nothing, Skipper." Suddenly, the combat monitor buzzed a warning tone. "We're being tracked by laser designator!" Ridpath boomed as he shoved the throttle to full thrust. They were pushed back in their flight chairs as he guided the launch upward. "Get your helmet on, quick!" As they cleared the mountain peaks, he activated the auto evasion program. It was too late.

The missile slammed into the underside of the launch. The blast left a jagged tear in the engineering section. Immediately, the doomed vehicle careened downward as it slowly rotated about its axis. System status monitors flashed warning messages in bright red letters. Smoke filled the cabin as the electrical system shorted out. Automatically, Clark's and Ridpath's visors closed as the hull lost integrity and the cabin air rushed into the vacuum of space. The approaching landscape filled the forward viewport.

"Eject!" Ridpath shouted as he reached on his flight chair and pulled the ejection handle. Explosive bolts blasted the emergency hatches away, and the rocket engines of the two flight chairs ignited. The flight chairs

blazed upward as the launch continued toward the surface. Seconds later the vehicle impacted against a mountain cliff.

Ridpath's flight chair came level and slowly descended toward the surface. He gripped the rocket engine control and guided the flight chair toward a clear area in a rock strewn crater. Bits of dust swept away as the chair came to rest. With pistol in hand, he jumped to his feet.

"Drop it!" Orson spun around to face a space suited figure holding a combat rifle pointed at him. He let the pistol slip from his hand. "Turn around!" Ridpath complied. He felt the intruder pull something free from his life support pack and his radio went silent. He waved the fuse pack in front of the commander's visor. The intruder released a stream of projectiles into the flight seat, destroying the distress beacon. With a poke in the ribs from the rifle, he began walking. Chills ran down his spine as he glanced about hoping to see Clark or some sign of her flight chair. He cursed himself for being so careless.

They climbed down a gradual slope into a huge canyon. They made their way around boulders and small craters until they came to the entrance of a cave in the canyon wall. Created by expanding gas when Mercury was formed, the cave opening was 500 meters wide and half as tall. Sitting a short distance away was the merchant starship. The cargo hatch was open to any empty bay.

Ridpath's heart skipped a beat. Chunks of metal and crushed stone littered the area. They stepped into the shadow of the entrance. His mouth hung open as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light.

The rectangular starship was lying twisted and broken next to the cave wall. Hanger doors hung open revealing empty launch bays. A blackened hole was in the center of the aft end of the ship. Ridpath clenched his fists in anger as he read the Imperial text on the nose of the carrier. "Nartor!"

Orson was pushed toward an open airlock hatch. The guard grabbed his shoulder and forced him to sit on a large rock nearby. He watched as the guard replaced his radio fuse pack. "Don't move and you won't get hurt," the guard growled.

A moment later Stovel climbed from the airlock. With hands on his hips, he gazed at Ridpath. "Well, Commander Orson Ridpath of the SDB Intrepid. I thought you were on a patrol circuit, Commander?"

Orson's eyes burned with hatred.

