

TRAVELLER

REFEREES BRIEFING 5 INCIDENTS AND ENCOUNTERS



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

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REFEREES BRIEFING 5: INCIDENTS AND ENCOUNTERS

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INTRODUCTION

As Travellers voyage from one world to another, things happen to them. Often little things, trivial things; incidents that cause a minor inconvenience or unnecessary aggravation during what should be routine planetfall. However, some of these little incidents can lead to adventure, or complicate what would otherwise have been a straightforward task. *Referee's Briefing 5: Incidents and Encounters* presents a collection of

incidents and details of local colour that can be slipped into a campaign wherever it will make the Travellers' lives that little bit richer. Of course, in this context richer is not always good....

Each incident contains the possibility of adventure, with ideas for where it might lead or how it might be used by the referee. What happens next, however, is entirely up to the referee and their Travellers.



THE CHURCH OF THE MIND

Travellers from a society that is generally anti-psionic in outlook, such as the Imperium, might be taken aback when they are suddenly confronted with video ads and billboards inviting all and sundry to join the Church of the Mind and unlock their hidden psionic powers. The Church does not advertise itself as a Psionics Institute as such, but it does apparently revere mental powers and makes reference to psionics in its advertising material.

Further investigation reveals that the Church of the Mind is a psionics religion for want of a better term. It is not hard to find a local contact, who is absolutely delighted to talk to potential new members. However, the Church is not interested in ‘just training someone’ – it is a religion, not a service provider, and reveals the secrets of the mind only to those who have proven their faith. Travellers must learn the tenets of the faith and attend numerous rituals before being granted access to any secrets.

However, there is a way to fast-track this. If the Travellers have encountered Ancients artefacts or been to one of the ‘holy sites’ believed to exist, and especially if they can help the Church members get access to one, they will rapidly advance from new members to full initiates, trusted with at least some of the Church’s inner teachings.

Members of the Church, whether psionic or not, revere psionic (or reputed-to-be-psionic) artefacts and locations. They tend to have a fascination with the Ancients and certain minor races reputed to possess psionic abilities. Church parties can be encountered at famous Ancients sites that are open to tourists, often behaving rather strangely. Some members seem to feel they are entitled to access areas the general public are not permitted, for vaguely stated ‘religious reasons’, whilst others wander around in a trance-like state and later claim to have had mystical or mental experiences.

Other groups from the Church of the Mind will attempt to gain entry to restricted or secret Ancients sites, and sometimes places that are not known to have signs of Ancient activity. They will descend upon a remote stretch of countryside, following a ‘psionic message’ or just a ‘feeling’ on the part of one of the members. Mostly this takes the form of a bunch of harmless cranks traipsing around, proclaiming they can feel a presence or are experiencing ‘heightened psionic energy’. However, there have been incidents when Church members have intruded and felt sufficiently entitled to remain in their ‘holy site’ that they resisted attempts to remove them.



The Travellers might be sceptical about the Church, and they would be right to do so. The Church is a real religion, not a deliberate scam as such, but its offer of higher powers brings in large numbers of would-be devotees who are happy to prove their faith with donations. Where all this money goes is open to speculation. It may be funding real psionics research or some entirely different project.

The Church of the Mind has been repeatedly investigated by anti-psionics groups and governments which are opposed to the use of mental powers. Whilst occasionally charges have been brought, in most cases it has either proven impossible to build a case, or the arrested parties were innocent. It seems likely that whilst the Church preaches mental powers and reveres them, most members have no psionic potential.

The core belief of the Church is that psionic power is granted by some superior force or being – though the Church is highly vague about who or what this is, or why it happens. It preaches that psionics are the means by which humanity will be able to commune with the higher beings or forces, and once humans develop sufficient skill they will begin to receive enlightenment on all things. The Church's rituals include mass meditations designed to channel latent psionic talents of those present and create a means to unlock them. It is not clear if this works at all, but observers have commented that seeing dozens of people sitting in complete silence for an hour or more is a little eerie at least.

Psionics researchers have suggested that – in some cases at least – there is a kernel of truth in the Church's teachings. It is quite possible that some of its members are in reality psionically active, and all of the noisy nonsense is a cover for what is in effect a proper psionics institute. Certainly the Church attracts many who seek psionic training, but unless they embrace the faith they stand no chance of being offered it; if anyone actually *is* trained, they do a very good job of concealing it.

The Travellers might be assigned to infiltrate the Church and find out if it really is teaching psionics, or they may want to find out for themselves. Alternatively, they might be approached by a band of believers wanting help getting access to a holy site – or perhaps the Travellers might pretend to be believers to cover highly illegal activities, essentially pretending to be harmless cranks rather than criminals.



CLAIM JUMPERS

Arriving on a rather dry backwater world, the Travellers receive a message from one Mr Hans Vammissen, of Vammissen Interstellar Brokerage. The content is cryptic, offering a 'very suitable fee' upon the completion of a 'simple but interesting task', without giving any details whatsoever. Replying to the message, the Travellers are invited to a meeting at Hans Vammissen's brokerage, where he explains that he is representing a consortium of investors in a delicate matter. The investors do not wish to be identified.

The short version is that Vammissen's backers have plunged a lot of money into a water-prospecting operation in the far south. It has been a big success so far; an enormous subterranean aquifer has been discovered. If it is remotely as large as initial estimates suggest, it could transform the region (which is at present a worthless semi-desert) into a lush garden with possibilities for farming or settlement.

Progress in opening up the basin has been slow because of the difficult terrain in the south. Extinct volcanoes with ancient lava flows pepper the area, making equipment transport and deployment very difficult. However, just recently the project has made a breakthrough. A borehole reached liquid water at a depth of seventeen kilometers. The hole is capped in preparation for the building of production facilities.

The consortium, up until quite recently, had almost run out of funds and had failed to renew their prospecting licenses for the region. Work continued in the absence of a license, leading to the location of the aquifer, but shortly after it was discovered a rival group arrived and ran the prospectors off at gunpoint. They have a valid license and are claiming the region and the works.

The consortium has managed to raise significant new financial support for the project but all of this is subject to the return of the works into their hands. To achieve this end, the consortium needs to have its license restored and the rival's license revoked or otherwise

nullified. The task offered by Hans Vammissen is to replace the existing records with 'corrected' versions. This involves breaking into the computer system of the Office of Mineral and Natural Resources. These are a small adjunct office off the main Customs office in the highport. The reward is for success only and amounts to Cr20000. Successful negotiation may raise this to Cr25000.

