

TRAVELLER

MERCENARY ADVENTURE 1: VERLOREN HOOP



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

MERCENARY ADVENTURE 1:
VERLOREN HOOP

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Printed in China.

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INTRODUCTION

Verloren Hoop is set on the world of Medrealm, in the Beckann subsector of Gateway. This world lies around 20 parsecs from the Imperial border, between two local powers with a history of confrontation. The mercenary ticket featured in this adventure is almost complete when the story begins, so serves as backstory to involve the Travellers rather than being the primary focus of the adventure. That does not mean the end of mercenary involvement on Medrealm, of course. At the Referee's discretion the war could continue for some years and spawn additional mercenary tickets.

The adventure is suitable for a mercenary unit of almost any type, since it revolves around the actions of a detachment rather than the unit as a whole. Indeed, *Verloren Hoop* could be played out with a typical band of Travellers, perhaps acting on behalf of friends in the mercenary force, although it is best suited to a well-equipped and experienced group of soldiers. It is likely that the mercenary force this group is detached from will be typical infantry or combined-arms force. If the Travellers' mercenary unit is something unusual, such as a maritime combat force, the Referee may have to adapt the default background but the adventure should unfold along the same lines no matter what the parent unit is.

The Referee should note that this adventure is not suitable for a group driving a grav tank or stomping around in battle dress. If the Travellers have access to such hardware they may be inclined to use it – or may not want to be parted from it. Such a group will not succeed, as there are obstacles to the high-tech approach. Experienced mercenaries will realise this, and should be informed by the Referee, but if they choose to proceed anyway they will suffer the consequences.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

If the Travellers do not have or are not part of a mercenary unit, the Referee will need to create one. In all probability this will be a company-sized force or smaller, modestly equipped for service against mid-tech opponents. This unit will feature in some aspects of the

VERLOREN HOOP

The term 'forlorn hope' is often used to refer to a storming party or similarly high-risk enterprise. The term is in fact derived from the Dutch 'verloren hoop', which is more correctly translated as 'lost troop'. This term for a doomed venture appears in other languages; in French it would be 'les enfants perdus' (lost children) in the same context.

Whatever language is chosen, verloren hoop describes the Travellers' enterprise very well. They are a small group detached from a larger force, sent to undertake a desperate mission in the hope of saving their comrades. The Travellers are indeed lost children and their prospects are not good. Yet the prize at hand is survival, not just for the Travellers but for their entire unit – a prize worth any risk.

adventure but need not be heavily detailed other than a few personalities the Travellers may interact with. The Travellers may be part of this unit or could be a group of replacement personnel sent to join it just as events start to go south.

Elements of this adventure draw heavily on the additional weapon characteristics described in *Mercenary* and the *Field Catalogue*. The Referee is advised to be become familiar with the alternate initiative mechanics making use of Quickdraw to resolve sudden encounters as well as the concepts of Signature and Knockdown.

This adventure mostly takes place in 'close focus' rather than abstracting the actions of a unit as a whole. For this reason there is no need to specify the CBAS and other values of most units involved – the big picture is in this case a backdrop for the actions of the Travellers. If the Travellers want to fight it out as a unit there is only one possible outcome – they will lose and badly. The fact they are in such a bad position is the reason for the adventure.

INVOLVING THE TRAVELLERS

The Travellers' unit is on Medrealm, operating alongside local forces but actually on contract to a broker from the Viyard Concourse. The terms of this ticket do not affect the adventure, so the Referee should create a middle-of-the-road set of payment terms suitable for the Travellers' unit. If the adventure is to be played as part of a campaign the early stages of the ticket can be played out if this seems desirable. Alternatively, events up to the beginning of the adventure can be narrated.

The Travellers' unit was one of the last to be recruited by the Viyard Concourse for service on Medrealm. Their remit was to operate alongside, and in support of, local forces fighting against the Galian Federation occupation of the world. Various other terms are used for the Galian presence on Medrealm, depending on the viewpoint of the observer but the ticket was legal and legitimate.

Unfortunately the unit (or just the Travellers if they are part of a draft of reinforcements) arrived on Medrealm just as the Galian Federation launched its endgame move. A swarm of orbital missile launchers was deployed

from the starport, attacking anything that rose above ground level. Deprived of aerospace support and grav transportation, many units ran out of supplies or found their positions untenable. Some surrendered, only to find the Galian Federation was not honouring its repatriation obligations. Rumours of massacres may be unfounded but few want to take the risk. What is certain is that any mercenary unit that does surrender will be detained for investigation for a sufficiently long time that its funds will run out.

Surrender means going out of business, one way or another, but even with a half-hearted Galian force advancing in a leisurely fashion there are no prospects of victory. The only answer is to get offworld; easier said than done. The unit is trapped with allies in the Rammline Pocket and cut off from support. There is transport available to a neutral landing area and starships whose captains are willing to accept the mercenaries' repatriation bonds. The problem is getting there through hostile territory.



REFeree'S INFORMATION

The following information is for the use of the Referee. How much of it is made available to the Travellers, and in what manner, is for the Referee to decide. Much of this data is commonly known or available through data terminals, info feeds to Travellers' comms and so forth. However, the commonly available version may be incomplete, dumbed-down or wildly inaccurate for all manner of reasons. The Referee has the whole story; if the Travellers want accurate information they may have to search for it or use inventive means.

THE GATEWAY SECTOR

Gateway was colonised before and during the early years of the Long Night and in addition has multiple minor non-human powers. It lies between the Third Imperium and the Two Thousand Worlds of the K'kree but sees little K'kree activity other than at its trailing side. Many worlds are independent but there are multiple small human and non-human powers vying for control of at least some of them. The overall situation is one of cross-cutting agendas in a loose and unregulated environment. This provides many opportunities for mercenary forces, although conditions are sometimes very dangerous due to a lack of enforced standards and practices.

THE GALIAN FEDERATION

Comprising some 32 star systems, the Galian Federation is a remnant of a much larger previous polity. This was the Galian Trade League, which once encompassed the territory of most modern human states in Gateway, as well as the space in between. Long content with a core territory and a few outposts here and there, in recent years there have been moves within the Galian Federation to re-integrate some of its old territories.

The Galian Federation may be a remnant but it remains one of the most important polities in Gateway. Close to the only jump-2 link into the Ley sector, the Federation has considerable contact with the Imperium. Its trade ships range widely, giving the Federation considerable influence right across the sector and beyond.

THE TRINDEL CONFEDERACY

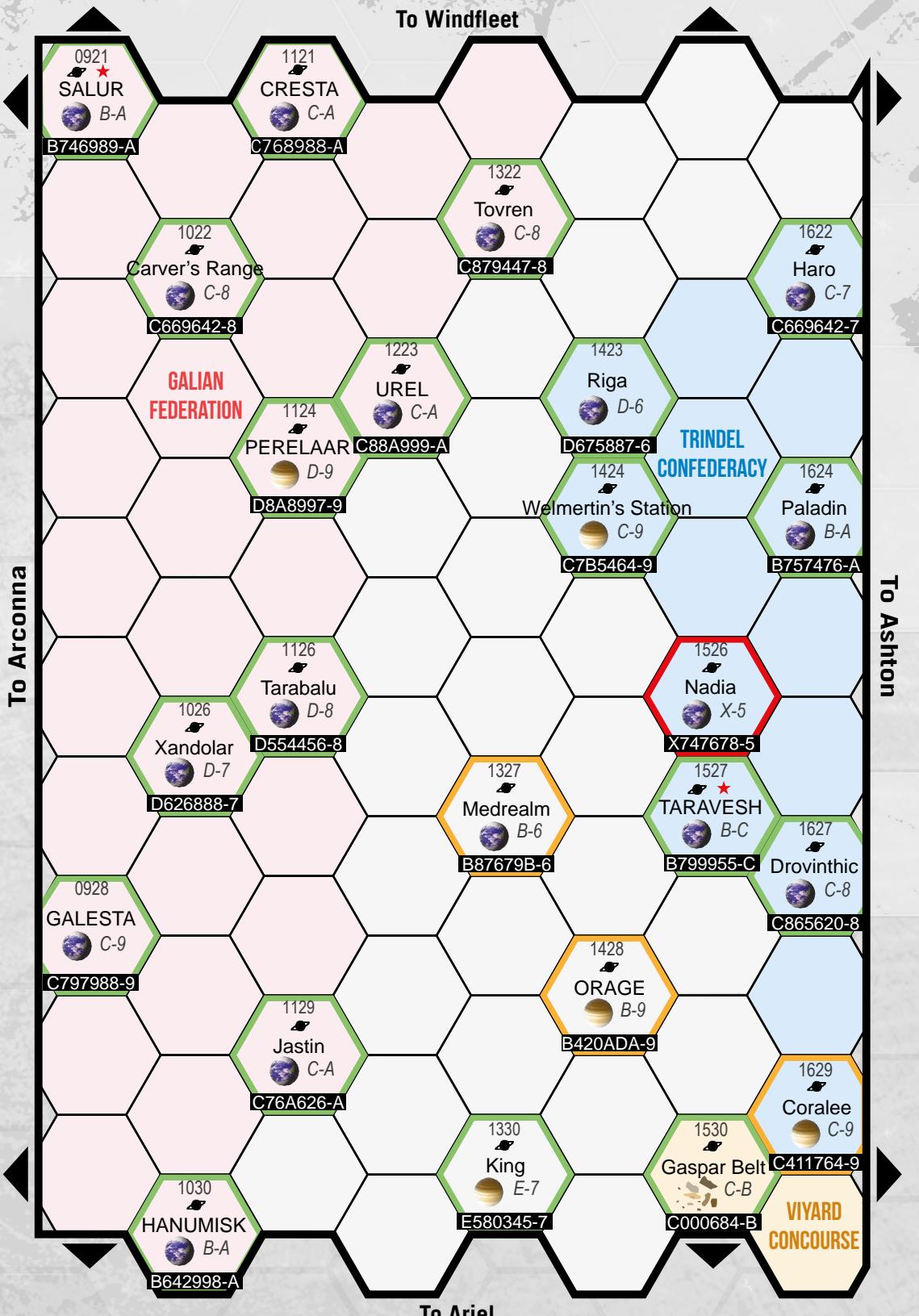
Once a part of the Galian League, the Confederacy comprises three small states across 12 star systems. These form a very loose organisation with no central capital – the three states that make up the Confederacy have their capitals at Tristar, Trindel and Ashton. The industrial worlds of Trindel and Taravesh provide most of the Confederacy's technology, although Trindel's central position makes it the natural choice for what passes for a capital and base of operations for corporate concerns.

Confederacy politics are something of a nightmare, with the internal affairs of three states spilling over into the internal and external policies of the Confederacy as a whole. As a result, an excess of compromises hamstrings most attempts to get anything done, while occasionally the need to push a measure through results in agreements to all sorts of projects, concessions and operations.

THE VIYARD CONCOURSE

The Concourse was formed from fragments of the collapsed Galian Trade League and another polity named the Collective. The capital is at Viyard but the old Collective capital at Barclaron is also extremely important. The average Tech Level of Concourse worlds is 9–10, although industrial capacity is rather low.

The Concourse is engaged in a dispute with the Galian Federation over the ownership of worlds lying between the two and with the Trindel Confederacy over Coralee. These disputes have led to many free-fire incidents and occasional 'war-like situations'. Tensions are not likely to relax in the near future and trade between the two is almost non-existent.



- Gas Giant
- Starport Class & Tech Level
- Naval Base

- Green Secure System
- Orange Amber Zone
- Red Red Zone

- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)
- Asteroid Belt

BECKANN SUBSECTOR

Gateway

J

BECKANN SUBSECTOR

Beckann contains 23 star systems, most of which are part of either the Trindel Confederacy or the Galian Federation. One system belongs to the Viyard Concourse; all others are – at least in theory – independent. In practice most of these worlds are disputed and have at times been fully controlled before being lost again. Tech Level of most worlds varies between 6–10, averaging at 8. The highest Tech Level available in the subsector is 12, at Taravesh.

Name	Location	Bases	Profile	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Gas Giants	Allegiance
Carver's Range	1022	—	C669642-8	Ni, Ri	—	G	GF
Coralee	1629	—	C411764-9	Ic, Na	A	G	TC
Cresta	1121	—	C768988-A	Hi	—	G	GF
Drovinthic	1627	—	C865620-8	Ag, Ni, Ga, Ri	—	G	TC
Galesta	0928	—	C797988-9	Hi, In	—	—	GF
Gaspar Belt	1530	—	C000684-B	As, Na, Ni, Va	—	G	VC
Hanumisk	1030	—	B642998-A	Hi, In, Po	—	G	GF
Haro	1622	—	C669642-7	Ni, Ri	—	G	TC
Jastin	1129	—	C76A626-A	Ni, Ri, Wa	—	G	GF
King	1130	—	E580345-7	De, Lo	—	G	—
Medrealm	1327	—	B87679B-6	Ag	A	G	—
Nadia	1526	—	X747678-5	Ag, Ni, Lt	R	G	TC
Orage	1428	—	B420ADA-9	De, Hi, In, Na, Po	A	G	—
Paladin	1624	—	B757476-A	Ni, Ga	—	G	TC
Perelaar	1124	—	D8A8997-9	Fl, Hi, In	—	G	GF
Riga	1423	—	D675887-6	—	—	—	TC
Salur	0921	N	B746989-A	Hi, In	—	G	GF
Tarabalu	1126	—	D554456-8	Ni	—	G	GF
Taravesh	1527	N	B799955-C	Hi, In, Ht	—	G	TC
Tovren	1322	—	C879447-8	Ni	—	G	GF
Urel	1223	—	C88A999-A	Hi, Wa	—	G	GF
Welmertin's Station	1424	—	C7B5464-9	Fl, Ni	—	G	TC
Xandolar	1026	—	D626888-7	—	—	G	GF

THE WORLD OF MEDREALM

Medrealm lies right in the middle of Beckann, providing a jump-2 link between the worlds of the Confederacy, Federation and Concourse. It is the logical trade nexus for the subsector, despite being of limited economic value in its own right. The construction of a Class B orbital starport and its small associated downport was undertaken using funds contributed by the Galian Federation, which began to claim ownership of the system soon after the port was completed.