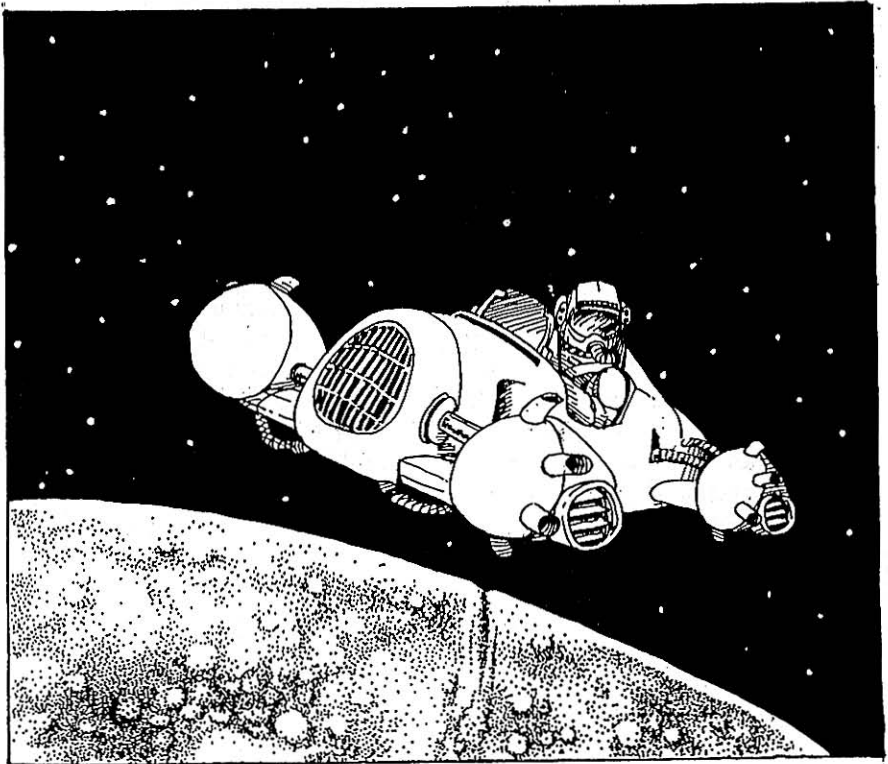
"You bastard!"

Stovel's face was solemn. "You have my sincerè apology about the death of Admiral Grechko. The technician has been punished for her incompetence. It was one of the unfortunate facets of a security investigation."

"You talk about the death of a fine man as if it was - "

"Oh, come now, Commander," Stovel burst out, pointing a finger at Orson. "Don't act like SolSec doesn't conduct the same type of operations on Imperial citizens. I even have it by good authority that they used the same methods on Solomani citizens to gather sensitive data." Ridpath's silence spoke volumes for him. "You didn't answer my question."

"I resigned."



Stovel nodded. "Were you alone?" Ridpath glared back. "No matter. If you weren't, no one can survive on the surface for very long, and besides the heavy metals in these mountains will block most comm signals. I don't think a rescue party will be coming anytime soon."

Their headphones hissed. "We're ready to start loading, Mr. Stovel."

"Proceed." They turned toward an open hanger. Floating on antigrav beams, an air raft loaded with six caskets drifted out. The Imperial flag was draped over each. A second air raft with a massive, black case strapped to the bed came next. They exited the cave toward the waiting merchant ship.

"A black globe generator!" Ridpath thought. "This was all for a force field generator?" he questioned the young man.

Stovel turned. "Yes, that's part of it. With all the unrest in the Imperium and a lack of replacement generators, it is a very important item. The other part of this operation will restore the reputation of my family."

"The caskets?"

The emotion in Stovel's Throat was clear even over the space suit radio.

"My grandfather and his senior staff, which includes my grandmother."

"Bringing them home for a decent burial is going to clear your family name?"

Stovel stepped closer to Ridpath.

"You Terrans don't understand, do you? When the Nartor never made it back to the fleet, it was assumed the carrier was damaged and crashed on Mercury. After the war, Imperial Intelligence investigated the Terran Patrol Search and

Rescue reports about finding no sign of the Nartor or its crew. Then everyone, Imperial and Solomani, thought that Captain Stovel put up his black globe screen and ran from the battle."

"Just because the carrier wasn't found on the surface doesn't mean it couldn't have made a misjump out of the system."

Stovel laughed. "You don't understand. The admiralty thought my grandfather RAN AWAY from an engagement with 24 fighters!" He looked down and kicked a small stone in disgust. "My grandfather and his entire crew were branded as traitors. The disgrace cursed my entire family. My father was never allowed to follow in the Stovel tradition of service with the Imperial Navy. He died two years ago, a broken and bitter man. Toward the end, even he thought grandfather had deserted." He crouched down so he could gaze into Ridpath's eyes. "No one ever imagined that the missile attack by Grechko had damaged the power plant shield. The Nartor was bathed in lethal radiation. I found grandfather still at the helm controls as he fought to save his ship." Tears welled in the corner of his eyes.

For a second, Ridpath felt pity for the young Imperial agent. He had heard stories about the Imperial Navy. "And now what?"