The licenses are maintained in both physical and electronic form. The physical form, based on holographic technology, is very difficult to forge. In the case of the computer records, the licenses are protected by many levels of encryption and physical security. To modify a record requires senior administrator level access and although penetration of the outer encryption shell can be done remotely, the final layer may only be entered at the office itself.

It might be possible to destroy the physical records, forcing the office to create a new one from the doctored version installed on the computers. Alternatively, someone might be induced to simply 'lose' the physical copies, again necessitating the creation of new ones. A subtle ploy might be to swap the real physical records for ones that say the same but have signs of tampering, (or to persuade someone to declare that they do), forcing the Office of Mineral and Natural Resources to fall back on the computer version. In all these scenarios changing the electronic record is the key to success, though a clever group of Travellers might come up with some other way to accomplish the task.

The situation may be further complicated if the consortium represented by Mr Vammissen are in fact claim jumpers, and the group he said muscled in are the legitimate license holders. It is also possible that backup records are held elsewhere, perhaps at the prospecting site itself, necessitating an additional forgery and/or alteration attempt.

THE DAWNLIGHTERS

In a backwater system, the Travellers venture just outside the starport... and into what might as well be another world. At first nothing seems very different; the Travellers have entered a small town peopled by friendly folks who seem very welcoming but are strangely saddened when they see anyone using high-technology devices. A second look reveals these people have a very strange way of doing things. They understand high technology perfectly well, but they do not want it in their lives.

These people call themselves Dawnlighters, and have enclaves on various worlds. They prefer to work hard with their hands rather than use a machine that could do the same job in seconds, though they are entirely happy to use power tools so long as they are manually controlled. The Dawnlighters eschew robotics and similar labour-saving devices, and maintain that they simply have no need for most of the high-tech toys desired by others.

The Dawnlight movement is social rather than religious. Its adherents believe that technology has progressed too far and reliance upon it has become toxic to humans. They thus reject advanced technology – loosely defined as anything based upon semiconductors and concepts that arise later in the normal flow of technological progression – and live simple ‘up at dawn’s first light’ lives in modest-sized communities.

Dawnlighters are not backward as such; they often have ingenious mechanical devices which parallel some advanced technological functions. Most groups, however, are farmers, steaders and market-town dwellers who pursue traditional crafts such as carpentry and blacksmithing. Towns are connected by steam-powered railroads or efficient combustion engine vehicles, some of which are very advanced for their type. However, there is nothing in any of these vehicles that cannot be fixed with a wrench – electricity is used, but circuits are simple and most devices are mechanical.

This can make Dawnlighter communities utterly terrifying to outsiders – vehicles with hydraulically applied brakes and mechanical steering, lacking

advanced sensors or collision-avoidance systems, are driven at speed and fixed by the roadside when something breaks. Conversely, the average Dawnlighter will sigh and shrug when someone produces some technological marvel, then go back to using their simple hand and power tools.

Among the Dawnlighters, there are a few doomsayers who warn of a coming technological apocalypse, in which the machines will take over or run wild... or simply stop working. When that happens, those who cannot live without technology will perish, whilst those who do not need it will continue as if nothing had happened. Most Dawnlighters do not try to force their beliefs on others, though they can be openly disparaging about those who cannot build a tractor from its component parts or fix their own plumbing.

There are a few more militant enclaves, but for the most part the Dawnlighters just want to get on with their own lives; everyone else is welcome to emasculate their self-reliance with technological crutches if that is their desire. However, Dawnlighters can become enraged if someone tries to force technology into their lives. A corporation wanting to build an advanced fabrication plant on Dawnlighter land would face strong and angry opposition. What form it took, and how violent things became, would depend very much on the personalities involved.

The Travellers’ interactions with the Dawnlighters might be fairly passive. A mission or patron might take the Travellers into Dawnlighter lands, in which case the Dawnlighters’ way of life might be an interesting backdrop to the adventure, or might cause problems when the Travellers need assistance repairing some of their advanced hardware. The Travellers might find themselves opposed to allied with a group of Dawnlighters who are trying to resist the encroachment of technology into their way of live. For example, a developer who wants to put a major communications hub right in the middle of Dawnlighter territory might face resistance or possibly even violence, forcing the Travellers to pick a side.

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Arriving in port with cargo to sell, the Travellers discover the local markets are in complete turmoil. Prices on the interstellar exchanges fluctuate wildly, sometimes over a period as short as minutes. The financial and commercial markets are flooded with high-risk speculative buying and selling, and a spate of suicides among both licensed brokers and casual market players has been reported. Investigation reveals that something called Deltacommerce has become popular in the past few weeks, with catastrophic results for local traders.

Deltacommerce is, according to its founders, the ‘fourth and final state of commercial activity’. It claims to be a system of insider tips, expert advice and secrets used by the most successful traders in all of history. Once the material is mastered, a Deltacommerce practitioner can make a killing on speculative trade, stock markets or even just buying and selling in the local street bazaar. Of course, the programme takes a great deal of time and effort to learn, and the secrets are not revealed all at once.

When a new practitioner buys into Deltacommerce (literally, though the fee for the Level 1 self-teaching materials is very small) they learn about basic negotiating and market-trend prediction techniques. These are real, and widely used by successful traders. Indeed, someone who makes a living in commerce – such as a free trader purser – will already know most if not all of the contents. For someone who does not, Deltacommerce Level 1 is a useful primer on how to avoid basic marketplace mistakes.

In all probability, someone who makes a real go of applying Deltacommerce techniques to any economic activity will show a profit. This creates satisfied clients, who then quickly become hungry for more. Progressing to Level 2 requires finding an Accredited Trainer and paying a sign-up fee as well as a percentage of profits obtained by Deltacommerce methods. The Level 2 practitioner simply registers what he or she is about to do with the trainer and undertakes whatever activity suits his or her inclinations. Once a Cr1000 have been earned through registered activities (and 10% of the proceeds paid to the trainer), the practitioner is awarded Level 3. Level 4 requires Cr10000; level 5 is awarded at Cr100000, and so forth.