Ownership was always based on economic factors rather than the wishes of the planetary population, who benefited little from trade passing through their orbital space. In due course the Trindel Confederacy began to exploit the annoyance of the world government, promising investment and technological assistance in return for allegiance. This inevitably led to a limited conflict in which the Confederacy fared badly, followed by the deployment of extensive ground forces from the Federation to secure territory.

For a time the people of Medrealm seemed content to live under near-occupation. The situation was not unpleasant; Galian forces interfered little in local affairs so long as the other regional powers were kept out. However, external influence was still felt and there were those who considered the Galian forces planetside to be an affront. A pro-independence movement gathered pace, eventually expanding into armed insurgency.

Despite protestations from the Galian Federation that Medrealm was already, and had always been, independent there were those who championed a 'Federation Out!' agenda and were willing to fight for it. Arms and funding were available from representatives of the Concourse and the Confederacy, who of course only wanted 'a free and independent Medrealm'. Nobody was fooled but insurgents were willing to accept help with strings attached rather than fight a doomed campaign against a greatly superior opponent.

The insurgency flared up and died down over the years, with the governmental forces of Medrealm showing little inclination to fight their own people. Only when the Galian Federation applied pressure did the government's forces act and then sluggishly and without a great deal

MEDREALM

B 8 7 6 7 9 B – 6

Starport	B	Good
Size	8	12,800km
Atmosphere	7	Standard; Tainted
Hydrosphere	6	60%
Population	7	Tens of millions
Government Type	9	Impersonal Bureaucracy
Law Level	B	Rigid control of civilian movement
Tech Level	6	Nuclear Power

of competence. Galian forces did much better against the insurgents, especially once they ceased sharing information with local counterparts.

Growing impatient, the Galian Federation's 'ambassador' to Medrealm ordered the arrest of several government figures accused of being in league with insurgents. These were mid-level officials whose arrest was intended to send a message without being a direct threat to the planetary government. The measure backfired, resulting in an uprising by previously moribund local military forces. They were able to surprise and disarm some Galian units, confiscating their equipment.

The captured personnel proved useful as hostages, enabling the world government to demand a withdrawal of Galian forces before the captives were dumped unceremoniously at the downport. However, no sooner were they offworld than the Galian Federation began establishing landing points and bringing in fresh units. Even with captured equipment the locals were no match for the offworlders. A series of hard defeats was only broken when forces from the Confederacy and Concourse began to arrive.

MEDREALM

UWP: B87679B-6

HEX
SCALE
100km

Direction of
world rotation
→



- Mountain
- Land
- Sea
- Semi-Desert
- Ice cap
- Starport
- City

A complex three- or sometimes four-way war then ensued, with elements of the local forces siding with the three offworld powers or opposing all of them in the name of independence. None of the major powers was officially at war with any other but operated 'in support of friendly local forces' or using similar legal fictions. Mercenary units were increasingly deployed by all sides, with varying degrees of success.

Over time the conflict bogged down, largely due to a lack of will on the part of the Galian authorities. They held the highport, which was essential to trade across the subsector, and cared little about the planet below. If one of the other powers came to dominate Medrealm it might have a legal claim to the port but preventing this was enough for the Gilians. A disputed Medrealm absorbed resources but the effort required to fully annex the planet was considered unviable.

Ultimately the Trindel Confederacy more or less withdrew from the conflict, other than sending money to the factions opposing the Galian Federation, and the Viyard Concourse began to operate solely through mercenaries. The planetary government received large subsidies and was expected in return to follow a pro-Viyard policy. The Galian Federation settled for occupying enough of the planet to claim ownership and the situation stabilised into a 'lukewarm war' characterised by raids and occasional minor clashes.

This continued for several years, draining Viyard resources whilst the Galian Federation needed to do little in order to maintain the status quo. Its control of the orbital port was all that really mattered to the Federation and with that came military as well as economic benefits. Troop movements in and out of Medrealm were easy for the Federation and difficult for the Concourse and eventually the port became the centrepiece of a new strategy.

A force of cheap, short-duration orbital weapons platforms was deployed at the orbital port, along with basic launch and control facilities. These missile-armed satellites could be deployed as needed, providing a low-orbit aerospace interception capability. On-station time was just a few weeks but during that time a satellite could shoot down grav craft or other flying vehicles in its area of coverage. When necessary, coverage could be surged by launching more satellites, although mostly only one or two were deployed.

This gave the Galian Federation a stranglehold on Medrealm, greatly impeding the operations of local forces and mercenaries fighting alongside them. The balance gradually tipped in favour of the Galian Federation, which was content to slowly and cheaply take over the surface of Medrealm. Today, the war is in its final stages. The last holdouts are isolated from one another and suffering serious ammunition and supply shortages.

For the mercenaries fighting on Medrealm there is an additional problem. Stung by the use of its forces as hostages, the Galian Federation is doing the same to mercenaries and any Viyard Concourse personnel captured. There are rumours, but no proof, that some are being disarmed and 'eliminated' but whether or not this is true at least some mercenaries are being shipped into Galian space for 'eventual trial as war criminals'. It is likely that the majority are completely innocent but being a captive in such a hostile political environment is always hazardous. In any case, the Galian Federation is punishing mercenaries for fighting against it by dragging out proceedings as long as possible in the hope of ruining the units financially.

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

The majority of the planet's surface is peaceful, in the sense that there are no major settlements or areas of economic worth. With nothing to fight over, these areas are left alone for the most part. About half the major settlements are either occupied by Galian garrisons or enjoy a nebulous status as 'Galian-friendly', under which they are left alone unless they start trouble. The remaining settlements are, for the most part, tenuously held by local and Viyard forces that are largely cut off from one another. One-by-one these pockets are surrendering or falling to an unhurried Galian advance after only weak resistance.

There are a few major centres of resistance, mainly in areas where terrain provides an effective defence, and in addition there are several neutral areas respected by both sides. The main starport is under Galian control but makeshift landing areas were set up during the more active phases of the conflict, protected under neutrality agreements as 'repatriation havens'. Essentially, any unit holding a valid repatriation bond – which is built into almost all mercenary contracts – becomes non-combatant upon entering a haven and activating its bond. The unit may have to wait for a ship to take it offworld but its costs are paid from the bond during that period. Transportation costs are also covered.

Any unit that declares itself non-combatant in a haven is protected by layers of interstellar agreements and treaties, plus the fact that a power ignoring such niceties would find itself unable to hire mercenaries and perhaps on the receiving end of the odd ‘speculative punitive operation’ by the more aggressive of those offended. On the other hand, a unit that has declared itself non-combatant must remain so. There are severe penalties for violating this clause under any circumstances other than self-defence. Once declared non-combatant a unit may be given permission to transit elsewhere but this is a matter for negotiation and unlikely to be granted in the present circumstances. The only options are to wait for a ship or hope the conflict ends soon so that the unit can move on to a new ticket.

GALIAN FORCES

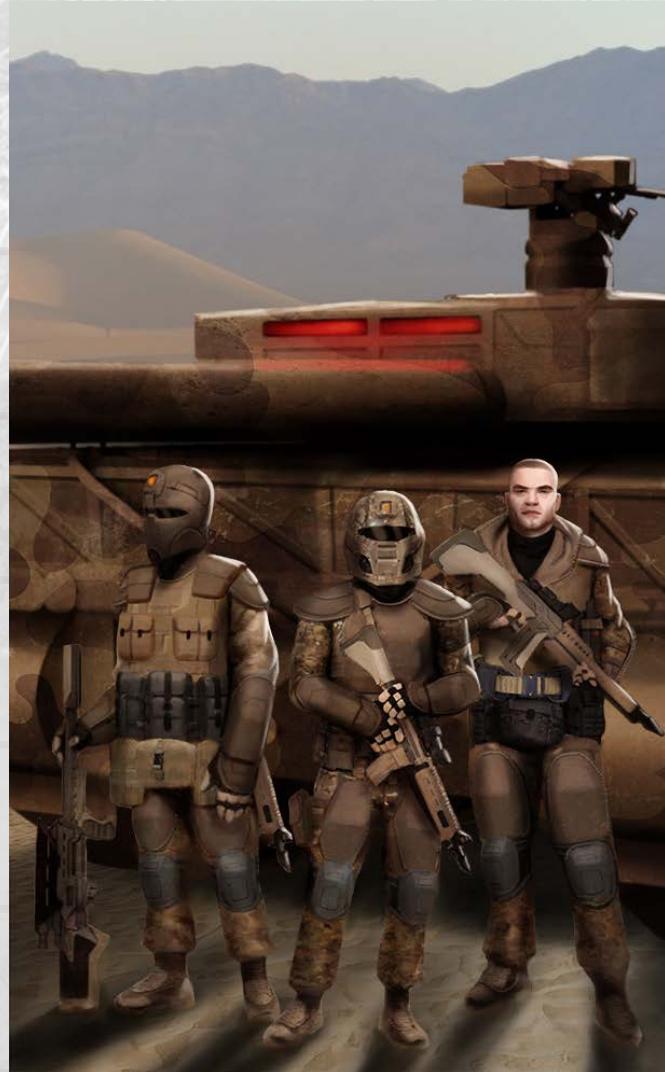
Galian forces are raised across the Galian Federation, trained and equipped to a common standard. The majority of troops are light infantry, in the sense that their units have few or no organic transport assets. If a unit is assigned as a garrison or security element at an installation, it may or may not have a few light vehicles assigned depending upon circumstances. For operations in the field an infantry formation will be paired with a transport battalion and whatever additional supports are required.

The standard Galian model for field operations is the reinforced infantry battalion. This is a battalion-sized infantry component with a wheeled or grav mobility element, fielded as a single unit, plus a company-sized element each of artillery and light armour. Such formations are the standard tactical unit and often more than enough to deal with a problem in their area of operations. The Galian Federation has fought few large ground wars and has little experience of operations with larger formations. The largest commonly encountered is an ad-hoc brigade made up of two reinforced infantry battalions, usually with some additional artillery and a reconnaissance element.

The majority of transportation is ground vehicles, including self-propelled artillery and light armour. Like most interstellar states the Federation fights its major wars in space for the most part, with ground forces used primarily to occupy and secure territory. Most combat vehicles are light four or six wheeled designs armed with medium-calibre guns or rapid-fire autocannon. Aerospace defence is taken seriously, with most combat vehicles carrying a secondary weapon for the purpose.

Galian Federation Reinforced Infantry Force

Characteristic	Value	DM
Force Name	Reinforced Infantry Battalion	—
Unit Size	Battalion	—
Unit Type	Infantry	—
Unit TL	10	+1
Mobility Type	Motorised	+4
Combat	7	0
Bombardment	3	-1
Aerospace	5	-1
Support	4	-1
CEI or DEI	7	0
Morale	8	0
Reputation	7	0



LOCAL FORCES

Medrealm's planetary army was equipped with TL6 weaponry of local production, plus a few imported items, before the Galian invasion. Quantities of hardware were captured early in the campaign but most of this is now unserviceable. Offworld opponents of the Galian Federation have supplied quantities of weaponry, creating a patchwork of TL6 and TL9–10 among local units.

Organisation before the war was very flat, with infantry grouped into patrols of 20 personnel. Mobile units were supplied with half-track trucks, which served throughout the force as weapons carriers, transports and specialist vehicles. There were no tanks or armoured vehicles, little artillery and virtually no high-level support or organisation. This setup was more than sufficient for internal security and capable of deterring raids from offworld in conjunction with Medrealm's small aerospace defence contingent. This used imported equipment to protect the downport and was lost during the Galian invasion.

The current organisation, if that is the right word, of Medrealm's forces is still based around the patrol. Offworld weapons are scattered among the many patrols, usually in the hands of more skilled soldiers. For example, a patrol might be equipped with local TL6 assault rifles but contain a couple of sharpshooters who have been given TL10 rifles. Whilst nothing special by interstellar standards, these weapons increase the range and hitting power of the force considerably.

Larger forces have been built up by simply combining patrols and adding a command layer. A Grand Patrol is typically formed from five or six patrols plus some command personnel and whatever supports are available. It will usually be mobile, using half-track trucks as transport, weapons carriers and artillery tractors, and have a handful of support weapons. Multiple-mount light autocannon are favoured, on a high-angle mount that gives a measure of air defence. Some trucks have been set up as tank destroyers with a 100mm gun but these are extremely vulnerable and not effective.

Those forces still fighting are grouped into ad-hoc field commands consisting of multiple Grand Patrols, which lack force cohesion and cooperate loosely at best. There are no officers who had experience of command above company level before the war and current leaders have learned their trade the hard way. Most field commands are demoralised and short of ammunition. Some are just waiting for an excuse to surrender.

