

TRAVELLER®

THE MARCHES ADVENTURES 1 - 5



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER®

THE MARCHES ADVENTURES 1 - 5

CREDITS

CLASSIC TRAVELLER

Marc Miller

MONGOOSE TRAVELLER

AUTHORS

Martin J Dougherty, Christopher Griffen

EDITORS

Matthew Sprange, Isabella Treccani-Chinelli

LAYOUT AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

Katrina Hepburn, Sandrine Thirache

ILLUSTRATIONS

Sergio Villa, S C Watson, Alejandro Palacio, Alfredo Dosztal, Sherif Wagdy, T Stirling Little, Farri Lensen, Anderson Maia, Jesse Sursoo, Andoni Fernandez, Isaque Guimarães, Leonardo Sá Guinard, Amy Wheeler, Flying Fox Studio, Andrew Welty

PROOFING

Charlotte Law

TRAVELLER INNER CIRCLE

Andrew James Alan Welty, Colin Dunn, M. J. Dougherty, Rob Eaglestone, Sam Wissa, Joshua Bell, Maksim Smelchak, Geir Lanesskog, Christopher Griffen



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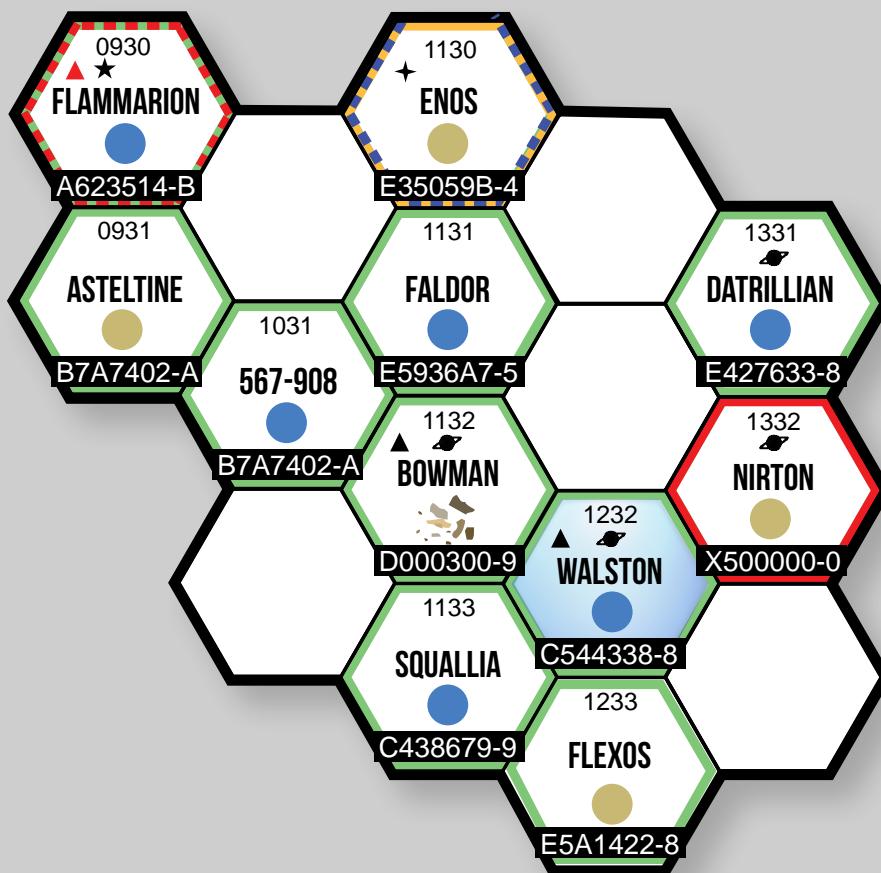
MARCHES ADVENTURE 1

High and Dry

In *High and Dry* the Travellers are given a ship in which they can explore the galaxy for the rest of the campaign – the only catch is that they have to find it first.

Travelling to the quiet world of Walston, the Travellers will have to engage with the locals, locate their ship and repair it before they can return home. However, the ship has been left in the crater of a volcano and there have been tremors rocking the surrounding area for quite some time...

High and Dry is the perfect introductory adventure for *Traveller*, full of exploration, character interaction and a truly explosive finale!



INTRODUCTION

This adventure provides the Travellers with a starship (and a whole load of problems to go with it) and a mission to carry out. The latter is not the focus of this adventure; it is the hook. The adventure concerns the acquisition of the ship and resolution of some subsequent issues. As it turns out, the ship is not waiting handily in a nearby dock but is located on a nearby world where it has become stuck due to an equipment breakdown. All the Travellers must do is travel to the ship's location and pick it up, after making a few minor repairs and dealing with any incidental problems along the way.

Simple enough on the face of it. However, this is the Imperial frontier and not everything goes to plan out here.

THE THIRD IMPERIUM

High and Dry is set in the Spinward Marches, within the Sword Worlds and District 268 subsectors. It is a complete and self-contained adventure, requiring only the *Traveller Core Rulebook* to play.

This adventure might feature very little combat depending on the path the Referee chooses the story to follow, and how things play out. In its basic form, the primary challenges the Travellers face are a mystery, a challenging physical test and the eruption of a volcano. However, should potential combat be desired by the Referee, there are several potential insertion points for a conflict with the previous crew of the ship they are searching for. The original crew are a nasty group, and certainly have some comeuppance coming to them. Whether this occurs as a shouting match, a brawl, a gunfight, or simply not at all is up to the Referee. An encounter with the previous crew is presented as a wild card that can be inserted at an appropriate point to add drama and immersion to the adventure.

Whether or not they encounter the previous crew, the Travellers might run into someone harbouring a grudge against them, resulting in aggression that might seem incomprehensible to them at first. The ship's original owners made a lot of enemies and might very

well mistake the Travellers for them. Sooner or later, the Travellers will discover that their ship is a trouble magnet. Alternatively, there are a few creatures on the world the Travellers will visit that might give them problems during their search for the ship. However, it is entirely possible to complete this adventure without drawing a gun or throwing a punch. This is not deliberate, nor a suggestion that *Traveller* should not involve combat; but it is a good indication that an exciting and action-filled adventure need not feature combat. This adventure certainly does not lack action!

Of course, any written adventure is subject to the interpretation of the Referee and Travellers. As written, *High and Dry* does not have an alien invasion or apocalyptic gunfight at the end but that does not mean a Referee who added these things would be doing anything wrong. This is a framework for a *Traveller* campaign. Campaigns are supposed to be fun, so change whatever you think necessary and everything will be fine. Trust us, we are professional game designers...

TRAVELLERS AND EQUIPMENT

This adventure can be played (and completed successfully) by almost any group of adventurers if they are able to think creatively and maximise their strengths. However, they will need to be able to pilot a starship, run its engineering plant and plot a jump if they are to make use of the ship in this adventure. The Traveller skill package (see the *Traveller Core Rulebook*, page 50) will provide everything needed in this regard and the adventure will suit just about any group of starting Travellers.

Other than the requirements to crew the ship, there are no encounters or challenges in this adventure aimed at any specific type of Traveller. Different Travellers will use different approaches and may struggle in some circumstances but this game is not about having the right weapons, skills or equipment to meet a challenge; it is about meeting what the universe throws at you with what you have and finding a way to win – or at least survive.

INVOLVING THE TRAVELLERS

The default opening to this adventure has the Travellers given their task at Flammarion Starport. The ‘hook’ in this case is that the Travellers are tasked with picking up a starship and bringing it to Flammarion on behalf of the new owners – themselves.

EX-SCOUTS

For newly created Travellers, just setting out among the stars, this can be perfect. In the best of all possible worlds, an ex-scout among the Travellers will have been given the use of a scout ship as a Benefit when they mustered out – if this is the case, do not simply give the scout their ship. Inform them that they must report to the Detached Duty Scout office in the Flammarion Starport. From there, the adventure can start smoothly with Mr Casari (see page 16) telling him where the ship is and what they must do to claim it.

If there are no scouts due a ship among the Travellers, there are two good alternatives.

FREE SCOUT SHIP!

A Contact of one of the Travellers has arranged a favour with the Scout Service to obtain a scout ship. All the Travellers need do is collect it. However, if this is the approach taken, grant the Travellers use of the ship on a limited basis, perhaps giving them a ‘one-year contract’ to use the ship, after which it must be returned to the Scout Service. The scouts are very covetous of their detached duty ships and do not hand them out to just anyone! The scouts will appreciate the efforts of the Travellers but the ship must ultimately be returned to the detached duty fleet in short order.

OTHER TRAVELLER SHIPS

If another Traveller has gained a ship as a Benefit, you can simply swap the scout/courier for the appropriate vessel. In this case, the Traveller owns the ship (or whatever percentage of it they managed to accrue as a Benefit) but it will not be as simple as picking it up from the nearest starport. Instead, the Scout Service will inform the Traveller of where the ship actually is.

Changing the type of ship the Travellers are sent to collect has no fundamental effect on the adventure but the ship must be capable of entering an atmosphere.



THE BOWMAN ARM

The coreward arm of the Spinward Main in District 268 is called the Bowman Arm. The region lies outside the Imperium but close enough that Imperial influence is fairly strong. Of the subsector's 32 star systems, 10 are Imperial client states, indicating Imperial colonies or some other type of sponsorship.

Ships bound for the Five Sisters subsector navigate along the Bowman Arm, although jump-2 ships normally make the transit by hopping from Datrillian to Walston, then Bowman to Asteltine, rather than going through every backwater system on the way. The Caladbolg-Enos-Flammarion run is much quicker but politics can prevent easy passage at Enos, which is owned by the Sword Worlds Confederation. The details presented here are thus simply that: an overview of the world and its place in the Bowman Arm's complex economic and political development.

This is a brief summary of the worlds on the Bowman Arm that are relevant to this adventure.

FLAMMARION

Flammarion is an important link on the x-boat route to the Five Sisters and the site of both an Imperial Navy base and a Scout Service way station. The naval base is a small affair intended mainly to support patrol ships and destroyers. It is unusual to see even a cruiser, let alone a capital ship, passing through the region in peacetime. The scout base is considerably larger, with full way station status. This makes it an important centre for Scout Service activity in the region, ranging from training and routine communications duty to exploration and survey missions, and probably (although the Imperial authorities will neither confirm nor deny) surveillance and reconnaissance missions into the Sword Worlds. The Flammarion scout base is also host to a Detached Duty Branch office, known for distributing decommissioned scout/couriers to retired scouts.

Flammarion itself is an unappealing world with a thin atmosphere, despite its size, and little surface water. Most Travellers stop over at the large and well-equipped highport and never set foot on-planet.

ASTELTINE

An average-size world with an exotic atmosphere unbreatheable for humans, Asteltine is home to about 2,000 people whose origins vary considerably. People tend to come to Asteltine to work rather than live, so the population tends to be somewhat variable. Most residents are Imperial humans but there are small numbers of Darrians, Sword Worlders and Aslan at any given time. There is some tension between these groups.

While Asteltine itself is an unpleasant world, the system supports a large belting and mining community. This was sufficient to support the development of a decent starport which employs nearly all of the world's inhabitants. The port is also used by ships plying the Spinward Main in the direction of the Five Sisters.

For decades, Asteltine's mining and ore processing industry has been a chaotic mess of small firms and entrepreneurial individuals. However, there are rumours that some of the larger corporations – or even the megacorps – might want to move into the system now that access has become easier.

567-908

A dry world with a thin atmosphere, 567-908 has seemingly little to offer colonists or businesses and has not received an official name. The world is still referred to by its Scout Survey Branch designation number. There is a rudimentary starport, little more than a landing pad and beacon that records the comings and goings of visiting starships. A separate landing field is maintained and operated by Scout Service personnel and private contractors. With little more than a few huts and a small lake to draw water from (for both consumption and hydrogen fuel processing), there is little reason to stay. Few visitors remain planetside longer than it takes to refuel their ship.

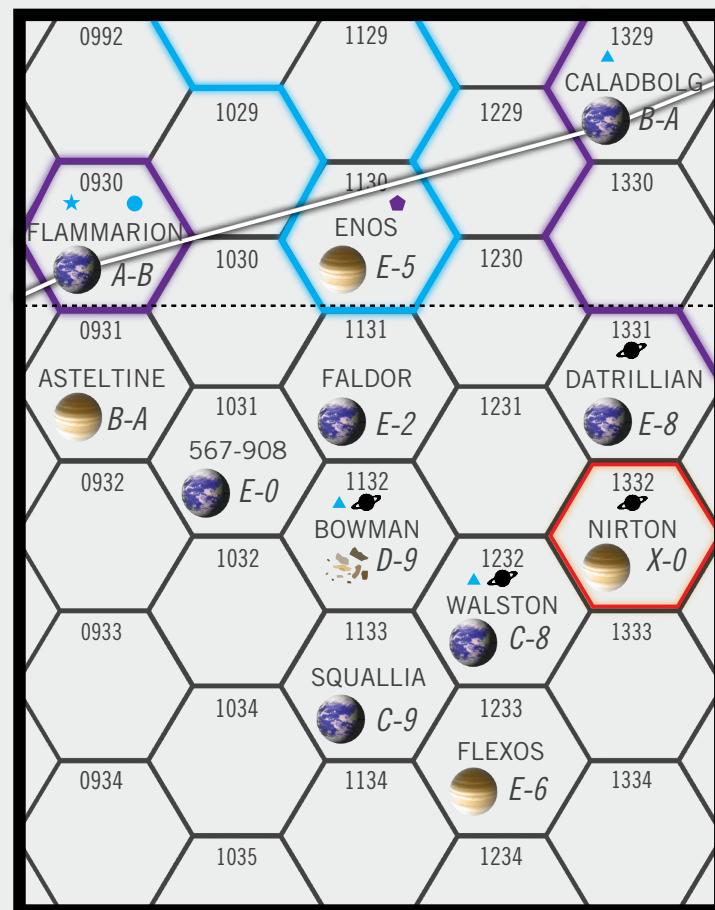
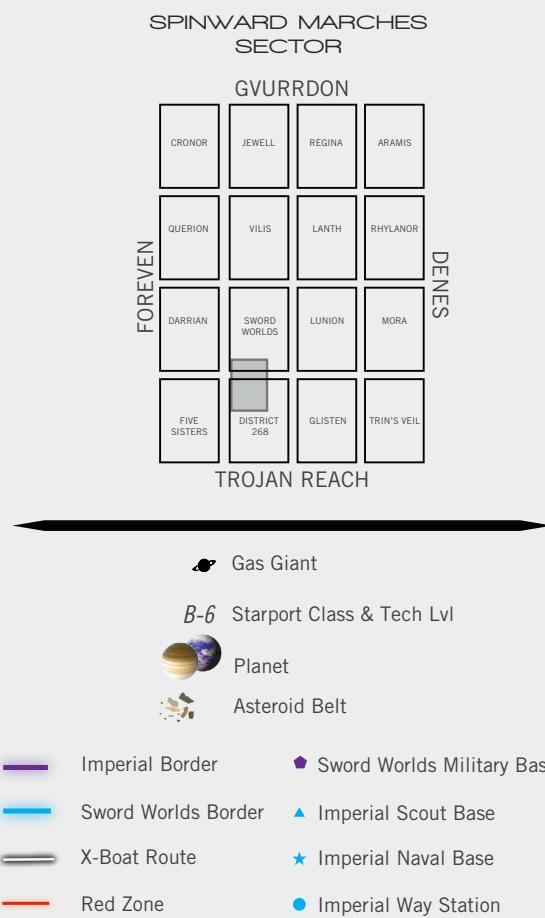
BOWMAN

The Bowman Belt is one of the wonders of the Spinward Marches. It is one of the most extensive planetoid belts ever discovered, occupying the equivalent of five planets' worth of orbits in one contiguous belt. The Bowman Belt is home to an unknown, but probably large, number of belter communities, individuals who make their way by prospecting planetoids for ores and rare earth elements. There are also rumours of other inhabitants in the belts – pirates, renegade Sword Worlders and the like.

The only actual planet in the system is the gas giant Bowman Prime, whose moons are designated by Greek letters. Alpha is home to a tiny IISS base, staffed by a dozen or so personnel, and Garrison Starport, the system's Class D port.

Ling Standard Products moved into the Bowman system some time ago and now has extensive operations in the Trojan asteroids. This has led to friction with the independent belters who work the system. There have already been incidents of violence and things look set to get worse.

PARTIAL MAP OF SWORD WORLDS SUBSECTOR AND DISTRICT 268



Name	Location	Bases	Profile	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Gas Giants
567-908	0201		E532000-0	Ba		
Asteltine	0101		B7A7402-A	Fl, Ni		
Bowman	0302	S	D000300-9	As, Lo		Yes
Flammarion	0110	2	A623514-B	Po, Ni		
Walston	0402		C544338-8	Lo, Ni		Yes

THE WORLD OF WALSTON

Walston lies on the most commonly used route through the Bowman Arm of the Spinward Main and possesses one of the best ports in the immediate area. This, and the reasonably habitable nature of the world, makes it a popular stopover. Under the right circumstances, Walston might become the economic centre of the arm if and when the subsector joins the Imperium. At present, however, it is a backwater of little importance.

WALSTON

Walston orbits an M2 primary called Albin's Star, named for the captain of the first Imperial exploration ship into the system. The system contains two small gas giants named Insive and Greenish (the latter for its colour) plus five rocky bodies in standard orbits. There are no planetoid belts but the system does have comets and planetoid collections at the Trojan points of the gas giants. Walston itself lies on the outer fringe of the habitable zone, occupying the innermost orbit of Albin's Star.

Lying in the closest orbit to the system's primary, Walston is the only inhabited body in the system.

Walston is not the most inviting of worlds. It is rather dry, with highly variable temperatures thanks to the thin atmosphere, which requires a filter mask to breathe safely due to the presence of atmospheric taints. Lying on the outer edge of the habitable zone, Walston does not get excessively warm, even during the day, and at night temperatures plummet well below freezing in all regions. Most planets that orbit red dwarf stars in the habitable zone are tidally locked; this is not the case with Walston, which has regular day-night cycles.

Somewhat less than half the planetary surface is under water, not all of which is in liquid form. In the polar regions the seas are constantly frozen to a considerable depth and icebergs are common even close to the equator.

Nightly freezing of freshwater bodies and the surface of some seas is a fact of life. Rainfall tends to be minimal since there is little evaporation of frozen water. Walston has no satellites, so there are no tides to contend with. There is little erosion on land, due to a combination of thin atmosphere and relative dryness. Walston has a number of

impressive mountain ranges which create wind shadows and further deprive inland regions of rainfall. The landscape tends towards being rugged and impressive but inhospitable. Rocky badlands and dusty plains are common, although most coastal regions are better watered.

A number of major deep sea thermal vents exist, giving rise to warm currents that make some areas much more habitable than others. Indeed, there are several obvious sites for settlement, although at present only one centre of population, which is on Settlement Island, off the eastern coast of the world's largest continent, Walston-Main.

Settlement Island is fairly large; some 200 kilometres from north to south and 350 kilometres from east to west. The sea between it and Walston-Main is shallow and dotted with small islands. A drop in sea level of just a few metres might create a land bridge, although this is not likely to happen. The island itself is not particularly high above sea level except in the southern extreme where a huge extinct volcano (Mount Salbarii) and its surrounding hills rise steeply from the coastal plain. The island is washed by a warm current which creates a zone of higher-than-average rainfall and fertile seas; Mount Salbarii traps some of the rain over the island, feeding two great lakes which spill over into northward-flowing rivers. These rivers not only make the island's interior the most habitable part of the planet but also serve as highways between the main and northern settlements.

Walston-Main is large, cold and uninviting. Mountain ranges (with the odd active volcano) are interspersed with dusty plains. A number of deep canyons run roughly east-northeast across the continent, although have never been explored. Erosion seems an unlikely explanation for their presence; tectonic activity or some ancient cataclysm may be the cause.

Walston-Main contains about 50 percent of the world's land mass. Most of the rest is split between the Main-Southeast Subcontinent, Walston-Antipodes, the Shallows and Varken's Continent. Main-Southeast is connected to Walston-Main by two narrow isthmuses. One is more or less impassable, consisting of a chain of volcanic mountains, the other is a frozen desert. Main-Southeast is effectively a separate land mass.

Walston-Antipodes lies mostly in the southern hemisphere and includes a great ice shelf. It is not known how much land lies under the ice cap. The Shallows is a vast region of very shallow sea with many islands and mountain-tops protruding above the surface. The region would be extremely hazardous to seagoing navigation if any were undertaken. Much of the Shallows is a vast saltwater swamp rather than an archipelago, land mass or sea area. In some areas it is possible to walk for hundreds of kilometres between islands, never encountering water deeper than a person's waist. Varken's Continent is a horrible place for habitation, with some of the worst terrain on the planet. Some areas may be marginally habitable but are surrounded by mountains and rocky deserts that effectively turn them into islands surrounded by an ocean of desolation, reachable only by air.

Countless small islands dot the surface of Walston's oceans. Most of these are covered in ice and few offer any reasonable prospects for habitation.

SOCIO-POLITICAL DATA

Walston is home to about 3,000 individuals, approximately 90 percent of whom are Vargr who are considered second-class citizens. The ruling elite of the world (a hereditary dictatorship) are humans claiming ancestry all the way back to the early settlement of the region during the Rule of Man. This claim is disputable but certainly the ruling families have held Walston for many centuries.

The only inhabited region of the planet is Settlement Island, which has three major 'towns' of about 600 people each and a scattering of small hamlets in addition to the capital at Central Lake. Central, as this settlement is called, is home to about 300 or so inhabitants, most of whom work with the government in some way. Expeditions occasionally visit Walston-Main for various reasons, prospecting being the most common, but until now there have been no attempts to create a permanent base on the mainland.

Law Level is moderately high but not excessive. It is true that Vargr are subject to more laws and regulations than their human neighbours, a fact that has caused concern among Imperial observers given the world's client-state status. An IISS mission in 1101 concluded that while Vargr are subject to racist restrictions they are 'not unduly oppressed' and their status does not contravene any Imperial High Laws.

As an Imperial client state, Walston receives protection from the Imperial Navy; this is more notional than real, given the lack of naval forces in the subsector. A small subsidy is paid to the world government to maintain a Class C starport, located at Walston Startown rather than the capital.

The planetary ruler (Dictator Masterton) is involved in negotiations with Imperial corporations, with a view to license mining and other economic installations in remote areas of the planet. There is absolutely no way for the people of Walston to exploit these resources, or stop any group that felt like moving in, but Masterton still insists upon extortionate licensing fees, stalling the whole process to no one's advantage. Meanwhile, offworld surveyors have begun to do their work. Perhaps the dictator wishes to hold out for a good deal when the surveyors find something that simply must be exploited. However, he runs the risk that a corporation may lose patience and simply move in without permission. With no ability to dislodge an operation by force and too little money to make a challenge in the Imperial courts, there is a real risk that Masterton will provoke a fait accompli that cuts the population out of any benefits of offworld investment.

The Vargr of Walston are accepting of their status. They get little say in government, and cannot hold certain posts, but on the whole are left alone to live their lives as they will, other than paying lip service to the idea that humans are their social superiors. Since most people of Walston live comfortable, unambitious lives and get along well enough, the poor treatment of the Vargr has so far failed to cause social upheaval. Were the population higher with the same proportion of Vargr to humans, an uprising would be more likely to occur but with all of Walston having the population of only a small town on most worlds, this is unlikely to occur. Nevertheless, offworld Vargr tend to become extremely offended at both the human 'overlords' and the contented Vargr 'peons' of Walston.

While Walston has been a client world of the Imperium for many years, there are no plans to apply for full membership. Change is unwelcome and Imperial membership might upset the 'natural order' of things. Certainly the status of Vargr as a lower order would be unacceptable to most Imperial citizens.

ECONOMIC DATA

Walston has a mainly subsistence economy based on shallow-water seabed farming off the island's ice-free western coast and more conventional agriculture along the river valleys. What manufacturing there is operates as cottage industries in the three main settlements.

A mature TL8 industrial base is quite sufficient to provide a high standard of living and meet the needs of the undersea farming industry. Virtually everything is craftsman-made to order and even utilitarian equipment tends to be of high standard.

The starport employs a few dozen people and brings in a modest income from passing vessels, with crews stopping over. Ships come through regularly – sometimes two or more in a single day – and the part-time port brokerage even turns a profit on speculative cargoes from time-to-time. Walston imports little and exports even less; the port is purely an external commercial installation.

MILITARY DATA

Walston does not possess a military of any consequence. The dictator maintains a security formation equipped with TL8 small arms and vehicles, which acts as law-enforcement agency, fire and rescue department, and starport security force, in addition to protecting the ruling elite. Other than a couple of support weapons at Central, the security force has nothing more potent than an assault rifle at its disposal.

There is no offworld defence capability whatsoever. Even the starport's single utility boat is unarmed and serves only as transport for maintenance personnel servicing the orbital mooring beacon. Walston does not even possess a ground-to-orbit missile battery.

Similarly, there is no way to project force beyond the coastal waters of Settlement Island and no real force to project. While a militia could be raised and deployed aboard the utility boat or seagoing craft such as coastal farming submarines, it is unlikely that much could be achieved. Walston has no history of conflict and no warrior tradition amongst its people.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The seas of Walston are home to a variety of hardy life. Most of this is on a microscopic level, although a wide range of fish species, seabed crawlers and free-floating invertebrates exists to feed upon them. Only two species of seagoing animals pose any real threat to humans.

The first is Alderson's coastal hunter, more commonly referred to as an Alderson. It has a broad body about half a metre long, covered in thick scales, plus a whip-like tail roughly the same length as the body. The Alderson has a pair of puny lobster-like claws but normally hunts by either surging from cover to grab small prey or entangling

larger invertebrates with its tail. Alders can give a human a nasty bite and are tenacious if they feel their territory is being threatened or they mistakenly entangle a diver's limb with their tails. Their armour plates make them difficult to kill with a knife.

The other seagoing threat is more dangerous. It is known as the deep-water brakarr for its similarity to a shallow water dwelling beast encountered on some other worlds; in fact they are not related. The brakarr is a sinister-looking beast that looks like a fish with an armoured head behind which several manipulative tentacles extend. When moving at speed these are swept back but during an attack they grab prey and haul it into the brakarr's mouth. Brakarr over 1.5 metres long and massing as much as an adult human have been sighted in coastal waters. They are aggressive and can decimate farmed fish stocks if not driven off. They are also quite willing to take on a diver and usually win.

Fortunately, they seem to prefer deep and cold waters and are rarely sighted near Settlement Island. Despite the harsh conditions there is a fair amount of life on land. Much of it is small; crawling insects and so forth. Terran creatures seem not to have gained much of a foothold on Walston, whose local fauna is primitive. There are no major flying creatures, although several species of insect possess the ability to spread a 'wing' membrane and drift on the thin air currents. Some of these tiny flyers drift in swarms which can pose a hazard in inland areas. Prevailing winds keep the western side of Settlement Island clear of them.

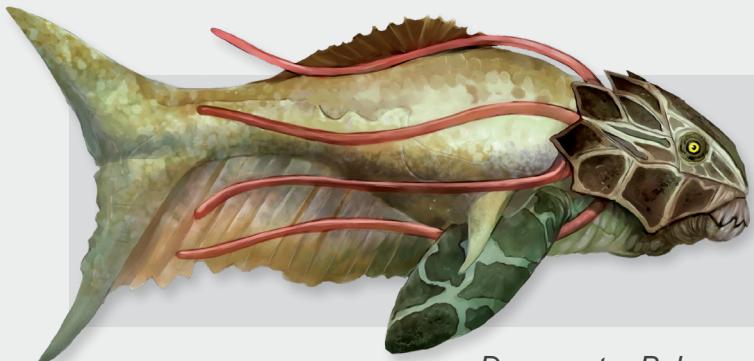
Most land-dwelling animals on Walston are harmless egg-laying burrowers of one sort or another. Many species can hibernate for long periods to survive a drought and most possess a coat of coarse hair to insulate them. There is nothing on land that can directly harm a human, although some burrowers can be a nuisance. Favourite tricks include climbing into awkward spaces on vehicles to enjoy the warmth from a power plant or burrowing under fences into a cultivated area, then engaging in a devastating feast.

One species of burrowers, known simply as Walstons, are kept as pets by many families on Walston. Sociable and loyal beasts the size of rabbits, Walstons are vegetarian and easy to care for, and seem to like living in the homes of humans and Vargr. They have absolutely no value as guards or working animals, being slow-witted and lazy when well fed. They do, however, emit a pleasing humming sound when petted and will snuggle up to anyone in emotional distress, apparently to offer comfort.

Animal	Hits	Speed
Walston	2	4 m
Skills	Athletics 0, Stealth 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	None	
Traits	Small (-2)	
Behaviour	Herbivore, Grazer	



Walston



Deep-water Bakarr

Animal	Hits	Speed
Brakarr	33	10 m
Skills	Athletics (endurance) 3, Melee (bite) 2, Recon 1, Survival 2	
Attacks	Bite (3D)	
Traits	Armour (+4)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Chaser	

Animal	Hits	Speed
Alderson	16	6 m
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Melee (bite) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2	
Attacks	Bite (3D)	
Traits	Armour (+3), Camouflaged, Small (-1)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Pouncer	



Alderson's Hunter

LIFE ON WALSTON

Daily life on Walston is slow and, for the most part, comfortable. Filter masks and thick clothing are needed when venturing outside but otherwise there are no serious hazards. Dwellings are kept at an uncomfortably warm temperature (as far as offworld visitors are concerned) by humans; less so by Vargr.

Within the three towns and Central, buildings are blocky with rounded corners and sunk into the ground rather than built upwards. Very few buildings have more than one story above ground but larger ones may have two or even three levels below the entry floor. Within a settlement, structures are grouped close together and connected by semi-sunken tunnels at the entry floor level. Most clusters have only a couple of ground-level entrances for personnel and a common vehicle garage. Outlying hamlets are mostly a single structure, although some have three or more independent buildings if the settlement has expanded.

Indoor clothing on Walston tends to be light. A kilt and light shirt or tunic is the commonest dress for both sexes, with light sandals or bare feet. Vargr tend to wear bright colours, with humans favouring more sober outfits in grey, white, black, blue or dark red. This makes humans look a sombre lot compared with the Vargr but in truth both groups are easy-going and friendly.

Although the Vargr are disenfranchised and must defer to humans in many situations, most refrain from expressing any discontent they might have. There are few decisions to make anyway and everyone has a high standard of living. People of both species tend to be unambitious and find many offworlders to be more than a little bit manic with their go-getter attitudes. Asking most Walston citizens why they do not go offworld to seek their fortune, or set off into the wilderness to find mineral riches, usually results in a blank look and the oft-repeated phrase 'It's nice enough right here!'.

Most of the population work in farms close to the settlements, with smaller numbers employed as divers or submarine crews in the coastal seabed farms. A small percentage work at the starport (usually part time alongside a craftsman or farming job) or are employed in the world's tiny bureaucracy and security force. Vargr work in all industries and can hold high positions, however humans are always given preference.

Vargr are not required to be obsequious to humans; merely to acknowledge that they dwell at a lower level in Walston's social structure. This idea has become ingrained to the point where it is thought of as the natural order of things. The locals are quite comfortable with the idea that offworld Vargr might have different values but here humans are superior. Offworld Vargr tend to find this idea more than a little creepy.

The people of Walston are not good at reacting to problems and are nervous about their responses until they are approved by whoever is perceived as being in charge. A few individuals are quite dynamic, such as the security managers at the underwater farms. These people deal with divers in trouble, and other crises on a regular basis, and are comfortable with thinking on their feet. Most individuals prefer to get together with friends and neighbours and have a good talk about the issue. Hopefully one of the more usual troubleshooters will deal with the problem in the meantime. If confronted with a minor disaster (e.g., a waste-bin fire) the average Walston local will deal with it well enough. However, all the time they will be looking around for someone to defer to and not be comfortable until someone takes charge and approves whatever action was taken.

WALSTON'S SCOUT BASE

The scout base at Walston is an underwhelming affair, composed of a landing platform and a few storage structures that once housed a small team of scientists. Its primary focus was to undertake research into the erosive effects of thin, dry atmospheres and support the occasional scout vessel that came through.

The base is located in a remote area of Settlement Island, high in the mountains, but has been virtually defunct since the Fourth Frontier War. Scout personnel sometimes appear on Walston and use the base as a stopover. There are no plans to refurbish the facility but should the settlement on Walston grow, there are rumours that the scout base would be revived and expanded.

SCOUT/COURIER HIGHNDRY

Many small vessels operated by the Scout Service or major shipping lines are registered under a number rather than a name but even those usually gain a name sooner or later. The scout/courier known as *Highndry* is one of those. Officially designated IISS S001642-C, *Highndry* is identified by both number and name in its transponder but only by number on official papers.

Originally built in 892 at a shipyard in the Gushemege sector, scout/courier S001642-C has seen service with all three major branches of the Scout Service (Exploration, Survey and Communications), although most of its time was spent on Communications duty, hence the -C on the end of its registry. It has been loaned out as a detached duty ship more than once, has suffered collision and combat damage, been rebuilt twice and even crossed the Great Rift both ways as well as going around via Corridor sector.

The last 92 years of its service life have been spent in the Marches or just beyond, out in the Outrim Void or Vargr Extents. Despite regular refits and the occasional complete overhaul, S001642-C has acquired innumerable dents, dings, incomprehensible minor modifications and more than a few idiosyncrasies. This is not atypical in ships of this kind, although there usually comes a point where the vessel is so worn out that it is not feasible to make repairs.

Sometime in the last century or two S001642-C was dubbed *Highndry* by its crew and the name stuck. It is possible that there are old-timers out there somewhere who know what the name refers to but no record of the reason remains.

Highndry is a standard Type-S, with all the usual features as well as its own characteristics. Its systems work, except as noted, to within normal tolerances. That means that although it is a little slow answering the helm when turning to port, it is annoying rather than dangerous. The air scrubbers are inefficient but functional and the galley sink is prone to backing up for reasons nobody has ever discerned. Yet for all that, *Highndry* can cross the stars and get to its destination safely.

Well, usually.

Highndry has been part of the Scout Service detached duty pool for decades now. These vessels are loaned to Scout Service personnel for private use on the understanding that the ship can be recalled to duty at any time even if the user is not. Ex-scout personnel on a detached duty spacecraft are often given the opportunity to participate in the ship's newly assigned mission if qualified for the job.

Detached duty ships tend to get a lot of abuse and even with annual refits paid for by the IISS, they tend to go downhill over the years. This is true of *Highndry*. Its upholstery is torn and the corners are knocked off pretty much everything with corners. Some of the tables have ragged sharp edges with literally decades of fibres from the clothing of passing crewmembers caught on them.

Up until recently, none of this was a problem. However, a few months ago *Highndry* suffered a serious failure in its control electronics which essentially rendered its drives useless. It was at that time parked in the crater of an extinct volcano on Walston in District 268. After several attempts to get the ship flying, the crew gave up.

Boarding the ship's air/raft, they travelled to the starport and made their way offworld, intending to go to the scout base at Flammariion and obtain whatever was needed to get it off the ground.

The crew got a nasty surprise at Flammariion. They had brought the ship's records with them as proof of what was needed, expecting to be given a set of spares and sent back. After all, they were detached duty scouts and the ship was assigned to them. The scout base commander saw things differently. The records showed the crew had seriously neglected the vessel – over and above the usual abuse that ships of this class incur – and had almost certainly run a scam on their last refit, pocketing service fees instead of using them to provide much-needed maintenance and repairs.

The scam was not a new one. When the time came for a Scout Service funded refit came, the crew bribed the dockyard crew to install parts scavenged from breakers' yards and sold components provided by the IISS for a profit.

This sort of thing is frowned upon and not merely because it is fraud. It also puts the next users of the ship in danger and could deprive the IISS of a vessel when needed. So, the crew found themselves in the slammer and the ship stayed where it was until someone could be assigned to pick it up and return it to Flammariion for a proper repair.

Highndry's major systems such as power plant and gravitics all work well enough but its control electronics are shot. A major repair is necessary for long-term safe operations but in the short term the most critical systems could be bypassed or replaced with just a couple of cases of equipment. A rather basic control software package could be installed to run the resulting Frankensteinian mess. It will not be pretty but will get the ship to the dockyard at Flammariion... probably.

Other than a great deal of wear, minor glitches in several systems and a thoroughly messed-up electronics setup, *Highndry* is a standard scout/courier as detailed on page 190 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*.

TL12

		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	100 tons, Streamlined	—	6
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 4	5	1.2
M-Drive	Thrust 2	2	4
J-Drive	Jump-2	10	15
Power Plant	Fusion, Power 60	4	4
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 12 weeks operation	23	—
Bridge		10	0.5
Computer	Computer/5bis	—	0.045
Sensors	Military Grade	2	4.1
Weapons	Double Turret	1	0.5
Systems	Fuel Scoop	—	—
	Fuel Processors (40 tons/day)	2	0.1
	Probe Drones x10	2	1
	Docking Space (4 tons)	5	1.25
	Air Raft	—	0.25
	Workshop	6	0.9
Software	Jump Control/2	—	0.2
	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre	—	—
	Intellect	—	—
Staterooms	Standard x4	16	2
Cargo		12	—

Crew:Pilot, Astrogator,
Engineer**Hull: 40****Running Costs****MAINTENANCE COST**

Cr3078/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr36.9405

Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems

20

Manoeuvre Drive

20

Jump Drive

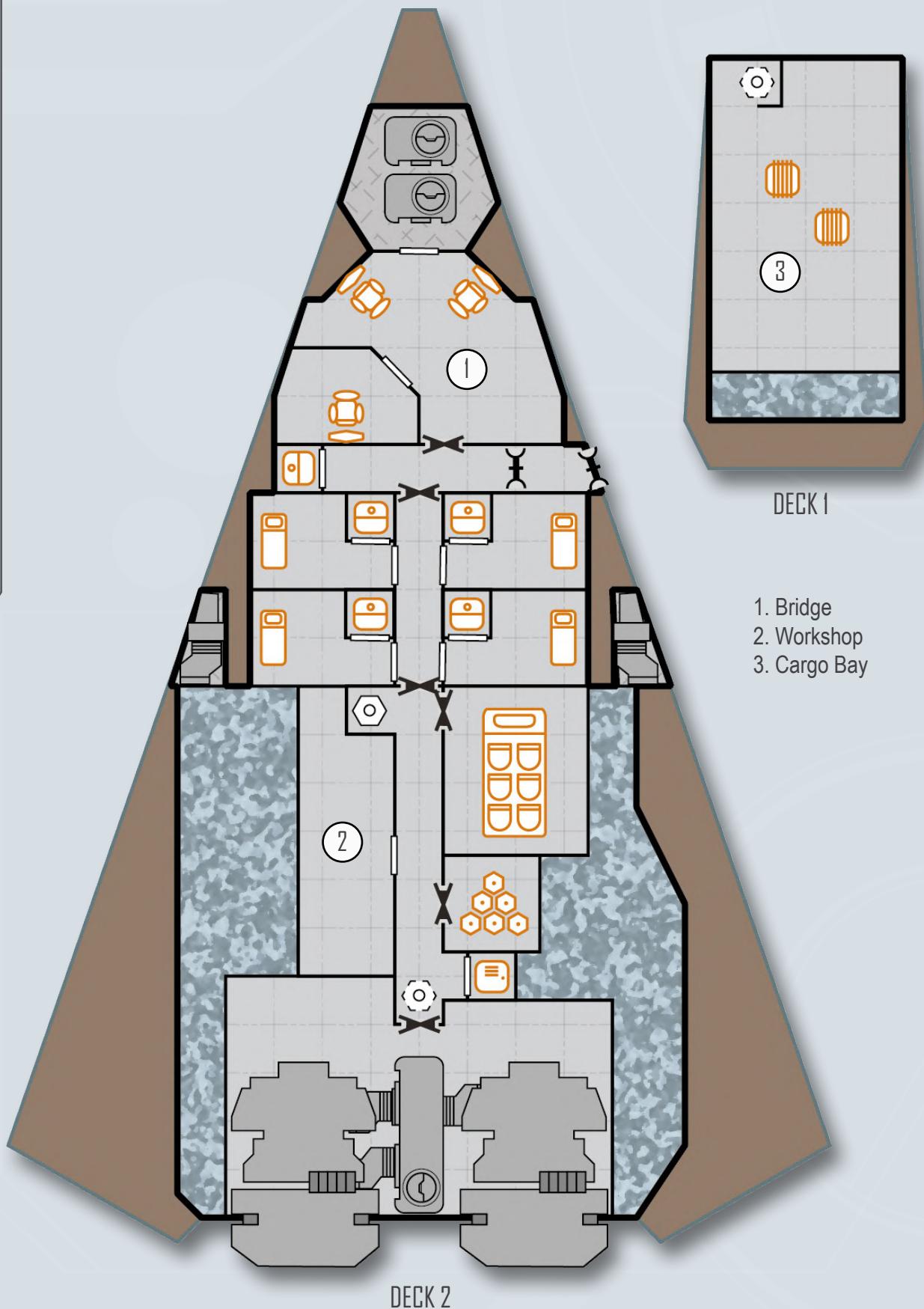
20

Sensors

2



HighnDry (HSS S001642-C)



1. Bridge
2. Workshop
3. Cargo Bay

DECK 1

DECK 2

FLAMMARION TO WALSTON

The adventure begins at Flammariion Highport. With new Travellers, it is assumed that they have recently mustered out of their careers and are due to pick up a ship.

STARPORT LIBERTY

With Credits burning a hole in their pockets and time on their hands, the Travellers are free to enjoy what Flammariion Highport has to offer, which is a lot. There are plenty of shops, bars and restaurants, as well as recreation facilities ranging from squash courts to prize-fighting arenas. Flammariion Highport has the feel of a boomtown. It is a crossroads, a place where Travellers begin their adventures and prepare to sally forth into Charted Space.

The port has a similar Law Level to the planet below (Law Level 4). In practice this means sidearms can be carried, as can blade weapons. Although shotguns are legal, anyone wandering around with one attracts the attention of the portside security force. Similarly, while discreet body armour is acceptable, someone stomping about in a flak jacket will be viewed with suspicion. There is simply no need, in the eyes of the port authority and thus anyone wearing overt armour is assumed to be up to no good.

Most bars and other facilities require that weapons be checked at the door. This can be inconvenient when shopping and many visitors just leave their weapons aboard ship or in their hotel. Violence is uncommon in the clean and well-lit corridors of the highport, other than the occasional punch-up in a bar. Such occurrences are one reason why most bars prohibit guns.

Society is generally cosmopolitan and easy-going. By far the majority of people are human, although they come from several cultures and can seem quite alien at times. The largest minority are Vargr, with smaller numbers of Aslan and odd members of other species.

The Referee should allow the Travellers as much time as they want to explore the highport, buy anything they need (rich Travellers might be eager to spend Credits gained as Benefits from their careers), read library data from public-access terminals and generally get used to their environment before beginning the adventure. However, aimless wandering about a starport has its limits. Once the Travellers run out of self-imposed direction, the Referee should get the adventure moving.

A GIFT HORSE

At least one of the Travellers will have an appointment to keep with a Mr. Anders Casarii of the Imperial Scout Service office at the highport. Casarii has a proposition for the Travellers. During the meeting, he explains that one of the Scout Service's detached duty vessels is stuck on a nearby world and needs bringing home to Flammariion. The ship has suffered a major problem with its electronic systems and needs a crew to deliver some replacement parts. They must also download a replacement operating system into the ship's computers to ensure that any corruption caused by the failure does not endanger the vessel.

Once the ship's systems are up and running, it must be brought back to Flammariion Highport where a proper systems overhaul can be made. There may be unexpected complications, of course, so ideally the crew will be multi-skilled and flexible enough to deal with whatever comes up.

The ship is downed at Walston, four parsecs away, where the previous crew abandoned it. The ship was a detached duty scout/courier assigned to them and has apparently been mistreated. There are penalties for abusing detached-duty ships since they still belong to the Scout Service, so the crew were shipped offworld and incarcerated. In any case, the ship legally belongs to the Scout Service, which will provide appropriate documentation to allow the Travellers to pick it up and bring it home.

The Scout Service will also provide vouchers for refuelling at Asteltine and Bowman on the way back and tickets aboard a passenger ship to Walston. All necessary spares and software will be provided, along with override codes that will allow the Travellers to delete the ship's operating system and install a new one. The old system may be badly corrupted and in any case it is still keyed to the old crew. Operating the ship with that system still in place would be hazardous if it were possible at all. The new system is temporary. It will work for three months without an update and then ground the ship at the first planetfall after expiration for security reasons.

THE BASIC OFFER

The Travellers are offered middle passage to Walston and Cr1000 each for incidental expenses up front, plus all costs for life support, fuel and so forth during the recovery of the ship. Once the vessel is brought back to Flammariion, the Travellers will then be given hotel accommodation and another Cr1000 for expenses during the week or so it will take to check over the ship and make sure its software is properly updated. If there is an ex-scout among the Travellers who has rolled – but not yet received – a Scout Ship, then the ship is given to them on the terms described on page 47 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*. If there is no unrequited Benefit to work with, the Travellers are awarded a one-year lease on the ship, after which they must deliver it to a scout base for return to the detached duty pool.

The Travellers will then have to meet their own life support and fuel costs and must keep the ship in good order in case it is needed. The vessel's logs will be examined whenever it passes through a Scout Service installation, providing information on starports and ship movements in the area. If the Travellers are able to retain possession of the ship, the Scout Service overhauls it at the end of each year, free of charge.

In addition, there are some ways to make a few Credits on the side. For example, the Scout Service pays – although not much – for first-hand reports on starports, cities and outposts a ship has visited. For the sake of recording a few lines detailing the Travellers' impressions and experiences of the places they visit, they can cover at least their bar tab in any given port.

ACCEPTANCE

If the Travellers accept the mission, they are given the equipment they need – three flight cases full of circuit panels and tools for swapping them out, plus a portable diagnostic/software download unit the size of the other cases. Their ship will leave in a day or so, allowing some time to finish up anything the Travellers need to do before they head off on their mission.

The Cr1000 expenses is credited to the Travellers' accounts and can be used as they please. What they spend it on and whether or not there is anything left for actual expenses on the trip, is up to them. The second Cr1000 instalment given to the Travellers, for lodging on Walston, becomes available after they reach their destination.

EN ROUTE

The Travellers have mid-passage tickets for the Type-A2 far trader *Autumn Gold*, under Captain Michelle Corelli. The ship is bound for Elixabeth, a few parsecs to trailing of Walston. Its route is via 567-908 and Walston, with drop-offs at each point.

Autumn Gold is not a Scout Service ship but has been affiliated with the scouts for a few years and takes on charters like this from time-to-time. Its captain will not discuss the deal in more than very general terms but essentially *Autumn Gold* has been chartered to deliver a couple of crates of supplies to the bare-bones starport at 567- 908 and the Travellers, as well as a container of general spares and components, to Walston. Most of its other cargo is bound for the naval base at Elixabeth. It is mundane stuff; uniforms, boots and a few cases of wine for senior officers but captains wishing to get naval contracts of any sort learn not to talk about what they are shipping or to whom as a matter of basic security. The crates are not marked as bound for a naval installation; they look like any other shipping crates.

The crew of *Autumn Gold* are a typical mixed bag of tramp-trader personnel. Some are ex-navy, ex-scouts or former employees of large merchant lines. Others signed aboard at a port and were trained on the job. The medical officer is in fact a college kid gaining experience as a shipboard medic before beginning a proper degree in medicine. The ship is a typical far trader; functional rather than luxurious. The accommodation is a bit worn and the food is, well, edible. The passenger area is clean enough but there is little that is new or expensive. Similarly, the crew are polite enough but they are spacers first and foremost, not public-service workers. Those that are expecting a luxury hotel travelling although space will be disappointed in such vessels (though the big liners usually live up to their expectations) but for those simply trying to get from place-to-place, *Autumn Gold* is an entirely acceptable conveyance.

There is not that much to do aboard a far trader for a week. It is very unlikely that passengers will be permitted access to the ship's critical areas (engineering and the bridge) and the available space tends to be somewhat limited. However, there are games, holovid dramas and educational materials on the ship's entertainment consoles and a common area to sit in and shoot the breeze. This is economy travel and nobody should expect more.

On the plus side, the Travellers can catch up on reading and sleep, get to know one another and are not disturbed by disasters, explosions or hazards more serious than a dropped coffee cup. There may come a time in their adventuring careers when they pine for a week of humdrum but safe travel.

THE LONELY AND FORLORN WORLD OF 567-908

Roughly 168 hours out of Flammarion, *Autumn Gold* makes jump emergence at 119 diameters out from the planet designated 567-908. Data on the world is available on any of the ship's consoles and there is not much to tell. The world is dry, has a thin atmosphere and is officially uninhabited.

Census data takes note only of permanent residents and 567-908 has none. There are, however, slightly less than two dozen people currently on-planet. About half are members of the Scout Service. The remainder are civilian contractors working with the scouts. To be frank, this is two dozen more people than are usually present on the planet. The starport, such as it is, consists of an automated beacon to notify visitors where the landing pad is and a console to record stopovers and flight plans. The landing pad is capable of handling ships up to 600 tons or any combination of ships whose tonnage add up to that total. The scout crew and contractors are much like the crew of the *Autumn Gold*, passers-by making their way across the subsector.

Once the cargo is delivered and refuelling is completed, the ship will be moving on as soon as possible. *Autumn Gold* is only stopping over for a day. Other than a chance to get out of the ship for a while, there is really no reason to go groundside at 567-908. The landscape near the starport is drab, dreary and depressing, offering little to do other than skim fuel from the local marsh, refine it and get back on one's merry way. However, the chance to wander around may be attractive after being cooped up for a week. The planet does feature more varied geography several hundred kilometres from the starport but unfortunately for the Travellers, none of it is visible or within reach during their limited stay.

The thin air is not a problem and even the dryness is not a shock; it is common practice for a ship in jump to gradually adjust its climate controls to suit the next destination, so by the time they arrive the Travellers should be more or less acclimatised to the conditions at their destination.

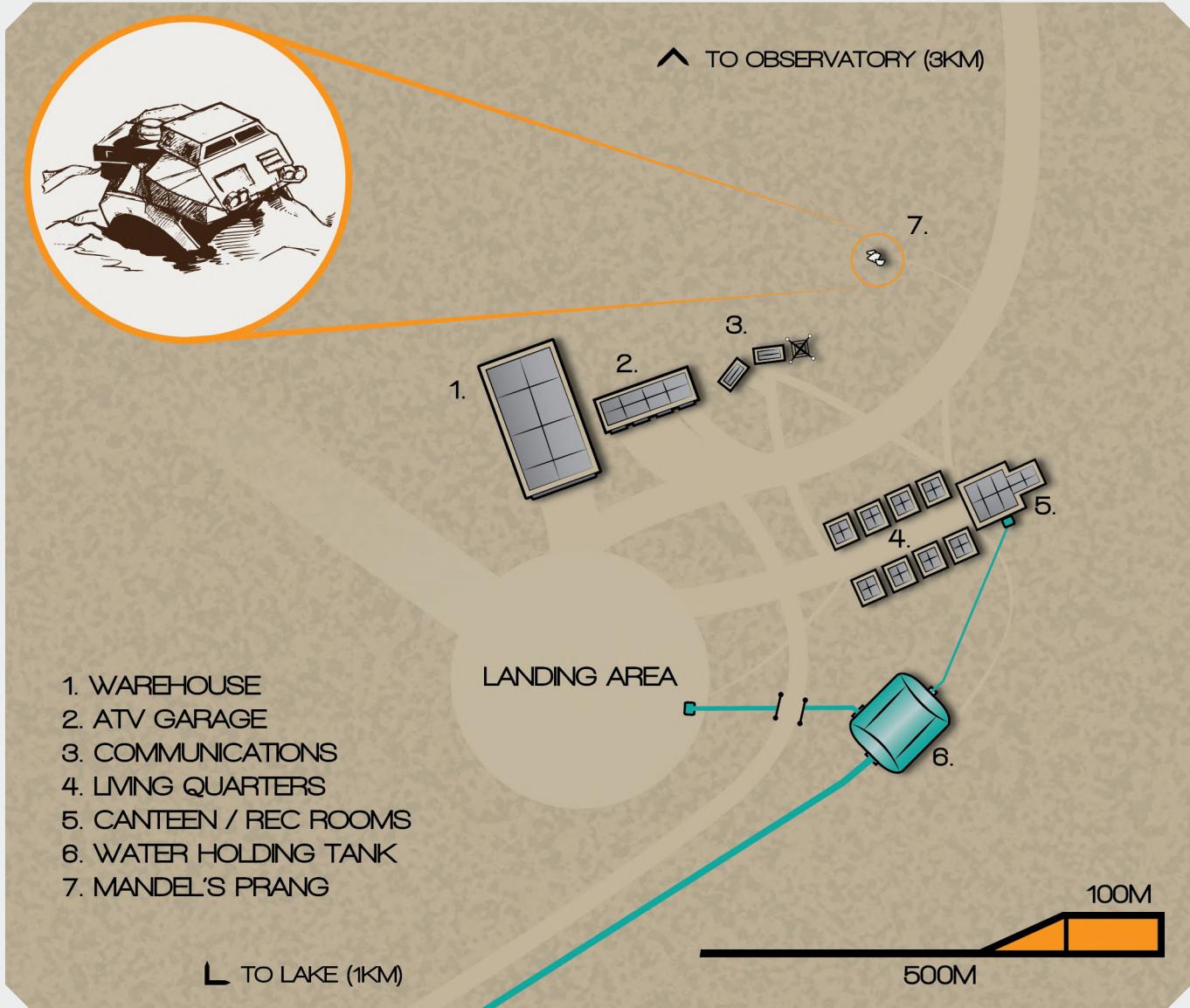
The sheer brown-greyness of 567-908 is impressive. There is just so very much of it in all directions from the starport. The colours of the landscape vary so little that it can be hard to make out details or even estimate distances to a given object. Not that there is much worth looking at anyhow. The ground rises to the north and falls away somewhat to the south. There is a small lake a kilometre to the southwest. Pipes run from the lake to a holding tank at the port, providing both drinking water and a source of hydrogen for fuel. Refuelling is a lengthy process as the ship's tanks must be first filled with water which is then cracked for the hydrogen content. Oxygen is bled off and the hydrogen cooled until it reaches its liquid form, then another load of water is taken on and the process repeated until the main tanks are full of liquid hydrogen.

While this is going on and cargo is being shifted to a big hut that serves as a temporary warehouse, the Travellers are free to look around. What they find is a collection of easily assembled prefabricated living quarters, an ATV garage constructed the same way and a few hastily constructed tents that shelter communications equipment. There is another structure visible on a ridge about three to four kilometres northwards. Anyone can tell the Travellers that it is a mobile observatory. It features a multi-wavelength telescope and a number of specialised instruments for measuring things like cosmic radiation, gravitic turbulence and the like.

Anyone talking to the observatory crew will be treated to an extremely technical exposition of how a starship emerges from jump and its mass causes gravitic 'ripples' that interact with other matter in a very scientific and utterly incomprehensible manner. Those who have not lost the will to live by this point can (correctly) draw the conclusion that the observatory is there to try out new instruments and scientific techniques to see if they are any use for something other than boring visitors to death.

The observatory crew has a supply of decent coffee and are glad of company. If they can be persuaded to talk about something other than obscure astrophysical experimentation, the Travellers might spend a pleasant afternoon with them. The same comments go for the port staff, for the most part.

If anyone wants to look around the planet, they can stare at as much drab brown-grey rock as they like. The port has three ATVs, one of which has been fitted with a bulldozer blade. However, these are not available for sightseeing tours. Exploring on foot is somewhat limited and taking water along is a good idea. There is not much to see, other than a few interesting rock formations and a strange sculpture made by some of the scouts



from the remains of an ATV. They call it Mandel's Prang after an incident a couple of years back when one of their number remodelled the ATV beyond its working tolerances by driving too fast over rough ground.

By the time the ship is refuelled and ready to move on, chances are that the Travellers are more than ready to depart. They may have some sympathy for the people who have to work on 567-908.

While it is beyond the scope of this adventure, 567-908 is, in fact, the homeworld of a sophont species, one that has yet to be discovered. For more information about them, refer to *Marches Adventure 5: Safari world*. The Travellers are not likely to discover tell-tale evidence that such a species exists but dropping a few clues might make for a nice setup for an eventual return to this mysterious world.

PLANETFALL: WALSTON

The crew announces that their vessel will be making a brief stop at Walston, only staying for a few hours. Experienced spacers can probably figure out why. The ship is on a charter which will be for a reasonable time given the distance that must be travelled. There is nothing that can be done about the time spent in jump but if time on-planet can be cut short then there will be days or even weeks at the end of the voyage when the *Autumn Gold* is essentially still being paid for the charter but is free to engage in other activities. The price tag is a tired and bad-tempered crew of course but in the short term the vessel can make extra cash.



Data on Walston is available from the ship's Library software. The Referee can decide how much or how little information to release to the Travellers but at a minimum the approximate population, the fact that the entire population lives on one island, and an overview of local conditions should be available. There is little turbulence as *Autumn Gold* dives through the thin atmosphere towards Settlement Island and soon the far trader is on the ground at Walston Starport. The associated startown has a population of about 600 people and resembles a semi-underground village rather than a major city. It is, however, one of the world's three main settlements.

Astute Travellers might notice that there are no other ships at Walston Starport and although there are a couple of roofed berthing pits that might contain a vessel, a quick look suffices to assure the Travellers that there is no vessel present. The ground crew, if anyone thinks to ask them, might remember a scout/courier coming through a few weeks ago with a similar name to the one the Travellers are looking for. They do not know where it went after it left.

To enter the town, it is necessary to pass through customs. Although the locals have a sustainable TL8, they have an imported weapon scanner and

can detect most weapons. Local laws prohibit private ownership of most weaponry. Any guns or blades longer than a dagger must be placed in storage at the port for a fee of Cr10 per week. The guards at the port carry handguns and wear light flak jackets. They do not see a lot of trouble and would probably be caught by surprise if someone did something stupid like trying to shoot their way through customs. A response team equipped with assault rifles would respond in short order to such an incident.

If the Travellers hand over their weapons, passing customs is a matter of signing a few forms and answering the usual questions about length of stay and business on planet. The customs people deal with a starship every day or two on average and rarely remember much about those that pass through. However, the crew of *Highndry* were memorable for their general lack of courtesy towards everyone around them. A Traveller with good social skills (such as Persuade or Diplomat) may be able to tease some information out of the customs personnel.

RACISM ON WALSTON

If the Travellers are focused on their mission, the treatment of Vargr on Walston may slip their notice. If they have a Vargr among them however, then things can get a lot more interesting.

The key to remember is that on Walston, racism is never overt. A Vargr Traveller will never be singled out, will never be lynched, will not even have derogatory comments thrown at them. Instead, everything should be done by suggestion and implication. The human population on Walston view themselves as superior to the Vargr who reside there. They believe that humans are more fit to run things and that Vargr are best suited to subservient roles.

For example, if a Vargr Traveller approaches a customs officer, government official or shop owner and asks a question, the Referee should pause, consider the question and then deliver the answer to one of the human Travellers. The assumption being made is that the humans are in charge of the Travellers' party and so they are the only ones worth talking to. If the Vargr Traveller insists on the answer being delivered to them (and they should), always be polite but make the answer short – then deliver the longer and fuller answer to a human.

For specifics on how the people of Walston view Vargr (and how Vargr here view themselves), see page 9.

WALSTON STARTOWN

The startown is only big enough to be a village on most worlds. However, its occupants make decent enough money from passing starships. Some work at the port, others in the hospitality industry. About half of the working population are dependent on offworld Credits for their income.

There are a few decent hotels and a rather more modest hostel offering barracks-like accommodations and basic meals at a very cheap price. In addition, there are a couple of restaurants and a handful of shops selling local and offworld goods. It is possible to walk around the town in a few minutes.

Note that most buildings are underground, with just the top (entry) floor sticking up. Even that is usually half-sunken into the ground and accessed by going down a ramp or steps. Buildings are usually connected in complexes rather than standing alone, with one or two common personnel entrances and an underground vehicle garage serving a number of dwellings plus amenities. The above-ground drabness is alleviated by colourful surroundings and the people inside the buildings.

The locals are friendly and welcoming for the most part and there is little sign of the oppression of the Vargr population. The social setup on Walston is more subtle than that and it would require an extended stay and close observation to become aware of how it all works.

The Travellers might want to find out what has happened to 'their' ship. Pretty much anyone in town will suggest asking at the Port Authority office, which maintains records of passing ships. These are freely available to anyone who wants to look but Walston has a policy of not placing such data on the general datanet. Thus it is necessary to go to the office (which is next to the port and so within five minutes' walk from any point in town) and look at the records in person. There is no fee for this. Access is granted for the asking but the information is not left lying around. This is not a deliberate security policy so much as the easiest way for a small staff to do things. It is rare for anyone to want information of this sort so a policy for making it available has never been created.

INFORMATION IN TOWN

From the ground crews, folks in town, official records and customs personnel, it is possible to find out the following information about the scout/courier *Highndry*.

- The vessel came through the port a couple of times in the past year. The last time was about three to four months ago.
- The crew were real jerks, loud-mouthed and offensive. They apparently did not like anything about Walston. They were displeased by the food and the beds in the hotel, hated the décor, found the local practice of wearing a kilt somehow hilarious and made a mess everywhere they went. Simple concepts like putting trash in a bin eluded them and they seemed to think they were better than everyone else put together.
- The scout was in dilapidated condition when it came through but seemed flyable enough. In any case it came and went a couple of times over the months running up to its final visit. On that occasion *Highndry* spent a couple of days in port before moving on.
- Its destination is recorded as 'In-System' but there are no details other than a note that the ship was on charter to the world government of Walston.
- A couple of weeks later the crew turned up at the starport in an air/raft and hung around making a nuisance of themselves until a ship bound for Caladbolg came through.
- They boarded the far trader *Maverick Spacer*, according to records. Apparently the crew of *Highndry* took passage aboard this vessel for Caladbolg via Datrillian.
- Their subsequent destination is unknown.
- They took their air/raft with them but left behind a few thoroughly trashed hotel rooms.
- Nobody was sorry to see them go.

In short, the ship seems to have gone somewhere on Walston and met with difficulties. The crew seem to have dumped it and left the planet, although it is possible that they went in search of critical spares.

What seems apparent is that the world government chartered *Highndry* to do whatever it was doing when the final systems failure occurred. Its location, or at least its destination, is almost certainly known to the government at Central Lake.

Although Walston has a perfectly good communications net, the government will not release information unless the Travellers go to the capital in person and meet with a government official. They are promised reimbursement for the cost of their travel, accommodation and a full explanation over dinner. To obtain the best and most complete information, the Travellers must go to the capital.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

The crew of *Highndry* really were a bunch of obnoxious jerks, who managed to land themselves in jail. This is how the Scout Service learned their vessel was downed on Walston. The ship was on loan and the Scout Service decided it would be more usefully assigned elsewhere. The crew explained the ship had problems but failed to volunteer information about its whereabouts. The Scout Service genuinely believes the vessel is parked at the starport.

The former crew are out of the picture now and their loan of the vessel has been legally revoked since they have allowed it to fall into disrepair. However, they see it rather differently and may someday show up wanting 'their' ship back.

BAD SEEDS

This adventure, as presented, need not involve the previous owners of the ship. They may remain part of the backstory of the *Highndry* and only exist in the imaginations of the Travellers as a group of ne'er-do-wells who belong in a penitentiary more than they do on the bridge of a starship. However, if the Referee wishes to give them a more menacing presence, have them make an appearance.

1. Starport Customs
2. Port Authority Office
3. Commercial Road
4. Industrial Estate
5. Residential Area
6. Rail Station



The surly former crew of the *Highndry* are likely to be in jail for any number of offences, not the least of which is breach of contract for their mistreatment of a detached duty scout ship. Their eventual incarceration is just about guaranteed but before they end up in the slammer, they might make one last-ditch effort to reobtain ‘their’ ship. Should the Referee determine that they do, it will be after having travelled aboard the *Maverick Spacer* to Caladbolg, where they obtained some spares to attempt repairs of the ship, then returned to Walston. Lacking the skills to get the job done properly, they are not likely to succeed and are fortunate that the Travellers have appeared on the scene.

PREVIOUS CREW OF THE HIGHNDRY

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Any		Any		Any
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	7	INT	6	Deception 1, Gun Combat (slug) 0 or 1, Melee (unarmed or blade) 1, Persuade 0, Streetwise 0
DEX	8	EDU	6	
END	7	SOC	6	
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3), Body Pistol (2D), Brass Knuckles (1D+2) Dagger (1D+2), or a Shotgun (4D, Bulky) Armour: None		

Divided amongst the crew: Astrogation 1, Engineer (j-drive) 1, Pilot (spacecraft) 1

The crew may attempt to barge in at several points during the adventure to assert their claim. This may result in a number of scenarios which are largely dependent on the Travellers’ actions. These are a few suggestions:

- At the starport or the capital. This is best played after the Travellers learn something about the former crew, including how disliked they were by the locals. This will set the stage for an eventual confrontation, at which point the Travellers can point out that they have a legal claim to the ship and therefore any attempt by the former crew will be an act of theft or even piracy.
- During the climb of Mount Salbarii. Having the former crew attempt to ascend the mountain at the same time as the Travellers will add to the tension of the climb and possibly result in a dangerous bout of combat.
- After the eruption of the volcano and subsequent events. The former crew wait until the ship, battered and beaten as it is, is safely delivered back to the starport. If the Travellers acted as the heroes of Mount Salbarii, doing everything they could to save the people affected by the volcanic eruption, then the locals protect them, shooing the former crew off and ‘helping’ them obtain the first possible basic passage off Walston aboard a passing far trader. However, should the Travellers fail to help anyone, possibly not even attempting to help anyone at all, they will receive no aid from the locals and must face down the former crew on their own.



CENTRAL LAKE

Reaching Central from the starport is not difficult. There is a regular rail service that runs once per day. The railroad is not in the best of condition as there is insufficient labour available to properly maintain it but so long as the trains do not go very fast it is safe enough.

The trains themselves are short, just a small electric locomotive and a carriage or two at most. There are often a couple of freight cars attached to the back of a train but these are usually empty; they are simply not uncoupled when not needed because that would require someone to do it and already the railroad staff

(all 17 of them, serving three main and a few more minor stations, plus the rail depot at the capital) are overworked just running a train every day.

However, despite the somewhat primitive transport, the journey does not take very long and soon Central Station comes into sight. It is located on the edge of the capital, a town that looks remarkably like the one the Travellers just left in many ways, although smaller. There is no starport but there is a large lake with islands to the north. This is Central Lake, named because it lies more or less in the centre of the island.



Central is the rail hub for the island, with a line out to each of the larger towns. The town actually has a reasonable service industry as anyone travelling from one settlement to another by train will almost certainly have to stop over in Central as there is only one train per day to each destination. There are also a couple of government-owned factories and the dictator's palace, which serves as a governmental centre.

The palace is rather grandly named. Like other buildings on Walston it is largely underground, with just the top floor above the surface. In fact the 'palace' is in four parts. Two are semi-separate accommodation wings for the employees of the government, the security force and the personnel that support them. Between these lies the governmental building where the world's tiny bureaucracy work and accessed through it (there is a private entrance at the other side but guests are not allowed to use it) is the home of the dictator and his immediate family.

The entire 'palace' contains about 75 people all told. About the same number work in the factories and the railroad, all of which are owned by Masterton or his close family. The remainder of the settlement's population either work in service industries or small businesses in town. There are a few farms close to the town as well, plus a small lakeside dock where a handful of fishing boats are moored.

The palace is not really segregated from the rest of the town, except by a wider than usual open space between it and the nearest building complex. There is an obvious entrance facing the town, which is the direction almost anyone coming to the palace will approach from. There are no guards outside and during office hours the outer doors are left open.

The entryway leads to a reception area decorated in the locals' idea of a tasteful and business-like manner. Pastel blue and light to mid-grey seem to be the colours of choice. There is a reception desk where there is a clerk present most of the time. Travellers from a high-population world might be stunned by this. The seat of government for a world does not have a full-time receptionist? Incredible.

In fact, everyone in the world government has more than one job. With just 3,000 people on the entire planet, it is difficult to provide all the trappings of civilisation. Law enforcement, fire and rescue, the railroads, industry and the starport all need personnel, as do the hidden but necessary jobs like sewer maintenance and road mending. As a result, everything has to be done on a shoestring or when someone with three other jobs is available to see to it.

The Travellers may have to wait around for a few minutes but eventually they will be spotted by an overworked clerk who recognises them as 'not from around here' and tries to put together a suitable reception. The Travellers are offered comfortable seats in a side room, with coffee or wine to drink and a plate of pretty good biscuits – this is about the limit of hospitality that can be offered off the cuff around here.

Within a few minutes a government official, Alan Greener – the Minister for Offworld Affairs, Public Relations and Fisheries, as it happens – enters the room and apologises for the delay.

He listens to the Travellers' story (if Vagr are present, remember to concentrate on the humans), looks over the papers and thinks for a moment. The Minister explains the situation, which may not be entirely to the Travellers' liking.

THE SHIP IS WHERE?!

Minister Greener explains the situation regarding the scout/courier. Its crew were, frankly, a bunch of troublemakers but for lack of anyone better the government chartered their vessel for a simple job.

They somehow managed to botch the task and disable their ship into the bargain, then departed in the direction of the starport aboard an air/raft before anyone knew what was happening. They took a ship out of the system a couple of days later and have not been heard from again.

The Travellers' documentation seems to be in order and, with no way to verify it 100 percent, Greener is willing to accept it at face value. He will tell the Travellers where the ship is and help them get access to it... if they agree to complete the mission the original crew were supposed to have carried out. Greener can offer a flat fee of Cr3000 in cash – a case full of Imperial Credits as it happens – but it is important and he is not willing to cooperate unless the Travellers finish the job.