Standing, Stovel took a deep breath. "And now we go home. You, on the other hand will be staying on Mercury." He drew his pistol and aimed at Ridpath. "Don't move." The guard began wrapping a rope around the commander's arms and legs.

"If you are going to leave me to die of asphyxiation - "

Stovel smiled. "No. You will have the honor of witnessing the end of the Nartor. The remaining missile warheads have been armed and linked with the self destruct warhead. I promise you will feel no pain."

A group climbed down from the airlock. One of them came over to Stovel and handed him a small box. "The merchant is loaded and we're the last of the crew to leave. The timer is set at 20. All you have to do is key the final sequence."

"Good." Stovel turned to Ridpath. "You should have followed Lewis' orders and went on your patrol."

"Imperial scum!"

For a second, Stovel stared at Orson as he tried to rub the scar on his arm. Smiling, he punched a series of numbers on the keypad of the box. "Let's go," he ordered the guard.

Orson watched as they left the cave. A minute later the merchant ship lifted off. He pulled his arms and legs against the ropes with no results. The guard had done a good job. His mind raced with ideas and reasons why they wouldn't work. A chill ran down his back. "Well, it's not the worst way to - " His eyes caught a change in the shadows



near the cave entrance. He stared out on the blinding landscape, but saw nothing. He blinked several times to stop his eyes from watering. "Only wishful thinking."

The combat officer glanced at the command station on the bridge. "Mr. Larson, the comm unit picked up something."

Sitting at the command station, Neda looked up from the image of an ore freighter on a monitor. "Something, mister?" she asked with irritation.

"The computer only received 0.003 of a second. It could be a distress call."

"Location?"

"Eastern Caloris Mountain near the Crater March."

"How long before the Skipper checks in?"

"Five minutes, sir."

Larson thought for a moment. "We'll let Mercury Patrol handle it. We have our orders. Maintain course and speed."

Ridpath managed to roll over to the transmitter Stovel had dropped. A small monitor above the keypad was counting down the minutes till the Nartor would explode. Ten minutes blinked in red letters. He typed on the keypad with no results. "He wouldn't have left it if it could be stopped!"

"Skipper?"

ridpath's heart jumped as he looked out the cave entrance. "Clark, over here!"

Limping, Lt. Clark rushed to Ridpath's side. She drew a knife and began cutting his bonds. "What happened to the Imperials?"

"Got what they came for and left." She helped him stand. "Did you contact the Intrepid?"

"My chair tipped over when I landed. I don't think the beacon is working."

Ridpath picked up the transmitter box and checked the monitor. "We only have eight minutes before the Nartor self destructs."

"I saw a narrow ravine off to the south. We may be able to get far enough away." She started for the cave entrance.

"No good. They tied in the remaining missile warheads in with the self destruct system. That'll take out this entire valley." The idea hit

Orson like a jolt of electricity. "Come on!" He sprinted toward the open airlock.

Clark hobbled after him. "Do you think we can disarm it?"

"Not a chance."

The hairs on Clark's neck stood out in fear. "What are we going to do in only eight minutes, Skipper?"

"I just remembered something Vladimir said about his encounter with the Nartor." He pulled himself into the inner chamber. "I hope he was right." He helped Clark climb in.

Larson keyed her headset microphone. "Intrepid to Launch Five-C. Do you copy?" Butterflies began dancing in her stomach. "Any sign of them on the scanners?"

The combat officer shook his head. "Nothing, Mr. Larson." Suddenly, the combat computer began blaring a warning tone. "An explosion on the surface!" He examined his monitor. "Location is in the eastern Caloris Mountain chain."

Larson felt as if her stomach dropped to her toes. "On the main screen." A circular shock wave of rocks and dust was rising high into the black sky. The ionized matter covered hundreds of kilometers. "That's the biggest nuclear detonation I've ever seen," she breathed. "Scan for any ships or vehicles."

The combat officer typed on his keyboard. "The radiation is playing the devil with our ECM equipment." Frowning, he slowly adjusted several knobs. "Nothing, sir."

"Keep scanning!", Neda demanded. Her mind went from one thing to the next. Should she contact Admiral Lewis, or land and

investigate the blast sight first? God, what should she do?