Medrealm Grand Patrol

Characteristic	Value	DM
Force Name	Grand Patrol	—
Unit Size	Company	—
Unit Type	Infantry	—
Unit TL	6	—
Mobility Type	Motorised	+4
Combat	5	-1
Bombardment	1	-2
Aerospace	3	-1
Support	1	-2
CEI or DEI	5	-1
Morale	6	0
Reputation	6	0



VIYARD MERCENARIES

The Viyard Concourse has deployed a considerable number of mercenary units since the conflict began. Most are typical; an infantry company plus some support. These units are scattered among local field forces to stiffen them and in some areas are the only credible resistance to the Galian advance. There are whole sectors where the feats performed by the crew of a lone grav tank are the only reason the defence has not collapsed. However, even the most determined offworlders are looking for a way out as it has become obvious there is no prospect of victory or even reinforcement.

The typical mercenary company is equipped to TL9, with three platoons of infantry who may or may not have their own transport plus a support platoon with some artillery or armoured vehicles. Many units have armed themselves with local weapons as ammunition is more readily available, saving their last stocks of munitions for a breakout or final defence.

Offworld Mercenary Company

Characteristic	Value	DM
Force Name	Mercenaries	—
Unit Size	Company	—
Unit Type	Infantry	—
Unit TL	9	—
Mobility Type	Infantry	-3
Combat	8	0
Bombardment	1	-2
Aerospace	4	-1
Support	3	-1
CEI or DEI	9	+1
Morale	8	0
Reputation	9	+1



THE RAMMLINE POCKET

The city of Rammline is relatively isolated as a result of its location. It stands on a high plateau bounded to the north by a low mountain chain known as the Prosven Range and to the east by an arm of mountains named the Aix Ridge. To the south and west the land falls away to an area of semi-desert of minimal economic value.

The river Prosven rises in the mountains and runs close to the city before heading generally east towards the coast. This creates a well-watered strip between the mountains and the desert, upon which several modest settlements stand. The river is a trade artery, with small vessels transiting from larger ports down the coast as far as the town of Trempel. The river is navigable by small craft above Trempel but a series of rapids and minor waterfalls known collectively as the Aix Falls creates a solid barrier.

THE PROSVEN RANGE

Unimpressive by the standards of many worlds, the Prosven range is still a formidable obstacle to travel and settlement. Its backbone is an almost unbroken chain of peaks, with only a few high passes. Mountains of this sort are a minor inconvenience to grav vehicles but gusty winds around the peaks can make travel awkward. For the TL6 economy of Rammline the Prosvens are more of a barrier and one reason why settlement followed the valley to the south.

The mountains have reasonable deposits of industrially significant metals and were once the site of several mines. Most are played out or have been abandoned due to economic realities and the rail links supporting them have decayed over the years. Only one mine is of significance to this adventure, as it was taken over by the Galian Federation for use as a forward base, now designated Forward Base Prosven. On the other side of a high ridge is Lake Eurle, source of the River Prosven. Forward Base Prosven is detailed on page 28.

RAMMLINE

Rammline is primarily an agricultural town, with some minor industry taking advantage of nearby iron and copper deposits. Population is around 25,000 in peacetime but at present there are thousands more refugees fleeing the fighting downriver and the remnants of army and mercenary units camped out around the town. Infrastructure and industry are at present largely unaffected by the conflict as the town has not been directly attacked.

Rammline is connected to the town of Trempel by a railway link that runs alongside the river by way of Liene and the Transaix Pass. This line is still in regular use, although it has occasionally been damaged by Galian attacks. Links to the mines in the mountains to the north are patchy; some have been cannibalised to keep the main line running and a lot of the rolling stock has been destroyed.

Work has been going on for several weeks to create a belt of fortifications around Rammline. These are thinly stretched but quite deep, with the intent of keeping enemy artillery away from the city as long as possible. The plan is for static units to hold improvised forts whilst more mobile formations use them as pivots for counterattacks. This is a reasonable strategy but can only prolong the defence a little. Sooner or later the enemy will be able to strike directly at the town and surrender will be necessary.

LIENE

The defensive works in front of Rammline are mainly for the sake of morale; Liene is the real last line of defence. The Aix Ridge is the last suitable terrain to hold up an advance and give the defenders an advantage. Rivercraft cannot cross the Aix Falls and mountains to either side make ground operations difficult. The defenders have created a set of bunkers and fallback positions along the length of the Transaix Pass, along with barricades and earthworks in and around the town.

RAMMLINE POCKET & SURROUNDINGS



Liene was once a mining town but the ore ran out some years ago and the economy switched to farming in the wide belt stretching back to Rammline. Population was originally around 8,000 but about two-thirds have left for the relative safety of Rammline. Some of those who remain have joined militias assisting the local forces but they are likely to melt away once an offensive begins.

The main advantage of Liene as a defensive position is the difficulty of reaching it other than through the pass, creating a choke point. The high ground to the east could be used to site artillery if it can be brought up by grav vehicles but there are few of those available to the Gilians in this region and no way to move heavy weapons through such terrain without them. It might be possible to bypass and flank Liene to the south by going around the mountains but this is a wide detour through rocky semi-desert and would be a difficult undertaking. Thus it is at Liene that the defenders mean to make their stand.

TREMPPEL

Trempel is the last port on the navigable section of the river. It grew to around 12,000 population as an economic centre, where the Transaix Railway met the riverine trade network and has always had an extensive farming industry. Most of the population have left, leaving Trempel as a barricaded ghost town occupied by local forces and offworld mercenaries. Work is underway to demolish the river-docks, preventing use of the port to supply the advancing Gilians.

Trempel is the current anchor of the defensive line, with units still moving into positions built whilst they were trying to hold further downstream. It is not a strong position, open on the southern side to a flanking movement, but there is nothing better before Liene.

THE PROSVEN VALLEY CAMPAIGN

The Prosven valley, and Rammline in particular, is not economically or politically significant. This region has thus far been a low-priority target for the Galian forces. However, as more important cities fall into their hands, the Gilians are beginning to push up the valley from the coast. Defeats elsewhere have driven a mix of local and mercenary forces into the Prosven pocket, which is shrinking steadily as defenders retreat upriver.

Galian grav-mobile forces are still for the most part busy elsewhere, so the river valley provides the only viable route of approach. The mountains are an effective defence in that direction and the semi-desert poses a different, but equally major, logistics problem for the Gilians. The simplest approach is to push up the river,

with each captured town becoming a forward logistics base. Supplies are mostly moved by river and despite the best efforts of the defenders little can be done to interrupt the supply chain.

The demoralised local and mercenary forces are putting up little resistance, whilst the Gilians are content to advance cautiously. The usual pattern is for defenders to pull back and set up a new position with one flank anchored on the river. This is held for a few days until the Gilians have achieved sufficient force density that an assault would be certain to break through. The defenders have no good options. When they try to hold their positions they are nibbled away by the Gilians' scanty but superior artillery before an assault smashes their line and forces a desperate fighting retreat. Alternatively the line is outflanked in the desert after a series of running skirmishes.

A pattern has emerged, whereby the defenders hold their position until it is obviously untenable then abandon it, removing the need for a costly assault. This saves lives on both sides, which may be important when the inevitable collapse occurs; mercenaries and locals alike face a greater chance of retribution if they inflict heavy casualties. The conflict in the Rammline Pocket is therefore now a formality, with the defenders buying as much time as they can before pulling back. Defeat is inevitable but the longer the pocket holds out the greater the chance of an armistice or safe-passage agreement. The alternative is surrender and a lengthy period in custody.

A few units are still putting up a fight. These include dutiful or patriotic locals and mercenaries who are either professionally committed or feel their reputation will be enhanced by a good – if doomed – defence. These units mostly operate on the desert flank whilst the less determined go through the motions of setting up a defensive position they know they will abandon after a few days. Occasionally a mission is launched downriver to try to disrupt the flow of Galian supplies. Some personnel volunteer for this duty as it gives them an honourable way out of the trap. There is an unspoken agreement that it is acceptable to do some damage then surrender, buying time for everyone else. As a result few missions now even consider extraction.

The units in the pocket are in a terrible condition. Battered from months of fighting, their remaining equipment is in a sorry state and ammunition is very short. It has become too risky to make use of grav vehicles or battle dress, as the signature from their systems will register on sensors aboard the Gilians' orbital interceptor constellation and generate a priority strike. The few remaining high-tech items are kept powered-down for the final defence of Rammline or a breakout attempt.

The only way to prevent capture – assuming a powerful Viyard force does not suddenly materialise, which is highly unlikely – is to breakout and escape offworld. There is a way this could be done but there are also obstacles that must be cleared. Sufficient transport for the Travellers' unit and its allies has been pooled in a neutral area, yet cannot move whilst the interceptor network is active.

By a little creative book-keeping, some of the mercenary units that reached their repatriation havens have managed to keep some of their grav transportation from being officially non-combatant. This transport pool could be deployed, just once, to dash into a pocket and extract the personnel there. The operators would want a favour or a wad of cash in return but are willing to make the effort if it is not a suicide run. Upon arriving back at the haven the transports would have to declare non-combatant status for real this time but a lot of mercenaries would be saved. The Viyard Concourse is willing to pay for this, providing the mercenaries take more tickets in their service... but all of this depends entirely on creating a window for escape.

The Interceptor Storm

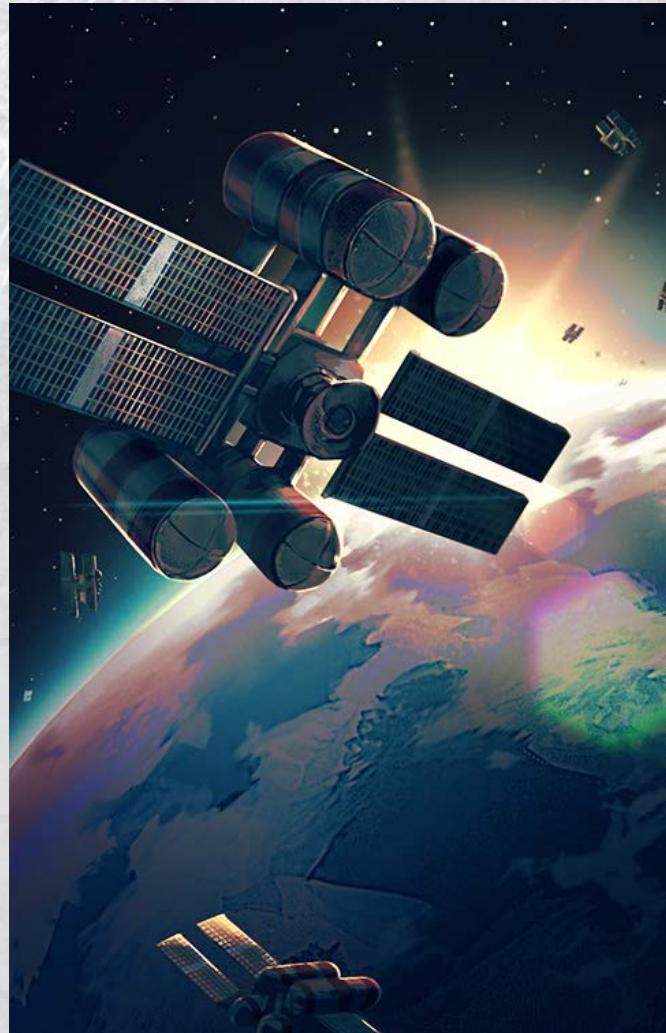
The tide of battle was turned by the Gilians' deployment of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of satellites. This in turn was made possible by the arrival of a small fleet that can prevent interference by hostile spacecraft. Where previously the interceptor platforms were a nuisance, now they are a lethal threat to any vehicle or asset that pokes above their detection/response threshold. The Gilians can afford to dump large numbers of missiles onto anything that looks like a high-value target; enough to swamp point defences and cripple even a grav tank.

The defenders have learned that most ground vehicles are beneath the notice of the interceptor constellation, although whether this is because they cannot be detected or are ignored as not being worth a missile is not known. This is an important question, as the defenders need to know whether they can use their low-tech half-track trucks with impunity or just until the Gilians decide there are no more valuable targets to save munitions for.

One piece of vital information has come to light. The interceptors are on a closed-loop communications system, which is beyond the available resources to penetrate but a control unit 'inside' the secure loop would be able to access the constellation's programming. It would probably not be possible to disable the interceptors but targeting parameters might be altered such that certain types of vehicle

would be ignored. Big changes are likely to be noticed almost immediately but if someone could get access to a control unit and exempt just a few classes of grav vehicle the defenders could be extracted before the interceptors' operators realise there is a problem.

A possible control unit location has been identified. When the Galian Federation first landed on Medrealm it established a forward base in the nearby Prosvén Range, using an abandoned copper mine to house a small aerospace contingent. The base was badly damaged in the early fighting and is now operational only as a collection point for sensor packs ejected from de-orbiting interceptor platforms. A small garrison and a group of technicians are housed there, using air/rafts to collect sensor packs. If the base can be infiltrated it may be possible to use a sensor pack to gain access to the secure communications loop. Failing that, perhaps the air/rafts' identification-friend-or-foe (IFF) systems might enable an attempt to be made.



THE TRANSAIX OFFENSIVE

The adventure begins as the Travellers arrive at the Liene defensive line. They may be new recruits to the unit or might have been elsewhere resting, refitting or conducting negotiations. Their reason for being away from, or just arriving at, the line is up to the Referee and will depend on the Travellers' circumstances. The Transaix Pass was contested with considerable vigour and it may be that the Travellers are a group of stragglers or a detached force reaching the new position just ahead of the rearguard. If so, they are likely to be tired and short of ammunition – with little prospect of either situation getting any better.