The task is not complex. Greener needs the Travellers to use the scout's planetary survey equipment and a bunch of seismic charges (which are aboard the ship, presumably, since they were given to the previous crew) to carry out a geological/seismic/tectonic survey of a region not far from the capital.

Greener is willing to admit that he cannot stop the Travellers from fixing up the ship and making off without holding up their end of the bargain but he thinks he is offering a fair trade; help in getting the ship and a little hard cash in return for a job that's important to Walston but will take only two or three days to complete for a suitably equipped group. He will not even discuss the ship's location unless the Travellers agree to his proposal. If the Travellers are honourable people they will surely be willing to keep their end of the bargain.

Greener is not willing to part with more cash – he already paid a lot to the previous crew and Walston does not have money to throw around. If the Travellers request more, Greener decides to wait for another scout/courier or similar vessel to come through the port. After all, they are hardly uncommon.

If the Travellers agree, Greener outlines the problem. There is a volcano on Settlement Island, called Mount Salbarii. It was thought extinct for millennia but has recently rumbled a bit and caused occasional tremors. A geologist who was passing through a year back took a look and concluded that it was 99 percent or more certain that this was just a 'twitch' on the part of the mountain, i.e., that there was no danger.

However, Greener wants a more detailed survey and a map of the interior of the mountain. Originally he intended to send this off for analysis at one of the high-population-world universities but recently became aware that a scout/courier's survey equipment could provide all the data he needs, such as the chance of an eruption within, say, the next decade. So, he hired *Highndry* to carry out the survey and something went wrong. Now that the Travellers are here the job can be finished just as soon as they get to the ship and reactivate it. The only problem, and it is not a major one, is the location of the ship, which is, of course, parked in the crater of a possibly active volcano.



MOUNT SALBARI

The Travellers have just learned that their ship is parked on top of a mountain and one that might be an active volcano.

The nearest major settlement to Mount Salbarii is, unsurprisingly, named Salbarii. It lies on the western shore of Settlement Island about 20 kilometres north of the volcano, which is a little inland from the coast. The island has a few big hills but Mount Salbarii is by far the highest peak, at about 1,500 metres above sea level. It rises more or less directly from the coastal plain, with only a ridge running southeast by way of foothills. This makes the mountain an imposing sight and fools the eye into thinking that it is a little higher than it actually is.

All the same, 1,500 metres is a considerable climb in an already thin atmosphere and not something that should be attempted on idle whim. There are no mountaineers as such in the town of Salbarii, although a few people have occasionally climbed nearby hills. Some offworlders took it into their collective heads to go up Salbarii a few years back. Apparently they made it and came back okay but did not leave any maps or useful information. In short, while the local shops will be able to sell the Travellers things like rope and backpacks, they are going to have to improvise their way up the mountain.

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

Getting to the base of Mount Salbarii from the town is not too much of a challenge. The Travellers are on government business, so it is not too hard to arrange to be driven to the mountain in an offroad vehicle. Indeed, the first 500 metres of the ascent can be undertaken aboard a vehicle, albeit not quickly. After that, it is not really feasible to drive a wheeled vehicle any higher. An ATV or an air/raft could do it but there are none available.

However, the climb up Mount Salbarii might not be as bad as the Travellers have expected. As with any expedition, preparation is key. If the Travellers have respirators or similar breathing-aid apparatuses and cold-weather clothing, the climb will be doable. The early stages are little more than a walk up a steep slope, although there are boulders and outcrops to be detoured around. The thin air will begin to be a problem after a while, even for those acclimatised to some extent.

Travellers will tire and become irritable more quickly than expected. Altitude sickness may worry medically minded Travellers without breathers but it will not be a problem just yet.

It is not possible to just go straight up towards the peak. Instead, the Travellers must follow a snaking path around boulders and scree slopes, following ridges and working their way higher. On average with detours, steep bits, slow going in places and the odd easy section, the Travellers will be able to ascend about 100 metres per hour. They would be well advised to rest or camp overnight on the way up rather than simply charging at the peak in one go, although it is doable for those who like an 'ironman' type challenge.

Up to about 800 metres, there are no significant problems, just a lot of very tiring uphill walking and the odd scramble up a steep or rocky section. After this, the Travellers may start to struggle a bit.

800-900 METRES

This segment of the climb is characterised by a lot of steep slopes and tumbled rocks, resulting in many frustrating detours. It takes approximately two hours to ascend 100 metres vertically. Or rather it would but for an obstacle in the form of a volcanic outcrop that runs around much of the mountain. After some investigation the Travellers realise they have a choice of following a long looping ridge around the outcrop or climbing up a 10-metre more or less sheer rock face which, while hazardous, could cut hours off the journey and perhaps avoid other problems further on which are as yet out of sight.

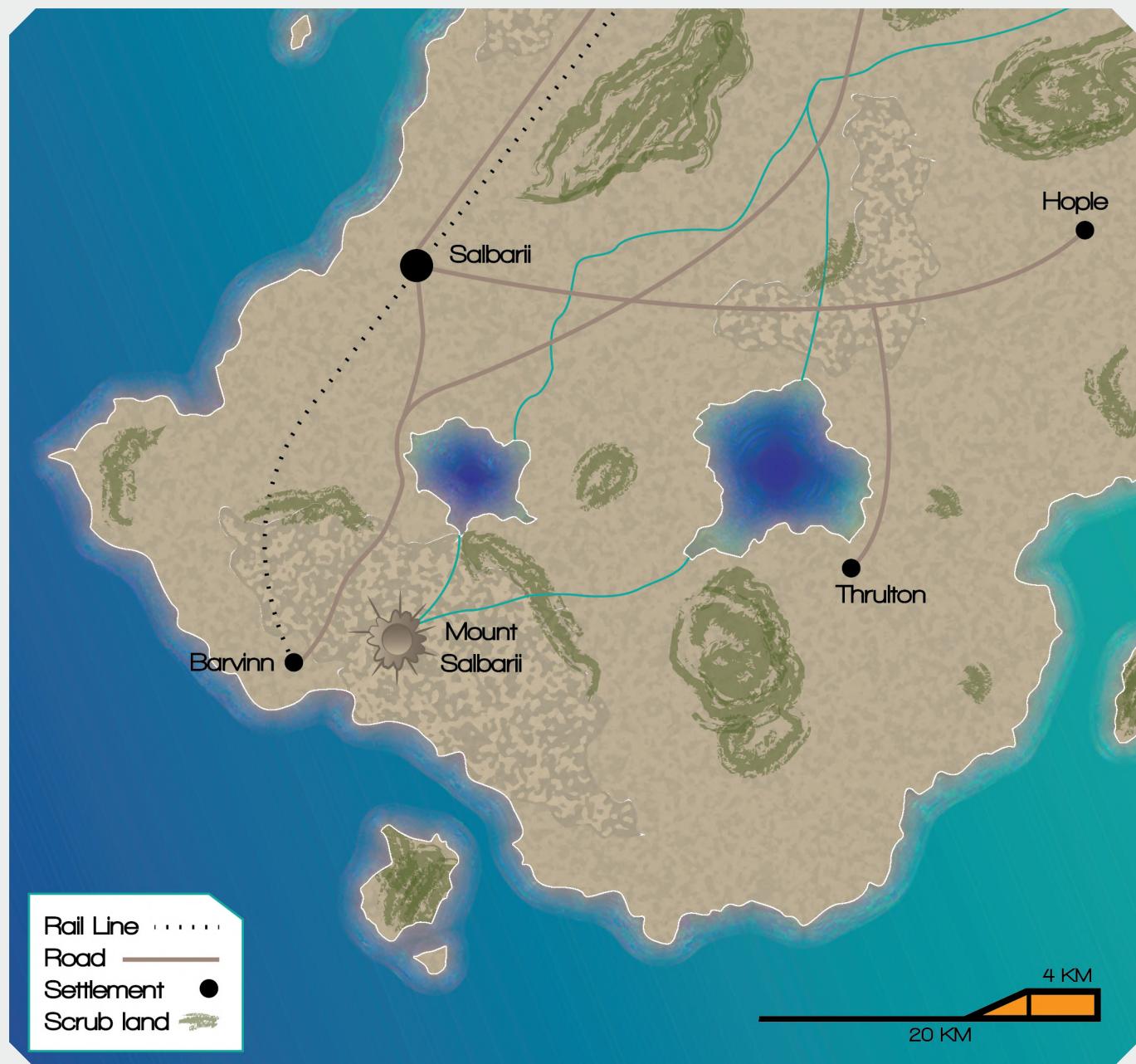
Climbing this segment requires a Routine (6+) END check (two hours), made every 100 metres. Once a rope is established at the top, less skilled Travellers should be able to scramble up with a more easily made Easy (4+) DEX check (30 minutes). Failure to make these checks typically indicates that a less-than-optimal path has been chosen or an unexpected impediment appears before the Travellers that requires taking an alternative route. Simply retake the check if this is the case. However, if an Effect of -6 or less is rolled and the Traveller does not have any Athletics skill, they are injured or affected by

some combination of the cold, thin atmosphere and the difficulty of the climb. In such case, the Traveller must rest for D3 hours before continuing.

While resting at the top, the Travellers make an unpleasant discovery – the bones of two humanoids, probably human, along with a forlorn collection of very decayed mountaineering gear. The bones show obvious signs of a fall. It seems that one of the climbers fell and injured himself very badly. His companion was

attempting a rescue when some sort of disaster befell them and they died together on the mountainside. The remains are half a century old and little of their gear is of any use now, although pitons and the like might be salvaged. A close examination of the bones reveals that they have been aggressively picked clean, possibly (and ominously) by some sort of insect.

If the Travellers choose not to climb, it will take them 1D hours of frustrating walking to follow the ridge round to a point where they can get past the difficult area.



900-1,100 METRES

The going is easier on this section, enabling the Travellers to make better time. However, this would be a mistake. They are on a thin-atmosphere world to start with and have ascended 1,000 metres from sea level in short time. Ideally, they need to rest and take the climb slowly to avoid altitude sickness.

A good decision here can save a lot of problems later on. The Referee might allow a Traveller with the Medic or Survival skill to make a check to realise that the ascent needs to be paced. If any Traveller points out that they are climbing a mountain in an already thin atmosphere, the Referee might illustrate the risk of altitude sickness and ask if the team are deliberately going slowly to avoid it. The use of respirators negates this effect.

If the Travellers do not specify they are pacing themselves or taking a suitable rest, and they do not have respirators, the Referee is free to assume they are pushing on at what seems to a layman to be a reasonable pace but which is in fact too fast for the conditions.

A party that slows down will make the usual 100 metres per hour in terms of altitude. A party that does not will manage 200 metres in an hour or so but each Traveller without a breather or other supply of oxygen will have to make an Easy (4+) END check.

Those who fail the check suffer mild altitude sickness. The result is that they will begin to tire faster than they expect and may begin to experience faint nausea, headaches and a tendency not to react quickly to changing circumstances. This will not yet be a serious problem, although the Travellers might begin to snap at one another and find simple tasks like retying a bootlace both tricky and intensely annoying. This translates as DM-1 on all checks, even when undertaking purely mental tasks.

Two things occur at some point during this segment: First, they see that another group of mountain climbers has begun to assemble at the base of Mount Salbarii. The Travellers' view of their base camp is obscured, so they cannot tell how these explorers got there. Presumably, they had a vehicle transport them there but it must have come from the other side of the mountain. Second, they begin to be bothered by large locust-like insects. Over time, any exposed flesh on the Travellers' bodies is bitten by the pesky insects. As they continue their ascent, the insects begin arriving in groups.

1,100-1,200 METRES

This section is steep and rocky, with little vegetation. There is clear evidence that the mountain was an active volcano in the distant past, with fields of hardened lava and obvious paths where it has flowed. The Travellers are slowed by the terrain but can take a direct route, so can traverse the 100 metres listed in this segment without undue strain in 2Dx10 minutes.

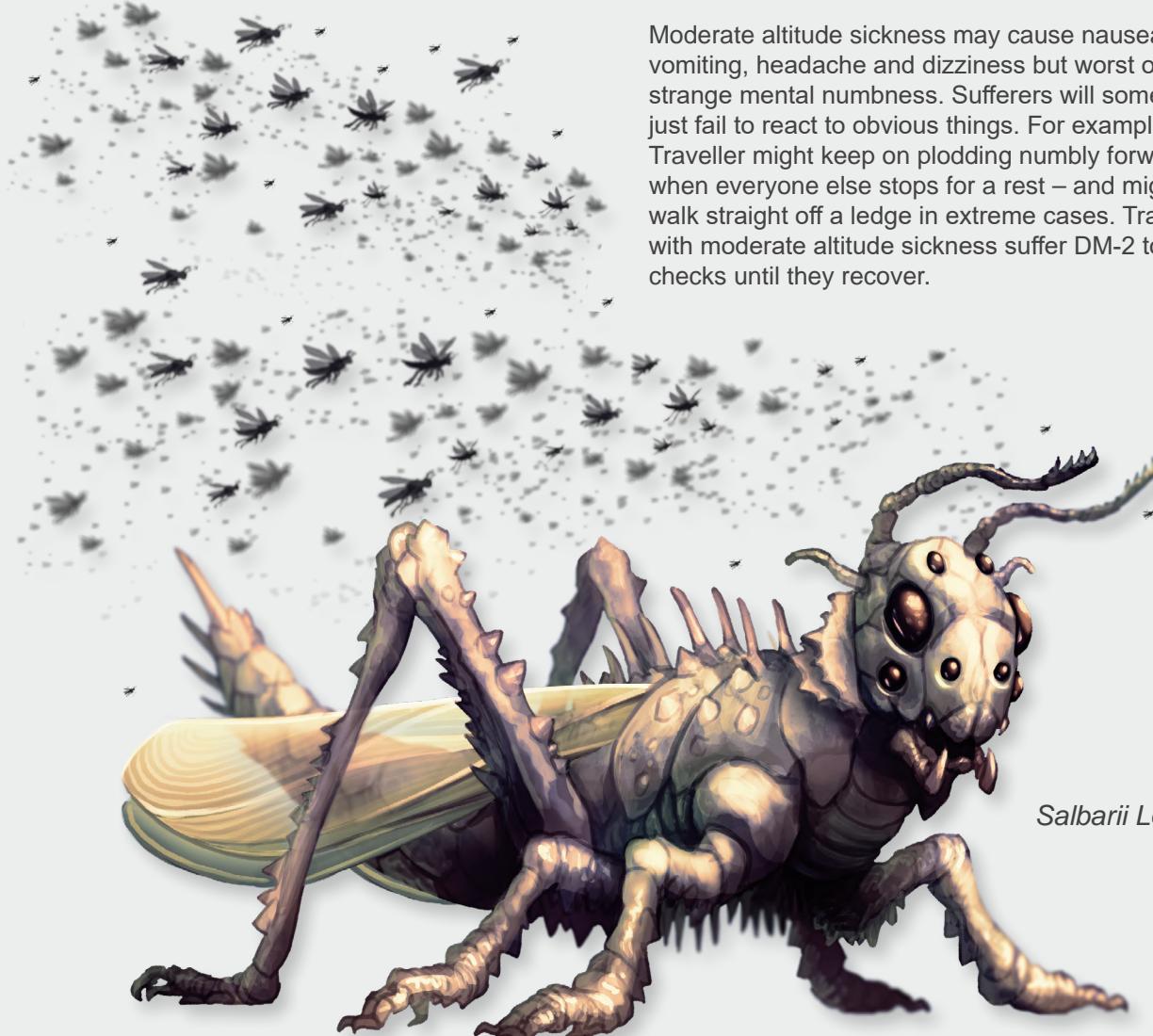
Unfortunately, the Travellers have wandered into the habitat of an insect species whose ecosystem is limited to this band of the ascent. They are attacked by a swarm of them and Travellers with exposed flesh are attacked until they cover up. As the biting insects descend upon them, the Travellers' vision is reduced to approximately two metres and all checks are made at DM-2. There are several ways to address this problem:

- Keen observers will note that the visible swarms are not seen 100 metres below or above them on the mountainside. For whatever reason, they adhere strictly to the 100-metre band that the Travellers are attempting to ascend during this phase of the climb. They may hasten their ascent to get beyond the insects' habitat, with the aforementioned DM-2 applied.
- The insects will flee from fire and chemicals. If the Travellers have flares, a camp fire or simply an aerosol can and a match, they can force the insects to leave them alone for 4D minutes, possibly giving them time to proceed to the next phase of the climb.
- Locating and hiding in a cave or crevice will cause the insects to give up within 1D minutes. They are clumsy fliers and do not operate well in confined spaces. After the Travellers resurface, they get a reprieve of 2D minutes before another swarm notices them.

The chaos of the insect event likely causes the Travellers to lose sight of the other mountaineers, unless they expressly make an effort to keep track of them. If this occurs, allow them to make an Average (8+) Recon (INT) check to discover that the group is making their way up the mountain on a more or less parallel track to that of the Travellers.

Animal	Hits	Speed
Salbarii Locust	1	10m
Skills	Melee (natural) 0	
Attacks	Bite (D3)	
Traits	Small (-4)	
Behaviour	Reducer	

The listed bite damage is inflicted by a swarm of 20 or more locusts. Bites from individual locusts merely cause mild discomfort and annoyance. Killing individual locusts is rather easy but does little to affect the behaviour of a swarm. However, they can be driven off by fire, chemicals and similar deterrents and prefer not to pursue prey into enclosed areas such as caves or crevices.



Salbarii Locust

1,200-1,350 METRES

This section of the mountain is steep and has numerous hazards in the form of loose rocks, overhangs and sections where there is no alternative but to climb or scramble up a more or less sheer rock face. It will take 1D hours to traverse this section. This might actually be quicker than on the lower slopes since the Travellers are now able to go more or less straight up. No check is needed as the climb is not especially tricky. However, there is another problem.

Another test for altitude sickness is necessary at this point for any Travellers not equipped with a respirator or other breathing device. This is a Routine (6+) END check for anyone not already suffering and an Average (8+) END check for anyone who has previously been affected. Travellers who fail the check are now suffering from mild altitude sickness, if they were not before, and moderate symptoms if this is the second test they have failed.

Moderate altitude sickness may cause nausea or vomiting, headache and dizziness but worst of all is the strange mental numbness. Sufferers will sometimes just fail to react to obvious things. For example, a Traveller might keep on plodding numbly forwards when everyone else stops for a rest – and might even walk straight off a ledge in extreme cases. Travellers with moderate altitude sickness suffer DM-2 to all checks until they recover.

RECOVERING FROM ALTITUDE SICKNESS

A Traveller's body will try to adjust to the conditions it experiences. As a result, simply resting up for a day or two, especially if the Travellers can descend a couple of hundred metres from their highest point of ascent, will allow a good recovery to be made. A Traveller's penalty due to altitude will go down by one for each day of rest at a constant altitude or slightly lower, i.e., each day the Traveller does not climb any higher. When it reaches zero, a full recovery has been made.

Artificial assistance is also possible. A few minutes of oxygen from a medical unit or vacc suit, or some time spent in the sealed environment of the starship, will dispel the penalty for an hour or two. It will, however, return after that until the Traveller has acclimatised to the conditions properly. A Traveller who can rest for a significant part of the day (say sleeping for eight hours) in a suitable controlled environment will recover quicker even if they work outside the rest of the time. Their negative DM will go down by one per day in this case. If the Travellers were to acclimatise for several weeks, they would eventually become more used to the conditions atop Mount Salbarii, although they would still tire quickly due to the thin air and consequent difficulty in getting enough oxygen. However, they would at that point be capable of functioning more or less normally. Until then, everything they do atop the mountain is harder and more tiring than they would normally expect.

Of course, this is not a good time to be uncoordinated or confused. The Travellers will need to make at least one DEX check to scramble up this section. Anyone who fails will fall, skidding down a rocky slope and suffering 2D damage. Precautions like being roped together might mitigate this at the Referee's discretion, although this might put other Travellers in danger. Anyone who fails must try again, with another chance to fall and injure themselves.

1,350-1,400 METRES

This section is worse than the last but fortunately not that high. It will take another 1D hours to clamber slowly up the rocky face of the mountain, which at times is almost sheer. As the Travellers approach their goal they must make a final END check to avoid altitude sickness.

This is Difficult (10+) for anyone already suffering any symptoms and Average (8+) for those who have not yet begun to suffer. As described before, Travellers with respirators are unaffected.

Travellers who have failed one check are now suffering from mild altitude sickness (DM-1 to all checks), those who have failed two checks are moderately afflicted (DM-2 to all checks) and those that have managed to fail all three will be a danger to themselves and everyone else. They stumble about like zombies, suffering from a terrible headache and occasionally vomiting. They respond very sluggishly to changing circumstances – even crises – and struggle with even basic tasks. These Travellers have severe altitude sickness and suffer DM-4 to all checks.

The climb itself requires another DEX check to make without mishap. It may be that some Travellers are by now almost incapable of making the climb, in which case their friends will have to get inventive and find a way to help. Failing the DEX check to make the climb results in another fall for 2D damage and the requirement to try again.

As they approach the next and final phase of the climb, they note that their competitors are making considerably better time than they are and despite having started an hour or two after the Travellers, appear to be set to reach the crater lip at the same time. If the Travellers attempt to call out or reach them by radio, they receive no response. A successful Recon check using binoculars, PRIS goggles or similar device reveals that the group is eyeing the Travellers from a distance, so their lack of communication seems deliberate.

THE CRATER LIP

The highest point of the crater lip is about 1,500 metres above sea level. However, it is not necessary to go over the highest point. There are several areas where the lip is a good 100 metres lower than the highest point. Most groups of Travellers will want to enter by the easiest route they can find, rather than determinedly conquering the summit.

As they approach the summit, their path finally crosses with that of their fellow mountaineers. They are locals who heard rumours of an abandoned starship in the crater. While they have none of the skills or experience necessary to operate a starship, they are quite certain they can scavenge the ship's remains to make a tidy profit.

This encounter is highly volatile. The scavengers view the offworlders as interlopers; foreigners who have no right to dictate terms on their homeworld, so their initial disposition towards the Travellers is not favourable. The Travellers might be able to present evidence that they have a right to recover the ship; however, they are on dangerous ground. While the scavengers are not

necessarily the murderous sort, if the encounter goes poorly and the two sides come to blows, an 'accident' could befall the visitors. As far as the scavengers are concerned, no one might ever discover just what happened. The encounter is not likely to go this way but if the Travellers are aggressive, the scavengers might feel cornered or endangered and lash out at them. A persuasive or intimidating group of Travellers might convince the scavengers that they have laboured in vain. The ship belongs to them and the difficult climb to the top was a wasted effort. The Referee must determine how the scavengers respond. There might be an argument, fisticuffs or, if the Travellers are the friendly and diplomatic sort, they might even negotiate some type of agreement by which both sides can profit. Whatever the case may be, the Travellers must carefully navigate this encounter so they can proceed to their goal.

The view from the crater lip looking outwards is impressive. South and west are coastal plains falling away to the open ocean. North and east, if anyone travels around the crater rim, the interior of Settlement Island can be seen. The crater is a good one to two kilometres across, with an outer zone sloping steeply down a good 200 metres (to a height of about 1,250-1,300 metres above sea level). There is a fair amount of vegetation in the crater including a scrubby bush-

forest and a small lake in a centre. The lake has an island, and on that island is parked the familiar arrowhead shape of a scout/courier. It looks to be intact, although it is surrounded by trash.

Descending into the crater is hard work but not unduly hazardous unless a Traveller is suffering severe altitude sickness and cannot keep their balance. However, it will take time to climb down and even longer to get back up if the ship turns out not to be flyable.

THE SCAVENGERS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Any	Any	Any
TRAITS	—	SKILLS
STR 8	INT 5	Athletics (endurance)
DEX 8	EDU 5	1, Mechanic 0, Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 0,
END 9	SOC 5	Survival 1
EQUIPMENT	Weapons: Knife (1D+2), Mountaineering Pick, Cudgel Equipment: Respirator, Cold-Weather Clothing, Climbing Kit	

The scavengers should number equal to or one less than the Travellers.



IN THE CRATER

The crater can be considered to be made up of three concentric zones. The outer, or lip, zone is characterised by steep slopes, tumbled rocks and a general lack of life. The inner zone extends from the outer zone edge to the shores of the lake and is an average of 6–800 metres wide. It has soil of a rather thin sort, covered in scrubby grass and in places a forest of waist-high bushes.

The lake lies more or less at the centre of the crater and is about 500 metres in diameter, being roughly circular. There is an island about 100 metres in diameter in the centre of the lake, with vegetation of the same sort as around the lake. The water is warmish and drinkable although it has an odd mineral taste, as might be expected.

Getting across the lake to the *Highndry* should not be a huge problem. The lake is deep but not especially wide. Prudent Travellers might decide to make some kind of float to get themselves and their cases of spares across to the ship rather than just plunging into the lake.

Travellers exploring the crater are likely to make two finds sooner or later. The first is that there are several lava tubes around the outside of the crater, mostly in the outer zone. The second is that they have company in the crater.

THE LAVA TUBES

Most of these are dead ends but a couple lead to caverns under the lake. These might be worth exploring from a mineral prospecting point of view. They are slightly warmer than rock would normally be, which may cause Travellers to worry.

COMPANY

The crew of the *Highndry* had a guard animal or possibly a pet. This beast was, or rather is, an omnivore the size of a large dog and similar in temperament. That is, were it not starving after living on what it could scrounge from the crater and the trash around the ship for several weeks, it would be friendly to those it considered part of its community or family. A reliable guard animal, companion and disposal unit for meal scraps under normal conditions, the beast is at present a threat to everyone around it.

The animal belongs to a species named Tensher's Wolf after its general appearance and the scientist

who identified it. Tensher's Wolf is not native to the Spinward Marches but is often imported as a guard animal. As luck would have it, the animal is suited to the environment in which it finds itself. While adaptable to standard atmosphere mixes, it evolved in the mountains of a world with a thin atmosphere. Among its adaptations are large lungs and expandable blood vessels that enable it to extract needed oxygen from Thin – and with some effort, Very Thin – atmospheres.

It is covered in sandy-brown fur which blends fairly well with the undergrowth and is adept at hiding from its prey. Tensher's Wolf prefers to attack by surprise. Normally it will not attack humans but this example is desperate and starving, and on top of that may consider the Travellers to be intruders into its territory especially if they go near the scout/courier. If it chooses to attack someone it will try to pick an isolated Traveller if possible.

The behaviour of this creature depends entirely upon the Travellers. If they are not aware of it or do not actively attempt to feed and befriend it, it will try to kill and eat them unless it can steal something to eat from them instead. An encounter where the creature steals food from



Animal	Hits	Speed
Tensher's Wolf	36	12m
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Melee (natural) 3, Recon 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3	
Attacks	Bite (D3)	
Traits	Armour (+2), Camouflaged	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Pouncer	

the Travellers' camp might cause them to realise that it does not fear people and might in fact be an abandoned pet. If the Travellers leave suitable food for the creature and allow it to satisfy its desperate hunger, it can be approached. If treated like a member of the family, it will revert to being one and eventually become a loyal guard animal/pet. If the Travellers do not befriend the creature they will have to kill it before it kills and eats one of them.

THE HIGHNDRY

Once the Travellers reach the island, they can see that the *Highndry*'s hatches are all closed but just about everything inside it has been dumped outside in a huge mess made worse by some kind of animal raking through it looking for food. It would appear (correctly) that the crew attempted a repair then stripped everything of value that they could carry from the ship, dumped the rest and took off in the ship's air/raft. Among the wreckage is a forlorn metal food bowl licked clean long

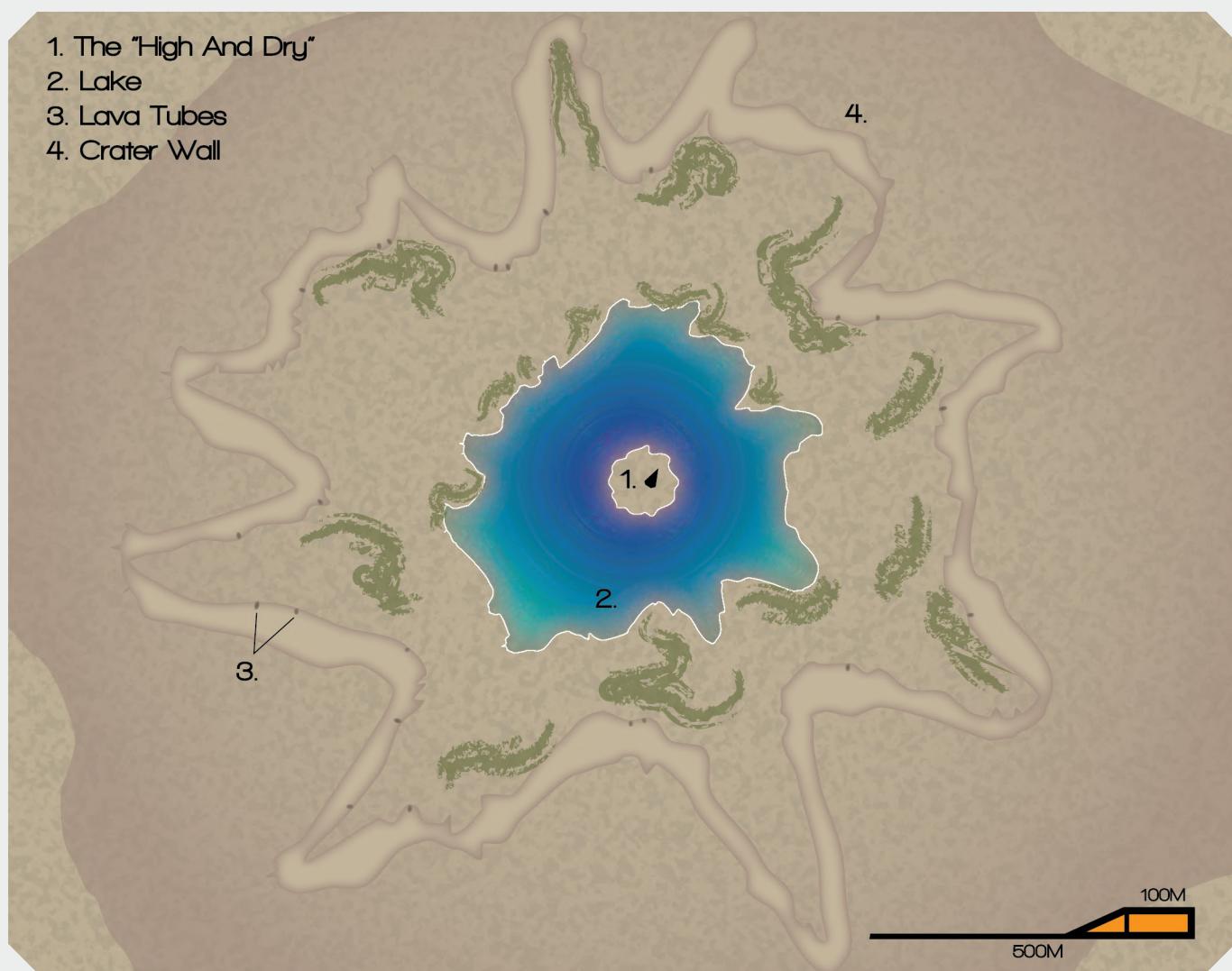
ago. The name 'Kimbley' has been hand-stamped into the metal of the bowl. Someone once cared for the poor starving beast now haunting the island but not enough to take it with them when they left.

Among the stuff that has been turfed out of the *Highndry* are ration packets, all of which have been ripped open and the contents (plus a fair amount of the packaging) devoured. Most of the rest of the stuff has been destroyed by the animal.

Gaining entry to the *Highndry* is not very difficult. Its reactor is powered down and the batteries are all but drained, although there is sufficient power left to accept an entry code for the airlocks but the doors will have to be manually opened. Inside, the ship is a terrible mess. The crew never took proper care of the ship when it was their home and in the process of leaving they were not gentle.

On top of that, virtually every access panel is open, the covers are off everything that has a cover and there are components strewn all over the deck. Putting it all

1. The "High And Dry"
2. Lake
3. Lava Tubes
4. Crater Wall



back together will be a big job. Fortunately, some of the components can be bypassed or replaced with the gear the Travellers brought with them up the mountain. The resulting lash-up will not be pretty or safe for people walking past but it should suffice to get the *Highndry* to a dockyard where a proper repair can be conducted.

The first stage will be fixing up the power, life support and flight systems and running some simulations with the ship's software. This is a job that really should not be rushed; a problem with the ship's control electronics at the wrong time would be disastrous.

So, having climbed to the top of the world, the Travellers can finally begin the job they came to Walston to do.

REPAIRS, SURVEYS AND TREMORS

Repairing the *Highndry* is a relatively straightforward task for Travellers who have the right equipment, i.e. the spares they have been given. The repair mostly takes the form of removing a large number of demountable circuit blocks and either bypassing or replacing them depending on how essential they are. The portable download/diagnostic unit can then ascertain whether a given system is useable or needs further work.

There are four main systems needing repair:

- Flight controls and navigational systems (bridge)
- General shipboard electronics (dispersed throughout the ship)
- Power systems electronics (engineering)
- Drive systems electronics (engineering)

Each of these jobs takes 1D+2 man-hours to complete. Most of the work can be done by an unskilled person who has been shown how, as it simply requires identifying a circuit block by its code number and a simple remove-and-replace procedure. However, the Referee should ask for an Electronics check at the end of each job.

The Travellers should not be told the difficulty level, creating a degree of uncertainty about whether the job has been done properly. In fact, between the diagnostic unit and a suitably skilled person offering guidance to those doing the actual work, there is no real chance of a disaster.

In addition, the ship's computers need to be accessed and purged, then the temporary control software uploaded. This can be accomplished by anyone with the Electronics (computers) skill and again a check should be made.

In the event of a really terrible check, the Travellers may want to redo the task, which takes another 1D+2 man-hours.

However, provided due care was taken there will be no serious problems with the ship's systems when the time comes to fire them up. Nothing ever works properly first time however, so a prudent crew will undertake a series of ground tests and a low altitude shakedown flight before blasting off into the unknown. It is all but inevitable that some sort of problem will appear and have to be fixed. In the meantime there are two other jobs that need doing.

The first is making the *Highndry* habitable. The general electronics systems dispersed throughout the vessel deal with things like life support, recycling and lighting but there is also a fair amount of filth and mess that must be cleared out before the ship is really fit to live in. A number of quite important components such as air filters are missing and must be located – the crew dismounted everything they might be able to take with them, selected the most portable and valuable, and left the rest scattered throughout the ship and on the ground outside. Locating and replacing important parts will take several people a couple of days and cleaning up properly will take even longer.

There is also the matter of the seismic survey to be carried out.

THE SURVEY

The Travellers do not, strictly speaking, have to keep their promise to Minister Greener. The people of Walston could not stop the scout ship from simply taking off with the work undone. However, if the Travellers wish to pick up any belongings they did not bring up the mountain with them, or to take on supplies for their voyage, the locals will want to know how the survey is going and may decide to be difficult if they think they are being taken for a ride.

The survey itself can mostly be done on the ground and may be quite entertaining as it involves emplacing a series of seismic charges and detonating them. The charges are aboard the ship, strewn around in a frighteningly haphazard manner and the sensor equipment for the survey is separate from the flight and power systems. The previous crew had little call to use it or mess with it, so it remains intact and functional unlike most of the things they got their hands on.

To do a really thorough job, the Travellers should emplace ground sensor units all over the crater and in some of the lava tubes. Charges should be set off in some of the tubes as well. The effects of the charge detonations will be used by the scout ship's computer to create a three-dimensional model of the volcano.

When matched up with readings taken by more sophisticated sensors like the vessel's high-penetration densitometer, this will allow the computer to predict if and when an eruption is likely. Other indicators include measurements of the lake temperature and samples of the gas mix around the crater area.

The survey will take about 10 man-hours to do cursorily and twice as long to carry out properly. Ideally Travellers with Electronics (sensors) or Science (planetology) will be available to carry out the data analysis and someone with the Explosives skill to emplace the charges but the system is reasonably idiot-proof and need not be too precise that a typical group of Travellers cannot muddle through somehow. After a few hours of blowing up small areas of rock and vaporising the occasional bush, the Travellers will get a fright.

THE TREMOR

Although the Travellers do not know it, their actions have nothing to do with a slight tremor that shakes the mountain in the middle of the survey. It is not especially violent but goes on for a surprisingly long time, bouncing things around in the scout ship and making it difficult to stand in the open.

After what seems like far too long, the ground stops trembling. At first it seems like nothing is different, then two things will be noticed. One is a slight plume of dust or gas escaping from the south-western side of the mountain. The second is a disturbance in the surface of the lake. As the Travellers watch, huge bubbles rise to the surface of the lake, which then subsides.

Astute Travellers may notice that the lake level is dropping. Not quickly, just a centimetre or two each minute, but the lake is slowly draining away. A small fissure has opened in the lake bed and it is draining into the lava tubes – which may be a problem for anyone in there at the time. It will take hours for the lake to empty, as it is 30 metres deep in places. All that will be left are a few forlorn pools. By this time the fissure will have ceased to vent gas and the mountain will once again be quiet. However, these events may give the Travellers cause for grave concern.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Highndry*'s computers (and any Travellers with relevant skills) will come up with a prediction after a few hours. There are many variables and nothing is certain but it seems likely that the mountain is indeed becoming active.

It would appear that the lava plug deep in the volcano's innards has been breached and magma is seeking a way to the surface.

It is highly likely that there will be an eruption of some kind within a few months. However, the scale is not expected to be very large. Chances are good that there will be very little lava actually reaching the surface and what does escape will cool long before it reaches the base of the mountain. Gas and ash clouds are more of a problem but again it is likely that the eruption will take the form of a steady release of pressure, with a plume of ash-laden gas escaping from the top of the mountain to be blown downwind (which means to the west, across the island and out to sea). This will look alarming but should not seriously threaten even the nearest town.

The computer model is relatively certain that there is no significant hazard to any settlement on the island, not even the handful of outlying farms that dot the fertile land below the volcano. However, it does suggest that further monitoring is advisable as the entire prediction is based upon one incomplete map of the mountain's structure.

TEST FLIGHT

At last the *Highndry* is ready for a test flight. The Travellers may be suspicious that the ship's systems are not in perfect working order, a reasonable conclusion as no-one ever gets a complete overhaul of this kind right first time.

A prudent crew would use the training-mode simulators on the ship's controls to make a dry run before take-off and run low then full-power tests on the ground. A sensible approach of this sort will take a few hours but will iron out the worst of the faults before take-off.

However, a nervous crew may want to get off the mountain right away, in which case the *Highndry* can be prepped for flight in a few minutes. However, it will function somewhat erratically. Un-calibrated controls, sudden faults in various electronic systems and the occasional burst of sparks from something will conspire to make the crew's task very difficult. If proper tests are not carried out before flight, DM-2 applies to all Pilot and Engineer checks until the crew can find a couple of hours to fix the worst of the faults.

Once the faults are fixed, the *Highndry* can be operated without penalty, although it does not quite 'fly right'. It is sometimes slow on the helm, sometimes erratic. Autostabilisation is wayward at best and power systems are not 100-percent reliable. All of this makes operating the *Highndry* a nerve-wracking and tiring business. However, the Travellers are going to need to fly and soon.

ERUPTION!

Just as the Travellers are preparing for their test flight, several things happen in fairly rapid succession. Most are alarming and the rest are downright scary. The first sign of a problem is a gentle pinging from the sensor data processing suite. This may not even be noticed unless someone is monitoring it or in the same room. The suite wants to inform the crew that it has revised the eruption prediction based on new data. To the computer, this is a dispassionate exercise and of no real urgency.

To anyone looking at the data from the point of view of, say, being sat on top of the volcano, the new data is a little more urgent.

The computer displays tables of temperatures and gas mixes and such, plus a helpful three dimensional model of the mountain which shows a huge lava plume smashing through the plug and filling the tubes. If asked for a prediction, the machine shows the top blowing right off the mountain in about six minutes' time. The Travellers just have time to realise that they cannot possibly get clear when the machine pings again to indicate revised data. Now it shows a much reduced lava plume simply pouring out into the crater and down the sides of the mountain, accompanied by a cloud of hot gas and ash. The first wisps of smoke can be seen coiling up from the lava tubes and the lakebed fissure. What water remains is beginning to boil. An eruption is obviously imminent and the ground begins to shake.

On-the-ball Travellers may have time to wonder what has changed, since the lava plume is now much smaller than the one depicted a moment ago. They will find out in due course.

In the meantime, there is still lava rising up the inside of the mountain and seeking a way out into the crater. The Travellers have a few minutes to take off.

As the last pre-flight checks are being made and the power plant brought up to full power, a plume of smoke can be seen rising from the south-western side of the mountain, well outside the crater. The ground shudders and the ship's radar begins warning of incoming missiles. These are in fact chunks of rock flung up into the air by the eruption going on well down the flank of the mountain.

The lava plume has found a way out, through a path that was too far down the mountain to appear on the survey.

While this means that the Travellers will not be incinerated in the crater and that there will be no catastrophic release of pressure resulting in the top being blasted off Mount Salbarii, it does have other implications.

By now the air in the crater is becoming too hot and too laden with volcanic gases to breathe. As the ship lifts off, lava begins to boil out of the lakebed fissures. If the Tensher's Wolf previously encountered is still around and has not been adopted by the Travellers, it will run for the ship seeking the safety of home. If it has already been befriended, letting it aboard will not be a problem. On the other hand, if the Travellers have just allowed a terror-stricken carnivore into the ship, where it finds strangers instead of its human masters... problems are likely, to say the least.

As the scout ship lifts clear of the hell zone that has become of the crater, bushes begin to catch fire and the air is filled with dust and ash. The radio is active, with two transmissions on similar bands.

TRANSMISSION ONE

The first transmission is coming in from the capital at Central Lake by way of the starport orbital beacon. Minister Greener wants to know what is happening. He has some garbled reports of smoke from the mountain and a tremor.

He would like to know how serious the situation is and what the long-term implications are.

Greener has little information and does not know how bad things are. However, as he receives reports of ash clouds in the sky, he begins to realise that things are serious indeed. At this point he becomes increasingly desperate for information. The Travellers have little to give him other than their own first-hand account of the eruption.

TRANSMISSION TWO

At more or less the same time, the town mayor's office at Salbarii tries to contact the Travellers. The tremors have been felt in the town, about 20 kilometres to the north of the mountain and dark clouds can be seen issuing from the mountain. The mayor and his tiny staff have issued a general alert and, like Greener, need information.

DECISIONS

The Travellers could cut and run at this point but for a minor problem. Their fuel tanks could be filled easily enough by taking on seawater and cracking it for hydrogen. However, a number of red lights appear on the jump drive control panel. The drive is inoperable until a proper repair is undertaken, which will necessitate removing a number of bulky components to get at the critical systems. This really needs the sort of tools and hoists found at a starport. If the Travellers ask, Greener

or any other government official on Walston will be happy to offer them use of the equipment they need if they will help with the present crisis.

For the time being, what the Walston authorities need is information. The world's handful of grav vehicles are en route to Mount Salbarii and a special train full of security personnel, fire and rescue workers, and the like, is being assembled. For now however, the only people able to make any real difference are the Travellers. Greener wants them to make a flyby of the whole mountain and the surrounding region, and report what they see. A direct video feed via the starport beacon would be ideal. Once he knows what is happening, Greener will be able to decide what to do – or better, put a full picture in front of the dictator and let him formulate a response.

The Travellers have a choice here. If they choose to run they will not be welcome on Walston and can expect no help with the ship, although they should be able to fix up the drives themselves eventually. In the meantime, people may be in danger and they have the means to help.



FIGHTING MOUNT SALBARII, PART 1

Assuming the Travellers decide to help, they will need to fly close to the mountain. There is a lot of thick haze caused by smoke and ash coming from the mountain and the odd rock flung into the air (the ship's sensors insist on wailing a missile alert for these), making the flight tricky. All Pilot checks are Difficult (10+) while operating in this environment. The ship's radar and other sensors make it possible to map the ground easily enough through the haze despite visual range being very short.

A circuit of the mountain reveals the following facts:

- There is a small amount of lava in the crater itself and some leaking from outlets on the higher slopes. This is not a significant hazard beyond the immediate area.
- There is a major eruption much lower down, where part of the mountainside has collapsed. A veritable river of lava is pouring out. This is on the south-western side of the volcano.
- The land slopes generally down to the sea from the erupting side of the volcano, offering the lava flow a direct path to the sea.
- The town of Salbarii, 20 kilometres north, is not in any real danger at present or in the foreseeable future.
- There are some small settlements, mainly just farms and a couple of hamlets, in the path of the lava flow. Within hours at most these will be swamped. The only settlement of any size in the danger zone has a population of about 60 people and is on the coast. It is not known for certain if it is endangered but this seems likely.

RESPONSES

At first, there is little response from the people of Walston. True to their collective character, most people simply wait for someone else to take charge. There are a couple of notable exceptions, however. The fishing submarine *Ocean's Bounty* has surfaced and is transmitting its intent to run into the coastal hamlet of Barvinn where it will take off as many people as it can. The mayor's office at Salbarii is broadcasting instructions for all inhabitants of threatened settlements to make for Salbarii where they will be looked after unless the town is in danger, in which case they will be evacuated by rail.

After a while Dictator Masterton comes on the air in person. From the poor quality of the transmission it seems that he is aboard a fast-moving vehicle. His instructions to the people repeat those of the mayor of Salbarii – head for the town where a rescue plan is being put in place. Those who cannot get to Salbarii should make a run for Barvinn on the coast and await rescue. Masterton asks to speak to the Travellers (assuming they have offered to help). He is indeed aboard a grav car heading for Salbarii, one of just three owned and operated by the government. He quickly outlines the situation.

There is a road – more of a dirt track really – up to Salbarii but it runs close to the mountain and may already be cut. There is also a single-track rail link down the coast to Barvinn which will stay open for a while. A train has already been sent to pick up the town's population. However, it is likely that some people will arrive after the train has departed. The submarine can take a handful off; the remainder will have to wait for a second run by the same train – Walston has a very limited transport system.

Masterton is going to set up a command post at Salbarii and send his grav vehicles to pick up anyone who is stranded. He hopes the travellers can help by getting an estimate of the lava flow rate. If so, this will indicate how long the town of Barvinn has before it is endangered. Ideally the Travellers will also be able to say whether the road is still open and report on conditions in general. Their radar terrain mapping system could help predict the best routes out for endangered personnel.

This comes down to three main tasks:

- Map the terrain and model the lava flow path.
- Establish a flow rate for the lava river headed in the general direction of Barvinn.
- Monitor the conditions at the mountain and report any changes.

MAPPING THE TERRAIN

This requires a couple of overflights and a successful Electronics (sensors) check. The map shows what is already suspected – Barvinn will be consumed by lava and the overland route will be cut before anyone can use it. The railroad will stay open almost to the end, however.

ESTABLISHING THE FLOW RATE

The lava is following ground contours and flowing much like a river as a result. Hovering directly above a flow is not a good idea but it is not very difficult to fly slowly parallel to a flow and try to estimate a rate of advance. This will require ignoring distractions like the spectacular combustion of nearby vegetation and a successful Electronics (sensors) or Science (planetology) check. The Recon skill might also be used to create a quick and dirty estimate.

Combining this estimate with the terrain map should enable the Travellers to estimate how long Barvinn has before the lava reaches it. The figure of roughly one to two hours seems reasonable at this point.

MONITORING THE MOUNTAIN

There is still some doubt as to whether Salbarii is in imminent danger or will need to be evacuated in the longer term. It may be that the town is perfectly safe. Which of these is true will have important implications for the handling of this disaster so again the dictator needs information to make a decision.

Ideally, the Travellers should return to the mountain (a part without lava spurting out of it would be good) and emplace some sensors in short holes drilled in the rock. This will allow an estimate of both temperature and stresses in the mountainside, which will allow an estimate of how long the eruption will go on for and if any more unpleasant surprises can be expected.

Landing on the mountainside is tricky but not especially dangerous so long as the Travellers stay away from the immediate vicinity of lava flows. The air is hard to breathe but a filter mask or air supply will suffice to deal with this problem. It is also, not surprisingly, hot.

Emplacing sensors takes half an hour or more, with a couple of hops from one point to another aboard the scout ship. Its air/raft would have been most useful for this job but the ship itself can manage with a decent pilot. Fairly soon, the data begins to come in and there is good news.

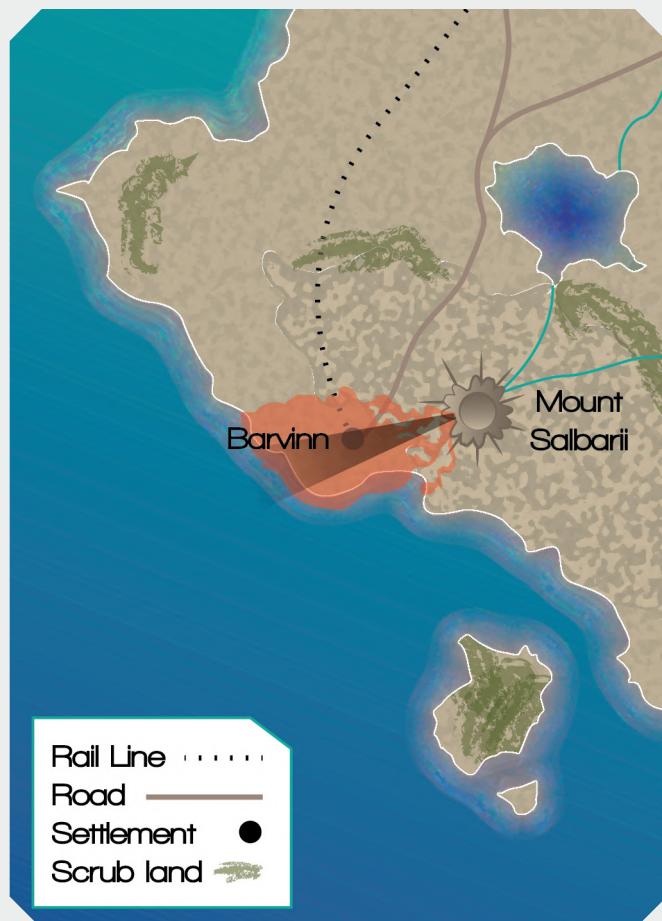
The lava flow is slowing and the temperature of nearby rock is dropping ever so slightly. It would seem likely that the eruption will be quite limited after all. Paranoid Travellers might choose to recheck these findings, use different instruments and generally do a more thorough job. If so, they will realise that there is more to their findings than initially meets the eye. If not, the computer model will present the data listed below in a few minutes anyway.

THE BAD NEWS

The lava flow rate has dropped because a plug has built up in the mountain somewhere. Now, sometimes this is a good thing as it can block the route to the surface and thus cause the eruption to end. However, in cases like this where there is a lot of pressure underneath, a plug of this sort tends to be short-lived. When it breaks, it will be like a dam bursting; the lava flow will massively increase and a chunk of the mountain may be quite literally blasted off.

According to the sensors and the computer model, Mount Salbarii is under rapidly increasing stress. Within just a few minutes the plug is going to fail and a massive eruption will take place. Worse, a huge cloud of super-hot ash and gas will be ejected from the mountain and will hurtle out across the coastal plain. The town of Barvinn will be destroyed and anyone in it will die.

The only good news is that the town of Salbarii will probably not be too badly affected, although a lot of ash is going to fall on it. In the long term the town may end up being abandoned but this would mean moving a significant chunk of the planetary population to new homes, representing a rather large project for the world government. It will not be even considered unless it seems inevitable.



FIGHTING MOUNT SALBARI. PART 2

The Travellers would be well advised to get off the slopes of Mount Salbarii. It is not possible to predict the exact effects of the lava plug failing, other than the general statement that it can be filed under 'really bad'. Anyone between the mountain and the sea will be killed for certain and the effects on the scout ship are likely to be severe to fatal. A withdrawal seems prudent.

EVACUATION ORDERS

Within moments of reporting the situation to Dictator Masterton, orders begin to come in from the temporary command post at Salbarii. The gist of it comes down to an order to cut and run right now. There is a train – really just a locomotive and a couple of cargo cars – running into Barvinn. It will take everyone who is at the station aboard and make for Salbarii at best speed. There is nothing to do but hope it gets clear in time.

However, there are people still trying to get to the station, who will not be there by the time the train leaves. The submarine *Ocean's Bounty* is in port at Barvinn and will take aboard anyone who can be crammed in before heading out to sea and submerging.

It should be safe, although nobody really knows how bad things are about to get. However, there are two groups that cannot reach safety in time. One is from an agricultural settlement, a farming hamlet well to the south. Ironically they might have been safe if they had stayed put or headed south but then maybe not. In any case, they are now well within the threat zone and cannot be reached by anyone but the scout ship.

Masterton asks the Travellers to attempt a rescue of this group. Asks, not orders. He acknowledges that the Travellers have taken risks already and have saved many lives. If they take their ship straight up they should be able to get above the threat zone and be safe enough. However there are 11 people, humans and Vargr, some of them children, jammed into a couple of ground vehicles struggling up a dirt road towards a promise of safety that the dictator himself has just withdrawn.

So, the Travellers are requested to help. They could fly to the refugees, pick them up and then take their ship out to sea and submerge it. The *Highndry* would

not make a great submarine – keeping water out is different to keeping air in – but it could happily function a few metres down, which would surely be enough to protect it from the eruption. What of the other group Masterton mentioned? He regretfully says they are beyond help. In such a small population, he is acquainted with many of the planet's residents and this pair are particularly stubborn. Indeed, their daughter, who is on the dictatorial staff, is just as bad. Point is, Masterton knows these people. He can tell the Travellers who they are and what they do. He can offer a pretty accurate prediction of their reaction to news of the eruption and their stubborn refusal to be worried or to run for it until it was too late.

What he cannot do is save them.

Masterton has to make a decision – 11 people or two, and the two probably cannot be saved anyway, not even with the *Highndry*. So he asks the Travellers to abandon them and pick up the larger group who are nearer the coast. The two have just lost the numbers game; it is really that simple.

However someone else has different ideas.

DECISIONS

The Travellers can see an ever-increasing flow of black smoke or ash-filled gas pouring from the mountainside. Their sensors show massive stress in the rock before going offline. It is time to run and decisions need to be made.

The relevant facts are:

- The Travellers could almost certainly get clear if they just decide to save themselves.
- Going after the large group is risky but there is a good chance they could do it and still beat the cloud.
- If the Travellers try to rescue the other group, they will be caught in the eruption for sure.

Before the Travellers can make up their minds, radar picks up an object coming in from the north, moving at well over 300 kilometres per hour. Its transponder indicates that it is a grav car with call sign Walston One – the dictator's own personal transport.

The limo is flying dangerously fast and somewhat erratically, right through the ash plume pouring from the mountain. It is probably flying more or less blind – grav cars do not have particularly great sensors as they rarely need to navigate under adverse conditions. The limo is broadcasting.

A breathless, growly voice – obviously a Vargr – is broadcasting on the emergency channel.

'Scout ship, get the big group. I'm going after my mother and father. I can get there before you can. Good luck.'

Masterton can confirm that his chauffeur was out picking up some refugees and has taken it into her head to try a rescue. Her chances are not good, to be realistic, but it is the sort of idiotic, stubborn, half-crazy stunt you would expect from... anyway, he says, it solves the dilemma. If the Travellers can pick up the refugees at Barvinn, there is a half-decent chance of saving everyone.

The Travellers still have to choose between definite safety and some risk in return for the chance to save lives. If they so choose, they can climb above the disaster zone or race out to sea and witness the final eruption from a safe distance.

If, on the other hand, they head for Barvinn they may find they get a closer view.

LAST TRAIN OUT OF BARVINN

Assuming the Travellers decide to undertake the rescue at Barvinn, they arrive to a pitiful scene. The settlement is very small, just three dwelling complexes and a rail platform where trains down the single line terminate.

There is also a concrete dock with a semi-underground warehouse and a small crane for unloading boats and submersibles. The area between the dock and the station is flat and concreted over to make transfer of cargoes (mainly fish) from dock to railroad car as easy as possible.

There are two civilian ground vehicles, typical 4x4 pickups as used on the local farms, parked on the concreted area. Several people are rushing around in a state of shock and panic. Some are pointing at a train which is disappearing northwards, some at a fishing submarine which is just visible out in the bay. Others are trying to break into a dwelling complex while still others are calling the rest back to the cars. These people are clearly desperate and have no idea what to do for the best.

When the *Highndry* appears, people begin to run towards it, waving, which of course will interfere with landing. The two cars on the concreted area are an additional obstacle, and landing without crushing them will be tricky (a Pilot check to avoid flattening a truck with the ship's landing gear would be appropriate). Just avoiding killing any of the people will be challenge enough.

Of course, while some of the refugees want to rush straight aboard the *Highndry*, others would prefer to indignantly pour out a tale of abandonment and broken promises to anyone who will listen. People under great stress are not always entirely rational.

Rounding up the refugees may prove tricky. Some want to grab things from the vehicles, others are sure that one of their children, relatives or dependents are missing. The Travellers may have to use leadership or persuasive skills, or else drag people bodily into the ship and keep them there. All this will take just a few minutes but it will seem like much longer.

As the Travellers are struggling to round up the refugees, bundling them aboard or making the decision to abandon them, the mountain finally goes. A vast cloud of superheated gas, ash and rock fragments is blasted clear, rolling out from Mount Salbarii at high speed. Chunks of rock and large boulders are flung into the air. It is really quite spectacular. Presumably there is a massive lava flow behind and beneath the cloud but it cannot be seen at this point.

The gas and rock-fragment cloud (correctly termed a pyroclastic flow) is moving at about 75 kilometres per hour and is roughly four to five minutes away. It is quite high, making a climb over the top a difficult proposition in the limited time the scout ship has before its arrival. Running ahead of the flow, out to sea, then submerging, is a better prospect.

If the Travellers pick either option, they will encounter only mild effects. The scout will be buffeted about by a high wind pushed ahead of the cloud, and the pilot will struggle to maintain control, but there is no serious danger to the ship. If the Travellers take to the water they will discover that the flow can travel a long way over sea and will turn the surface layer to steam but does not heat the water to any great degree more than about five metres down. It does deposit lumps of rock which sink and bang against the hull, creating a sensation similar to being depth-charged.

The *Highndry* will survive either of these options with a few new dents and scorch marks to go with the many it already has. However, the valiant Vargr chauffeur

and her parents will not. If the Travellers choose not to go to her aid, the limo is forced down on the shore and overwhelmed by the pyroclastic flow. There is no chance for anyone to survive such an event.

DISTRESS CALL

As the *Highndry* is lifting off from Barvinn, the Travellers pick up a distress call from the dictator's limo. The Vargr's voice is even more breathless and there is a roaring sound that suggests that the windshield or another window has been shattered. There is also a hideous whining sound in the background which sounds like tortured lift units – anyone who has worked with gravitic units can tell the limo is in serious trouble even without the distress call.

The content of the call is plaintive and desperate.

'Mayday... Mayday, this is Walston One. The car is damaged, drives are failing... windows are cracked, I can't see properly... I think I'm heading for the sea but we're losing speed and altitude. I don't think we're going to make it. Is there anyone? Please?'

The voice gets weaker and then cuts off entirely.

Radar shows the limo limping towards the coast, losing height fast. It is perhaps a minute or two ahead of the pyroclastic cloud emerging from the mountain, and actually outpacing it for now, but within moments it is going to be grounded. The limo's projected crash site is less than two minutes' flight time away but the cloud is going to be only a minute or two behind that.

If the Travellers ignore the distress call, a Vargr chauffeur they have never met and whose name they do not even know, and her parents, will burn to death and be entombed in ash but they and their shipload of refugees will survive.

If they go to the rescue, the pyroclastic cloud will engulf all of them for sure and there is no way of telling what will happen.

INTO THE CLOUD

If the *Highndry* heads for the projected crash site, the limo drops off radar but can be tracked by its transponder beacon. The sky is black with dust and falling ash, and it is very hard to see without electronic assistance. It takes a few moments to locate the downed limo, which is in a terrible state. Much of the damage was done before the crash, it would appear. Someone is firing flares from the emergency kit but the radio seems to be out.

As soon as the three Vargr spot the *Highndry* (which is not easy, given the circumstances) they begin stumbling towards it supporting one another. The chauffeur's comments about not being able to see properly are given a different context when any Traveller spots her face. She was hit in the face by fragments of the windshield when it shattered and blinded by blood coming from a great many small cuts.

The falling ash is now moving almost horizontally. Even in the thin air of Walston there is a considerable wind picking up, driven before a 75 kilometres per hour cloud of superheated steam and volcanic debris. The cloud will bury the *Highndry* easily if it is caught on the ground and the heat will overload its systems and broil the occupants alive. The only chance is to run for it.

However there is less than one minute to impact and no chance to outrun the cloud.

There are basically three options. The first is to climb as high as possible and try to get above the cloud. This will at least avoid the worst of the debris but there is no chance to get high enough to avoid being engulfed. The second option is to run for the sea and try to submerge. The cloud will catch the *Highndry* before it can enter the water, however.

The third option is the best but not by much. If the *Highndry* hits the cloud head-on, its aerodynamics might lessen the impact and at least it will have its strongest axis pointing at the threat.

At the very least, everyone should strap in or grab something.

The *Highndry*'s bunks and cabin seats are all fitted with straps and crash frames, so eight people can be secured in the cabins as well as those on bridge chairs and emergency crash seats in engineering. The rest will simply have to cling on to something and hope for the best.

Whatever the Travellers choose to do, they will be hit by the pyroclastic cloud and will have to deal with its effects. The base of the cloud is a layer of superheated steam. If the scout ship is above that (just a few metres) then the temperatures are not sufficient to damage the vessel. However, the shockwave hitting the *Highndry* will have severe effects.

Physical damage to the vessel itself will be minor but objects and people inside will be thrown around by the impact. Base damage for everyone inside is 3D at the initial impact, reduced by 1D if the ship is headed

directly into the cloud and by another 1D if the Traveller is properly strapped into a crash frame or seat. Those simply clinging to something must make a Very Difficult (12+) STR or DEX check to gain this reduction. Those who fail take full damage and in addition are dislodged from their hold on whatever it was, causing them to bounce around inside the ship for the next few moments.

As already noted, physical damage from the impact is not massive but the *Highndry* is flung upwards and out, away from the volcano and towards the open sea. Worse, the power plant and drive system are overloaded and cut out for a moment. This causes all the interior lights to go off, then come back on dimly as the emergency batteries cut in. Unfortunately these are not sufficient to power the lifters or the main drive, which is a shame because the *Highndry* is travelling in a ballistic arc without power and both tumbling and spinning to boot. Any moment, the ship will reach the top of its arc and begin to fall. It is unlikely that anyone will survive the crash when it hits the ocean.

SAVE THE SHIP!

The Travellers are inside an unpowered, tumbling, spinning death-trap that used to be a space vessel. They have been flung out of the pyroclastic cloud but will soon fall back through it into the ocean. People and objects are flying about inside the ship.

The Travellers will need to act fast to save the *Highndry*. Note that a scout/courier cannot glide; it has no control surfaces and while streamlined for passage through atmosphere it is not aerodynamic in terms of generating lift. With even just a little power it can be pointed in the right direction and made to fall controllably but it needs a powered drive to fly. That is the very thing it lacks.

There are two things that need to be done to make the scout ship controllable. The first is to reboot the control systems, which can be done from the bridge or engineering section. The second is to manually override the safety cut outs on the power plant and get power to the engines. The sooner both of these things are done, the sooner the pilot can begin trying to regain control of the ship.



There are three segments to the fall: Going Up, Going Down and Seconds to Impact. During each segment the pilot may attempt a Pilot check if they have both controls and power. The more successful checks they make, the less severe the effects suffered by the *Highndry* will be. If other crewmembers make their checks to supply power and control in a given round, the pilot can immediately attempt to gain control of the ship.

To reboot the control systems: Average (8+) Electronics (computers) check or Difficult (10+) Pilot check.

This can be done from engineering or any bridge console. If the pilot completes this task, they may still attempt their Pilot check to save the ship.

To get the power plant out of emergency shutdown mode: Average (8+) Engineer (power) check.

This must be done from engineering and requires physical access to the power systems, i.e. the Traveller will have to leave their seat and more or less cling to the power plant as they work.

Both of these tasks must be completed before the pilot can attempt to stabilise the ship. The pilot can make their check to regain control in the same round that the other two tasks are completed. This may mean waiting for another task to be completed; it is equally possible that the crew will get everything working in the first few seconds after the ship begins to tumble.

First Successful Pilot Check: The ship is stabilised and is at least falling predictably.

Second Successful Pilot Check: The ship is under power and begins to respond to the helm.

Third Successful Pilot Check: The ship is under full control and can avoid crashing.

Note that it is not necessary to roll damage and checks for every one of the refugees during these scenes. They make a lot of noise, pass out, vomit, shout for help, scream in terror or pain and occasionally do something stupid like trying to get out of a crash frame in order to run around in a panic. The Referee should use them as scenery to add to the drama and possible tragedy of the situation.

GOING UP

The *Highndry* is nearing the apex of its crazy tumble through the sky. It is spinning wildly during this segment and all attempts at checks are made at DM-2 unless the Traveller is secured in some way.

Anyone who is not strapped into a crash frame or a seat is liable to be flung about and hurt. Travellers simply clinging on to something and trying to avoid being hurt may make an Average (8+) DEX check to remain stable and not allow themselves to be bashed against the fittings.

Failure results in 2D damage. A Traveller clinging to something can grab someone else, requiring a STR check and save them from damage. These checks are not penalised for the tumbling of the ship since the Traveller is secured to something, even if it is merely by their fingernails.

A Traveller who is held by another in this manner will not be hurt and can attempt to use their skills without penalty for the ship's movement. Teamwork of this sort represents the best chance for success. Other Travellers may find themselves trying to catch refugee children who have come loose from their seat straps or struggling to hold an unconscious friend against a bulkhead and prevent further injury.

GOING DOWN

The *Highndry* begins to fall and stabilise somewhat. This is nothing to do with being under control; the vessel will tend to stop tumbling on its long axis due to its shape. It goes into a flat spin, which is not much of an improvement in the grand scheme of things. Anyone not strapped in or otherwise secured makes checks at DM-1 and suffers 1D damage from being bounced around.

SECONDS TO IMPACT

Literally seconds before impact, the ship's automatic systems will bring the controls back online and remove all the safety cut outs from the power plant. The ship's avionics have detected that a collision is imminent and disregarded all other considerations in order to allow the crew a chance to save the *Highndry*. Damage to the drives or even an explosion is no worse a fate than hitting a planet at speed.

However, the *Highndry* is still in a flat spin. Auto-stabilisation systems make a single, two-second attempt to right the ship and correct the spin and then shut down in a cacophony of overload alarms and wisps of smoke from the control systems. The pilot gets one attempt (with no penalties for the spin) to get the ship at least partially under control.

If power and control systems were already back online, the pilot simply needs an Average (8+) Pilot check to get the ship properly under control. Anyone bouncing around unrestrained in this segment suffers 1D damage.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

What happens next depends upon how many Pilot checks succeeded. Three attempts were possible, assuming that control and power were restored in the first segment.

If the pilot made all three, the *Highndry* pulls out of the spin and lifts its nose, accelerating out of the dive over the sea and climbing unsteadily to a safe altitude. There is a fair amount of minor damage to internal components, people have been violently sick and the ship is a bit worse for wear but the ordeal is over.

If less than three Pilot checks succeeded, things do not go so well.

TWO SUCCESSFUL CHECKS

The *Highndry*'s spin is stabilised and it is answering the helm but this is a little too late. It hits the surface of the ocean at the bottom of a shallow but high-speed dive, skipping on the surface before pulling up and climbing into the air in a triumphant spray of steam and minor debris. Everyone aboard takes 2D damage if loose, 1D if held or clinging to something, and no damage if strapped into a crash frame or seat.

ONE SUCCESSFUL CHECK

The *Highndry* is sort of under control, mostly, when she hits the water surface in a steep dive. It arrows deep into the bay and embeds its nose in the silt at the bottom, coming to rest stuck in the seabed a dozen metres down. Its hot hull boils water around it and hull plate groans under the stress of rapid cooling. Alarms are ringing and there is water getting in somewhere. Then the lights go out.

The initial impact causes 3D damage to anyone bouncing around loose, 2D to those secured by others or clinging to something and 1D to anyone strapped into a proper seat or crash frame. It is up to the Referee to decide how much to make of being stuck in the seabed. The simple option is for the crew to be able to restore power in a few minutes and to allow the ship to pull herself free. More sadistic Referees (our favourite kind) can create a whole mini-disaster movie out of this situation.

Really evil Referees might like to note that the *Highndry* is nose down and leaking slightly. The ship's bridge and avionics are at the front. The effects of seawater on the ship's electronics are up to the Referee (it probably will not be good) but it could be interesting trying to operate controls in a vacc suit while underwater in a flooded bridge. There is an emergency helm station in engineering, which solves this problem in less dramatic fashion.

Sooner or later, it should be possible to get the *Highndry* free using its lifters and return to the surface. Getting the water out might be an interesting challenge.

NO SUCCESSFUL CHECKS

If the crew were not successful in self-rescuing, all is not (quite) lost. As noted above the ship's automations make a valiant if unsuccessful attempt to restore control.

The result is a massive belly-flop onto the ocean surface, causing 6D damage to everyone aboard. This is reduced to 4D for anyone properly braced or held and 2D for anyone in a proper crash frame or seat. The *Highndry* is badly damaged by the impact and plunges beneath the water.