"Something is moving away from the blast sight!" the combat officer burst out.

Not waiting for the officer, Larson jumped from her chair and typed on the the tracking control. She held her breath. A small lifeboat was accelerating toward orbit. The Imperial markings were clear on its white hull. "Helm, plot an intercept course!" The communication computer beeped for attention. Neda pressed down on several keys.

"Ridpath to Intrepid."

The disguised Imperial merchant vectored away from Mercury. It was heading toward the point where it could engage its jump drive and return to Imperial space.

On the bridge, Stovel watched the image of the Caloris Mountains on the main view screen. He smiled as the Nartor exploded.

The commander glanced from his station to the young agent. "Phase five complete."

Stovel nodded. "It will be good to get home and -" He stopped as the combat computer locked onto an object leaving the blast sight. "Zoom in on that!" The image on the screen jumped in size. "A lifeboat." "Ridpath," the commander uttered in disbelief.

In anger, Stovel slammed his fists down on the arm rest of his flight chair.

A knock came at the sick bay door. "Come in," the doctor said.

Orson entered. "How is she, Doc?" Smiling, the doctor finished wrapping Clark's knee. "Just a pulled ligament and some bruising, she'll make it."

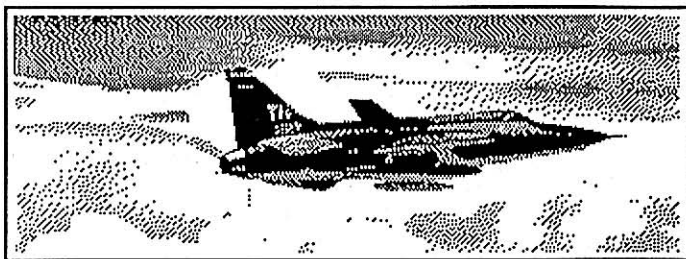
"Feels better all ready," Sandy said. Nodding, the commander put a hand on her shoulder. "Go ahead and get some rest. Later, I want to get a complete copy of the Thunderbolt's files to give Admiral Lewis." He left sick bay and went to his cabin. The intercom buzzed. "Ridpath here."

Larson's face appeared on his view screen. "We completed the scan of the blast sight, Skipper. Nothing left but a 500 meter crater. Mercury Traffic Control said they lost the Imperial merchant shortly after it left orbit."

Orson took a deep breath. "Very good, Mr. Larson. Set course for Terra Station Five and get me a channel to Admiral Lewis."

He switched off the screen and trudged over to the viewport. Mercury was receding as the Intrepid left orbit and vectored toward Terra. He gazed at the millions of stars blazing in the blackness. "You should've finished me when you had the chance, Stovel. Someday - someday I'm going to find you."

-- Gary Kalin --



Astrogator's Update To Diaspora Sector

by Charles E. Gannon

Shadigi Subsector

('E' of Diaspora Sector)

Date: 001-1129

Toga: The approximately 800 inhabitants of Toga—an interdicted planet reserved for individuals who wish to escape the technophilic environment of the Imperium—were the indirect victims of a Solomani attack late in 1118.

Units from the Federation of Daibeï fled to the world after being cut off from their squadron. The Solomani tracked them down and the ensuing battle destroyed the few technological installations that the Togans had decided to permit—including the community-serving air-filtration unit.

Over the past decade, occasional passing ships that lay over on Toga help to maintain what's left of the apparatus, but despite these efforts, the taint of the atmosphere is becoming increasingly pervasive inside the pressurized community.

The Togans are attempting to learn to live with the taint, but not all of them are capable of doing so. The atmospheric irritant is a form of spore that can cause respiratory seizures in many individuals—similar to a sudden, extreme (and unremitting) asthma attack. If the air filtration equipment fails altogether, as much as half of the community

might perish. The remainder will certainly have a dramatically reduced life expectancy.

Khuugar: Khuugar is the home of the thrunker, a bountied agricultural pest—and man-eater.