As the Travellers arrive, it is apparent things are not going well. The town is almost deserted other than soldiers, who are putting barricades in place and constructing makeshift strongpoints. In some cases this necessitates demolishing buildings; it is notable that the offworld mercenaries are a lot less reluctant to do this than the locals. The whole operation is well enough organised; indeed, this sort of defensive preparations have been made multiple times before and everyone knows what to do. What is missing is a sense of urgency or hope of success. Positions are well sited and put together properly but the troops building them are

unenthusiastic. This is because they have gone through these motions several times before, only to have to bug out once the position is compromised.

The occasional artillery shell is lobbed in the direction of the town from high ground to the east. This is literally one or two guns and they have very limited ammunition. Their fire is hazardous but not especially damaging to the positions or the troops occupying them. In time, other guns will be brought into position and more ammunition will arrive. At that point, Liene becomes unviable as a defensive position and the whole force pulls back... again.

The defenders are not completely passive. A couple of artillery pieces are returning fire, although their chances of hitting the Galian guns are slim. There is sufficient anti-aerospace weaponry in evidence that an air or grav attack would be driven off with heavy casualties and in any case the Galian force opposite Liene has not received much grav support to date. A chain of positions stretches away southwest from Liene, protecting the flank, and beyond that there are mobile units ready to oppose a flanking manoeuvre. It will take some time for the Galians to move heavy weaponry up through the Transaix Pass, so the Liene position might hold out for a few days.



TRAVELLER AGENCY AND PLOT

The plot of this adventure requires certain events and realities. For this reason, the Travellers and their allies cannot simply win the battle of Liene. They can influence how the battle plays out but the end result will be the same. This does not rob the Travellers of agency any more than gravity does; it is the reality of the situation that will force the Travellers to solve the problem of escaping the Ramline Pocket.

Likewise, the interceptor constellation is a reality that cannot be ignored. If the Travellers use a grav vehicle it will be destroyed and they do not get to roll dice to avoid this. Again, this does not rob the Travellers of agency but it does create a situation where they will have to use other means.

So if the Travellers decide they will drive back the Galian forces with their grav tanks, the Referee has two choices. One is to scrap the adventure as written beyond that point and play out an entirely different story using the *Traveller* rules and *Mercenary*. This is always an option if the prospective story is more interesting than the adventure as written. The only alternative is to mercilessly implement the restrictions as per the adventure. If the Travellers insist on using a grav vehicle or high-value equipment such as battle dress they will be on the receiving end of enough missiles to saturate any defence and the vehicle or equipment will be destroyed.

This is not unfair, providing the Travellers receive sufficient warning. The adventure provides for that and it is the Referee's responsibility to ensure the Travellers are given the message, so to speak. That is not the same as 'getting' the message but the Referee can do nothing about stubborn stupidity. Saying to a Traveller 'this pool of acid will dissolve your vacc suit and kill you' does not rob the Traveller of agency; what it does is spell out the consequences if the Traveller chooses to take certain actions. If the Travellers have had fair warning and proceed anyway, so be it.

The situation in this adventure is no different. There is a consequence, which will destroy expensive equipment, and the adventure revolves around finding a way to circumvent it.

COLONEL WARNER'S PLAN

The defence of Liene is under the command of Colonel Sophi Warner, a local officer who now has far too much combat experience. Local troops accept her leadership but some of the mercenaries object to being under the command of an officer from a mid-tech world who may not grasp the threats and possibilities of the high-tech battlefield. Nevertheless, Colonel Warner is in charge and would be replaced by another local officer if necessary. All the mercenaries at Liene have contracts that stipulate local command, so direct disobedience would be considered mutiny or breach of contract depending on perspective.

Colonel Warner is looking for a group of... 'volunteers' to undertake a hazardous mission. During the fighting retreat through the Transaix Pass she ordered a unit of combat engineers to place charges at strategic points. The work was not completed before the engineers were driven off. A sudden retreat by the rearguard compromised their position – Warner may venture

some negative opinions about everyone involved at this point – and the charges were not detonated. If they had been, a section of the pass would have become vastly more difficult to move along, delaying the fall of Liene by several days at least. Warner may choose to phrase this as 'giving us more time to prepare a decent defence' but she is getting to the point where she no longer bothers trying to sound optimistic.

Warner's plan is not complex. She will order the most effective of the mercenary units to make a counterattack before the enemy has properly secured the mouth of the pass and under cover of this diversion a small but well-armed party will infiltrate to the location of the explosives and set them to detonate. This should bring down the side of the pass on the road and railway that run through it, impeding the flow of supplies and reinforcements. Of course, Warner wants the Travellers to volunteer but if they do not she will order them to undertake the mission. She has the authority to do so and failing to obey would be a breach of contract.

The counterattack will begin at first light tomorrow. It will be led by Oxford's Company, a relatively intact mercenary unit with a few combat vehicles, and supported by mercenary unit remnants and local troops. The battered rearguard will enter Liene and take up defensive positions, hopefully receiving some reinforcements detached from other units. Ideally, the counterattack will catch the enemy by surprise, as they expect Warner's full attention to be on preparing yet another defensive position. If so, it might even be possible to hold the mouth of the pass for a while. There may also be stocks of ammunition and supplies that can be seized if the attack succeeds.

The counterattack is a diversion but has a chance of creating real benefits. It is obvious from Warner's demeanour that she is excited by the prospect of hitting back and maybe even winning a small victory. She is pinning a lot on the capabilities of an understrength force but the enemy are likely to be disorganised from their advance and combat with the rearguard, and may be dangerously complacent.

The Travellers will advance with Oxford's Company during the night but will diverge from the road as the ground rises. They will have to make a difficult climb up the rocky ridge and transit along the side of the pass above the road and rail link. Setting the charges may or may not be difficult, depending on conditions high on the mountainside, but the Travellers will have to do it stealthily. The engineers who originally set the charges do not have the skills to reach them through hostile territory. They suffered casualties from falls and accidents last time, even without the enemy in the offing.

Warner points out – some personnel would suggest unsteadily – that the Travellers' mission is to set the charges and drop a section of the mountainside into the bottom of the valley. This does not preclude engaging the enemy, if necessary, but the delay imposed by blocking the road link is worth far more than victory in a small scuffle. She also adds that if the Travellers choose to 'keep going eastwards' – a euphemism for finding someone to surrender to – they will surely be considered to have done their part. In other words, Warner is offering an excuse to surrender as an incentive to complete the mission. The situation is that bad.

THE COUNTERATTACK

Even if the Travellers go AWOL or refuse to take part in the mission, the counterattack goes ahead and a party of volunteers attempts to transit into the pass. The initial phase of the counterattack is a rapid advance using vehicles that halt just short of the enemy's outer positions

to deliver fire support. A couple of the vehicles detach from the main force to take the volunteers – ideally the Travellers! – as close as possible to their infiltration route.

The Gilians are not well prepared. They have thrown up some basic positions to fight from but they are thinly held and the defenders are surprised. An aggressive assault overruns the outer positions and the first reinforcements hastening to join the fight are caught in the open. It looks to the Travellers like the first stage at least is a clear success, although the advance slows as resistance increases and the assault force becomes disorganised. The Travellers may be tempted to join this fight. If so, they can contribute a little additional firepower but their mission will fail, which overall will damage the defence more than if they had ignored the fight and started climbing.

SUICIDE BY GRAV TANK

During the advance to contact, the Travellers witness an incident that should indicate just how deadly the interceptor constellation can be. A small mercenary unit named Toxon's Armoured has become frustrated at operating without their vehicles. They have taken casualties fighting as infantry or aboard mid-tech half-tracks when they could be winning battles in their grav tank and support sled. Against orders, they have crewed their vehicles and are soon charging ahead of the advance force.

Observant Travellers might see contrails high above after a few minutes, then small explosions as the interceptor missiles are ejected from the bus component. Soon missiles are streaking down at the two armoured vehicles. Toxon's Armoured is doing it right; low to the ground and moving fast, and at first they cause mayhem in the unprepared Galian force. Then the support sled is hit multiple times and crashes into the ground. The tank lasts a little longer, stopping some missiles with point defence fire, evading a few and surviving the first hits. Inevitably, it too is brought down.

There is nothing anyone can do about this. It is a grim reminder of what happens to high-value targets in the present environment – and fair warning for the Travellers.

The default result of the counterattack is that it will develop into a three-day battle up the pass and back down again as more Viyard troops arrive. A stand at the mouth of the pass buys another day, after which the exhausted force breaks contact and withdraws to Liene. This time the Gilians fortify their position at the mouth of the pass, buying more time for the defenders, and will in future be much more cautious. This will buy just enough time for the Travellers to find a way out of the pocket. Their actions on the present mission might buy them additional time.

INFILTRATION

It will take a couple of days to reach the target point, requiring an arduous climb and transit of the high ground above the pass. The first stage of this is little more than a tough uphill hike but after a few hours the Travellers will reach their first real obstacle and their first major decision. Their orders are to infiltrate stealthily but they may be tempted to blast their way past obstructions or take advantage of targets of opportunity. One such presents itself during the climb.

The ground gets much steeper, to the point where it is necessary to climb vertical faces up to three metres high, where faults in the rock have been exposed. This gives access to the top of the first ridge, from where the path ahead can be viewed. Behind the ridge the land drops about 50 metres then begins to rise again. This is more of the same – steep grassy slopes with the odd bush here and there, interspersed with vertical rock faces of no great height. The problem is that atop the next ridgeline is a forward artillery position set up by the Gilians. Getting even a single gun up here was obviously a major challenge, requiring dismantling and manual transport. Ammunition will also have been a struggle to obtain.

As a result of these difficulties the position is not strong. The gun crew and security/munitions lugging detachment total 12 soldiers equipped with small arms only. There are no emplaced support weapons and the gun itself is simply pegged down to the turf. Attack was not considered likely, so no effort has been made to emplace sandbags. In short, this is a target of opportunity just begging to be eliminated.

The Travellers may be able to slip past undetected but the passable section of the ridge is just a few hundred metres long. A detour will require more time than is available, so the Travellers will have to get past somehow. The furthest the Travellers can pass the gun emplacement is about 300 metres along the ridge from the gun position. Beyond this the cliffs will require a long and difficult climb, which is not practicable under the circumstances. It might be possible to swing north and try to find another route over the ridge but again that will take too long.

THE AIX RIDGE

The Aix Ridge is more properly considered a series of steep ridges, cliffs and short vertical rock faces created by faults in the rock. There are few practicable routes over it for a party on foot and none for vehicles. The Transaix Pass offers the only direct path through, although a group on foot could thread their way up the steep slopes and around the most difficult cliffs. Such a transit still requires some climbing but if the Travellers stick to a practicable route they will be able to move quickly enough to reach the explosives in time.

If the Travellers decide to sneak past or stealthily move into an ambush position they will need to climb quietly and unobtrusively, which is no mean feat in military kit. Each Traveller must make a Routine (6+) DEX check. If this is successful the Traveller negotiates the steep slopes and vertical faces to reach a good vantage point. Failure means the Traveller is only partway along and must try again. Each try takes 3D minutes minus the Effect of the DEX check.

Being spotted depends on the alertness of the guards, which is not high unless the Travellers give them some reason to search for intruders. Five minutes into the first attempt to sneak up the slope, and at five-minute intervals thereafter, the Referee must make a Recon check for the guards. This is Difficult (10+) unless there is a reason for an alert, in which case the difficulty will be lowered depending on the urgency perceived by the guards. If a Traveller making the ascent has Stealth, their skill level is used as a negative DM on the guards' chance to spot them. A failed DEX check earlier gives the guards a positive DM equal to the negative Effect of the check as the Travellers disturb vegetation or send small rocks tumbling down the slope. One check is made for each group of Travellers if they are at different stages of the ascent or have split up, using the worst Effect and the lowest Stealth in the group.

One good option might be to send the stealthiest Travellers up first, into an overwatch position, then hold ready to engage if clumsier members get themselves spotted. If the Travellers can all reach the top of the ridge undetected they have the chance to slip past without engaging the gun crew or their guards. This is best for the mission and the long-term strategic situation but Travellers may not be able to resist the temptation to open fire. There is enough noise from the battle below that suppressed shots or laser weapons might not be immediately noticed but other weapons surely will. Once any Gilians return fire the Travellers' presence will be very obvious and the whole force will respond.

Engaging the Gunners

If the Travellers are spotted or decide to engage, the Gilians' response will be erratic and patchy. There is a lot of gunfire coming from down in the pass and occasionally the gun crew will fire a shell in the direction of Liene. Their attention is thus aimed in the wrong direction and they are very complacent. At any given time there will be two or three personnel with weapons in hand, wandering around on the ridgeline and sort-of-on-guard. Other weapons will be stashed nearby as the crew work at moving ready ammunition up or try to observe the battle going on in the valley below.

If the Travellers are very stealthy they may actually be able to sneak into the position and take out some of the personnel with silent hand weapons. This would require a successful Difficult (10+) Stealth check, with the Travellers automatically being noticed by one Galian for every point of negative Effect. It will be obvious to anyone watching if a Galian spots the Travellers, although a Traveller engaged in sneaking might not notice something outside their field of view.

The Gilians will not notice the Travellers all at once and will not necessarily react correctly or swiftly. The most likely initial response is a rather obvious 'taking another look', which may be followed by a call for assistance or a closer look through a weapon's optical sights. Thus if the Travellers are in a ready position they may be able to take out the first guards to notice them before the alarm can be raised. The Knockdown rules found in the *Field Catalogue* are relevant here, as a guard can be put out of action with a suppressed weapon or knife before they can call a warning or start shooting.