The *Highndry* bobs back to the surface in a huge cloud of steam, then begins to take on water from buckled hull plates. The drive is smashed up and power is offline. There is nothing that can be done to stop the *Highndry* from sinking. It might be salvageable from the seabed at some point in the future but for now the priority is to abandon ship and take to the life rafts.

Fortunately, there are some. All shipboard survival kits carry one. A raft can squeeze six people in and there are two of them. Any extra personnel can cling on and hope a rescue boat arrives before the local wildlife does. Animal attacks while in the water are at the Referee's discretion. There are a couple of creatures that might try to attack a weakened human but this needs to be finely judged – it may be that the Travellers have suffered enough already. For those who need one more challenge, the problem of fighting off a sea creature with only what they can grab from the survival kit might be interesting.

The most likely assailant is an opportunistic Alderson's coastal hunter. The brakarr, a far more dangerous creature, is not commonly encountered in shallow water.

AFTER THE DUST SETTLES

The Travellers will eventually make their way to the shore somehow or be rescued. When they do so, they will gradually find out the full extent of the situation. The Referee must determine how many people were killed or injured but it is entirely possible that (assuming everyone aboard the scout ship survived) there were no fatal casualties. Even if there were deaths, it is obvious to everyone that the Travellers are the heroes of the day. Whether by direct action or by bringing a warning in time they have saved dozens of lives among the small population of Walston.

Although the town of Salbarii may have to be abandoned in the long term, at present it looks like this may not be necessary. The volcano is 20 kilometres away and the centre of the eruption zone is pointed away from the town. Lava is likely to flow south and west, down to the sea rather than northwards to Salbarii. Ash and dust is blowing across the island but the prevailing wind is taking it mainly out into the ocean. The eruption itself is winding down now that the pressure has been released but it seems likely that the mountain will remain active and if so, living so close is not really desirable.

However, in the short term there is an atmosphere of celebration among the people of Walston. They have survived a disaster in better shape than might have been expected and have a few new heroes to adulat. The Travellers will find themselves invited to a number of parties all over Settlement Island and a reception at the dictator's palace. In the meantime the resources of Walston's tiny starport will be brought to bear on making the scout ship flyable, assuming it survived at all. Things quickly wind down however and the party atmosphere fades to be replaced with the more usual comfortable ordinariness of life on Walston. Note that with such a small population and limited resources, everything Walston has is going to be absorbed by dealing with the new problems faced by the town of Salbarii. There simply is not the cash available to shower the Travellers with gifts. The locals will make sure that the scout ship is well stocked with home-baked goods and the Travellers will probably acquire any number of home-knitted sweaters but there will be no big buckets of cash for them.

If the Travellers return to Walston in the future, they may become involved in further events spurred by the newly active volcano or an attempt to relocate people from the town of Salbarii. People from the Salbarii end of the island will always have great respect and friendship for the Travellers, although those from further away will probably wonder what all the fuss is about. They may even view the Travellers with suspicion, as if it were their fault the humdrum complacency of life on Walston was shattered by an exploding mountain.

DEPARTING WALSTON

Sooner or later the time comes to depart Walston. If the *Highndry* is flyable, it has to be delivered to Flammariion. If not, the Travellers will have to report its loss to the owners and the insurers. They may have to face some searching questions about the risks they took but given the state of the ship, thanks to the previous crew, they have a ready scapegoat to deflect any serious criticism of their actions – they can simply blame a breakdown caused by lack of maintenance.

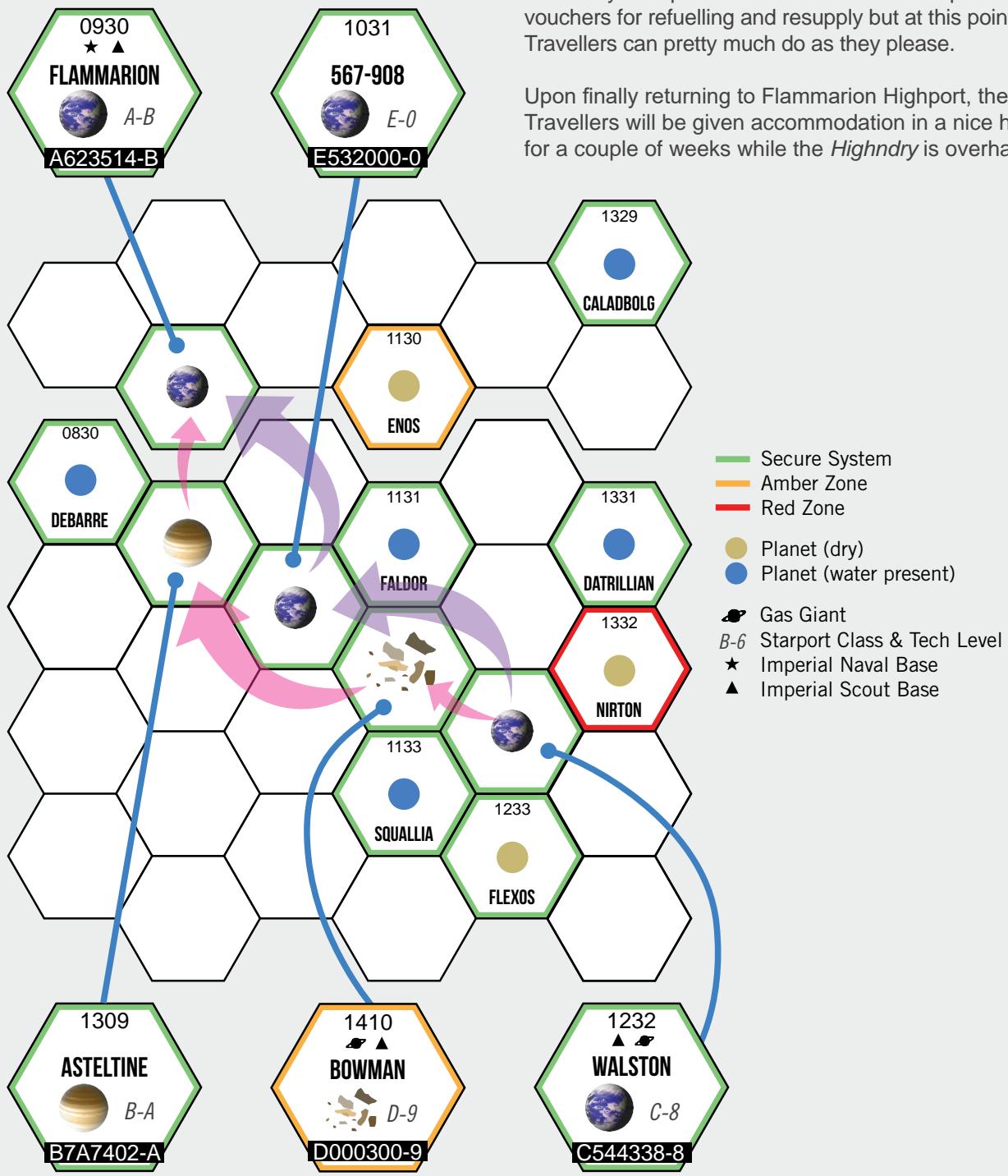
Either way, it is time to go. There may even be a crowd of well-wishers to see the Travellers off when they depart. The *Highndry* climbs to orbit, leaving behind Settlement Island and the vast plume of ash trailing from the volcano towards the mainland. The world of Walston shrinks in the distance, and finally it is time to jump.

The Travellers have vouchers for refuelling and life support resupply at Bowman, so that is their likely destination. In the meantime they will have a week in jump to reflect on their adventures, gorge on baked goods and try to decide whose sweater is the most garish... as heroes do.

EPILOGUE: FLAMMARION

SWORD WORLDS SUBSECTOR

DISTRICT 268 SUBSECTOR

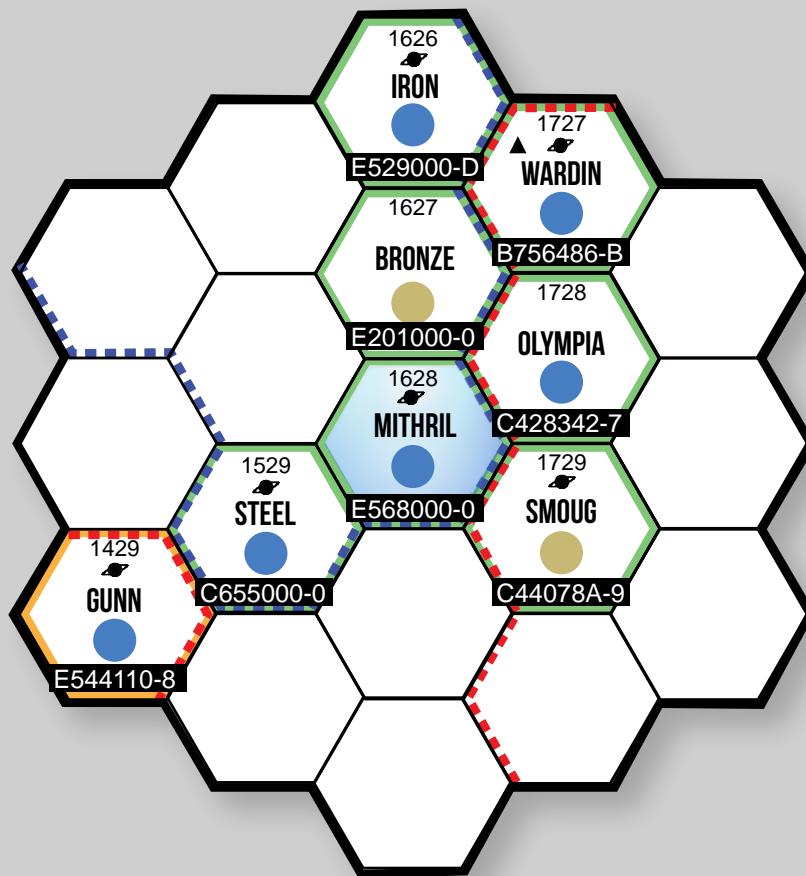


MARCHES ADVENTURE 2

Mission to Mithril

This adventure takes place on the world of Mithril, a cold, low-population frontier world. The Travellers land at Mithril's rudimentary starport, only to find their vessel disabled and the base strangely empty. As the Travellers explore, they discover there may be survivors of whatever happened at the port. A distant distress beacon is detected but reaching it requires an overland trek. Having located the survivors, the Travellers discover their problems are only just beginning...

Mission to Mithril is in part homage to the Classic *Traveller* adventure, *Mission on Mithril*, and in part a sequel. Any group of Travellers will be suitable for this adventure, although outdoors skills such as Recon and Survival will be highly useful, as will the ability to drive an ATV and fight.



INTRODUCTION

This adventure takes place on the world of Mithril, in Sword Worlds subsector of the Spinward Marches. It could be transplanted elsewhere without undue difficulty, with Mithril replaced by any cold, low-population frontier world. The mission requires the use of a starship to reach Mithril but once there the Travellers will require only ground transportation.

Mission to Mithril is in part homage to the Classic Traveller adventure, *Mission on Mithril*, and in some ways a sequel. No previous knowledge of that adventure is required. Almost any group of Travellers will be suitable for this adventure, although outdoors skills such as Recon and Survival will be highly useful, as will the ability to drive an ATV and fight.

In *Mission on Mithril*, the Travellers land at Mithril's rudimentary starport, only to find their vessel disabled. The base is strangely empty. As the Travellers explore, they discover there may be survivors of whatever

happened at the port. A distant distress beacon is detected but reaching it requires an overland trek. Having located the survivors, the Travellers discover their problems are only just beginning...

SETTING UP AND RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The Travellers require a reason to go to Mithril. More than likely, the Travellers will be making a routine stopover on the way to somewhere more interesting. The reason for the visit is not relevant to the adventure, so the Referee has plenty of options if this adventure is being inserted into an ongoing campaign. If the Referee desires, the Travellers might be given a cargo to deliver to somewhere that requires passing through Mithril. All that is necessary is for the Travellers to approach what passes for a starport on Mithril, at which point the events of the adventure will begin to unfold.



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.

SWORD WORLDS SUBSECTOR

This subsector is dominated by the Sword Worlds Confederation, with only a handful of worlds not belonging to the Confederation. These are Imperial possessions, some separated from Imperial territory by Confederation systems. The generally anti-Imperial stance of the Confederation, along with its rather vigorous internal politics, creates an uneasy border region.

Four systems (Iron, Bronze, Mithril and Steel) are claimed by the Sword Worlds Confederation as 'reserve worlds' but are not members of the Confederation as they have no indigenous population. Largely undeveloped and unexplored, the reserve worlds have a token Sword Worlder presence and are occasionally patrolled by naval vessels. Attitudes to Imperial starships, which sometimes pass through from Lunion subsector to District 268 or Five Sisters, vary considerably depending on which factions are in power within the Sword Worlds. Polite hostility is not uncommon and it is rare that Imperial visitors feel welcome on any Confederation world.

However, despite being on opposite sides in the occasional war, the Sword Worlds and Imperium are not enemies. Tension is normal, incidents not uncommon, but for the most part conflict is restricted to harassment of merchant vessels and a general policy of making outsiders feel unwelcome. As a result, there is little Imperial traffic into or through the Sword Worlds subsector, apart from a few shipping companies who have the right contacts on both sides of the border. Some merchant factors (in both the Sword Worlds Confederation and Imperium) are actively on

the lookout for crews willing to undertake trans-border work. In reality it is not risky but many captains consider any possibility of harassment to be too much.

The Sword Worlds Confederation itself is a very loose organisation, with its member worlds frequently at odds (and sometimes even at war) with one another. Naval and military assets encountered, especially around the reserve worlds, tend to be in service to the Confederation as a whole rather than any of its member states but even so they are on loan from one of those states and thus as embroiled in its politics as anyone else. It is not always possible to predict exactly what the attitude of a given ship captain or port director might be.

MITHRIL

Mithril is a cold but habitable world orbiting an F4 V star along with six terrestrial (rocky) planets and one gas giant. No other bodies in the system are known to be inhabited and Mithril itself has no official population although it does have a small Sword Worlds Confederation outpost maintained mainly to assert territorial rights.

Mithril's surface is largely covered with ice. Its extensive oceans are frozen at the poles, with large ice caps and have other areas which are at most semi-liquid. Nearer the equator the water is a little above freezing but icebergs are not uncommon in any region. Similarly, much of the land is also covered in deep snow or ice.

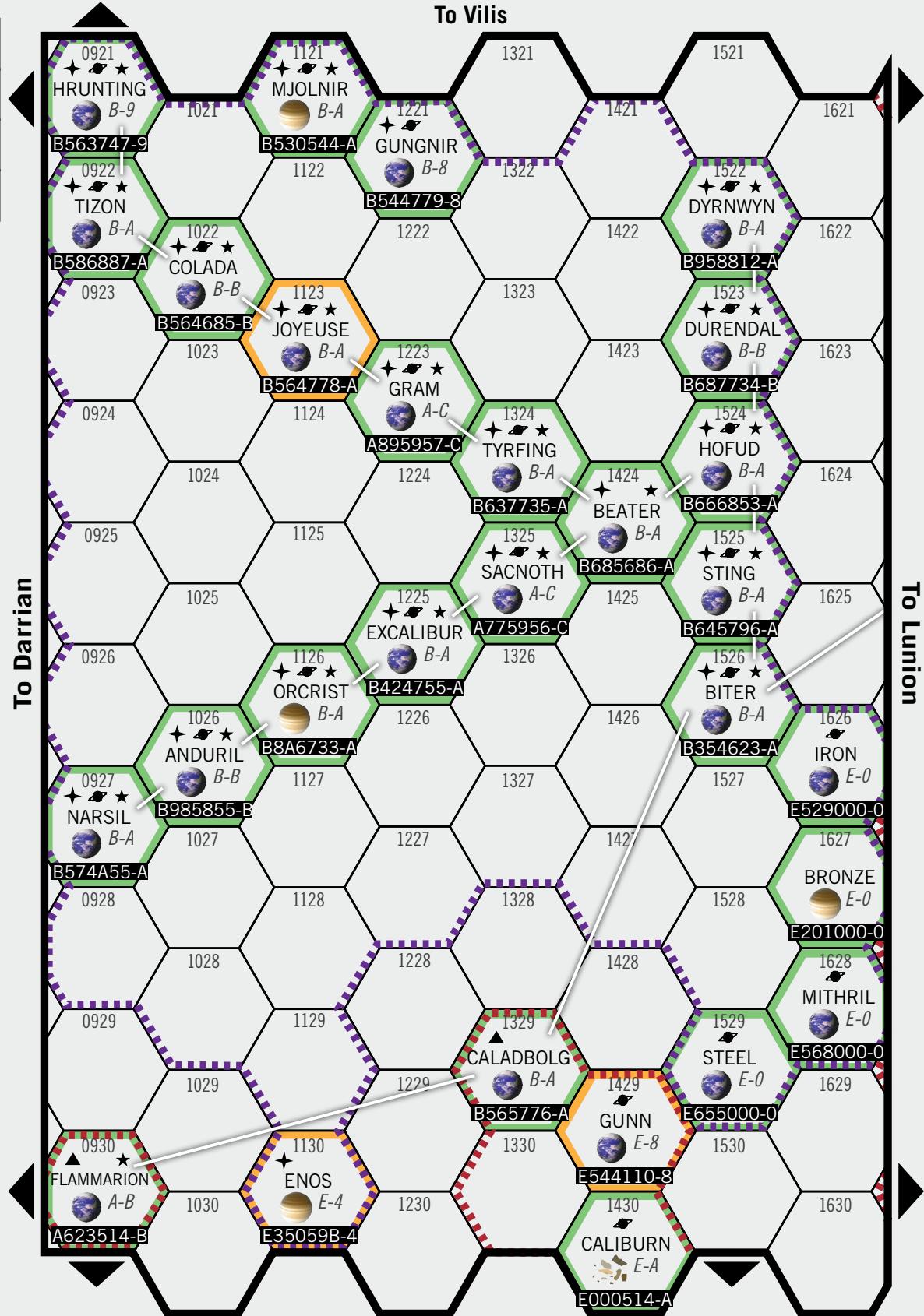
Travellers tend to evolve shorthand that conveys necessary information. Often vague, generally unscientific and sometimes quite insulting, many of these terms have nonetheless found their way into common speech and whilst planetologists may cringe at the terms, Travellers find them useful. The terrain of Mithril is generally subdivided into four unofficial types.

Arctic Zones: Some areas of Mithril are permanently under arctic conditions. Their seas support a variety of plant life, fish, crustaceans and the like, with a few land-dwelling species, but for the most part the extensive arctic zones of Mithril have very little life on land.

Ice Zones: Ice zones are subject to thick ice, covering land or sea. Occasionally, conditions warm up sufficiently that the ice breaks up creating crevasses, icebergs and other

SWORD WORLDS SUBSECTOR

SPINWARD MARCHES



hazards but ice zones are very rarely clear of ice – and never for long. Some ice zones are extensive; others, such as glaciers, are relatively small. Ice zones tend to have more life on land than arctic zones, due to the availability of food under the ice or in more hospitable nearby regions.

Snow Zones: Snow zones are warm enough that plants can grow, at least for short periods. Snowfall is frequent and snow can lie deeply at times. The ground may be frozen much of the time, although there are sheltered areas that remain above freezing more or less permanently. Thick ice can be encountered in a snow zone but it is not the primary terrain.

Rock Zone: Mountains, badlands and areas where there are significant amounts of bare rock are imaginatively known as rock zones. Temperature conditions can vary, which will determine whether there is much life present. Many rocky areas have a considerable amount of plant life, especially on the sheltered sides of mountains or in gaps between large boulders.

THE SWORD WORLDER OUTPOST

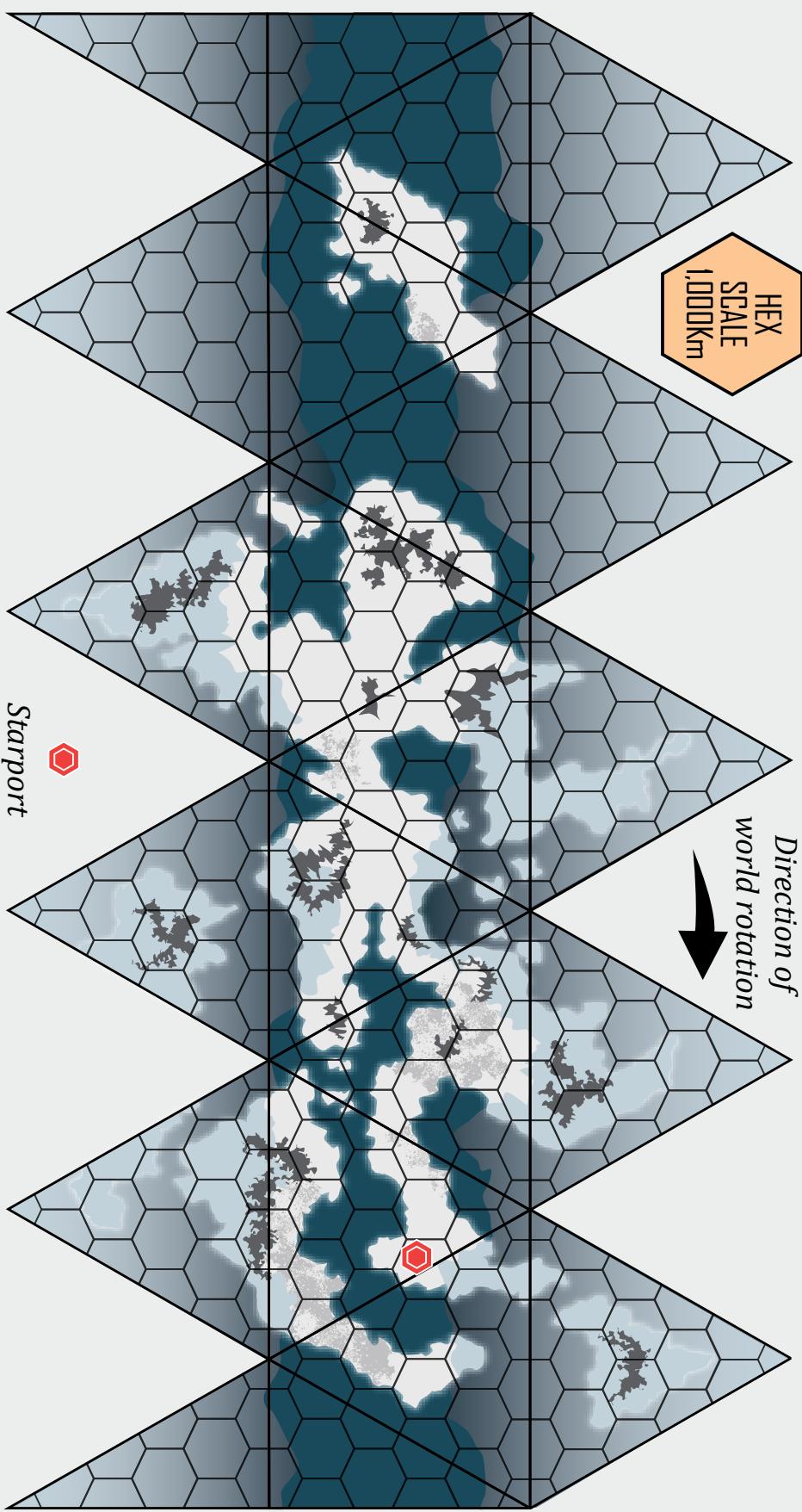
Mithril is officially designated as possessing a Class E starport – little more than a marked landing area. This is accurate but the presence of the outpost provides visiting starships with minimal services if the staff are friendly to them. Sword Worlder vessels are usually welcome, as well as some independent trade ships that pass through from time-to-time. Imperial-registered ships are generally directed to the system's gas giant for refuelling or granted grudging permission to land and take on water and ice, to be internally converted to fuel. These vessels are then pointedly ignored.

Some Imperial ships receive a warmer welcome at Mithril, usually due to previously-established good relations or possession of a transponder code that indicates a friendly vessel. There is little trade to be had at Mithril; at least, not in the volumes that keep a starship flying. However, the outpost staff will buy small luxuries and items, so there is sometimes a little money to be made.

Name	Location	Bases	Profile	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Gas Giants
Anduril	1026	M N	B985855-B	Ri		G
Beater	1424	M N	B685686-A	Ag, Ni, Ga, Ri		G
Biter	1526	M N	B354623-A	Ag, Ni		G
Bronze	1627		E201000-0	Ba, Ie, Va		
Caladbolg	1329	S	B565776-A	Ag, Ri		
Caliburn	1430		E000514-A	As, Ni, Va		
Colada	1022	M N	B564685-B	Ag, Ni, Ri		G
Durendal	1523	M N	B687734-B	Ag, Ga, Ri		G
Dyrnwyn	1522	M N	B958812-A			G
Enos	1130	M	E35059B-4	De, Ni, Po	A	
Excalibur	1225	M N	B424755-A			G
Flammarion	930	N WS	A623514-B	Po, Ni		
Gram	1223	M N	A895957-C	Hi, In		G
Gungnir	1221	M	B544779-8	Ag		G
Gunn	1429		E544110-8	Lo	A	G
Hofud	1524	M N	B666853-A	Ga, Ri		G
Hrunting	921	M N	B563747-9	Ri		G
Iron	1626		E529000-0	Ba		G
Joyeuse	1123	M N	B564778-A	Ag, Ri	A	G
Mithril	1628		E568000-0	Ba		G
Mjolnir	1121	M N	B530544-A	De, Ni, Po		G
Narsil	927	M N	B574A55-A	Hi, In		G
Orcrist	1126	M N	B8A6733-A			G
Sacnoth	1325	M N	A775956-C	Hi, In		G
Steel	1529		E655000-0	Ba, Ga		G
Sting	1525	M N	B645796-A	Ag		
Tizon	922	M N	B586887-A	Ri		G
Tyrfing	1324	M N	B637735-A	Ie		G

MITHRIL

UWP: E568000-0



The outpost consists of an administration building, reactor shed, accommodation block and vehicle garage. It can house up to 12 people with ease but normally has a staff of five. They are bored most of the time, with little more to do than to bulldoze snow off the landing area in the ATV and monitor automated equipment on the off-chance a vessel comes through. The staff have secondary duties connected with weather monitoring and collecting data on Mithril's soil, water, air and wildlife. This is mostly scientific make-work, creating a body of knowledge that might some day be useful to settlers or colony planners but is of little importance today.

The outpost is not a military base, although the personnel assigned there are armed and trained to handle their weapons. The installation is sovereign Sword Worlds Confederation territory (as is the whole planet) and an attack upon it would be an act of war. One reason for the refusal to accept many ships is that the outpost is simply not in a position to conduct much business with outsiders, especially badly behaved ones. It is simpler to shut the doors than enforce any sort of law and order, and less disruptive of routine.

Occasionally the outpost plays host to people not assigned there, usually a party of scientists or explorers engaged in work connected with the eventual colonisation of Mithril. It is very rare for two such groups to be on-planet at the same time, so the spare capacity of the accommodation block usually suffices. At present, the installation is hosting a family of four visitors. The parents are explorers and their children are assisting them. This party conducted a range of weather and soil experiments at the port during the first few weeks of their stay and recently headed into a remote part of the planet to investigate points of interest.

THE INCIDENT

There is, or rather was, another guest at the port. This individual came on a ship out of the Imperium and quietly disembarked, remaining unofficially at the port to await a ship to any port deeper in the Confederation. He did not tell the port staff his business and they did not ask as he was carrying the identification of a diplomatic courier. The fact that a courier was crossing the border quietly suggested skulduggery was afoot but the port staff had seen this sort of thing before and were not concerned.

Perhaps they should have been. The courier was indeed what they suspected; an intelligence officer bringing back reports and observations from his time in the Imperium. There was nothing illegal about any of this, not as such. Discreet observation of conditions along the border are

part of the constant intelligence and counter-intelligence game played by the Imperium and its neighbours. Part of the game is not letting the opposition know what has been reported and what has not, so information is often carried by personnel crossing the border 'on the quiet'.

The courier was carrying reports on the movement of Imperial commercial and naval assets among the worlds of the Lunion Shield; the strategically critical star systems just across the border. Knowing whether the Imperium is in a position to defend its assets in that region, and what assets are present, is vital to the Sword Worlders' strategic planning. The Imperials do the same thing to the Confederation, after all.

The Imperial authorities did not know about this courier and would not have cared much if they had. Disrupting information flow to the opposition is always worthwhile but there was nothing going on worth taking risks over. However, not everyone thought so. Ironically, it was not the Imperial authorities that detected the information transfer but a consortium of merchants engaged in shady trans-border shipping. Worried that their activities might be brought to light, they decided to intercept the courier.

The first attempt failed but caused the courier to miss his pickup by a routine resupply ship coming through Mithril. Arriving after it left and forced to wait for the next ship, he was still present when an independent far trader – the *E-a-taka Wasab*, registered out of Tarsus in District 268. Despite being named in the language of the Bwaps, *E-a-taka Wasab* was crewed by humans. She was not known at the port, so was brusquely directed to stick a hose in the snow for fuel and subsequently ignored.

E-a-taka Wasab refuelled then blasted the front doors off the accommodation block with a low-powered shot from her laser turret. Armed personnel stormed the installation, catching the three Sword Worlders and courier who were present by surprise; the Sword Worlders put up a creditable fight but were quickly overwhelmed and shown no mercy. The wounded courier was taken aboard the ship along with his data and notes, and *E-a-taka Wasab* took off.

One of the Sword Worlders at the installation had a background in military electronics and had been working on a personal project to alleviate the boredom of her posting. This was an electromagnetic pulse device designed specifically to disrupt gravitic lifters of the sort used by vehicles and starships. She managed to arm the device before she was killed but its setup sequence was incomplete when *E-a-taka Wasab* left Mithril. The device is now armed and charged, with no-one to turn it off. It will be triggered by the first set of gravitic lifters that pass over the landing field; i.e. the next starship that touches down.

THE SURVIVORS

Two of the base personnel were out in the field at the time of the attack, assigned to assist the family of scientists currently on-planet. This mostly meant flying them around in the installation's air/raft or making supply runs back to the port. They were far enough away when the attack occurred that they were not detected and upon hearing a distress call from the port, they attempted to rush back to help. This went awry in two ways.

The family were opposed to being abandoned in the field and argued vigorously against the idea, to the point where the father came to blows with one of the base personnel. In the resulting chaos, he made a serious piloting error and ran the air/raft into a rocky outcrop on takeoff. Believing it still flyable, the two Sword Worlders raced homewards to help their comrades, only to come down hard in a region of rocky hills. They are still alive, although injured.

The family are also still alive, although they are stuck in the far outback of a world whose human population was more or less halved by gunshots at the port. They are resourceful people, and trying to survive as best they can, but there is a limit to how long they will manage in the harsh conditions of Mithril.

IMPERIAL ATTITUDES TO SWORD WORLDERS

The attitude of many Imperial citizens to the Sword Worlders is one of unintentional prejudice. This is fed by entertainment shows that keep re-using various rather inaccurate tropes when they portray the Sword Worlders. As a result, many Imperials expect Sword Worlders to behave like sexist cartoon Vikings, in some cases down to the horned helmets and mead-filled drinking horns.

In reality, the Sword Worlders are proud of and heavily influenced by the spiritual roots of their culture, which is based on the values of archaic North Europeans and particularly Icelandic culture. Resourcefulness, independence and personal integrity are highly valued and there are stronger concepts of male and female roles than in most other starfaring societies (the Aslan are a notable and far more extreme example). Sword Worlder culture holds that males and females are disposed towards different strengths and this natural order of things creates a strong partnership that should not be lightly ignored.

Put simply, to the average Sword Worlder it is obvious that men should undertake most tasks that take place outside the home and that women should run the household. Since the men must live in that household, there are various opinions about who actually wields the power in Sword Worlder society. The typical Sword Worlder finds it questionable that men from other cultures do not take 'proper care' of their women, and try to force them into roles unnatural for them. The more egalitarian Imperials see this viewpoint as archaic, chauvinistic and rather silly.

Sword Worlders do not see themselves as sexist and resent the label. They feel that each person has a natural role that plays to their strengths, as determined by gender, and that this is not sexist; it is merely common sense. Many Imperials think this means women are second-class citizens in Sword Worlder society and are surprised to see strong women working alongside men in many fields.

The other common expectation is partially true. Sword Worlders do tend to have an accent, even when speaking Anglic, and are prone to use traditional figures of speech which supposedly come from ancient Icelandic or Norse sayings. However, it is far more common for a Sword Worlder to refer to a starship as a starship than a 'mighty star-steed', although some play to that stereotype just for the fun of it.

Some stereotypes are true, at least to a degree. Sword Worlders are, on the whole, proud and independent. They enjoy competition and relish the respect of those they feel are worthy of their own. Complaining all the time, being incompetent or cowardly are seen as personality defects as well as weaknesses but stupid recklessness is also poorly regarded. Sword Worlders are mistrustful of over-complexity in devices or plans, preferring straightforward solutions.

Ease of use is more important than advanced functionality, causing many Sword Worlders to dismiss fragile and complex devices as unreliable – and have little respect for those who rely upon them. This attitude can be summed up as 'grav vehicles beat walking but the passenger who doesn't bring along their boots is a fool.'

Overall, most Imperials first discover the Sword Worlders are a lot more like them than they imagined, then over time realise that there are indeed some great differences between Sword World and Imperium culture. A common reaction to first encounters with Sword Worlders is 'I was surprised to find they're just like us... then I found out they're not. But not in the ways you'd expect.'

OVERVIEW

Mission to Mithril has three main components; an investigation of the deserted starport, an arduous overland trek to the site of a distress beacon and the return to the starport. The adventure is very much about the interaction of the Travellers with the world around them; they must undertake an overland journey and this is one case where the journey is more important than arrival. Along the way, the Travellers must solve a variety of problems, few of which can be dealt with by bribery or gunplay. For much of the adventure, there is no-one outside the Travellers' group to interact with.

The Referee has a chance to show the Travellers the wonders of an alien world – and some of its dangers. It could be possible to reduce the journey to a series of checks but this would miss many of the opportunities for adventure along the way. The Travellers have a destination to reach, and may be impatient to do so, but there is a world to be experienced. The obstacles are not delays to be shoved aside with the right check; they are the adventure.

Eventually the Travellers will reach the beacon and find out at least some of what happened at the starport. They will also discover that critical components they need to fix their starship are available but must be found by locating a crashed air/raft. This leads the Travellers to the second group of survivors, after which they will need to return to the starport. The journey back will be slightly different to the outward trip as it involves interactions with the survivors, which may not all be amicable.

Travellers being what they are, it is likely that the Referee will be presented with all manner of unexpected incidents and self-inflicted setbacks. The main opposition to the Travellers is a harsh world where stupidity or bad luck can be fatal. On the other hand, these conditions have led to some unique local plants, creatures and phenomena which might spark the Travellers' interest and it might be that finding out more about Mithril becomes a priority for the Travellers. The Referee should not fall into the trap of letting the Travellers dash from one encounter or plot point to the next in the manner of a flow chart. Instead, the Referee should show the Travellers the world they are on and let them experience it up close and personal.



CONDITIONS ON MITHRIL

Mithril is not a friendly or welcoming world, although it is nothing like as hostile as the typical airless rockball or toxic-atmosphere moon. To survive on Mithril, humans need heat and food, neither of which the world supplies in any great quantity but they have air and water provided for them. There are far worse places to be marooned.

The equatorial area of Mithril, where the starport is located, is mostly a snow zone, with large areas of rock zones and some ice zones, mostly in the form of glaciers. There is also a fair amount of open sea, most of which is clear of pack ice. Large icebergs can still be encountered there, however.

Conditions in the equatorial area can be harsh but nowhere near as bad as elsewhere. The temperature sometimes goes above freezing for several days at a time, which results in an explosion of plant growth. Animals usually emerge soon afterward, cramming what might normally be months' or years' worth of activity into a few short days.

Rainfall is rare in the equatorial area, although sleet is almost as common as snow. Hailstorms are not infrequent and occasionally the region will be swept by tremendous storms characterised by huge hailstones and repeated lightning strikes. A Traveller equipped with good cold weather clothing can operate outdoors for an extended period with only mild discomfort, providing somewhere warm and dry is available, with plenty of food.

The plant and animal life of Mithril is at best unpleasant to eat and can make some Travellers mildly unwell. There is little nutrition to be gained from plant life, even when processed into ration bars or porridge by a survival still. Animals and fish provide a little more sustenance, if carefully prepared or processed, but overall a human cannot survive for long by hunting or foraging, even in an area with relatively abundant life.

WEATHER

Weather in the equatorial area is moderate compared to the arctic zones, where freezing windstorms can blow for weeks on end. Extremes of weather – storms at one end and warm conditions at the other – are uncommon, with most days cloudy and sleet or snow falling at intervals throughout the day. A weather category is used to indicate the prevailing conditions on any given day.

Warm: The temperature is well above freezing, around 4–8°C. Rarely, a hot spell takes the temperature above 10°C but this is short-lived and only occurs once every couple of years. During a warm period, there will be some melting of thinner ice but these conditions rarely last long enough to affect thick pack ice. During a warm spell, the phenomenon of the Ephemeral Glade (see page 69) is likely to take place. Warm days are quite overcast, and may see some rain or sleet.

Cool: Cool conditions would be considered cold on most planets but for Mithril any day above freezing is a good one. On a cool day, the temperature typically hovers around 0–4°C. An Ephemeral Glade is possible in areas with thin snow cover and snowfall or hail is also likely but intermittent.

Cold: The average temperature in Mithril's equatorial zone is around -10°C. A cold day sees temperatures around this average, ranging a few degrees either side. Snowfall or hail is common, and can last for several hours.

Very Cold: Very cold for Mithril means temperatures in the -20°C to -40°C range, averaging around -30°C. This is too cold for much snowfall unless a storm blows it into the area.

Extremely Cold: Extremely cold refers to temperatures of -50°C and below. These conditions are uncommon in the equatorial area but near-constant in arctic regions. Snowfall is unlikely unless a storm moves it but strong winds are common and can carry small ice particles which are deposited on any surface they strike.

STORMS AND PRECIPITATION

Storms can occur in any temperature conditions. To determine the possibility of a storm, the Referee should roll 2D, adding DM+1 for every day since the last major storm. A result of 7+ indicates there is significant precipitation that day (rain in a warm period, sleet or hail if cool, snow or hail if colder conditions prevail). A result of 13+ indicates a serious storm.

A storm will last 2D hours and is characterised by strong gusty winds that blow snow into deep drifts, driving hail or snow, and heavy precipitation that reduces visibility to almost nothing. Driving in these conditions is inadvisable – an ATV can be blown sideways on ice and might even be tipped over by an extreme gust. Moving around outside on foot is also highly dangerous. There is a one in six chance that the storm will be accompanied by spectacular lightning.

To determine the weather conditions each day, the Referee should throw 2D and consult the Weather Conditions table.

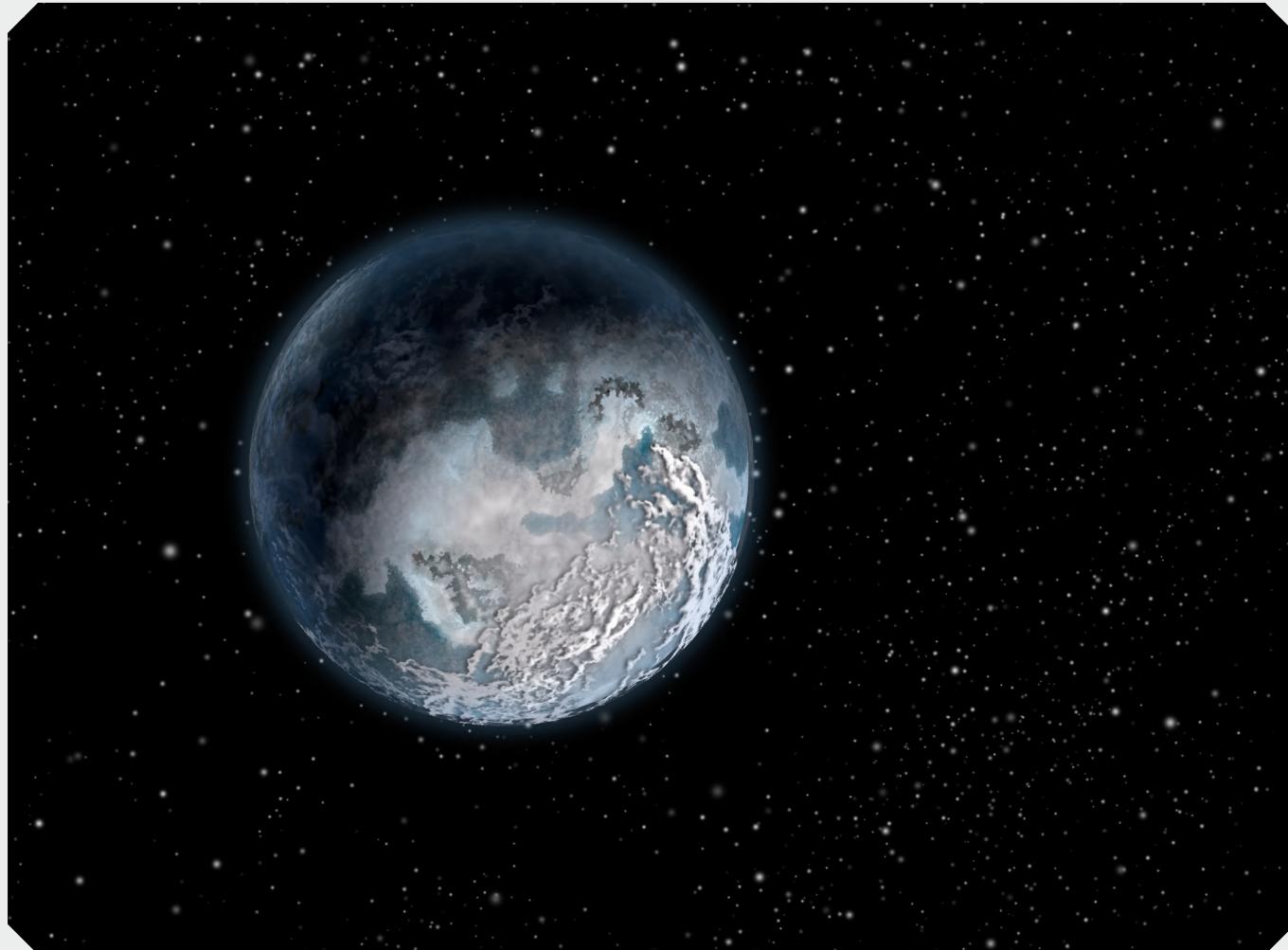
Weather Conditions

2D	Result
2 or less	Extremely Cold
3–5	Very Cold
6–9	Cold
10–11	Cool
12+	Warm

Apply the following DMs:

Snow Zone:	Ignore all other DMs
Ice Zone:	-2
Arctic Zone:	-4
Storm Occurred Yesterday:	-4

It is possible for the temperature to suddenly rise by more than one category. This is accompanied by thawing and cracking of surface ice which can make conditions even more hazardous. A large change the other way makes a storm likely; roll 2D, on 8+ a storm occurs the next day.



MITHRIL DOWNPORT

Nothing seems out of the ordinary as the Travellers' ship approaches Mithril Downport. There is no message of welcome, just an automated beacon informing incoming vessels that they are permitted to land at the port but not granted clearance to enter the installation or travel on the planetary surface. Vessels can take on fuel by melting snow and those who want anything else are advised to file a request with the port director's automated message system. If the Travellers do this, they get an automatic response but no action, for reasons that will soon become apparent.

Mithril is predominantly grey-white, as far as the eye can see, and the Travellers may be moved to speculate that perhaps this is the origin of its name. The port is in a Snow Zone, so depending on the temperature there might be anything from a light dusting to a metre-deep pack of snow with huge drifts. The sky overhead is cloudy with the threat of yet more snow.

As the Travellers make their landing, some may note there are no signs of life at the port installation, although there is power; lights are on and a dish rotates endlessly on the roof. Looking more closely, the Travellers realise there is something odd about one of the four buildings. Its outer snow-screen, a light framework designed to stop snow drifting in front of its entrance, is in place making it difficult to see the actual doors but it becomes clear the screen is damaged. Heat scoring suggests intense energy, such as a laser weapon.

Before the Travellers can act upon this information, the ship's instruments spike and it drops the last metre onto the landing field, hitting hard and shaking the Travellers up. Loose objects tumble to the floor and for a moment the lights go dim. Any attempt to take off again fails; the ship's drive and lifters are simply not responding.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Travellers' ship has suffered damage but it is mostly cosmetic. Lighter fittings may be dented and anything not properly secured has at least been rearranged. The landing gear has taken a pounding but should have been able to withstand the shock. All the same, it needs inspection. Power and most significant functions are still online, although there are signs that an overload has occurred and fried a few circuits. The only system with critical damage is the drive.

Inspection of the drive reveals the control circuits are intact and working but the gravitic lifters and drive are inoperable. The fault is presumably within the systems themselves, necessitating a crawl into the inspection spaces. There, an ominous smell of burning circuitry leads to the gravitic systems' governor circuits. All of them have been overloaded by a power surge generated by feedback in the gravitic lifters themselves. Something like this could happen in one system because of malfunction – although that is still very unlikely – but for every single governor to be overloaded at once there must be an outside cause.

A replay of sensor data from the landing indicates there was an electromagnetic pulse just as the ship touched down. It was on a narrow frequency and apparently designed specifically to interfere with gravitic systems. The pulse originated somewhere nearby but it is not possible to pin down the precise location.

There are no footprints or signs of vehicles, starships or any other form of traffic to and from the port installation but it has snowed recently which would cover any tracks. Nobody is moving in the port; the Travellers do not seem to be under attack.

The damage is not repairable with the equipment and spares the Travellers have to hand. They are stuck on the landing pad until they repair their ship or another vessel comes by. The latter might not be for weeks. The only course of action seems to be to investigate the downport.

INVESTIGATING THE DOWNPORT

The port installation consists of four buildings with a perimeter fence around them. It is not clear what the fence is designed to keep out; it is a simple wire barrier without barbs or heavy posts, and seems to have been erected mainly to delineate the installation. There is no gate, just a gap wide enough to drive a couple of ATVs through side-by-side. A road of sorts runs the short distance from the landing pad to the installation and about 150 metres past before stopping abruptly. Whatever the road was intended to lead to was never built; today there is a large pit near the end of it, which is used to dispose of large objects that would otherwise clutter the installation. The road is of the same crushed-and-fused stone as the landing pad, a common building material used by most advanced cultures throughout Charted Space.

The installation consists of four drab, blocky buildings with thick windows covered by storm shutters, all closed. Doors are equally thick and well insulated, and protected by an overhang of the roof with a light fabric snow screen extending to the ground.

At the time the Travellers land, there is a small fire burning within the reactor building and an alarm sounds for a few minutes as the fire suppression system is activated. The installation is silent and without mains power for about four minutes after the EMP device goes off, after which the reactor automatically comes back online. The Travellers might be too busy with their own problems to notice this.

THE VEHICLE GARAGE

This is a windowless brick-shaped structure with a large access door on the front and smaller personnel entrance at the side nearest the accommodation block. The doors are shut and it is in darkness but the lights will come on automatically if someone enters. The building has a heating system, which is run at low level just to keep the vehicles from freezing up.

The garage has a cradle for an air/raft – the vehicle is not present – and an all-terrain vehicle is parked beside it. The ATV (see page 84) is functional and unlocked. The keys – actually a data storage device with a finger grip, giving the impression of a key – are in the driver's access slot. Clearly the installation staff preferred to be able to use the vehicle at a moment's notice rather than having it secure. The Travellers may wonder why but there is no big secret here – the ATV was mainly used as a bulldozer to clear snow from the landing area.



Anyone with a background in starship engineering or grav vehicle operations will realise that an air/raft has similar governor circuitry to a starship, just less of it. Finding the missing air/raft will enable the Travellers to get their ship off the ground and back to a port where a full set of spares is available.

Racks at the back of the garage contain maintenance tools for the ATV, along with an assortment of manual tools such as snow shovels. Most are in their racks and have seen little use.

There are no signs of combat within the garage; the attackers merely made sure the building was empty.

THE REACTOR SHED

The reactor 'shed' is a very solid building with thick walls and no windows. It has a single entrance, a heavy door which is closed. Within is a compact fusion reactor adapted from a standard Sword Worlder design that normally powers small starships. The reactor's fuel reserves are contained in a series of large tanks under the landing pad, connected by underground pipes. These tanks also provide fuel to passing starships and contain enough processed fuel to run the reactor for years.

Additional fuel is normally obtained by way of smaller pipes running out from the landing pad to artificially constructed dips in the ground. These are not obvious when covered with snow but will show up on thermal sensors as warm spots. Slight heating in these areas, caused by low-powered dispersed elements, causes melting snow to run down the dip and be collected in a small tank just underground. It is then pumped through the purifier (also under the landing area) and stored as liquid hydrogen ready for use. In periods of high demand, often additional snow could be bulldozed onto the collection points and heated more quickly to create a considerable volume of water which is then cracked into hydrogen and oxygen, but this has never been needed.

The reactor shed contains a small electronics workshop, which is in complete disarray. It looks like it has been ransacked but investigation will reveal it has merely been used to store, dismantle and fiddle with every piece of scrap electronics the base staff could find. This took place over a lengthy period and there are several parts of half-built devices lying around. It was here that the EMP device was constructed and the presence of several heavy-duty coils, all of them misaligned or damaged in some way, will give a clue that someone was building some kind of electromagnetic device if a Difficult (10+) Electronics or Average (8+) Engineer check (INT) is made.

By the time the Travellers enter the reactor shed, it is likely that the power will be back on and the fire out. It was caused by the detonation of the EMP device which has crippled the Travellers' gravitic lifters. The remains of the device itself can be found in a corner of the electronics workshop. Its detonation was electromagnetic rather than explosive, and has not caused a blast effect, but it did become hot enough to melt itself and cause the small fire. The EMP affected the reactor only a little, causing a short shutdown and automatic reset, but has destroyed nearby electronics. None of the civilian electronic devices under repair in the workshop are salvageable but shielded electronics will be untouched.

THE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

The administration building follows the same general design as the other structures; thick-walled and blocky. There is a small vestibule, intended to reduce heat loss and provide somewhere to leave outdoor clothing. Beyond the entryway, the building contains four offices, two of which look like they have rarely if ever been used, a communications suite, an administrative centre with far too many desks for such a small installation and two secure storage areas.

The Vestibule is a small chamber with racks for coats and a couple of snow shovels. It would be unremarkable under most circumstances but there is a lingering smell of solvent-based cleaning products and an odd reddish stain here and there. It appears that someone has cleaned up quite a lot of blood here and there are a couple of bullets embedded in the row of parkas hanging down the wall. They are too flattened to identify.

The Offices are very small, with little more than a workstation and a few shelves. One was routinely used by the port warden and another by whoever was on duty when he was not. The other two have only been used occasionally. The port's records are intact and can be accessed from any of these terminals but require an authorisation code. If the Travellers can hack the terminals with a Very Difficult (12+) Electronics (computers) check (2D x 10 minutes, INT), they will be able to view the (very sparse) shipping records for the past few months. The last visitor to the port was the far trader *E-a-taka Wasab*. Before that, subsidised merchant *Jinfrei* came through a couple of weeks previously and three weeks earlier a Sword Worlder vessel designated only Supply Run 4-14 called at the port.

Appended notes indicate *Jinfrei* makes a semi-regular run from Zaibon to Caladbolg by way of the reserve worlds and is a friendly vessel – i.e. her crew interact with the port staff. On this trip, one of her passengers disembarked and remained at the downport. There is no indication as to this person's identity.

Similarly, Supply Run 4-14 has an appended note that supplies were delivered and four personnel remained at the port. These were Eric and Myntelle Bothildr, noted to be explorer-scientists, and their children Egino and Runa.

The Admin Centre is the largest space in the building and clearly intended to house a full port staff. A double row of desks has been pushed together down the middle of the chamber and is strewn with outdoor clothing plus several sets of what appear to be home-made skis formed out of resilient plastic. From the cracks, the experiment does not seem to have been a success. There is another stain, much like the one in the vestibule, in the doorway to the communications centre and the walls are pockmarked by a considerable number of bullet holes.

The Communications Centre is a small room jammed full of electronics. Most of the downport's systems are still functional, although the data storage cores of the comms system have been removed.

The Secure Storage Chambers were used to house an armoury and a home-made still. There are racks for a dozen longarms and the same number of pistols but no sign of any weapons or ammunition. Some webbing, cleaning equipment and so forth remain, suggesting the armoury was looted. Likewise, only a couple of bottles of home-made hooch remain.

THE ACCOMMODATION BLOCK

The door to the accommodation block has received a hit from a laser weapon and it is obvious this has been deliberately concealed by lowering the snow screen. The accommodation block has a small entrance vestibule leading into a main chamber, which is used for dining, meetings and recreation, along with 12 individual accommodation chambers, a kitchen and its associated storage area, and two configurable areas in use as a lounge and gym.

The Main Chamber, like that in the administration block, was the scene of a brief but vicious gunfight. Numerous bullet holes in the furniture and chips out of the walls indicate well over 100 rounds fired. Most casings have been cleared up but a few were missed. They come from Sword Worlder smallarms and generic weapons common along the frontier, as well as within the Imperium. The central dining table was overturned as a barricade and is riddled with bullets. A large stain has been cleaned up behind the table.

The Kitchen and storage area are well equipped with gadgets and can turn out meals for well over 20 people at once. Large stocks of food remain, with perishable items in cold storage. The kitchens have not been unduly disturbed except for the cleaning products, which have been ransacked.

The Configurable Chambers are currently set up as a lounge and a gym. They are untidy but otherwise not disturbed.

The Accommodation Rooms are small and basic. Indeed, they are slightly inferior to those aboard a second-rate commercial starship. A couple have been used as 'junk rooms' where various items have been dumped – notably a large number of holed, torn and otherwise damaged pieces of outdoor clothing. Another contains various basic medical supplies, most of which is in cases that have at some time been opened to deal with a minor emergency.

It is obvious that six of the chambers were in recent use. Five of these have clothing and personal items belonging to a mixed male/female crew, in varying degrees of tidiness. They have been cursorily searched and notably lack items like jewellery, personal electronics and any form of cash.

The other room will remind the Travellers of a starship cabin used by someone who dislikes to pack and unpack. A few items have been placed on shelves or hangars but it appears occupant lived out of his bags. These are missing, as is the occupant, although there is a blood trail leading to this chamber from the central one. It has been thoroughly doused in some solvent-based cleaner.

THE PIT

At the end of the road is the downport's refuse pit. It has been used for many years to dispose of large items that would otherwise create obstacles. The original snow-clearance vehicle, having finally given up the ghost, was dumped in here along with various broken tables and fittings. There are signs that something has burned in the pit, although anyone climbing in will run the risk of being cut or even impaled by twisted metal. There are three burned bodies, along with clothing and personal identification, in the pit. They were doused pretty thoroughly before being burned and identification is impossible.

EVENTS AT THE DOWNPORT

The Travellers may be able to piece together what happened here. After refuelling their ship (in case a quick getaway was needed), the attackers disembarked and moved towards the administration building. Two of the base staff were outside and, in accordance with standing orders, they were armed whilst foreigners were present. These two were fired upon, resulting in a running fight across the installation. One made it to the accommodation complex where he joined the base's other visitor – the intelligence officer – inside. They sealed the door, only to see it shot away by the ship's laser. They made a last stand in which the staff member was killed. The intelligence officer attempted to retreat into the living chambers but collapsed from his wounds and was captured.

The other Sword Worder was separated from her colleague and entered the reactor shed. There, she attempted to arm her experimental EMP device in the hope it would cripple the attacker' ship, after which she slipped back out and began trying to get around the attackers and into the admin building. She was eventually killed somewhere between the reactor shed and her destination in an exchange of gunfire that killed or wounded at least one of the attackers. It would be hard to find the location in the snow but a thaw would reveal numerous cartridge cases and discarded magazines.

Meanwhile, the installation commander attempted to defend the entrance to the administration building, wounding some of the attackers, and fell back to the central chamber. He finally attempted to destroy the communications logs and code data in the comms room, but was killed before he could reach the data cores.

The attackers burned the bodies of the three staff and attempted to clean up or at least degrade blood spills in the hope it would not be obvious who was dead and who had been captured. Their goal was the intelligence officer and they have him along with the installation's (not very valuable) comms data. Subsequent events concerning this individual are beyond the scope of this adventure but the incident may well increase tensions along the Imperium/Sword Worlds border.

THE CURIOUS SILENCE IS BROKEN

The Travellers may be expecting some deadly alien threat to have overwhelmed Mithril Starport and might engage in a 'bug hunt' looking for a lurking monster. There is none to be found, although there are clues as to what happened here. The fact that sometimes there is no monster waiting to leap out at the Travellers will keep them guessing next time they encounter a deserted outpost or drifting alien wreck...

However, the Referee should not allow the Travellers to wander around the downport for too long. They may become bored and aimless, especially since they are stuck there. Instead, the Referee should allow the Travellers time to collect any clues, then introduce the next element of the story. This comes when the port's automated systems, or those of the Travellers' ship, pick up a weak and distant signal.

The signal is nothing more than a repeater beacon, of a sort used by distressed colonists and starfarers. It conveys no information except a location and appeal for assistance. There is no reply to any attempt to contact the operators of the beacon.

If the Travellers ignore the beacon, sooner or later a ship will come through the starport and they will be able to get assistance. Of course, if this is a Sword Worder ship (which is likely) they will have to explain where the port crew are and why they ignored a distress beacon. That might lead to further complications.

The best solution might be to respond to the beacon. The Travellers' ship will not fly and there is no answer on the radio, so the only option is to take the port's ATV (or any ground vehicle the Travellers' have on board their ship – remember, any grav vehicles they have will also be inoperable) and drive to the signal site. The ATV's communications equipment is powerful enough to reach the starport if any ships come in whilst the Travellers are en route; they are in no danger of missing the chance to get help by investigating the beacon.

OVERLAND

The distress call is emanating from a point around 2,000 kilometres to the west of the starport. That is no great distance in an air/raft, and a short hop for a starship, but for a band of Travellers in an ATV it is quite a trek. Still, it should be possible to reach and investigate the signal and get back to the starport in less than three weeks. There is little chance of a ship coming through in that time and if one does the ATV's communications suite will enable contact to be made from anywhere on the planet.

Mithril has a 20-hour day, creating roughly 10 hours of daylight and 10 of darkness. Driving an ATV at night is entirely possible, although more hazardous than travelling by day, but trying to drive around the clock would quickly exhaust the Travellers. It is not possible to get much sleep in a bunk aboard a vehicle crossing rough terrain.

The Travellers would therefore be best advised to adopt a routine of travelling for most of the day, with the occasional stop to investigate a point of interest, check out some obstacle ahead or perhaps just to take a break.

The ATV is capable of quite high speed on open ground but when driving on unknown terrain this is inadvisable. On reasonably open terrain, the Travellers' ATV can cover about 250 kilometres per day (assuming 10 hours of driving) on average, although at any given time the vehicle might be moving much faster or slower than its average speed of 25 kilometres per hour.

The Travellers' rate of progress will depend on a number of factors, including terrain, obstacles, weather and a willingness to take risks. The nominal speed of 250 kilometres per day assumes the Travellers are cautious and gives them a good chance to spot anything of interest along the way. Groups who insist on travelling faster may run right into a problem before they have a chance to spot it, or could drive straight past something of importance. The rate of travel affects the chance of a mishap along the way (see page 67).

Each day, or each significant segment of a day if the Travellers enter different terrain or some other change in circumstances occurs, the Travellers should indicate how fast they intend to travel.

Normal Travel: The nominal speed of the ATV is, as already noted, an average of 25 kilometres per hour. At this speed, the primary focus is on covering ground rather than exploring. The Travellers are unlikely to notice anything but the most obvious features. Chances of an event, incident or mishap are normal.

Travelling Fast: Maintaining a high average speed and approaching obstacles with little reconnaissance or forethought is risky but allows the ATV to proceed 20% faster; i.e. an average speed of 30 kilometres per hour. Chances of a mishap are higher.

Reckless Driving: If the Travellers are in a real hurry they can take risks and charge through obstacles that others would normally go around. Driving recklessly is 100% faster than normal travel (50 kilometres per hour on average) but incurs significant risks.

Proceeding Cautiously: Moving more slowly reduces the chance of a mishap and increases the chances of spotting something interesting along the way. Speed is reduced by 20% to 20 kilometres per hour on average.

Exploring: Moving very slowly and weaving about to investigate anything interesting from the ATV, sometimes dismounting to take a closer look, reduces movement speed by about 40%, i.e. the Travellers proceed at an average of 15 kilometres per hour. Exploring does not just mean looking for points of interest, it also results in being very cautious about obstacles and hazards. This greatly reduces the chance of a mishap.

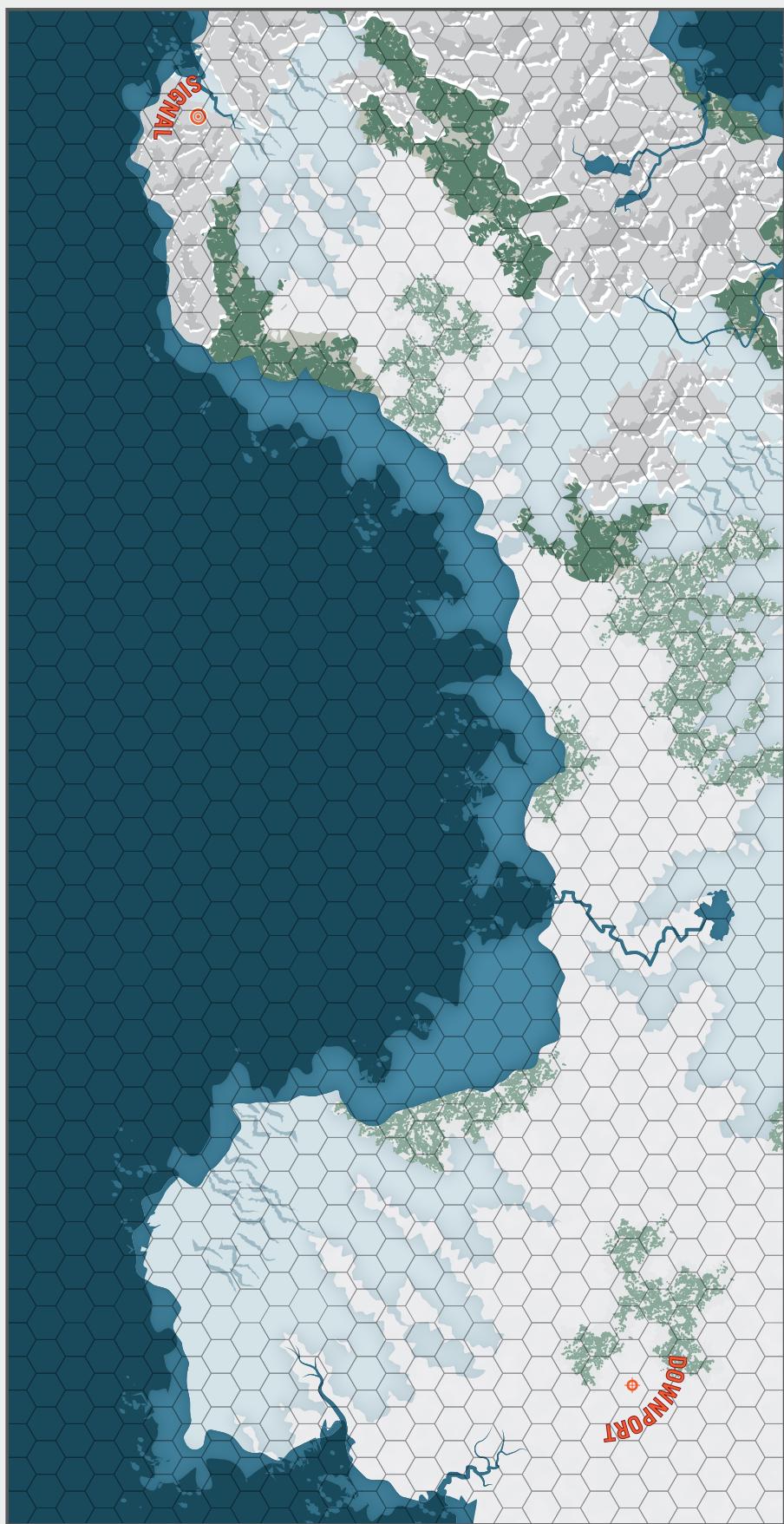
Driving at Night: Other than making it hard to get any sleep in the ATV's bunks, driving at night also increases the chance of a mishap. Speed is reduced by about 20% if a full set of instruments, including radar and thermal imaging is available (the ATV's sensors include these instruments). If using lights alone, speed is reduced by 50%.

TERRAIN

Terrain also plays an important part in determining movement speed and the possibility of a mishap.

Ice: Ice is the predominant terrain in arctic and ice zones, and can sometimes be encountered in a snow zone. Solid ice that has not been thawed and refrozen is stable and

- OVERLAND
- Snow Plains
 - Plains
 - Mithril Taiga
 - Ice
 - Broken Ice
 - Broken Terrain
 - Seacoast or Lake
 - Open Water
 - = 50Km



relatively smooth, allowing progress up to 50% faster than normal without increasing the chances of a mishap.

Broken Ice: Broken ice may have rock projecting through it or littering its surface and may also be very uneven due to thawing and refreezing. Crevasses and similar hazards are not uncommon. Broken ice can be traversed at normal speed but the chances of a mishap are greater.

Plains: The flat lands of a snow zone may be covered in shallow snow which will not impede the ATV's progress. Snow cover will conceal dips and watercourses, which can result in sudden lurches or even a plunge into a shallow lake through thin ice. Plains may also have a fair amount of vegetation, although this is low and hardy and does little more than to conceal the nature of the terrain. Plains can be navigated at normal speed.

Snow Plains: Snow plains are simply plains covered in deep snow, necessitating the ATV using its dozer blade and pushing through. Snow plains slow the ATV by 50% and may conceal hazards that require backtracking or present themselves too late to be avoided.

Broken Terrain: Rock zones may be characterised by tumbled boulders and sharp-edged outcroppings. Sudden dips and small cliffs are not uncommon. Speed is reduced by 25% and hazards are more likely.

Mountains: Minor hills are not much of an obstacle for the ATV and can be considered the equivalent of plains for most purposes so long as the Travellers take easier routes through valleys and over saddles rather than trying to drive over peaks. A tougher route through hills can be treated as broken terrain. Mountains, however, tend to be tough going for an ATV. Speed is reduced by 90% unless an easy route through a valley can be found, in which case the reduction is 50%. Even using a known pass can be tricky; the ATV will need to struggle over obstacles and occasionally backtrack. Mishaps and incidents are quite likely.

Mithril Taiga: Some areas of Mithril, notably sheltered areas in the lee of hills or mountains, have an equivalent to Terra's taiga forests. On Mithril this takes the form of low, scrubby and thorny bushes which are almost impenetrable to an ATV and difficult to find a path through even on foot. The taiga regions have more animal life, but have been little explored. Taiga will snarl up an ATV within a few metres, requiring hours of work to free it. Travellers on foot can make slow progress or cut a path into the vegetation to create shelter but anyone trying to get anywhere needs to go around this obstacle.

Seacoast or Lake: Shores and shallow water can be navigated easily enough and are treated as plains or

snow plains depending upon conditions. The ATV can drive through lakes and calm rivers without hazard or drive over frozen ones. Thin ice, i.e. which is forming or melting, is more of a hazard as the vehicle might break through and become stuck.

Open Water: Attempting to navigate the open sea in a ground vehicle is hazardous. If the water is calm, the ATV can make headway at about 2.5 kilometres per hour, i.e. around a 10th of normal offroad land speed. Strong winds or currents will take the ATV wherever they will, typically in a westwards and towards-the-equator direction. A storm will be a horrible experience for everyone aboard and will almost certainly injure or even kill the occupants if the ATV is rolled over but the vehicle itself will stay afloat and ultimately survive to be washed up somewhere.

OTHER FACTORS

Offroad driving in rough terrain is physically and mentally tiring and even driving on a flat ice plain causes fatigue – largely due to monotony. Drivers should be changed every two hours and not drive more than a quarter of any given day/night cycle. Players who roleplay this rather than just dismounting to investigate something of interest when it arises are entitled to some slight leniency on the part of the Referee if they hit a major problem as they will be less tired and stressed than those who insisted on the 'iron man' approach to overland travel.

MISHAPS AND INCIDENTS

Each day the Travellers are driving or are otherwise outside the downport, the Referee should determine if an incident or mishap occurs. This is a straight check on 2D, with a base chance of an incident determined by the local terrain, as shown on the Mishap table.

The question may arise as to who is driving at the time an incident potentially occurs. This can be determined randomly by asking the Travellers to indicate who is driving in each hour of the day and rolling 2D-2. This gives a result of 0–10. A number indicates the hour and can be matched to a driver, whilst a 0 permits the Travellers to choose who was driving. Alternatively, if an Average (8+) Recon or Navigation check is made the Travellers may decide who was driving when the incident occurred – forward planning allows them to put the best driver in the hot seat when things look like getting tricky.

Note that many incidents occur in such a way as to permit the Travellers to plan their approach. It is not mandatory for the person driving the ATV when a hazard was spotted to be the one who negotiates it.