The thrunker is a very flat, wide annelid with a hard exoskeleton (armor value of 3) and a set of scoop-like front mandibles for digging. The 400 kilogram creature gets its name from the sound it makes as it pushes its way through the ground, buckling and displacing huge clumps of soil. It usually travels 1-5 meters below the surface as it searches for prey.

The thrunker is alerted to prey by vibrations, usually caused by creatures walking on the surface. Although an indiscriminate (albeit enthusiastic) carnivore, the thrunker is most likely to kill humans since it finds cultivated fields easiest to dig through in the terminal stages of its attack.

Once a thrunker has located its target, it begins coiling up toward the surface, compacting into a tight mass just before it breaks ground. Its final attack begins with a sudden fierce uncoiling motion that sends it up through the remaining dirt and onto its target.

The thrunker's mouth is not

colocated with its digging mandibles, but rather, is located along the first 1/4 of the creature's anterior/underside. Bracketing the mouth are two pair of hunting 'trap jaw' mandibles, which dig into the prey like grapples. The thrunker's mouth is somewhat like that of a lamprey, except that there are only five serrated plates that contract to

located somewhere near the planet's north pole. The other family of three (the Kinders) have decided they want to leave. Unfortunately, only Jeanette Kinder has the necessary technical know-how to keep the solar extractor/still and the air processing plant in working order. Originally TL 10 devices, Jeanette has jury-rigged these environmental systems to work with the equivalent of TL 8 parts and maintenance. None of the Sdar-Hugs have anywhere near this mechanical capability, nor do they have the background necessary for quick education in these matters.



Therefore, if the Kinders leave, the Sdar-Hugs will also be forced to depart, or will remain behind and die when the environmental systems undergo their first failure. Mutual threats have been exchanged and the arrival of a starship —ANY starship— at their small base could catalyze the tense mood into a violent confrontation.

shear the flesh of the prey. As it continues to eat, the creature burrows into the victim.

As was the case in the earliest days of Khuugar's settlement, the thrunker is still a bountied species, bringing in 300 cr. (or the equivalent in food or goods) per head.

Sudan: There are tense times on Sudan, where once congenial relations between the two prospecting families have gone sour.

The Sdar-Hugs (a family of 4) want to stay and continue to search for the rumored lanthanum deposits

Kushga Subsector

(F' of Diaspora Sector)

Date: 001-1129

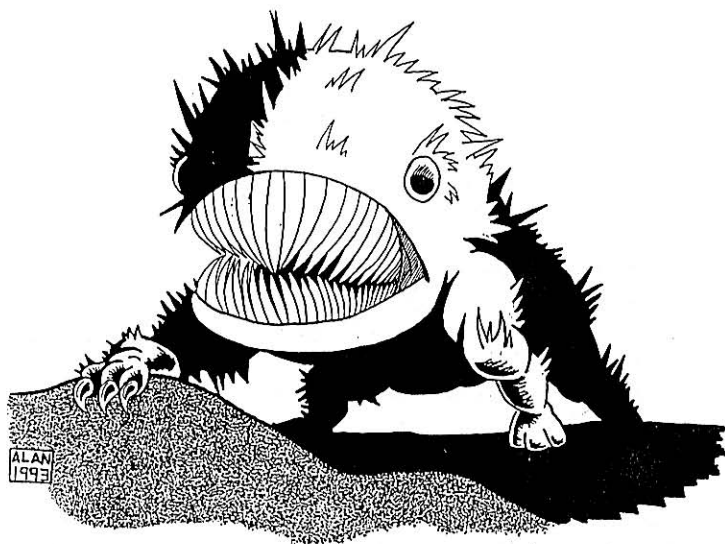
Fisher: The people of Fisher, having plummeted 7 tech levels (formerly TL 11, now declined to 4) in terms of local manufacture and industry, have nonetheless managed to take control of their difficult environmental situation without suffering any catastrophic loss of life.

Never a major transit node, the Fisher system became a seldom-visited backwater as the Rebellion wore on. As high-tech supplies wore out, so did the society's high-tech capabilities. Push came to shove when the main community's fusion reactor suffered a major failure in 1118 (it was due for a complete overhaul in 1119). Community leaders restructured their government into a group of technical bureaus, each charged with a major environmental task. Although the fusion reactor was repaired to a level of marginal operability, radical tech downscaling followed, designed to produce long-term self-reliance that could be sustained by locally available resources.