GETTING CAUGHT DOWNSLOPE

The default scenario for this encounter assumes the Travellers have initiated an engagement on their own terms and are firing from the top of the ridge along its length. If they are still climbing, or for some reason choose to engage when they are below the crest, they suffer DM-2 on all attack rolls whilst the Gilians gain DM+2 on checks to detect and locate the Travellers. This reflects the difficulty of hitting someone partly behind the ridge line – the Gilians can come forward to fire when they choose whereas the Travellers are exposed on the hillside. They may have to contend with grenades rolled down the hill at them as well...

A guard taken out in this manner might not be noticed straight away. The Referee should make an Average (8+) Recon check for the Gilians as soon as the Travellers do something hostile. One Galian notices something amiss for every point of Effect and the check is repeated each round with an additional DM+1 for every round. If non-suppressed weapons are used, the rules for Detecting and Locating a Shot come into play. See the *Field Catalogue* page 19.

Once the guards notice something, the Gilians will react in a haphazard manner. Those without weapons to hand will rush to get them unless kept away by incoming fire. Those with weapons may return fire if they think they know where the attack is coming from but may not at first be able to locate the Travellers. This is another occasion for the Detecting and Locating rules. The Travellers may manage to eliminate the entire position without anyone getting a shot at them.

Triggering a Response

If the Travellers slip quietly past the position and move on there will be no response as nobody knows they are present. Gunfire at the artillery post will not necessarily produce a response from the main Galian force but a distress call will. This can be prevented by taking the defenders out quickly. Most will be more concerned with getting fire on the Travellers' position than calling for help, since they lack much in the way of cover, but sooner or later someone will call for help or simply open a channel and let the sounds of battle speak for themselves. The possibility of a distress call going out can be abstracted by an incremental number. On the first round of combat the number is 0 and it increases by +1 each round. The number is decreased by -1 every time a Galian is put out of action. On round one of combat the Referee should roll 2D. When this value is reached the distress call begins going out. The Travellers may be able to spot someone who looks like they are communicating rather than trying to fight or escape. If so, they have D3 rounds to eliminate this person.

Even if a full distress call goes out, the Gilians are too hotly engaged to respond at once and the gun position is high above the pass. However, a major response (see following page) will be made. A partial or garbled transmission, or significant gunfire from the artillery position, will trigger a minor response (see following page). If the Travellers successfully slip past or eliminate the artillery crew efficiently there will be a minor response once the position fails to check in. This will not be for 1D hours, giving the Travellers time to leave the area.

Responses

The Galian forces in the Rammline Pocket are strung out and lack grav vehicles other than a handful of air/rafts used for scouting and response work. Any response to the Travellers' incursion will be made mostly or entirely with ground vehicles. Given the present situation, investigating the possibility of a small infiltration will not be a priority. However, repeated incidents will draw a more robust response sooner or later.

A **minor response** takes the form of a small detachment sent to investigate. This will usually be an infantry section with light ground transport – typically four-wheel off-road vehicles with minimal armour, equipped with a pintle mounted support weapon. Where the ground is unsuitable for vehicles, personnel will operate on foot. These are ordinary infantry, untrained for mountain operations and lacking the right equipment, so will tend to follow the easiest path to the highest point and conduct a visual search from there. If the Travellers are spotted they might find themselves engaged in a long-range sniping duel between ridgetops.

A **major response** takes the form of multiple detachments rushed to the trouble spot. One or more air/rafts may be used to reconnoitre the location or drop an advance party off but the majority of the personnel will have to slog up the hills on foot. This response will be a lot more determined and deployed personnel will make a good go of looking for intruders. If they find tracks they will try to follow and call in for reinforcements to be deployed ahead of the Travellers' projected route. A successful Average (8+) Recon check will find traces of the Travellers' passage unless they have taken steps to minimise their trail. This will make it an opposed check instead, using the Travellers' Stealth or Survival.

Moving On

If the Travellers slipped past the artillery position without engaging and were not detected there will be no response at all. If they did engage then sooner or later the Gilians will realise something is amiss. If no distress call is made from the artillery position, silence will be investigated as noted before and the Gilians will take measures to find the infiltrators. The artillery position will be secured by the first force to arrive there, as with a minor response, and an additional section or two may be sent to search the surrounding area for infiltrators. This will be a problem for the Travellers if they come back by the same route but other measures are more likely to directly affect them.

Once the Gilians realise there are infiltrators moving along the ridgeline they will attempt to locate and engage them. One or two air/rafts will be diverted for a short time but they are needed elsewhere and cannot spend all their

time chasing ghosts. The Travellers may see the air/rafts in the distance, moving around the ridgetops but they do not come close. Closer observation reveals personnel being dropped off at high points. There are not many of them but soon the Gilians have observers on high ground. Avoiding being spotted follows similar procedure as before; the Travellers must make an opposed Stealth or Survival check, against a Recon check for any nearby Galian forces.

If the Gilians win this check the Travellers are spotted and will be engaged at a range of 2–400m. It will not be hard to break contact and get out of line-of-sight but if the Travellers decide to fight it out they may end up wasting a lot of ammunition. Nearby troops will be called in but they also have to slog up and down the ridges and are not trained for this. Unless the Travellers actively seek contact they can move ahead of these units. The Galian air/rafts will not take part in this part of the operation.

REACHING THE TARGET POINT

The target point is about 15 kilometres up the pass but travelling on foot over steep mountain ridges will take more than a day – possibly two – to traverse. In that time the Travellers may have to contend with searching parties, although they are likely to be behind the Travellers. If so, steady movement will keep the Travellers ahead of searchers and intervening terrain will hide them. The Referee can stage an encounter with Galian infantry but they are already heading into enough trouble. The Travellers may also be asking themselves how to get back through the now-hostile ridges but that is a question for later.

The explosives were emplaced along a ledge overlooking the pass below, on a cliff some 10 metres or so high, below which the ground drops away in a steep grassy slope to the valley floor. The road and rail link does not run through the very bottom of the pass but instead follows a path cut into the hillside a few metres above the floor. Tumbled rocks and scree deposits have been bulldozed into the bottom of the pass to keep the road clear. It is obvious that explosives detonated here will cause a rockslide that will partially block the road and tear up the rail link. However, there are complications.

The counterattack has gone rather better than expected and allied forces are established a little ahead of this position. They will be cut off if the charges are detonated. On the other hand, dropping the cliffside on an advancing enemy force would do a lot of damage and perhaps enable the Travellers' allies to make a clean

disengagement. If the Travellers think to contact their allies, this plan will be bounced to Colonel Warner who will readily agree.

The explosives are standard TL6 equipment; there is little more advanced hardware left in the Rammline Pocket. The charges can be command-detonated by wire but there is no way to determine which charges are in place and correctly wired up without moving along the ledge checking each in turn. If the Travellers choose not to do this, they can obtain a partial success on the detonation. A check will reveal some charges still lying on the ledge rather than being inserted into boreholes and fractures in the cliffside. Some of the wiring is incomplete as well. Fixing this is easy enough, requiring a Routine (6+) Explosives check. Of course, the inspection must be made by moving along the ledge, risking being seen by enemy forces or falling from the ledge. Such a fall would not be survivable unless the Traveller were properly roped and secured.

Complications

As the Travellers are about to begin their survey of the explosives, they come under fire. The first shot comes close and it is apparent that moving out onto the ledge will make the Travellers an easy target. From the fact that the shot hit the cliff face it is possible to deduce that it was fired from across the valley. Beyond that, the Travellers will have to try to locate the source if they want to eliminate the threat.

The shooter is a Galian sniper – not a very good one but skilled enough to hit the Travellers eventually. The sniper and their spotter are located near the top of a rise on the far side of the valley. This position is not very well concealed but they have camouflage clothing and a few bits of local foliage pressed into service. They have camo tarps that mask their thermal signature. The sniper is using an accurised semi-automatic version of the standard TL10 ACR with reduced physical emissions, gaining DM+3 from their skill and DEX, and an additional DM+1 for the weapon. The range is about 500 metres, which is within the effective range of the sniper's modified ACR but not by much. This imposes DM-2 for long range and given the distance between the shooter and target any movement imposes an additional DM-2, increased to DM-4 if the target is moving evasively.

The sniper will not spray bullets across the valley but take carefully aimed shots at anyone exposed for more than a few seconds. They are aware of the possibility of charges placed on the valley side – why else would anyone go to so much trouble to get there? – but does not know for sure. However, they have taken the precaution of calling in and a response will be made as quickly as the Gilians can manage. The sniper team

are not in a great position themselves – the front line has moved past them and their withdrawal route would be arduous – but they are confident they can hold their position for now. This means the Travellers will have to either eliminate or neutralise the sniper, or else take fire as they work.

The sniper's rifle has a low signature, imposing DM-2 on attempts to locate the source of the shots. The battle in the valley counts as noisy conditions, imposing a further DM-2, and the sniper's camouflage imposes another DM-2. Spotting them will be difficult, but each time the sniper shoots a Traveller observing the general area continuously gains a cumulative DM+1. The sniper will typically begin setting up a shot 1D rounds after someone becomes a reasonable target; that means a Traveller is in the open, not moving much and unlikely to enter cover in the next few seconds. The sniper will shoot quickly after deciding the target is viable, aiming for no more than one action unless the Traveller seems likely to be exposed for a long time.



SIMPLE COMBAT OR PROBLEM-SOLVING EXERCISE?

The complications surrounding the Travellers' mission can be resolved in a variety of ways. Simply making attack rolls until all hostiles are down is always an option but possibly a costly one. Smart Travellers will view this as a problem-solving exercise, with firepower as only one of the tools at their disposal.

The enemy cannot hit what they cannot see, so blanketing the ledge in smoke is an entirely viable option. Of course, the Gilians might fire indiscriminately into the smoke, so it is not entirely safe. Multiple smoke clouds will make it difficult to saturate the target area or guess where the Travellers might be, and since the Gilians do not know exactly where the charges are placed they cannot simply plaster a small area to make it untenable. Smoke might also be used to draw fire so a shooter can be located and engaged with a precision weapon.

Other possible gambits include stalking the hunters or setting up an ambush, perhaps picking the Gilians off one-by-one. They do not all have to be killed to counter the threat; a force that has taken casualties and cannot locate the source of the shots will go to ground and may stay there until reinforcements arrive – which will be too late. Suppressive fire is always an option, although it burns through ammunition quickly.

A rapid scramble down the valley, racing Galian infantry to a downed air/raft, offers more of a memorable game experience than just point-and-shoot. Daredevil Travellers might do something truly reckless, like swinging from the cliff on ropes to land on the air/raft and hijack it. A mercenary campaign that involves little but attack rolls will quickly become dull, so the Referee should reward those who think like soldiers and use good tactics, and let those who want to try other methods take their shot.

Once the sniper is located the Travellers could attempt counter-sniper fire or simply hose the general area with automatic fire and maybe the odd RAM grenade or two. This uses the area fire rules. Suppression is also an option, shooting at the general area to keep the sniper under cover. Other brute-force methods could be attempted, such as asking forces in the valley to lob a few artillery shells at the hilltop. This would require some persuasion on the part of the Travellers, however.

There is an additional complication, which might be turned into an opportunity by enterprising Travellers. A few minutes after the sniper calls in their observation of the Travellers, the Galian commander sends one of the few available grav vehicles to deal with the problem. This is a 'militarised' air/raft, not much different from the standard version other than mounting a support version of the TL10 ACR on a pintle in the passenger compartment. Its crew of two sit up front in transit, with six infantry soldiers jammed into the rear compartment. The support gun cannot be used whilst the vehicle is overcrowded in this manner.

The air/raft crew are instructed to land their troops above the Travellers' projected target then scout the area for them, engaging with the support gun if necessary. The Travellers may spot the air/raft as it approaches and may be able to engage it before it lands its troops. Once they are on the ground, the six-member force will begin to search for the Travellers or occupy good shooting positions depending on what the Travellers do. The air/raft crew will also search, trying to maintain distance to avoid becoming an easy target.

The Travellers will need to deal with these complications one way or another. This might be a straight-up firefight or perhaps the Travellers can lead their opponents into a trap. One option is to allow the air/raft to see part of the group, causing the ground force to move up through a waiting ambush. As to the air/raft, it is the most serious threat but could also be a way out of the situation. Firing at the crew suffers DM-2 for the cover the vehicle affords them, with an additional DM-2 if the air/raft is above the shooter – assuming the crew can be targeted at all. It may be possible to draw the air/raft down to a position below the Travellers, perhaps by having someone act as a decoy, which will make hitting the crew an easier prospect. The crew receive no cover DM if targeted from above.

However they do it, the Travellers will have to deal with a flying machinegun nest, a concealed sniper and a ground combat force close by, with reinforcements on their way. Once they have done so it is a simple matter to detonate the charges. A remote control device could be improvised and attached to the existing wired detonator if the Travellers have a few basic electronics components and some tools. The timing of the detonation will be important, however.