At each level, new techniques and marketplace secrets are revealed, in theory enabling the practitioner to make bigger and bigger profits in ever more lucrative

marketplaces. Much of this material has been ridiculed as bunk and hokum by eminent economists, but the Deltacommerce programme can cite many examples of people who are making a lot of money by using its methods. It has been suggested that all that is really happening is that people are being encouraged to take financial risks using their savings, and some of them get lucky – perhaps assisted by the basic rules of thumb put forward at Level 1. The trainers rake off a percentage, and when these marketplace gamblers finally crash and burn there is always someone else to take their place.

The Deltacommerce concept has begun to affect the interstellar trade marketplace, with individuals undertaking wild speculation on a market that can become unstable. Even otherwise reputable brokers and starship purser are involved, and some of them are turning phenomenal profits. Those who are riding high extol the virtues of the programme and quote their level number with pride. Those who have lost a lot of money are bitter and angry, but current Deltacommerce practitioners are sure that it cannot happen to them – the method is infallible, you just have to earn the next batch of secrets and fully comprehend them. Those that have lost everything have surely misunderstood something.

The Travellers may want to investigate Deltacommerce for a number of reasons. Its secrets might benefit (or bankrupt) them, and there may well be more to the situation than meets the eye. Those higher up the Deltacommerce pyramid are obviously making a great deal of money off the new recruits, and there may be nothing more to it than that. However, it is possible the utter chaos caused on the interstellar markets is in someone’s interest. Certainly, there are a few brokers who have taken to buying options on goods at stupidly low prices. Essentially this means the broker pays a fee to guarantee his right to buy at a certain price if that commodity ever falls so low. In such a turbulent marketplace, this could well happen and the broker can clean up on goods as their prices rebound. What is interesting is who is taking such options, and what they are buying.

It is also possible that someone ruined by Deltacommerce might want revenge on the higher-ups in the pyramid, who he blames for the disaster he has suffered, or the Travellers might be approached to help a Deltacommerce mogul escape the wrath of those who feel he has scammed them.

THE GREAT REVOLUTIONARIES



Normally, world governments do not allow blatant recruiting for revolutionary movements, or fundraising that is explicitly aimed at supporting them. Yet in the Travellers' latest port of call there is a great deal of activity in support of something called the Great Revolution. Fundraisers include very nice people holding coffee mornings, even jumble sales and donate-your-old-clothes drives as well as well-attended speeches by eloquent and very moderate-sounding personalities flanked by armband-wearing supporters who are terribly sincere and rather, well, reasonable. It all seems a little bit odd.

The Great Revolution is a multiworld movement dedicated to bringing down all forms of interstellar government. Its publicity and propaganda arm makes a great deal of noise about liberty and independence but this is not quite what the Great Revolution is aimed at. Its stated goal is to remove any and all multiworld governments, allowing each world to make its own decisions and chart its own path into the future. This may seem like a questionable goal, since it is probably not a useful end in and of itself. The regional leaders of the Great Revolution will not admit it, but it is obvious that the removal of other governments will pave the way for a new one to emerge – presumably the Great Revolution will be followed by a Great Endeavour to link up the newly independent and liberated worlds into an interstellar state run by the Revolution's leaders.



Perhaps surprisingly for such an organisation, the Great Revolution fights an extremely clean war – cleaner than many of its opponents in fact. Its core principles include the decent treatment of captives and a policy of dealing fairly with the local population. Personnel are harshly punished for taking by force what they could buy instead, or for any mistreatment of non-combatants. Although this has created some internal divisions, the Great Revolution has come to be viewed as 'the good guys' by people on many worlds unconnected with the struggle. It is not uncommon to find fundraising efforts going on, usually behind a pretence of some other cause, in places that would not normally be associated with support for a revolutionary group.

The Great Revolution is sufficiently widespread to be able to field conventional military forces in some cases. These tend to be rather light in terms of equipment; typically, light infantry and cavalry riding in converted civilian ground vehicles. In a few cases the Revolution controls or at least contests large areas of a continent, and is a real threat to the continued existence of the local government. In other places it has only a few small insurgent groups or agents in place causing what disruption they can.



The Revolution also has a spacegoing arm, though this is mainly equipped with converted merchant craft. It carries out commerce raiding operations which are inevitably denounced as piracy by the authorities but are as cleanly executed as ground combat. Some raider craft are independent and conceal themselves by sticking to the backwater ports but, in a few cases, there are organised bases with a flotilla of vessels operating from them. These may include small warships, typically of obsolete designs which have been salvaged and returned to service.

According to rumour there is a central command to the Great Revolution, but its members remain out of sight and make their pronouncements through third parties. This is not a charismatic, heroic leadership but a careful group of political and military strategists who are mindful of the long-term goal. Likewise, it is thought that there is a Revolutionary Fleet somewhere, containing at least a handful of ships in the cruiser class. These vessels are rarely sighted, but do carry out the occasional raid from time to time. It seems likely that this is to remind the authorities the fleet exists, but the rest of the time it exerts influence only as a fleet in being, i.e. by potential rather than action. The Revolutionary Fleet would be destroyed in a straight fight against any major navy, but it nevertheless represents a threat that cannot be ignored.

The Great Revolution also has many sympathisers, not all of whom believe in its goals. Numerous smugglers and weapons dealers work with the Revolution but do so only because it is a steady and reliable client. They do not really mind who they sell to or transport illicit goods on behalf of, so long as they get paid on time and are not double-crossed. The Great Revolution fulfils these criteria, but is sometimes a bit too squeamish for its potential allies' liking – association with the Revolution comes at the risk of being policed if the dealer or smuggler acts in a way the Revolution's leaders do not like.

It is hard to say whether the Great Revolution is winning or losing. It is gaining ground in some areas, causing severe disruption in others, and has been all but eradicated elsewhere. Its dispersed nature makes it hard to kill completely, but at the same time prevents decisive action from being taken in areas where the Revolution has gained a significant advantage. It thus seems likely that the raiding, activism and insurgency will continue for many years to come. The Travellers' current port of call has been won over to the Great Revolution's cause, which might result in some form of backlash or intervention. However, in the meantime there are many possibilities, from making Credits working for or against the revolutionaries, to infiltrating their ranks to find out more about their real intentions. It is possible the Travellers might even be won over to the Revolutionaries' cause, and find themselves fighting for interstellar liberty.



LOST AMONG THE FIRSTERS



Many worlds have groups living on them beside the main population. It is of course the primary culture recorded in the world's profile, but secondary and minor populations can exist almost anywhere. The Firsters are one such culture. They are descended from the earliest colonists to arrive, possibly a Vilani or Solomani expedition from the late First Imperium/early Second Imperium era. The colony mission was unsuccessful and the colonists regressed to a primitive level.