To this end, the tech bureaus (now simply referred to as The Bureaus) initiated a number of key TL - 4 projects. Primary interface with (and protection from) Fisher's corrosive atmosphere was shifted away from the small, efficient, but sophisticated and power-hungry special environment airlocks. Instead, a 5-chamber sequence of heavy iron doors (which can be moved by manual crank, if necessary) was combined with a constant

purging system which uses a constant out-draft of inert gases to keep local sulfur contaminants from entering the pressurized areas of the community.

The latest project is even more ambitious —and essential. The people of Fisher are constructing a tidal power station on the shores of the nearest of the fluid seas (some 120 km away from their community). Fisher's large moon (UWP size rating of 4) creates prodigious tides which could alleviate the community's dependence upon their fragile fusion plant. The construction of this system is decidedly dangerous work, given the inhospitability of the environment and the often savage conditions along the coast. However, the pay is in gems and off-worlders with technical expertise in any useful skill (vehicle operations, electronics, mechanical, vacc-suit, underwater or 0-gee operations) are gladly hired on.



Arriba: This planet is home to the faradgang, one of the most dangerous carnivores in known space.

The faradgang is large (massing over 1000 kg.) and prefers a steady diet of chirpers. Although most animals find chirpers to be impossible prey, the faradgang's evolution seems to have been driven to take advantage of this uncontested 'food opportunity.'

Chirpers are generally difficult prey because of their psionic 'invisibility' by which they cloud the minds of potential aggressors and make themselves 'unseen.' However, this power does not extend to the surrounding environment; twigs broken in passage still appear broken, for instance.

The faradgang's ability to locate and track chirpers is based upon its ability to discern the immediate 'trail' of a chirper. The faradgang accomplishes this by using its large, extremely IR-sensitive eyes to pick out the 'thermal path' left by a passing chirper. The very short-lived nature of this path is what makes it an excellent hunting guide; where the thermal path begins is where the chirper is located. Even though it cannot be seen, the faradgang can close in and refine the thermal signature almost to the point of a body outline of the chirper, at which point its position has been established clearly enough to permit an attack.

The faradgang is a large-headed quadruped with short, fur-like scales that lie flat when it is calm or resting, creating the appearance of

a flexible, unsegmented exoskeleton. However, when aroused or hunting, the faradgang's 'coat' becomes erect, giving it a 'prickly' appearance (and texture).

Viedma: The planet of Viedma is currently under military jurisdiction after a revolt by an unusually savage nihilistic group nearly destroyed the world's C-class starport. Not much is known about the rebels, other than their name (Vacuum Offers Infinite Delight, or VOID). Most of the membership is under 25, from the over-crowded low-level slums of the two larger cities, and has a dark fascination with death. Employment offers for investigators and security 'consultants' are generous, but thought to be very risky.