Mishaps

Terrain Type	Chance of Incident
Ice	Difficult (10+)
Broken Ice	Average (8+)
Plains	Very Difficult (12+)
Snow Plains	Difficult (10+)
Broken Terrain	Routine (6+)
Mountains	Easy (4+)
Seacoast or Lake	Difficult (10+)
Open Water	Average (8+)

Apply the following DMs:

- Driver's Drive (wheel) -skill level
- Highest Recon or Navigation skill -skill level
- For every hour past two
 a driver remains at the controls +1
- For every hour past five in the last 20
 a driver remains at the controls +1
- Heavy snow falling +2
- Driving at night +2
- Travelling fast +2
- Driving recklessly +5

If an incident occurs, the Referee should roll 1D for the nature of the hazard and consult the Incident table.

Incident

1D	Incident
1	Hidden Obstacle
2	ATV Malfunction
3	Terrain Feature
4	Blocked Passage
5	Ground Subsidence
6	Navigational Error

Hidden Obstacle: The ATV encounters a previously undetected obstacle. A Difficult (10+) Recon check will allow the driver to halt before it is too late; otherwise the vehicle will not be able to avoid the hazard. Backtracking will take 2D hours. The nature of the obstacle depends upon terrain; a deep gully or crevasse is likely anywhere, or perhaps an area of thin ice causes the ATV to plunge through and become stuck.

ATV Malfunction: The ATV starts making some alarming noises or suffering intermittent power loss. The Referee should roll 2D to determine the severity of the problem. The resulting number is the amount of cumulative Effect that required on Average (8+) Mechanic checks (INT) to fix the problem, e.g. a result

of 9 will require multiple skill checks to eventually fix the malfunction. A check can be attempted for every hour of work, which necessitates operating outside the vehicle. If the Travellers choose to ignore the warning signs, the Referee should roll 1D-2 for each hour of driving and add the result to the existing severity. When the total reaches 12, the ATV is no longer drivable. It can be repaired in the field requiring a Very Difficult (12+) Mechanic check (INT) and each attempt requires an entire day of work. If the Travellers lack the requisite skills, they may be able to improvise a solution using their starship engineering or scientific skills, hack the vehicle's onboard computer to compensate, or otherwise cleverly bypass the problem. Any such solution is temporary.

Terrain Feature: The Travellers encounter something unusual but not necessarily hazardous. Warm-water geysers are possible in any terrain and create a local warm spot that will have vegetation and some animal life. Other possibilities are wind-carved rocks that look almost artificial, curious snow dunes and patches of impenetrable taiga 'forest', which might conceal something of interest if the Travellers want to spend all day hacking away to investigate.

Blocked Passage: The Travellers' progress is blocked by some obstacle, which might be a crevasse, thick boulder field or blind canyon. They will have to backtrack a while and find a way around – this takes 2D hours minus the Effect of an Average (8+) Navigation check (INT).

Ground Subsidence: A recent thaw has weakened the ice or created loose, possibly muddy, conditions. Crossing this area requires a Difficult (10+) Drive (wheel) check (DEX); failure indicates the ATV has become stuck. Extricating it is a long process; the Referee should roll 2D for the severity of the situation. Getting out requires a cumulative Effect on Average (8+) Drive (wheel) checks equal to the severity value. A check can be made every hour, with DM+1 for every Traveller who has found a means of helping. Once free, the ATV is still in the middle of the hazardous area and requires another Drive (wheel) check to get out.

Navigational Error: Having become quite lost, the Travellers emerge from the hex they are currently in, in a random location. Roll 1D, counting round map hex sides from the top (north) side for their heading. This may take them into new hazards.

EVENTS

Where incidents and mishaps can occur because of the Travellers' own actions – or they may get lucky and avoid them – events are semi-scripted. That

is, they are applied whenever the Referee feels appropriate. Not all of the events listed below need occur in the course of the journey; the Referee can choose which seem the most appropriate.

Some events are best applied when the Travellers are stopped for some reason; whether they are camped for the night, halted to investigate something or dealing with a mishap. Others can be hinted at, perhaps by an odd sensor return or a shape glimpsed through the snowfall.

Events can be spaced along both the outward and homeward legs of the journey, with different events used for changes of pace. The Referee should not forget that the Travellers are operating in extremely cold conditions, often with poor visibility. This can complicate the simplest of tasks and make a mundane event quite deadly.

THE ATV WRECK

A strong sensor return leads the Travellers to a wrecked ATV. It is a tracked vehicle, unlike the wheeled one they are driving. It may be washed up on a shore or disabled in a gully. The vehicle has been stripped of everything the crew could carry, suggesting there were survivors. However, the wreck is very old (decades at least) and few components remain in a salvageable state.

THE CRATER

The Travellers come across a large crater, presumably the result of a large meteorite impact in the distant past. The crater rim is around 30–40 metres high in some places and too steep for the ATV to negotiate. The crater is around one kilometre across and 150 metres deep at its lowest point. The crater sides shelter the interior to some extent, resulting in a small lake of semi-liquid water surrounded by tumbled rocks and ice. The sides are overgrown with Mithril's equivalent of taiga forest and home to various small creatures.

THE RUIN

A strangely regular rock surface nearby turns out – if investigated – to be a wall. It was originally part of an octagonal building with two storeys above ground and one below, with a minimal lighting system powered by solar cells on the roof and not much else in the way of amenities. The top floor has completely collapsed into rubble and there is little left above waist height of the middle storey. The underground segment is intact (if rubble is cleared to access it) and contains water storage tanks and some decayed shipping crates that once held emergency rations and other supplies. The Travellers may recall hearing rumours of a chain of 'octagon shelters' built to assist stranded starfarers but why one was built in Sword Worlder territory is a mystery.

THE MAGNETIC ANOMALY

The ATV's sensors record unusually strong magnetic interference. Investigation reveals a reasonable deposit of ferrous metal ore close to the surface. If the Travellers choose to map the deposit and take core samples (a process that will take a couple of hours in clear weather, longer in heavy snowfall), they can sell the data for Cr10000 to the Sword Worlder authorities. There are no plans to exploit Mithril's resources as yet – indeed, it is prohibited – but an accurate map of prime resource sites will be useful when the order is given to open up Mithril.

THE CHASM

A fissure in the bedrock has created a deep chasm. Warmer conditions inside keep ice from forming over the top, at least most of the time, and result in a constant trickle of meltwater down the sides. In some places this produces small waterfalls that have carved the chasm sides into fantastic shapes. The chasm is around 50 metres deep, with some deeper areas filled with water. Plant life not seen elsewhere grows in this sheltered environment, feeding a variety of animals. The chasm offers good shelter from a storm, although it would not be possible to get the ATV into it (not in a manner that would facilitate getting it out again, anyway). Travellers who explore the chasm will eventually discover there are caves, some underwater, running off to the sides. In one of these caves is a large pile of bones. They are ancient and there are dozens or perhaps hundreds of sets. Closer examination suggests they might be Aslan but also a primitive culture and dating the bones would place them here long before Aslan ever reached this region of space.

THE EPHEMERAL GLADE

An ephemeral glade occurs when the temperature rises above freezing for a day or two in areas where this is rare. Warmer regions have vegetation all the time but in colder areas life must make the most of the few chances that occur. An ephemeral glade centres on a pool of meltwater, around which plants spring up at an incredible rate. It is possible to watch the plants grow, with some bamboo-like species reaching a height of two or three metres in just a few hours. Creeping plants climb the taller varieties and a carpet of moss-like growth covers the ground. Within an hour or two, small creatures can be seen clambering over the plants and devouring them. Thus begins an orgy of feeding, mating and egg-laying which goes on until the temperature drops enough to start freezing the pond. Once that happens, the vegetation rapidly dies. Creatures continue to feed on dying plant matter for a while but it quickly dissolves into brown sludge. Within hours of a temperature drop the glade is gone and the creatures return to hibernation.

ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

Animal life is sparse on Mithril. Most of what exists is primitive and small, variations of thick-skinned reptiloids with the ability to burrow into snow. There are few large predators on Mithril; most creatures are either herbivores or opportunistic scavengers. The Referee should use the following creatures – with the possible exception of snow-worms – at any time it seems appropriate. An animal encounter can make one of the events noted above a lot more complicated.

CALAMANDER

The calamander is a reptiloid scavenger, with individuals falling into three distinct types; male, female and protector. It lives in ice or snow terrain, burrowing out extensive tunnels through which individuals can move surprisingly quickly.

The large female is attended by several drone males who feed her and take care of the warren; it is these males that are the most likely initial encounter with a calamander colony. Males are about the size of a badger, are amphibious and tend to flee or hide when threatened, except when the warren is attacked. If unable to hide, males give off a curious squealing sound which attracts other calamanders.

The third type of calamander is a protector, which normally remains close to the warren. Protectors will come to the aid of a squealing male and are vicious, although they can be driven off if the warren is not under threat. If it is, protectors will defend the female to the death. The protector is significantly larger than the male, although not as big as the female. Most tunnels in a warren are not large enough to accommodate a female; a mature female rarely leaves her burrow.

Calamanders are attracted to shiny objects and will steal important components if they are left lying around. Their tunnels are large enough for a human to crawl into, although encountering a protector is hazardous to say the least.

Animal	Hits	Speed
Calamander	12	2m
Female		
Skills	Melee (natural) 0	
Attacks	Bite (1D)	
Traits	Slow Metabolism (-2)	
Behaviour	Omnivore, Intermittent	

Animal	Hits	Speed
Calamander	8	8m
Male		
Skills	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	Bite (1D)	
Traits	Amphibious	
Behaviour	Omnivore, Intermittent	

Animal	Hits	Speed
Calamander	14	2m
Protector		
Skills	Melee (natural) 2, Recon 2, Survival 1	
Attacks	Bite (2D)	
Traits	Amphibious, Armour (+2)	
Behaviour	Omnivore, Intermittent	



Calamander

CRYSTALLICE

Crystallice are small but nasty creatures resembling ice crystals. They are extremely hard to see, even for those who know what to look for, and will attach themselves to clothing or skin when something warm passes by. Over the next few hours the Crystallice will crawl to bare skin and begin to feed. They inflict a bite that causes no real damage but is intensely painful and take a small quantity of blood over the course of an hour or two. After this, the crystallice – now a reddish colour – drop off and digest their meal. Few can stand the pain of the bite for this long but other than waiting for them to drop off the only solution is to pick the Crystallice off – which is in itself a painful exercise.

RAUCUSS

The raucuss probably has a proper scientific name but the Sword Worlders assigned to the starport do not know it and nicknamed the creature for the raucous noise it makes. The raucuss is a flying scavenger, which will devour anything organic and try to eat almost anything else. Often encountered in small groups, raucuss will mob other creatures to drive them away from food and are prone to landing on buildings or vehicles (including air-rafts in flight, which can be comical) and pecking at seals or ripping antennae out of fittings. Raucuss are noisily defiant and more likely to hop out of reach and scream at Travellers than flee.

Animal	Hits	Speed
Raucuss	5	8m
Skills	Athletics (dexterity), Melee (natural) 1, Recon 2, Survival 1	
Attacks	Bite (1D)	
Traits	Flyer (very slow), Small (-2)	
Behaviour	Scavenger, Intermittent	

Crystallice



Raucuss



SNOW-WORM

The snow-worms of Mithril are rarely sighted and thought by many to be myth. They move endlessly under snow plains and can tunnel through solid ice given enough time. Snow-worms are filter feeders, extracting small particles of food from snow or ice forced through their bodies, although a snow-worm will eat larger organic matter, including the remains of an ephemeral glade or some hapless creature trapped in the snow. The worms are essentially mindless, existing only to feed, but will rear up out of the snow and lash at any source of damage with either end of their long bodies. They may also attempt to eat downed Travellers. Most snow-worms are about a metre in diameter and around 25 metres long but giant specimens have been (unreliably) reported.

Animal	Hits	Speed
Snow-worm	75	3m
Skills	Melee 0	
Attacks	Crush (5D)	
Traits	Armour (+6), Slow Metabolism (-2), Large (+4)	
Behaviour	Omnivore, Filter	

Animal	Hits	Speed
Giant Snow-worm	160	3m
Skills	Melee 0	
Attacks	Crush (8D)	
Traits	Armour (+12), Slow Metabolism (-3), Large (+6)	
Behaviour	Omnivore, Filter	



THE EXPEDITION

Once the Travellers get within 250 kilometres of the beacon location, they will be able to contact the Bothildr family. They are quite excited to be speaking to anyone, which may make it a little difficult at first to get any useful information. The family will ask what happened at the port – all they heard was a garbled distress signal – and if the Travellers have seen Egil and Katrin. The Travellers will not know who that is at first.

It will not be hard to follow the beacon to the expedition camp. It lies in a sheltered area, on the fringes of a range of broken hills. Steep rockfaces are common in the area, which has been fractured by ancient upheavals to create multiple faults in the bedrock. Scrubby Mithril taiga is common, providing additional shelter but also making travel difficult.

The expedition camp consists of two semi-rigid field shelter modules (see page 87), one configured as living quarters and one as a working area. These are surrounded by a windbreak constructed of scrubby bushes cut and wired together. A framework supporting an angled roof of the same vegetation provides overhead cover.

There are a few items outside; mostly equipment left carelessly on a folding table or dumped in a pile where no-one is likely to trip over it. The working area contains only a couple of portable computer terminals and a network interface. There is no long-range communications antenna since the expedition were using the one onboard the air/raft before it left. The living quarters are equally sparsely appointed, with a few personal items

The Bothildr family have no reason to be suspicious – indeed, they have many reasons to be glad to see a vehicle approach – but they do have a healthy caution due to working in the wilds. Eric stands in the open, waving to the ATV, with his shotgun nearby in case it is needed. Myntelle positions herself out of sight where she can use her rifle if necessary. The kids, too, disappear among the nearby vegetation.

If the Travellers seem non-threatening, the family welcomes them with greetings and anxious questions. Although they are gravely concerned, the family are also bound by a long habit of frontier hospitality. Anyone who stays still long enough will be offered a bowl of stew and hot drink. Eric also slyly produces a flask of something stronger and quite unpleasant. The offering of food and drink is not merely a social ritual; it is a chance to take the measure of the newcomers.

The Travellers will notice the stew is thin and tastes odd. It is made from rations that will only last so long and has been supplemented with local ingredients – calamander meat and berry-like objects picked from a bush. Although these have little food value, they add bulk to an otherwise meagre meal. The Bothildrs will think much more highly of the Travellers if they reciprocate the offer of food from their more plentiful supplies but only if they do so in a sensitive manner. The family are proud, like most Sword Worlders, and will not take kindly to being patronised or offered what looks like charity – even if it actually is charity.

The Bothildr adults are quite happy to talk about events like an attack on the starport in front of the children; they are going to need to deal with what has happened sooner or later, after all; this may surprise Travellers who are careful what they say around the kids. Eric wants to get his family back to the starport and offworld as soon as possible and will ask the Travellers to take them.

The Travellers, for their part, know the family came out here in an air/raft but it is clearly not present. Eric can fill in some of the details – including the part where he and Egil had a short and not very fair fight over the vehicle. The two port staff wanted to race back immediately as soon as the distress call from the port was heard. The last Eric saw of them was a hurried takeoff that clipped a nearby rock stack. The air/raft disappeared into the distance, flying unsteadily. It did not answer any communications from the family and soon after it took off its distress beacon was activated. Since the air/raft was not present at the port, Eric believes it might have come down in the snow plains.

Eric and his kin have been stuck here since, eating reduced rations and trying to continue their work as best they can in the hope that 'something... you maybe... would turn up'. He makes little of the fact that his family would eventually starve or die of exposure if help did not arrive – it either would appear or it would not; there was no point in fretting over what Eric could not control.

Eric proposes breaking camp and heading back to the port as soon as possible but suggests setting off at first light rather than halfway through a day. He also wants to look for the downed air/raft; he did not like the port staff members much but they may be stranded and he feels he should try to help them.

In the interim, Eric asks his kids to show the Travellers around the site and explain what they have found. If anyone is interested, the Bothildr kids offer a highly erudite explanation of what they have been working on as they lead a quick tour of the area. This is a little tricky in places as the local vegetation can be thick and surprisingly resilient.

THE EXPEDITION'S FINDINGS

Some years ago, a starship came through the port with a crippled jump drive. As luck would have it, a suitable spare part was in storage and, in return for it, the crew undertook a rather amateurish (in the opinion of Runa, anyway) survey of some points of interest. They found strange rock carvings in one location ('and managed to miss all the others!') and a radioactive waste site dating back hundreds or maybe thousands of years. The port warden duly noted the findings and sent them off to be forgotten about in his report.

Eric and Myntelle Bothildr came across the report some years ago ('while they were killing time at the university so us kids could grow up a bit') and decided to come to Mithril to investigate. An aerial survey indicated rock carvings at several spots, all of them widely spaced, but virtually no evidence of an advanced settlement. That suited the Bothildrs; they were mostly interested in primitive cultures.

The initial hypothesis was that Mithril was once warmer, had an indigenous intelligent species, which never reached the technological stage, and that the radioactive waste came from some other source. This idea was blown out of the water ('Dad says his idea evolved, though!') by proof that Mithril has not had a warmer phase in hundreds of thousands of years.

The rock carvings are primitive but impressive. They seem to depict giant Aslan-like figures but also smaller ones that also appear to be Aslan. There is at least one better set of carvings somewhere on Mithril but the survey neglected to indicate where and the Bothildr family have not located it. What they have found, however, is a crude cave-village settlement not far into the hills. It was surrounded by refuse that had been buried over many years, suggesting primitive people lived there for some time. Conditions in the hills are tough but not as bad as out on the snow plains. Presuming plant and animal life could support these people, a settlement could have been sustained.

What the Bothildr family are sure of is that these people were Aslan – genetically, if not culturally. They have measured the bones and teeth found at the site, including some in a burial cave, and have concluded without any doubt that primitive Aslan at one time lived on Mithril. The question of how they got here, considering Mithril is far from the Hierate and the bones date from long before Aslan moved into this region of space, is a good one. Eric believes the reported radioactive waste dump suggests these Aslan had high technology at their disposal. Perhaps they arrived by starship – an extremely long-range colony ship perhaps? If so, their colony presumably could not sustain its technological base and eventually failed. Later generations lived a primitive life until they died out.

Eric believes the fate of these Aslan was not a miserable one. Their new world was harsh and unforgiving but Aslan are tough and relish challenges. They were lords of this world in their time and perhaps they were content.

He also harbours a theory that some remnants of ancient Aslan technology could be still on Mithril. Despite his primary interest in primitive peoples, he would be fascinated to find out more about these ancient interstellar voyagers. Why come so far from the Hierate? Why settle on Mithril? Did they build colonies elsewhere? If they got this far, where else did the ancient Aslan voyage to? Are there more of them out there somewhere?

These questions will have to wait, however. There is pressing business; notably to find the downed air/raft and get back to the starport.

SEARCHING

Eric roughly knows the direction taken by the air/raft. For some reason – he does not know why – it was not headed directly back towards the starport. Eric's best guess is that the navigation system was damaged in the collision, which might also explain the lack of communication once the vehicle was out of sight. Myntelle remembers seeing a storm front on the horizon and suggests the port staffers were trying to go around it. Either way, the air/raft will not have come down on a direct line back to the port.

The air/raft's location should be chosen by the Referee, somewhere off the Travellers' route to the expedition site by about 200 kilometres. Its guidance and main communications systems are indeed damaged but the short-range emergency beacon works. Once the Travellers get within 100 kilometres they will pick up the signal and can begin a more detailed search.

During this time it should be noted that the ATV may be getting a bit full. Once the two air/raft survivors are located, the situation will get worse. One solution, in clearer weather at least, is for some to ride outside the vehicle on its outer gantry. This is a little precarious – the kids will love it however – and can get very cold if it is windy. However, with suitable clothing a perch outside the vehicle at least reduces crowding inside.

There are two minor incidents, both related, during the search.

A SUDDEN LURCH

Even in clear conditions, patches of deep snow, sometimes with layers of ice buried within, are not uncommon. Some patches go on for tens of kilometres and, apart from being monotonous to the eye, they are generally a good thing – snow and ice are often more even than bare ground and allow a higher cruising speed.

Whilst crossing such a patch of snow, the ATV suddenly lurches forward and down, coming to a violent halt with the driving cab buried in the snow. Everyone outside will be flung off, although they will land in snow for only 1D damage. Those inside will be flung into hard surfaces or each other, suffering 2D damage and possibly causing

tempers to flare, although anyone who makes an Average (8+) Athletics (dexterity) check can reduce the damage by 1D. Those strapped into seats suffer no damage.

It is not possible to open the cab doors due to packed snow around the vehicle's front end. Rear or roof access points are free, enabling the Travellers to get outside and take stock of the situation. Investigation shows that the ATV has broken through a thin layer of frozen snow and plunged its front wheels into a cavity beneath. This is strangely tunnel-like, extending away in both directions before ending in other collapsed sections. The cavity is almost two metres in diameter and lined with packed, frozen snow. It will remind Travellers of a pipe or burrow.

Getting the ATV free is mostly a matter of hard work. Digging the cab out and shoving something under the wheels to improve grip will enable it to be driven clear. It will take time, however, and the work may be complicated by bad weather or other problems; this is an excellent opportunity for an interaction with Mithril's wildlife. Calamanders will try to steal small tools, the raucess will try to eat them and crystallice may be found on Travellers' skin after the vehicle is freed.

SOMETHING MOVING IN THE SNOW!

While the Travellers are digging out their ATV, someone spots movement in the snow or just under it. After a few minutes, more movement is spotted some distance away. Staring at a large expanse of snow is likely to play tricks on the eyes and Travellers who are watching for movement cannot work properly. The Referee should play a couple more incidents of this sort out, with people pointing and shouting, sometimes looking in completely different directions.

After a few repetitions, Travellers who make an Average (8+) Recon check will spot that the last movement is snow falling into a cavity remarkably like the one the ATV plunged into. No known natural phenomenon could cause such regular cavities through the snow but there is no creature around that could have done it, either.

Once the ATV is freed, the Travellers can press on. Eventually the air/raft distress beacon is detected and as the ATV closes in voice contact can be made with the survivors. They are both alive but not in a good

situation. The air/raft is unflyable but Egil managed to get it down in the mouth of an ice cave. While power remains, the survivors have light and heat but their food ran out days ago and what vegetable matter Katrin managed to drag together does not seem to make good ration bars even when processed through the emergency field utility module (see page 87) carried as part of the air/raft's survival stores.

Egil is injured and cannot move around much, so the survivors could not leave the cave and meet the Travellers even if there were not 'something' lurking outside. They do not know what it is, only that they have seen glimpses of something moving under the snow; something serpent-like. The survivors have not been attacked but fear they will be if they encounter whatever is under the snow.

GETTING TO THE SURVIVORS

The cavities encountered by the Travellers were made by a particularly large example of a snow-worm, one of Mithril's largest creatures. They are attracted to warmth and will eat anything they can filter out of the snow. However, the worm outside the ice cave is big enough to swallow a person whole.

The worm will detect the approaching ATV and move towards it under the snow, rearing up underneath with enough force to tip the vehicle on its side. It will then lash at the ATV with its body, potentially causing serious damage.

The worm is tough and persistent, and will have to be dealt with somehow. It could be riddled with bullets but, rather than fighting or killing the worm, the Travellers might treat it as a problem to be solved. It can be driven off by powerful vibrations through the ground and snow (small explosions or an extremely loud sound system would do the trick) or by something it does not like the taste of in the snow. Since the worm cannot move without ingesting snow, anything toxic or irritant will cause it to retreat rapidly. Fuel oil or solvent-based chemicals, or almost any acritical liquid, will cause it to retreat. Clever Travellers might be able to create a barrier this way. Electricity will also work; zapping the worm with a live cable from the ATV's power plant will cause it to retreat, although doing this without harming themselves might be a challenge for the Travellers.

Once the worm is dealt with, the ATV can be righted (digging away snow on one side and pushing the other will work) and finally the survivors can be rescued.

EGIL AND KATRIN

Egil and Katrin are not in a good state. They are extremely hungry and have been living in a crippled air/raft for many days. The air/raft is of a 'ragtop' design, with a flexible cover over the six-person crew compartment. This enabled the survivors to keep the internal temperature above freezing but waste heat has melted part of the ice cave, creating a puddle of meltwater around the air/raft which has then frozen again. Not only is this dangerously slippery, the vehicle is frozen to the ground in several centimetres of ice.

If the Travellers want to remove the gravitic lifter governor circuits, they will have to thaw out the ice and gain access. This may require some ingenuity and extracting the circuitry will be a cold job since the Travellers have to stand on half-melted ice with icewater running over their boots. There are no major technical problems however.

Egil needs medical attention and has either fractured or badly bruised ribs. It hurts him to breathe, let alone move and, on top of hunger, cold and the knowledge that the crash was his own stupid fault, this does not make him a pleasant companion. He and Katrin are suspicious of the Travellers, since they know something bad has happened to their comrades at the port. However, food and blankets will go a long way towards overcoming their reservations.

Egil and Katrin do not know much more than the Travellers, except that the visitor at the downport was some kind of intelligence officer or maybe a courier. He was supposed to have met the ship the Bothildr family came in on and was annoyed at being delayed by something in Imperial space. Other than that, the intelligence officer was tight-lipped and surly, and did not make good company. Katrin can add that she volunteered for this assignment mainly to get away from him, as he did not seem to understand the concept of 'no'.

Finally, with the parts they need and an ATV full of rescuees, the Travellers can head back to the starport. The journey will take a few more days, during which additional adventures could occur. The Referee should use any events not yet encountered, perhaps complicated by the overcrowded vehicle. The journey back might become a nightmare of people riding outside in a huff, others yelling at one another in the passenger compartment while their comrades try to sleep and so forth. It should be a memorable trip....

RETURN

There is one last complication awaiting the Travellers at the starport. Soon after reaching Imperial space with their prize (the wounded intelligence officer), the crew of the far trader *E-a-taka Wasab* were curtly told to go back and finish the job. There were to be no witnesses, but more importantly they had failed to find critical data the intelligence officer had stashed at the downport. Without it, their employers were going to be displeased. So, loading up some additional muscle *E-a-taka Wasab* set off back towards Mithril downport, arriving a few hours ahead of the Travellers.

The far trader crew spotted a starship on the landing pad but it was silent and locked down. They landed a force at the port and did a quick reconnaissance, after which their starship took off again and began flying an orbital search pattern. Believing they had plenty of time, the attackers began a methodical search of the port buildings, intending to crack open the starship on the pad at their leisure. They did not know that the Travellers' ATV was approaching the port....

A SHIP IN ORBIT?

The ATV's communications suite starts receiving a feed from the port, which indicates a ship is in orbit. Its behaviour is strange; it makes no attempt to communicate but begins an approach to land. The ship behaves as if its crew are not expecting an answer from the port, which implies they know it is out of action. The ship touches down, spends about an hour on the landing pad, then takes off again. It begins flying what looks like an orbital search pattern.

What the Travellers make of this, and how they respond, will dictate the course of this part of the adventure. Smart Travellers will be able to access the communications logs, which show radio traffic between the downport's antenna and the ship in orbit. This traffic is encrypted and cannot be read – the port's system is boosting the signal but not interpreting it, so unless the Travellers can unscramble the comms' encryption (they may have the skills but not the time, as it would take many hours to even attempt

breaking the encryption) they will not be able to tell what is being said. However, knowing that something is being said at all might still be useful.

It would be possible to hack the downport's security cameras from the ATV with a Difficult (10+) Electronics (comms) check (1D hours, INT) and doing so will enable the Travellers to determine what is going on there. Essentially, a group of well-armed personnel, probably low-end mercenaries, seem to be tearing the place apart looking for something. The Travellers' ship seems intact for now.

How many mercenaries are at the port is up to the Referee, and a count made using the cameras might not be accurate. The opposition faced by the Travellers should be significant but not overwhelming. The mercenaries arrived aboard a far trader but it is possible some of them were crammed into bunks in the cargo hold rather than using standard staterooms aboard the ship. If so, there could be quite a lot of them.

The far trader *E-a-taka Wasab* missed the Travellers' ATV in its first sweep, largely because it overflew during the initial climb to orbit when the crew had not begun their search. It has now disappeared over the horizon and will not be back for some time (the crew are investigating something of interest spotted in a far distant location; the radioactive waste dump reported by the original survey perhaps?). Thus, the Travellers have some time to act. Their ship is a sitting duck if *E-a-taka Wasab* returns, however, so they act with some haste.

ENDGAME

The Travellers need to reach their ship and rig a repair on the gravitic lifters. That will take D3+3 hours. It is unlikely they will remain unobserved for that time but a stealthy group might manage it – especially if the weather is bad. An alternative approach would be to charge into the downport and fight it out with the mercenaries. This is not necessarily a great plan, since the Travellers' resources are limited and they have children aboard their vehicle.

Between these extremes is a smarter approach in which the Travellers sneak into the installation and eliminate some of the mercenaries quietly while others try to reach their ship. The vessel does not need to be able to fly to fight; its weapons turrets will function even if the lifters are offline. Someone with a good Gunner skill could ambush *E-a-taka Wasab* or at least hold it off with the threat of weapons fire. That would require bringing up the power plant to full capacity, a process that normally takes about 30 minutes from standby. A good engineer could do it faster, of course, with a Difficult (10+) Engineer (power) check (5D minutes, INT)

The mercenaries will respond violently as soon as they spot anyone in the downport. If the Travellers conduct reconnaissance first, they may be able to stage ambushes and rig the odds in their favour. If they just blunder in blindly they will have to react to whatever happens.

The mercenaries, for their part, are complacent but not stupid. They have a couple of personnel on guard to patrol the installation and at least one sniper armed with a laser rifle on the top of one of the buildings. The effectiveness of any sniper will be limited in bad weather, which might be used to the Travellers' advantage.

The Referee can play fast and loose with timing if necessary, perhaps allowing the repair to be completed just in time for an escape if everything else has gone badly wrong. A mad dash to the ship and a hurried takeoff, pursued by *E-a-taka Wasab* and weapons fire from the ground would make a suitably dramatic ending to the adventure but the endgame can play out in many other ways. A clever band of Travellers might simply slip away without the mercenaries even realising they are there at all.

AFTERMATH

Once the Travellers have escaped from Mithril or eliminated the threat from the mercenaries, there are a few choices to be made. The Bothildr family want to continue their research but Mithril seems very dangerous at present. They will ask to be taken somewhere they can get a ship home and re-outfit for another expedition and would prefer to go somewhere in Sword World space. The survivors of the port staff also need to get somewhere they can report what has happened. None of them have money to pay for passage, of course, but they should be able to arrange payment if the Travellers can convey them to Biter or Sting.

It is possible that the Travellers might return to Mithril with or without the Bothildr family and investigate the mysterious primitive Aslan further. They may also stumble upon what the mercenaries were searching for; a set of data storage devices concealed among the pipes leading from the reactor chamber to the underground fuel tanks. Hidden inside a maintenance cover, these devices contain multiple copies of the intelligence officer's findings. They are encrypted but can be broken sooner or later, and make for interesting reading.

The intelligence officer compiled a detailed listing of ships moving among the worlds of the Lunion Shield, highlighting several that might be involved in intelligence-gathering and others that could possibly become assets for the Sword Worlds Confederation (are the Travellers on this list, perhaps?). His findings indicate some discrepancies in the movement of certain Imperial merchant vessels, which may not be making the stops their logs claim.

What the Travellers do with this data is up to them. The Sword Worlds Confederation and Imperium would both be willing to pay a finders' fee of up to Cr25000 for the data, with no questions asked. It might even be possible to sell it to both sides. Each will issue dire warnings against doing so but you should fully expect your Travellers to try it anyway. Indeed, they might be approached to sell a 'doctored' version of the data to the other side and might end up being able to sell two versions of the same information, twice, to both parties.

As to the attack on the downport and abduction of a Sword Worlder intelligence officer... he will likely never be found (perhaps that was the point; what if this was all an elaborate ploy to plant false data and extract an operative?). Paranoia on both sides creates ripples in their intelligence communities but there is no indication this was an incident of aggression. Nobody can prove anything.

The result, in the short term, is a slight escalation of tensions and some sabre-rattling speeches by hawkish political and military figures on both sides of the border. There are those who fear the region is heading for war and attention-grabbing headlines appear on the datanets. For now, the only real consequence of the Travellers' Mission to Mithril is seeing their ship named in an article called '12 Reasons Mithril Will Be The Flashpoint of the Next War (View Now)'. There will, however, be days when the Travellers wonder if the screaming headlines were correct. Tensions remain high along the border and there are many on both sides who seem to want a new war.

CHARACTERS AND OPPPOSITION

THE EXPLORERS

Eric and Myntelle Bothildr have worked together for many years, returning to the field when their children were old enough to be safe in a frontier camp. The kids are well-educated, especially on matters of history, geology and wilderness survival, but not used to being around large numbers of people.

ERIC BOTHILDR (SCIENTIST)

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Sword Worlder		Male		38
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	8	INT	8	Admin 1, Advocate 1, Carouse 1, Diplomat 1, Flyer (grav) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Investigate 1, Leadership 1, Persuade 2, Recon 1, Science (archaeology) 3, Science (linguistics) 2
DEX	7	EDU	10	
END	9	SOC	8	

EQUIPMENT

Weapons: Shotgun (4D, Bulky)

Eric is primarily an archaeologist, with an interest in primitive cultures. This is what brought the family to Mithril; old rumours of evidence on-planet of habitation in the distant past. Eric is not an 'Ancients hunter'; he believes the quest for answers about the mysterious Ancients is less interesting than finding out how primitive people lived and what they believed. He is a practical and pragmatic man; whilst protective of his wife and children, he trusts them to take care of themselves.



MYNTELLE BOTHILDR (SCIENTIST)

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Sword Worder		Female		39
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	7	INT	11	Admin 1, Electronics (sensors) 1, Flyer (grav) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Medic 2, Science (biology) 2, Science (cosmology) 1, Science (planetology) 3, Survival 1
DEX	8	EDU	10	
END	8	SOC	8	

EQUIPMENT**Weapons:** Carbine (3D)

Myntelle Bothildr is a planetary scientist, with some experience of biological sciences. Often, Eric will identify evidence that a primitive people engaged in a practice and Myntelle will figure out why from the local conditions. They are in many ways an ideal Sword Worder couple, with skills that complement one another and create a partnership stronger than individuals. Myntelle is well aware of this and might offend a female Traveller who she sees as 'trying to be just another man when you could be a remarkable woman'.



EGINO BOTHILDR (SCIENTIST-TO-BE)

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Sword Worlder		Male		11
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	4	INT	8	Electronics 0, Gun
DEX	6	EDU	10	Combat 0, Science
END	5	SOC	8	(history) 1, Survival 1
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Revolver (3D-3)		

Egino Bothildr, at 11 years old, is the youngest of the children and on his first field expedition. He was enjoying the experience until one of the port staff dashed off with the air/raft. Egino saw his father try to prevent this and get a bloody nose, so is likely to be nervous around people he does not know. His mother has dealt with this in pragmatic fashion by giving Egino the spare gun; a small-calibre revolver normally stashed in the expedition supplies. Egino has orders not to show it to anyone but may pull it out if scared enough. He is trying to be a tough Sword Worlder man but he is ultimately a frightened kid.



RUNA BOTHILDR (SCIENTIST-TO-BE)

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Sword Worlder		Female		14
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	6	INT	11	Athletics (dexterity) 1,
DEX	9	EDU	8	Melee 0, Science
END	6	SOC	8	(archaeology) 1, Survival 1

Runa Bothildr is 14 and also on her first field expedition, although she did some practice runs with her father whilst Egino was too young to be taken on an expedition. Runa hated the university where her parents were working and enjoys the wide-open spaces of Mithril. Like the others, she is concerned about recent events but confident her parents will figure something out. In the meantime, she has been exploring the site more thoroughly than the others and was the one who discovered the village.



THE PORT STAFF

Katrin Gyrowetz and Egil Tedorsson have both served on Mithril for a couple of years. They are a sort-of couple, although do not really like each other all that much and are together more due to a lack of anyone more suitable. This caused some friction with Myntelle Bothildr, who can be a little smug about her perfectly balanced family and who made the mistake of giving relationship advice to Katrin.

KATRIN GYROWETZ (TECHNICIAN)

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Sword Worlder		Female		25
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	6	INT	8	Electronics (comms) 2,
DEX	9	EDU	8	Gun Combat 0, Jack-of-
END	8	SOC	6	All-Trades 1
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3)		

Katrin is a technician, whose primary task at the port was to look after the communications equipment and deal with minor maintenance issues. She was thoroughly bored during the field expedition, and became argumentative at every opportunity, but on the whole is dealing with the situation better than Egil.



EGIL TEDORSSON (FIELD OPERATIVE)

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Sword worlder		Male		28
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	10	INT	6	Drive (wheel) 2, Flyer
DEX	6	EDU	5	(grav) 1, Gun Combat
END	9	SOC	5	(slug) 1, Mechanic 1, Survival 1
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3), Autorifle (3D, Auto 2)		

Egil Tedorsson is a field operative, which basically means he is assigned to Mithril Downport to do heavy work and provide security, normally bulldozing snow off the landing field or driving parties across the plains on one of the intermittent sample-collecting missions. He is not technically minded and at something of a loss when there is no obvious path forward. He is currently frustrated to the point of barely-repressed fury, not least because it was him who damaged the air/raft and he has no idea how to fix it. He is naturally transferring this to Katrin, further damaging their already poor relationship.



In addition, Egil is injured and in quite a lot of pain. He may have broken ribs from the second air/raft crash and cannot move around quickly.

THE ATTACKERS

The crew who originally attacked the downport were sent back to finish the job. They are a typical low-end starmerc group, of the sort who do not bother with niceties like licenses or bonding authorities. They are ruthless but not especially skilled and are not expecting any resistance. Given how easily they overran the place last time (those who were wounded are more a source of derision than a warning to others), the mercenaries are overconfident and trying to cover several bases at once. They tend to shoot first and not bother with questions at all, and since they have been told to eliminate everyone they encounter, they are not inclined to be merciful. Indeed, some enjoy the idea of killing everyone on an entire planet.

MERCENARY GUNMAN

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		—
TRAITS		—	SKILLS	
STR	8	INT	6	Gun Combat (slug) 1,
DEX	7	EDU	4	Melee Combat (unarmed)
END	8	SOC	3	1, Recon 1, Streetwise 1
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3), Assault Rifle (3D, Auto 2) Armour: Flak Jacket (+5)		



MERCENARY SNIPER

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		—
TRAITS		—	SKILLS	
STR	8	INT	6	Gun Combat (energy) 2,
DEX	7	EDU	4	Melee Combat (unarmed)
END	8	SOC	3	1, Recon 2, Streetwise 1
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3), Laser Sniper Rifle (5D+3, Scope, Zero-G) Armour: Flak Jacket (+5)		



EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONRY

SWORD WORLDS

ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE

The ATV found at Mithril Starport is a Sword Worlds-built vehicle, slightly different to the version encountered in the Imperium. Notably, it is vastly more expensive but has effectively unlimited range. It is also less well protected due to the need to shoehorn a fusion plant into a relatively small space.

The hull is significantly larger than the standard Imperial ATV and the vehicle runs on six very large wheels rather than eight, with tyres filled with a lightweight gel which seals punctures and provides the vehicle with buoyancy in water. The vehicle's interior consists of a driving compartment, main compartment subdivided into two configurable areas separated by the tiny galley on one side and fresher on the other, and rear section which is accessed by way of an airlock. There are side doors just behind the driving compartment, and roof hatches in the driving and main sections of the vehicle, but the only way to use these as an airlock is to close the airtight partition between the main and driving compartments. This is little more than a plastic curtain but sufficient to allow atmosphere to be retained in either compartment whilst the other is evacuated or exposed to outside conditions.

Airlocks are not necessary on Mithril, as the atmosphere is breathable, but the ATV is designed to function on airless worlds. It has a small but efficient life-support plant under the main compartment floor, alongside its fusion power plant. So long as the vehicle has power, it can recycle air and water, processing a range of biological matter, gases and liquids. Plant and animal matter can also be processed into an edible paste served like porridge or formed into dried blocks and carried as emergency rations. How nutritious and bad-tasting these rations are depends on what is available but in theory an ATV of this type can keep its crew alive for months or even years.

The control cab has seats for a driver and an additional crewmember, who can move the secondary seat around to face a configurable instrument console. The ATV is equipped with powerful driving lights and remotely controlled spotlights plus radar, thermal and low-light instruments. It is also equipped with magnetic sensors and a seismic activity detector as standard.

The two configurable spaces are currently set up with two bunks which can be collapsed when not in use, creating additional working or living space. One configurable area has a dining/meeting table on the other side, whilst the forward compartment has workstations for two crew. This is a common configuration for ATVs used for exploration.

The ATV has a narrow gantry running around the outside from the cab doors to rear airlock, with retractable ladders to reach the ground. This platform is intended for use as an elevated working station, with another pair of ladders giving access to the flat roof of the vehicle. Like many similar vehicles, the ATV has a small retractable dozer blade on the front, which on Mithril is mainly used to clear snow, and a winch for towing or self-recovery if the vehicle becomes ditched.

There is a small turret on the roof containing various antennae and instruments including a powerful multimode camera, and can support a light weapon. A locker next to the rear airlock contains a shotgun and rifle, with 100 rounds of ammunition for each. They do not appear to have ever been removed from their brackets.

The ATV is outfitted with a range of common tools, including shovels, saws and various power tools which can be charged or run directly off the ATV's power plant, along with an awning that can be used to protect a work crew from the sun (unnecessary on Mithril!) or increase living space by acting as a tent.

Typical working crew is four; two in the cab and two riding in the rear area or sleeping as best they can in the bunks. Collapsing the bunks makes it possible to accommodate a more people in the rear area in cramped semi-comfort and up to six or possibly more if they are jammed in like sardines. Many crews resort to space-gaining tricks like opening the airlock or moving items into it for storage, or rigging seats or hammocks over the cargo, making a trip more tolerable for a larger crew.

TL	10
SKILL	Drive (wheel)
AGILITY	-1
SPEED (CRUISE)	Medium (Slow)
RANGE (CRUISE)	100 years
CREW	2
PASSENGERS	2
TRAITS	—
CARGO	0.5 tons
HULL	90
SHIPPING	15 tons
COST	MCr2.3

EQUIPMENT	Airlock, Aquatic Drive, Autopilot (improved), Bunks x 2, Communications System (improved), Computer/1, Digger Blade, Fire Extinguishers, Fresher, Fusion Plant (advanced), Life Support (short term), Mini-Galley, Sensor System (improved), Vacuum Protection
WEAPONS	Small Turret (basic fire control)

ARMOUR

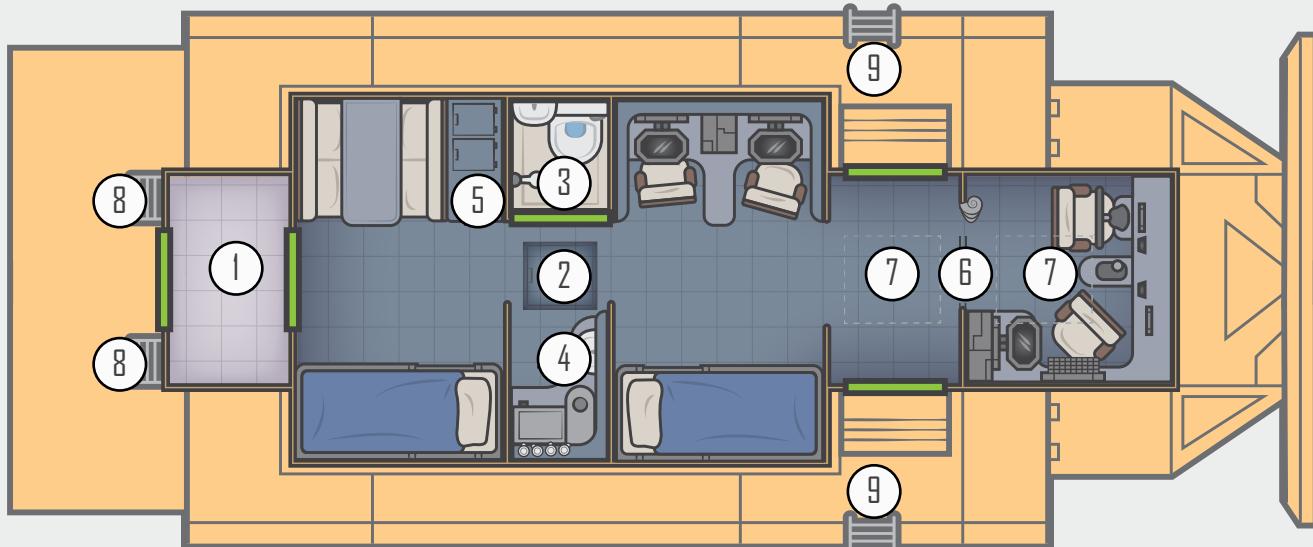
FRONT	3	REAR	3	SIDES	3
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EQUIPMENT

Autopilot (skill level)	1
Communications (range)	500km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+1
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	1
Camouflage (Recon DM)	—
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	—



SWORD WORLDS ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE



- 1. Airlock
- 2. Utilities Access
- 3. Fresher
- 4. Galley
- 5. Tool Storage
- 6. Airtight Partition
- 7. Ceiling Hatch
- 8. Ladder to Roof
- 9. Ladder to Ground

ROUGH TERRAIN EQUIPMENT PACKAGE

A standard four-person equipment package, this item is stowed in a locker aboard the ATV. It contains four sets of individual equipment and some shared items.

Four Personal Kits:

- Boots, one Pair (all sized for people with quite big feet)
- Knee pads and tough 'field' gloves
- Personal harness with attachment points for tethers and climbing rope
- Padded 'field' cap with rigid plastic skullcap insert
- Light working jacket, sleeveless
- Overcoat, waterproof
- Face mask with light-reactive lenses
- Pack of six disposable detection badges; these change colour in the presence of harmful radiation or some chemical threats
- Poncho/blanket

Communal Equipment:

- Climbing rope and pitons
- 'Cold Light' lighting kit – spikes, brackets and holders for chemical glow units
- Field tent, very cramped with four people, and groundsheet



FIELD SHELTER MODULE

favoured by explorers and field teams, the FSM system is designed to create a warm and weatherproof shelter without being difficult to transport. Each module is the same size; a 4x8x3 metre block built out of an inflatable frame/wall filling sandwiched between two layers of extremely tough fabric. The roof is the same, with the floor using a thicker inflatable layer over which a thin flooring layer is laid. Translucent panels allow some natural light into the shelter, which is supported at the corners and edges by semi-rigid pipes that become solid when pumped full of high-pressure air.

The shelter gives good insulation and is reasonably resilient but cannot survive strong winds or snow piling on the roof; a windbreak or overhead cover is essential in these conditions. Each module has its own pump unit, which can run on its own batteries or an external power source. The pump can also be configured to act as a heating, ventilation and compressor/filter unit, taking in external air and making it safe to breathe before pumping it inside. A detachable secondary outer door creates an airlock if one is needed.

An FSM can theoretically be used on a vacuum or trace atmosphere world but is not designed for these conditions and may fail unexpectedly. It is safe in very thin or tainted atmospheres and remains tolerable even in extremely cold conditions.



Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Field Shelter Module	7	30	Cr8000

FIELD UTILITY MODULE

The FUM is a ubiquitous and almost universally hated piece of survival equipment, with a range of applications. At its core is a small but powerful mashing and grinding unit that can pulp almost any organic matter, which can be processed into drinking water and a compressed 'food bar' or porridge-like substance. The nutritional value of the product depends on the raw materials; on Mithril there is little that can provide sustenance to humans, so the output of an FUM will be both disgusting and of poor quality. There are those, calling themselves FUM-chefs, who claim to be able to feed the right ingredients into an FUM and produce something edible but this usually means just adding a vast quantity of hot sauce to the mix and hoping for the best.

The FUM runs off an external power source such as an ATV or air/raft and has internal batteries which will keep it in operation for at least two weeks. The FUM can supply heat to a tent or shelter, and has a hotplate for more conventional cooking, and has detachable flashlights.

Most ATVs have a larger version of the FUM as part of the galley but it is rarely used except on very long expeditions. A standard FUM is carried as part of the emergency kit in some ATVs and most air/rafts intended for use outside major cities. In theory, an FUM can keep survivors warm and fed, supplying them with drinking water, until they are rescued. More commonly, it is used as a mobile power source by teams in the field.



Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Field Utility Module	9	4	Cr8000

FINAL NOTE: ASLAN ON MITHRIL

Classic Traveller Double Adventure 2: Mission on Mithril/Across the Bright Face presented a tantalising hint that Aslan had at some time in the distant past been present on Mithril. This was an anomaly, which was never really explained in later materials.

The conclusions drawn by the Bothildr family are essentially correct; the primitive people of Mithril are indeed Aslan and they originated offworld. The Aslan discovered the jump drive in -1999 but it is not clear exactly when they came to Mithril. If they arrived before the invention of the jump drive, they must have used a 'sleeper' ship of some kind. If so, it is quite possible that Mithril was not their intended destination but that some or all of the colonists were placed there for some reason.

There is an implicit implication that, at some point, there was a technological society on Mithril. This is correct; a segment of the colony mission's population was deposited on Mithril with sufficient materials and equipment to build a small city. This may have been intended as a waypost, or they might have been exiled for some reason.

The colony on Mithril failed and by the time the Sword Worlds were colonised around -400 there were no Aslan living there. They lingered for some centuries after the collapse of their technological society, eking out an existence as hunter/gatherers and creating increasingly crude monuments to their former greatness. The earliest Aslan carvings on Mithril were made with energy weapons or instruments developed from them; the last were chipped out with stone tools. Yet all seem to depict the same thing – giant, 'godlike' Aslan and smaller 'mortal' Aslan. The message was clearly important but is lost to history unless someone like the Bothildr family can decipher the carvings.

In the meantime, the presence of Aslan on Mithril raises new questions:

- Why did they come so far?
- Why did they leave the Hierate at all?
- Are there remains of their technological enclave somewhere on Mithril?
- Did some other part of the expedition keep going past Mithril and where might they have ended up?

It is possible that these early Aslan voyagers encountered the Darrian civilisation, which had reached TL3 by -1500 and (with the assistance of Terran settlers) could build jump-capable ships by -1395. The Darrions lost a lot of their records in the Maghiz, a self-inflicted nova event that destroyed their interstellar civilisation in -925, so it is entirely possible they did encounter the early Aslan colony mission but have since lost that knowledge.

Inquisitive Travellers might want to find out more about the lost Aslan of Mithril and there are those who would pay well for good information. Several universities would be interested and some Imperial agencies might try to use the previous settlement of Mithril to undermine Sword World control. The Aslan Hierate might also be very interested in knowing what happened to their lost brethren and could make use of the discovery that they once had a foothold in what is now human space.

These implications are beyond the scope of this adventure. Subsequent events are, as always, at the discretion of the Referee and their Travellers.

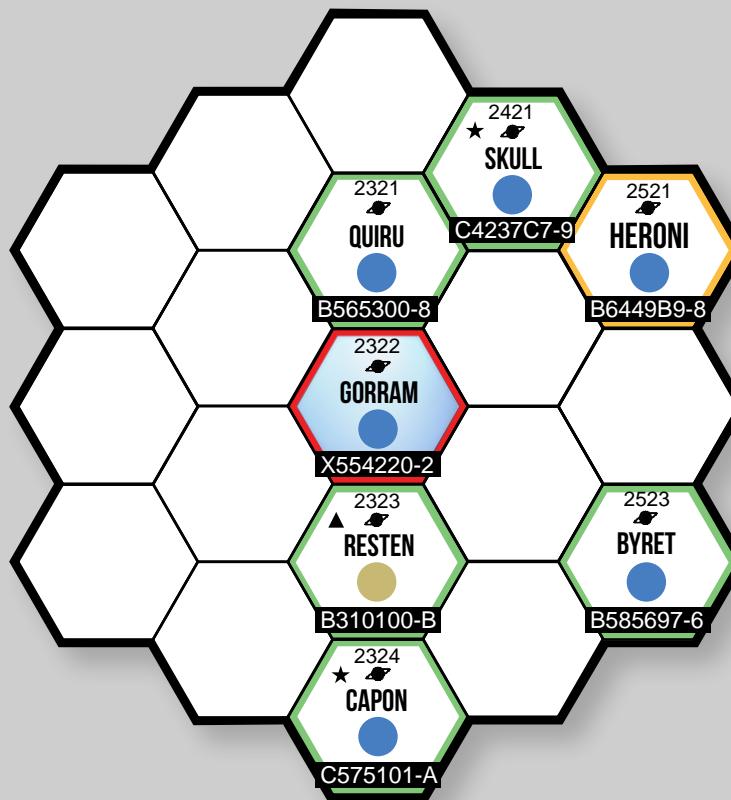
MARCHES ADVENTURE 3

Search and Rescue

Working search and rescue in the Gorram system is a complex business. Gorram is Red Zoned to protect its emerging culture, with passing ships directed to refuel at Gorram Station. For the Travellers, a contract to run the search and rescue operation is a legal way to bypass the interdiction. They might have to put up with bureaucrats, and the occasional entitled free trader captain, but overall the job is low-risk.

After weeks of patrols, exercises and the occasional Red Zone Etiquette seminar, the Travellers receive a GK signal. A ship is in distress, somewhere in the Red Zone. Investigating, they find it is down on Gorram itself. The ship is crippled, its occupants in mortal danger and the Travellers must act fast to save them.

Entering the wreck, the Travellers find that not all is as it seems. This is no lost trader; it is a liner with rich tourists aboard. Half-submerged, leaking liquid hydrogen which freezes the surrounding water, the ship is in security lockdown. Some bodies have gunshot wounds and survivors are hiding from the rescuers. The Travellers have limited time to unravel the mystery of the liner *Amishi* – what brought her down and why was she on Gorram in the first place?



INTRODUCTION

Search and Rescue takes place in the Gorram system but could be transplanted to any other backwater location. The adventure does not require the Travellers to possess a starship, although skills suitable to shipboard operations are desirable.

In *Search and Rescue*, the Travellers are tasked with supporting shipping moving through the Gorram system. Their role is simple – they are to help any ship that gets into trouble. However, there are those who abuse the system and others who should not be trusted with something as sophisticated as a starship. In addition, operating in Gorram brings additional complexities due to the presence of a Red Zone and the need to be discreet.

SETTING UP AND RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The Travellers require a reason to be running a search and rescue operation in Gorram. There are several possibilities depending on their background and motivations. Once there, the Travellers have an obligation to assist passing vessels and will face consequences if they do not. This might give insight into the lives of ordinary starport workers and an opportunity to reflect on how they treat them.

Search and Rescue does not provide the Referee with detailed instructions on how to run every encounter or what level of difficulty is appropriate for each task. Apart from anything else, a difficulty level appropriate for one group of Travellers might be utterly impossible – or ridiculously easy – for another. The Referee should judge what checks are needed and at what difficulty, based on circumstances and narrative drama.

Whilst equipment is specified, the Travellers might have their own gear or skills which make items unnecessary. They are free to use whatever they have but there are consequences for bad decisions. Travellers who go about their business overly casually or cause excessive destruction will find themselves in increasingly serious trouble.

For example, a band of Travellers that executes a rescue by randomly blasting holes in the side of a distressed vessel using plasma guns might face investigation for their recklessness. A group that loots ships they are supposed to be assisting certainly will. This does not mean the Travellers' actions are constrained; they are free to do as they please. However, they have responsibilities and need to approach their tasks in a more disciplined manner than if they were free agents.

INVOLVING THE TRAVELLERS

If the adventure is a one-off or the beginning of a campaign it may be sufficient to simply tell the Travellers they are currently working in search and rescue in the Gorram system. In an ongoing campaign they will need a reason to undertake a period of service. The adventure includes a possible ‘hook’ but the Referee can always come up with a different reason if it suits the campaign better. Alternatively, the Travellers might simply take a job for the money.

A search and rescue ship has clearance to enter the system and travel where other vessels would be challenged. If the Travellers have reason to be active in Gorram, this is an excellent cover. Indeed, they might be able to use this as an excuse to get into restricted areas. Clever Travellers might allow themselves to be co-opted into a similar role in other sensitive areas, especially if they have performed well – or not been caught doing nefarious deeds.

The default option is for the Travellers to take a search and rescue contract from the Imperial authorities. There are many reasons why they might do this, few involving payment. Official contracts are not unfair but they appeal more to ‘working spacer’ types. The job can be dangerous, and rescuers well respected, but there are no big pay-outs for major risk takers. In short, search and rescue is the sort of career a Traveller might end up in rather than one they would choose.

REFEREEING THE ADVENTURE

It is possible to play out *Search and Rescue* without much detail about daily occurrences. Jumping straight to the rescue is not recommended, however. Instead, the Travellers should be permitted to operate in Gorram for a while before the *Amishi* arrives. Space precludes detailing everything that could happen but the Travellers encounter several minor tasks, including:

- Servicing monitor buoys without being spotted from the planetary surface.
- Responding to calls for assistance that turn out to be vexatious or sent by clueless crews.
- Being sent halfway across the system to check a sensor anomaly or an old accident site.
- Meeting the crew of a visiting naval ship.
- Delivering (or attending) mandatory training seminars for people who do not want or need them.
- Rendering minor assistance to people who actually do need it and are grateful.

If played in this way, much of *Search and Rescue* is freeform. The Travellers will solve minor problems and do more or less what they please in between. They are required to obey instructions from the station commander and respond to any vessel in distress. In between these incidents the Travellers might involve themselves in politics or economics, or trade with ships passing through. If they are so inclined, they might buy cargo from one ship and sell it to a later one, or perhaps scam someone into thinking they are trade brokers. The adventure does not have to be a series of incidents and skill checks; the Travellers can make as much or as little of it as they please.

However, the Referee must keep in mind that this system is a Red Zone and the Travellers are answerable for their actions. They can sail pretty close to the wind, and get away with it if they are careful, but drawing attention by blatantly ignoring the rules or engaging in illegal acts will result in investigation. The Travellers will also have to contend with other agendas, which might conflict with their own or expose them to unwanted scrutiny.



REFeree's INFORMATION

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

LUNION SUBSECTOR

Lunion subsector was settled during the early Imperial expansion into the Spinward Marches, becoming an important local and regional trade hub. Expansion was largely guided by the Spinward Main, with worlds lying off it receiving less attention at first. Today the subsector is mature, with several high-technology worlds. Lunion and Strouden are major centres for shipbuilding, with Ling Standard Products (LSP) maintaining huge yards on both.

These yards mostly produce high-volume craft and vessels for major clients, such as shipping lines or the Imperial Navy, but smaller-scale building is also available. Most minor vessels are built at smaller yards owned by subsidiaries of LSP or other contractors. Lunion and Strouden also hold the subsector's main naval bases, with heavy units concentrated there and lighter patrol assets based out of Capon and Adabici.

The majority of worlds in the subsector lie on the Spinward Main, a chain of systems one parsec apart which permits cost-effective, if slow, movement of goods throughout most of the sector. The main runs through several subsectors, each the responsibility of the local subsector fleet. In the case of Lunion subsector, security is the responsibility of the 43rd Fleet, which maintains a significant forward deployment at Adabici. This force is tasked with patrolling the so-called Lunion Shield Worlds, showing the flag along the frontier and policing trade ships entering Imperial space from Spinward. Elements of the 43rd Fleet can be encountered in standing patrols or roving a segment of the Spinward Main. It is uncommon to encounter large numbers of the Spinward Marches sector fleet on the Spinward Main, as they tend to be concentrated around the major naval bases, but cruisers or small task forces do pass through local systems including Gorram.

GORRAM SYSTEM

The Gorram system poses a problem for starship operators using the Spinward Main. The usual practice for jump-1 vessels is to refuel at every mainworld starport along the route but this is not possible where the mainworld is interdicted. One common solution to this is gas giant refuelling, although there are always risks inherent in diving into a gas giant's atmosphere, or to provide tankers that allow passing ships to stay clear of the mainworld. A small refuelling station may be built around one of the other bodies in the system, however in Gorram there are additional problems.

UWP	X554220-2	
Starport	X	None or Unknown
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	5	Thin
Hydrosphere	4	40%
Population	2	Hundreds
Government Type	2	Participating Democracy
Law Level	0	No Prohibitions
Technology Level	2	Printing Press

The Gorram system is binary, consisting of a K8 (yellow-orange) main-sequence star with an M6 (red) main-sequence companion. The system has one gas giant, named Waseid, and seven other worlds. There are no planetoid belts. The mainworld, Gorram, orbits at the outer edge of the system's warm zone and has a low average surface temperature. Its thin atmosphere is breathable and with 40% coverage of water Gorram is a reasonable candidate for colonisation. Indeed, it was colonised at some point in the distant past. The inhabitants regressed to a primitive state and are only now beginning to experiment with wind power and similar TL2 technologies.

Goram is Red Zoned by the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service. The reason is rarely openly stated but is known to starfarers operating in the area and some academics. The Red Zone exists to protect Gorram's primitive society and allow study of their development without offworld cultural pollution. Although the Scouts imposed the interdiction it is the navy that enforces it. Visiting the world is illegal for anyone who does not have an appropriate permit. These are in theory issued only to serious academics and approved research programmes but as always there are ways for those who really want one to get a permit.

The interdiction extends to ships going anywhere visible from the planet, as this would raise questions that might alter the development of the local culture. Skimming fuel is prohibited during the visible cycle when ships might be observed from the mainworld. Orbital beacons inform vessels when they are clear to skim and when they must conceal themselves. This is a fragile arrangement since an impatient captain might derail the development of an entire culture. Threats of legal action if vessels are tracked by the beacons, backed up by regular patrols by the subsector fleet, deter most passing ships from playing fast and loose. However, fuel skimming is not an ideal solution even if the restrictions are respected.

The answer was to create a refuelling station in orbit around one of the system's more distant rockball worlds. Vessels proceeding along the Spinward Main are made aware of the existence of Gorram Station at nearby ports. There are stiff penalties for jumping to the mainworld or gas giant without a permit but transit via Gorram Station is unrestricted. The installation has little in the way of facilities, other than cut-price fuel.

GORMAN STATION

Goram Station is a modest installation consisting of a set of mooring points on long gantries surrounding two large cylindrical modules which look suspiciously like the gutted hulls of old freighters. One of the modules houses a mini-starport with a few shops and bars, plus accommodation for the installation's personnel. The other is a hangar and maintenance facility for small craft.

The majority of craft are fuel shuttles, which fly back and forth to the gas giant. Fuel is skimmed when it is clear to do so, then returned to the station for refining and eventual sale. The station also has a handful of fighters and some armed shuttles for self-defence and to fill in the gaps between naval patrols. These are operated by crews on contract to the station.

Although they are mercenaries, most were recruited upon leaving the Imperial armed forces. This gives the station a very official feel which some starship crews find uncomfortable.

There is always a chance of a naval ship being in the system, typically a corvette but occasionally something larger. Such vessels typically visit Gorram Station for a day or two either at the beginning or end of a deployment. These vary in length, generally being 10 to 20 days in-system plus transit time to and from the vessel's base. Sometimes deployments overlap or multiple ships are assigned but on other occasions there is no subsector fleet presence in the system for a week or more. The mercenaries are always present, however. They patrol in small craft or monitor the live feed from beacons at the gas giant.

Goram station is subcontracted, answerable to the subsector administration. As such it is considered 'Imperial territory' in the same manner as a starport. The public section is sealed off from the crew areas by internal bulkheads protected by electronic locks requiring a keycard to access. Staffed checkpoints can be set up at entry points but they are not considered necessary. Thus, once the Travellers have crew passes, they can move around freely – although they may be required to account for why they were in certain areas. The armoury and sensitive areas such as the command suite and reactor chambers require special access permission, which the Travellers will not be given unless necessary.

Command of the installation is quasi-military and many personnel are former members of the Imperial or planetary armed forces. However, there is no rank structure as such – authority and pay are determined by the post an individual holds. Unlike the military, where rank would be retained from one posting to another, this sort of corporate installation appoints the best candidates it can and gives authority based on their responsibilities. It would, in theory, be possible to encounter a former Imperial Marine officer taking orders from a superior who previously was an ordinary member of the Scout Service. In general, however, former rank does correlate to the post held at the station.

COMMAND STRUCTURE

The command structure is relatively flat, with officers acting more like civilian managers the majority of the time. However, the station personnel are required to enforce Imperial law when necessary and do operate as a system security force. In times of crisis, even those who phrase orders as polite suggestions revert to clipped, no-nonsense commands. The relative importance of an individual is represented by seniority level, indicating equivalence of various posts.

Personnel

Post	Seniority Level	Notes
Station Commander	0	The overall commander of the entire station and its craft complement. Naval crews would grant them courtesy rank equivalent to a naval lieutenant-commander.
Station Executive Officer	1	Handles the day-to-day business of the station. The commander decides what needs to be done and the executive officer makes it happen. Courtesy rank is equivalent to a naval lieutenant.
Engineering Officer	2	The engineering officer is responsible for power and life support as well as technical support for the station's computers and communications systems. The engineering officer is also responsible for damage control and would be granted courtesy rank equivalent to a naval lieutenant.
Station Engineer	3	The station's engineers are well-qualified in relevant fields and serve as managers and expert advisors to personnel under them. Courtesy rank is equivalent to a naval lieutenant.
Technician	5	Technicians carry out work in both heavy and light applications. Courtesy rank rarely matters at this level and lower but most would be considered equivalent to a well-qualified enlisted person or petty officer.
Operations Officer	2	The Operations Officer is part of the command team, overseeing the general running of the station as a whole. Responsibilities include inventory, logistics and record-keeping.
Medical Officer	3	The Medical Officer answers to the Operations Officer and is in charge of providing medical services and managing the medical facility.
Medical Assistant	5	A handful of medical assistants answer to the Medical Officer.
Purser	2	The station's Purser is in charge of all financial matters and oversees civilian businesses licensed to operate at the mini-port.
Stewards and Administrative Assistants	5	The Purser's assistants include stewards who keep the crew fed and administrators who maintain the station's accounts and monitor supply levels.
System Security Officer	2	The System Security Officer is responsible for all aspects of security, both of the station and the Gorram system as a whole. The Red Zone is overseen by the navy but when there is not a ship in system the SSO handles day-to-day operations.
Flight Operations Officer	3	The Flight Operations Officer answers to the SSO and is responsible for the station's own craft operations and vessels using the port.
Security Officer	3	The Security Officer answers to the SSO and is responsible for all potential use of force conducted directly by personnel (rather than from spacecraft) as well as damage control and internal policing.
Team Leaders	4	These are appointed as necessary. Small teams undertake most security operations, each with their own leader. Leadership is semi-permanent once assigned and most personnel have well-established habits of deference to their usual leaders.
Craft Crew, Security Personnel	5	These are paid more than 'foot' personnel but are considered equivalent in command status. If necessary, someone will be elevated to Team Leader although teams often function perfectly well on a cooperative basis. This is due to well-established relationships and can be disrupted by 'pushy new guys'.
Civilians	N/A	The station's mini-port has many civilian business owners and employees who are not part of the command structure. Their concerns are addressed by the Purser or Security Officer.

The Travellers are attached to this command structure as a unit. They are answerable to the Flight Operations Officer for matters connected to their vessel and to the System Security Officer at all times. The designated commander of the rescue ship is equivalent to a Team Leader in seniority but is not part of the station chain of command. The commander, or a council of survivors in the event of some utter disaster, can appoint anyone to any post for the duration of a crisis. Leadership in such a case would be more about the consent of those being led than any formal right to take over.

THE SITUATION ON GORRAM STATION

Travellers might wonder what happened to the previous search and rescue team. The answer is pretty mundane, although it is unlikely anyone will talk openly about it. Essentially the rescue team wearied of the station commander and quit. It is generally thought they were tired of getting chewed out for little mistakes that were not their fault and there is some truth to that. However, there is more to the situation than is apparent.

The last search and rescue crew had been working the station for a couple of years, since before the current executive officer arrived. They were competent and generally got along well with other station staff but seemed to get into trouble a lot with the station commander. This was largely to do with objecting to 'pointless make-work' such as being ordered to investigate a sensor ghost halfway across the system or to conduct a safety inspection on a ship that clearly did not require it. In fact, most were attempts by the station commander to keep prying eyes away from the activities of his associates.

Chrix Derisson, the station commander, was appointed as a manager rather than a military officer. This is perfectly reasonable since the station is basically a small starport. Derisson has not greatly endeared himself to the station personnel due to his tendency to micromanage and criticise people. However, his profit figures always look good, so his employers are content. Unknown to them, Derisson is engaging in some underhand dealing. This is mainly a matter of ensuring the right ships are permitted to move through the system without an inspection or are granted certification that will allow them to avoid close inspection at later ports of call.

Derisson has been getting away with this low-level corruption for years and it has gradually escalated. He recently entered into an agreement to permit a

vessel to make illicit visits to Gorram. This vessel is the *Amishi*, a subsidised liner supposedly offering luxury sightseeing tours along the Spinward Main. It does indeed do this but the extensively upgraded décor and sector-class entertainment aboard are not the reason it commands huge fees. The operators have discovered that some rich people will pay fabulous sums to do something illegal, so long as they can do it in comfort. The latest attraction is a visit to a Red Zone, complete with a trip planetside. With the assistance of Derisson the ship can slip through the Red Zone and land on a deserted island. There are those who will pay handsomely to be able to say they have been to a forbidden place. The tour operator even has a stash of souvenirs salvaged from a wrecked maritime craft.

The first couple of visits went well enough but Derisson had to do more to cover the vessel's arrival and departure than he expected. This involved hurriedly diverting the search and rescue crew halfway across the system, meaning they were out of position when a passing free trader requested assistance. They were then chewed out by Derisson for a situation he had created. This was the final straw. They quit and now the Travellers must take their places.