Over the centuries, these Firsters spread out across much of the planet but never built a technological civilisation of any sort. Instead, they have developed a semi-nomadic lifestyle. The Firsters do have some villages and even towns, but people often wander between them and a significant segment of the population do not have any permanent home. Their lifestyle is simple in the extreme but they have a great cultural heritage. Their oral traditions go back millennia, and they have produced a number of great poets. Much of their knowledge is retained in saga-poems, many of which contain fairly accurate descriptions of the worlds the original colonists passed by on the way to settle here.

The Firsters get on well enough with the technologically-advanced settlers who came later, and there is little competition. Neither has the numbers that would require huge amounts of land, and their homelands are divided by both a tradition of mutual respect for the other's territory as well as a very real barrier in the form of a broad region of rocky desert. Occasionally some of the 'Laters', as the more advanced colonists are known, visit the Firsters or go to live with them permanently. Some Firsters go the other way, but not so many.

The Firsters are largely ignored by offworlders, who pass through the port and move on. Those that venture into their territory but cause no trouble find them friendly but not really interested in offworld affairs. Firsters will, however, happily act as guides or work for offworlders who need someone to help them get by in the wilderness.

The Firsters' numbers are increased – at least a little – by Laters who choose to go native or to 'Go First' as the local saying has it. The Firsters' lifestyle is very simple but fulfilling, and the world government is entirely happy for its citizens (or outsiders) to join the Firsters. Few choose to return, and both local populations believe an individual must find their own way. There is even a semi-secret organisation that 'puts people First', essentially facilitating their disappearance into the Firster tribes. They will not do this for known criminals except under very unusual circumstances, but are sympathetic towards those trying to escape debt, excessive stress, bad decisions or unhappy circumstances. The Firsters are politely uncooperative when attempts are made to find such people.

The Travellers might encounter the Firsters in various ways, perhaps being approached by someone who Went First some time ago and who now wishes or needs to return to the starfaring life. They might also be asked to help find someone, perhaps a deserter from the armed forces or a relative who has run off. There is also the possibility that someone might have been taken to join the Firsters against their will. Whilst few Firsters would even consider such an act, a partner or parent determined to start a new life might drag family members along, assuring them that they will come to like the new lifestyle. Other relatives or friends of these people might want to bring them home and ask the Travellers for help locating their loved ones or at least ascertaining if they are being held against their will.

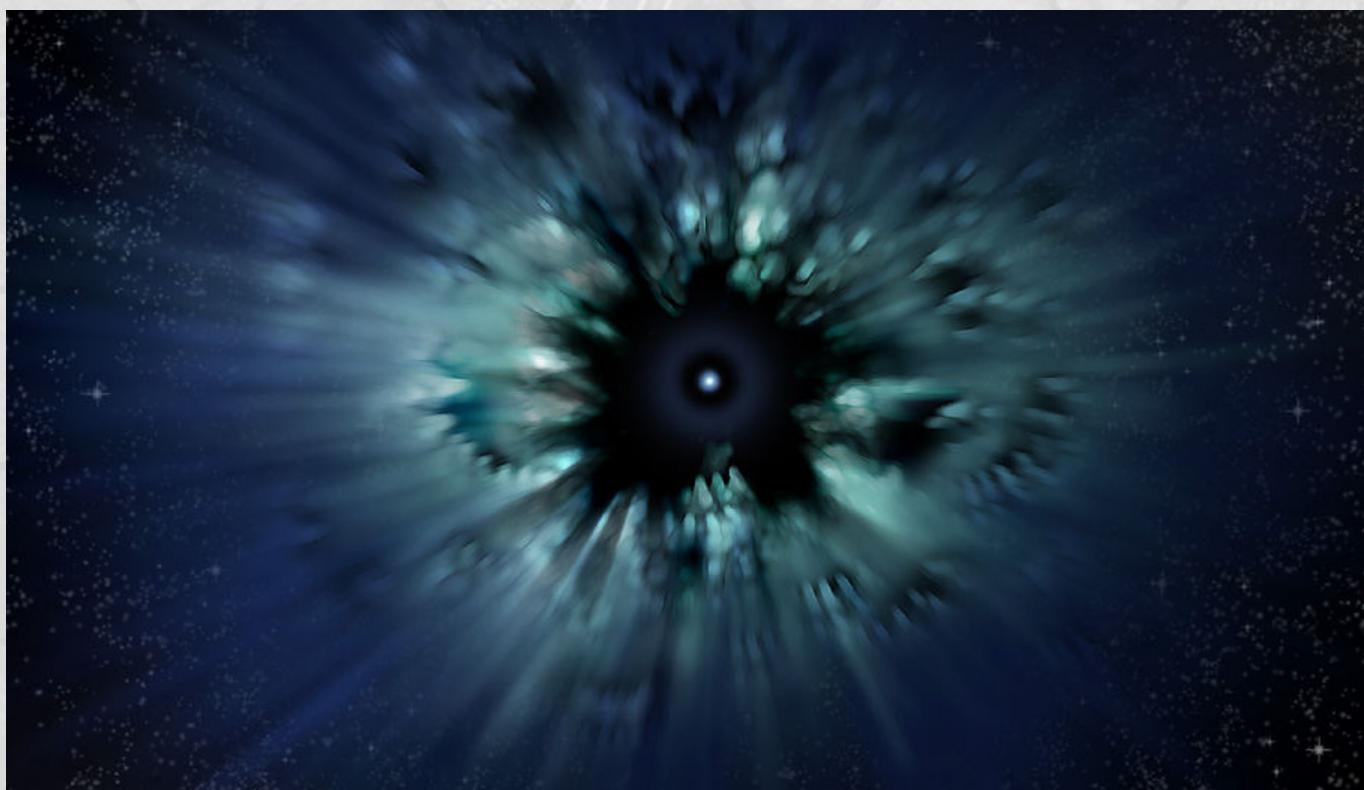
THE NEO-ANIMIST

The Travellers encounter a severely depressed spacer in a portside bar. She has leads on well-paid work aboard reputable ships, but simply cannot bring herself to venture into jumpspace for fear of losing her soul, or her self, or both. After some initial talking around the subject she opens up about the problem. The short version is that she is a neo-animist and she believes she has been exposed to the effects of jumpspace one time too many.