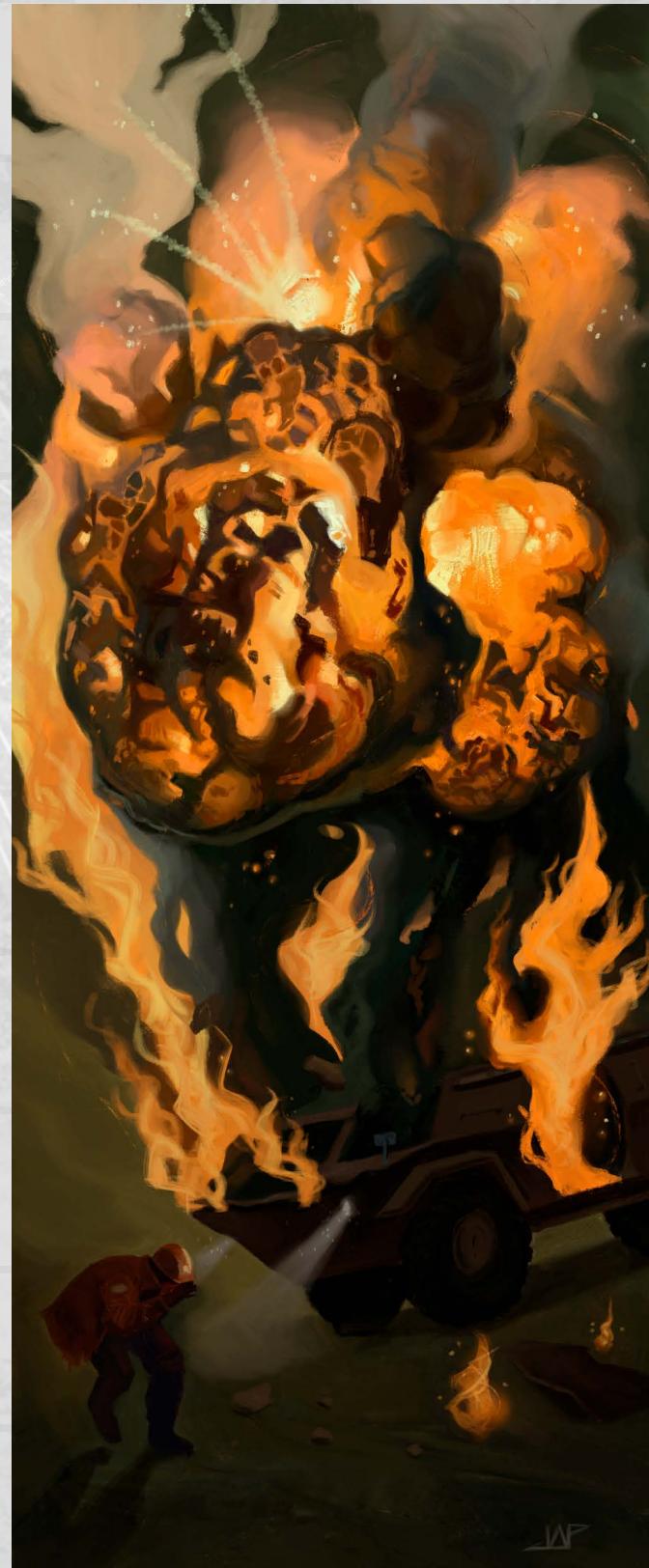
EXPLOSION AND ESCAPE

Once the way is clear the Travellers can detonate the explosives any time they want – even whilst their allies are further into the pass. Doing so will kill allied troops and cut the rest of the force off, robbing Colonel Warner of her best troops. The blocked pass will still buy time but the Travellers will have failed in the most spectacular manner possible. If they are sensible, they can wait until their allies have fallen back then detonate the charges, quite possibly bringing down tons of rock on advancing Galian forces. This does mean hanging around after friendlies have retired down the valley, making escape more difficult. In between the two is the option to descend to the valley floor and join the retreat, remotely detonating the charges once clear. This risks the possibility of Galian engineers reaching the explosives and disarming them, although this is unlikely.

Retirement back the way the Travellers came is problematic given that there are search parties in the hills, which will have to be evaded or dealt with. The Travellers might be able to slip around them and move back along the river's edge but this will be slow going. The ideal outcome, in terms of maximum destruction of Galian forces and other benefits, depends on capturing the air/raft in a flyable condition. If the air/raft can be brought down without crippling it, the Travellers will be able to fly out of the valley. This permits the Travellers to guard the charges until their allies are well past, then drop the mountainside on the road below.

If the Galians realise there are charges emplaced above the road they will not use the pass, halting until the ledge can be cleared. This will impose significant delay, especially if someone is defending the charges. If the Travellers have the air/raft they can hang around for a good while then escape when the odds become too great. Alternatively, there are some among the local forces who will volunteer to guard the ledge until overwhelmed. This is not a suicide mission – they will fight until the odds are too great then surrender. This sort of honourable gesture is becoming more prevalent as hope fades.

The Travellers might come up with some entirely different way of getting back to Liene and they have time to be stealthy if they needed. The situation in the Transaix pass has shocked the Gilians and caused a major rethink of their plans.



BACK ON THE DEFENSIVE

Whether the Travellers traded places with other troops or not, the battle for the valley has bought the defence extra time and there are lessons to be learned from what the Travellers have seen. Notably, it is not possible for their side to fly a grav vehicle without being pounded with missiles but the Galian interceptor constellation does not target friendly vehicles. Examination of the captured air/raft's electronics indicates its standard transponder has been replaced with a low-powered IFF (identification-friend-or-foe) device. It is not possible to use this device to protect other vehicles but it does indicate communication between the satellites and friendly assets.

Perhaps this knowledge can be put to use but not immediately. Colonel Warner 'requests' to speak with the Travellers as soon as they return. She is pleased with the outcome of the operation – unless of course the Travellers dropped a mountain on their own forces – and seems to be in quite an upbeat mood when she personally congratulates the Travellers on their efforts. It soon becomes apparent she wants something more from them, however.

Colonel Warner predicts – correctly, it turns out – that the Gilians will try to clear the Transaix Pass but use this as a diversion from a flanking movement around the south of the mountains. Their vehicles can traverse the slopes to some extent but a supply line will have to go around. The next phase of the campaign involves skirmishing in the foothills and the semi-desert beyond and to this end Warner is redeploying her mobile forces south. Some static units will be conveyed to good defensive positions and dig in, denying the enemy movement through the hills as long as possible. It is a matter of conjecture whether the pass will be cleared before the southern flank is turned but either way it will be a few days before Liene becomes untenable. After that, the only option seems to be to fall back to Ramline and make a stand.

In fact, Warner is considering attempting a breakout overland to the southwest but this means crossing a wide expanse of semi-desert to the nearest friendly city. Only a fraction of the force will be able to make it due to fuel problems and any grav vehicles will have to be abandoned at Ramline as the interceptor

constellation will annihilate them as soon as they power up. Warner has a task for the Travellers. She wants them to proceed rapidly south and tour the units deploying there. Ostensibly they are auditing the supply and ammunition situation but the Travellers have another purpose. Warner wants them to quietly gain an impression of which units are in good enough shape to make the breakout and which are worth including. This is a very hard decision for her but if she is to salvage any force at all from the pocket she will need to sacrifice units unsuited to the arduous crossing of the semi-desert and those too dispirited or understrength to be useful afterward.

TOURING THE DEFENCES

Whatever rank they hold, the Travellers are given orders authorising them to generally poke around in other units' business. They cannot tell anyone what to do, other than demanding information on supplies and equipment, but are authorised to personally inspect vehicles and equipment. If they captured the air/raft the Travellers can perform their mission efficiently but if not they are given a half-track truck to use.

The picture is not a pleasant one. Morale is low, equipment battered and ammunition short. Some units are blatantly just going through the motions until they can surrender, whilst others are grimly preparing to fight to the last. Warner has been amalgamating remnants of local units to create Grand Patrols of varying strength. Those with enough vehicles to allow full mobility are deployed a little to the rear as a response force, whilst static units are digging in to create strongpoints. The mercenary forces are mostly small, and for the most part attached to local units, but those retaining good fighting power are assigned the most difficult task – holding the southern flank in the semi-desert. Not coincidentally this positions them to escape southwest if necessary.

The Travellers will not be welcome at most units, as everyone already has too much to do without assisting a band of armed bean-counters. Their reception will be better if word has got around about a well-timed use of the explosives in the pass and the air/raft will

attract comment. There are of course those who see it as a ticket out of the pocket, so the Travellers may have to deal with attempts to steal it or bribe them to part with it.

The tour goes reasonably well at first, although the Travellers can hear intermittent gunfire to the east; the first Galian forces are probing the defensive line. This is mainly a matter of reconnaissance patrols, who fall back upon meeting serious resistance. A few of the more active allied units have established forward positions or placed sharpshooters well in advance of the defensive line to slow the process, so at present the engagements are small and sporadic. That, however, changes whilst the Travellers are visiting Provisional Grand Patrol Kleine. Commanded by Acting Captain Jensen Kleine, this is a fully motorised force tasked with providing mobile support to the centre of the defensive line. The unit has been formed from remnants of others and is loosely organised but apparently willing to fight. As such it has been given a full complement of trucks, including some set up as weapons carriers, and is reasonably well supplied with ammunition.

THE KLEINE MUTINY

Whilst the Travellers are visiting Kleine's command, word comes of an attack on one of the forward positions. Surprised and dispirited, those defenders that did not desert their posts are already overrun and captured. In short, there is a big hole in the line. If it is not plugged quickly the whole position will be compromised and forces south of the breach may be cut off. Kleine immediately orders his force to mount up for a counterattack but is obeyed only by about a quarter of the force.

The remainder do not, with a very few exceptions, directly refuse the order. Instead some personnel discover problems with their vehicles or urgent tasks that require attention. Whilst a few do blatantly defy their commander, most are obviously dithering and not quite in open mutiny. Medrealm's military laws permit immediate and drastic action, such as shooting mutineers, but there is a possibility the Travellers can restore the situation without resorting to such measures.

Kleine himself has no idea how to deal with what is happening. If the Travellers do not act he will gather up everyone who will follow him and go out to fight with a severely depleted force. Some crews will join him but Kleine stands little chance against the

advancing Gilians. In this case he inflicts serious damage on the enemy at the cost of almost all his vehicles and his own life. Grand Patrol Kleine is finished as a fighting force, although it buys enough time for other units to plug the gap.

The Travellers might be able to tip the balance by decisive action. Just following Kleine might be enough to bring some of the force around – the person who says 'follow me' is important but it is the first to start moving who really leads the advance. Kleine has the support of about 25% of his force. Another 3D% of the unit will grudgingly follow along after him, increasing to 2D+10% if the Travellers do nothing more than join Kleine. If they try to rally the force, they can add an additional 20% for every point of Effect on an Average (8+) Leadership or Persuade check. More forceful measures such as shooting mutineers might trigger retaliation and an internal bloodbath. To avoid this the Travellers need to make a successful Average (8+) Tactics or Leadership check. If the force is simply driven in this manner rather than being rallied the Travellers can bring along 10% of the force for every point of Effect.

Kleine will be going into action with anything from 25% to all of his Grand Patrol. The Referee can narrate the battle if the Travellers do not take part – the costly victory noted above is the result in this case. If the Travellers get involved Kleine will listen to their advice on tactics and they can resolve the action using *Mercenaries in the Far Future*. Kleine's force is a typical Grand Patrol, resolving actions with an additional DM-1 for every full 10% less than full strength. The opposition is a Galian infantry force that is mopping up the last feeble resistance at the positions it has overrun.

If the Travellers get involved there is a chance they can win this battle and keep Kleine's force intact. They may even be able to educate him a little, to the point where he realises there are better options than flank speed, guns blazing. If the battle is lost, the allied position is compromised and Colonel Warner has to pull in her forces to a tight pocket around Liene. The defence has perhaps two to three days before collapsing if this is the case. Victory, even at high cost, plugs the gap long enough to bring up reserves. The defensive line holds, granting several extra days at least.

FORWARD BASE PROSVEN

With the situation stabilised for now, Colonel Warner sends for the Travellers again. She has been in contact with mercenaries holed up in a repatriation haven some 300 kilometres to the west. They have a considerable pool of grav transport, which could evacuate the mercenaries and many local troops if only it could get through the missile storm. It is clear the Gilians have a 'don't-shoot-me' transponder in their vehicles and it might be possible to duplicate it... eventually. In the meantime, there is another way to get past the interceptor constellation.

North of Rammline is Lake Eurle and close to that is an old copper mine. Warner knows it was used as a forward base in the early days of the war but was mostly abandoned after taking heavy damage. A small Galian force is now based there and she knows what they have been doing; this force uses air/rafts to collect electronics packages ejected by deorbiting satellites. If someone – and naturally she means the Travellers – were to get hold of one of these packages it might be possible to spoof the interceptors long enough to stage an evacuation by grav vehicle.

Warner can supply a map of the mine, although it does not show alterations made by the Gilians and a half-track if the Travellers do not have the Galian air/raft. She will also make sure the Travellers are resupplied as best the defenders of Liene can manage and makes it clear that if they make a credible go of this mission she will consider them blameless if they proceed to the repatriation haven or simply surrender.

The Galian forward base in the Prosvens Range was never heavily garrisoned and is difficult to reach overland due to the high ground and steep mountains around it. The only overland link is a heavy-duty railway running more or less due south through a series of cuttings and tunnels, eventually crossing the river and entering Rammline. Or rather, it used to. The bridge into Rammline was destroyed early in the conflict and the rails torn up for some distance north of where it used to stand. An attempt to run forces into the base by this route would be easily detected and offer little

chance of success. Thus the base was left alone other than harassment from the air, which eventually caused sufficient damage that plans to use it to stage an attack on the Rammline pocket were abandoned.

Today, the base is used by a small force who collect electronics packages ejected from the satellites, storing them until there are enough to justify a pickup. These packages are the Travellers' target. Colonel Warner has no information on where they are likely to be stored but common sense suggests somewhere dry and secure.

REACHING THE MINE

If the Travellers have the Galian air/raft it is a simple matter to fly close to the base and sneak in on foot, or the Travellers might decide to just fly in and hope they are mistaken for friendlies. This is actually quite likely, since the Gilians have become used to only their vehicles being able to fly. Travellers who make some effort to look like Galian soldiers will be able to infiltrate the base in plain sight. They will be detected sooner or later but will gain significant advantages. Alternatively they can use a vehicle to get as close as possible, perhaps through the railway cuttings, then sneak in.