NAY AND DINDY CODES

To avoid vessels authorised to be in a Red Zone continually triggering the alert system they are issued either a 'Nay' or a 'Dindy' code. Colloquially referred to as a Nay, a NI (No Intrusion) code orders a monitoring sensor system not to trigger an alert. The presence of the vessel will be logged and routinely reported but no immediate alert is triggered. The Travellers' rescue craft has a Nay code for the Gorram system, which is not valid anywhere else. Naval ships usually have Nay codes for all Red Zones in their region.

The code is simply a way of enabling them to do their jobs without annoying everyone; there is no need for the crew to constantly explain why the rescue ship was in the Red Zone. The Nay code does not hide the presence of the vessel and its activities are routinely monitored by the Flight Operations Officer. Travellers who think they are invisible might get themselves into trouble. If they want to avoid detection by the monitoring system, they will need a Dindy code.

A Do Not Detect, or Dindy, code instructs the monitoring system to completely ignore the transmitting vessel and keep no record of its presence. Dindy codes are only issued to naval ships and are typically assigned to a single system. It is less common for a blanket Dindy to be assigned for a whole subsector or

sector. There are rumours that some navy ships have a 'Dindy-all' code or even a Dinty (Do Not Track) which makes them effectively invisible. The Travellers can get a local Dindy code if they work for it, which may lead to the realisation they can make themselves invisible elsewhere with the right information. Of course, having this information is a serious offence.

GORRAM AND ITS PEOPLE

The population of Gorram is officially listed as around 800 but this figure is obviously incorrect. A primitive society this small would be unviable. It might be a subject for those wishing to study the final decline and extinction of a culture but development is simply not an option for such a small number of TL2 humans. The cited population figure probably comes from an early survey that spotted a small community and assumed this was the entire population.

In fact, there is no reliable estimate of the population on Gorram but it must be in the tens or hundreds of thousands. The inhabitants are descended from colonists who arrived in the early Rule of Man era. No ships were crashed or left in the system but there are traces of early settlements remaining. These are mostly buried under thousands of years of soil deposition or destroyed by earthquakes and other natural disasters. The Gorrmites are aware of a few strange locations where artefacts turn up from time-to-time.

They generally believe these items were left behind by titans from whom the present-day population are descended. This is not altogether untrue, at least from a metaphysical perspective.

Goramite culture is considered fragile and in need of protection, and worth studying for social and technical reasons. The Gorrmites are mostly confined to one continent and until recently have been entirely incapable of open-ocean navigation. Their world's thin atmosphere makes the creation of sailing vessels challenging, resulting in experimentation with highly complex sail systems. It is now becoming possible to venture across the oceans, ushering in an age of wind-powered exploration.

Exploration and the development of sailing ships has led to an expansion of other industries and the growth of new technologies. Scientists, notably from the University of Mora, are interested in seeing how their society changes as a result and how the Gorrmites solve the new technical problems they face. A few very discreet expeditions to the surface have been carried out, usually in remote areas, with most observation done with tiny drones that are unlikely to be detected. The Scout Service has a contact plan filed for when the locals inevitably discover they are not alone in the universe but for the time being the intent is to leave the Gorrmites alone to develop at their own pace.



THE CONTRACT

The default hook for this adventure assumes the Travellers have done something they should not have and been caught for it – or at least accused – or they want something from someone and have to strike a bargain. There might alternatively be something in the Gorram system the Travellers want. The situation below assumes the Travellers are having to bargain.

Whatever the problem may be, the Travellers are offered a solution. Gorram Station requires a search and rescue crew, as the existing team has come to the end of their contract – in fact they quit en masse but the Travellers will not be told that – and replacements are necessary. In return the Travellers will get what they want, be it charges dropped, information on a psionics institute or support for an endeavour of their own. They will also be paid a modest salary and get to help people!

Recruitment for the search and rescue team at Gorram is handled by a Lieutenant-Commander Nigilisa at a nearby naval base – probably Capon or Skull. Nigilisa is a typical Imperial Navy ‘plodder’ – an officer who is competent enough but is constantly overtaken by the high-fliers who go on to command warships. Late in her career she has finally achieved the rank of Lieutenant-Commander. Her next promotion will almost certainly be the one long-service officers usually receive upon retirement.

Nigilisa is not embittered. She knows perfectly well she is not that talented and has balanced her naval career with a good home life, children and hobbies. She is a competent administrator who does her job and is properly respected for it. In short, she is typical of the run-of-the-mill personnel who fill most berths in the navy. She will deal politely with the Travellers unless they are deliberately rude and will play fair by them. The fact the task of handing out contracts requiring access to a Red Zone is handled by such an ordinary officer might lead the Travellers to the conclusion there is nothing very interesting about Gorram as far as the navy is concerned. This is a reasonable conclusion.

Lieutenant Commander Nigilisa outlines the terms of the contract. If the Travellers are accepted, they will carry out a tour of duty aboard the search and rescue vessel assigned to Gorram Station. Their own ship, if they have one, will be moored at the station and its daily expenses met but the Travellers must use the

rescue vessel whilst in the system. They will be on-call at all times and are required by contract and law to respond to any distress signal or order from the system administration at Gorram Station.

For this, the Imperial authorities are offering a salary and bonus system which is quite generous by the standards of commercial ship operators but which might underwhelm Travellers more used to the boom and bust of risky endeavours. However, this job is not about the money; it is a means to an end. The contract begins at the moment of signing, which means the Travellers will get paid for their journey to Gorram and any orientation period they require.

Salaries are based on standard commercial spacing rates, with an increment to offset the short-term nature of the contract and an additional payment in regard to the additional risk faced by rescue crews. The authorities have a clear idea of how many personnel are required and what jobs need doing. They are prepared to be a little flexible in order to get a crew, which means a couple of extra support or rescue workers without the requisite skills will be paid. Anyone who fulfils two or more roles gets the higher salary plus 50% of the lower.

The authorities have identified a need for the following personnel:

Position	Number Required	Monthly Salary
Mission Commander	1	Cr10000
First Pilot	1	Cr7500
Backup Pilot	1	Cr5000
Engineer	2	Cr5000
Medic	1	Cr4000
Rescue Support	1–2	Cr2000
Rescue Crew	2–4	Cr3500

If the Travellers prefer, they can pool the salaries and take shares according to their own agreements. A nominal crew with a support technician and two to three rescue crew totals Cr45500 per month. There is no bonus for performing rescues but each month the Travellers satisfactorily perform their duties – as determined by the station commander – they will receive a 10% bonus. As

subcontracted employees of the subsector authorities the Travellers are also in line for civilian bravery awards and similar non-financial recognition.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Upon taking the contract the Travellers will be conveyed to Gorram Station or can make their own way there. Their shipboard expenses will be paid for the duration of the mission either way. The Travellers can appoint a mission commander from among their number but they will answer to the commander of Gorram Station. Their duties are fairly straightforward; they are to be available to assist any craft in difficulties and in between calls will conduct patrols and training flights. Personnel may also be called upon to perform safety inspections and advise passing ships of issues. Although not part of the system patrol force, the Travellers' vessel will act as a roving sensor platform and will be expected to maintain sensor buoys as necessary.

The Travellers will certainly know they are required to respond to calls for assistance and that their performance will be monitored but they will be reminded anyway. The contract requires the Travellers to take instructions from the station commander but they have autonomy over how they tackle any given situation. This does not mean he will not try to micromanage them. The details will be worked out between the Travellers and their commander, and if everyone is professional there should be no difficulties.

The Travellers will not be held financially responsible for broken or lost equipment but they have to provide an account of what happened. In most cases the loss will be written off as 'cost of doing business' so long as there is a reasonable explanation. However, Travellers who take liberties or are wilfully negligent may be prosecuted for misfeasance, destruction of Imperial property and so forth. The agreement comes down to a simple understanding that the crew will carry out their duties diligently and in return will be treated honourably.

Mission Brief

Mission Phase	Actions	Notes
Arrival	Report to Gorram Station at earliest convenience.	Travellers will be expected to report to the station commander. Naval etiquette is not expected but a degree of formality is required.
Preparation	Undertake equipment and craft checks.	Travellers will need to submit a full appraisal to the station commander and confirm equipment status. At this point they become responsible for maintenance and must account for damage or losses.
Preparation	Undertake test flight and trials.	This is something of a formality but the Travellers are required to conduct drive and control tests, submitting an appraisal before being cleared for operations.
Routine	Undertake patrols and training flights as directed by the station commander.	The Travellers can expect to be busy, spending some time on-station at potential incident sites or moving around the system to gain familiarity with their vessel, equipment and local conditions.
Routine	Undertake maintenance of in-system assets as directed by the station commander.	The Travellers may be tasked with minor jobs that are not within the search-and-rescue remit. This is normal on a minor station where resources are limited and the Travellers are expected to comply with reasonable requests from the station commander.
Routine	Provide advice and assistance to vessels requesting it.	Much of the activity undertaken by search and rescue assets is extremely mundane. The Travellers may have to bring spares to a vessel or run a seminar for a crew on how to conduct refuelling without falling foul of the interdiction.
Response	Respond to any distress or emergency call and provide all necessary assistance.	Any distress or emergency signal must be investigated immediately and assistance rendered if possible. This is what the Travellers are there for.
Constant	Avoid detection by the local population.	The Travellers have permission to enter the Red Zone as necessary to conduct their duties but are required to avoid detection. This might cause a conflict if a distress call would require a more overt response than usual. The station commander will advise in such circumstances.

AT GORRAM STATION

Whether they arrive at Gorram Station under their own power or are conveyed by a passing ship, the Travellers must come aboard. They are arriving as crew and are assumed to be trustworthy but isolated stations are sometimes targeted. Infiltration is always a threat. The Travellers therefore must prove themselves.

Upon arrival, the Travellers will be met by a delegation consisting of a couple of crewmembers led by a smartly dressed individual named Sar Aylen. She is a former navy officer, now the executive officer of the station, and is clearly well respected by the crew. Astute Travellers may note that Sar routinely uses the names of other officers, except the station commander. He is always 'The Commander' and her tone is professionally neutral. Other officers and personnel are greeted with varying degrees of warmth.



Sar outlines a few basic rules. Personal weapons are not allowed on the station. Any weaponry the Travellers have can be stored aboard the rescue ship and used as necessary but cannot be brought aboard the station. Weapons will be issued as needed from the armoury. The station has snub pistols, batons and a few laser carbines for security work and boarding parties but this is unlikely to be a concern for the Travellers. Once Sar has given the Travellers their keycards they can go more or less where they please. She adds that some parts of the station are not all that pleasing but there are some reasonable recreation facilities in the mini-port section of the station. The station's command centre, engineering spaces, armoury and main electronics chamber are off-limits to non-authorised personnel, so the keycards will not access them unless permission has been granted.

Sar also informs the Travellers that whilst officially they report to the Flight Operations Officer and the System Security Officer, in practice she will be their main point of contact. The Commander might want to speak with them but it is likely they will have little or no contact with him. So long as the departments do their jobs efficiently the Commander is more concerned with wider issues. There is no hint of disapproval in Sar's voice as she says this. None.

The Travellers are encouraged to move their possessions aboard the search and rescue ship as soon as possible and get on with preparations for takeover. Until the mandatory trials have been completed the ship is not cleared for operations, meaning any rescue work will have to be done by other personnel using the station's shuttles. There have been no incidents since the last crew left but that could change at any time.

PREPARATIONS

The Travellers are expected to familiarise themselves with their vessel and its equipment, and they should want to. Nobody wants to operate in space with their craft in an unknown condition and attempting a rescue is even less desirable. Standard trials and inspections are easy enough for competent spacers. The following table indicates the level of relevant skill to be checked and the information the Travellers will be able to obtain. If the check succeeds with Effect 4+, the additional information will be gained.

Trials and Inspections

System	Relevant Skill	Information	Additional Information
Controls and Manoeuvring	Pilot	System meets or exceeds all requirements.	None. The system was overhauled in the last major maintenance cycle and is in excellent condition.
Drives and Power Systems	Engineer	System meets all requirements but in some cases only marginally.	Slight sluggishness on the pitch and yaw controls but within acceptable parameters.
General Ship's Systems	Electronics	System meets all requirements but in some cases only marginally.	Most systems are in good working order. There is a slight power drain, origins unclear, but this is not a threat to the vessel.
General Spaceworthiness	Mechanic	System meets or exceeds all requirements.	There is evidence of repairs from minor collisions, or simply ongoing wear and tear, but these have been well carried out and the vessel is spaceworthy.
Rescue Equipment	Vacc Suit	Systems barely meet minimum requirements. Spares are in short supply.	Rescue equipment is overdue for a full overhaul and replenishment of spares.

If the Travellers want to try to locate the power drain they can but it is buried in layers of subsystems and cabling that really should be replaced. The problem can be traced – eventually – to inefficiencies in the pitch and yaw thrust controls. These are wasting energy creating an eddying field that partially counteracts itself. The only solution is to replace critical components, requiring the vessel be taken out of service for several days whilst the system is dismantled. This requires standard components but these may not be readily available at a small station. However, the problem will do no more than annoy the pilot and worry the engineers until it becomes a lot worse.

Similarly, the rescue equipment is run down. It all works but there are many components in need of replacement and spares are in very short supply. Indeed, it is clear the previous crew have improvised a few repairs using non-standard bits and pieces and have cannibalised everything not absolutely necessary. The kit is functional but will not remain so for very long.

READINESS REPORT

Reporting any found defects is part of the commissioning process and also an opportunity to ask for a suitable amount of spares plus some maintenance support. It is of course up to the Travellers whether they decide to do so or simply state their vessel is ready for operations. This is true, although it does mean the Travellers will have to make do and mend – and they will be leaving a problem for the next crew.

The readiness report is delivered in person to the station commander. This is likely to be the only time the Travellers meet him but they may not realise that at the time. The Travellers, or at least a designated representative, are summoned to the station's command suite then kept waiting in an anteroom for long enough to demonstrate how important Chrix Derisson is. When they are finally ushered into his office, he is of course in the middle of some critically important business that simply cannot wait.

Derisson begins by waffling on for a bit about how requisitions are always made far too late and people need to synchronise with the supply ship schedule or they will miss an entire cycle. What he is saying sounds true, and could be simply a frustrated manager venting about his subordinates, but Travellers with a knowledge of psychology – either the science or as the result of working in a similar environment – will realise Derisson ensuring everyone knows his subordinates are responsible for problems and providing a plausible explanation for keeping the Travellers waiting. They may gain an insight into his personality now or might realise later.

Finally, Derisson asks for the readiness report. All he wants to hear is that the Travellers are ready to begin operations; the details do not matter to him. Again, astute Travellers will realise the moment they say they are ready, they and not Derisson are responsible for problems with the search and rescue service. If they bring up the subject of spares and

supplies, Derisson informs them they should make a detailed list and submit it as a requisition. The previous crew have clearly been rather lax about that sort of thing but he assures the Travellers he will get them what they need as soon as he can. That is likely to be several weeks, however, given time to send a requisition and wait for it to be fulfilled.

Derisson makes what sounds like a humorous reference to the Travellers moving on by then and not having to worry about it but in fact he is obliquely informing them that he would not mind if they just got on with the job and let the next crew worry about the supply situation. Once he has what he needs – a statement that the rescue ship is serviceable – he does not really want anything more to do with the Travellers. Any attempt to prolong the interview will be met with polite but adamant assertions that there are matters needing immediate attention.

SUSPICIONS ABOUT DERISSON

If the Travellers investigate – either straight away or at some later point – they may discover a few uncomfortable truths. Sar Aylen will not discuss these matters with people she does not know but may be willing to open up with those she has come to trust. She dislikes Derisson but does not think he is doing anything more than being an annoying micromanager. Her time in the navy left her with the clear impression that everything is more complex and will take longer than it seems from the outside and she has not seen anything more serious than an abrasive management style.

Asking around will produce mixed results. Most people know little about Derisson but can see that the station is providing its intended services. It even makes a profit sometimes, which results in everyone getting a small bonus. That is unusual for a station of this sort, so whilst Derisson has no friends as such, most of the staff are satisfied. Those who are not have usually been on the wrong end of a chewing-out or disciplinary proceeding and there are usually two sides to those stories. Indeed, at least some of those with a gripe have obviously done something wrong.

It is not possible to tell how many of the others have a legitimate grievance but sufficient research does produce something of a pattern. Whatever the ostensible reason for the disciplinary proceeding, many of those on the receiving end believe they were shut down for the same reason. It seems that spares and

supplies take a very long time to arrive and, when they do, they are often short of the required quantity. Anyone who complains about this is ‘not a team player’ and can expect a hard time from Derisson.

In fact, Derisson is not skimming the supply budget but he is unrealistically reducing the station’s overheads by delaying orders for necessary materials and encouraging departments to skimp on their maintenance. This has been going on for a long time but on a low level such that it has taken a long while to become apparent. The station has gradually used up its allocation of spares and even emergency components, whilst every delayed order results in someone coming up with a clever workaround. At the same time, promotions and raises are few and far between. The station has a personnel budget, which is increased a little each year to account for inflation. By keeping staffing costs down and withholding raises, Derisson is able to create an apparent efficiency.

What the Travellers saw with their own ship is prevalent right across the station; Derisson is using the ingenuity and goodwill of the crew to reduce overheads and make his own stewardship seem highly effective. This has not yet become dangerous but it is beginning to affect morale. Anyone who pushes too hard for a raise or a set of necessary components is put in their place. In the case of the previous rescue crew this was combined with annoying make-work and when they complained they were disciplined.

This situation is not simple or clear-cut. Derisson is not embezzling; he is manipulating the budget to make the station look more profitable than it really should be. This may be mismanagement but it is not a crime. Letting the maintenance schedule slip might be considered negligent but he has contrived to make it someone else’s fault in most cases. In short, any direct legal action will harm a lot of other people and probably will not damage Derisson. Physical assault will lead to a jail sentence. If the Travellers want to act against Derisson they will have to find another way.

It is possible the Travellers will not notice Derisson’s involvement or care much about it. They might even make a deal with him if they are that way inclined. The Referee can continue to provide clues that he is not quite on the level as the Travellers operate out of the port. If they uncover his misfeasance, this will provide an explanation for other events in the adventure. If not, perhaps the Travellers will encounter him again in the future.

THE AMISHI RESCUE

After the Travellers have been at the station for a few weeks, a situation develops which requires immediate attention. Every monitor buoy in the system suddenly begins repeating a distress signal. This is coming from a subsidised liner named *Amishi* but curiously does not indicate the vessel's location. The signal is a full GK, not a hazard or emergency declaration.

GK is short for *Gashimeku Kaalariin*, which translates from Vilani as Vessel In Distress. By law, all vessels must respond to a GK signal unless this would place them in undue danger. For a dedicated search and rescue ship there is no choice – the Travellers' mission is to render assistance to vessels declaring any emergency. The first problem is locating the source of the original signal.

THE AMISHI INCIDENT

The liner *Amishi* has visited Gorram a few times. Not the system; the planet. This is highly illegal but has been done several times without incident. This run, however, has gone badly awry. The sort of people who crew a vessel which routinely penetrates Red Zones, just so that rich idiots can say they have been there, tend not to be entirely honest and there is always a certain amount of personnel turnover aboard such a vessel. This permitted an enterprising group to put their own people aboard until they formed a significant proportion of the crew. The plan was to hijack the liner and take it somewhere quiet for a while but this was to be no simple piece of piracy. The ship was a suitable prize but it was the people aboard who would bring in the real rewards.

Amishi's operators charge a phenomenal amount of money for a luxury cruise including the opportunity to collect souvenirs from an actual Red Zoned planet. This is extremely illegal but thus far they have been able to get away with it. Those able to afford the ridiculous fees have generally been careful who they told about their adventure but the cruise developed a secondary purpose. A visit to Gorram aboard the *Amishi* is an opportunity to make contacts with other rich people who share a general disregard for the law.

Goram is Red Zoned to protect its developing culture but this is of little interest to the passengers. They are the sort who think the rules only apply to – or even

exist for – the lower orders. Their whims and status are what matter and allegations of misconduct can be easily deflected or simply ignored. This does not mean the passengers aboard the liner are entirely bad people but they are rich and entitled, and not really interested in anyone else's problems.

This attitude extends to the crew and is one reason for high personnel turnover. Even when conveying rich people to legal destinations the crew have to put up with a lot. On a Gorram Run the situation is typically worse, with about half the crew quitting after one or two runs. Only those whose past means they cannot get a well-paid job elsewhere are likely to stay on long-term. However, that has improved of late, with several crewmembers apparently willing to put up with any amount of aggravation in return for an above-average salary.

The reason for this was the planned hijacking attempt. The hijackers reasoned that they could command huge ransoms for those they captured and that a rescue attempt was unlikely since the captives will not want their activities to become public. There is some good logic behind this but the best-laid plans can go awry. In this case, they did.

The hijack was scheduled just before the liner left Gorram, since it would be moving in secrecy and a change to its intended destination was highly unlikely to be discovered. The passengers would, as usual, go planetside and collect souvenirs from the wreck of a Gorramite vessel. After their usual antics – such as filming sequences of themselves prancing around aboard the wreck or crowing over their 'conquest' of the Red Zone – they would come back aboard for the departure celebration. This was to be a sort of dinner-and-miniature-ball affair in full finery as the ship climbed to orbit, then a final salute to the Interdictors from the observation dome before the ship departed the system.

The plan was simple enough. When the targets were suitably distracted and their security personnel off-guard, soporific gas through the ventilation system would render them helpless. Anyone missed could be rounded up at gunpoint. Meanwhile the ship's astrogator, part of the hijacking team, would alter the jump vector. Crewmembers who noticed would be eliminated or taken captive and the

hijackers would form a skeleton crew and take the ship to a place of concealment. Nobody – or at least, nobody valuable – was to be harmed.

Whilst the ship was on its approach to land, final preparations began. A bodyguard became suspicious and was in the wrong place at the wrong time; the plan unravelled quickly after that. What was supposed to be a bloodless round-up of sleepy rich people became a gunfight on the bridge and a pursuit through the rest of the ship. Casualties were inevitable, among them the pilot. She managed to get a distress call off before succumbing to her injuries, shortly after which the liner crash-landed close to the intended landing spot.

The crash put most of the passengers and crew out of action and did a lot of damage to the vessel. The surviving hijackers have lost control of their hostages, with individuals moving around the ship or trapped in sealed compartments. Meanwhile the distress call is being routed through various buoys rather than coming direct from the ship. This is a result of the vessel being tied into the system's interdiction-monitoring system – which it should not be. The same codes that allow *Amishi* to slip through the interdiction are currently confounding the rescue attempt. The hijackers – and the victims – are unaware a distress signal has been sent at all.

FINDING THE AMISHI

The distress signal is an automated GK, which requires an immediate response by the Travellers. It contains only the ship's identity – misrepresented as a free trader named *Sacaggan* – and some badly scrambled telemetry data. It is being repeated on an endless low-power loop by the interdiction buoys. A preliminary analysis of the signal requires an Average (8+) Electronics (comms) check and 2D minutes. Failure indicates the Travellers cannot make out much from the telemetry data but they will still obtain the basic information noted below.

BASIC INFORMATION

The signal was transmitted to the interdiction buoy network rather than being a full emergency broadcast. This is unusual, to say the least, but there is no obvious explanation. Travellers with a naval background might figure out that the ship has a Dindy code active. Similar measures are used to restrict distress calls among friendly naval vessels for various reasons. Not wanting the enemy to know the location of a damaged ship is one, along with a desire to keep problems from

becoming public knowledge. If this is the case, the vessel has access to a Dindy code for Gorram – but its transponder says it is a free trader. This does not match up. The signal includes codes for a planetary impact and the presence of a survivable environment outside the ship. This can only mean the vessel is on Gorram.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Piecing together fragments of the signal, it may be possible to obtain a little more information. Travellers succeeding in the above check will learn one of the following for every point of Effect:

- The vessel's manoeuvre drive is not available.
- The vessel remains capable of jump-3.
- Crew casualties have been taken.
- Internal environment is compromised, with at least one hull breach.
- Internal conflict has been detected; shots have been fired.
- The exact location of the vessel.

Which pieces of information the Travellers are given is up to the Referee. Each is picked out of the garbled signal after a few minutes of work. The Travellers may be able to infer from what they learn that the distressed vessel is definitely not a free trader. They may also realise the crash was caused by internal events rather than an accident and that the crash site is therefore potentially dangerous.

COMPLICATIONS

It is apparent the distressed vessel is on the surface of Gorram, which raises questions and poses problems. Approach to the planet is normally forbidden, even for vessels with permission to operate in the system, but at the same time there is a requirement to assist any distressed vessel. The Travellers might decide this is above their pay grade and contact the station commander, which proves less than useful. Derisson has seen the distress signal but cannot be sure whether it is coming from a vessel he has provided access codes to or one that obtained access by other means. All the same, he knows he is potentially in trouble and has no idea how to deal with the situation. He dithers for a while then unhelpfully tells the Travellers to 'proceed at discretion'. Requests for clarification are met with an indignant statement that the Travellers are the rescue crew, not Derisson, after which he cuts comms and will not take their calls.

If the Travellers do not act, eventually Sar Aylin abruptly signals them to: 'Get on with your jobs. You're the rescue crew. Get rescuing!' She is more helpful than Derisson, citing laws that permit the Travellers to ignore

the Red Zone if necessary to save lives. It is of course preferable for the Travellers not to be detected but so long as they take reasonable steps to conceal their activities from the locals, they will not be held liable for a breach of the Red Zone. Charging in headlong over major population centres is another matter, however.

Locating the crashed ship should not be hard if the Travellers can get into orbit but it is not responding to communications. There is no problem with using normal comms – the locals have nothing that would pick up radio traffic – but the ship's communications system is still locked into 'quiet mode' in which it does not respond to transponder pings or communications traffic without authorisation from the bridge. If the Travellers try, they can get a location by triggering an interrogative through the interdiction buoy system and tracking the Dindy signal made in response. The irony of using a do-not-detect signal as a locator might amuse the Travellers but the option is available only to those 'inside' the system to start with.

MAKING AN APPROACH

Under the circumstances it is permissible for the Travellers to enter orbit and conduct a search. There is a chance their vessel will be spotted by someone on the ground but they are unlikely to realise the significance of what they have seen. Thus, careful Travellers can avoid damaging Gorram's emerging culture and lucky ones might get away with it.

Detection

Action	Notes	Chance of Being Spotted (2D)
Blatant Approach and Search	No significant attempt at concealment whilst flying a search pattern.	11-
Blatant Direct Approach	No significant attempt at concealment but a direct approach to the crash site.	10-
Careful Approach and Search	Some concealment measures taken whilst flying a search pattern.	8-
Careful Direct Approach	Some concealment measures taken using direct approach to the crash site.	6-
Stealthy Approach and Search	Extreme concealment measures taken whilst flying a search pattern.	4-
Stealthy Direct Approach	Extreme concealment measures taken whilst on direct approach.	3-

The liner can easily be detected from its power and thermal signature, although its transponder does not respond to pings. Once the Travellers know where the vessel is they can plan a covert approach. If, for some reason, the Travellers do not realise remote detection is possible they may have to fly a search pattern, which increases the chance of detection. Travellers who are more careful might try scanning from a high orbit where they are unlikely to be spotted, then making a descent to low altitude over open sea or uninhabited land. Terrain such as mountains could also be used to mask entry.

The detection table indicates the chance of being spotted depending on the Travellers' actions. The chance of being spotted is a straight 2D check. The Referee might apply modifiers for clever actions by the Travellers, such as keeping mountains between the ship and the nearest Gorramite settlements.

The Referee should decide whether the Travellers' plan constitutes a blatant, careful or stealthy approach, but the latter does require a good plan and extra time taken. 'Stealthy' should not be easily achievable. Also, Travellers who take a long time about reaching the wreck may be called upon to justify their actions at an inquiry. The most likely reason for this to occur is Derisson seeking to transfer blame.

Ultimately the Travellers need to weigh up the conflicting requirements of speed and stealth. The Effect of the detection check is used as a DM on a second 2D check on the culture shock table.

Culture Shock

Result Outcome

0-	Major cultural damage results from the incursion. The Travellers will be subjected to a highly intrusive inquiry.
1–2	Multiple sightings in different places send ripples through the Gorramite culture. The Travellers will be called to account for the debacle.
3–5	Multiple sightings in different places cause some local controversy. The results are mainly bad for those labelled cranks, liars or drunks for speaking about it.
6–8	A few sightings cause some locals to wonder what they just saw, creating no more than a few baffled conversations.
9–10	A handful of sightings leave some locals confused but cause no significant cultural damage.
11–12	Hardly anyone saw the ship and nobody realised what it was. The Travellers' handling of the situation is above reproach.
13+	Nobody noticed anything. The Travellers will be commended on their excellent handling of the situation. There might even be a case study circulated so others can learn from them.

THE WRECK OF THE AMISHI

The subsidised liner *Amishi* is down in shallow water, in a bay on a remote island. There are no signs of significant habitation on the island, although there are possible indications of very small-scale agriculture and some collapsed wooden structures close to the bay. There is also a local sailing ship, clearly wrecked and with its sails removed, in the bay. It has obviously been there for some time.

The sailing ship was wrecked here decades ago, its brave crew of explorers killed or stranded to eke out whatever existence they could. It is the source of souvenirs desired by visitors to the world and there are indications a ship has landed just inland from the wreck at least once in the past. It was this spot the liner was approaching when the fight broke out.

The liner splashed into shallow water, only a few metres deep, settling on the same underwater rocks that claimed the sailing ship. The vessel currently lies at an angle, bow underwater and stern just clear of the waves. Water is entering the hull but slowly, seeping through cracks rather than flooding into major hull breaches. The ship still has emergency power but its internal systems are on lockdown due to a full-scale security alert triggered by the gunfire.

Scanning the area from close range indicates the liner has some power and there is a secondary signal coming from the Gorramite wreck. This is an automated distress signal, of a sort put out by most personal comm devices. As a rescue ship the Travellers have access to codes that will cause the comm to provide additional information. If they think to do this, they receive strangely truncated data. It simply says:

IMPERIAL VIP. Priority Extraction

Followed by some life-signs data which is worrying:

Pulse weak and erratic, blood pressure falling, body temperature dangerously low. Death imminent.

There is no other data – no name, species or any other useful information. Nor is there any guidance available on what Imperial VIP might actually mean. If the Travellers have worked in a high-end security or rescue field before they might be aware that some individuals are flagged for rescue first, even at the expense of multiple other casualties. The exact criteria for this status is not known but can be presumed to involve noble status or high rank. The presence of such an ID on this vessel raises some questions.

THE GORRAMITE WRECK AND THE ISLAND

If the Travellers take some time to explore the island – justifiable perhaps if they think other casualties might be nearby – they will find evidence that someone lived there several decades ago. These were the survivors of the shipwreck. Far from home and with no prospect of rescue they built themselves shelters and tried to farm the plants they found on the island. One-by-one they died and were buried alongside their comrades who had perished in the shipwreck. There is a sad dignity to the situation, counterpointed by the fact that many of the graves have been desecrated.

Early souvenir hunters took tools or surviving fragments of journals from where the last to succumb left them but once the readily available trophies were exhausted some of the later visitors dug up the bodies to see what they could find. More accurately, they had their staff or the ship's crew do it. Graves have, in some cases, been carefully refilled but many bodies were left exposed. What the Travellers make of this depends on their own moral stance.

The wreck of the Gorramite ship is a wondrous thing, with slender spars designed to support vast sheets to catch the thin winds of Gorram. Some masts came down and the lower decks are filled with water but the remains of the vessel are still impressive. Primitive the Gorramites might be but they are clever and determined. Virtually everything that can be reached without plunging deep underwater has already been stripped, either by the survivors or those who came along later.

Huddled on the middle deck, near where the hull is stoved in, is a wounded human. He is barely conscious, having lost a great deal of blood from two gunshot wounds. This is Sir Paul Ramaeda, a good-looking young man who happens to be a very distant cousin of the Duchess of Mora. His presence aboard the liner would be a great embarrassment if word got out. Although his decision to come to Gorram was... questionable... his actions here were rather more honourable. His bodyguard was the one who realised something was afoot and was attacked whilst investigating.

It appears the bodyguard put up a terrific fight, downing one of the attackers, and afterward Sir Paul took her gun and tried to protect the other passengers. He was badly wounded in the attempt and with no prospect of rescue – he thought – he did the honourable thing. The liner has no meaningful passenger manifest, no evidence of who was aboard. Sir Paul managed to get to the launch docking bay and threw himself into the sea. He was not thinking particularly clearly but saw it as his duty to protect his family name. The plan was to allow his body to be washed away and lost, sparing his family any embarrassment when the liner was found. In the event he was driven against the Gorramite wreck and his will to live resurfaced.

Although he has managed to get out of the water, Sir Paul has little time if the Travellers cannot get to him. He is in a dark area of the mid deck, which can be accessed through the breach by going underwater or by climbing onto the top deck and making entry by more normal means. Saving him means stabilising him in situ then getting him to a medical bay before the combination of hypothermia and blood loss kill him. The medical components of this task are straightforward but it is the unusual circumstances that pose problems for the Travellers. That and the fact that their attention is needed elsewhere.

THE AMISHI

Outwardly, *Amishi* looks like any other Type-M subsidised liner. However, its accommodation has been heavily altered. The forward four cabins on each side are unchanged and are used by the crew. However, the remaining 22 staterooms, along with the low berth chamber and the crew common area, have been remodelled into a luxury accommodation suite.

The central area is a multipurpose social area/ballroom/dining area with a bar and well-equipped galley at the rear. In addition, there are four guest suites down the sides of the ship. Each contains one luxury and two standard cabins plus a six-ton private area, meaning the ship can accommodate four parties of 1–2 VIPs with 2–4 attendants, bodyguards or hangers-on.

At the time of the disaster, *Amishi* was carrying three VIP parties. A crew of eight was carried. Of these, about half were unscrupulous or desperate enough to take part in the cruise but were not in on the hijacking plan. Marin Suwa is the coordinator of the hijackings. His two staff are recent hirelings with no idea what is going on.

VIP Parties

Suite	Principal	Nature	Staff
Aft-Port	Sir Paul Ramaeda	Minor Noble	Bodyguard, Steward
Aft-Starboard	None	—	—
Forward-Port	Stev and Alix Gvaegloen	A Vargr couple from Porozlo with huge stock holdings but no real political power	None
Forward-Starboard	Marin Suwa	Ostensibly a shipping magnate from Glisten subsector	Personal chef, Attendant/Steward

Crew

Position	Notes	Hijacker?	Alive?
Captain/Astrogator (Rhysse Laslic)	The vessel's captain is the longest-serving member of her crew.	No	Yes
Pilot	Recent hire, ex-Scout with a questionable history.	No	No
Chief Engineer (Penter Deov)	A career merchant-line engineer fired for drunkenness.	No	Yes
Engineer	Poorly qualified hireling who constantly underperformed during the cruise.	Yes	No
Medic (Saress Aten)	Medical student just trying to scrape together enough to pay for tuition.	No	Yes
Chief Steward	Former Army chef, claims to have trained at a starport restaurant.	Yes	No
Steward/Security Officer	Poorly qualified and hired for precisely that reason.	No	No
Steward (Giovanna Maitte)	Well-liked and personable, also a sociopath.	Yes	Yes

WHAT HAPPENED?

As noted elsewhere, Sir Paul's bodyguard became suspicious during the approach to planetary landing. She made her way to the bridge to speak to the captain and commed her employer to lock himself in his cabin. As she was confronting the captain, who was completely in the dark, the ship's assistant engineer entered the bridge armed with a shotgun and tried to take the bodyguard prisoner. She refused to surrender and managed to fatally wound the attacker, although she was also hit. The ship's pilot was critically injured by a stray shot. *Amishi* crash-landed almost immediately, injuring most of those aboard.

Rhysse called for the chief engineer to get the comms systems working, which could only be done on the bridge. The vessel's security chief set off to meet him but was ambushed, after which the hijackers grabbed the chief engineer and locked her in the disc section. The captain managed to prevent the hijackers from gaining access to the bridge but in so doing trapped himself inside with no control over the rest of the ship.

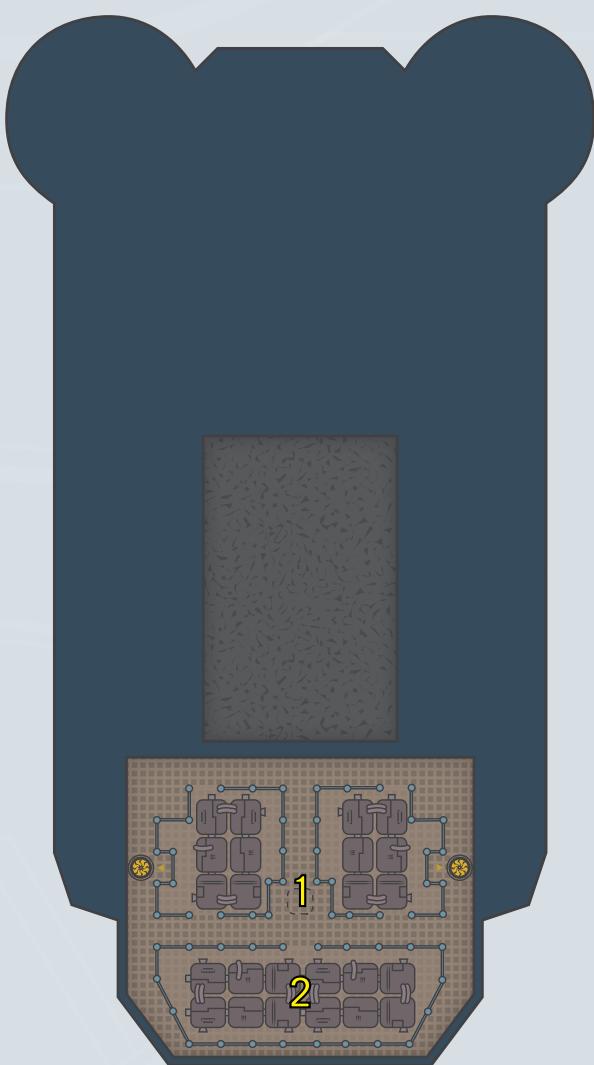
Staggering back to the guest suite, the bodyguard found the ship's security chief and realised there was no way to tell which crewmembers were hostile. She collapsed from blood loss at Sir Paul's cabin, urging him to remain safe. Instead, he set off to round up the other passengers and succeeded in doing so. Unfortunately, these included Marin Suwa. As Sir Paul tried to get the passengers to the ship's launch, Suwa shot him in the back. Stev and Alix fled, as did Suwa's personal steward. His chef hesitated and was gunned down.

Suwa and the ship's stewards set about trying to secure the ship, with mixed success. They finished off Sir Paul's bodyguard and his steward but could not gain access to the bridge. They did not know Sir Paul left the ship and continued looking for him along with the other survivors. Suwa particularly wants to find and eliminate his own attendant so he can pretend to be an uninvolved passenger when rescue comes. The chief steward met with an accident whilst searching the lower decks; Suwa does not know she is dead.

THE AMISHI

Upper Decks

1. Emergency Hatch
2. Upper Engineering
3. Lounge
4. Steam Room
5. Bridge
6. Bar/Galley & Lounge
7. Lower Engineering

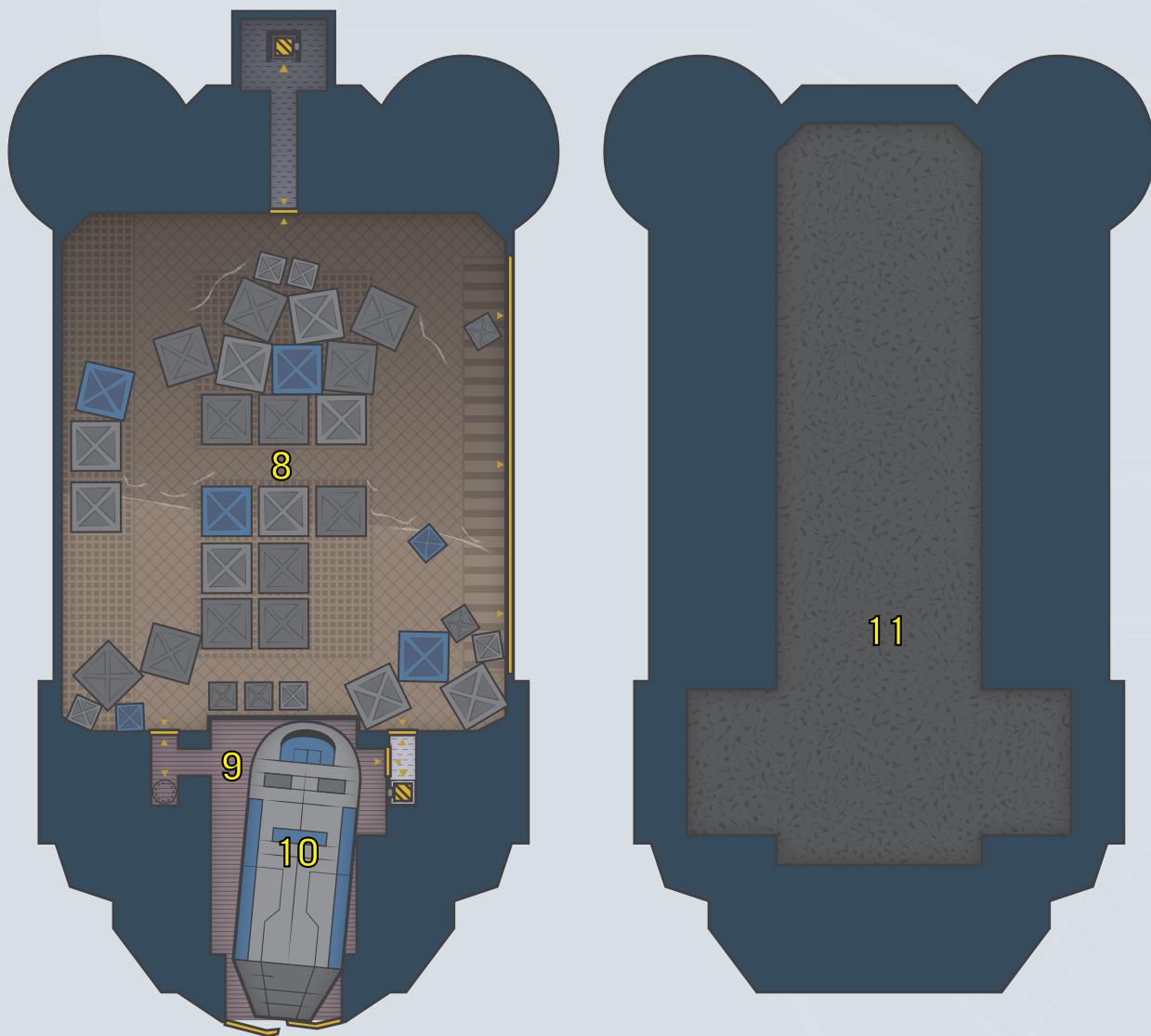


| Door ▶ Iris Valve ⚡ Deck Access Down ⚡ Deck Access Up 🏗 Lift Shaft

THE AMISHI

Lower Decks

- 8. Cargo Hold
- 9. Docking Space
- 10. Launch "Docked"
- 11. Lower Fuel Tank



Door

Iris Valve

Deck Access Down

Deck Access Up

Lift Shaft

THE PRESENT SITUATION

In all there are eight survivors still aboard. The chief engineer is locked in the flooding disc section. His keycard was taken but is no use to anyone else. The captain is trapped in the bridge. His card would work if he can get out but the doors have been damaged and control pathways interrupted. Suwa's attendant is hiding somewhere, as are Alix and Stev. Of the hijackers, Suwa has the 'floating' access keycard. The other steward was not seen with the hijackers by anyone still alive and will try to play the part of a scared victim if at all possible.

Time is running out for any survivors aboard the *Amishi*. The wreck is sliding off the rocks into deeper water and flooding is increasing. At present, systems are powered but locked down due to the security alert. There is an additional hazard, which the Travellers might not at first detect. The ship's liquid hydrogen fuel tanks are intact but some of the fuel-handling machinery is damaged. As a result, liquid hydrogen is slowly seeping into the surrounding water. Liquid hydrogen is stored at temperatures below -250 degrees and instantly flash-freezes water it encounters.

Water expands when frozen, causing further damage to the piping and causing miniature icebergs to float to the surface around the ship. The Travellers might not immediately note the hazard but sooner or later a tank will crack and a large quantity of liquid hydrogen will come into contact with the surrounding water. This is likely to seriously damage the hull, potentially allowing supercooled liquid to enter the remaining habitable spaces.

Travellers using thermal sensors will be aware the surrounding water is far too cold and sooner or later someone will surely notice the chunks of ice floating to the surface. The water will not harm someone in an environmentally controlled suit, although vacc suits are not designed for underwater use and may be damaged. The real danger is coming into contact with a clump of liquid hydrogen as it bubbles out of the ship. This will cause 1D damage on even a light contact, possibly freezing a suit to the point where it is breached. Major contact will be fatal. In short, anyone going into the water is in real danger and pretty soon the wreck itself will be compromised.

MOVING AROUND OUTSIDE

If the Travellers can get onto the hull, there are three likely methods of entry. The bow of the ship is entirely underwater, with the upper deck under or awash as far aft as the bridge. Parts of the ship above the waterline are slippery and canted at a difficult angle. All but the most careful movement requires an Average (8+) Athletics (dexterity) check. If failed, the Traveller falls and suffers 1D-1 damage. Armour does not normally protect against this but a good suit – such as a rescue suit – or even just a worksuit with knee and elbow protection will reduce damage to D3-1.

Travellers who fall may start to slide down the hull. A second Average (8+) Athletics (dexterity) check allows the Traveller to grab something. If not, they will begin to slip down the hull towards the freezing water. Typically it will take D3 additional rounds to reach the end and fall into the water but the Referee may adjust this for dramatic purposes. Other Travellers can of course try to assist but there is a chance that this will result in someone else going into the water. The difficulty of these checks increases to Difficult (10+) once the hull has iced up.

Cutting a hole in the hull will allow entry at a point of the Travellers' choosing. This is likely to be the upper deck drive room but they could attach cables and dangle down the flanks or stern of the ship to get into the main deck instead. There is also an emergency hatch in the dorsal surface of the upper engineering space, which could be cut or forced. Failing that, entry is possible through the launch docking bay. Its doors are twisted out of shape, allowing someone to squeeze through. Of course, the bay entrance is a couple of metres above freezing water with no useful handholds, another problem the Travellers will need to solve. Perhaps they could lower themselves on cables from a hovering spacecraft and use their rescue suit jets to push them against the hull whilst they make entry or come up with a more outlandish solution. Whatever they do, they will have to figure a way of getting the casualties out.

MOVING AROUND INSIDE

The emergency situation has resulted in an internal lockdown. All iris valves and hatches are locked shut and will only respond to a command-level keycard. There are three of these aboard the vessel. Two were originally the property of the captain and chief engineer, with a third intended for use by whoever was assigned as VIP-wrangler that day. This was a serious security flaw; one that was exploited by the hijackers to great effect. The two assigned keycards have to be authenticated by the owner's biometrics, and are useless to anyone else, but the 'floating' keycard simply needs to be presented to a reader.

All iris valves and hatches are locked and must be cut or electronically bypassed. They will open for anyone with a valid keycard – either the ‘floating’ card or the captain and engineer cards in the right hands. If the security alert can be cancelled, any crewmember’s card will open the doors. Most are still on the fallen bodies.

Cutting hatches and iris valves is a lengthy process requiring specialist equipment – which fortunately is issued to rescue crews. Alternatively, it is possible to spoof the locks by way of the maintenance panel. This takes 2D minutes under normal circumstances and requires a Difficult (10+) Electronics check. It is possible to make repeated attempts to unlock a door but of course there may be someone drowning on the other side. Once unlocked a hatch or valve can be manually forced open. This is relatively easy for hatches but iris valves require a specialist winding tool to force the mechanism.

Standard entryways such as cabin doors are robust but can be kicked in with enough effort. Smashing open a cabin door requires a total of 12 points of Effect on Average (8+) Athletics (strength) checks if no specialist tools are available or eight points if the Travellers have suitably weighty rams. A standard door can be forced with a single ‘rescue key’ in a single round. Whilst hatches and valves are water and airtight, cabin doors will always leak a little. Leakage increases as attempts are made to force them open.

Note the ship’s internal recorders and some sensors have been disabled. This is due to the illegal nature of the voyage, to prevent evidence being available if the ship were to be inspected. There was never any intent to aggravate a situation like the present one but the lack of data might be a problem. For example, the ship’s passenger manifest consists only of a set of code numbers and whereas normally there would be a record of who has accessed which parts of the ship, no such data is held. This is in violation of numerous statutes but so is everything else about the voyage. The upshot of this is that the Travellers will have to rely on observation and physical evidence rather than accessing the ship’s records.

UPPER DECK

The upper deck is mostly fuel tank. Cutting into this will cause an escape of super-cold but rapidly expanding liquid hydrogen. This is somewhere between a jet and an explosion, and will do 4D damage to anyone making the hole, 2D to anyone within three metres and will propel them off the upper deck. This means the Travellers will be dumped into the sea with their suits frozen solid... all in all this is best avoided.

Entering the upper engineering space by way of the hatch or what some crews call a ‘bespoke point of entry’ – a hole cut in the hull – is safer. It is a small matter to climb down the access ladder or even the equipment to the floor of the engineering chamber on the middle deck. The upper deck contains only the higher parts of large machinery, with access walkways for maintenance. There is no-one present and no real threats other than the difficulty of clambering around the chamber.

MAIN DECK: ENGINEERING

Engineering is on this deck, protruding into the one above. The chamber is well above the water surface when the Travellers arrive, so is dry. Valves and hatches are locked tight due to the security lockdown. The auto-diagnostic function of the valves shows that someone has accessed every valve and hatch in engineering during the security lockdown using a command override keycard. No data is held on who used the card or when.

MAIN DECK: ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation deck is mostly dry but some water is entering at the front through minor hull cracks. The bridge is sealed off from the rest of the vessel, as is the ship’s office. The security lockdown can be cancelled only from the office or the engineering chambers. Normally, this would be done at the bridge but the control pathway damage makes this impossible.

It is likely that some survivors will be in this area but they are frightened and do not know who to trust. Winning them over might be difficult and once the Travellers have done so they must contend with a clamour for immediate removal from the wreck. Of the eight survivors, Suwa moves the most openly. He has the ‘floating’ keycard and alternates between searching the ship and puzzling over the launch on the deck below. Others are more inclined to hide, with the exception of the junior steward Maitte. She has been tasked with eliminating witnesses by Suwa whilst he seeks a way out. Given her nature, she is more inclined to look for her own exit or to keep tabs on Suwa in case he double-crosses her but she might be encountered skulking about ‘looking for other survivors’.

The Referee can place other survivors anywhere in the ship but at least one will be trapped in the elevator shaft between this deck and the one below. This will likely be Osteir or Aten; perhaps both. Whomever is in the lift shaft tried to get to the lower deck when the shooting started and became stuck when the lift’s power cut out. They can access the shaft through emergency hatches but there is water in the bottom and it is rising quickly.

DISC SECTION

The disc section is underwater and almost completely flooded now, with water coming in at a fair rate. The ship's engineer, Deov, is here – drowning the prospect of dying with the ship's spirit supply.

CARGO DECK

The cargo deck is partially flooded, with neck-deep water at the front. There are many hiding places among the supply crates and it is likely at least one survivor is here. Alix and Stev will have probably taken refuge here.

The launch docking bay is above water level – just – and more or less dry. However, the launch is wedged tight due to the crash and the aft doors are jammed partially open. Suwa has been visiting the vessel, bringing a few belongings and trying to figure out how to free it. Neither of the surviving hijackers can fly it but they are becoming desperate enough to try.

PLAYING OUT THE RESCUE

Search and Rescue is not the sort of adventure with a big ‘boss fight’ at the end. Indeed, there might not be any violence at all. In all likelihood, the Travellers will enter the wreck and start searching for survivors. The Referee should decide where everyone is – locations given are merely suggestions. Once they encounter someone, the Travellers will have to piece together what happened.

The liner can be felt shifting on the rocks as the Travellers explore and occasionally it lurches alarmingly. After a while, a larger amount of liquid hydrogen starts to escape and the water around the vessel cools rapidly. This might be a mixed blessing – water entering the ship poses a real hypothermia hazard to the survivors but at the same time if enough ice forms it may support the wreck.

In addition to figuring out what happened and finding survivors who have a reason to remain hidden, the Travellers have some problems to solve. These include:

- Freeing the engineer from the disc section before she freezes.
- Getting people out of the lift shaft.
- Obtaining an indication of how many people were aboard.
- Freeing the captain from the bridge.
- Treating injuries and hypothermia.
- Calming panicked passengers.
- Encountering hostile hijackers.

This is taking place on a tight time frame, as the vessel may slide fully underwater at any time. The Referee should play into claustrophobic drama for the situation, forcing the Travellers to make tough decisions. They may have to abandon some survivors in order to save others or might even find themselves fully underwater in a flooding ship, sitting on enough liquid hydrogen to entomb the vessel in ice for days.

RESOLUTION

How this plays out depends on the Travellers' choices. They are under obligation to assist but how they go about that is up to them. After all, the *Amishi* is illegally in a Red Zone, carrying entitled rich people who do not care about laws or protecting emerging societies. The Travellers' job is to rescue these people no matter their opinions on whether they deserve it and they will be judged on their efforts – but nobody expects the Travellers to take stupid risks to save someone who makes it difficult.

After the rescue, there are some additional possibilities. The Travellers might uncover the station commander's complicity and if they save Sir Paul there are further complexities. The Travellers could use his presence on the cruise as leverage or might be gracious about their silence. Rescuing Sir Paul might gain them a grudging contact or a grateful friend, giving them a conduit to nobles who cannot openly acknowledge what the Travellers did but might offer useful patronage. Similarly, the Travellers might figure out the station commander is involved. This information might be useful, as who knows when leverage over someone who can grant Red Zone access might come in handy or be extorted for profit. Alternatively, the Travellers might turn Derisson in, although he might escape justice through skilled weaselling.

Overall, *Search and Rescue* is a problem-solving exercise. The Travellers will receive little reward for their efforts – after all, they are merely following their duties – but a good look at the situation might open up other possibilities. This can be beneficial to a campaign, with Travellers finding inventive ways to profit rather than simply accepting a fee for completing a mission.

SURVIVOR LOCATIONS

The default positions for the eight survivors are as follows:

Survivor Situation

Survivor	Location	Issue	Activity
Rhysse Laslic	Bridge	Trapped.	Trying to over-ride the electronics and re-establish control.
Penter Deov	Disc Section	Trapped, threat of drowning or hypothermia.	Climbing on furniture, drinking, climbing back on the furniture.
Marin Suwa	Free to move	Leader of the hijackers.	Trying to locate other survivors and find a way to free the ship's launch.
Saress Aten	Accommodation section or lift shaft	Scared and confused. Liable to drown or freeze if in the lift shaft.	Hunkering down.
Giovanna Maitte	Free to move if Suwa opens hatches for her	Hijacker but not likely to be suspected.	Seeking to eliminate other survivors so there are no witnesses. Watching Suwa for signs of betrayal.
Yenaffi Osteir	Accommodation section or lift shaft	Scared and confused. Liable to drown or freeze if in the lift shaft.	Hunkering down, specifically hiding from Suwa.
Alix and Stev	Cargo Deck	In the least immediate danger but will eventually freeze or drown.	Hiding.



GARIS-CLASS RESCUE VESSEL

The Garis-class is common both in 'official' use and operated by freelancers. It is a sublight vessel, typically operating from a station or starport but capable of being carried by a parent ship or operating unsupported for an extended period. Occasionally a vessel of this type will be dropped off in a system and picked up later, possibly with crew swaps in between. This is a cost-effective way of implementing basic search and rescue capability in a backwater or uninhabited system. These craft are capable of operating as a repair ship in some circumstances, making them useful to starport operators for maintenance and dealing with minor damage.

Vessels are built mostly at TL12, making spares easy to come by. The only exception to this is the deep penetration scanner suite. This can be swapped for a less capable version if imported electronics are unavailable but very few vessels have had to do this. Overall construction is rugged, with light armour to protect against collisions with debris and armoured bulkheads around some of the most important systems.

Designed as twin cylinders, the hulls are linked by blocky structural members which contain storage space and towing equipment. Each cylinder fulfils different functions and are designated 'crew' and 'mission'. The crew cylinder contains the drive and main powerplant, which is more than sufficient to supply the entire vessel and protected by an armoured bulkhead. Forward of

this is a crew accommodation area with eight cabins and a modest common area. The primary bridge is at the fore end of this cylinder, with its own bulkhead. This cylinder sometimes mounts two dual laser turrets for self-defence, although these are omitted in safe areas.

The crew section can be sealed off from the mission cylinder at need. This contains a secondary reactor which can provide emergency power to a distressed vessel without putting the main plant at risk and a secondary bridge used to coordinate rescue operations. The cylinder also contains four cabins and some living space for the use of rescued personnel plus a bank of low berths and medical facilities. This area is occasionally turned into an emergency triage and treatment centre but more commonly rescued personnel need only a stiff drink and a once-over by the medic. The briefing room is typically used to take statements from those who have been rescued and to prepare the correct legal notes but again can be used for spillover in a large-scale rescue.

Garis-class ships carry a modified armoury/workshop used to support vacc suit and rescue suit operations and to keep tools in good working order. The two missile turrets on the mission cylinder can launch standard munitions but it is rare to ship more than a handful of these. Most ammunition stowage is taken up with line-attachment and rescue equipment.



GARIS-CLASS RESCUE VESSEL

TL12

		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	400 tons, Close Structure, Rugged	—	27
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 2	15	3
M-Drive	Thrust 4 (energy efficient)	16	35.2
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 300	20	20
	Fusion (TL12) Power 150	10	10
Fuel Tanks	40 weeks operation	30	—
Bridge	Standard Bridges x2	40	4
Computer	Computer/20	—	5
Sensors	Improved	3	4.3
	Life Scanner	1	2
Weapons	Dual Turrets (pulse lasers) x2	2	5
	Single Turrets (missile rack) x2	2	1.9
Armoured Bulkheads	Bridge x2	4	0.8
	Main Power Plant	2	0.4
	M-Drive	1.6	0.32
Systems	Armouries x4	4	1
	Brigs x2	8	0.5
	Medical Bays x2	8	4
	Workshop	24	3.6
	Briefing Room	4	0.5
	UNREP System (40 tons/hr)	2	1
	Cargo Crane (150 tons)	3	3
	Cargo Scoop	2	0.5
	Probe Drones x20	4	2
	Deep Penetration Scanner (TL13)	10	10
	Breaching Tubes x2	6	6
	Forced Linkage Apparatus (TL12)	2	0.1
	Grappling Arms x4	8	4
Staterooms	Heavy Grappling Arms x2	12	6
	Tow Cable	4	0.02
Software	Standard x12	48	6
	Low Berth x 40	20	2
Common Areas	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Library	—	—
	Intellect	—	—
Cargo		64.4	—

Crew

Captain, Pilot,
Engineers x2, Medic,
Additional Rescue
Crew

Hull: 192

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr14539/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr175.12

Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems

80

Manoeuvre Drive

120

Sensors

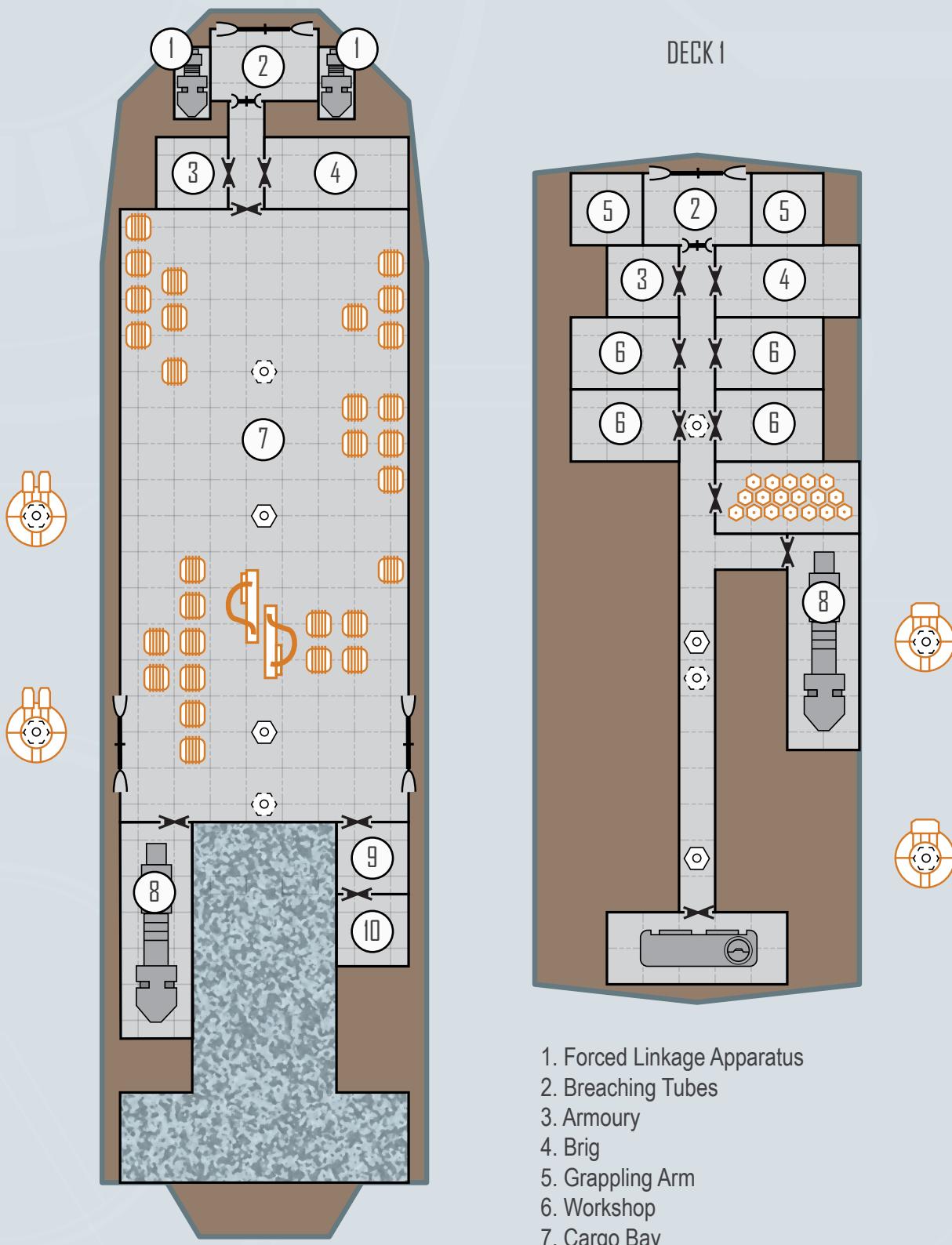
15

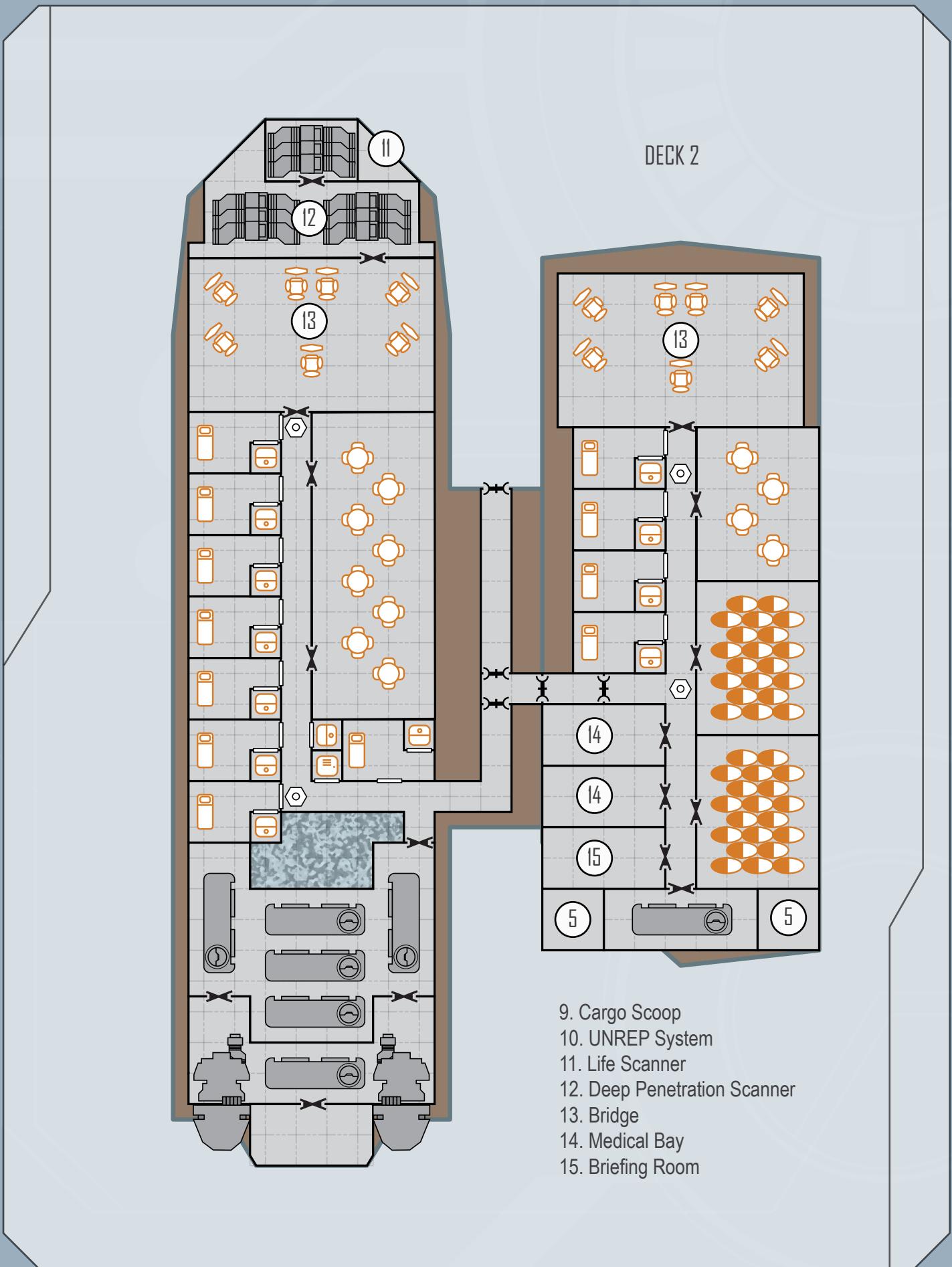
Weapons

20

Systems

17





- 9. Cargo Scoop
- 10. UNREP System
- 11. Life Scanner
- 12. Deep Penetration Scanner
- 13. Bridge
- 14. Medical Bay
- 15. Briefing Room

RESCUE OPERATIONS

Where possible, a rescue is enacted by coming alongside and taking personnel off through the airlock. However, this is not always feasible. The *Garis*-class has options including forced linkage or grappling arms and can deploy suited personnel assisted by specialised equipment. The second bridge is typically used to coordinate the rescue but it is possible to control another ship from here.

Few ship captains ever want to hand over control of their vessel to an outsider, so there are protocols in place. Under most circumstances the distressed vessel must voluntarily provide access codes and can revert to local control at any time. This locks out the remote pilot until another set of codes is exchanged, unless the distressed vessel grants blanket access. Even then, the vessel's systems can override external control. It is rumoured that a variant of this system is in use by the military and perhaps some pirate groups, which allows a complete takeover that cannot be blocked from the target ship. Use of such a device would be highly illegal for anyone but the proper authorities and even then subject to restrictions.

An emergency override is possible under some circumstances. Where a ship has lost its bridge and backup control capability it may be desirable to hand off control. This requires connecting a remote access point to the target vessel's command pathways, usually through damage points. If there are none, it may be necessary to cut into the hull. A vessel with a functioning ship's computer will normally resist the control attempt unless instructed otherwise but rumours of pirate bands cleverly inserting a control point in port and later using it to gain control of the target after hacking the main computer to allow access are abound.

The popular concept of a rescue in space comes mainly from vid dramas and is less common than most people think. However, it is always possible to attach lines and bring out personnel in rescue bubbles, with rescuers using powerful tools to cut away debris and wreckage. No crew wants to do it this way, however, as it is fraught with risk. In general a hull-to-hull rescue will be made, if at all possible, and ideally nobody is taken off a distressed vessel at all. The common service provided by *Garis*-class ships is to bring a replacement for a failed component and crewmembers who know how to fit it or jury-rig the system. It is generally preferable to assist a distressed vessel in reaching port under its own power than to pull victims out of a dying ship.

MISSILE SYSTEMS AND DRONES

A standard missile launcher can be used to deliver a range of useful equipment and systems, either allowing greater area coverage or getting equipment where it is needed before the ship arrives. A standard missile bus is used, with the warhead replaced by various specialist systems. There are six 'package spaces', with a basic assistance package taking up one space and a larger one requiring four spaces. Packages can be delivered by a single missile, providing they are all in the same relatively small area. Submunition ejection and guidance units can carry the packages out to a distance of 10 kilometres or so from a central point, although more commonly emergency packages are bracketed around a crash site or distress call.

ASSISTANCE PACKAGE H

The H assistance package is designed to assist distressed personnel in a habitable environment – hence the H designation. It assumes a group of six survivors per payload but obviously equipment can be shared out among a greater number. There are six individual packs, each containing:

- Backpack/shelter, known as a 'bivvy bag', with carrying straps. Fold-out panels create a waterproof sleeping bag/personal shelter suitable for any human or similarly sized species.
- Pack, basic clothing. Contains socks, mittens, trousers and a tunic or robe suitable for a range of humanoid body forms. Also, several disposable filter masks and a pair of tinted goggles.
- Belt, carrying water bottle, small knife, ration bars for two days, chemical lightsticks, water purification kit, personal sanitation kit, cord and multitool with saw, blade, screwdriver/lever and other basic tools. The kit also has a 'squealer', which emits a piercing high-pitched sound when activated. It is used mainly as an audible beacon but can frighten off some animals.