Neo-Animists believe that certain places are powerful and of spiritual significance, and that visiting them cleanses a person's spirit. This has the effect of making them more resilient and bringing good luck. There is a list of these places – actually, several lists, some of which are false according to various Neo-Animist teachers. Some lists conflict with others about which places are significant, and some contain rather odd locations. A certain starport bar; a burger joint on an obscure backwater world, and a derelict railway bridge are among the more oddball areas of significance. They receive pilgrims from time to time, and there are those that believe there might be an element of commercialism involved.

Neo-Animists tend to be very impressed with large or spectacular animals, even those that are not on the so-called sacred lists, and will often become involved in conservation efforts. Likewise they tend to oppose almost any construction work in an area of natural beauty, and can be something of a nuisance to those trying to work there. This sort of activity is generally harmless, but there is a darker side to Neo-Animist belief, connected with jumpspace. Neo-Animists believe – not unreasonably – that jumpspace is unnatural, and that being cut off from the rest of the universe is bad for the soul. Many Neo-Animists who are forced to travel have a small shrine in their quarters, and conduct protective rituals before entering and leaving jump. An early emergence, which catches the believer before he can prepare himself, is a spiritually threatening experience.

Oddly perhaps, there are quite a few Neo-Animists among spacer crews, and some ships have a shrine on the bridge. This is usually a collection of what appear to be souvenirs and junk assembled from significant places, along with items the believers themselves find personally important. Someone who did not know better



might tidy up the shrine, which could cause friction. Neo-Animist belief holds that the more time is spent in jumpspace, the greater the weight upon a person's spirit. This can only be countered by a bigger and more comprehensive shrine and spirit-cleansing pilgrimages to significant places.

Long-term spacers have been known to suffer from depression, addictions and unaccountable runs of truly appalling luck which have no known cause. Those who believe in Neo-Animism are sure this is due to the ill-effects of jumpspace, and there is some medical evidence that spacers who work in non-jump-capable ships such as in-system transports and mining ships do not have the same incidence of these maladies, despite living and working in much the same conditions. This is not the same thing as proof, of course, but Neo-Animists cite the phenomenon as supporting their beliefs.

Thus, in addition to their shrines and their often rather odd pre-entry and emergence rituals, spacers who subscribe to Neo-Animism tend to want to get planetside as often as possible. Some believe that just interacting with a lot of people will help offset the effects of jumpspace. Getting blind drunk in a starport bar is a common option, and this behaviour is well enough known that the term 'place of worship' is a common euphemism for a portside drunk tank. Other Neo-Animists are convinced they need to get outside and experience the natural world. This can mean running barefoot on the beach or hugging trees – some Neo-Animists actually do this – but a quiet walk in a vacc suit amid the stark majesty of a rockball world can also be a cleansing experience.

There are tales of spacers who went out into jumpspace one time too many and came back... not quite right. Some believe this can be caused by depression or mental illness arising from the spiritual draining effect of jumpspace. Others say it was more directly caused; the hapless spacer's soul was leached away into jumpspace, leaving him an empty husk. There are even claims that this can go further; that something else can get in once a spacer's spirit is gone.

There are many who question why anyone who accepts the teachings of Neo-Animism would risk their souls in jumpspace, but interstellar commerce is necessary to society and people have to work for a living. A few Neo-Animists actively go into jumpspace to challenge whatever they fear is there. By matching their resilient souls against its darkness they hope to provide a beacon for those who are becoming lost, and delay the day when all humanity's spirits are gone into the void. This, fear Neo-Animists, is the ultimate end for all starfaring species. The collapse into soulless despair can be delayed, but not averted.

The Neo-Animist sincerely believes that she has been affected by too much time in jumpspace, but could be helped to cleanse her spirit by friendly Travellers. Alternatively, she can point them to some good job leads in return for a sympathetic ear. Of course, some of the tales she relates will make the Travellers wonder if maybe there really is something horrible lurking in jumpspace....



OUR FRIENDS FROM OLD EARTH

The Travellers' latest port of call is a watery world with a mixed human/dolphin population. Relations have historically been amicable, but in recent years a dispute has developed over fishing rights in the Alphain Coast region. Industrial trawling has depleted fish stocks and even killed the occasional dolphin, and since the fishery companies are not willing to alter their procedures or even admit responsibility for the deaths, there is a real danger of a human-dolphin feud breaking out. Using a human intermediary, the dolphins hope to break the impasse by hiring a group of offworlders, who understand human culture and laws but have no agenda of their own, to assist in mediating a peaceful resolution to the dispute.

The intermediary is one Silviy Francesci, a lawyer who normally specialises in civil cases and divorce proceedings. She has discovered that dolphin-human relations offer an opportunity to work bigger-money cases to which she would not normally have access. Since there are plenty of lawyers willing to work the human side, she has carved herself a niche as a representative of the dolphin population and increasingly takes a biased, pro-dolphin stance regardless of the details. This has led several prominent human leaders to accuse her of collaboration with the dolphins.

The truth is that Silviy is a pragmatist and has found a way to make a lot of money. She has no great love (or hatred) of dolphins, but they have access to goods of considerable value to humans, and Silviy has no moral problems charging the dolphins top Credits to represent them. She has inveigled her way into their business dealings and now gets a percentage of sale price on many valuable items. This particular case could upset the arrangement, so Silviy prefers to distance herself from it whilst still being seen to serve the needs of her dolphin clients.

The Alphain Coast has traditionally had only a small fishing fleet, but in recent years the number of vessels has increased tenfold, with several very large trawlers being brought in. At the initial meeting with Silviy

and her clients, they neglected to mention that some dolphins have retaliated against the fishing fleet, and that there have been several violent incidents. With deaths on both sides, bitterness is increasing and widespread conflict is becoming increasingly likely.

The hope is that the Travellers will be able to defuse the situation and arbitrate a settlement that is acceptable to both sides. The chances of this will diminish with every incident, and since there are agitators on both sides trying to spark a fight, the task will be a difficult one. The dolphins' leaders will of course agree to any meeting set up by the Travellers, but the fishery executives may not unless persuaded somehow.

Even if they do not agree to mediate the dispute, the Travellers will find themselves in the middle of an increasingly rancorous situation, with sporadic outbreaks of violence. Unless the dispute is calmed down, matters will reach the point where dolphins begin attacking fishing boats, and the fishermen will fight back with improvised depth charges that kill innocent dolphins as well as those actively involved in the conflict. The region will be a war zone within weeks.