THE MINE/FORWARD BASE

The mine lies in a depression halfway up a steep ridge. To the west the land drops away in a series of ridges to the lake, which can be seen from the tops of the tallest buildings. It is obvious at first glance that the mine has been bombarded at some point. There are craters here and there, along with damage to some buildings. It was not in great shape even before that, having been abandoned when the ore played out some years previously. A general air of dilapidation and neglect pervades the whole place and most of the work done since the Gilians arrived is of a makeshift nature. Where power cables have been strung they hang loosely, close to the ground or trailing across abandoned machinery in a manner that will alarm any qualified engineer.

FORWARD BASE PROSSVEN



- 1. The Mine
- 2. Escarpments
- 3. Mine Sheds
- 4. Conveyor Belt Powerhouse
- 5. Tailings Pile
- 6. Sunken Rail Loading Bay
- 7. Vehicle Sheds
- 8. Command Complex
- 9. Workshops

1. **The Mine:** The former open-cast mine is now a deep pit filled with dirty water. A conveyor belt extends into the water to a platform a few metres below the surface. Ore was loaded onto the belt here, having been brought up from the bottom of the mine in trucks.
2. **Escarps:** The mine area is bounded to the north and east by steep ridges and small cliffs. There are a few minor ore veins exposed, which have in some cases been dug out leaving deep holes in the cliff face. The ground rises steeply to the northeast and is impassable to ground vehicles.
3. **Mine Sheds:** Some of these wooden sheds are intact, more or less, whilst others have been caught on the periphery of a shell burst or have burned. They originally served as storage for tools and equipment but were cleaned out when the mine was abandoned. Most are now empty or contain damaged or low value items, which were left behind.
4. **Conveyor Belt Powerhouse:** This tall wood-and-steel building still contains machinery for the ore conveyor. It is in poor condition but still works, since it has been used as a generator for the base. Make-shift power cables are strung out towards the control complex and to lights positioned here and there around the base. The generator is run intermittently, charging up fuel cells that provide light and power without the noise of the machinery. The belt itself is severed and its supports collapsed just short of the lake, creating a pile of debris with a bomb crater close by. The top of the powerhouse is used as a lookout or vantage point for a sniper but not usually manned unless the garrison are alerted. Within the middle floor of the powerhouse is an ore crusher, which smashed up the lumps sent up the conveyor and dropped them to a secondary belt.
5. **Tailings Pile:** Pulverised rock and ore was deposited here and would be loaded into railway wagons by machinery, which has since been removed. The area between the pile and eastern escarpment is covered in tumbled rocks and would be difficult to traverse without damaging an ankle.
6. **Sunken Rail Loading Bay:** The railway link runs into the mine area through a cutting, with a roof over the end. It is obvious that mobile machinery was used to load the ore wagons and removed at some point. The sunken railway line is out of line-of-sight of the powerhouse roof for the last 200 metres of its length.
7. **Vehicle Sheds:** These large wooden buildings originally housed the mine's heavy vehicles. The southernmost of them took a direct hit and is nothing more than a pile of charred timbers, and the next one is in dangerously unstable condition. The northernmost is intact and used by the garrison to stow air/rafts.
8. **Command Complex:** The mine was originally overseen from this large wooden building. Although damaged it is structurally intact and mostly dry inside. The garrison have turned this building into a makeshift barracks.
9. **Workshops:** This modest wooden building contains a basic ore-testing laboratory and workshops for maintaining mine tools and vehicles. Although smaller items were stripped out, heavier machinery remains. If electronics packages have been retrieved they are stashed here until picked up. The building is not specifically guarded since the Galian force is more worried about attacks on their post than an attempt to steal bundles of electronics they do not consider all that important. The door is kept locked and the building is robust but there are no electronic security devices.

The area between the buildings is not flat. There are some natural undulations in the ground, the occasional bomb crater and debris here and there. There is sufficient cover to hide an infiltrator, although open ground must be crossed between these points. There are lights on high points, powered by cables snaking out from the command centre, bright but casting stark shadows among the debris, which could be useful to infiltrators.

The Galian force at the base has operated unmolested for many weeks now, and is not on high alert. There are two air/rafts, each with a crew of two, plus three air/raft technicians. In addition there is a security element consisting of an infantry section. This is nominally fifteen strong but may be down a few personnel. Because this is an outpost in hostile territory, an officer has been assigned to take charge.

The base is commanded from the top floor of the command complex, where there will usually be a soldier or two on guard. The officer will be present unless they are overseeing a task personally or investigating something unusual. Neither circumstance is likely. On a typical day the air/raft crews will be at the vehicle sheds working on their craft and one might be out on a retrieval or running patrols. The remainder of the base's personnel are dispersed carrying out various tasks or on guard. It is policy to keep a lookout on the top of the conveyor powerhouse building but this is not always followed.

The danger points for the Travellers are:

- **Command Complex:** One or more personnel on the top floor, others in the building resting, eating or working.
- **Conveyor Building:** One lookout/sharpshooter.
- **Vehicle Sheds:** Air/raft crews and technicians, possibly other personnel.

In addition there will usually be a small patrol of three to five personnel on duty. They may actually be patrolling the base or in a static position ready to deal with a threat they consider unlikely to present itself. Other personnel may be out and about performing tasks but may have left their weapons in the armoury at the command centre.

Once the alarm is raised, weapons will be issued and personnel will take up a defensive stance or start searching for intruders. The Gilians will assume they are the target, not the electronics packages, and have a 'defend the base' mentality rather than 'secure the electronics'. However, as soon as it becomes apparent there is a serious threat the commander will call for help. It will take 2Dx20 minutes for a response, a grav-mobile infantry force of no more than a platoon in strength.

INFILTRATION OR ASSAULT

The Travellers have two primary options. They could sneak into the base and try to steal the electronics packages, perhaps even slipping away without anyone being any the wiser. Alternatively, they could attack the garrison and take what they need by force. Clever Travellers might come up with something else, such as a brilliant bluff or distraction that pulls the guards away but most approaches are going to involve avoiding attention or eliminating guards.

The Travellers will be able to identify enemy positions if they take time to observe and can perhaps plan a route into the base using dead ground and obstacles. Of course, this is a two-way street; the Travellers may be observed if they are careless. The Referee should make a Difficult (10+) Recon check for one of the lookouts or patrols if the Travellers are outside

the base, with a higher difficulty level if they are being especially stealthy. The check should be made at intervals of every 2Dx5 minutes. The difficulty drops to Average (8+) once the Travellers enter the base and if they split up each group has a chance to be detected. Infiltrating in darkness increases the difficulty for both the Travellers and their opponents to spot one another by one level.

The Referee should continue to make checks so long as the Travellers are in the vicinity of the base and also whenever the Travellers do something obvious or noisy such as dashing across open ground or trying to bash the lock off the workshop door. If the Travellers are clever and stick to areas out of sight they cannot be spotted. For example, the railway cutting offers a concealed route into the base; Travellers using it cannot be seen from the control or conveyor buildings. However, the defenders know this and might have a patrol pass by from time-to-time. They will not be sitting in ambush, however, unless they are sure they are about to be attacked.

A middle road between infiltration and assault might allow the Travellers to reduce the level of opposition by sneaking up and taking out some of the guards or sniping one or two with quiet weapons. Indeed, the Travellers would be well advised to have someone on Overwatch with a precision weapon whilst the others sneak in. The watcher can do more than just shoot; if they have a good vantage point they can direct others past guards or patrols.

The action at the forward base can thus be anything from a quiet infiltration to a head-on assault. Once the Travellers are detected they can expect a confused and escalating firefight, which will be even more chaotic if it happens in the hours of darkness. The rules in *Mercenary* and the *Field Catalogue* can help the Referee resolve these situations as they develop. The Travellers might find themselves trying to locate the source of gunfire in a dark building or using the Quickdraw and Knockdown rules to get a shot on target before a guard can respond. How the events at the base play out depend entirely on what the Travellers do but *Mercenary* provides the tools to deal with all manner of situations.

REPATRIATION CLAUSE

However they do it, the Travellers need to retrieve one or more electronics packages. These are not large – less than one kilogram once removed from their ejection capsule. They will also need to get clear of the base before a response emerges. This might be achieved by flying away in an air/raft or the Travellers might prefer to go to ground nearby. The air/rafts at the base would be a useful asset to the defenders of Liene, although ultimately there is a limit to what can be achieved with a couple of light grav vehicles.

The key is the electronics package. Connecting these up to a reasonably powerful computer – a personal or military portacomp will do – allows access to the interceptor constellation's internal communications net. This has a serious security flaw, in that each package is 'inside' the network and can communicate with all the others without much in the way of security. Gaining access to the network requires total Effect 6+ from Average (8+) Electronics (computers) checks, with one check made for every hour of work.

Once in, the Travellers may be disappointed to find they cannot turn the missiles on the Galian forces. What they can do is spoof the system into ignoring certain classes of target by raising the interception threshold. Vehicles (such as grav APCs) that would have previously been targeted will now be ignored. Alternatively, the system can be put into an unresponsive state by triggering confusing signals. This exploits the constellation's shooter-selection process by constantly telling each

satellite that another one has an optimal shot or similarly confusing the system. The result is a period in which the interceptor constellation will not fire. It will be hours, perhaps a day or so, before it is back online.

This is long enough for an evacuation. If the Travellers can signal Colonel Warner or contact the rescue force directly, within minutes a horde of grav vehicles will take off from the repatriation haven, racing to the Ramline Pocket. There might be encounters with minor Galian forces on the way but soon the transports are slamming down and loading everyone who can scramble inside.

Within hours, the Ramline Pocket is emptying of mercenaries and local forces. The Travellers will have earned a lot of goodwill from their peers, who otherwise faced a long and possibly dangerous captivity. The conflict on Medrealm will continue to its inevitable conclusion but at least the Travellers have lived to fight another day. Sometimes that is all a mercenary can hope for when a contract goes bad.

Meanwhile, the Viyard Concourse has a need for mercenaries on other worlds. The Galian Federation is seeking to absorb other systems between the two, which might eventually lead to open war. Even if it does not – especially if it does not – mercenaries allow the Concourse to resist its rival's expansion without committing its own resources. It is likely the survivors of the Ramline Pocket will face Galian troops again in the near future.



CHARACTERS AND OPPPOSITION

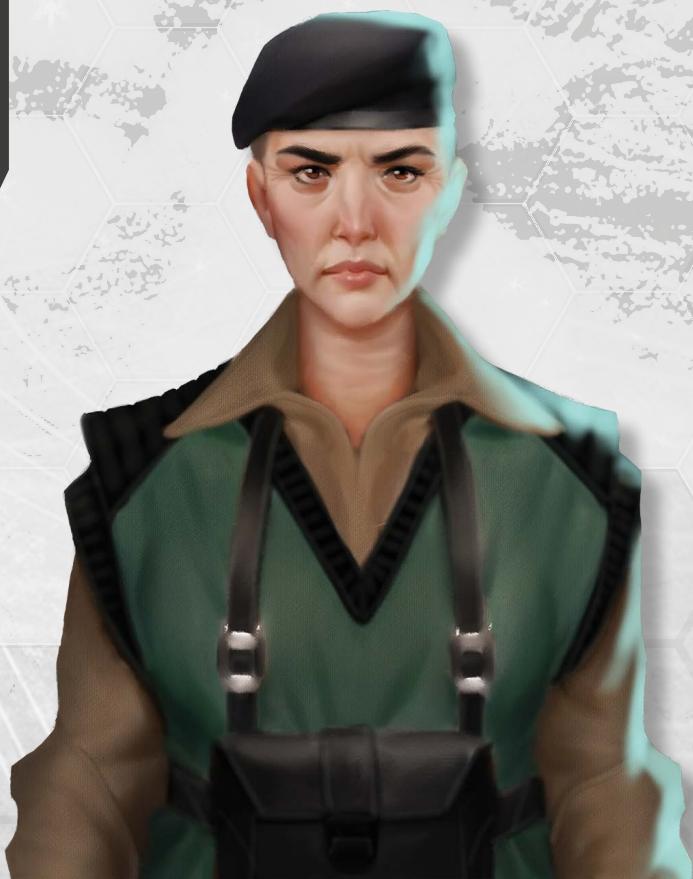
COLONEL SOPHI WARNER

GENDER		AGE	
Female		49	
TRAITS		SKILLS	
STR	6	INT	9
DEX	8	EDU	8
END	10	SOC	8
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3), Submachinegun (3D, Auto 3)	

Colonel Warner was a typical Medrealm officer before the conflict. Holding the rank of captain in early middle age, she had gone as far as she could go in a peacetime military with few opportunities for advancement. As a patrol commander her role was more administrative than active and like the rest of the Medrealm military she had no experience beyond security sweeps and very occasional disaster-relief operations.

Advancement came as a result of combat losses, with many promising officers emerging only to be killed in action before they could achieve their potential. Sophi Warner was one of the lucky ones who survived their learning experiences and found herself in command first of a cobbled-together Grand Patrol and finally the whole defensive pocket. Her actual rank is still captain but she is acting in the capacity of a full colonel – the highest position in the Medrealm military – with the blessing and support of the planetary government.

Warner has a small but effective support staff and a few mercenary liaison officers who advise on technical matters. Although some of the mercenaries hold her in contempt as a ‘backwoods soldier’ she has a good grasp of what is and is not possible with the right technology. Her strategy is sound given the circumstances but she is well aware that she is just delaying the inevitable – which will cost lives. She has requested permission to surrender and been ordered to fight on, so she does.