In addition, the group kit contains a multifrequency beacon/communicator, four configurable chemical generated lamps, preserved rations for 14 days for six persons, TL8 medikit, chemically powered stove providing heat and light for up to two weeks, basic multi-person tent and group sanitation kit. There is also one small hatchet/ prybar and one small but heavy hammer/pick.

The H package is intended to be delivered to personnel stuck on the ground in an inaccessible area, providing the most basic survival equipment. Sometimes an area might be bracketed with such packs whilst a search is

going on. They have an audio-visual beacon and will respond to radio-frequency pings. Any standard comm can activate radio beacons in this manner, although dedicated units are also available.

Package H costs Cr8000 and takes up one package space.

ASSISTANCE PACKAGE N

Package N is intended to assist survivors in an environment where the atmosphere is unbreathable or serious hazards exist. It is far more expensive than the H package and represents forlorn hope. However, occasionally it is possible to support a group of survivors long enough for rescue to arrive. For example, where a vehicle has been breached and is losing atmosphere slowly or where air is running out for vacc-suited personnel groundside.

The pack has a radio/visible beacon and centres on a small power-and-utilities unit. This is chemically fuelled and lasts 5–10 days depending on conditions. It contains an air scrubber and water recycling unit and can provide heat and light. A tough airtight tent, with an airlock segment is included and supports up to six people in very

cramped conditions. The tent can be covered with a tough, reflective blanket to provide some protection against micrometeorites and direct solar radiation.

The rest of the pack is mostly made up of air bottles and oxygen generators, sufficient for one or two days for six people or more if the air scrubber is in operation. There are also emergency vacc suits for six people. These are rather flimsy but come with over-gloves and foot/lower leg covers for rough environments. A large selection of patches, a TL10 medikit, plus rations and water for a week are also stored in detachable bags.

Assistance Package N costs Cr50000 and takes up four package spaces.

OTHER ASSISTANCE PACKAGES

There is nothing to stop operators from creating their own packages. A small one costs Cr5000 without contents; a larger package taking up four spaces costs Cr12500. Packages can be used to deliver almost anything, from dry clothing through inflatable boats to sweet treats and are sometimes repurposed to deliver contraband when lacking a suitable landing spot. It might be possible to create a stealthy delivery system which could slip past monitoring beacons and ships but most package units are designed to be noticeable for obvious reasons.



RESCUE SUIT

The Imperial Navy uses a heavy-duty rescue suit similar to those in civilian service but constructed at a higher Tech Level and incorporating extra accessories. Navy personnel are more likely than civilians to deal with radiation or toxic coolant gases in an emergency situation, although the possibility always exists. Thus, civilians sometimes try to buy reconditioned navy suits. The Travellers in this adventure will be issued with them and are expected to return the suit in good condition at the end of their period of service. Although the search and rescue ship at Gorram is not a naval vessel, any navy property aboard is subject to laws governing theft of military property. However, suits do get damaged enough that they have to be scrapped and inventive Travellers might find a way to have theirs written off whilst remaining serviceable.

Suits are constructed at TL14 and offer additional protection against physical damage and radiation. They are resistant to corrosive and insidious atmospheres, although this is not the same as being impervious. A naval suit will withstand these conditions at least five times as long as a standard suit. In addition, it incorporates a high-capacity battery to power its own systems and four detachable power packs which can be plugged into a standard vacc suit or tools. Onboard power lasts 12 hours, with the same duration in oxygen.

Rescue suits also have a set of emergency manoeuvring jets, attachment points for towing casualties or equipment bundles and a built-in laser cutter along the left forearm. This is designed to burn through debris and obstructions but can be used in combat. If so, it does 3D damage but the way the beam is focused means this drops to 2D beyond 20 metres and 1D at 40 metres. The laser is useless as a weapon beyond 60 metres. All suits have a built-in configurable holster. This can carry a spare thrust pistol but is issued with a snub pistol on a lanyard.

Accessories include a line gun which can be clipped to the right arm of the suit and later detached. Short lines run from the gun, allowing the user to tether themselves and any casualties in place. The rescue belt is almost always worn. It carries various tools, suit patches and two reels of tethering line. A backpack manoeuvring unit is also available, which provides high-speed manoeuvring capability in free space, at the expense of being bulky. Slipping in and out of the harness is a challenge without a frame to any but a skilled user. This requires an Average (8+) Vacc Suit check and takes one or two minutes per attempt.



Armour Type	Protection	TL	Rad	Kg	Cost	Required Skill
Imperial Navy Rescue Suit	+14	14	150	20	Cr75000	Vacc Suit 1
Thrust Pack	—	14	—	8	Cr25000	Vacc Suit 2



RESCUE SUPPORT DRONE, PERSONAL

The RSDP, or 'Res-Dapp', is sometimes described as a rescuer's best friend. A chunky ovoid floating on its own gravitic system, the RSDP will automatically follow its operator, using sensors to provide constant information. These include conventional and thermal cameras, high and low power radar, radio-frequency monitors, ultrasound emitters and a densitometer. In addition, the drone has bright lights that can be tuned to different frequencies, a laser rangefinder that can function as a designator for semi-active homing of other drones or equipment. Best of all, according to many users, the drone has a big handle and can tow the user out of danger or facilitate easy movement when needed.

RSDP drones normally stay close to the operator but can be sent to investigate an area. Some variants have short-duration sub-drones which have an endurance of about an hour. These scout dangerous areas, or spread out to find casualties, and are normally recoverable. All data is streamed back to the RSDP and thus to the operator. There is also a capability to network several drones, creating a real-time model of the local situation. Well-funded operators will have several drones under the command of a support and analysis team, whilst others may only have one per rescue crew.

RESCUE KEY

A 'rescue key' is a door-opening device which uses the rapid expansion of a compact low explosive to snap a door out of its frame or dislocate locking components. The 'key' is a small wedge-shaped device backed with instant-setting glue. It requires an Average (8+) Mechanic check to place one correctly and if even slightly out of position the device will only damage the door or cause a breach allowing water or air to enter or leave the compartment. If used correctly, a 'key' pops the door out of alignment sufficiently that it can be dragged or kicked out of its mountings by any sufficiently determined individual. Keys are normally issued in strips of three, attached to a disposable bandolier.

Robot	Hits	Speed	TL	Cost
Rescue Support Drone, Personal	4	9m	14	Cr55000
Locomotion	Grav			
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 3, Recon 2			
Attacks	—			
Manipulators	—			
Endurance	72 hours			
Traits	Armour (+4), Flyer (idle), Heightened Senses, IR Vision, Small (-3)			
Programming	Basic (recon) (INT 4)			
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), Densitometer Sensor, Drone Interface, Laser Designator, Light Intensifier Sensor (advanced), Recon Sensor (enhanced), Transceiver 500km (advanced), Vacuum Environment Protection, Voder Speaker, Wireless Data Link			

Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Rescue Key	9	0.25	Cr250

CHARACTERS AND OPPPOSITION

Travellers may interact with a variety of people during their deployment. Most will be crews of passing ships, stopping off to refuel at the station and partaking of the limited entertainment available there. Travellers prone to acting like obnoxious jerks in bars might encounter others of the same. Where these encounters lead is up to the Referee. Characters necessary to the adventure are detailed here.

CHRIX DERISSON

Chrix Derisson is a well-educated business graduate with years of administrative experience. He has absolutely no military experience but is not a fool. When the possibility of commanding a station came up, he familiarised himself with the underlying concepts. This was good enough for the subsector authorities; if Gorram was a military station it would have a military commander but it is first and foremost a commercial installation. Business acumen was considered the most important asset.

Derisson could not be said to have a command style. He runs the station like a business and generally quite well. If he were more willing to accept advice from subordinates who know more about the subject than he does there would be no problem, yet Derisson has to be seen to be in charge... unless something is going wrong. This attitude places him at odds with some staff, notably his executive officer. He is aware that she is a huge asset but slightly resents her popularity with the military personnel.

Although not much of a commander, Derisson does not usually need to be, he has standing orders from the navy and sees they are obeyed. At the same time, Derisson is good at making money and this pleases both the business sector at the station – such as it is – and the authorities. The station's overheads are kept low enough that it actually makes a profit some years. Since funding was provided to support commerce in the region, it was accepted that Gorram Station might have to run at a significant loss.

Unfortunately, one reason for the profitability is some irregular dealing on Derisson's part. He has negotiated very low supply prices from 'old friends in the shipping trade' who benefit from small favours. This is typically the ability to stash goods at the station or for a customs

certificate to be issued. A ship that has an official customs certificate from one port on its route, especially an Imperial facility rather than a locally owned starport, will normally have its manifest taken at face value by busy officials elsewhere. Derisson is also involved in a distinctly shady deal allowing certain ships to bypass the Red Zone around Gorram.



CHRIX DERISSON

GENDER		Male	
TRAITS		—	
STR	4	INT	10
DEX	6	EDU	11
END	5	SOC	8
SKILLS			
Admin 2, Advocate 2, Broker 3, Carouse 2, Deception 1, Gambler 1, Persuade 1			

SAR AYLEN

Sar Aylen came from a poor background but managed to scrape the funds together to attend a naval academy. She emerged as a qualified but not outstanding officer, serving just over nine years aboard a variety of vessels. These were mostly tankers and transports; necessary but unglamorous and if asked she would say that her low social status was a factor in her assignments. Whilst not one of the high-flyers, she was at least as good as some of the well-connected officers now commanding small warships. Nevertheless, the Imperial Navy gave her a chance to better herself and she is, on the whole, grateful for it.

Leaving the service at 30, Sar moved through subcontracted navy-connected jobs over the next five years. She finally arrived at Gorram Station last year and has since thrived. Paid more than twice what she was getting in the navy and holding a more important job, she is happy with the corporate sector. This is reflected in her enthusiasm and ambition – she hopes to command a similar station within a few years, with a real shot at a starport governor's post before she turns 45.

Aylen has a relaxed demeanour made possible by her meticulous planning. Almost every contingency has been foreseen, resulting in efficient responses to incidents that occur in Gorram. She is liked and respected by the personnel, who have confidence in her and will take her side against any critics. This does not mean she is over-friendly; Sar Aylen is a career officer and well aware of social implications.



SAR AYLEN

GENDER		Female		
TRAITS		—		
STR	6	INT	9	Admin 2, Athletics 0,
DEX	8	EDU	8	Diplomat 1, Gun Combat
END	6	SOC	5	(slug) 1, Leadership 2,
				Pilot 1, Tactics (naval) 1,
				Vacc Suit 1

EQUIPMENT

Weapons: Snub Pistol (3D-3, Zero-G)

MARIN SUWA

Marin Suwa is, outwardly, a rich starport broker with a taste for fine wine. He is the brains behind the hijacking attempt, although now he is completely out of his depth. Hugely in debt to all the wrong people, he conceived of the scheme and convinced himself it was fool proof. It never occurred to him the situation would become violent and he had no contingency plan for anything, let alone a crash on Gorram.

Suwa has demonstrated a willingness to use violence but this originated from panic rather than ruthlessness. He is horrified at what he has done, and the likely consequences, and will flit from one desperate idea to another. Thus, he may stash his weapon and pretend to be a scared passenger, then try to shoot someone in the back. He knows that some passengers and crew can identify him as one of the hijackers, so will try to arrange for them to remain un-rescued or to suffer a disaster. This is most likely to take the form of frightened exhortations to get to safety even if it means abandoning someone, or lying about the number and location of survivors.

Getting weapons aboard the ship was ridiculously easy, they were brought aboard in Suwa's luggage and not all were taken up by the hijackers. There is evidence of complicity if the Travellers search Suwa's cabin. Overall, he is the classic traitor, ostensibly grateful for rescue but secretly plotting to leave some survivors – or even the Travellers – behind. His fear is genuine and may conceal his true nature for a time. Indeed, the Referee might use Suwa as a cover for Maitte, who is altogether more dangerous.



MARIN SUWA

GENDER	Male		
TRAITS	—		
STR	4	INT	7
DEX	7	EDU	9
END	9	SOC	9
EQUIPMENT	Weapons: Body Pistol (2D), Combat Shotgun (4D, Bulky)		

RHYSSE LASLIC

Rhysse Laslic is an independent liner operator and used to be proud of it. His ship was owned free and clear, and used to be a regular at the upmarket ports of the Spinward Main. The refit to create a luxury variant was expensive but seemed worth it. Then came the downturn, which drove the vessel so far into debt that running illegal cruises to Red Zones became worth the risk.

He had no idea what was planned and still does not know the whole story. The first he knew anything was amiss was when Sir Paul's bodyguard started asking strange questions, then gunfire erupted. He is locked in the bridge and unable to get out or communicate meaningfully. He has been pulling panels off and fiddling with the electronics but has no idea what he is doing. Rhysse has armed himself with an emergency snub pistol and might do something stupid if the Travellers fail to identify themselves in time.



RHYSSE LASLIC

GENDER		Male	
TRAITS		—	
STR	7	INT	8
DEX	7	EDU	8
END	7	SOC	7
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Snub Pistol (3D, Zero-G)	

PENTER DEOV

Penter Deov is not someone the captain would have hired in better times but once he was running illegal cruises she was all he could get. Deov is a good engineer when only somewhat drunk but she combines a talent for sneaking alcohol into engineering with a need to drink it as soon as possible. Fired from various jobs, she is grateful to Laslic for the chance he offered her but unable to control her drinking. She is currently locked in the disc section with no prospect of rescue and dealing with imminent death the only way she knows how. The spirit safe was no match for her and she is now well on the way to total helplessness. She might get it together if hope resurfaces; Deov is an experienced drunk who can summon moments of superhuman concentration. However, most of the time she is likely to be an annoying liability.



PENTER DEOV

GENDER		Female	
TRAITS		—	
STR	6	INT	8
DEX	9	EDU	9
END	4	SOC	4
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Randomly hurled gin bottle, possible projectile vomiting	

SARESS ATEN

Saress Aten took the job of medic aboard *Amishi* to pay for her medical degree. She is young, naïve and scared. With suitable direction she can be channelled into useful tasks such as caring for the injured but left to her own devices she will try to hide or sneak to the Travellers' point of entry in the hope of getting off the ship.



SARESS ATEN

GENDER		Female	
TRAITS		—	
STR	5	INT	10
DEX	10	EDU	9
END	6	SOC	7

— SKILLS
Medic 2, Science (biology) 1

YENAFFI OSTEIR

Osteir is a recent hire, a typical ambitious young person with no connections, hoping to get into the starship hospitality trade. She took the job with Suwa blind and never considered that she might be going on an illegal cruise. The first indication something was amiss was when Suwa gunned down her colleague in front of her. She reacted like any normal person, rushing around the nearest corner and looking for a place to hide. The security lockdown has trapped her in the accommodation section, where she sneaks from cabin-to-cabin hoping to find salvation.



YENAFFI OSTEIR

GENDER		Female	
TRAITS		—	
STR	7	INT	6
DEX	8	EDU	8
END	6	SOC	5

— SKILLS
Admin 0, Steward 1

GIOVANNA MAITTE

Giovanna is the junior steward and well-liked by everyone. Nothing is too much trouble and she is always cheerful, at least outwardly. In fact, she is a stone-cold sociopath trying to stay ahead of a murder investigation. She grew impatient with some 'insect' who was annoying her and stabbed them. No big deal, she thinks but the law says otherwise.

Maitte will play the part of the scared young steward to the hilt and has no intention of revealing her true self. The other hijackers know she is one of them, so she will eliminate them if she can. If not, she will find a quiet moment to 'advise' them to keep quiet about her identity. She claims this is in their interests as she will help them escape later, yet in fact plans to only save herself.

It may be the Travellers never realise Maitte is one of the hijackers, in which case she will go on her way once rescued. They might run into her again or find bodies she has left behind. She is no serial killer, and has no intention of becoming one, but other people mean nothing to her and sooner or later she will kill again. The Referee might use her in a future adventure and perhaps the Travellers will fail to suspect the scared kid they saved from the *Amishi*.



GIOVANNA MAITTE

GENDER			Female	
TRAITS			SKILLS	
STR	6	INT	8	Melee (blade) 1, Persuade 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1
DEX	11	EDU	5	
END	8	SOC	6	
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Kitchen Knife (1D+2)		

STEV AND ALIX GVAEGLOEN

Stev and Alix are Vagr but grew up on Imperial culture and values. Both come from well-off high-middle-class families and are very well aware of their station. They took the cruise to make contacts, ideally among the nobility, and spent the time networking without realising they were in mortal danger. Now they are terrified, hiding in corners of the ship and frantically discussing the possibility of rescue or dramatic action to secure their escape. Neither is likely to be much use in a crisis.

STEV AND ALIX GVAEGLOEN

GENDER		—		SKILLS
TRAITS		—		
STR	5	INT	7	Advocate 1, Broker 2, Diplomat 1
DEX	7	EDU	9	
END	6	SOC	9	

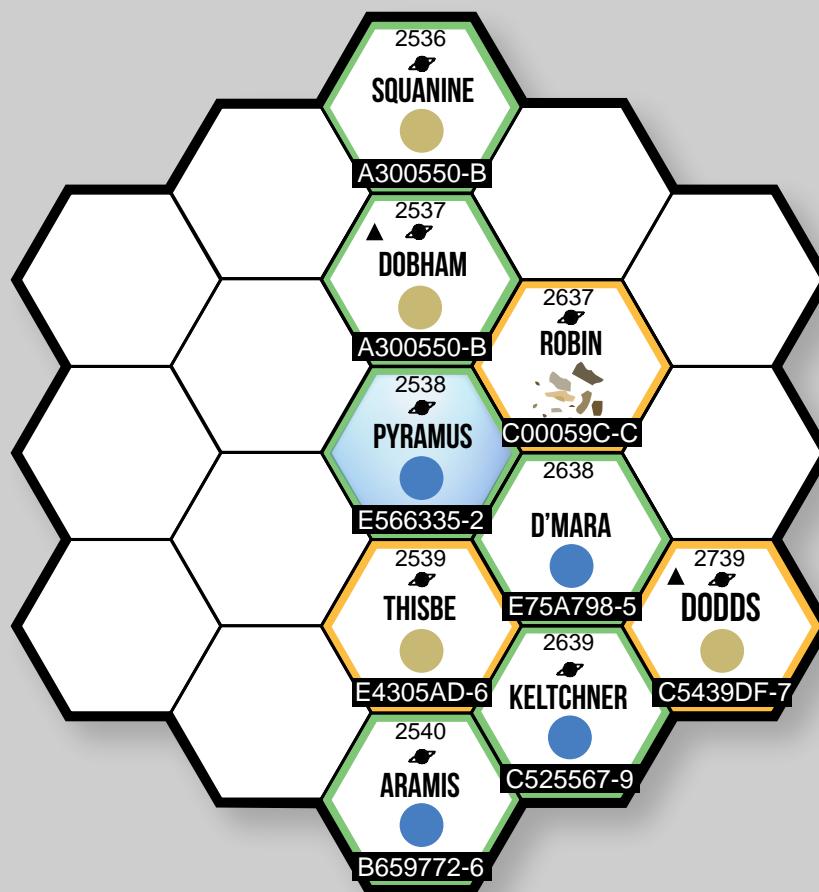


MARCHES ADVENTURE 4

Artemis Wept

The Travellers have an unusual cargo to deliver, a breeding herd of critically endangered animals. Their destination is Project Artemis, located on the backwater world of Pyramus. There they can relax for a while and enjoy the pleasures on offer – dinner with the local noble, pony-riding in the countryside... and saving an entire species from extinction.

A pleasant interlude becomes a fight to save Project Artemis as the long hot summer breaks and storms sweep the region. With starving carnivores trapped on the wrong side of the rising river, the Travellers must decide whether or not to let nature take its course. In the dark, in the rain, with no-one watching and no prospect of reward, they are Project Artemis' only hope.



INTRODUCTION

Artemis Wept takes place in the Pyramus system, in the Trin's Veil subsector of the Spinward Marches. It could be transplanted without undue difficulty to any other backwater location. The adventure does not require the Travellers to possess a starship, although a vessel capable of transporting cargo will be useful. No particular skillset is required.

In *Artemis Wept*, the Travellers deliver or escort a group of rare animals to a conservation project on Pyramus. They are required to observe the animals and assist the staff, and must deal with a series of crises. They have the option to just walk away but the animals do not. If the Travellers make the right choices, they have a chance to save a critically endangered species.

TRAVELLERS AS HEROES

Like many roleplaying games, *Traveller* does not have a system for rewarding 'good' and 'bad' behaviour. The Travellers must make their own decisions and live with them. Often, it is most expedient to go for the greatest gain no matter what moral issues are present. Indeed, some will refuse to do anything unless there is a pile of credits involved.

It would be possible to introduce some kind of in-game 'karma' system whereby Travellers are rewarded for good deeds in some manner but to a great extent this defeats its intended purpose. A certain kind of Traveller will grind karma to gain an advantage, turning a moral choice into a reward-selection process. Yet without such a system there is nothing to gain from turning down an offer to do bad things for money. Why, then, would Travellers choose the path of decency over profit?

One reason is that most people playing *Traveller* – it is to be hoped – have a moral code and do not identify with the bad guys to any great degree. Some actions are uncomfortable even as part of a game. A group of Travellers motivated by decency and outraged by wrongs done to innocents is easy to write for – their motivation to have adventures might be nothing more than seeing something they disapprove of. A *Traveller* game is a chance to star in your own movie... and most people would prefer to be a hero than a villain.

Yet the pile of shiny Credits has a certain allure. Not every Traveller is satisfied with knowing they did the right thing but the Referee can encourage 'good' actions by letting the Travellers know they are appreciated. This can be little things; a local news report about some guys who did a thing, the occasional encounter with someone they helped. They might overhear wild tales in a bar about some big heroes and realise they are the subject. Perhaps the Travellers catch a lucky break or someone helps them out just because 'it's you guys'. Rewards for being heroes rather than Credit-accumulation machines are intangible but then so is everything else in a roleplaying game!

Thus, the Referee should reward Travellers who behave like heroes – even very minor ones – with praise, glory and approval. This is only fair and may be well deserved. There is no mechanic for this, because good deeds done when there is no prospect of reward are the best sort. It is the mark of a hero to make the right moral choice – although a Traveller's background might produce a different definition of 'right'. Moral dilemmas make a more interesting story and give Travellers the chance to be heroes.

SETTING UP AND RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure begins when the Travellers are engaged to transport or accompany a group of endangered animals to a reserve on Pyramus in Trin's Veil. The Travellers will need some reason to do this. One is provided here but, as always, the adventure can be worked into an existing campaign by altering the 'hook'. If the Travellers are involved in scientific pursuits, they may become aware of the Project and decide to help out or they may come into possession of a small herd of quadrupeds by some convoluted happenstance.

Upon arrival at Pyramus the Travellers will interact with the installation staff, the locals, the planetary noble and various animals. They will discover the Project is facing a crisis and will be called upon to help deal with a series of incidents caused by a long dry spell. Eventually, the weather breaks and a different set of problems occur.

INVOLVING THE TRAVELLERS

If the Travellers own a suitable starship, they are approached about the possibility of a charter. If they do not, they are instead asked to accompany a sensitive cargo. Charter rates are standard: Cr900 per cargo ton of their ship plus Cr5000 per cabin, per week. If the Travellers can find freight or speculative trade along the way they are welcome to but the cargo they are hired to transport must not be compromised and they must follow a direct route. Personnel will be compensated at a basic rate of Cr3500 per month on top of ship charter, with bonuses payable for successful delivery and subsequent actions.

The cargo is unusual. It consists of six breeding specimens of Przewalski's horse, a critically endangered quadruped once native to Terra. Brought back from the brink of extinction at least three times, Przewalski's horse a flagship project among conservation groups. The cargo consists of six individuals: two adult mares and two immature mares, an adult stallion and a juvenile stallion. The animals are in specially built low berths, to be delivered to the Artemis Project on Pyramus where they will help establish a breeding population.

The charter (or contract) is for delivery of the animals, waking them from suspended animation and ensuring they become properly established in their new home. A bonus of Cr5000 per animal delivered alive is payable and an additional Cr20000 per animal pronounced healthy and likely to breed by the Artemis Project after one month. Travellers are expected to remain at the Project for that time, collecting charter fees on their ship if they have one. Whilst there the Travellers are salaried and will be expected to assist the staff in their work. Exactly what roles they fulfil depends on the Travellers' skillset.

There are many reasons why the Travellers might take this job. Perhaps they like animals or the payment appeals. If possible, the mission should be worked into an ongoing campaign. The Travellers may have a friend at the Project or want some information that might be available there. They might owe someone a favour or want one, carrying out the mission in return for something they need. A conservation project is likely to have extensive information – and perhaps experts – on climate, ecology, biology and xenobiology, and even detailed information about nearby worlds.

REFEREEING THE ADVENTURE

Artemis Wept consists of three main sections. In the first, the Travellers arrive at the Project and assist the staff. This takes them to the noble's estate and allows some interaction with the planetary elite. In the second part the Travellers attempt to protect the endangered animals from threats arising, mostly, from the weather. The finale requires the Travellers to take extreme measures to prevent the annihilation of the Artemis Project and the extinction of an entire species.

It should be ensured the Travellers have a few hints to remind them they are dealing with a member of the Imperial nobility. Barging around making demands will quickly alienate the estate staff and their knight, and violence will bring a response from the Ministry of Justice. Crimes against local people are one thing but the Imperium protects its own. Travellers who are respectful and subtle can achieve a lot but direct measures will have serious consequences.

The Referee can make as much of the Travellers' time at the Artemis Project as is desirable. There is plenty for the Travellers to do and although it is possible the Travellers do not care about the endangered animals, there are still reasons to help. For example, they might cultivate a relationship with a planetary noble. There is no single way to win this adventure; it is a situation the Travellers find themselves in. What happens is between the Travellers and the Referee.

It is possible to reduce any adventure to a series of skill checks and critical incidents, and there is no reason not to do so. However, an adventure is about the journey, not the loot drops. The Travellers will get more out of playing out what they do than rushing through to the finale. An adventure of this length cannot contain all the possible detail the Travellers will encounter if they decide to trade in the market or explore the estate in detail but this is where the Referee's creativity comes into play. Skill checks are all very well but this adventure will be better if the Travellers become immersed.

To put that differently an adventure is a roadmap but the Referee provides the details of the places visited and the people met.

REFeree's INFORMATION

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

TRIN'S VEIL SUBSECTOR

Trin's Veil is characterised by two large clusters, named after the worlds of Dodds and Kataralu. The Dodds cluster is mostly under-developed, partly due to the two to three parsec gap to Spinward. The Kataralu cluster sees significant traffic headed to and from the subsector capital at Trin but whilst many ships pass through the Class A starport at Squanine few enter the Dodds Cluster. As a result, the local economy is weak, which discourages investment. The cluster's worlds are not impoverished but do not benefit from the interstellar economy of the Imperium.

The subsector is the responsibility of the 207th Fleet, headquartered at Kataralu. Patrol vessels routinely cycle through the Dodds cluster but there are no bases present. Ships frequently stop at the Class A and B starports to give crews some liberty time but 'navy money' does not find its way to the backwater Dodds Cluster worlds. The Imperial Interstellar Scout Service, on the other hand, maintains no less than six installations in the cluster. Most are specialist facilities and rather small, although the communications hub at Dobham is a major base.

THE PYRAMUS SYSTEM

The Pyramus system centres on an unremarkable K6 (orange) main sequence star. There are six terrestrial planets, including Pyramus itself, plus four gas giants and a planetoid belt. The mainworld is a small but near-perfect garden world with 60% ocean coverage and a standard atmosphere. Unusually for such a good prospect, Pyramus is virtually uninhabited. Around 2,000 people live there in small low-tech communities.

Profile	E 5 6 6 3 3 5 – 2	
Starport	E	Frontier Installation
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	6	Standard
Hydrosphere	6	60%
Population	3	Thousands
Government Type	3	Self-Perpetuating Oligarchy
Law Level	5	Personal concealable weapons prohibited
Technology Level	2	Printing Press

THE WORLD OF PYRAMUS

Pyramus has had a human population since the early years of the Third Imperium. A poorly funded colony mission produced a short-lived technological society which collapsed into a group of villages, stabilising at TL2. The hulls of the colony landers were stripped over time and eventually permission was given for an offworld salvage team to dismantle them. This brought in some credits but was nowhere near enough to fund a climb up to even mid-tech levels.

The planetary population reached a maximum of 8,000 in the early 500s and has declined ever since. Inbreeding became a problem, although this was partially solved when the Scout Service intervened. A controversial programme to bring in embryos and sperm from other worlds allowed those who wanted children but were concerned about consanguinity, to choose unrelated donors. This practice is considered normal and the bloodlines of Pyramus are almost as diverse as elsewhere.

When Pyramus was absorbed into the Imperium it was assigned an Imperial knight as its liaison with the wider universe. The fief has changed hands over the centuries but relations between the population and their knight have generally been cordial. The knightly fief is located on the fringe of the small, inhabited region, with much of the planet left untamed. How this vast expanse of prime land was never settled is a complex tale of politics, lobbying and self-interest, interspersed with occasional good intentions.

Officially, Pyramus has a Class E starport. Essentially there is a known and marked area where the occasional trade ship lands. The locals have little to trade with since their population is too small to support efficient farming, let alone any significant industry, but they do have quantities of luxury goods and novelties to offer. Exports, such as they are, include metal art pieces, wines and spirits.

More trade is done with the knight's fief than directly with offworlders. The fiefdom has its own landing area and supports a significant household staff. Ships visit every couple of weeks; sometimes more often. These are couriers bringing updates on the Imperium and connecting the world to the government at Trin. Merchant ships sometimes pass through with cargoes necessary for the fief, being everything from electronic spares to exotic foods. Most staples consumed by the knightly household are locally sourced, however.

For many years the presence of an Imperial knight was the only significant source of offworld currency for Pyramus. Given the small size of the population, even a trickle of Credits was enough to fund some luxuries. This has been augmented in the past two decades by a second offworld presence. The Saxonula Conservation Institute (SCI) has leased land close to the inhabited belt and begun moving endangered species into reserves. The income is not great but the people of Pyramus are better off than their world's profile would suggest.

THE SITUATION ON PYRAMUS

When the Travellers arrive, the inhabited part of Pyramus is suffering a long hot spell. This is not unusual; it occurs in cycles of 15 years or so and lasts only for a couple of months. This dry spell is going on longer than normal, which is of concern, but at the time the Travellers arrive the locals and the Artemis Project staff are confident the weather will break any time. They are not incorrect but unexpected problems are arising due to the conditions.

The planetary noble, Sir Tayce Gazishpa, has long defended Pyramus against plans to exploit the world's resources or to allow other nobles to settle there. Her reasons are partly selfish and partly genuine care for the planet and its people. They will be lost amid new investment and eclipsed to become a backwater population in a developing world and their way of life will be badly impacted. At the same time, Sir Tayce will lose her generous stipend – granted by the Duke of Trin to support a noble on an otherwise unproductive world – and would have to spend more time away from the excitement of the court at Trin.

One way to ensure plans to develop Pyramus are blocked is to make powerful friends. Sir Tayce's estate is pleasant enough that a number of nobles like to visit, whether she is there or not, and granting them access has provided political influence. However, this has led to a mistake on Sir Tayce's part. One of her friends indicated he would like to introduce some animals to hunt and Sir Tayce decided she would be better not objecting. This was a difficult decision as introduced species can be disruptive but her friend assured her their numbers would be kept down.

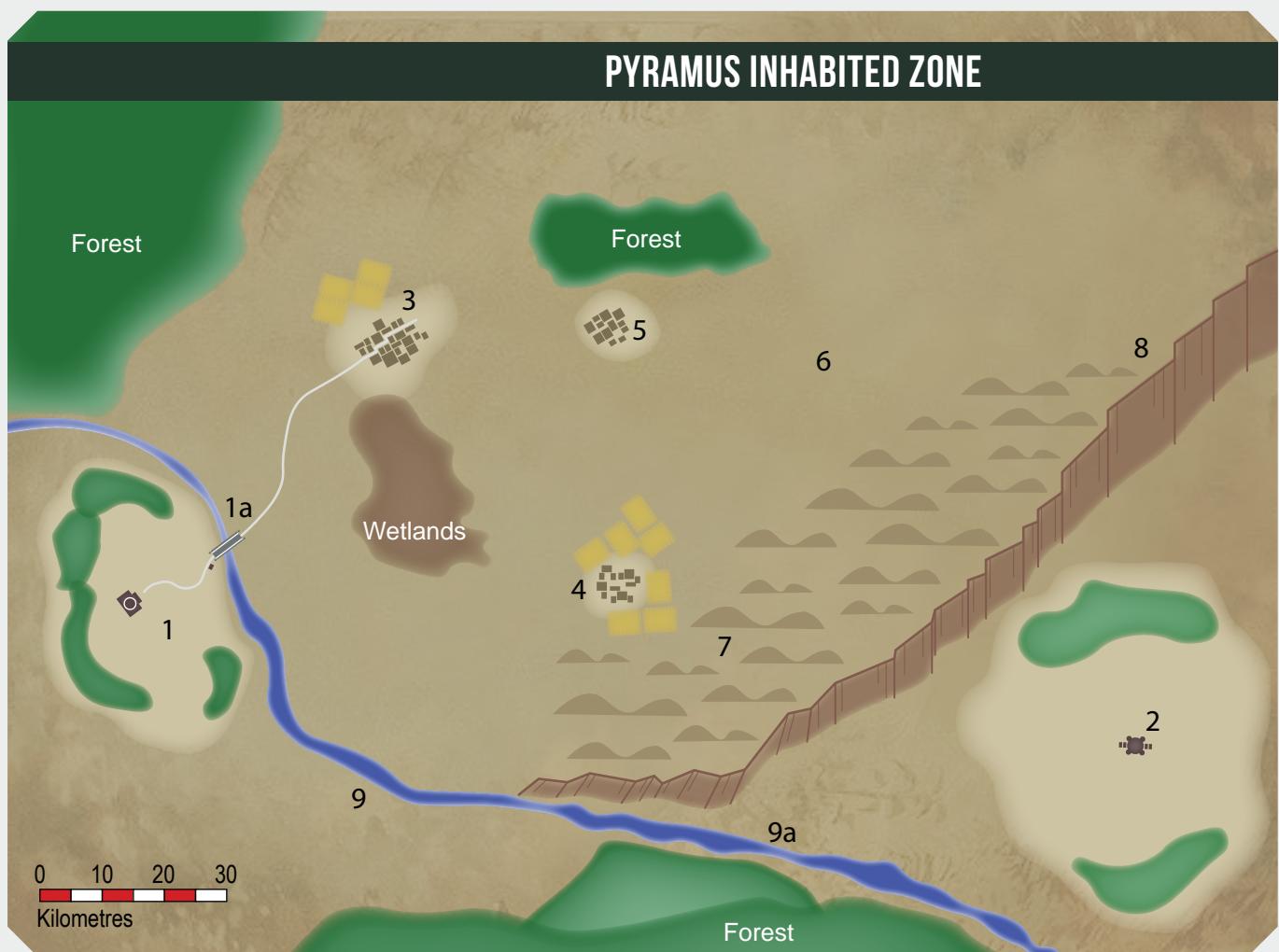
A few years ago, a pack of Alderson's predators were introduced to a region about 300 kilometres south of the estate. Once established, hunting parties began shooting from time-to-time. Sir Tayce found this distasteful. She has no objection to hunting for food – many locals can only obtain meat that way – but blasting a sleeping animal from the bed of an air/raft half a kilometre away, just for fun, is not the same.

Sir Tayce knows the Artemis Project staff would object rather strongly to the whole business. Introducing a dangerous carnivore to an ecosystem requires licenses and research, processes that were bypassed. There are dangers to both the population and the animals at the Project. However, Sir Tayce could not really say no and now has an illegal population of dangerous carnivores. Her friend is too powerful and useful to challenge or blame, so her only option was to hope the creatures remain where they were settled.

This was not a problem at first. Numbers were low and terrain kept the predators in a narrow area but as food became scarce this year they moved out. Driven north, the packs are now dangerously close to the inhabited area. The river would normally be an effective barrier as the creatures hate water but it is drying up. Sir Tayce has to choose between telling the locals about the danger and her part in it, or hanging on in the hope the problem solves itself. This is why she has come back to Pyramus; she has created a difficult situation and is honourable enough to face it.

PYRAMUS INHABITED ZONE

The population live in a handful of small towns, with hamlets and villages in between. These have a population of about 100 people and local amenities such as a pub, general store and craftspersons. Not every village has a crafter, and few have more than one, but it is usually possible to get something made or fixed within a few days. The local sustainable Tech Level is 2 but the villages have a fair amount of imported equipment. This is run off fuel cells recharged at the knight's fief for a small fee. It is not



uncommon to see a trader's wagon bumping along with a cargo of quality meat, wine and discharged fuel cells. Power is distributed by way of ramshackle overhead wires, with most households using only a little. A light or two, hotplates or ovens for cooking and perhaps an imported refrigerator are about all a typical household will have.

There are few vehicles in the possession of the local population. Those that do exist are electrically powered offroad types used for emergencies or specialist tasks. Most transportation is by horse-drawn wagon or horseback and in many cases people will simply walk between villages. The entire inhabited area is no more than a couple of hundred kilometres long and about half that wide. Beyond this, the planet has been mapped but not explored in any detail. There are exceptions to this general rule, however. At times plans have been mooted to exploit the world's resources or set up luxury estates for the subsector's nobles. Inability to

agree terms on the latter is one reason Pyramus' noble spends too much time at court and perhaps the only reason there are not additional estates on the planet.

Within the inhabited zone, most terrain is characterised by low hills with clumps of forest. The area around the villages and towns is cleared for farming and herding but in between it is wilderness. The main herd creature is a flightless bird named the Barix, about the size of a turkey. These are noisy, stupid and destructive creatures, prone to clawing up vegetable patches and pecking their way into sheds. The primary beast of burden is the Terran horse, used for ploughing and transport. Locals are adept at herding the Barix from horseback, which is a slightly bizarre sight involving hooting and hissing from the angry birds as well as whistles from the riders. It involves a great deal of fuss and near-chaos, which resolves itself into strangely silent order.

Most hamlets and outlying farms use either a mix of subsistence arable farming and Barix herding or more extensive cereal and vegetable cultivation. It is not uncommon to see a farmhand chatting over a headset comm to a friend whilst guiding a horse-drawn plough and occasionally a soil mapping drone travels overhead. The mix of high and low technology is typical of backwater worlds, with every piece of imported tech playing an important role in producing income or providing something the locals really want. Little is wasted, including effort. The locals are not impressed by technology for its own sake and have little craving for items they do not need. If there is a market for technological items, it is for labour-saving devices and tools.

Life is simple on Pyramus, but fulfilling. The diet is good, with plentiful seasonal produce and meat most days. Wine and grain spirits are cheap and even if they are not good there is the company of friends to endure them in. The Travellers may get the impression of a bunch of bucolic hicks but if they spend any time on Pyramus they will realise these are *happy* bucolic hicks.

1. The Gazishpa Estate

This estate is an extensive, if nebulous, area surrounding the Gazishpa residence. The estate's buildings are built differently to local construction and of far more advanced materials. Antennae atop the taller structures speak of a different technological standard. Around the estate's buildings is a neat area of gardens and a much wider stretch of parkland, gradually becoming complete wilderness. A modern, highly durable and properly surfaced road formed from fusion-cut stone blocks faced with advanced polymers leads to what is known locally as The Trade Bridge and the town of Orlan's Hollow.

The Trade Bridge (1a) is the gateway to the estate for locals coming to trade, hence its name. Few local wagons go all the way to the estate. Instead, they halt at the bridge and conduct business with a representative there. This is a local person, appointed by the planetary noble, assisted by a small staff. These are quite literally the best jobs on the planet – and highly prestigious. The staff have a small complex of dwellings built to offworld standards and a trade hall of the same sort. There are usually a few locals hanging around here, hoping to be hired for some odd jobs or spotted as potential household staff. Traders from the towns are frequent visitors, creating the atmosphere of a bazaar.

2. The Artemis Project

Lying at the centre of a zone of 'managed wilderness', the Artemis Project is constructed of similar materials and using the same techniques as the Gazishpa estate but is lower and more spread out – and generally humbler in appearance. There are small paddocks between the buildings and gardens where small amounts of food plants are grown. Fenced and hedged enclosures supposedly keep the species apart and away from local wildlife but success has been mixed.

3. Orlan's Hollow

The de facto capital of Pyramus, Orlan's Hollow is its largest town with just over 400 inhabitants. It has the highest concentration of offworld gadgets on-planet and not coincidentally the most complex and ramshackle power delivery wire system. In most other ways Orlan's Hollow is similar to the other towns – wooden houses and shops, packed-earth roads everywhere but the terminus point of the offworld-built road to the estate and animals wandering between structures. There is one building of modern materials and design; a maternity and fertility clinic staffed by offworlders on contract to the Scout Service. Almost everyone on Pyramus was born in this building.

Orlan's Hollow is the westernmost of the four largest settlements, with arable farming and herding providing most local employment. The town derives its name from a natural depression to the south, creating an area of wetlands which is home to a great variety of species. Scientists from the Artemis Project can often be found in this area conducting research into the local ecosystem. They are usually assisted by locals hired as guides and sample-carriers.

4. Hada's Progress

Hada's Progress lies almost in the shadow of Hada's Ridge, which stretches away to the north-east. A small farming town, it is known for making the best wines and grain spirits on Pyramus. It is otherwise unremarkable.

5. Parrich

Parrich is similar to the other towns, with the exception that it has a broad belt of forest immediately to the north. This is assumed to be a remnant of the forest that once covered the whole area as far east as Hada's Ridge. Some logging takes place, along with hunting for local animals in the deeper forest. Much of what is produced is snapped up by traders from the Gazishpa estate, to the extent that flash-freezing machinery has been installed in a vacant house at Parrich. Game from the forest routinely graces the knight's table at court and is said to have been enjoyed by members of the duke's court at Trin.

6. Coupen's Plain

Coupen's Plain lies between Hada's Ridge and the vestigial forest to the north-west. The area appears to have been drying out for centuries, creating an area of unbroken grassland well suited to grazing horses. The town is the main producer of horses, most of which roam free on the plains until rounded up for training and sale.

7. Hada's Ridge (7)

Hada's ridge is a series of steep rises aligned north-west to south-east, falling away sharply close to the river where it runs through a steep gorge. Attempts have been made to locate useable veins of metals in the ridge but mining has never been feasible on such a small scale. As a result, any resources that may exist go untapped whilst the locals have to buy in raw iron, copper and other basic materials from any traders who pass through.

8. The Drop

The 'back' side of Hada's Ridge is a steep fault in the rocks beneath, creating a natural barrier running north-east from the river. A few narrow paths wind up the gentler slopes but the area east of the Drop is considered isolated from the main inhabited zone. This was one reason for placing the Artemis Project where it is – roaming animals are less likely to come into contact with local wildlife. The Drop is only a few metres at its highest point and in many cases it takes the form of multiple short faults that can be clambered up by a determined person. Even a small horse could get over the Drop if it really wanted to but there is plenty of green grass on the lower side so only the most wayward and cantankerous beasts try.

9. River Kaney

The river Kaney flows eastwards through Kaney Gorge (9a) and past the Artemis Project. It is a convenient southern border and beyond it there are extensive tracts of forest. The river is wide and deep, making a crossing difficult at most points. As a result, few locals venture south of the river other than to visit the Gazishpa estate.

10. Forest

Away from the inhabited areas, thick forest covers the plains and lower slopes of hills. There has never been much need to penetrate deep into the forests, other than near Parrich and whilst most locals are familiar with the flora and fauna of the fringes, only researchers from the Artemis Institute take interest in the interior.

ARTEMIS

Artemis is an ancient Terran deity associated with the hunt and with nature in general. She is also a facilitator of childbirth and a protector of mothers. Her name was a natural choice for the installation set up on Pyramus. Although a huntress, Artemis was a protector of the wilderness and can be considered a patron of hunters who are part of the natural order. Thus, Artemis blesses those who hunt out of necessity, and respect the creatures they kill, but has no time for those who shoot animals just for the fun of it.

PRZEWALSKI'S HORSE

Przewalski's horse is, or rather was, native to Terra. Sharing a common ancestor with the modern horse, Przewalski's horse is sometimes considered to be a separate species. They became extinct in the wild on Terra around -2550 but were reintroduced from breeding specimens in captivity. All Przewalski's horses are thought to be descended from around 10 individuals.

Returning from the very brink of extinction, Przewalski's horse survived the Interstellar Wars and tremendous changes on Terra but became extinct sometime during the Long Night. After the establishment of the Third Imperium a population was discovered offworld and successfully reintroduced to Terra a second time. At this point Przewalski's horse became not only a topic for doctoral theses but a symbol of hope for conservationists across Charted Space.

Around 800, Przewalski's horse became extinct for the third and probably final time on Terra as a result of habitat destruction and climate change. Populations on at least two other worlds continued to thrive, until an outbreak of disease reduced populations to the Critically Endangered level. Small breeding populations, carefully screened for disease, are being moved to reserves across the Imperium. This initiative has caught the public imagination in some areas and remains a regular topic in the newsvids. Whilst to many citizens of the Third Imperium the demise of a funny-looking little horse is of no consequence, there are those who consider preserving Przewalski's horse to be a symbol of what is best about Humaniti.

Przewalski's horse forms family groups – usually called harems – comprising a mature stallion and two to four adult mares. Offspring will accompany the group until they are no longer dependent, typically at around two to three years of age. Younger stallions may form bachelor groups until they attract females and form a

harem. Multiple family groups may band together to form a herd. They are friendly and social creatures who will protect one another and the herd but prefer to meander away from potential threats.

Although they are of little use as beasts of burden and cannot be ridden, the population of Przewalski's horses on Pyramus are well-liked by the locals. Care is taken to prevent interbreeding with the 'true horses' owned by the planetary population but other than this they are permitted to wander where they please. The breeding experiment seemed at first to be a great success, with the population expanding from a dozen animals to over 100. However, additional specimens are needed to ensure genetic diversity – a situation the local human population fully comprehend.

Animal	Hits	Speed
Przewalski's Horse	26	8m
Skills	Athletics 0, Survival 0	
Attacks	Kick or Bite (1D)	
Traits	Large (+1)	
Behaviour	Herbivore, Grazer	



ALDERSON'S PREDATOR

A carnivore found on several worlds in the Solomani Rim, the predator is thought to have been spread by the Ancients. They are large semi-biped mammals, which run on powerful hind legs but can drop to all fours for a stealthy approach. Their downward-projecting fangs are capable of penetrating light body armour.

Alderson's predator operates in matriarchal family groups. An older female leads the pack, which typically includes two or three males of breeding age and the same number of mature but 'beta' females. There are usually some immature creatures in any given pack. The pack leader will kill any beta female that becomes pregnant, although it is not uncommon for a pregnant female to slip away from a pack with a couple of the older immature males and set up her own group. Predators are territorial and rarely wander far if food is plentiful, so the present migration has affected their social organisation.

Older females are wily and tackle larger prey like humans by drawing their attention and driving them towards a group concealed in ambush. Adults can run for only a short distance, typically about 250 metres, before becoming tired and abandoning the chase. Thus, for all their size they rely on ambush and group hunting. Younger predators, females in particular, have greater endurance. Their ability to prolong a chase is offset by inexperience; they are prone to break cover early.

Animal	Hits	Speed
Alderson's Predator	40	10m
Skills	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1	
Attacks	Bite (3D) or Claw (2D)	
Traits	Large (+2)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Killer	



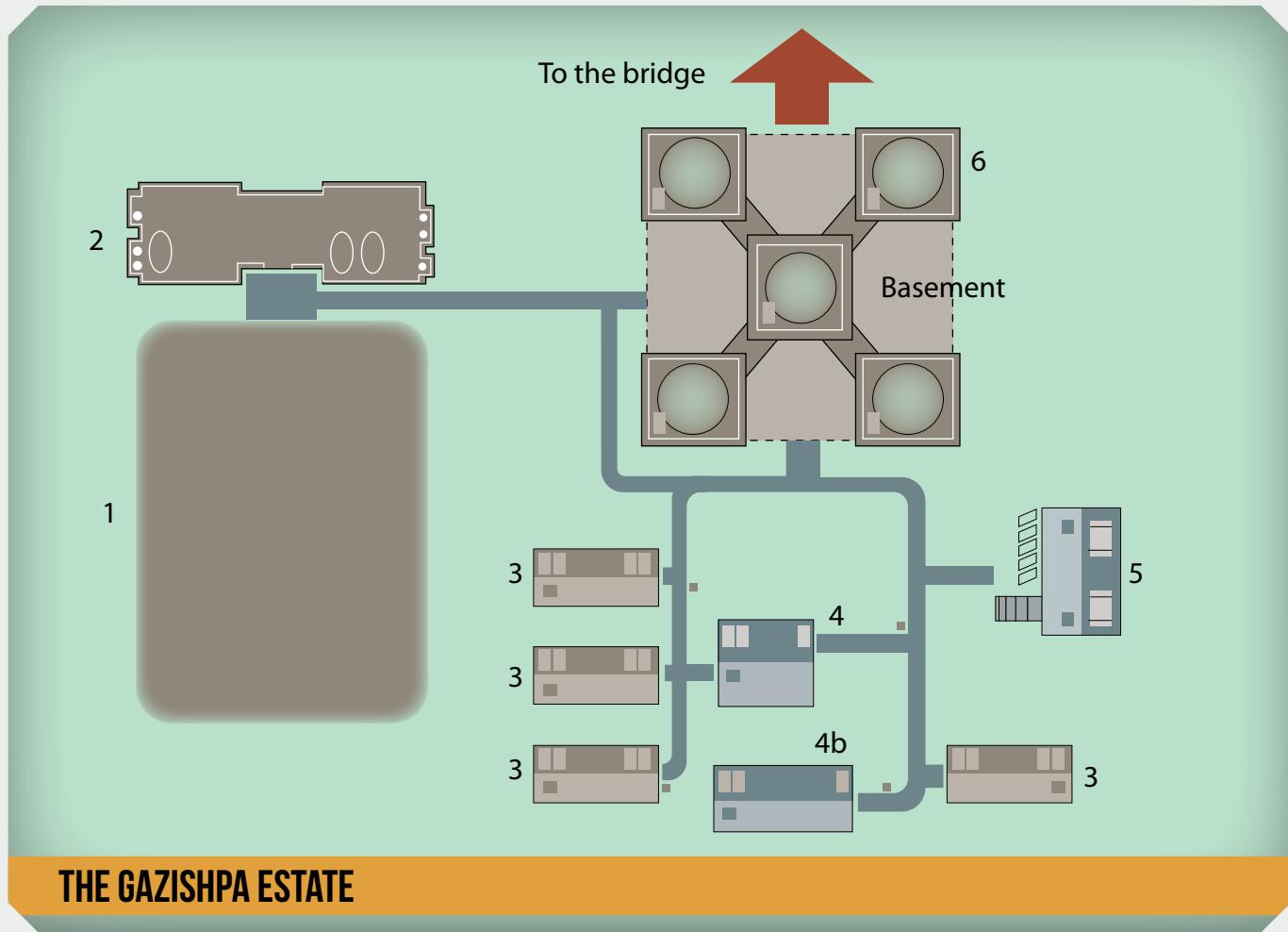
HOUSE GAZISHPA

Assignment of Imperial knights to various worlds is usually on a lifetime-and-heirs basis. That is, so long as the knight fulfils their duties satisfactorily the role is passed to their heirs and their fief becomes more or less hereditary. Reassignment is always possible, especially for those who are disgraced or fail in their duties. On other occasions a knight is elevated to a higher position and given greater estates elsewhere, although in many such cases the family retains the original post and passes it to a close relative.

The fiefdom of Pyramus is both desirable as a place to live and the potential graveyard of careers. Being the representative to the Imperium of some 2,000 low-tech farmers is not prestigious and the income from the estate is so small that the fiefdom comes with a stipend from the Duke of Trin. Nothing much ever happens

on Pyramus and even if it did the significance for the Imperium would be negligible. Thus, most of the knights assigned to Pyramus have chosen to spend their time at the subsector duke's court, using the fief as a holiday home or retirement village.

Sir Tayce Gazishpa, the current incumbent, the third of her line to hold the Pyramus fiefdom. She rarely visits her estate, preferring to stay close to the Ducal court at Trin. The estate is run by a manager and placed at the disposal of other nobles or important contacts. It is exceedingly rare that anything happens that requires her to champion the interests of 'her' people, so she mainly plays politics and tries to expand her portfolio. Sir Tayce would do her duty if anything came up, of course, but nothing ever does and she is quite happy that way.



THE GAZISHPA ESTATE

The Gazishpa estate is built from modern materials using precise methods. The entire central estate stands on a 'raft' of slightly flexible concrete-like material buried about 10 metres under ground level. Atop this is the very best topsoil that could be created under local conditions, topped with expanses of manicured grass, flower beds, ornamental shrub gardens and rockeries. The road from the Trade Bridge approaches from the north-east and terminates at a garage complex with a small reception area. Most locals never get any closer to the estate's main structures than this.

Exact boundaries of the estate are recorded in the document of enfeoffment received by the Gazishpa family but are not obvious to the casual observer. The fief does not extend all the way to the river, nor out to the edge of the empty land around the central hub. However, there is an assumption that the knight owns all of the cleared area. Since the fief is considered Imperial territory rather than being part of Pyramus, local officials have no jurisdiction. The exact boundary could therefore be important to the Travellers but figuring out exactly where it is will not be easy.

1. Landing Area

A slightly raised landing area stands at the westward side of the state's central hub. It is capable of accepting a ship of up to 800 tons in comfort and perhaps a little more with some careful positioning. This and the landing ground at the Artemis Project are superior to the marked landing fields at the four towns but are not counted as starports because they are private facilities. On the rare occasions when more than one ship is present, the usual practice is to land and unload or deliver passengers at the landing area then move the ship onto the grass. Landing legs tend to sink into soft soil making take-off clumsy, which is why ships are moved to the landing area to receive important passengers – after the muck has been cleaned off the landing gear of course.

2. Space Control Centre

The estate has a control building of sorts. This is little more than a couple of offices and a control room at one end of a large building, which also contains basic maintenance tools and the delivery equipment for liquid hydrogen fuel stored in an underground tank north of the building. Two cargo robots handle heavy lifting when necessary, sharing their large parking bay with any cargo awaiting shipment.

3. General Stowage

There are four general stowage areas, some contain gardening equipment and robots, and others have small carefully packaged crates of wine waiting to be shipped offworld or unpacked. There are also containers of staple goods intended for the on-planet market. These typically contain tools and metal ingots. They will eventually be transferred to the trading post at the Trade Bridge.

4. Specialist Stowage

There are two specialist stowage areas. The one nearest to the house (4a) contains ground vehicles and spares, whilst the far one (4b) is partly given over to stables for horses and partly used to store as feed and tack.

5. Staff Accommodation

Locally recruited staff do not, with a few exceptions, live in the main structure. They are accommodated in a more basic manner – which is still luxurious by local standards – in this building. In addition to starship-style cabins there are common areas and an education centre. Anyone taking a good look at the facilities will see that staff are well looked after and given opportunities to better themselves. A local who wanted to get offworld could learn what they needed using the education facilities or ensure their child got into an offworld college. Overall, living conditions are as good as most starship crews have and in some ways better. The staff have their own chefs who put together excellent meals from locally sourced ingredients.

6. Primary Structure

The primary structure takes the form of four towers rising from a base under the topsoil, with a fifth 'flying' tower supported by elegant curving structures coming from the inner corners of the four. The outer towers are connected by a walkway that runs from the midpoint of each to the next. A belowground level contains the estate's fusion reactor and never used emergency shelters. This level connects the above-ground towers and provides a means for those with access to secretly move between them.

Outer towers are six levels high plus a basement, beneath which is the reactor chamber. The basement is not accessible to guests and the chamber beneath is subject to heavily restricted access. The contents of the four main towers is given in the Tower Levels table.

The most prestigious facilities are located at the tops of the towers. Guests typically have the run of tower 6c and the upper level of all towers, along with the art gallery and the exhibition space if it contains

Tower Levels

Level	Service (6a)	Estate Management (6b)	Guest Accommodation (6c)	Specialist (6d)	Notes
6	Main Catering	Conference Suite	Grand Dining	Ballroom	Retractable grav pads and walkways to outer towers
5	Catering Stores	Estate Management	Guest Accommodation	Art Gallery	Parallel to lower level of inner tower
4	Staff Accommodation	Estate Offices	Guest Accommodation	Exhibition	Anchor point for central tower
3	Staff Accommodation	Staff Catering	Guest Reception and Assistance	Medical	Walkway to outer towers
2	Staff Accommodation	Instrumentation, Communications	Guest Recreation	Armoury	—
1	Staff Access, Stores	Entrance, Offices	Guest Entrance	Workshops	Entrances to towers
Basement	Stores	Stores	Stores	Stores	—

something the host deems suitable. Access to the level 3 walkways is restricted but could be granted by staff always stationed in the reception and assistance station. In general, staff whose duties do not require contact with guests move about at level 3, whilst the stewards and specialists tend to be in the upper chambers or 6c.

Access to the central ‘flying’ tower is by way of sloping grav-tubes at all four upper levels, allowing the host to make a grand entrance in the ballroom or avoid contact with guests by slipping out through the conference suite. The tower is supported by curving structures attached at level 4, which meld with the lowest level of the central tower parallel to level 5. This is a traditional architectural use of the term ‘flying’; it is in fact very firmly attached to the rest of the structure.

The central tower has four levels, placing its roof two levels above the others. The lowest level contains an entry and reception area and lounges for entertaining the most favoured guests. Above that is a personal dining and social area. Next is accommodation for immediate family, with a penthouse suite on the top level. The roof is flat and surrounded by a transparent disc which allows the owner to enjoy a glass of wine whilst apparently suspended in mid-air. A grav field nullifies wind and deflects rain, and will deposit anyone who falls off safely on the walkways at level 6.

PERSONNEL

The estate requires a fair amount of upkeep, although that could be handled by a few staff and robots. In

WEAPONRY

The estate has a selection of small arms for defence. Security is armed with gauss pistols and advanced combat rifles, and there are a few spare weapons for use by trained staff. In addition, there are several very fine hunting rifles and sporting shotguns, and one extremely powerful Gazishpa poni gun (page 160). These are used by people who hunt when they visit the estate and were not intended for combat.

order to impress visitors and keep the estate ready, an expanded staff is maintained. In addition to these personnel there are security operatives and a small intelligence staff who monitor everything from interstellar market prices to fashion trends. This information is sent to the ducal court at Trin whenever a ship comes through. The whole process is overseen by the estate manager, who acts as host when friends of the Gazishpa family visit.

There are around 30 people at the estate, most of whom are capable in more than one field. At any given time, there will be one or two people at the Trade Bridge and some in local communities. Buying of goods from the locals is normally the province of the estate stewards but others will deputise on occasion.

SIR TAYCE GAZISHPA

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		27
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	6	INT	10	Admin 2, Carouse 3,
DEX	5	EDU	13	Diplomat 3
END	7	SOC	10	
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Gazishpa Poni Gun (4D+2, AP 4, Scope, Very Bulky)		



Sir Tayce is young for her position at 27 years old but after the death of both parents in a speeder crash, she has stepped into her role as Pyramus' Imperial noble with determination. Sir Tayce spends most of her time at the ducal court, partly for political reasons but also to be away from the estate her parents should have retired to. She is fond of her estate and its people but her childhood home has too many reminders of tragedy to be altogether comfortable.

Like most nobles with a similar position, Sir Tayce is extremely well-informed on politics and economics, and follows social trends with interest. She is an effective liaison but has little to liaise about – Pyramus

is about as unimportant as a planet can be. Her one big success is in blocking plans to assign tracts of land to other nobles. Although this would bring in a lot of money, Sir Tayce feels it would not be good for those she represents in the long run. On the other hand, she believes the Artemis Project is worthy and generally supports its activities.

Sir Tayce is friendly and polite but she is an Imperial noble and anyone who is not is a little (or a lot) beneath her. She considers it the hallmark of good breeding and expects to be treated with deference. Disrespectful Travellers will quickly lose her cooperation and may be banned from the estate.

Gazishpa Estate Personnel

Post	Number	Notes
Estate Manager	1	Keeps the estate in a manner pleasing to its owner.
Estate Steward	2	Assistants to the estate manager.
Intelligence Manager	1	Prepares detailed reports, this individual is expected to have a finger on the pulse of the subsector, sector and wider Imperium.
Intelligence and Communications Staff	3	Undertake analysis to provide the knight with information on trends and events across the region. Also directs visiting space vessels.
Physician	1	Ministers to sick locals if required but works primarily on the estate.
Executive Chef	1	In charge of catering.
Assistant Chef	2	Assist in catering.
Service Staff	4	Waiters, sommeliers and the like, responsible for ensuring the knight, household and any guests, are comfortable.
Security Chief	1	Provides training to non-security personnel as well as planning for all manner of circumstances.
Security Operative	2	Conduct general security operations.
Technicians	3	Maintain all systems within the estate, including robots and vehicles.
Grounds Manager	1	Keeps the grounds tidy and ensures local wildlife does not intrude.
Groundskeepers	9	Responsible for maintenance and related matters such as caring for horses or providing labour such as loading produce onto a starship.

SAXANULA CONSERVATION INSTITUTE PROJECT ARTEMIS

Project Artemis is a component of the Saxanula Conservation Institute, which operates in the Spinward Marches and Deneb sectors. Its installations are small and located in remote areas of habitable planets. The institute conducts research into local ecologies and conservation projects aimed at preserving endangered species. The institute has a particular interest in the effects of introduced species on established ecosystems and how 'secondary invasive' arrivals affect a re-established ecosystem combining local and offworld species.

The Artemis Project at Pyramus is a typical installation. Its staff are mostly offworlders with a few locals. Many are long-term colleagues who have gained an impressive amount of scientific knowledge even if they have no formal qualifications. The Project focuses on conservation of Przewalski's horse alongside study of the local ecosystem. Scientists are trying to breed a more resilient and less cantankerous variant of the Barix in the hope of creating a staple food animal for production on other worlds.

1. West Paddock

The west paddock is home to a captive population of Barix, whose noise and general commotion eventually fades into the background. Until visitors get used to this, the paddock is a source of constant aggravation as the birds hiss and honk over the slightest provocation. Feeding times are particularly chaotic. A few sheds provide shelter, requiring constant repair as the birds peck at every corner and surface. The feed storage sheds (1a) are overbuilt but still subject to the occasional incursion by greedy birds.

The Barix population are not entirely captive. Significant numbers run wild around the installation and are sometimes joined by others released from the paddocks. The intent is only to keep a few birds in captivity, for scientific and medical purposes, and herd the rest as necessary. Attempts to teach the Barix to obey commands or even respond predictably to stimuli have thus far been unsuccessful.

2. East Paddock

The east paddock is set up to receive quadrupeds, with stockpiles of feed and equipment such as horse blankets. A handful of Przewalski's horses are corralled

here, although like the Barix most are allowed to roam free in the surrounding area. The paddock is subdivided; once the new arrivals are ready, they will be introduced to the existing herd with a fence safely in between and will hopefully become friendly with the local population. Once oriented the new arrivals can be released into the wild.

3. Veterinary Centre

The installation's veterinary centre is an elongated hexagon. Its facilities are set up mostly for Barix and Przewalski's horse but can deal with most species. The installation has a small collection of injured birds and animals at any given time, most of which are nursed back to health and released. It is not uncommon for staff to pop in and have their minor injuries taken care of by the duty vet. The veterinary centre has become something of an unofficial social centre as well; there is always someone there to talk to under the pretence of helping with minor tasks. Travellers who insert themselves into this social circle will be welcome enough but might find themselves bottle-feeding a rescued animal or trying to weigh a violently struggling Barix.

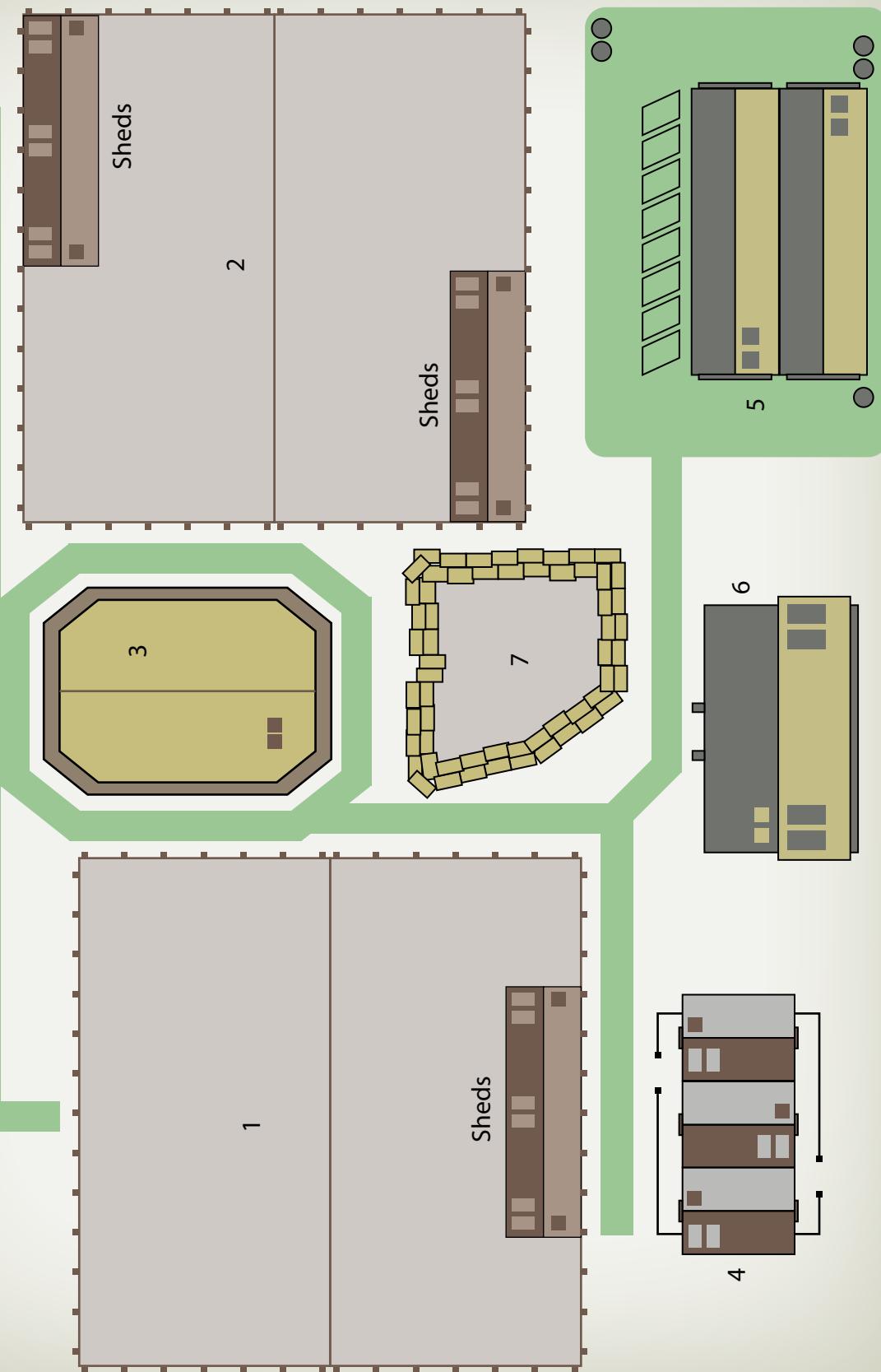
4. Machinery Shed

The machinery shed is a large, roofed area with smaller enclosures and unwalled areas beneath. It houses some of the installation's ground vehicles and most of its larger machinery, including workshops for repairing tools and equipment. It is not uncommon to find an offroad ground car in bits here alongside the innards of a delicate DNA-analysis machine.

5. Stable/Garage

The Artemis Project makes extensive use of horses – normal ones, not Przewalski's horse – for transportation. These are stabled here along with a handful of electrically powered offroad bikes. A considerable amount of horse feed is also stored in the building, which has a 'haymaker' at the rear. This can be filled with grass or almost any other edible organic material to create extruded strips that resemble hay. These are then formed into what are effectively hay bales. Some are used for fodder whilst others form impromptu barriers, which fail to keep the Barix out of anything.

PROJECT ARTEMIS



6. Main Building

The main building has two main levels above ground and one below. The latter houses the installation's reactor and essential machinery, whilst the lower floor contains labs and conference rooms. The upper floor provides accommodation for the staff and access to a tall tower. This has antennae and weather-monitoring equipment on the top and is rarely ascended except to calibrate or maintain the instruments.

7. Paddock Three

'Paddock Three' is an open space delineated by an intermittent wall of hay bales. It is used for whatever requires such a space, which can range from staff social events to temporary corralling for animals. Bales are moved to block the entry points at these times but usually it is possible to walk straight through the enclosure.

WEAPONRY

Weaponry is rarely needed at the Project but several civilian hunting rifles and shotguns are in a locker along with far more commonly employed tranquiliser guns. Personnel can draw a MFD (Multipurpose Field Device, page 160) from the locker. These are the closest thing to handguns the Project has.

STAFF

The Project employs about 24 people at any given time. It is under the direction of the senior scientist, with a distinctly loose hierarchy. The table below indicates a typical complement, although more or less personnel might be present.