This can be avoided with some good diplomacy. Neither side wants conflict, though some individuals may, and it can be made clear that a negotiated solution is to everyone's benefit. However, this will require getting the agitators on both sides to desist, which may require robust measures. There is also a possibility that pro-conflict or vengeance-seeking individuals on one or both sides may attempt to disrupt any settlement conference. The Travellers might end up defending against attacks from both sides, and there is a possibility that a lasting friendship could be built from delegates helping one another... or collapse into widespread violence if they do not.

The actions of the Travellers will be critical here. Even if they are not actively involved, they will be in the vicinity of some of the major events, and will have a chance to influence the outcome if they choose to do so.

PARKING PROBLEMS

Arriving at a frontier starport, the Travellers are faced with an interesting challenge. The landing pad is occupied by an obviously converted Type R Subsidised Merchant, covered in burn marks and scars of combat, and parked at a very awkward angle. Normally the pad can accommodate three or four such ships, but this one has been landed and left in the middle of the pad with obvious disregard for other starfarers. The merchant's launch is missing, and two additional turrets have been retrofitted into its place.

It is possible to land, but this means squeezing in between the berm that surrounds the pad, the control huts and the grounded ship, a tight squeeze made more difficult by a gusty wind. The grounded ship is tracking the Travellers' vessel with its fire control radar and one of its turrets is slewing around, ostentatiously pointing at a location exactly two ships' lengths behind their ship. Instruments show the weapons (a dual laser mount) are not powered, but they could quickly be brought into action. The gesture is, obviously, an arrogant warning not to bump the grounded ship rather than an actual threat.

If the Travellers open fire, not only are they making an unprovoked attack on a grounded ship, but it could retaliate with its own weapons. It is unlikely that either ship would survive an engagement at such short range.

If the Travellers attempt to land, they can manage it, but this requires a tricky manoeuvre – a Difficult (10+) Pilot check would be appropriate in these conditions. If successful, the pilot squeezes his ship in with no real problem. Failure indicates the Travellers have clipped the berm and their ship has taken some minor damage, but they are down. Failure with Effect of -4 or greater means the pilot has collided with the grounded ship (which does not actually open fire), causing some minor damage to both vessels.

The ship is the Hamali, a heavily modified merchant vessel registered out of a dubious freeport in the region. It belongs to Captain Mikhyl Teiss, a member of one of the smaller but more adventurous pirate bands operating in the area. He is in a bit of a jam at present. He has landed himself a lucrative job smuggling weapons to illegal militias on various worlds, but just could not pass up the chance to bushwhack a juicy merchant or two along the way.

Teiss' latest victim was not a merchant at all, but turned out to be a Q-ship operated by StarSecure, a merc outfit. Teiss 'had a feeling' about the target and left himself a large window of opportunity to escape, which was just as well. The short exchange of fire that followed his challenge caused a great deal of damage to both vessels, but the Hamali jumped out and carried on with her gunrunning mission while the ship's engineer made running repairs.

Tiess is on a tight timeframe and stands to make a lot of money from his smuggling. He dare not go home to his superiors and tell them he blew the job out of greed, so has pressed on with complete disregard to common sense. Things worked out well enough for a while, until the ship's engineer got into a knife-fight with one of the gunners and died shortly thereafter. Shooting the gunner did not make Teiss feel any better, and now he is two men down, behind time and unable to launch without an engineer and a damage control team. And perhaps worst of all, he is stuck on this low-population desolate rockball.

He is not a happy man.

Tiess and his predicament could affect the Travellers in various ways. They are stuck between the port berm and his heavily armed ship, which might make simply leaving a problem. Tiess needs help fixing his ship and will go to any lengths to obtain it. That might include trying to kidnap an engineer from the Travellers' ship or demanding help fixing (possibly imaginary) damage to his vessel caused in the landing.

Tiess would also cut a deal with the Travellers if they are of a suitably crooked mindset. He might cut them in on the gunrunning setup, or get them to assist him in a bit of piracy. He would pay a reasonable fee to a crew willing to feed him information from ports his ship cannot enter without risking arrest, or to launder cargoes taken from ships he has plundered, by transferring them to the Travellers' (presumably more legitimate) ship.

The Travellers might actively join in a bit of piracy either directly or as a decoy. Their role would be to send out a distress signal as if being attacked and sucker in a Good Samaritan who can then be outgunned by both ships and forced to surrender. Tiess would really like to get even with StarSecure by catching their Q-ship in this way, but if that happens he will not be interested in surrender.

THE RELUCTANT WANNABEE

The Travellers are contacted by one Armand Ultrei, who seems to think he knows them quite well. A moment of hurried recollection turns up the possibility that Armand is a friend of someone the Travellers knew a while back, or was not he married to someone they served with? Or perhaps he is related to a friend's ex-husband's sister? There is some connection, the Travellers are sure, but it is tenuous and vague. Nevertheless, Armand seems delighted to see the Travellers and wants to catch up on how everyone is doing – including various individuals the Travellers are pretty sure they have never heard of.

After some confused preamble, Armand asks if the Travellers can help him out. His son is coming up to sixteen and wants to embark on a wholly unsuitable and utterly mundane career. Armand wants to show him that there are opportunities to really make something of himself and be a high flyer if he just has a little confidence. He would like the Travellers to take his son – named Androklos – with them for a few days and, you know, show him the ropes.

Armand is apparently convinced that if his son sees self-reliant, highly resourceful people in action, then he will leave behind his dreams of becoming an artist or a chef or whatever it is he wants this week, and embark upon a proper career like the navy or merchant service. To this end, he is willing to pay reasonable expenses for the Travellers to just keep Androklos around while they are in town. He is a good kid who can run errands and he is keen to learn, Armand says, he just lacks confidence and any idea of how the real universe works.

Armand lets slip that he has contacted some other adventurer types about the same setup, but Androklos is highly unwilling to go anywhere with them since they seem a bit... rough around the edges... and might be involved in something illegal. Armand does not want that for his son.

If the Travellers check out these other adventurers, they do indeed seem unsavoury and hardly the sort of people a child should be keeping company with. Androklos himself is a skinny, nervous kid who desperately wants to please but is so worried about failing that he makes a mess of everything he attempts. If the Travellers do



agree to take him with them for a while they will likely be driven mad by his nervous questions about everything and his real fear of not living up to the expectations of people his father seems to idolise.