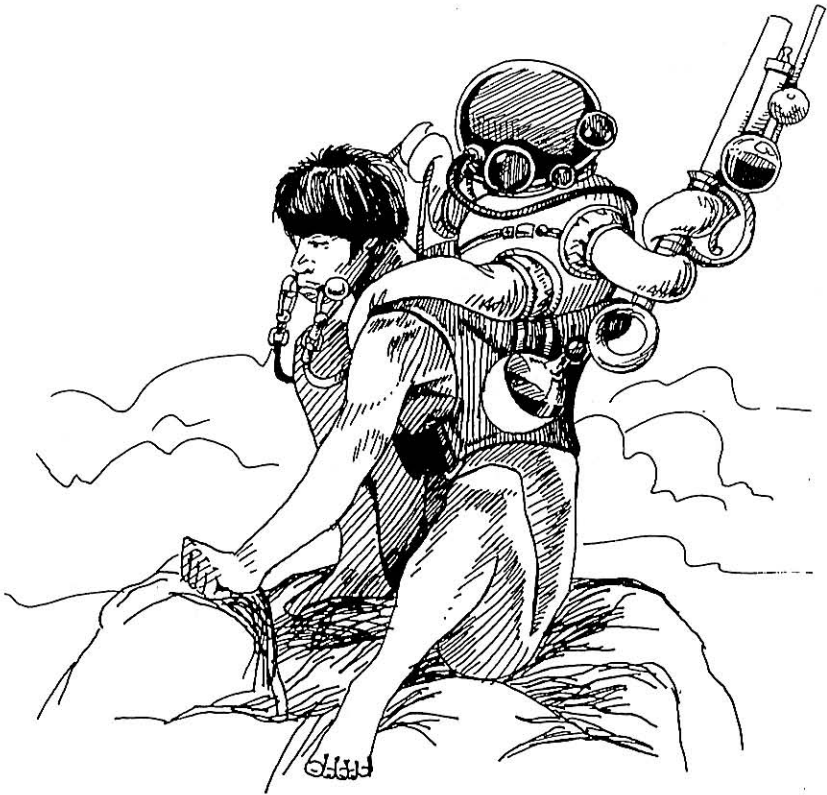
Erobi: One of the great tragedies of the war, over two billion died on Erobi after the environmental processing equipment of two major metroplexes were destroyed during the last half of 1121. The Solomani and Imperial combatants then both left the area for more than a year, pulling back from the stalemated area and leaving it as a no-man's land. During that time, no large merchant ships dared venture into this area, where occasional patrols of fighters hunted for unauthorized hulls.

As a result, despite immense efforts to repair the environmental systems and reshuffle as much of the population as possible, almost two billion persons succumbed to the insidious invasion of the Erobi's natural atmosphere, or suffocated as oxygen pressure plummeted in their areas. Naturally, individuals in

these doomed areas began struggling to leave them. Its own security forces overwhelmed, the normally repressive government of Erobi had to repeal various weapon ownership laws and permit civilians to carry melee weapons and shotguns to aid in the fight to protect the still-habitable areas from the desperate refugees that were trying to escape their dying areas.

The situation on this planet is still tense; scattered survivors in the lower levels of the damaged communities have managed to eke

out a grim existence by throwing off various taboos that are integral to even the most savage human societies. Armed and quite dangerous, they stage occasional raids into the undamaged metroplexes, often with devastating effect. Local security forces, while effective in defense, seem too guilt-ridden to counter-attack into the damaged areas. Outside contractors are welcomed, although most find the situation on this world too grim to endure for very long. Recruiters do not bother to advertise that aspect of the job, however.



How Are We Doing???

Please take the time to let us know what you liked and didn't like about this issue. Just photocopy this page or write your responses down on a piece of paper. Thanks.

Rank the following articles and submissions on a scale of one to five, with one being 'Totally Awesome' and five being 'Most Heinous'.

The Far Frontiers	1	2	3	4	5
Mercury Quest	1	2	3	4	5
Astrogator's Update to Diaspora Sector	1	2	3	4	5
Bonnie Mess	1	2	3	4	5
Lady Charlotte Class Yatch	1	2	3	4	5
Art Work (Paul Sanders)	1	2	3	4	5
Art Work (Alan Gillispie)	1	2	3	4	5
Art Work (Gary Kalin)	1	2	3	4	5
Art Work (Mike Sorensen)	1	2	3	4	5
Art Work (Tim Osborne)	1	2	3	4	5
Overall Satisfaction with TTC #3	1	2	3	4	5

Again, thanks for taking the time to fill this out. Oh yeah... I guess if you are not feeling creative enough for the contest this issue, if you just send in your response, we'll drop your name in the hat.

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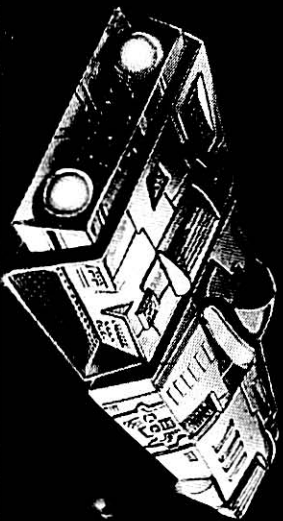
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