Artemis Project Personnel

Post	Number	Notes
Chief Scientist/Project Director	1	In charge but usually sufficiently busy that staff make their own decisions.
Ecological Scientist	1	Heads research into climate and ecological factors.
Veterinarian Scientist	1	Heads research into the animals and deals with complex medical issues.
Assistant Veterinarian	1	Deals with day-to-day medical issues.
Technician/Engineers	2	Maintains or fixes equipment, calibrates instruments or helps scientists use their computers.
Research Assistants	3	Conducts meticulous and rather boring experiments or collects data from the countryside.
Vehicle and System Operators	3	Drivers for vehicles, usually assists with the task being carried out.
Animal Wranglers	6	Mostly locals receiving education and training whilst looking after the animals.
General Assistants	5	Completing odd jobs including cooking, helping lift Barix out of ditches and assisting with scientific procedures.

DELIVERY CONTRACT

The Travellers are under contract to deliver six breeding specimens of Przewalski's horse to the Artemis Project on Pyramus and to remain with the animals to ensure they settle in properly. The Referee can make as much or as little of the journey as seems suitable. Indeed, there are many adventures to be had crossing a huge expanse of space to deliver the animals. However, the adventure proper begins as the Travellers approach Pyramus.

The world officially has no spaceport but as the Travellers approach their ship is hailed by an installation on the planet's surface. This is the Gazishpa Estate, whose automated systems serve as orbital traffic control. A recorded message requests that ships with business at the estate seek clearance to land, whilst those headed for the Artemis Project or one of the towns should state their intentions for the record and then proceed. There are no restrictions on landing anywhere on-planet but pilots are requested to be respectful of cultivated land and property. The message ends with a standard disclaimer that landing somewhere other than a marked area can be hazardous and that no liability can be assumed by the estate.

The Travellers are not legally bound to respond to this message but it is courteous to do so. Whether or not they do, soon afterward they receive a message of welcome from the Artemis Project and an invitation to follow the beacon to the Project's designated landing area. As the ship descends, it is clear that Pyramus is a lush garden world and the region the Travellers are headed for is normally very well-watered. However, the vibrant green of planetary records is replaced with a brownish-yellow in the inhabited belt and around it. The region is clearly experiencing a dry spell.

The Travellers' ship flies over a region of small towns and cultivated fields, following a river which more or less connects two obviously more advanced structures. The water level is low, exposing rocks and leaving slowly evaporating pools behind. Despite the dry conditions, creatures can be spotted here and there; a small herd of wild horses and a large bird-like creature.

Approaching the Project, the Travellers are directed to a landing area just south of the main structure. People are assembling as the ship comes in to land and there

is an air of excitement as the Travellers emerge. Dr Eva Danvier, the formidable and no-nonsense chief scientist, cuts through the babble with a curt question – *'Are the specimens intact?'*

Danvier's use of words like 'specimen' and 'intact' is scientific and in no way implies a lack of regard for the animals – but the Travellers may not realise that. She comes across as authoritarian (which is correct) and uncaring (which is not) as she directs the unloading of the horses. Ideally, the Travellers have cargo robots or vehicles that can deliver the specialist low berths to Paddock Three. If not, they will have to be dragged onto the bed of a pickup truck and carefully driven to the paddock. This is a simple undertaking but requires effort. The Travellers will be acutely aware of how hot and dry conditions are.

The plan is to wake the specimens all at once if possible. They are herd creatures and will be calmer if they have company. However, this means six awakening operations all at once, conducted in a paddock made from hay bales in the hot afternoon sun. There are only two vets, plus a couple of other scientists who can assist. If the Travellers want to pitch in, they can help with monitoring and overseeing the wakeup process, or they might try to rig some cooling apparatus for the area.

Waking six animals so they all achieve consciousness more or less simultaneously is tricky. A Difficult (10+) Medic or Animals (veterinary) check is required on each low berth, with DM-2 for each after the first a given person is monitoring. Failure is not disastrous in most cases but each point of negative Effect delays the wakeup of that animal by 1D minutes. Effect -6 or worse indicates a medical emergency. The animal will die unless someone can make an Average (8+) Animals (veterinary) check or a Very Difficult (12+) Medic check. Saving the casualty will take 2D minutes and absorb the full attention of a single person. It is also possible to spam the emergency button, at which point the low berth will try to refreeze the casualty. There are risks; on a straight 2D check the casualty will die on 4-. Waking a refrozen casualty is also more hazardous, imposing DM-2 on Medic or Animals checks.

This process could go smoothly, especially with someone coordinating all the medics and directing them to slow or accelerate the wakeup process for different animals in order to get at least some of them to wake together. An Average (8+) Leadership check by an agreed coordinator – who need not be a medic or vet – will produce a DM which must be distributed among those operating the low berths. Negative Effect will thus make things worse.

The Referee can use a copy of the table below to note which animal wakes when. Take the moment the first awakens as 'T' and note how many minutes later the others will awaken. The differing mass of the animals can affect the time required for resumption of normal functions, which may disrupt the Travellers' plans.

When each animal wakes, it will be groggy and disorientated. This will not stop it from getting up and trying to run away from whatever danger it imagines exists. To keep an animal calm requires a Very Difficult (12+) Animals check with DM+1 for every other awake animal that is not freaking out and DM-2 for every one that is. Attempts to calm an animal take 1D minutes and others might be set off by a panicking member of the herd. Physically restraining an animal will not calm it – quite the opposite in fact – but will prevent it from escaping.

Przewalski's horse is not a big or aggressive animal but a terrified one will kick and bite at anything in reach, seeking to escape the paddock and flee into the countryside. The paddock is fenced off by hay bales, which are at most a moderate obstacle to a frightened quadruped. If things go well, the Travellers will have participated in an effective delivery of animals. If not, they will find themselves trying to catch terrified animals, getting kicked and bitten – and quite possibly dragged out of the paddock. Some horses might even die in the confusion.

Of course, there are plenty of people who can help and some might have relevant skills. However, the Referee should involve the Travellers as much as possible.

Awakening Times

Animal	T +	Notes
Adult Male		Medic or Animals check subject to additional DM-2 due to differing mass
Adult Female 1	—	
Adult Female 2	—	
Juvenile Female 2		Medic or Animals check subject to additional DM-2 due to differing mass
Juvenile Female 2		Medic or Animals check subject to additional DM-2 due to differing mass
Juvenile Male		Medic or Animals check subject to additional DM-1 due to differing mass

Seeing a vet perform CPR might or might not be memorable but doing it will be. Likewise, clinging to the hind leg of a Przewalski's horse as it flees the paddock is an unusual experience for the average starfarer that might be remembered longer than mundane events.

One way or another, the delivery is completed and the Travellers can exchange introductions with the staff at the Project. Their reception will be warmer if they helped with the wakeup – however badly it went – than if they stood around watching. They will be offered billets in the main building or they could live in their ship. The former is more social and convenient but the Travellers can make whatever choices they want.

DINNER AT THE PROJECT

Whether or not the Travellers impressed with their animal wrangling skills, dinner is a major social event and all are invited. There are always members of staff away doing necessary jobs but whenever possible everyone tries to gather and afterward small social groups tend to form. The Travellers might be invited to share a few beers in the wreckage of the paddock, laughing about the chaos that occurred or sharing praise for a job well done.

Dinner and the evening after are an opportunity to find out about the Artemis Project and its people... and the weather. The region has suffered an unseasonal dry spell for over two months and whenever it looks likely to break there are a few minor rain showers before the drought continues. This is causing problems for the locals as well as the animals and the environmental science team are working to predict when rain will come.

The Travellers' contract requires they stay at the Project for a while and the staff will want to know what their skillsets are. Everyone is expected to pitch in but those with specialist skills might be able to help with some longer-term or complicated problems. The horses were delivered today but the work starts tomorrow.

PITCHING IN

The Travellers will be at the Artemis Project for a few weeks, during which time they are expected to help out. They can of course refuse to perform any given task – or any and all tasks – but there is not much to do on Pyramus. Friendly relations with the institute staff will quickly sour if the Travellers do not pitch in. If they do, there are all manner of small jobs that require an extra set of hands. The Travellers can make good friends here with nothing more than a shared job and a few kind words.

The first task that requires attention is a simple-but-constant one. The institute has drones to monitor the surroundings but there is no substitute for ‘eyeballing’ the situation at ground level. Thus, members of staff make routine patrols out into the countryside. Ground vehicles are available but the staff prefer to use horses. They are generally able to get closer to the wildlife and have less impact than a four-wheel-drive vehicle chewing up the ground. Besides, many of the staff just plain like to ride.

The Travellers are requested to join one of these patrols, ideally on horseback. If they really do not want to they can use a vehicle but will need to hang back to allow the mounted personnel to get a closer look at any animals. Oran Yota will lead the patrol, a local who has been with the Project for some time now. She is an expert on the local terrain and can point things the Travellers might (or might not) find interesting. Those on horseback will get to interact with Oran, whilst anyone trailing in a ground vehicle will be largely left to their own devices.

Animals Skill Checks

Task	Difficulty Level	Notes
Just riding	No check needed	Average check can be made as an indicator of style and number of mishaps but should have no serious consequences.
Crossing broken ground	Routine (6+)	Failure will not injure a horse if moving carefully. A brisk pace imposes DM-2 and risks injuring the animal, which suffers D3 damage per negative Effect. Charging straight through imposes DM-4 and imposes 1D damage per negative Effect.
Jumping a low obstacle	Routine (6+)	Jumping over something up to 0.5m high or a couple of metres wide is not a huge problem.
Jumping a significant obstacle	Average (8+)	Obstacles up to 1.5m in height can be jumped with relative ease. Higher obstacles (up to a bit over 2m) impose DM-1 per 10cm over 1.5m. Clearing 2.5m would be a record-breaking leap made with DM -10.

Oran is sympathetic towards anyone who struggles to ride a horse. She has picked out the most docile and tolerant of the installation’s mounts and ensured that everyone has the equipment they need. This includes quite a lot of water for both horse and rider. Operating on horseback requires an Animals (handling) check at varying difficulty levels. Travellers who do not have the relevant skill suffer the usual DM-3 unless they can offset the deficiency with Jack-of-all-Trades. Most of the time the Travellers will be ambling along at a steady walking pace which is not much of a problem. They should make an Average (8+) Animals check to give a general indication of how much they embarrass themselves in the first hour or two but there should be no major consequences beyond having to wait for Oran to catch their startled mount and return it.

Whenever the Travellers are operating on horseback the following table gives an indication of the checks required. Failure does not necessarily mean a fall; horses can stumble and recover without unseating their rider. If something does go wrong, indicated by a negative Effect, the Traveller may be able to avoid coming off by making a Routine (6+) Athletics (dexterity) check with a negative DM equal to the negative Effect of the failed check.

Falling from a horse normally inflicts 2D damage, which can be reduced by an Athletics (dexterity) check. Damage is increased to 3D if the Traveller comes off whilst travelling at speed or on particularly rough ground. A Traveller who falls is permitted a Simple (2+) Athletics (dexterity) check and reduces the damage from the fall by any positive Effect. Typically, this means

a Traveller – even one with very little physicality – will suffer no more than a bruised ego when falling off – unless they are doing something dangerous.

RIDING OUT

When riding cross-country, the Travellers can expect to progress at about five or six kilometres per hour unless the terrain is very difficult. It is possible to push for twice that for a few days at a time with well-fed horses but this will take its toll in dry conditions. Thus, the Travellers can expect to make perhaps 40 kilometres per day or less if they are stopping at points of interest. Oran strongly urges the use of horses or a ground vehicle if the Travellers hate that idea. Grav vehicles would be quicker but the whole point is to be at ground level. Observations from horseback have proven more useful than brief sightings or scared animals as a grav vehicle passes overhead.

Oran is making a longer patrol than usual, intending to go all the way to the Trade Bridge and back. If the Travellers want, they will be introduced to Gazishpa estate's manager or the planetary noble if she is in residence. There is a good chance of that, as she sent a message a while ago that she would be visiting. If the Travellers have tired of horse-riding by that point, they may be able to request one of the estate's grav vehicles give them a lift back to the Project.

The patrol begins by moving south, turning north-west along the river and through the gorge, then across the plains to the Trade bridge. If the Travellers want to return with Oran, she expects to visit a couple of towns and look at the wetlands to gain a first-hand impression of conditions there. Anything interesting can be investigated as it appears. Oran knows one of the groups of Przewalski's horses are in the area between the Project and the river, and there may be other creatures to look at. She also intends to check on sensors planted at the river since the readings are not what would be expected. The trip might take a few days if there are frequent stops.

Oran's Patrol

Day	End Point	Distance	Notes
1	Riverbank	30km	Make camp near the river.
2	Gorge Mouth	20km	Follow the river through the gorge and make camp at the far end.
3	Wetlands	30km	Head north-west to the wetlands and along its southern fringe.
4	The Trade Bridge	20km	Head West to the Trade Bridge and stay there overnight.
5	Undecided	Undecided	Oran will head back by way of the towns but this part of her patrol depends on what she discovers along the way.



The first thing the Travellers notice is the dryness of the vegetation. Oran is concerned about the ongoing drought, which has completely dried up some previously reliable watering places. The scientists at the institute are puzzled about the length of the dry spell but Oran and other locals know this is just something that happens every few years. This is a particularly bad one, however.

After a while, the Travellers spot the group of Przewalski's horses they are looking for. This is the bachelor herd, formed of males who do not have a family or are too old to breed. The herd is led by an individual Oran calls Victor, an old and apparently wise stallion normally accompanied by Alex and Rudy-the-Asshat. Oran explains that this is Rudy's 'sevenday-best name', reserved for when he is being especially annoying. Right now, however, Rudy is missing.

The Travellers – especially those with the Survival skill – will note the other two animals are wandering aimlessly and seem distressed. If the Travellers can get close enough and know anything about horses (or horse-like creatures), they will see they are underfed and possibly dehydrated but not seriously so. They are... upset. This must be something to do with the missing individual.

Searching, ideally with the help of drones, will locate the missing Rudy in a nearby ravine. It is relatively cool and a little damp, so it is entirely possible that Rudy tried to get to the water and became stuck. He is hurt, but not badly, and very agitated. As a result, he keeps trying to run up the steep walls of the ravine and could suffer serious injury if he falls back. Oran wants to try to calm him before attempting rescue.

The Travellers might feel that getting a funny-looking and very stupid little horse out of a ditch is beneath their dignity but Oran expects them to help. It would be possible to call for a ground vehicle and some lifting gear from the Artemis Project but Oran would like to solve the problem here and now. If they are to do this, the first stage will be to calm the animal down. Soothing words will not do it. The Travellers might solve this problem in all manner of ways. Something as simple as getting to Rudy (without being bitten or trampled) and giving him a drink and some fodder would help. The Travellers might produce something more unusual like playing soothing music or rounding up Rudy's herd-mates in the hope that Victor might give him a stern horsey talking-to. The Referee should reward sensible plans, even if they are a bit odd.

Rudy's injuries are little more than a few scrapes. He should probably be seen by a vet but, if not, he will be fine. The problem is getting him out of the ravine. None of the Przewalski's horses at the Project are broken to saddle and bridle, and trying to harness the poor creature will only scare him. Nonetheless, it might be possible to get a rope around him and assist his progress by pulling. Very brave Travellers might even try to push him from behind, although this risks being fallen on by a scared and violently thrashing animal.

Rudy-the-Asshat can be assisted out of the ravine by a total of Effect 12 on relevant checks. For example, if Travellers are pulling and pushing they can make Average (8+) Athletics (strength) checks and count the total towards what is necessary. Someone else directing Rudy's progress with an offer of food could use their Animals (or even Persuade) skill to contribute. Pre-positioning Rudy by chivvying him into a good spot

to make the attempt is also possible and the best path can be selected using Navigate or Survival.

Ultimately, the Travellers should be able to get Rudy out of the ravine, at which point he will run off to join his fellows. This is not the stuff of star-smashing legend but helping a breeding male avoid disaster affects the prospects of the whole species. These are worthy deeds and will win the respect of the institute's staff. Once the immediate crisis is over Oran calls for one of the vets to come out and take a look at Rudy over the next couple of days and continues the patrol. In all probability Rudy trots off happily with his little herd, safe until the next time he does something stupid.

AT THE RIVER

The river Kaney is very low for this time of year; that much is obvious as the Travellers approach. Trickles of muddy water flow sluggishly over the rocks, picking up dust as they go. Some channels are becoming choked with this mud, creating pools that may become stagnant. Inspection shows some of the instruments are no longer in contact with the river water but this is not the reason for strange readouts. Those not in contact are sending a null signal which indicates their status. It is those still in the water that are producing skewed readouts.

Travellers with a background in instrumentation, using Electronics (sensors) or biological sciences, using Science (biology) will realise the river is experiencing biological contamination. It would be easy to assume the noble estate upstream is to blame but this is not the case. Falling water levels have resulted in rapid multiplication of various algae. This has not yet made the water toxic but there is a possibility it will in the near future.

There is little the Travellers can do about this, although they might look into solutions if they have scientific inclinations. The ecologists at the Project might have some ideas, although they are generally reluctant to mess with the ecosystem. What is happening is natural, even if it is bad for the local wildlife. After transmitting the data and observations back to the Project, Oran decides to push on.

THROUGH THE GORGE

The Kaney Gorge might be an impressive sight with the river in full spate. The Travellers will note a track has been worn higher up the sides of the gorge; they are moving along what is normally the riverbed. If the

Travellers insisted on bringing a ground vehicle, they will find out why Oran disapproved; it is only possible to get a vehicle along the high trail at very low speed with enormous difficulty. Horses, on the other hand, amble through the lower trails with ease.

The ground in the riverbed is rough, which makes riding fast dangerous to horse and rider alike. Travellers on foot or horseback may notice something unusual; anyone in a vehicle is too busy being jolted around to spot anything. A successful Average (8+) check using Navigation, Survival or Science (planetology) draws the attention to a series of recent sand-and-stone slides down the southern side of the gorge. These are in positions which would normally be considered stable, so are unlikely to be natural. Shreds of vegetation at the bottom of the gorge – where it would normally be underwater – would suggest something with the mass of a human or more, slid down into the gorge.

If the Travellers look for tracks, they will find three-toed, clawed prints that could be those of a really, really big Barix. They suggest a creature fell down and crossed

the shallow river in a north-westward direction. The tracks are a couple of days old. Oran is puzzled, as she does not recognise the tracks. She suggests this might be a '*'honkin' big Barix'* and laughs at her own pun but is wary from this point on.

Oran has no idea that Alderson's predator is present on Pyramus and it would not spring to mind as it is native to worlds on the other side of the Imperium. If the Travellers try to follow the tracks, they will need to make an Average (8+) Survival check. Failure indicates the trail is lost and cannot be picked up again in the gorge. Success leads the Travellers to a pile of dung and further tracks headed onward. The dung pile clearly did not come from a bird or herbivorous animal. This is the spoor of a predator and a large one.

Figuring out what the Travellers are up against is not easy. They could rake through databases for a match but this will take time. Meanwhile Oran wants to push on and try to get a sighting of the creature. She will get her wish somewhere between the river and the wetlands, first encountering a Barix that has been savagely ripped apart and eaten... then another. There is little left of the poor dumb birds and Oran is at a loss as to what could have caused such carnage.



ANIMAL ENCOUNTER

A single adult female Alderson's predator left the tracks. It is pregnant and has escaped its mother's herd to avoid being killed and eaten. Having fallen down the gorge, the predator had no option but to follow the river, where it managed to sneak up on a couple of wild Barix. It had the advantage of not being native to Pyramus, so its scent was not immediately associated with danger. Having devoured two of the birds the predator is less desperate but still very hungry. It will begin to stalk the Travellers once it scents them.

How this plays out depends on the Travellers. It could be a straight animal attack to be countered by gunfire but there are other options. Oran wants to capture rather than kill the predator, or to drive it back across the river, but she recognises the need to protect lives and will agree to shooting it if necessary. The Travellers might end up trapping the creature and calling for assistance in getting it under control, or they might have another solution. Blasting it into oblivion is perhaps the least satisfying option – if the animal can be lured back to the river and chased across it will cease to threaten the local population. It would also make a fascinating study specimen, alive or dead.

THE TRADE BRIDGE

Oran is more determined to push on to the Trade Bridge than ever before. She wants to talk to Sir Tayce or the estate manager in person and ask if the knight will send an air/raft to help move the specimen (or its carcass) to the Institute. She will also ask that the estate sends a warning to local settlements in case there are other creatures roaming around. Getting to the Trade Bridge might require a hard day's ride but Oran feels it is important. In the meantime, she informs the Project of what has happened and that she is investigating further.

Upon arrival at the Trade Bridge, Oran will try to convey the gravity of the situation as she sees it but the staff there will be reluctant to disturb their newly-arrived noble over an animal encounter. If the Travellers leave the matter to Oran she will have to wait until the following morning before anyone takes much notice. Calls to and from the Project, leading to entreaties from the Project staff, will expedite the process. Alternatively, the Travellers might step in.

There are ways to get a direct audience with Sir Tayce. On a more populous planet this would be entirely impossible but life on Pyramus is a little different. If the Travellers can make a good case, backed by a suitable Average (8+) check, they may be given an audience immediately or at least invited to stay at the estate overnight until Sir Tayce can see them. Suitable skills depend upon what the Travellers do. They might try a legal argument, citing the rights of citizens to representation (Advocate) or present a concise scientific argument for why the situation cannot wait (Science or Persuade). Formal entreaties for an audience might be made (Diplomat) or some other course of action entirely.

If the Travellers try to barge into the estate, they will be met with a warning to surrender followed by gunfire. Whatever happens after that, they have just become Imperial felons and will be hunted for the rest of their days. The Imperium does not tolerate attacks on its nobles or their property. Assuming the Travellers are not foolish enough to do that, sooner or later they will be able to meet with Sir Tayce.

The Travellers are invited to the estate but must surrender all weapons at the Trade Bridge. This is not negotiable. Once disarmed, they are offered transportation in an air/raft, to land on the upper levels of the estate's towers. The meeting may be urgent but there are protocols that must be observed. Travellers cannot have a formal audience *dressed like that* (and smelling of horse and dust) so will be guided to some very nice guest rooms. Light refreshments are provided, because they are now guests and must be treated properly.

Once showered and cleaned up the Travellers will be provided with suitable attire. This is a matter of selecting an outfit from a holographic menu, at which point it will be machine-created in seconds. Travellers may note that the Good Taste filter and the Exquisite Taste filter are both in place. The former prevents the Travellers from selecting something outlandish or inappropriate and the latter restricts them to the sort of clothing a SOC 9 individual would wear. Outfits made in this manner look great for a few days but soon begin to become threadbare. Cynics claim the system is intended to prevent nobles from having to look at ill-dressed yokels but prevents the peasantry from taking anything useful.

Be that as it may, the Travellers are courteously escorted to the Estate Management Office where Sir Tayce awaits. She is simply dressed in trousers and tunic of the most unimaginably expensive hand

tailoring, with a knight's star and university pins but little other adornment. The office is similar. There is just enough expensive art and fine offworld brandy to make the point that the planetary noble is rich, important and tasteful.

As long as the Travellers are polite and respectful, Sir Tayce will be helpful. However, she has a responsibility not to go off at half-cock just because someone said there is a problem. She needs hard information and must ask the Travellers about their experience. A call to the Artemis Project will provide additional information. The Referee could abstract this with a simple skill check but it is better to play out the scene. If so, Travellers may notice that Sir Tayce's questions are more along the lines of '*are you sure this was an Alderson's predator?*' rather than '*what is an Alderson's predator?*' She will not reveal she knows about the presence of these creatures on Pyramus, however, as that is a very sensitive subject.

If the Travellers are not sufficiently respectful, Sir Tayce will be extremely passive in her assistance. She will still consider requests from the Project but will not volunteer anything extra. On the other hand, if she can be convinced of the gravity of the situation, she will order some of her staff to make a search from the air whilst others collect all available information to be passed to the Project. In the meantime, Sir Tayce absolutely insists the Travellers stay for dinner and a modest social event.

A SMALL BALL

If the Travellers agree, they have the run of the guest segment of the house and the surrounding estate. There will always be staff on hand to show them around or bring them a drink, and as honoured guests they will be treated at least as well as someone paying for a fine hotel. The Travellers have a chance to see how the upper echelons live and the Referee is encouraged to provide details of luxuries taken for granted.

If the Travellers want to use this time to nose around, they run the risk of discovery and Sir Tayce's displeasure. Stealthily breaking into rooms requires defeating sophisticated locks and their associated alarm systems but in many cases it may be possible to simply ask to see the chamber. If the Travellers can provide a suitable explanation the staff might take it at face value – they are used to the whims

of noble visitors after all. Thus, an engineer might gain access to the subterranean reactor chamber just by asking – accompanied perhaps by a long-winded ramble about the relative merits of one type or another. Staff will listen politely as they always do and keep the guest happy.

It is possible to take this too far but a suitably experienced Traveller might end up talking guns with the security chief in the armoury whilst someone else is proclaiming delightedly at the selection of choice cuts in the catering stores. Sir Tayce really has nothing to hide, other than the presence of Alderson's predators on Pyramus. There are no endangered species in the larder and no illegal weapons in the armoury. Access to confidential information like the estate's accounts would be extremely hard to get but a Traveller can gain an overview just by talking business with Sir Tayce.

As evening approaches, Travellers who have behaved decently will find the Exquisite Taste filter has been unlocked. They can dress in a close approximation of the latest court fashions as they have dinner and a semi-formal social afterwards. Anyone with SOC 9+ knows how to use all the utensils correctly and which way to pass the port. Others can avoid a gaffe by making a Routine (6+) Diplomat check. Sir Tayce would prefer to be gracious about gaffes and will offer to explain the hideously complex rules for future reference. Her tone depends on that of the Travellers. Those that seem worthy of developing as friends and are suitably respectful will be helped as a friend does. Those who have given offence will not.

Sir Tayce is willing to tolerate some poor behaviour from the Travellers since she wants something. Ultimately, she is a politician and has a problem to solve. She wants to figure the Travellers out – what they can do, what they are likely to do and how to play them if it proves necessary. At the same time, she needs to decide what to do about the predator situation and tries to pick up information or cues from the Travellers. Are they the type who can be bought off or coerced? Will they understand her position and help in return for patronage and assistance?

Thus, the dinner and drinks might go off like any other social event but there are nuances and subtleties which may or may not be picked up by the Travellers. What may come as a surprise is that there are no sudden interruptions or emergencies that must be attended to. At least, not until the morning.

M AKE HAY AND HOPE THE SUN STOPS SHINING

The following day brings a call, bright and early, from Dr Danvier at the Artemis Project. She is concerned about the presence of an Alderson's predator on Pyramus as this cannot have been a natural occurrence. However, there are other things to worry about. The meteorology instrumentation pack which provides the most critical climate data has suffered an outage and someone needs to investigate. The problem is that it is located about 400 kilometres west near the top of a mountain. A journey of several weeks by ground vehicle is out of the question, so Dr Danvier wants the Travellers to find a way to take a look.

One option is to head back to their ship and use it as transport, or perhaps the Travellers have a grav vehicle. Sir Tayce may be willing to loan one if the Project requests it, along with a pilot if necessary. However they do it, the Travellers are to proceed to the instrumentation package's location and figure out what is wrong with it. If they can repair it or retrieve the last set of data Dr Danvier would be pleased.

The Travellers could refuse to carry out this task. There is no-one else capable, so the data they would have gathered will remain unknown. This might cost lives – human and animal – and the Project staff will resent the lack of help even if no-one is injured as a result. The events that follow will largely catch the Project by surprise. There will still be some warning but the Travellers will find themselves lacking the opportunity to plan ahead.

EXTREME METEOROLOGY

A 400 kilometre flight in a grav vehicle is not a big deal. As the Travellers proceed, they will be aware of a very welcome sight – rainclouds ahead. Indeed, on the far side of the mountains lies the makings of a truly immense rainstorm. Lightning flashes occasionally and the air becomes noticeably colder and moister. The location of the instrument package is well known, although it is not transmitting. Reaching it requires flying into a thunderstorm.

The package is near the top of a small mountain, on an artificial plateau big enough to land an air/raft. It is not, however, sufficient for a starship. A

suitable spot to set down can be found but it does mean clambering up steep slopes in heavy rain. The Travellers might solve this by using anything from grav belts to a rope from the airlock. Landing or hovering in high, gusty winds requires a Difficult (10+) Pilot check. Success indicates a landing – not necessarily a good one – or that the craft has hovered long enough for someone to jump down or scramble back in. Actually doing that requires a Difficult (10+) Athletics check.

Upon reaching the instrument package the Travellers can see it has been struck by lightning. It needs to be removed for a full overhaul and replacement of components but could be jury-rigged by a skilled Traveller. This requires working in heavy rain and strong wind and produces a limited output of data. Some instruments remain offline whilst others are intermittent but data transmission begins straight away. If they have their own equipment set to receive the Travellers will be informed that it is cold and raining! More useful data follows.

Data from the instrument package confirms there is an almighty storm on the eastern slope of the mountains, spilling over and slowly moving east. This is likely to go on for days and spells the end of the dry period. That would seem like excellent news but there are a few complications. Winds are likely to cause damage among the towns of Pyramus and heavy rain after a long dry period can cause flash floods or wash away hillsides instead of soaking into the ground. The Travellers may notice there is data from lakes and watercourses on this side of the mountains and they are rising fast. Again, in the long term this is good news but it does mean the river will soon become a deep torrent. Again, this poses an erosion threat and will endanger anyone in the gorge or on the riverbed. There are other connotations but these will not be immediately apparent.

The Referee can make more out of this part of the adventure by adding natural hazards – falling rocks and mudslides seem likely – and the Travellers might complicate matters by finding a particularly difficult way to go about reaching the site. Ultimately, however, it will be time to head back. The Travellers

will fly out of the storm, back into bright sunlight. As they get closer to the Project, they receive an urgent call for assistance. It is vague at first, just a request that anyone close enough to the territory of Victor's Herd should lend priority assistance. Perhaps Rudy-the-Asshat has fallen in another ravine? If only it was something so trivial...

RELOCATION OR ELIMINATION

A drone put up by the Project has located a second predator on the north side of the river. Dr Danvier is concerned it poses a threat to Victor and his herd-mates. She provides information on the creature if the Travellers do not already have it but has no explanation for its presence. It must have crossed the river and scented the herd.

Danvier would like the predator captured for study, although the Travellers and some of the Project staff are likely to protest this idea. If not captured, she wants it relocated across the river. If the Travellers' data is right the creature will be prevented from recrossing once the river rises. It may be a threat to the Gazishpa Estate but that is Sir Tayce's problem. Danvier will accept a recommendation to kill the animal if necessary but will argue strongly against it. Her requirements are that the Travellers save the herd, if at all possible, and eliminate the predator only if absolutely necessary.

Locating Victor and his friends is not difficult due to the drones. The predator is only a little more difficult to find. The herd is moving briskly north-west, with the predator a few kilometres behind and closing slowly. Victor's path takes his herd-mates directly away from the threat but they will eventually run up against The Drop. The Travellers need to do something about that. They may be aboard their ship or in a borrowed air/raft but the transport they are using is more mobile than anything the Project has available.

Eliminating the predator would not be difficult. It will be spooked by anything flying around but if the Travellers' transport is more than about 400 metres away it will not take much notice. This means that the predator is a slow-moving target for rifles or similar, and not at all hard to hit. If it is not brought down immediately it will seek to flee if there is no close-by foe to strike back at. A wound will drive off the creature for now but it has to eat. If it is not disabled it will continue to hunt and Victor's herd will still be in danger.

If mortally wounded the creature will try to flee, fight or whatever is necessary to stay alive. Its death throes might be distressing to those having to watch, or the Travellers might find themselves chasing a wounded animal for some time before either finding its body or having to deliver more shots. This could be a simple 'shoot the monster' situation but it is a chance for the Travellers to reflect on what it means to take a life.

The Travellers might try something else, like landing a party to stalk the creature at ground level. This is riskier but offers other possibilities than simply killing it. The Travellers might use some hugely overpowered weapon like a starship laser or plasma gun. This will vaporise the predator... but start a wildfire in the dry undergrowth. Travellers who use a sledgehammer approach may create more problems than they solve.

The alternative is to drive the creature across the river. That means herding an aggressive predator about five kilometres across open country, without getting eaten or maimed, but it could be done. Loud noises will 'push' the predator, as will 'buzzing' it with a grav vehicle. It can also be 'pulled' by the scent of food, animals or meat. The Travellers might find themselves using a small starship and improvised fireworks, or something equally strange. In general, an Average (8+) Animals check is needed to 'pull' the predator or get it to choose a course of action. Attempts to 'push' it will depend on relevant skills. Thus, someone trying to use a starship to frighten the creature into changing path would decide what to do and make a Pilot check to do it. Well-timed fireworks might use Explosives or Tactics skills.

Getting the predator to the river requires a 'push' or a 'pull' at every decision point. Once the creature has been moved a kilometre or so closer to the river a new decision point is reached. This is accompanied by some appropriate action by the predator. Perhaps it scents prey and veers off eastwards or it goes to ground and must be found and coerced to move. Finally, after four 'pushes' or 'pulls' the beast reaches the river. The Travellers will note the water level is already rising and the predator is very reluctant to cross. A total of three different 'pushes' and/or 'pulls' are required to coerce it. This might be a repeat of earlier or the Travellers might try something different. Whatever they do, the predator stays on the far side for now.

The problem could be solved in other ways. Somehow disabling and netting the creature, then flying it over the river will work. Alternatively, Victor and his herd could be driven north-east and protected until they can be corralled at the Project. This still leaves the predator on the loose, however. The Referee should encourage problem-solving rather than violence. This is in part because the Project disapproves of unnecessary killings and partly because shooting an animal is not particularly memorable... but what about that time they lured an Alderson's predator across a rising river by dancing maniacally about on the far bank waving a violently struggling Barix as bait? Yes, the bird made it and the Traveller has the scars to prove it. You want to know if that was from the bird or the predator? Well, how about another drink?

MAKING HAY

Back at the Project, news about the weather is well received. The Project staff have been making pseudo-hay bales out of available fodder but they are starting

to fall apart when they come out of the machine. Hay is supposed to be dry but the vegetation has such small water content that it is unsuitable. Limited water was available and it was running out. But now... everyone stops working and watches the skies.

This could be a special moment for the Travellers, as they stand with their new friends watching rainclouds roll in from the west. A front of heavy rainfall is approaching but few people want to get under cover. Instead, beers are cracked and a cheer goes up as the first heavy drops fall. Within seconds everyone is drenched in warm rain, animal wranglers and scientists alike cheering themselves hoarse. Delighted honking and neighing comes from the paddocks.

The weather has finally broken. The river is rising and the predator is stuck on the far side. Those with further concerns are largely ignored in a party atmosphere which goes on for an hour or more. Then the emergency siren cuts through the celebration. Most are puzzled; they had forgotten it existed. Then Dr Danvier comes over the Project's speakers, '*Emergency meeting. Now!*'.



CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

As the rain continues to pound down, Dr Danvier calls an emergency meeting in the dining hall. Anyone who cannot be present is connected by comm. The news Danvier has to deliver is dire. She has been told by the Gazishpa Estate that their drones have detected multiple packs of Alderson's predators on this side of the river and are headed north-west towards the Project. There are regularly used trails in the area, so presumably the predators are following the scent of human and horse. That might be a mixed blessing. If they lose the scent, they may disperse into the countryside and be harder to track.

Some drones have been downed by the weather but it may be possible to track the predators. Sir Tayce has offered to bring her security to the Project to help and Danvier has accepted. In the meantime, there is a decision to be made. There are too many dangerous creatures to attempt a relocation or deflection, so Danvier has decided the animals at the Project must be protected at all costs. Anyone who objects to fighting should head out now. They have two choices. The first is to take one of the paths to The Drop and head for the nearest settlement. The Drop will protect that region but anything on this side is in mortal danger.

The alternative is to head north-east, find the herds of Przewalski's horses and drive them away from danger. This needs doing and may save the herds – but only if the predators are stopped. The new arrivals are still weak from their long period in suspended animation and will not be able to move quickly or far. The only answer is for those who are willing to defend them. The normally phlegmatic Danvier is openly crying as she tells her staff:

'Przewalski's horse is critically endangered. Alderson's predator is not. Nature does not care about this sort of thing but we do. We have to kill the predators. All of them.'

With the rising river to their rear the predators cannot go back. Those not killed will establish territories and hunt the animals of the Project. It may be that when their numbers are thinned the survivors can be moved away but right now the threat must be met head-on. It is possible to track the progress of the predator packs but only intermittently. They are a few hours away from the Project, spread across the countryside but following scent trails.

PREPARATIONS

The defenders have a few hours to prepare. There are large numbers of pseudo-hay bales, now rather soggy, which could be used to create ramparts and barriers. Vehicles and equipment could also be set up. It is not possible to turn the Project into a walled fortification but access can be limited. The Travellers might also consider the need to see once it gets dark. Visibility is poor at present but the first pack will arrive at dusk and others afterward. Rigging additional lights is a good idea and the time to do it is now.

Many are unwilling or scared to fight, whilst others think it is more important to drive the herds away. This leaves about half a dozen personnel equipped with ordinary hunting rifles and shotguns plus the Travellers if they choose to join. Sir Tayce arrives after a while, armed with the Gazishpa poni gun. She has two security people with ACRs and an air/raft.

If the Travellers are on good terms with Sir Tayce, they can persuade her to work with their plan – if they have one – and she might be willing to detach one of her security people or hand over the poni gun to a better shot. If not, Sir Tayce decides her best option is to shoot from the hovering air/raft. Her security people are more interested in keeping her safe than protecting horses and will be far less use than if they are an active part of a plan. It may be best that Sir Tayce hand over the gun and take up a high position to direct the defenders.

THE ATTACK

The first attack comes at dusk. A pack of Alderson's predators, containing an alpha female and four to six adults, approaches the Project. All ranged attacks or attempts to spot the attackers are made with DM-1 for the heavy rain and another DM-1 for poor light conditions, increasing to DM-3 for full dark. The latter can be offset by thermal scopes and the like or by stringing lights in the right places. The predators are wary and will slink about under cover before making their move. They will also retire from loud noises like gunfire, seeking concealment before moving forward again.

It is not necessary to run the attack like a miniatures skirmish game unless the Travellers want to. Instead, the Referee should play for drama and make the attack a problem-solving exercise. Scared but determined defenders might take excessive risks or get caught in a bad position and require rescue – or they may die horribly before anyone can help. The whole scene is punctuated by terrified honking and neighing. Barix will try to scatter and the horses will attempt to escape from their paddock. This may provide additional problems or drama, as animals weakened by cryosleep pathetically totter through a gap in the paddock fence.

A few injuries or casualties can discourage the first pack but it becomes apparent there are others creeping closer to the Project from the flanks. The exact number of attackers might never be known to the Travellers but there are enough to massacre the animals and probably the people at the Project. The scene is one of people running and shouting, trying to rescue or protect animals and colleagues, and shooting into the darkness. If a Project animal is caught there will be terrified, then agonised noises and other predators will close in to feed. This does provide an opportunity for a clean shot but too late to save the victim.

How long this goes on for is up to the Referee but it is recommended the defence of the Artemis Project be a story rather than a simple fight. The Referee should reward heroics and what the entertainment industry would call stunts. For example, someone calmly shooting from the Project roof might not be in much danger but they will struggle to get a clear shot at fleeting targets in the dark, in the rain, moving fast behind obstructions. Someone who scrambles up a pile of hay bales to get a shot, then leaps off as the pile is toppled by a charging predator... into the bed of an air/raft flown by a fellow Traveller deserves a reward. Thus, the resolution of the attack can be abstracted. If the Travellers prefer a wargame style, that is fine but the following is recommended for dramatic resolution:

Retreat Index

RI Value	Effect
0	The predators are confident and aggressive. They will try to reach the animals and gorge themselves.
1–3	Some predators turn their attention to the defenders, trying to stalk or rush them. Most are still drawn to the animals.
4–6	Most predators are after the defenders now. They are clever pack hunters and will distract someone whilst others sneak close.
7–9	The predators make a sudden switch to the animals again. They will also try for trapped or wounded people.
10–12	After a sudden lull, the predators make a last attempt to overrun the defenders, attacking en masse.
13+	The predators scatter and break.

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10–12	After a sudden lull, the predators make a last attempt to overrun the defenders, attacking en masse.
13+	The predators scatter and break.

The predators' level of success or failure is indicated by their Retreat Index (RI). This starts at 0. Whenever a predator is downed, add +1 to the RI if the Traveller succeeds an Average (8+) straight 2D check. In addition, any time the Travellers perform a heroic act such as rescuing a person or animal, or a cinema-worthy stunt, RI is automatically increased by +1.

If the Travellers are struggling, the Referee should remember there are other defenders. A predator might have been downed 'off camera' or a trapped Traveller might be suddenly rescued by a desperate scientist on a horse. The greater the chaos and the drama, the better. It is worth noting the attack does not have to be the 'main event' of the story. Some Travellers prefer a different play style. The whole thing might be narrated as the backdrop to an intensely roleplayed argument between Sir Tayce, Dr Danvier and some of the Travellers. Or to a buddy-movie or romance between two (or more) of the characters. What is presented in this adventure is a set of events. What actually *happens* is between the players and the Referee.

AFTERMATH

Once the attack is broken, the predators will slink into the night. Odd individuals might sneak back, or some of the Project's animals may have got loose and be chased down, but the Project will survive. Dawn rises on a scene of wet carnage. It is still raining, there are still predators out there and something must be done. The Travellers may or may not figure out Sir Tayce's involvement – and if so, what they do with the information is up to them. New adventures may await but in the meantime the Travellers have fulfilled the Project's name. Artemis was a huntress but also a protector of nature. A necessary killing was acceptable and even glorious to her. The Travellers must decide for themselves if Artemis would weep over the predators but some of the Project's staff certainly will.

CHARACTERS AND OPPosition

The Travellers may interact with all manner of people during their time on Pyramus. Most contacts will be incidental and do not require specific descriptions. Those necessary to the adventure are detailed below.

GENERIC PYRAMUS LOCALS

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		—		—
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	8	INT	7	Profession (farmer) 1, Survival 1
DEX	7	EDU	4	
END	9	SOC	4	
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Shotgun (4D, Bulky) or Rifle (3D) if needed.		

The people of Pyramus can only produce TL2 metalwork and similarly basic items but they are neither dumb nor ignorant. Everyone can read and write Anglic, and most people can operate advanced devices even if they do not own one. A significant proportion of the local population do possess a variety of useful items and there is no guarantee that any given local will not possess a basic comm. Information might move faster than the Travellers expect from low-tech locals.

Most of the population have basic 'farming and fixing' skills and are generally outdoorsy types. Clothing is functional rather than fashionable, mostly made from locally available materials, whilst tools are a mix of imported and locally made items. The majority of people are good-natured and friendly but intolerant of stupidity and waste.

DR EVA DANVIER (CHIEF SCIENTIST)

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		—
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	4	INT	12	Animals (veterinary) 3, Investigate 2, Science (life sciences) 4
DEX	9	EDU	14	
END	6	SOC	9	
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Frosty Glare and Disappointed Silence		

for officials and nobles who say sympathetic things but do not actually assist. As a result, she and Sir Tayce do not get along. They are coldly polite and observe social conventions but Dr Danvier considers Sir Tayce a 'mumbling politician' whilst Sir Tayce resents Danvier's lack of respect for her position.

When not annoyed at the planetary noble, Dr Danvier is usually irritated at something else. She is very good at what she does and genuinely appreciates those who try to help. However, she is not good at making others understand what she wants them to do. Those that have figured out 'Danvier-speak' win her favour whilst those who take a best guess and get it slightly wrong receive quiet disapproval. Danvier is not unpleasant, just disappointed that she cannot get everything done.

Dr Danvier has been working in conservation for over four decades and has developed a certain intolerance

Boutros
Vianne



ORAN YOTA (ANIMAL WRANGLER)

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		—
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	8	INT	8	Animals (handling) 2, Gun
DEX	6	EDU	6	Combat 0, Navigation 2,
END	8	SOC	6	Profession (herder) 1, Survival 1

EQUIPMENT Weapons: Rifle (3D)

Oran is a cheerful young woman from a local family. She was hired as a general assistant and quickly became invaluable as an animal expert. She spends

much of her time riding around the countryside making observations which she records in her ever-present paper notebook or – when she is badgered enough about it – using a camera mounted on her wide-brimmed hat. Oran particularly likes horses of all kinds and can identify herd members at a great distance through minute details.

If the Travellers journey outside the Project, Oran is likely to be assigned as their guide. She is unwilling to travel far from the animals, as she has constant tasks to perform, but will trade help with something for a couple of days acting as a local guide. If this takes the Travellers to Coupen's Plain, Oran will insist on a visit to her parents' house, where the Travellers will be fed to within an inch of their lives.

BOUTROS VIANNE (ASSISTANT VETERINARIAN)

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		—
TRAITS		SKILLS		
STR	10	INT	8	Animals (veterinary) 2,
DEX	8	EDU	9	Carouse 1, Medic 1
END	9	SOC	7	

EQUIPMENT None

Boutros is a newly-qualified vet who sought something a bit different from treating household pets. He found this when he arrived on Pyramus

a few months ago. Since then, he has become a popular member of the community, not least due to his habit of working shirtless with his long hair blowing in the breeze. It is no coincidence the veterinarian structure has become a social hub and that any jobs there are overwhelmed with volunteers.

Despite blatantly relishing his assumed persona as 'the hot vet', Boutros is a dedicated member of the team. He likes work and believes the Project's mission is important. He does not get along well with Dr Danvier but then hardly anyone does. Boutros is exasperated by Danvier's inability to give clear instructions, whilst she refers to him as 'that pretty dunderhead', who is useful mainly as a publicity figure.

WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

Most weaponry in this adventure is standard but there are two notable exceptions. One is the poni gun at the Gazishpa Estate, the other is a tool more than a weapon.

GAZISHPA PONI GUN

A Poni is a large eight-legged creature which has become famous as the emblem of the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service. Any large-calibre firearm capable of taking down a Poni is referred to by the generic term 'poni gun' – often in preference to its actual designation. The weapon at the Gazishpa Estate is unusual in that it is not a civilian hunting weapon but a repurposed anti-materiel rifle of military origin.

Chambered for 14mm cartridges, the Gazishpa poni gun is fed from a four-round detachable magazine. Only four magazines are available – this is far more than a leisurely hunting trip would require in a hurry, so typically the gun is taken with just one magazine and reloaded from loose ammunition. Action is semi-

automatic, with an artillery-style recoil system. All the same, the weapon must be fired from a rest or its bipod to avoid injury. If fired from the hip or on the move, the operator must make a Difficult (10+) Gun Combat check using END and suffers an amount of damage equal to any negative Effect. Effect of -6 or worse results in the weapon being dropped.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
Gazishpa Poni Gun	10	1,200	4D+2	14	Cr12000	4	Cr100	AP 4, Scope, Very Bulky

MULTIFUNCTION FIELD DEVICE

The MFD is considered a tool rather than a firearm by the Artemis Project staff. It takes the form of a stubby, bulky, smoothbore top-break revolver. The cylinder holds three large (27mm) cartridges fired using single or double-action. When carried by Project personnel, these devices are usually loaded with noisemaker rounds. These produce a piercing screech using fold-out fins and detonate 200 metres from the muzzle. A bursting charge scatters multiple submunitions which then explode – noisily but in general harmlessly. The characteristic 'screeeeeeeeech-bangbangbangbangbang' noise made gives the nickname 'screeblers'. They frighten off predators or other unwanted creatures and in skilled hands serve as a crude herding tool.

An illuminating flare round is available, although in very dry conditions might be inadvisable. The Project also has a few line rounds, which can be used to launch a thin steel line across or atop an obstacle. The Project has little use for this capability but MFDs are used as survival and working tools in many industries. Whilst a screebler might cause injury on direct impact, the only anti-personnel ammunition is a rather underpowered shotgun cartridge.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
MFD (Screebler)	8	200	1D	0.8	Cr100	3	Cr20	—
MFD (Shot)	8	20	2D	0.8	Cr100	3	Cr10	—

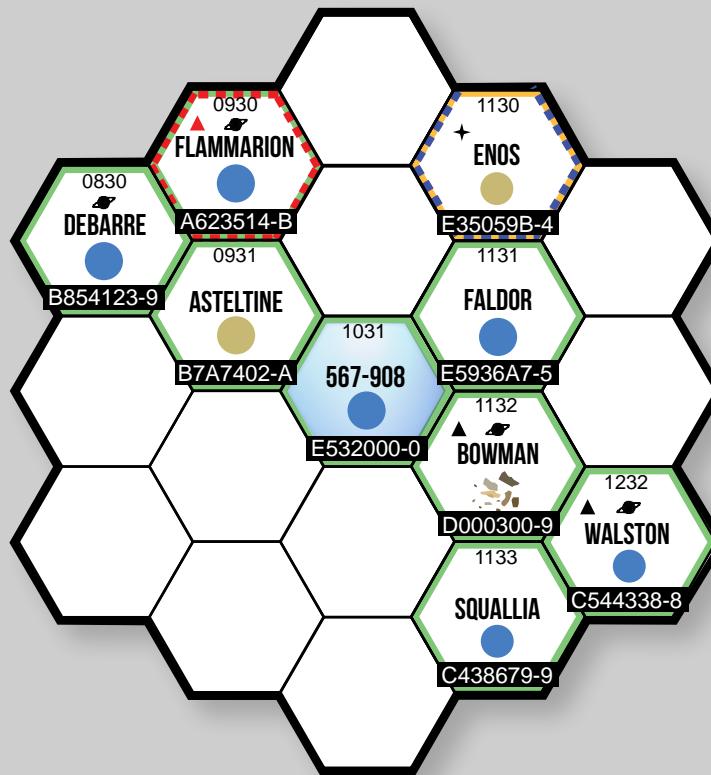
MARCHES ADVENTURE 5

Safari World

A wealthy industrialist needs a qualified crew to accompany him on a hunting expedition to an uncharted world. His prey? A magnificent and mysterious trapper species said to roam the planet.

The Travellers escort their patron across District 268 in the Spinward Marches to reach this far-off world. Their transportation is the *Leaping Snowcat*, a Type-K safari ship. A noble's conveyance, the *Leaping Snowcat* is a luxury spacecraft but this is no pleasure cruise. District 268 is on the Imperial frontier and their destination is 567-908, a planet known only by its scout survey code. It is a dry, dismal and uncivilised world... or so they think.

The safari takes on a new dimension when the Travellers discover they are not alone. There is something, or someone, else out there. The residents of 567-908 have eluded discovery for their entire existence and now that they have been found, they might just be the key that helps the Travellers and their patron find their quarry.



INTRODUCTION

Fame and fortune are desired by many citizens of the Imperium. In this adventure, the Travellers are offered the chance to help a rich industrialist acquire both in a rather unusual manner. A chance meeting at a starport affords the Travellers the opportunity to crew the *Leaping Snowcat*, a Type-K safari ship. They must escort their patron to a backwater world in District 268, an unincorporated subsector of the Spinward Marches. On this world, they are to hunt a rare and elusive animal that is purported to exist there.

Travel in District 268 can be a challenge. While the district has many worlds classified as Imperial Client States, most are unaffiliated and therefore have few of the perks and advantages present in civilised space. The Travellers must be prepared for a voyage into the wild outback, leaving the comfort and safety of the Imperium behind.

To compound their difficulties, they have a limited amount of time to complete their mission. The Travellers' patron must acquire his quarry and return post haste to Mertactor in order to catch a fast liner to the distant world of Mora, where he intends to triumphantly announce the amazing new species that he and his intrepid band of Travellers have found.

The benefits of taking this job are many; the Travellers will be paid well, they get to crew a luxury starship for several months and they have the opportunity to make contacts with a would-be future noble and an Imperial megacorporation. Furthermore, District 268 is on the Imperial frontier. Travellers who brave its uncharted worlds are likely to garner a good reputation and will be considered for future jobs in the region.

QUALIFICATIONS, SKILLS AND EQUIPMENT

The Travellers should be able to operate a starship and navigate the challenging environment of a frontier world. At a minimum, they must have a pilot, astrogator and engineer to operate the ship. In addition, they should have skills and experience that enable them to function in challenging outdoor environments. Skills like Survival, Recon, Gun Combat and Navigation will be extremely valuable. While not all of these are required, the Travellers will find the challenges before them much easier to tackle if they have the requisite skills and experience.

A stipend for necessary equipment will be provided for things like consumables, first-aid, survival gear and hunting weapons. Should the Travellers want to bring their own weaponry, keep in mind that military and paramilitary weaponry is not desired on this expedition. The object is to capture live specimens or possibly to kill one or two for preservation and exhibition. In addition, the hunting party might want or need to hunt for survival, killing prey that may be consumed over the course of the expedition. Considering that such prey will be acquired on an alien world, there is the question of whether its proteins are digestible by the Travellers but if they obliterate it with energy weapons or automatic fire, the point will be moot. While more powerful military weapons may be stowed on the ship, their patron will most certainly prohibit the possession of such weapons during the expedition itself. More appropriate hunting weapons and ammunition will be provided from the ship's locker if necessary.

OVERVIEW

The adventure begins on Mertactor in the District 268 subsector of the Spinward Marches, where the Travellers find themselves looking for work. As luck would have it, a wealthy industrialist by the name of Kafla Thingvellir is looking for a crew with just their qualifications. Well, close enough, anyway. Thingvellir is the founder and majority stockholder of Sterilon, LIC, a medical equipment company. He and the Travellers are introduced to one another by Gasha Nouhdular, a representative of the Naasirka megacorporation.

Thingvellir is in a bit of a bind, having travelled from Mora all the way to Mertactor where he was supposed to meet a hand-picked crew of spacers who were to escort him to the 567-908 system aboard the *Leaping Snowcat*, a Type-K safari ship lent to him by Naasirka. Thingvellir took a circuitous route, stopping at several star systems to inspect Sterilon satellite and sales offices, and to oversee other business interests. Finally making it to Mertactor on schedule, he discovered that his crew was late, which simply will not do. Thingvellir is on a tight schedule and must complete his expedition and get back to Mora in time for the *Siren Symposium*, a prestigious meeting of the scientific endeavour society of the University of Mora. At the symposium, he intends to display an amazing discovery: a heretofore unseen animal species, heard of in spacers' legends and thought of by many as myth. He intends to find the species at 567-908, the site of the expedition.

In the Third Imperium, discovery of a new species conveys the naming rights to that species to its discoverer. Should the species be unusually magnificent, it might catch the attention of the Imperial Court. After achieving public acclaim on Mora, Thingvellir intends to travel all the way to Capital in the Core where he hopes to use his newfound fame to acquire a knighthood or barony, and then settle into life as an Imperial noble.

A standard Type-K safari ship, the *Leaping Snowcat* has jump-2 and Thrust 1 performance. As the crew of the ship, the Travellers must get Thingvellir across District 268, from Mertactor to 567-908, in as expeditious a manner as possible. They have 18 weeks to get to 567-908, find the possibly mythical beast and get back to Mertactor.

Once they arrive in the 567-908 system, they may optionally survey the planet, which will give them a better understanding of its terrain and climate. Upon landing, the expedition begins in earnest. How they go about this is entirely up to the Travellers but most will simply opt to begin hunting at a desired site on the planet. While 567-908 does not lack game, unfortunately, they will not be able to find the trapper species they are looking for. However, they do find something else.

The Travellers will be under the observation of a Shrieker scout, or a 'seeker' as they call them. The Shriekers are an as-yet-undiscovered sophont species native to 567-908. One way or another, the Travellers will eventually make contact with the Shriekers. With some creativity and effort by the Travellers, they should be able to find a way to communicate with the seeker or other Shriekers they encounter, and then travel to a distant place that may be translated roughly as 'The Great Retreat'.

At the Great Retreat, they are introduced to a high priest of the Shrieker religion. Using whatever form of communication has been established between the two species, the priest explains to the Travellers that they might be able to help each other. Apparently, 567-908 suffered from some extreme seismic events some time ago and the resulting damage has prevented them from being able to access the Valley of Memories, a place of great importance to the Shriekers. If the Travellers use their technology to help clear the path to the valley, the Shriekers will tell them where they can find the crested trapper that Thingvellir covets.

After studying and acquiring samples of the creature, the Travellers whisk Thingvellir off to Mertactor so he can catch a jump-4 subsidised liner back to Mora in time for the Siren Symposium. Thingvellir intends to win the top prize, which he will then carry off to Capital to acquire yet more fame, prestige, fortune and – if he plays his cards right – a noble patent.

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

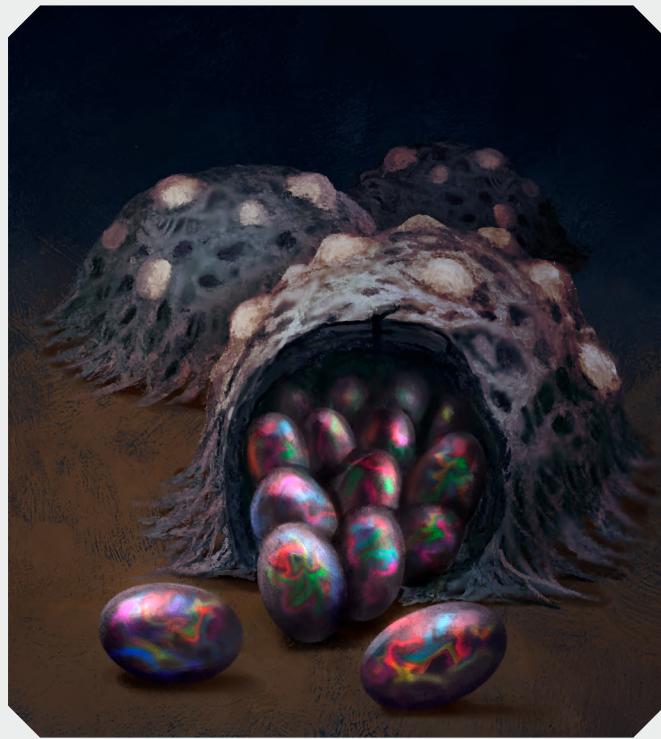
All you need to run this adventure is the *Traveller Core Rulebook*. However, for more equipment options, the *Central Supply Catalogue* will also come in handy.

REFeree's INFORMATION

The following information is for the Referee and contains facts that may or may not be made available to the Travellers. Much of this data can be discovered by searching public information systems, a ship's Library software or by interacting with individuals from various star systems. Keep in mind that the information the Travellers discover could be out of date, biased or obscured by forces beyond their control. Partial information or misinformation can be stumbling blocks on the road to becoming fully informed. Furthermore, the process of putting together the pieces of the puzzle can be an enjoyable and fulfilling experience in their own right.

DENULI CRYSTALS

One of the rarities that can be found on 567-908 are Denuli crystals, named for the explorer Mtume Denuli, an explorer who came to the planet in the year 480, landed his ship in the Valley of Memories and obtained hundreds of the glistening stones. He kept them in his personal possession for the remainder of his life and they were auctioned off for a fortune after his death. Pristine Denuli crystals fetch approximately Cr10000 each on the open market. Considering how few people have come to 567-



908 to acquire the stones, they are extremely rare. Denuli never revealed their source, so there was never a mass rush to the world to extract them.

As it turns out, Denuli crystals are not rare gemstones at all but the unfertilised eggs of Shriekers. Taking Denuli crystals as collectibles is highly offensive to the Shriekers, even if the eggs have been spent or left unfertilised. They are sacred to the Shriekers and should remain on their world for eternity as far as they are concerned. For more information about Shrieker eggs, see The Shriekers on page 179.

STERILON, INC.

Sterilon, Inc. is a highly successful medical equipment company based on Mora with subsidiaries, research and development facilities, and sales offices throughout the Spinward Marches. Its founder and majority stockholder, Kafla Thingvellir, is considering retirement and the sale of his holdings. Thingvellir hopes to retire to Capital but will only do so if he achieves lasting fame by finding and killing or capturing a beautiful as-yet-unnamed animal species. Sterilon is highly sought after by Naasirka, which intends to do everything in its power to ensure Thingvellir achieves his dream and willingly sells his shares in the company.

NAASIRKA

Naasirka is an ancient and renowned megacorporation whose origins date back to the era of the Ziru Sirka. Their primary industries are information technology, data storage, software, computers, robots and other electronic devices. Naasirka is the primary supplier of communications, data storage and software for the Imperial X-Boat Network. Naasirka's corporate leadership would like to break into the medical equipment industry and hopes to acquire Sterilon in order to do so. While they certainly have the resources to finance and build a new medical equipment company, it would be less expensive and more efficient to purchase a successful operation like Sterilon to bring into their portfolio.

Naasirka is aware that Thingvellir would be interested in selling his company under the right circumstances. While they cannot deliver his vaunted 'beautiful

species' on a platter for him, they intend to do everything within their power to enable him to find it for himself. Thingvellir's desire to become famous for the discovery of 567-908's crested trapper and to carry that fame all the way to Capital are well-known.

SIREN AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MORA

Kafla Thingvellir is a huge benefactor of the University of Mora. He has donated millions of Credits to the university and eagerly recruits its graduates into the ranks of Sterilon. In addition, he actively participates in various clubs and organisations associated with the university, especially Siren, the university's premiere scientific society. Siren has become a magnet for rich donors and one of their primary pursuits is the acquisition of naming rights to rare and unusual species from worlds throughout the Spinward Marches and beyond. To name a species, one must find it, record and photograph it, return samples of the species to a qualified institution and record it in the Imperial Archive.

Thingvellir himself has already hunted and named numerous species but has not yet given one his own surname. The rules of the game dictate that one can only apply their name to a single species. His cohorts have named animals such as Aishiani's segmented worm, Dornfeld's lightseeker and Kirigama's acidwort. Particularly vexing to Thingvellir is the fact that one of his rivals managed to hunt down and name an extraordinary multi-legged crawler from the deserts of Catuz. Since that moment, Thingvellir has been obsessed with finding and naming a beautiful and extraordinary species of his own, one so exceptional that it will not only be the perfect recipient of his hallowed name but will also vault him to interstellar fame and fortune. Thingvellir is shooting high but he truly believes that 567-908's mysterious and elusive crested trapper is the creature that will take him there.

DISTRICT 268

On the periphery of the Imperium are subsectors designated as Districts. The last frontier of the Spinward Marches is District 268, which was opened for Imperial expansion in 940 but the majority of the subsector has yet to be incorporated. Currently, only the Mertactor and Mille Falcs systems lie within Imperial borders.

The subsector is bifurcated by two stellar gaps known as the Greater and Lesser Collace Rifts. The rifts have an effect on the culture and politics of the subsector, effectively dividing it into rimward and coreward provinces. The rimward province is dominated by the Collace system and includes an extremity of the Spinward Main, the extensive jump-1 path that blankets much of the sector. The coreward province is fractious, a collection of individualistic star systems, most of which relish their independence. The 567-908 system lies within this region.

District 268 includes 10 Imperial Client States, worlds sponsored by the Imperium but not yet incorporated into its borders. The other worlds of the subsector are non-aligned, with some seeking Imperial sponsorship, others which prefer to remain independent and a number adamantly opposed to joining the Imperium.

567-908

When the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service (IISS) surveys a newly visited region of space, it names uninhabited star systems with a six-digit call sign. As these worlds are colonised, most are given new names. The 567-908 system, which has never been colonised, retains its original call sign.

The 567-908 system is binary, with a type K5 III giant primary star and a white dwarf companion. The primary was once a much smaller main-sequence star but has exhausted the hydrogen at its core and expanded to its current size, on the gradual path to becoming a red giant. Its eight planets are alphabetically named 567-908a through 567-908h, the latter being the system mainworld where the adventure takes place. All seven of the other planets are in the inner zone and none have atmospheres. The star system has no gas giants but there is a planetoid belt far beyond the orbit of 567-908h. The white dwarf is unceremoniously dubbed 567-908i and is a distant companion with no orbiting planets of note. Despite the system naming conventions, this adventure will henceforth refer to the mainworld simply as 567-908.

The planet is dry and warm with only 20 percent of its surface covered by water and it has a median temperature of 25°C. It rotates once every 30 hours, giving it a fairly typical day-night cycle, but the enormous dim orange globe of the system primary takes up far more of the sky than a main-sequence star. The majority of the planet's water is in a single sea, although this was not the case until fairly recently. There was once an eastern sea as well but massive climate change and drought dried the sea. All that remains of the eastern sea is a dry seabed and the archaeological remnants of a long-lost alien

civilisation on its former coast. These remnants are so old and worn away by millennia of exposure that most would require scientific equipment to identify. This lost civilisation belonged to the Shriekers, who are described in greater detail in *The Shriekers* on page 179.

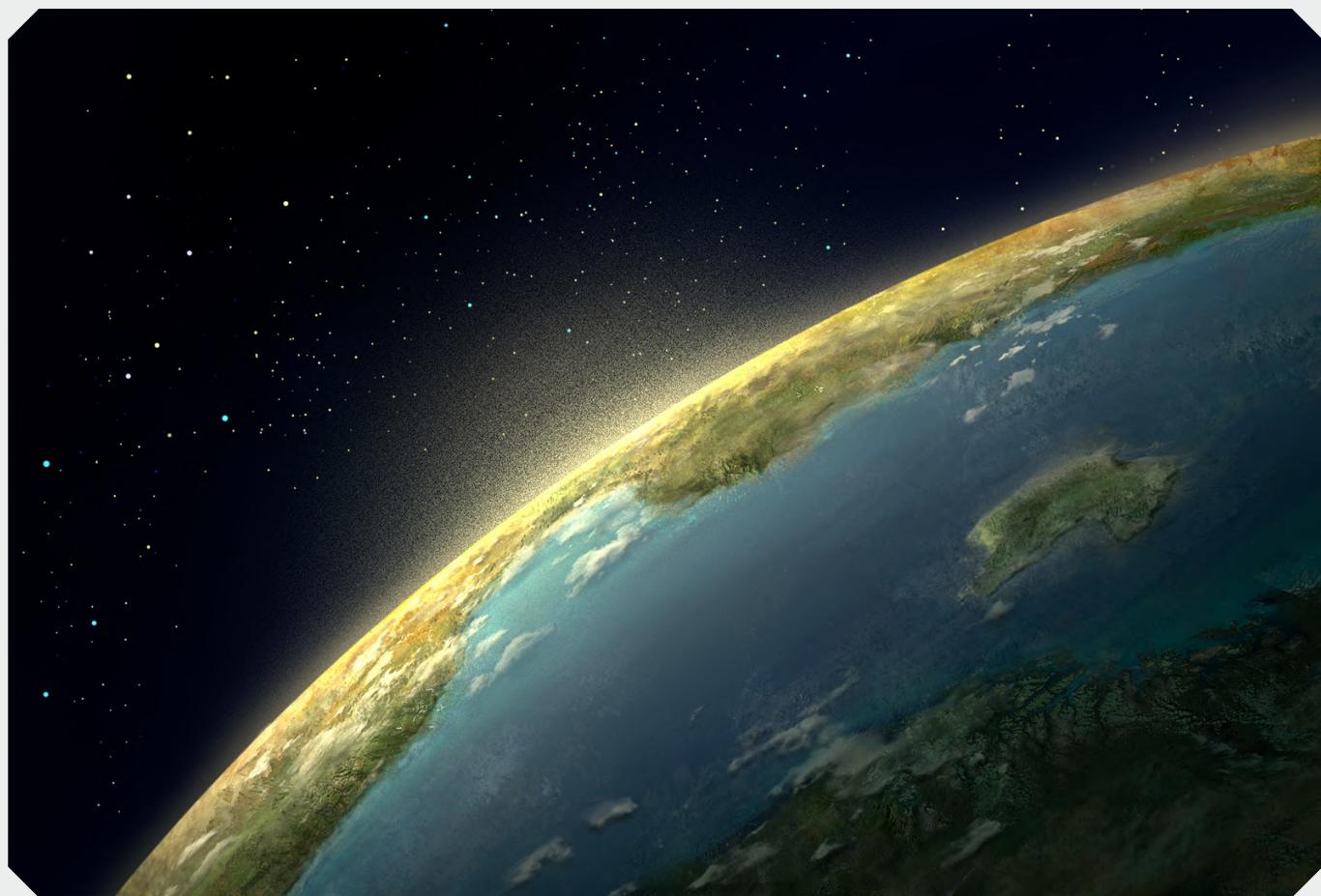
For the most part, the Great Sea is quite shallow, with a median depth of only 100 metres. However, two tectonic plates separated a few thousand years ago, creating a deep trench that runs north-south near the western side of the sea, reaching depths of up to 3,000 metres. Marshes and swamps run along the eastern coastline of the Great Sea and, to a lesser extent, the western as well. Much of the west coast of the sea is consumed by hill and mountain ranges that abut the coast, preventing the presence of more wetlands. The lower ranges are anywhere from 1,000–4,000 metres high, with the taller ranges reaching an impressive 15,000 metres in elevation. Rivers flowing from the Great Sea keep portions of this region temperate.

An entire hemisphere of the planet is consumed by desert. The desert of 567-908 is as enormous as it is desolate. Only the hardiest life forms can survive in this hot, arid environment.

The planet has a very thin atmosphere, so most sophont species must don respirators to breathe there. In addition, the atmosphere provides little protection from the radiation of its primary star, so visitors are encouraged to cover exposed skin lest they incur a nasty sunburn and possible radiation sickness. The air becomes very dry on 567-908 when one strays far from the Great Sea or any of the planet's wetlands, especially in the open plains where the winds blow fiercely. Travellers are advised to use various moisturisers to prevent their skin from drying and cracking, and to use a humidifier when sleeping or resting in a tent or other sheltering structure.

The region around the Great Sea experiences the occasional storm and flash flooding in the coastal plains and the dry seabed are fairly common during heavier rainfall. Visitors must take caution lest they get caught in such a flood.