Armand is not asking for his son to be taken on some long and potentially dangerous offworld adventure; he simply wants the Travellers to let the kid hang around with them whilst they go about their business in the port or nearby. A trip in a space vessel would be a great bonus, even if it is nothing more than a transit from highport to downport. Androklos is very keen to please, and will run errands for the group without complaint. This might be abused by a cynical party, who could use him as a cat's paw for some less than legal dealings, or they might just run him around for the fun of it. He will come to resent this sooner or later.

If the Travellers play fair by Androklos, he may become something of a pain due to his enthusiastic admiration. Whenever someone uses a skill, he is impressed and says to. His constant outbursts of 'That's so awesome!' and the like every time someone programmes a navigation computer or fixes a squeaky chair might become endearing or irritating, and Travellers might find themselves mimicking Androklos long after they have

parted company with him. He will truly appreciate any small consideration he receives from the Travellers; even just a few words of encouragement will mean a lot to him.

A couple of other facts will emerge from this interaction. Firstly, it is not really about Androklos – Armand has lived a very mundane life and is vicariously seeking adventure through his son. Secondly, Androklos is a truly talented chef and wants to pursue this career. There is no big financial payoff for having him around for a few days but dinner will be memorable, and perhaps it will be reward enough if Androklos says 'Don't the big merchant shipping lines have a training programme for stewards? My dad would like that, I think, and I would too.'

Androklos or Armand might turn up again later, perhaps aboard a ship the Travellers encounter, or possibly as the tragic victim of a bad career choice. Whatever happens next, a few days with Androklos might put the Travellers' lives in perspective for them. They might consider what they do to be really quite mundane but to the average person the life of a Traveller is strange, dangerous and exciting. They may not make any money on this one, but to one kid and his father at least, they are heroes.



RESURGAM



The Resurgam movement takes its name from the Latin for 'I shall rise again', and is dedicated to the recreation of a long vanished interstellar empire, or rather the idealised version of it put forward by the movement's leaders. If the Travellers are active in the Trojan Reach this will likely be the Sindalian Empire. It might also be the Second Imperium or even the First.

Although it is based on a real state the 'old empire', at least as the Resurgam movement presents it, never really existed as such. The old empire has been given characteristics that suit the movement's current leaders, and evidence to support this position has been 'found' in ruins on several worlds or inferred from half-forgotten folk tales.

The Resurgam movement has considerable backing on several worlds, most of which lack a major industrial base. Its strengths are thus more in the fields of fervour and manpower than high-technology military forces, though it has gained access to advanced weaponry and manufacturing capabilities by way of defections and coups.

Resurgam operations are characterised by aggression, cunning and a high degree of brutality. Fear is a useful tool, and devotees of the movement are not hesitant to use it. Mass executions of captured enemy personnel are not uncommon, though sometimes the movement will unexpectedly show clemency. On other occasions, civilian populations have been subjected to harsh reprisals after Resurgam has demanded support or even a coup, and the local people have not risen when commanded.

Terrorism is a standard approach for Resurgam, typically carried out by small cells of operatives coordinated by a central network. Some cells are devoted to intelligence gathering or recruiting and never undertake active operations, which improves security as well as ensuring there is a place in the network for those of more delicate sensibilities. Other supporters are tasked with fundraising and disruption of hostile economies by various means. Strikes among workers are a common tool – usually the striking workers are coerced into their actions by threat of violence, which can work even if no active terrorist cell is available to carry out the threats.

Resurgam is not short of money, and uses this to conduct economic warfare against its opponents. It is not uncommon for a cargo of important goods to be bought out at a hugely inflated price just to keep them out of the hands of opponents. Brokers and starship captains unwilling to change a deal often find themselves coerced by threats of violence or a campaign of harassment. The movement is a voracious buyer of military hardware and starship components, and will pay high prices if it has to. Of course, since its normal negotiating practices involve extortion, coercion and violence, only those strong enough to resist being dictated to can command such fees.

Piracy is also used to fund Resurgam, and to obtain hard-to-get items. The movement has a network of informants – some idealists, some paid, and some under threat – who pass along information about certain types of cargo or shipping movements. This information is sometimes acted upon directly, but often sold or passed to pirates in return for winning their favour. The Resurgam movement shelters numerous pirates, and will give a home to the worst of war criminals so long as they fight for the cause. They do not have to believe in it, just support it.

Resurgam's operatives can be encountered on many worlds, often searching for information on the lost empire. What appears to be a legitimate archaeological expedition might turn out to be Resurgam researchers, who will have no qualms about destroying artefacts that do not fit with their preferred version of history. Several newly-discovered archaeological sites have been wrecked in this way, and a lot of knowledge has been lost as a result.

The Travellers might interact with the Resurgam movement in various ways. They may be approached (with offers of money, or threats, or both) to transport personnel or items, or smuggle artefacts out of a restricted archaeological site. If the Travellers are actively involved in trying to build a post-Sindalian Empire state such as Drinax they may find themselves directly at odds with Resurgam; a dangerous situation to be in.

SPIRALLING INTO WEIRDNESS

The Travellers will probably be peripherally aware of Galacticism, a sort of interstellar-age spiritualism popular on many worlds. It has recently enjoyed an explosion of popularity, which some observers find suspicious. The Travellers may become aware of the local popularity of Galacticism when they are approached to join a ‘spiral’ within moments of landing their ship, or they might be asked to investigate the sudden increase in membership of what was until recently very much a minority religion.

Galacticism combines some elements of fringe scientific theory with the concept of spiritual energy created by all living things. This energy is produced most strongly by sentient beings, especially those with mental powers. This includes psionics but also persons of strong will and persuasiveness. The energy created by the thoughts and life processes of all beings illuminates the Great Darkness (which can be taken to refer to space, or jumpspace, or sometimes some other mystical place, depending upon local variations) and makes possible phenomena such as telepathy and the jump drive.

This energy flows in a spiral down towards the galactic core, mostly along the spiral arms of the galaxy but also across the stars between them. It eddies around concentrations of life and persons of cosmic importance, and in some areas can concentrate sufficiently to create matter. Devotees of Galacticism maintain this is how the galaxy births new stars, and that some of these energy-eddies can create habitable pocket environments which can be shaped to the will of a sufficiently powerful mind.