The colonel has no time for incompetents or anyone who thinks they are above her troops just because they possess better technology. She is extremely tired and sees no way out of the present conflict, all of which contributes to a short temper. At present this is held in check but it is only a matter of time before some new calamity triggers a destructive rage. At the best of times she is abrupt and abrasive, although manages to stop just short of being deliberately antagonistic towards offworlders.

Colonel Warner carries a submachinegun in addition to her sidearm and has been known to personally lead a counterattack. She knows this is unwise, as being put out of action would further disrupt an already fragile force. However, it is the only safety valve she has for the pressure of command. She is not reckless but given the circumstances it is only a matter of time before she is killed or injured.

ACTING CAPTAIN JENSEN KLEIN

GENDER		AGE	
Male		35	
TRAITS		SKILLS	
STR	9	INT	6 Drive (track) 2, Gun
DEX	7	EDU	8 Combat (slug) 3,
END	8	SOC	Leadership 2, Tactics 0

EQUIPMENT

Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3)

Jensen Kleine was a sergeant a few weeks ago, commanding a half-track equipped with an improvised anti-tank gun. Now he is a captain in charge of a Grand Patrol, with no training on how to organise or supply a combat force. What Kleine does know is how to fight. His command style is to drive at the enemy and shoot until there are no targets left. His force naturally suffers heavy casualties in every engagement but it does get results. With other formations being hesitant about entering combat, Colonel Warner has come to rely on leaders like Kleine and funnels them more than their fair share of spares and ammunition. However, being assigned to Kleine's Grand Patrol is an unpopular posting due to its dangers and morale is dropping fast. Kleine has no idea how to deal with this, other than by setting an example and hoping others follow.



Galian Infantry

The majority of Galian forces are light infantry – light in the sense that they do not have their own vehicles. Infantry units are accustomed to being assigned transport assets or other supports was necessary for their mission, or operating on foot in an urban area. Equipment is low-cost but generally serviceable, with soldiers issued a flak jacket and composite metal/ceramic helmet incorporating a battlefield communications system but few other electronics.

Most soldiers are equipped with a TL10 Advanced Combat Rifle as their personal weapon plus a single hand grenade, usually a smoke or fragmentation. In addition, each soldier carries a single 40mm rocket-assisted multipurpose (RAM) grenade. All rifles have an adaptor for launching these but doctrine is to pass them

to a designated grenadier who has received additional training. Standard combat load is six magazines of 40 rounds each, assuming the unit is fully supplied. Few in the Ramline Pocket are in such a state, although forward-deployed personnel will usually have a full combat load unless it has been recently depleted.

The standard small unit is a 15-soldier section, broken down into two squads of six and a command element. Each squad has four infantry soldiers including the squad leader, a designated grenadier armed similarly to other troops and a support gunner equipped with a high-capacity version of the ACR used by the rest of the squad. The command element nominally contains the section leader, a medic and an additional support gunner. However, most units are well understrength and may be down to six personnel or sometimes even less.

GALIAN INFANTRY SOLDIER

TRAITS		SKILLS	
STR	8	INT	7
DEX	7	EDU	5
END	9	SOC	7

EQUIPMENT

Weapons: Advanced Combat Rifle (3D, Auto 3)

GALIAN AIR/RAFT CREW OR TECHNICIEN

TRAITS		SKILLS	
STR	7	INT	7
DEX	9	EDU	5
END	7	SOC	7

EQUIPMENT

Weapons: Submachinegun (3D, Auto 3)



HARDWARE

The hardware and equipment presented in this adventure is specific to the region and the combatants but very similar items are available elsewhere under different designations.

GALIAN INTERCEPTOR PLATFORMS

The most important asset in the Galian Federation's arsenal is its orbital aerospace interdiction platforms. These are small, short-duration satellites designed for the sole purpose of making grav and air movement planetside a problem. Each satellite carries four missiles plus a small electronics package. The satellites can be retrieved but are cheap enough to be considered disposable if necessary. The range of their weapons is short, so a low orbital position is required. Duration in such an orbit is typically 2D+6 days, after which the satellite must be retrieved or repositioned, or else it will begin to de-orbit.

The satellites have no engines as such but possess a small manoeuvring system, which permits the sensor pack and weapons to be aligned. Minor orbital shifts are possible at the expense of on-station duration but changing coverage to any great degree requires the use of a maintenance vessel. If the satellite is deliberately de-orbited or left to fall in its own time, the sensor pack can be ejected and parachuted to the surface for retrieval.

The interceptor platforms are designed to interact with one another. If multiple platforms are in place, forming what is termed a constellation, they will communicate and decide which is best placed to engage a target. Range and heading are important factors but the effectiveness of the constellation as a whole is also factored in. Rather than use the last missile on one platform, a slightly lower-percentage shot will be taken from one that has two or more left. The exception to this is when a platform is nearing de-orbit or running low on power.

The platforms are considered to be vehicles rather than spacecraft and are much more lightly built than a crewed craft would have to be.

INTERCEPTORS IN THIS ADVENTURE

In this adventure the interceptor constellation is the enemy that must be circumvented and takes the form of a plot device rather than something that can be defeated by force of arms. There are so many in orbit that an attack is inevitable within 2D minutes of any vehicle being detected. Attacks will continue at intervals of 2D minutes until the vehicle is disabled or destroyed.

The saturation of platforms in this adventure is unusual. More commonly there are just one or two in orbit and it is possible to plot their coverage and stay out of their detection or engagement zones. The latter can be adjusted by the platforms' operators, as some targets are worth taking a low-percentage shot at and others are not. Even if the Travellers were detected by a lone satellite, it might not engage depending on how many missiles it had left and the perceived value of the target.

If the satellites do engage, the main missile bus can put the terminal component anywhere within 1,500 kilometres of the satellite's position. This does not require much in the way of precision; an Easy (4+) Electronics (remote ops) check will suffice, using the weapon's own systems or the skill of a controller. If the check is successful the terminal vehicle will then engage.

GALIAN INTERCEPTOR PLATFORMS

TL	10
SKILL	ELECTRONICS (REMOTE OPS)
AGILITY	+0
SPEED (CRUISE)	—
RANGE (CRUISE)	2D+6 DAYS
CREW	12
PASSENGERS	—
CARGO	—
HULL	12
SHIPPING	12 TONS
COST	MCR1.974

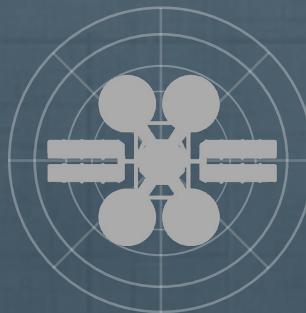
Autopilot (skill level)	2
Communications (range)	5000 km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+2
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	+1
Camouflage (Recon DM)	—
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	—

WEAPONS

Hardpoint (6 Spaces, Skybolt missile, advanced fire control) x4

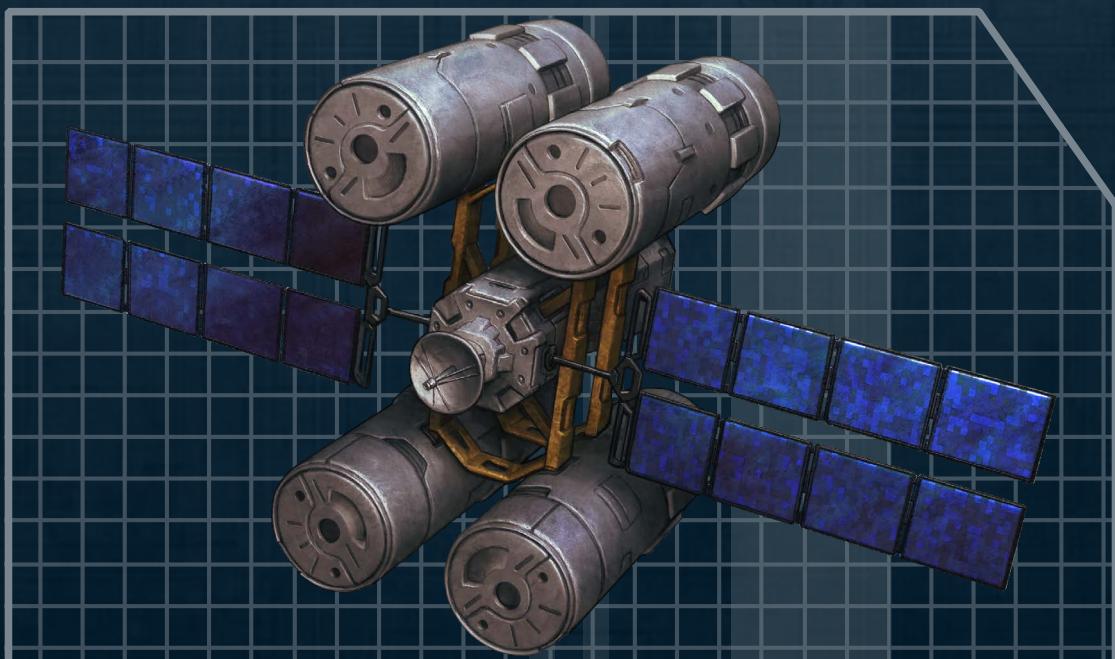
ARMOUR

FRONT	3
REAR	3
SIDES	3



EQUIPMENT

Autopilot (enhanced), Communications System (improved, encrypted, increased range), Computer/2, Control Systems (enhanced), Navigation System (improved), Robot Brain (advanced), Sensors (improved, increased range x3)



SKYBOLT MISSILE SYSTEM

The primary armament on the interceptor platforms is the Skybolt missile system. Central to this is a large 'bus' designed to carry far more propellant than a standard anti-aerospace or anti-armour missile, with large fold-out fins that provide aerodynamic lift, further increasing the weapon's range. Once the missile reaches the target area the bus is ejected and a relatively small 'terminal component' is launched under its own power at the target.

Engagement envelope for the terminal component is nominally 10 kilometres from a dead stop but it is unlikely a missile would engage under these conditions. Ideally, the bus releases the terminal component well above the target and with significant velocity in the right direction. Use of gravity and propulsion can increase the engagement envelope to as much as 80 kilometres.

Variants of the Skybolt missile exist, all using the same bus and carried in identical container-launchers. The standard version has a nominal range of 250 kilometres, which is increased by explosively launching the missile from orbit. A charge is detonated behind the missile and the container-launcher acts similarly to a firearm barrel. This imparts significant starting velocity, which is increased by the bus section. The missile follows an indirect path using gravity and, later in its fall, aerodynamic lift to increase its range. Effective range under good conditions using this system is 1,500 kilometres and can be pushed further under extreme circumstances.

The standard Skybolt missile (designated Skybolt-OAA) is intended for use against lightly armoured grav vehicles and aircraft, and uses a smart warhead designed for a closest-point-of-approach proximity detonation if contact cannot be achieved. An anti-armour version, designated Skybolt-OAT, trades range for penetration and uses a focused-charge warhead. Skybolt-OB is rarely deployed. This is a bombardment missile intended for use against static ground targets.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Spaces	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
Skybolt-OAA	10	250	10D	6	Cr65000	1	—	AP 12, Blast 12, One Use, Smart
Skybolt-OAT	10	150	6D	6	Cr85000	1	—	AP 40, One Use, Smart
Skybolt-OB	10	250	10D	6	Cr55000	1	—	Blast 20, One Use, Smart

MEDREALM

HALF-TRACK

The off-road transport of choice on Medrealm is a half-track truck, using tracks at the rear to bear load and provide drive, whilst the vehicle is steered using the front wheels. A fully wheeled version of the same vehicle is used in towns or where there are good roads but the military – such as it is – is exclusively equipped with half-tracks. These have been ‘militarised’ by the addition of light armour plate and a ring mount atop the cab.

The rear bed of the truck can carry infantry or supplies, or may be used to mount a weapon of some kind. Mortars, autocannon and anti-tank guns are all in evidence, along with various field improvisations. It is possible to encounter a crudely up-armoured variant, or one mounting a captured laser weapon, but all versions are slow, clumsy and vulnerable to direct fire.

Driving these vehicles is a challenge. Even with powered steering it is necessary to wrestle with the

wheel to make even the slightest course adjustment. On the other hand, rough terrain performance in a straight line is good and the vehicles themselves are well made. Reliability is not an issue; indeed the commonest reason for a loss is a vehicle forcing its way into a situation it cannot get out of. Becoming jammed is a constant threat in close terrain. Whilst bushes and small trees can be crushed or forced aside, a large rock or building wall can trap an unwary driver. All trucks carry heavy cables for rescue operations and a ground anchor for self-rescue.

These vehicles are extremely basic, with no sensor system and only a minimal communications fit. The crew of two ride in the cab, with one Space for additional equipment. The remaining Spaces are in the bed of the truck, which may be a flatbed or lightly armoured sides and roof. If a support weapon is mounted in the bed it will take up all the available room with its traverse mechanism and ammunition stowage.



ARMOUR

FRONT 8

REAR 8

SIDES 8



EQUIPMENT

Communications System (basic), Control Systems (basic)

HALF-TRACK TRUCK

Autopilot (skill level)	+1
Communications (range)	50km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+2
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	+1
Camouflage (Recon DM)	—
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	—

TL	6
SKILL	DRIVE (TRACK)
AGILITY	-2
SPEED (CRUISE)	SLOW (VERY SLOW)
RANGE (CRUISE)	300 (200)
CREW	2
PASSENGERS	—
CARGO	6.5
HULL	90
SHIPPING	15 TONS
COST	CR337450

WEAPONS

None

TRAITS

Open