The planet has relatively abundant plant and animal life. Larger animal lifeforms tend to have eight legs and a keel bone or spinal column along the ventral surfaces of their bodies.



Now Hiring

While on a layover at Mertactor Starport, the Travellers are contacted by Gasha Nouhdular, who introduces herself as a representative of Naasirka, the powerful Vilani megacorporation whose prowess in high-tech products is renowned throughout the Imperium. Nouhdular offers to introduce them to Kafla Thingvellir, who may have a job offer for them. Thingvellir hails from Mora, where he is the founder and chief executive of Sterilon, LIC, a highly successful medical products company.

Thingvellir has come to Mertactor to embark upon a hunting expedition to 567-908. He expected to meet his hand-picked crew here at the starport days ago but they have not yet arrived. He is on a tight schedule and cannot risk further delay. Nouhdular believes that the Travellers have the requisite skills to fly Thingvellir's ship across District 268 to 567-908 and to embark upon a hunting safari. They must find an elusive quarry: a beautiful and dangerous trapper species, an apex predator reputed to hunt lesser prey in the wilds of the planet. To hear Thingvellir tell the tale, it will be the most glorious hunting expedition in the history of Humaniti.

If the Travellers are the friendly sort, they will get along quite well with Thingvellir. He is a gregarious and charismatic man who shows genuine interest in each of them. After treating the Travellers and Nouhdular to a generous meal, Thingvellir curtly offers each of them Cr4000 per month to crew the *Leaping Snowcat* for the duration of a voyage to and from 567-908, promising them 'the adventure of their lives'. He then apologetically dismisses himself from the table, encouraging them to have as many drinks or as much dessert as they like, with the statement, 'I'm terribly sorry. I have a few business matters to attend to before heading off to bed. The ship leaves in 12 hours. We'll see you at the docking bay four hours before departure.'

Thingvellir is obviously a man who is accustomed to having people do as he says. While Cr4000 per month is fairly standard for some roles on a ship, the amount is underwhelming for others. He departs before the Travellers can ask additional questions but Nouhdular beckons them to stay at the table after his departure.

After Thingvellir has disappeared from sight, Nouhdular speaks up, offering an additional Cr2000 per week per person if they accept the offer, doubling that amount if the expedition is successful. For undisclosed reasons, it is very important to Naasirka that Thingvellir should succeed. This should sweeten the deal significantly. Nouhdular will not give additional information but provides contracts for each of the Travellers to sign, each of which includes the caveat that they do not inform Thingvellir of their arrangement with her. As a signing bonus, she offers an additional Cr3000 stipend per person to purchase any equipment they might need for the voyage and expedition. They must act quickly. The *Leaping Snowcat* departs in a mere 12 hours.

FAME AND FORTUNE

Thingvellir has big plans after he and the Travellers successfully find and capture samples of the elusive trapper species on 567-908. After triumphantly returning to the University of Mora to deliver what will be the keynote speech of the annual meeting of Siren, he intends to sell Sterilon LIC, the highly successful business he built from the ground up, and depart for a long journey to Core, where he will register the newfound species at the Imperial Archives on Reference, then travel to Capital. He plans to leverage his newfound fame and the wealth he has acquired from the sale of his company to establish himself as a member of the Imperial Court.

This is why Naasirka has become involved. They very much want to add Sterilon, a highly successful medical equipment company with holdings across the Spinward Marches, to their portfolio. Naasirka corporate officers believe Thingvellir will only sell if he manages to have a successful expedition and returns in time to Mora to announce his wondrous discovery.

THE LEAPING SNOWCAT

The *Leaping Snowcat* is a typical Type-K safari ship. The ship is owned by a collection of nobles and wealthy industrialists, most of whom reside in the Gisten subsector. Thingvellir has recently bought out one of the partners and has chartered the ship for the next few months. The ship is streamlined, and can land on the surface of a planet, but it also contains a launch, ATV and air/raft. At minimum, the ship requires a pilot, astrogator and engineer to operate it. Additional crew, such as a steward and a medic, are often brought along to facilitate safaris but are not needed for basic ship operation. See Spacecraft on page 194-196 for the complete statistics of the *Leaping Snowcat* and its launch, *Snowkitten*. The stats for the ATV and air/raft may be found on page 144 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*.



The *Leaping Snowcat* is a luxury vehicle and crewing it is an enjoyable experience. Its galley is well stocked and the staterooms and common areas are plush and comfortable. The Travellers and their patron might even enjoy relaxing in the trophy room and gazing out the broad viewport while planetside. Sipping on high-end beverages while taking in an exotic alien landscape is a fine way to pass the time.

VOYAGE THROUGH DISTRICT 268

At minimum, four jumps are required to get from Mertactor to 567-908. The ship will require fuel at each stop, which may be purchased at a starport or acquired via wilderness refuelling from a gas giant or planetary ocean. When estimating the length of each stop, be sure to include the time required to manoeuvre in from 100 diameters, manoeuvre back out to jump point and to refine unrefined fuel.

The stops in each system can be as long or short as the Referee and Travellers desire. They should keep in mind they are on a tight schedule. While the itinerary has plenty of slack, they really have no idea how long the expedition will take on 567-908. It could be just a few weeks or it could drag out to a month or more. With that said, visiting each world provides the opportunity to visit a new and exciting place. If the Referee is running this adventure as part of a larger campaign, adding colour to other star systems in the subsector potentially sets things up for more adventures in the future. In addition, there are several publications that provide more information about some of the star systems in their path. *Spinward Marches 1: The Bowman Arm* describes Bowman and Walston, among others. *Marches Adventure 1: High and Dry*, provides a full adventure primarily set on Walston.

ENCOUNTERS

As the *Leaping Snowcat* makes its way through District 268, run space encounters as normal, as described in Encounters on page 155 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*. However, if a result of Pirate comes up, consider making it an Imperial or Sword Worlds patrol craft. If a pirate encounter is desired, make it a corsair from Collace or Trexalon, which are in a state of cold war and occasionally raid each other's ships.

ARRIVAL AT 567-908

The planet 567-908 is described in detail in the Referee's Information section on page 164. The Travellers may discover much of this information with a few close orbits of the planet. The sensors of the *Leaping Snowcat* can be used to run a cursory survey of the planet and give them basic topographical and climate data. For more detailed information, they are going to have to planetside.

The starport, such as it is, is a naturally developed chunk of flat bedrock, big enough to accommodate most spacecraft of 200 tons or less. It is flat, reasonably level and therefore easy to land on. There is no one present to meet the Travellers upon their arrival, nor are there any enclosed structures present. Other than the landing slab, the only item present is a beacon for ships to use to guide themselves to the spot from orbit. The beacon consists of an antenna that protrudes from the ground which is connected to a low-tech computer system secured in a sub-surface vault. The computer has a user interface that accesses a starport log. The log automatically records landings and departures but visitors may optionally add more information, such as a flight plan which can be used for rescue operations, if necessary. While there is no refuelling equipment, there is a nearby river where water can be extracted and refined for fuel.

THE EXPEDITION BEGINS

How and where the Travellers begin their expedition is up to them. While the legend of the elusive crested trapper somehow made it off 567-908, none of the stories contain additional information about its whereabouts; therefore, there is no knowledge about where it might be found. The Travellers might begin hunting in the region around the starport or may relocate and start elsewhere on the planet if desired. If they performed a cursory survey of the world from space, they have seen there are multiple climates, a single sea and varied topography. Their starting point might be influenced by this information.

Use the following encounters rule and animal descriptions for their hunts. Thingvellir is an avid sportsman and eagerly participates. He is scientifically curious and will want to know everything about

whatever creatures they manage to track, observe or kill. He carefully records details about each habitat they visit and every species of plant or animal they encounter in a portable computer journal.

Roll 2D every four hours the Travellers spend actively tracking animal wildlife. On a result of 2–8, nothing of consequence happens and there is no need to consult the tables. Optionally narrate details about the terrain, perhaps adding in interesting information such as the presence of unusual tracks on the ground, the bones of a large dead animal or other information to keep the narrative moving. On a result of 9–12, they wander into the territory of an animal or group of animals. Wandering into the territory of an animal is the potential start of a hunt. See Hunting on page 177 for the next steps to take. Several animals native to 567-908 are described below that may be selected for the encounter.

Most animal species on 567-908 inhabit the lowlands – valley floors, canyons and so forth – where the very thin atmosphere is thick enough to support life. However, some species are adapted to live in elevated regions above sea level. Because of the lack of atmosphere, there is almost no life above an altitude of 4,000 metres.

Note that none of the creatures encountered have official names. Each and every one of these animals are being discovered by offworlders for the very first time. Should the Travellers want to go to the trouble of collecting data and samples and reporting them to the Imperial Archives, they could conceivably name them. However, keep in mind they are on the payroll of Kafla Thingvellir. If the Travellers exert too much energy chasing their own prey, Thingvellir might have to remind them that their primary goal is to find the trapper species.

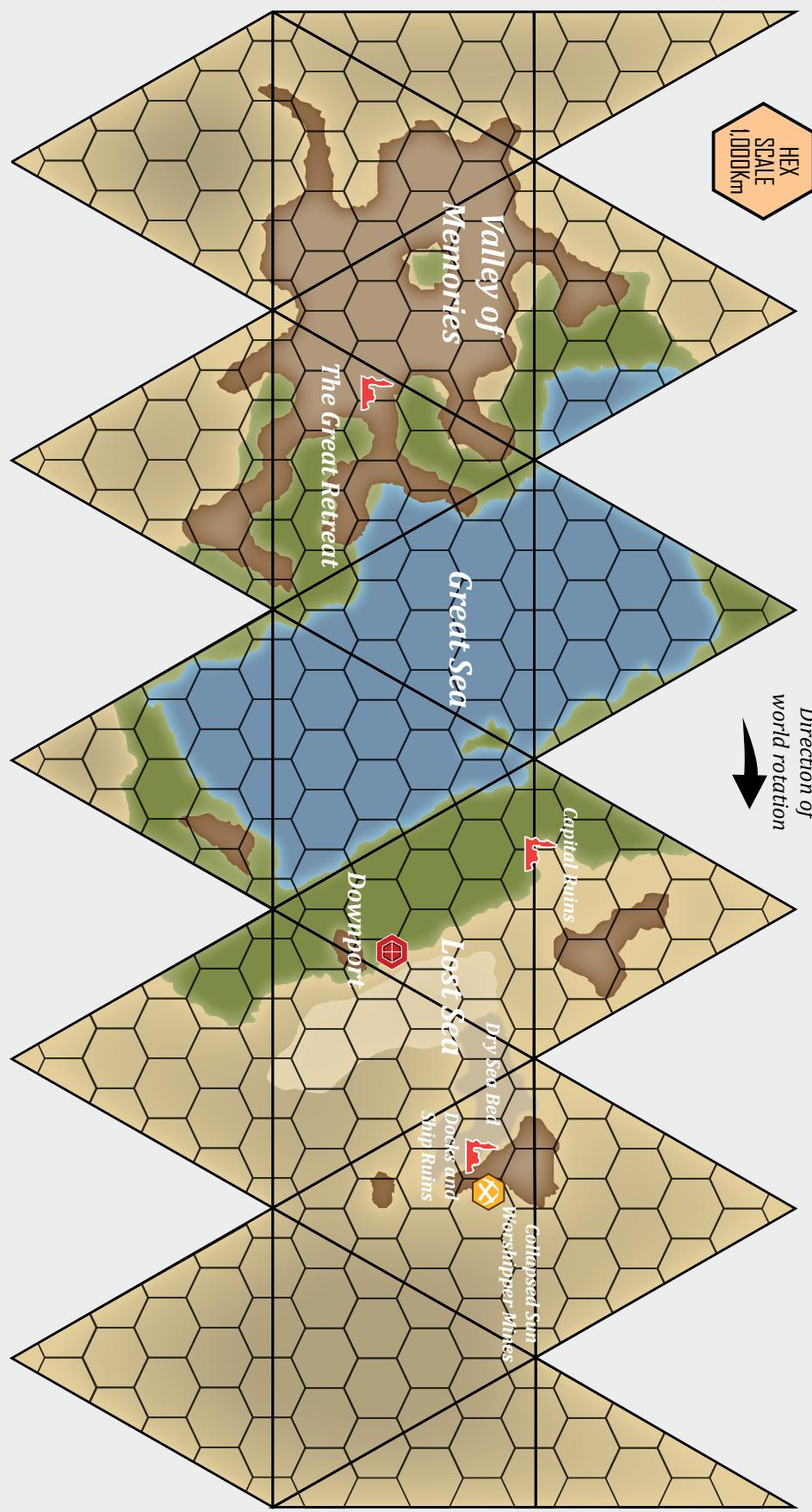
Unfortunately for Thingvellir, none of the animals they see are the vaunted crested trapper. To find this rare and elusive creature, the Travellers are going to need a stroke of luck. Not to worry, however. During their hunting expedition, they will eventually encounter one of the Shriekers. Provided the encounter goes well, the Travellers will receive all the assistance they need to find the lair of the trapper.

567-908

UWP: E532000-0

HEX
SCALE
1,000KmDirection of
world rotation
→

-  Sea
-  Savannah
-  Mountain
-  Desert
-  Starport
-  Dry Sea Bed
-  Mining
-  Place of Interest



ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

Allow the Travellers to hunt the following animals on a successful encounter roll, as described on page 177-178. The Referee should select an animal that suits the terrain the Travellers are exploring.

HIJACKER

The Travellers initially detect the presence of the animal by sound or smell but this prey is exceptionally elusive. They must make two opposed Recon checks against the animal's Stealth to find it. If successfully detected it will attempt to flee but will fight if cornered. The hijacker has a deadly thrasher on its back that strikes with lightning speed. Fortunately, this does not contain venom.



Animal	Hits	Speed
Hijacker	17	10m
Skills	Melee (claws) 2, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	Thrasher (3D)	
Traits	Armour (+1), Heightened Senses	
Behaviour	Hijacker	

EATERS

These animals travel in groups of 1D+6, and are extremely dangerous, but like many species on 567-908, they have poor hearing and senses of smell, and therefore only discover the Travellers if directly confronted. While they are slow and somewhat ponderous, they can sprint once every five rounds, increasing their speed to eight metres for that round. These creatures are social and work together to hunt prey. The Travellers must be careful, lest the hunters become the hunted.



Animal	Hits	Speed
Eater	26	4m
Skills	Melee (claws) 1, Recon 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	Claws (2D)	
Traits	Armour (+3), Large (+1)	
Behaviour	Eater	

INTIMIDATORS

These animals travel in groups of 2D3 and tend to be more bark than bite when they encounter larger prey. They are quite large, averaging about 400 kilograms each, and noisy, but have little desire to engage in combat with the Travellers. They loudly attempt to frighten them off, however.



Animal	Hits	Speed
Intimidator	32	6m
Skills	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	Teeth (2D) or Claws (1D)	
Traits	Armour (+1), Large (+2)	
Behaviour	Intimidator	

HUNTER

This hunter spends the majority of its time in the trees from which it drops down upon its prey, which are usually smaller animals since it hunts alone.



Animal	Hits	Speed
Hunter	15	9m
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	Teeth (2D)	
Traits	Heightened Senses	
Behaviour	Hunter	

INTERMITTENTS

Found in groups of 4Dx3, these creatures are herd animals that extract nutrients from earth and plant life with an array of suckers on their undersides. The hump on their backs serves as a head of sorts, which has four protruding stalks that detect nerve pulses at a range of up to 50 metres. The hump appears to have a pair of large eyes as well but these are actually decorative colouring, possibly intended to ward off predators.



FLYING POUNCERS

Solitary hunters that eat small rodent- and insect-like creatures, these fly with wings that are three quarters of their total weight. The very thin atmosphere of 567-908 does not lend itself to easy flight, yet somehow evolution made it possible. They crawl up hills and mountainsides to perches, spot their prey at distances of up to 500 metres with their impressive eyesight and then drop, flapping their wings violently to remain aloft, gliding in for the kill at the last moment.



Animal	Hits	Speed
Intermittents	21	4m
Skills	Recon 2	
Attacks	Teeth (2D)	
Traits	Armour (+1), Heightened Senses	
Behaviour	Hunter	

Animal	Hits	Speed
Flying Pouncer	4	4m
Skills	Recon 2	
Attacks	Beak (1D)	
Traits	Flyer (10m), Heightened Senses, Small (-2)	
Behaviour	Pouncer	

SCRIPTED ENCOUNTERS

In addition to the encounter tables, there are three types of scripted encounters: archaeological discoveries, challenges and Shrieker encounters. The Referee may insert these events into the story at suitable moments. Hunting and discovering the planet's native species should provide some entertainment but if the cycle of rolling for an encounter, playing out the encounter and then repeating becomes monotonous or repetitive, insert a scripted encounter to get things moving and to keep the players engaged. The Shrieker encounters are required to advance the adventure to its next chapter.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

Depending on where the Travellers and their patron explore, they have the opportunity to make archaeological discoveries about 567-908 that offer clues about its past. These discoveries can be used to move the narrative along and give the players a sense there is more to this world than initially meets the eye. Keep in mind that each of these discoveries can be made while concurrently hunting for prey, as described in Animal Encounters on page 171.

Ancient road: This event may occur in multiple locations, including 100 or more kilometres from the starport, north or south of the Great Sea, or anywhere on the western plains and mountain ranges where the Shriekers currently reside. This event should not happen in the dry seabed.

By making a Difficult (10+) Investigate or Recon check (INT, 2D minutes), one of the Travellers notices the path they are on does not appear to have occurred naturally. By following it, they discover it is an ancient road built centuries, if not millennia, ago. If they follow it for a significant amount of time, they discover the road is broken up by 180-metre-wide plazas every 17 kilometres. Some include the vague remnants of a central fountain or well and the foundations of long-lost circular structures may be found on the periphery.

Many such roads may be found, each 2Dx20 kilometres long. Each road ends in ruin at some point and may not be followed beyond the randomly determined length. If the Travellers find more than one such road, they might begin to see a pattern. If multiple roads are found near the dry seabed, they may lead toward the capital ruins, docks and ship ruins, or the collapsed Sun Worshipper

mines. If roads are found on the west coast of the Great Sea, they may lead towards the Great Retreat. Establishing a pattern to the roads requires a Difficult (10+) Navigation check (EDU, 2D hours) after two or more roads have been found.

If the Travellers successfully find roads that lead towards the Great Retreat, they are unable to establish a complete route to the city before encountering a Shrieker. In this case, proceed to Shrieker Encounters overleaf and, in particular, The Seeker.

City ruins: See the 567-908 Referee's Map on page 170. If the Travellers explore within three hexes of the docks and ship ruins, capital ruins or the Great Retreat, they find the remnants of an ancient city. On a successful Difficult (10+) Investigate check (EDU, 1D hours) or Average Science (archaeology) check (EDU, D3 hours), they can determine the city was built by an intelligent species by the various artefacts that are found. Spent sparkplant wands, armour, animal-driven carts, tools and weapons may be unearthed if the Travellers make the effort. There is approximately one such ruin to be found in each hex within three hexes of the described locations.

Dry seabed: See the 567-908 Referee's Map on page 170. If the Travellers explore the region labelled Dry Seabed, they may find evidence the entire region was once the site of a large sea by making a successful Difficult (10+) Investigate check (EDU, 1D hours) or Average (8+) Science (planetology) check (EDU, D3 hours). On a successful check, they begin to find eroded artefacts that must have fallen into the sea eons ago. The path leads to the eastern portion of the dry seabed, where the docks, ship ruins and collapsed Sun Worshipper mines may be found.

Docks and ship ruins: See the 567-908 Referee's Map on page 170. If the Travellers make their way to the east of the dry seabed, they may discover the ruins of docks and ships where once there was a thriving seaport city. The city itself was swept away by floods and seismic events, so it is very difficult to find remnants, but in the concave region of the dry seabed itself, eroded remnants of the docks and ships that once sailed it may be found. The structures are difficult to identify due to the amount of time that has passed but on a successful Difficult (10+) Seafarer check (EDU, D3 hours), artefacts can be identified that indicate a successful seafaring culture.

Collapsed Sun Worshipper mines: See the 567-908 Referee's Map on page 170. Shrieker civilisation has undergone significant upheavals and change over the millennia. See The Shriekers on page 179 for a brief description of Shrieker history. One of the long-lost aspects of Shrieker civilisation is the Sun Worshipper regime, which held sway for thousands of years. Whilst the Sun Worshippers are long gone, the remnants of their civilisation may be found upon close inspection. One of the larger vestiges of that civilisation are the collapsed mines approximately 300 kilometres to the east of the dry seabed, nestled in the foothills and lower mountain ranges. The mines collapsed during severe earthquakes but were once the site of a major resource-extraction facility. Close investigation of the mines and the surrounding region might uncover mounds of copper, tin, gold and silver. Finding the mines might require that one or more of the Travellers discovers an ancient road leading from the ruined docks into the hills and mountains where the mines are located.

CHALLENGES

This world has been the site of catastrophic natural phenomena, the most recent of which was the separation of tectonic plates at the centre of the Great Sea. In the more distant past, severe drought and famine brought about the destruction of the Sun Worshipper civilisation. The climatic changes to 567-908 caused by the loss of the eastern sea include heavy rainstorms on the periphery of the Great Sea and flash floods that strike the dry seabed and other low-lying areas seemingly out of the blue.

Whilst strong, the storms are a relatively minor inconvenience. They are generally brief, lasting one or two hours at most, with heavy rainfall and winds of up to 100 kilometres per hour. It is recommended that the Travellers do not fly the air/raft during one of these storms. If they choose to do so, increase all Task Checks by one Difficulty Level.

The more dangerous threat is the chance of getting caught in a flash flood. Within 1–2 hours of a series of rainstorms, regions of the dry seabed and other valleys, marshes and other low areas can be subjected to one of these floods. If one or more of the Travellers are caught on the ground during such an event, allow them each to make a Difficult (10+) Athletics check to get to safety quickly. Those who fail their checks must be rescued by their associates, either by swimming to them (not recommended due to the dangers of rushing water) or by using the air/raft or launch to extract them. Regions affected by a flash flood dry out within 2D days.

THE TASK AT HAND

It might be easy for the Travellers to get sidetracked by everything going on. If they are closely investigating their surroundings, they begin to discover that 567-908 may once have been the site of an alien civilisation. If they start wandering away from hunting and get more interested in the archaeological discoveries and challenges, use Thingvellir to get them back on track.

Thingvellir is sympathetic to their interests and concerns but reminds them that they are on 567-908 on a hunting expedition and they are on a tight schedule as well. Without browbeating them, he implores the team to stick to the task at hand. *'That crested trapper isn't going to hunt itself, my friends!'*

SHRIEKER ENCOUNTERS

While their primary focus is trying to find a rare and unusual animal on an alien world, the Travellers discover they might not be the only sophonts on the planet. After some time, they begin to discover remnants of a past civilisation, one that appears to have been lost, possibly resulting in the extinction of an intelligent species. However, the events in this section reveal that the people who once inhabited the ancient ruins are very much alive.

Like the events listed in Archaeological Discoveries, those in this section should be interspersed with the hunting expedition.

Shrieking at night: On the first night of the expedition, the Travellers hear high-pitched shrieking at an indeterminate distance from the camp. It lasts for only 10 seconds or so and the direction from which the sound is coming is impossible to determine.

The shrieking continues: On a subsequent night, the Travellers once again hear the shrieking sound they heard on their first night at camp. This time, after the shrieking stops, more shrieking sounds of a slightly different tone and from a different direction are heard mere seconds later, as if in answer to the first. This 'conversation' between two sources, which seem to be some distance apart, lasts for a good 30 seconds. With a successful Difficult (10+) Recon check (DEX), the Travellers can pinpoint the direction from which one of the shrieking sounds was coming. If they want to brave the night, they can make their way towards it. If searching on foot, allow

them to make a Difficult (10+) Survival check (INT, 2Dx10 minutes) to find the approximate location of one of the Shriekers. Unfortunately, when they get there, there is nothing to be found but some tracks and food remnants. The source of the shrieking is long gone.

The seeker: Several days into the expedition, the Travellers notice what appears to be a six-legged creature in the distance. Curiously, the creature is wearing a harness of some sort and is carrying equipment. This is a seeker, a member of a Shrieker caste that explores the wastelands of 567-908 and makes contact with nomads and distant settlements. The seeker is an astronomer who noticed the flight and atmospheric re-entry of the *Leaping Snowcat* or its launch on its way down to the surface of the planet. It piqued his curiosity and he has come to determine the source of the ‘unusual astronomical phenomenon’.

The seeker avoids encounters with the Travellers, observing them from afar. They might note that he does not seem to be hunting them, merely keeping them under his watchful eye.

If the seeker is able to track and follow the Travellers for several days, consider what he sees. Do the Travellers successfully hunt several species? Do they display items of high technology? Observation also gives the seeker the opportunity to see how they communicate. Shriekers communicate with a combination of high-pitch sound, gestures and nerve pulses. Given enough time, the seeker will see that humans primarily use sound. Shriekers can detect sound at the frequency humans and other Charted Space sophonts speak but do not have very good range. The seeker will have to get fairly close to be able to hear them with any degree of acuity. The seeker might also notice that gestures and touch play a much smaller role in communication than they do among Shriekers.

Should the Travellers find a way to approach the seeker, he does not respond defensively to their approach. There is some trepidation in his stance but he does not attempt to draw either of his two weapons, the sparkplant wand or the crossbow, unless the Travellers attack him first. Shriekers are omnivorous and the seeker knows a bit about hunting. If he has witnessed the Travellers successfully bringing down game, he expresses his admiration once communication is established between the two parties. For that, proceed to Learning to Communicate on page 180.

It is possible that the Travellers fail to make contact with the seeker. If they do not attempt to communicate with him, he eventually departs on a long journey back to

the Great Retreat, the city he calls home. In this case, after a few close encounters with the seeker, inform the Travellers that he has seemingly disappeared. They can attempt to track him but find that he moves quite quickly. If the Travellers are on foot, they must successfully complete a task chain to find him: An Average (8+) Athletics (endurance) check, whose Effect may be applied to a subsequent Difficult (10+) Recon check. If the Travellers search for the seeker in their air/raft or launch, they have a higher chance of finding him. Reduce both Task Difficulty levels by one if they do.

If they fail to make contact, assume the seeker has made his way back home and proceed to the next encounter a few days later with the Shrieker expedition.

The Shrieker expedition: Whether or not the Travellers make contact with the seeker, they might come into contact with a Shrieker expedition that includes one priest, one seeker, 1D fighters and 2D serfs. The group is out on an expedition to gather herbs and spices. It might appear to be an awfully large group for such a menial task but the area was recently raided by nomadic barbarians and the herbs and spices in question are important for certain religious ceremonies.

The Shriekers will, of course, be flabbergasted at the sight of the Travellers. They have never seen anything quite like them. There are legends of strange beings in floating ‘chariots’ that have come from the sky and set down upon their world but no one in the party has ever seen one in person. The fighters in the group will take up defensive positions around the priest and seeker, and at least half of the serfs will cower in fear at the sight of the fearsome offworlders. The fighters will not attack unless the Travellers incite violence against them. While the Shriekers are primitive, the Travellers might discover the hard way that their sparkplant wands are extremely dangerous.

Should the Travellers approach them carefully, the Shriekers will do the same and the two parties may attempt to communicate with each other as described in Learning to Communicate on page 180. After the two sides have established communication with each other, the Shriekers will offer to take them to the Great Retreat, their home city. They will insist on travelling on foot since they are unaccustomed to spacecraft and other high-tech vehicles. This might give the Travellers additional opportunities to hunt and might even result in the subject of the crested trapper being brought up.

The Shrieker priest knows of the crested trapper and informs them that his high priest knows where to find them. If they come back to the city, the high priest might be able to help them find their prey.

HUNTING

Hunters detect, pursue and then record, capture or kill wildlife. Hunting may be undertaken for survival or sport. When hunting for survival, the end goal may be to harvest food or to obtain useful animal products such as oils, bones, hides and other materials. Survival hunting also includes eliminating vermin or predators that pose a threat to one's life or livelihood. Hunting for sport includes trophy taking and group activities such as mounted hunts.

While most hunting occurs on one's native planet where the environment and ecosphere is well known, interstellar hunters travel to strange new worlds to pursue their quarries. This adds a level of difficulty since each world poses different challenges in unfamiliar alien environments. Indeed, many hunters seek game they know very little about. In this adventure, the Travellers are seeking a quarry that is known to exist but about which there is little concrete information and next to no hard scientific data.

DETECTION

The first phase of the hunt is detection. The ability to detect an animal depends upon a number of factors, all of which contribute to a hunter's ability to proceed to the next phase of a hunt, pursuit. These factors may be summarised as follows:

- **Territory:** Most animals operate within a defined territory, in which they do the things they must do to survive, such as obtaining food, shelter and seeking mates. Some animals live within limited confines their entire lives while others are migratory, changing their territory over time due to weather patterns, scarcity of food, mating and other purposes. Knowing the territory or types of territory in which a desired animal may be found enables a hunter to narrow down its location. While territories vary in size from world-to-world and animal-to-animal, most animals' territory is approximately one square kilometre for each kilogram of body weight. Therefore, a 100 kilogram animal has a territory of approximately 100 square kilometres or a roughly 10 by 10-kilometre patch of territory.
- **Lair:** Within the confines of their territory, many animals have a distinct home where they go to sleep, recover when fatigued or wounded, rear their young or store food. Predatory animals may situate their lairs near food sources. Trappers set their traps within or adjacent to their lairs. The 'lair' of a grazing animal can be found on a grassy field, hill or valley. After food stocks run low, become less desirable or predators threaten them, such animals migrate to a new location where similar stocks may be found. Hunters who know their quarry's lair can find it within the animal's territory. Note that some animals change their lair from time-to-time, so discovered lairs have sometimes been abandoned.
- **Activities:** Knowing what an animal does enables a hunter to detect it. Grazing animals typically have preferred territories. Predatory animals have preferred prey. On planets that rotate, and therefore have a day-night cycle, some animals are diurnal while others are nocturnal. Animals that make noises for hunting, mating or other purposes inadvertently give away their locations. The more a hunter knows about their prey, the easier it is to find.

A typical hunt begins in the desired animal's territory and proceeds with a search for its lair, aided by knowledge of its activities. If none of the above are known, additional investigation is required before the hunt can occur.

Detection requires a successful Average (8+) Recon check (INT, 2D minutes). If the animal has Stealth, detection requires a successful opposed Recon check against the animal's Stealth.

PURSUIT

The actions taken by a hunter or hunting party in the Detection phase enable them to proceed to the Pursuit phase. Simply put, Detection puts the hunter in the vicinity of the animal and a successful Pursuit puts the hunter in direct contact with the animal. Coming into Pursuit range means the animal may detect the hunter.

HUNTING (CONTINUED)

After beginning a Pursuit, the hunting party must make an opposed Stealth check versus the animal's Recon. Profession (hunting) skill may be added as a positive DM (refer to *Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society Volume 8* for more information). If the animal detects the Travellers' presence, the Referee must roll on the Animal Reactions table on page 90 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*. See the following table for the results of the check:

Pursuit Table

Effect	Result
-4 to -6	The animal flees or attacks per the Animal Reactions table. If the animal flees, a subsequent opposed Stealth versus Recon check may be made at DM-4 to stay in pursuit of the animal. If the animal attacks, it gains DM+2 to its attack roll.
-1 to -3	The animal flees or attacks per the Animal Reactions table. If the animal flees, a subsequent opposed Stealth versus Recon check may be made at DM-2 to stay in pursuit of the animal. If the animal attacks, it gains DM+1 to its attack roll.
0	The animal detects the presence of the hunter or hunting party but does not initially react. After a moment of suspense in which the animal neither flees nor attacks, the Travellers must make a subsequent opposed Stealth versus Recon check to continue Pursuit. Success enables approach to within 3Dx10 metres, optionally proceeding to the Kill, Capture or Record phase. Failure causes the animal to immediately flee or attack per the Animal Reactions table.
1 to 3	The Travellers are not detected by the animal and may approach to within 2Dx10 metres, optionally proceeding to the Kill, Capture or Record phase.
4 to 6	The Travellers are not detected by the animal and may approach to within 1Dx10 metres, optionally proceeding to the Kill, Capture or Record phase.

Additional factors might affect how the Pursuit phase continues. For example, whilst the Travellers might close within the required distance to proceed to the next phase, environmental factors such as obstructing trees, rocks, hills or a river might come into play. Pursuit is the most challenging phase of the hunt and events can be prolonged. Failure followed by flight of the animal in a Pursuit Table resolution results in loss of one's quarry and a return to the Detection phase.

If the objective is to trap or record the animal, this may be done during the Pursuit phase after a successful opposed check. The hunter may set up traps or recording devices as desired. This may be done at discovered lairs or other areas where the animal has been determined to be active. For more on traps, recording devices and other equipment, see the *Central Supply Catalogue* and the Central Supply Catalogue section of this adventure starting on page 193.

KILL, CAPTURE OR RECORD

The endgame of the hunt is to kill, capture or record the quarry. If the objective is to kill the animal, the hunter may do so once in range. If using a ranged weapon, such as a hunting rifle, this can occur after achieving success in the Pursuit phase if there are no obstructions to prevent the hunter from targeting the animal. Otherwise, the Referee may determine that additional stalking is required to target the animal.

Hunters often use multiple Aiming Minor Actions, as described on page 75 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*, to maximise the accuracy and damage of their shot.

THE SHRIEKERS

Shriekers are a native sophont species of 567-908. They are omnivorous and homeothermic with a bilaterally symmetrical body that features a head and eight limbs. The six rear limbs are used for locomotion, whilst the front pair are smaller and serve as manipulators. Shriekers have a ventral keel bone and spinal cord. Their bodies average two metres long, stand one metre high and a typical adult weighs approximately 200 kilograms.

Shriekers have eyes, ears, olfactory orifices and a mouth on their heads. Their three pairs of eyes serve three different purposes. The bottom pair provides superior close-range vision at a distance of one metre but loses focus quickly beyond that range. The middle pair have especially acute distance vision, giving them the ability to see about twice as far as humans. For example, human visual acuity at 500 metres is similar to that of a Shrieker at 1,000 metres. The highest pair enables them to see in the infrared spectrum, with somewhat fuzzy resolution. However, they can concentrate for up to 2D minutes to achieve maximum resolution (roughly the same as their close and far vision) but are then affected by Fatigue, as described on page 80 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*.

The atmosphere in which they evolved limited their hearing ability but Shriekers with Language (shrieking) skill learn to propel their voices at high frequencies over long ranges, making them audible to others of their species. Fortunately, speech is not their only method of communication. Shriekers have nerve pads in the palms of their hands that they use to communicate intimate concepts to one another, such as emotion, opinion, judgment and principle. Speech and bodily gestures work in concert with this ability to frame nerve pulse expressions with more certainty and clarity.

Shriekers evolved to live in the low altitudes of their world and they cannot survive above 4,000 metres. Compared to humans they are slow and ponderous, unable to move at a high rate of speed without assistance. To remedy this, they have invented prosthetic legs that attach to their natural legs. Skilled users can move quickly and cover much greater distances over less time than their species otherwise might. Use of these legs is not irreversible but removing them renders the user permanently debilitated.

Shriekers have two sexes, roughly equivalent to male and female. Mating Shriekers usually pair bond for life. Together they produce a sac of 10–20 eggs, which may be fertilised by the male over time or all at once, depending on the circumstances. In civilised society, up to three eggs are fertilised per year until the sac is expended. Under these conditions, about 40 percent of the eggs are hatched and reach adulthood while the others are unviable or die in infancy. Due to the uncertainty of their lives, nomadic Shriekers fertilise all their eggs at once, experiencing a much higher mortality rate.

When ancient Shriekers settled into an agrarian society, they experienced a reduced birth rate. As it turns out, their previously nomadic migrations activated hormones that ensured higher infant survival. To remedy this, the Shriekers of the Great Retreat engage in a mating pilgrimage, a journey from the city to a place called the Valley of Memories, deep in the mountains. Undergoing this journey before mating counters the sedate lifestyle of urban living and produces more viable eggs and a higher infant survival rate. Children born from egg sacs that did not receive the benefit of a pilgrimage are looked down upon in Shrieker society and are automatically relegated to the serf caste.

If the male in a mating pair dies, the eggs produced by him and his mate cannot be fertilised by another male, so they essentially die with him. Traditionally, unfertilised eggs are taken to the Valley of Memories, where it is believed the souls of the unborn migrate to other eggs that are conceived by other mating pairs, giving them another chance at life.

Shriekers are considered children until they are approximately eight years old, at which point they have been assigned to a caste and begin their adult lives, becoming a serf, seeker, fighter or priest. At about 40 years of age, Shriekers experience an ageing crisis during which most die, with fewer than 10 percent surviving. Those who survive undergo a second ageing crisis about five years later, which inevitably kills them. Shriekers who survive the first aging crisis form the fifth caste, elders.

FIRST CONTACT

The meeting between the Travellers and Shriekers is the first contact between the natives of 567-908 and offworlders. When orchestrated by an exploration agency such as the IISS, a precise protocol is followed during first contact. The Scout Service is careful about contacting developing species lest they adversely affect their natural progress.

In this scenario, a chance meeting has thrown protocol to the wind. The two sides must each figure out what to make of the other and decide what to do next. While capable of violence, the Shriekers are a mostly peaceful species and would prefer to establish communication with the offworlders. Unfortunately, the Shriekers' natural communication methods are quite different than the Travellers'. They have speech but it occurs at a much higher pitch, some of which cannot be heard by humans; however, Vargr – if there are any – would be able to detect these sounds. They also have specialised nerve pads that are unlike anything the Travellers have. Should the Travellers attempt to communicate, there are several ways this could develop.



LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE

Communicating with an alien species can be extremely difficult. More often than not, the species has evolved quite differently due to their natural environment, abundance of life, available resources and species diversity. Whilst sight and sound might be the primary senses used for communication for one species, another might use similar senses with different nuances or entirely different senses. For the Shriekers, it is a little of both.

The Shriekers have the same senses as Humaniti but with different levels of sensitivity and acuity. Shriekers use their eyes for perception of physical gestures and movements but their octopodal physiology does not display their mouths, from which they emit sound. Shriekers also have poor close eyesight beyond a range of a metre or so. Because of this, they generally do not rely on a combination of vocal and physical gestures as humans and most other Major Species do. When Shriekers shriek, they do so as a way to communicate over long distances and to impart messages to large groups. It requires special skills and talents to use their voices in this manner. While two-way shrieking is a form of communication, it is for very specific purposes, not general use.

Shriekers also have an acute sense of touch, particularly in the palms of their hands, which emit nerve pulses used to communicate with each other. A Shrieker that attempts to use this on another species will discover their message is lost when attempting to transmit to someone who cannot receive it.

If the Travellers strive to communicate with the Shriekers, it will be a gradual process. Given the time constraints of their expedition, they are limited in how much they can learn. However, they might discover that communicating with the natives will be integral to finding their quarry and completing their hunt. Use the following guidelines should the Travellers attempt to communicate with the Shriekers.

Drawings and diagrams: To get started, the Travellers and Shriekers might have to resort to drawing things in the sand or on paper. The Shriekers do not heavily depend on written language for the expression and storage of information but will recognise symbols and illustrations with effort and patience by the Travellers. Getting the basics of communication in this manner will take 2D hours. They can stick with this method of communication if desired but the Referee should inform them that communication is slow and frustrating at this level. If they want to communicate complex messages, they are going to have to make additional effort.

If the Travellers use only drawings and diagrams to communicate, 2Dx10 minutes are required to communicate any complex ideas or thoughts.

Use sensors: The Travellers might have access to sensor equipment that can detect Shrieking, which occurs mostly at frequencies undetectable by the human ear (Vargr will pick up more of it, however). A Traveller with Electronics (sensors) skill might be able to detect and record Shrieking and begin to identify its linguistic components. A Traveller with Language (any), Electronics (computers), or a combination of the two, can analyse the recordings and identify patterns. The Referee may optionally consider these to be completely separate tasks or combine them into a Task Chain.

If the Travellers use technology to record, analyse and learn aspects of Shrieking, 1Dx10 minutes are required to communicate complex ideas or thoughts. Shrieking is generally used to communicate broad concepts and to further define other aspects of Shrieker communication; hence the inability to easily communicate with them using only this aspect of their language.

Nerve pulses: While the Travellers cannot naturally detect nerve pulses if the Shriekers attempt to communicate with them in this manner, if they are observant enough they will notice the Shriekers are a very touch-oriented species. They frequently touch palms with one another, resulting in gestures and behaviours that appear to be reactions. A curious Traveller might use technology to examine a Shrieker's nerve pulse detectors and create a device that reads the pulses. This might require Science (xenobiology), Science (linguistics), Electronics (sensors), Electronics (computers) and even Mechanic skills (to build a device that reads the nerve pulses) or some portion thereof.

Creating a device or using computers to analyse and translate nerve pulses will require some effort but, if the Travellers are creative enough to do so, and successfully make the checks the Referee believes are suitable, they will be able to communicate clearly and succinctly with the Shriekers.

If the Travellers successfully use technology to learn the meaning of nerve pulses, 2D minutes are required to communicate complex ideas or thoughts.

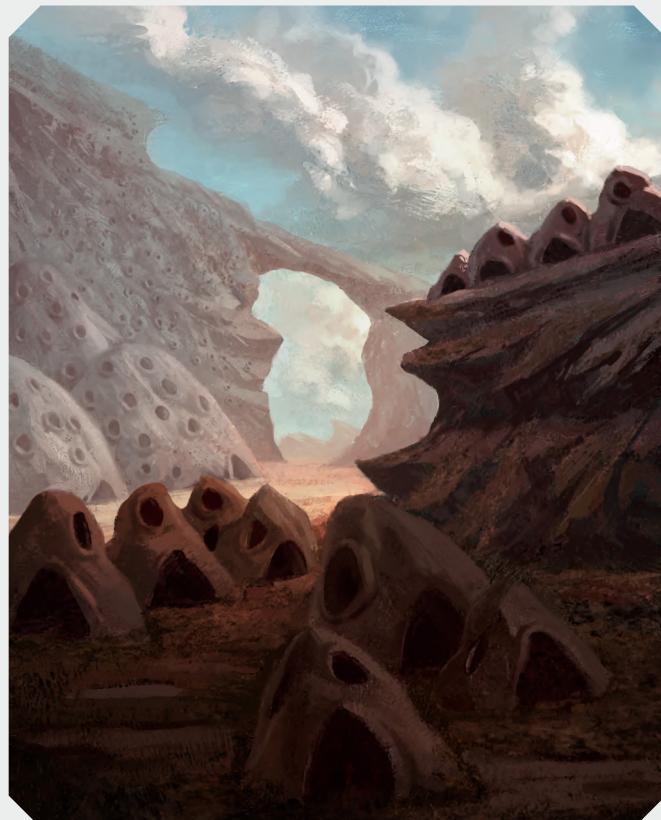
THE GREAT RETREAT

The largest Shrieker population on 567-908 is located at the Great Retreat. There are approximately 75,000 Shriekers living at the Retreat and in the surrounding

areas. The low stone huts and agricultural plantations of the Shriekers appear to be part of the surrounding landscape and are therefore difficult to discern from natural rock formations and wild growth. This explains why the Scout Service did not identify their presence based on early survey data taken of the planet. If the Travellers spent any time surveying the world prior to landing at the starport, they encounter the same thing. Once among the Shriekers, they wonder how they managed to overlook the presence of their civilisation, although from space the settlement looks little different than the planet's natural landscape.

The priesthood has made the public aware that alien visitors have come to visit the Great Retreat. Just what this means to them varies from person-to-person. The Shriekers have never met other species before. Some will be frightened. The Shriekers are already under duress and the portent of outsiders is mysterious to them. Others are curious and eager to see and possibly even meet them. None will be hostile unless the Travellers are seen to have collected Denuli crystals from elsewhere on 567-908.

Members of all five castes will be seen but the Travellers will primarily interact with priests, fighters and seekers. Serfs are too busy with their day-to-day labours and elders are few in number, making encounters with them far less common. The Travellers are given a tour of the city by a member of the priesthood.



THE GREAT RETREAT

Cliffside Temples

Fighter Dome

Residential Domes

Seeker Dome

Farms

Farms

Residential Domes

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE SHRIEKERS

As they make their way around the city, the Travellers have the opportunity to meet the Shriekers. If they have developed a technological means of communicating with them, they can have in-depth conversations with those willing to talk to them. Depending on how much effort they made to establish communication methods with the Shriekers, as described in Learning to Communicate on page 180, the Travellers will be able to get a broader understanding of Shrieker society and history.

The Travellers are allowed to wander the Great Retreat freely. They become a curiosity to the Shriekers, who exhibit a great deal of curiosity about them. The Travellers may visit Shrieker homes, watch the fighter class train for defence of their city, observe the seekers while they practice medieval-level science and even trade at the market bazaar if they desire. To an extent, the Travellers become celebrities in the city.

The key interaction for the Travellers will be the discovery that the Shriekers know where to find the crested trapper. The possessor of that knowledge is the high priest, who would be more than happy to divulge what he knows about the creature provided the Travellers help them with a few problems.

HISTORY OF THE SHRIEKERS

The Shriekers evolved over hundreds of thousands of years, acquiring intelligence in order to deal with the challenges of life on their world. By -200,000, they had developed the basis for what would one day become their caste system. By approximately -150,000, they had developed agrarian societies in multiple locations, with most Shriekers shedding their nomadic tendencies.

The apex of Shrieker civilisation was heralded by the arrival of the Sun Worshipper Empire, which appeared about -108,000 and lasted for millennia. The exact date of the empire's decline is uncertain but is believed to have been caused by extreme drought and resultant famine. Shrieker civilisation virtually disappeared and the species returned to its nomadic ways.

In -15,000, nomadic bands begin to establish a stable civilisation on the west coast of the Great Sea, developing trade routes and a central religious authority sometime around -10,000. The priesthood was eventually challenged by a warrior class, which created a rival civil authority. A few centuries later, the priesthood retreated from its position of authority and a secular civil service bureaucracy filled the vacuum.

The Shriekers were once again laid low by a natural disaster in approximately -6,000 when tectonic plates in the Great Sea tore apart, creating an enormous, deep fissure. This disturbance created enormous earthquakes and wrought mass destruction on 567-908, all but destroying Shrieker civilisation. Today, all that remains of their society is the Great Retreat, a city of approximately 75,000 people centred on the priesthood retreat in the mountains west of the Great Sea. The remainder of the planet's Shrieker population have returned to nomadic barbarism.

Shrieker Historical Timeline

Year	Event
-200,000	Shriekers create division of labour that makes way for the caste system.
-150,000	Advanced farming techniques developed and agrarian society created.
-108,000	The Sun Worshipper Empire is founded, based on food collection and development of an intellectual noble class.
~ -100,000 to -50,000	Sun Worshipper Empire collapses due to widespread famine and drought.
-15,000	Nomadic bands begin to form a hunting and gathering society on the west coast of the Great Sea.
-10,000	Trade is established and a central religious authority is founded.
-9,200	Fighter caste forms a separate civil authority.
-8,900	Civil service bureaucracy established and the religious authority recedes into a mountain retreat.
-6,000	Massive earthquakes with their epicentre in the Great Sea have a catastrophic effect on Shrieker civilisation.
1105	The last bastion of Shrieker civilisation is the Great Retreat, a city centred on the mountain temples of the priesthood.

VALLEY OF MEMORIES

Thousands of years ago, the ruling authority created a 2,000-kilometre path to reach the Valley of Memories, winding its way through the mountains to stay below 4,000 metres altitude, above which the Shriekers cannot breathe. This path became known as the Road to Memories.

Shrieker civilisation is based on the pilgrimage to this valley. The trek is extremely difficult. About three percent of pilgrims do not even survive the journey but most make the round trip in about eight weeks. Most Shriekers see the difficulty as a small price to pay to create a viable egg sac, one whose eggs may produce individuals of multiple castes, which is critical for the maintenance of civilisation.

In addition to enabling the Shriekers to make the trek at a desirable altitude, it allows them to circumvent three obstacles:

- A road that skirts the sheer rock face
- A rocky mountainside, through which a tunnel was built
- A major chasm, across which a suspension bridge was built

Subsequent earthquakes have damaged or ruined all three structures and the Shriekers need assistance getting them cleared or rebuilt. Otherwise, they face a precipitous drop in fertility, which could cause the demise of the last bastion of Shrieker civilisation on the planet, and possibly even lead to the extinction of the species. The Shriekers need the Travellers' help.

As they learn about the problems facing the Great Retreat, the Travellers might discover alternative solutions. Many have suggested that a new, more-efficient path could be built. However, there are two factors that have prevent this from happening:

- **Belief:** Conservative forces in the priesthood believe the Road to Memories and Valley of Memories are sacred and must not be replaced or altered.
- **Science:** Seekers have suggested the difficulty of the pilgrimage is critical. The viability of Shrieker eggs is enhanced by the struggle that mating pairs endure enroute to the valley, enhancing hormone development.

A REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

The Shriekers have some problems to overcome that have existential implications. They request the Travellers' assistance, and in return promise to lead them to the elusive creatures that Thingvellir came for.

If the Shriekers have seen the safari ship, the launch, the air/raft or the ATV, they assume the Travellers will use this amazing technology to assist them. If they have not seen them, they simply expect these offworlders have access to equipment that can help them. It is ultimately up to the Travellers to use their equipment however they see fit to help the Shriekers.

If the Travellers agree to help, they are accompanied by two Shriekers, a priest and a seeker, as they embark upon a pilgrimage to the Valley of Memories. If the Travellers ask for the seeker they met in the wilds of 567-908 (or did *not* meet, as the case may be), he is ready and available to join them. If they do this, they might find out that Shriekers are not gloryhounds. They do not seek fame or notoriety. There is no pride in being 'the one' to get the job done or to be 'the hero'. The Shriekers are community-oriented and individual glory is not a factor in decision making. The seeker they encountered, or anyone else they select, will be pleased to aid the Travellers, but it is for the salvation of the community, not a desire to increase one's status or any other selfish goal. Shrieker status is a reflection of what one has done to support the community, not themselves. Shriekers do not bask in the limelight of high status, but status does enable them to get more things done for the community. Individuals will follow and assist a Shrieker with high status.

The priest and seeker are happy to travel in the Travellers' vehicles as necessary. During travel, Thingvellir cannot help himself and asks the priest more about the crested trapper. He seems to be trying to obtain additional clues about where the creature might be found, but the priest is unfazed. He patiently informs Thingvellir the location of the animal will be revealed in a matter of time.

Before they depart, the high priest informs the Travellers that 1,000 Shrieker couples will be following their route on foot. They intend to get to the Valley of Memories via the traditional route as the Travellers do what they can to clear the path. Should any tasks require manual labour, these Shriekers will be ready and willing to serve as necessary. The couples travel about 250 kilometres per day and depart the same day as the Travellers.

The first 750 kilometres or so of the road are through rough canyon territory. The road is well-paved and travel should be relatively easy. The first sign of difficulty is seen as they approach the mountain with the collapsed tunnel. Numerous rockslides and other impediments show the earthquakes did a great deal of damage here.



COLLAPSED TUNNEL

When the Travellers reach the tunnel, 100 kilometres distant from the Great Retreat, they find its entrance is obscured by fallen rocks, so much so that the Travellers might not initially recognise the tunnel entrance until the Shriekers point it out to them. With some careful climbing and examination, viewing both sides of the tunnel and the mountain through which it passes, the Travellers can determine the tunnel is about 700 metres long. An Average (8+) Profession (construction) check (EDU, 1D hours) reveals that the framework looks intact. It merely has to be cleared.

There are two choices: they can either clear the tunnel or find an alternative passage. Both will require the use of the launch and possibly the ATV. Clearing the tunnel will take D3 weeks. Finding an alternative route will take 1D days and another 1D days to mark it. The priest would prefer they clear the tunnel, regardless of the time required. It is the traditional route, which makes it sacred. He will accept a detour but only grudgingly.

If they choose to clear the tunnel, the Shrieker couples will be at the site within three days and provide a 2,000-member work force. If the Travellers decide to clear the tunnel with their help, allow them to make an Average (8+) Leadership check (SOC) and reduce the labour time by a number of days equal to the Effect of the check.

RESTORING THE ROCK-FACE ROAD

After solving the tunnel situation, the road is clear for 400 kilometres until it reaches a sheer rock face covered by an avalanche. It is virtually impassable and would require years of manual labour to clear it. Neither the Shriekers – nor Kafla Thingvellir – have that kind of time. Fortunately, the Travellers have two vehicles at their disposal that can clear the avalanche: the launch and the ATV. However, either or both would require a digger blade and neither is equipped with one.

It may be the source of some chagrin that ATVs can indeed be fitted with a digger blade. It is a common accessory but the expedition simply does not have one. Fortunately for them, the Shriekers are skilled metal workers and can manufacture what they need out of available materials. All the Travellers have to do is ask and one (or two in the event they want to equip both vehicles with one) will be provided. After equipping the vehicle(s), the job will take 2D days. The time can be cut in half if the Travellers arrange round-the-clock work crews.

THE BROKEN BRIDGE

After the sheer rock face has been bypassed, the pilgrimage can continue another 600 kilometres before it is halted by an enormous chasm that runs for many kilometres in each direction. There was once a suspension bridge here that the Shriekers crossed but the moorings on the near side gave way during the earthquakes and the bridge fell into the chasm. Circumnavigating the chasm is virtually impossible because the mountains on its extents rise far above the 4,000 metres that the Shriekers can withstand.

Retrieving the fallen bridge and repairing it is simple when using the launch or air/raft and, with parts built by the Shriekers, the bridge can be restored in D3 days.

THE PILGRIMS' PROGRESS

With all of the impediments out of the way, the pilgrimage can continue to the Valley of Memories, a mere 900 kilometres away. The Shriekers are saved and they should be able to thrive for the foreseeable future. While there is always the danger of more earthquakes, the Shriekers have been given a reprieve and their last bastion of civilisation can grow and thrive.

With the assistance of the priest who has attended the expedition with them, the Travellers and their patron are guided to a place along the valley wall, where he assures them they will find their crested trapper. The Shrieker priesthood has given them permission to hunt and take samples of the rare and elusive creature.

THINGVELLIR'S CRESTED TRAPPER

Use the Hunting rules on page 177 for the Travellers to detect, pursue and kill, capture or record (or all of the above) their quarry. Should they succeed, the creature will very soon become known as Thingvellir's crested trapper.

CRESTED TRAPPER

The crested trapper looks like a large spider with wings and weighs about 200 kilograms. The wings are not actually wings at all but translucent light filters that mesmerise prey before it is stung by the trapper's ample stingers mounted on its forward legs.

Hunting the creature can be as challenging as the Referee desires. It should be noted that the trapper has evolved to be a stealthy and elusive animal. Thingvellir and the Travellers might very well have to work at it to find a specimen in the valley. Once they do find one, Thingvellir reminds them they must first record it, obtaining photographs and holovids. They may then proceed to capture and or kill specimens to take back to Mora.

Live specimens may be transported in the multi-environment holding tanks on the *Leaping Snowcat*. These may be configured to simulate the environment of 567-908 to preserve the creature for transport. Engineering (life support) is used to configure the tanks precisely but they have an intuitive user interface and should be configurable by any member of the crew with a modicum of training.

DENULI CRYSTALS GALORE

While hunting for the trapper, the Travellers discover one or more troves of Denuli gems. By now, they know these are not gems at all but the unfertilised eggs of Shriekers, which are considered sacred. They have been deposited in the Valley of Memories so the souls of the unborn can be reconceived by the hundreds of mating couples who have come to the valley to breed. The question is: Do the Travellers respect the Shriekers' wishes and leave the eggs in place or do they give in to temptation and acquire as many as they can?

These 'gems' fetch Cr10000 apiece on the open market and there are hundreds available in the valley.

Animal	Hits	Speed
Crested Trapper	16	10m
Skills	Melee (natural) 2, Recon 2, Stealth 2, Survival 1	
Attacks	Stinger (2D)	
Traits	Armour (+2), Heightened Senses, Large (+1), Poison (Average/2D/1D rounds)	
Behaviour	Trapper	



RETURN TO MERTACTOR

The return flight to Mertactor may be a leisurely voyage or a mad dash through District 268, depending on how much time they have left in their schedule. Thingvellir is due back on Mertactor exactly 18 weeks after their departure. If they are even a single day late, Thingvellir's jump-4 subsidised liner will have departed for Mora without him. Should such a thing occur, the Travellers may procure alternative transportation for their patron aboard a jump-3 patrol corvette that is taking a more direct route to Mora.

Before Thingvellir departs, he pays the Travellers their salaries and wishes them a fond farewell. If everything went according to plan – the expedition acquired recordings and samples of the trapper and Thingvellir makes it back to Mora on time – the Travellers collect their ample bonuses from Nouhdular, who remains on Mertactor to meet them after their patron's departure.

If all pieces fall into place, Thingvellir astonishes his peers at the meeting of Siren on the University of Mora campus, becomes the talk of the town, sells his company and departs on his long journey to Capital where he intends to capitalise (so to speak) on his fame and fortune. As for Naasirka, they become the new majority stockholders of Sterilon and break into the medical equipment market.

The Travellers collect their paychecks and have made friends in high places. If they have developed a taste for the hunt, perhaps they can find out who the other partners are for the *Leaping Snowcat*. Good hunting parties are hard to find and the Travellers now have experience and an admirable reputation they can leverage for similar jobs, leading them to new adventures on the Imperial frontier.



ALLIES, OPPPOSITION AND RESOURCES

KAFLA THINGVELLIR

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		48
STR	8	INT	8	SKILLS
DEX	9	EDU	8	Admin 4, Carouse 1, Electronics (computer) 2, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Leader 1, Profession (executive) 3, Profession (hunting) 1, Science 0, Survival 1
END	7	STA	10	



GASHA NOUHDULAR

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		32
STR	5	INT	9	SKILLS
DEX	7	EDU	9	Admin 2, Advocate 1, Carouse 1, Drive 0, Flyer 0, Melee 0, Profession (business representative) 1, Steward 0, Streetwise 1
END	8	STA	8	



SEEKER

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Shrieker		Male		20
STR	11	INT	10	SKILLS
DEX	7	EDU	3	Drive (walker) 1, Gun
END	10	STA	7	Combat (archaic) 1, Language (Shrieking) 1, Recon 1, Science (astronomy) 2, Science (memory) 2, Survival 1

TRAITS		Heat Sense (infrared), Far Sight (2x), Reduced Senses (hearing, taste)
EQUIPMENT		Legs, Sparkplant Wand, Light Crossbow, Field Armour (+4)

This seeker tracks the Travellers several days after their arrival on 567-908. If the Travellers encounter with additional seekers, this character may be used as a template by substituting a few skills to create some variety.

**PRIEST**

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Shrieker		Female		32
STR	11	INT	8	SKILLS
DEX	6	EDU	5	Art (writing) 2, Language (Shrieking) 1, Leadership 1, Mechanic 1, Profession (clergy) 3, Profession (farming) 1, Persuade 1, Science (history) 2
END	14	STA	9	

TRAITS		Heat Sense (infrared), Far Sight (2x), Reduced Senses (hearing, taste)
EQUIPMENT		Vestments

This priest is met by the Travellers in the Great Retreat. Additional priests may use this character as a template but reduce several of the skill levels and age for lesser priests.



FIGHTER

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Shrieker		Male		24
STR	13	INT	6	SKILLS
DEX	8	EDU	3	Drive (walking) 2, Gun
END	11	STA	7	Combat (archaic) 2, Language (Shrieking) 1, Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 1, Survival 1
TRAITS		Heat Sense (infrared), Far Sight (2x), Reduced Senses (hearing, taste)		
EQUIPMENT		Legs, Sparkplant Wand, Crossbow, Heavy Armour (+6)		

Fighters are the police and soldiers of Shrieker society and are almost invariably male. They are typically equipped with legs, giving them greater mobility.



SERF

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Shrieker		Any		24
STR	11	INT	5	SKILLS
DEX	7	EDU	2	Drive (archaic) 1, Gun
END	10	STA	5	Combat (archaic) 1, Language (Shrieking) 1, Melee (unarmed) 1, Profession (farming or hunting) 2, Recon 1, Survival 1
TRAITS		Heat Sense (infrared), Far Sight (2x), Reduced Senses (hearing, taste)		
EQUIPMENT		Spear, Crossbow		

Serfs are the lower caste of Shrieker society, serving as manual labour, farmers, hunters and gatherers, and teamsters.



ELDER

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Shrieker		Any		42
STR	6	INT	12	SKILLS
DEX	6	EDU	9	Skills vary, depending on their pre-Elder career. However, Elders are looked upon for wisdom and leadership, so add Persuade 2 and Leadership 2 to an appropriate pre-Elder skillset.
END	5	STA	20	
TRAITS		Heat Sense (infrared), Far Sight (2x), Reduced Senses (hearing, taste)		
EQUIPMENT		Staff, Elder Vestments		



The effects of age are severe on Shriekers, and Elders show the scars and stature of a difficult life. However, they also carry themselves with pride and authority, as they are a very select few looked upon for leadership by all other castes. Elder Priests hold the highest station in Shrieker society.

CENTRAL SUPPLY CATALOGUE

CATCH POLE

The catch pole is thrown over a target's neck with the intention of restraining it. An animal restrained in this way does not sustain damage. Allow the animal to make a Melee (natural or unarmed) check opposed by the Melee (unarmed) check of the attacker, as if being grappled. If the animal fails the check, it is restrained. The animal cannot free itself as long as the Traveller maintains a hold on the catch pole.



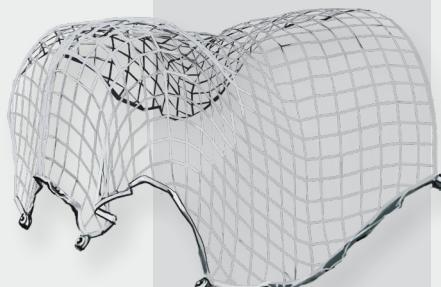
FOLDING CAGE

The folding cages used by the Travellers to contain captured animals are made from lightweight and durable crystaliron composites. They are fairly easy to transport but must be wrapped in a tarp or other material to prevent clanking or rattling.



NET

The net, which includes weights fastened to its extremities, is thrown over a target with the intention of entangling it. An animal tangled in a net does not sustain damage. Allow the animal to make a Melee (natural or unarmed) check opposed by the Gun Combat (archaic) check of the attacker, as if being grappled. If the animal fails the check, it is captured. The animal can free itself by making a successful Difficult (10+) Melee check (1D rounds), so the Travellers must quickly sedate or transfer the animal to a cage to prevent its escape.



SPARKPLANT WAND

Created from a local plant, the sparkplant, this wand discharges a powerful bolt of electricity at Close to Short Range. The shaft of the plant is shaped into a quarterstaff of sorts, usually 1–2 metres long. Each sparkplant wand contains enough electricity for 1Dx10 uses. After that, it is reduced to a cudgel that does 2D damage.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
Catch Pole	1	Melee	—	2	Cr25	—	—	—
Net	1	5	—	1	Cr25	—	—	—
Sparkplant Wand	3	1	5D	1–2	—	1Dx10	—	—

THE LEAPING SNOWCAT

TYPE: K

Like most vessels of the safari ship class, the Leaping Snowcat features a rare combination of hardiness and luxurious comfort. For hunting expeditions, the ship includes two eight-ton holding tanks with configurable environments to take live specimens and a trophy lounge that serves as a comfortable recreation area. The

ship is streamlined and can land on the surface of a planet but it also includes its own launch (with an all-terrain vehicle in a docking space) that may be used for light excursions, leaving the mother ship in space. Details of the air/raft can be found in the *Traveller Core Rulebook*.

TL12

		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	200 tons, Streamlined	—	12
M-Drive	Thrust 1	2	4
J-Drive	Jump-2	15	22.5
Power Plant	Fusion, Power 105	7	7
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 4 weeks operation	41	—
Bridge		10	1
Computer	Computer/5bis	—	0.045
Sensors	Civilian Grade	1	3
Weapons	Double Turret (empty)	1	0.5
Systems	Docking Space (20 tons)	22	5.5
	Launch (<i>Snowkitten</i>)	—	5.535
	Docking Space (4 tons)	5	1.25
	Air/Raft	—	0.25
	Fuel Scoop	—	—
	Fuel Processor (40 tons/day)	2	0.1
	Multi-Environment Equipment	0.8	0.4
Software	Multi-Environment Holding Tanks	16	—
	Jump Control/2	—	0.2
	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre	—	—
Staterooms	Intellect	—	—
	Standard x11	44	5.5
Common Areas		13	1.3
	Trophy Lounge	7	0.7
Cargo		13.2	—

Crew

Pilot, Astrogator,
Engineer, Medic,
Steward

Hull: 80

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr5309/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr70.78

Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems

40

Manoeuvre Drive

20

Jump Drive

40

Sensors

1

Fuel Processor

2

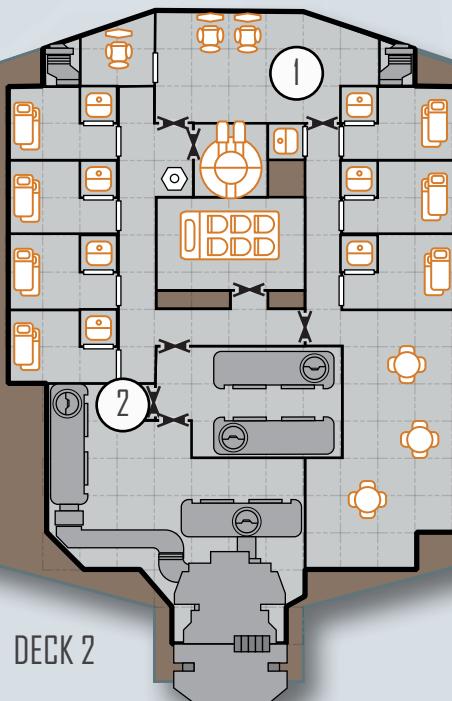
Multi-Environment

1

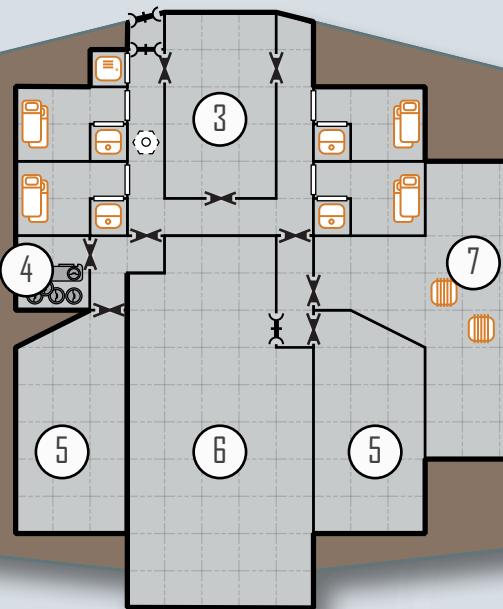
The Leaping Snowcat



TYPE: K



DECK 2



DECK 1

1. Bridge
2. Multi-environment Equipment
3. Trophy Lounge
4. Fuel Processor
5. Multi-environment Holding tanks
6. Launch Docking Space
7. Cargo Bay

The Snowkitten is a specialised launch that features a docking space for a 10-ton ATV. Inclusion of a docking space allows for rapid and comfortable deployment and reclamation of the ATV when on planetside expeditions. Details of the ATV can be found in the *Traveller Core Rulebook*.

TL12

		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	20 tons, Streamlined	—	1.2
M-Drive	Thrust 1	0.2	0.4
J-Drive	—	—	—
Power Plant	Fusion (TL 8), Power 10	1	0.5
Fuel Tanks	4 weeks operation	1	—
Bridge		3	0.5
Computer	Computer/5	—	0.03
Sensors	Basic	—	—
Systems	Fuel Scoop Docking Space (10 tons) ATV	11 — —	2.75 0.155
Software	Library Manoeuvre Intellect	— — —	— — —
Cargo		3.8	—

Crew

Pilot

Hull: 8

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr461/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr5.535

Power Requirements

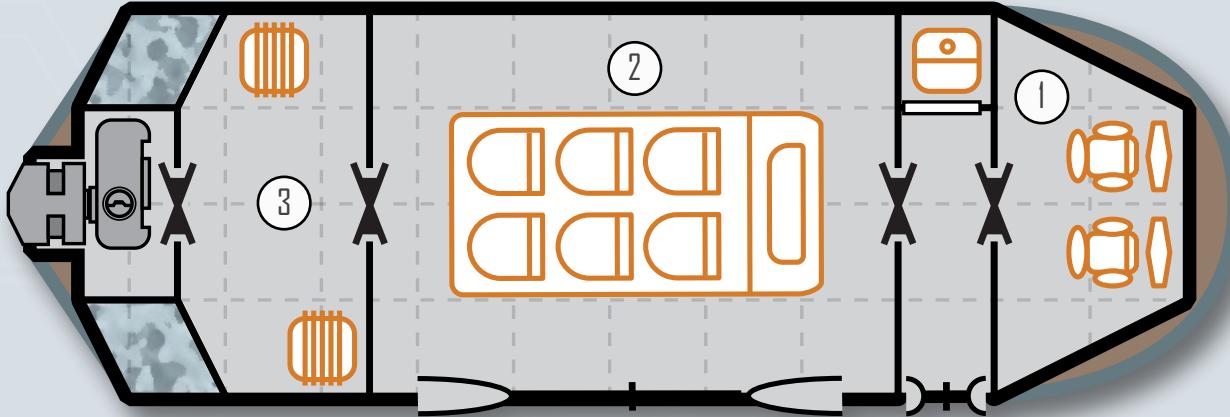
Basic Ship Systems

4

Manoeuvre Drive

2

1. Bridge
2. ATV Docking Space
3. Cargo Bay



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