On a more local scale, the energy flow can be manipulated by the positioning of variously-shaped objects around the home or a work space, according to highly complex rules which are understood only by those attuned to the secrets of Galacticism. This attunement is achieved by a combination of hidden talent, meditation, and interaction with those who already have it. It brings well-being, peace and prosperity to all and to those who master their attunement it reveals the wonders of the universe.

Galacticism is an extremely decentralised belief system, with adherents on many worlds and orbital stations. Most larger population centres have one or more ‘spirals’, as believer groups call themselves, who meet on an informal basis. Most are just groups of friends who are ‘into’ Galacticism, though they may be quite fervent believers. Some are more organised, with a central figure who knows secrets (or purports to) or who leads the group through charisma – which Galacticism claims is connected with the energy flow in any case.

Galacticism is basically harmless, and tends to be practiced by people with very mundane lives who have some time on their hands. It provides a sense of being part of something bigger and offers the chance (or illusion) of a mundane individual becoming someone influential and powerful. Prominent Galacticians sometimes denounce one another or expose ‘false teachings’, but often support one another. This has been dismissed as a mutual buy-in to the same nonsense, each strengthening their own delusion by feeding off that of others. Devotees counter this with examples of how cosmic energy flow has improved their lives.

It has been suggested at times that Galacticism might be a cover for psionic activity, or could lead unsuspecting people into some kind of psionic outbreak. This has provoked the occasional moral panic on very conservative worlds, and even led to the outright banning of Galacticism in some places. There is no evidence of any such thing is going on, but the pseudo-mysticism of Galacticism would indeed be a good cover activity for a group of psionic individuals. It might also be a way of recruiting potential psionic candidates; those who join a Galacticism spiral and show no signs of psionic capability are left to believe that everything is as it seems, whilst those with the potential for training are singled out.

Galacticism has little potential for violent insurrection or major social change. Its adherents prefer to practice their beliefs at home or in small groups around the coffee table. They are more likely to be victims of prejudice than instigators of violence. However, there is always the possibility that an influential figure might

create a more militant following. The nearest anyone has come are mass protests about the building of a secondary starport on a heavily populated world, on the grounds this would disturb the cosmic energy flow and make the world a much less pleasant place to live; this idea upset enough Galacticists to result in a major disruption to construction work.

The Travellers might be asked to infiltrate a local Galacticism spiral to find out if there is psionic activity going on, or discredit some of its more prominent figures who are leading opposition to a new development project. They might also become caught up in a moral panic, with reactionary local groups attacking Galacticists either metaphorically or physically. Most Galacticists helped by the Travellers would be grateful but gracious enough not to try to take the opportunity to push their faith on them, but there are some who are such true believers that they will annoy their benefactors by trying to 'educate' them at every opportunity.



THE WIZARD

Turning a corner on a startown street, the Travellers are a little taken aback to be confronted with what appears to be a wizard. He is a tall man, complete with white beard and very mangled hat that might once have been pointed. He wears a caped grey greatcoat rather than a robe, over jeans that might once have been blue, and a patterned shirt that might do everyone a favour if it were to start fading soon. He leans on a staff and turns to look directly at the Travellers. He nods sagely, as if he knows all about them, then passes by about his business.

This is David Andereich, well-known in the local starports variously as a crank, seeker after knowledge, or harmless but entertaining lunatic. It is possible that more than one of these labels is correct. Certainly, Andereich answers the question ‘are you a wizard?’ with ‘Yes, well, actually a sorcerer’ and seems quite sincere about it. He is a member – some say a highly placed and well-connected member – of the Arcane Order.

The Arcane Order is a pseudo-religion based around the teachings of one Arnulf Dimitrov, a purported sorcerer who disappeared a century ago after allegedly performing feats of magic witnessed by hundreds of people. Dimitrov left behind several grimoires containing his notes on the performance of magic, and these are eagerly sought by those who wish to follow in his footsteps.

The grimoires were, it is said, ensorcelled in such a way that little or nothing could be learned from any facsimile of them. Copies could be made by hand, by those who knew how and had access to the right materials. Simply scanning or photographing the pages results in what appears to be lucid and legible text, but which conveys no useful information. Members of the Arcane Order move from world to world seeking the original texts or the few successful copies made from them, and will occasionally take an apprentice.

The Order do not adopt the traditional trappings of wizards; they are as likely to be wearing a business suit or t-shirt and jeans as a robe and pointy hat. They do,



however, seek knowledge and wisdom, and will travel far just to stand in a particular spot that resonates with magic, or to speak with a local madman about arcane matters. Members seem to have a different perception of the world to outsiders – most would say this is due to viewing the universe through a distorted lens of self-delusion – and they occasionally offer insights others would never think of.

Generally assumed to be fakes, deluded idiots or perhaps in need of psychiatric treatment, members of the Arcane Order pursue their own agenda and rarely interfere in the affairs of others. If asked, most would say that having learned of the existence of sorcery they are driven to pursue it in the way others feel compelled to become artists or chefs. Members cannot explain their compulsion and do not try very hard, saying those who are called will understand, and those not cannot possibly comprehend what it is to be a seeker of the arcane. If asked if they can perform sorcery or magic, most admit they have not yet learned how. Others evade the question or make some profound but irrelevant statement. There are no records of anyone actually performing sorcery since Dimitrov, and those accounts are rather questionable.

Andereich is likely to turn up again once the Travellers have encountered him. Quite possibly this may be on different worlds. If queried about this ability to find or

encounter by chance the Travellers, Andereich smiles cryptically and says he is a sorcerer; of course he can find someone across several parsecs. He does not seem able to do it upon demand, however.

Andereich develops a fascination with the Travellers and wants to hear their story for its ‘hidden wisdom’. He will also press them for information on obscure books and where to find them, and can be encountered in the oddest places searching for hidden truths or lost grimoires. There is never any proof that he can perform magic – he does not actually claim to be able to do so, only that he is a sorcerer – but he does occasionally know strange facts that could not possibly have come from the local data terminal.

David Andereich and the Arcane Order might be nothing more than a passing encounter to the Travellers, to be joked about in the starport bar of an evening. But he is quite sincere in his search for knowledge – that does not mean he is not crazy – and might become a useful contact, fellow Traveller, ally or even a patron. His search for arcane grimoires or secret knowledge can take him to some very strange places – just the sort of places a band of Travellers might go. He may even be willing to travel with a band of adventurers and take on an apprentice from among them.