

TRAVELLER

MERCENARY ADVENTURE 2: BUG HUNT



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

MERCENARY ADVENTURE 2 :
BUG HUNT

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INTRODUCTION

Bug Hunt takes place on the world named Paradise of El, in an independent region of the Gateway sector. The ticket that forms the backdrop to the adventure is suitable for a platoon or company-sized force capable of operating in an urban environment. Infantry-based units are obviously the most appropriate but a formation of a different sort, which can deploy at least some infantry – perhaps scratch units thrown together by combing out the headquarters or borrowing vehicle crews – can contribute meaningfully.

The adventure assumes that the Travellers have accepted a ticket to clear the area around Aldia City of an infestation by hostile creatures. What begins as a simple bug hunt develops into a fight for survival against overwhelming odds, with the Travellers at the centre of the defence. They will need to make strategic decisions as well as tactical ones, switching from roleplaying leadership of the defenders to manoeuvring forces through the embattled city. If the Travellers are not part of a mercenary unit they can still play the adventure. Caught up in the chaos during a routine visit, almost any group of Travellers might find themselves joining the fight. However, the adventure assumes a military force.

Running the Adventure

If the Travellers do not have or are not part of a mercenary unit, the Referee will need to create one. This should be a unit typical of the region; company-sized and equipped around TL8–9. This unit will be prominent in the adventure, at the forefront of combat and providing soldiers for any additional tasks the Travellers may undertake. That is to say, if the Travellers want to go visit the leaders of the defence, troops from this unit will be guarding the doors. If they are sent with a scientific party to investigate the creatures, the escort will probably come from the mercenary unit. If the Travellers have a force of their own they will be the ones assigning guards and escorts, although they may receive assistance from local forces.

The general map of the area (see page 15) should be made available to the Travellers as soon as they arrive at Aldia City. They will be able to access locally available information about the city and its infrastructure, and will need to do so in order to create an effective defence. The Referee should note that artillery and grav tanks are of limited use but if applied correctly could tip the balance of the final defence. For the most part, the action will take place in buildings and streets, where assault rifles are more useful than plasma guns – at least if the Travellers plan to defend the city rather than levelling it.



Involving the Travellers

The Travellers are either part of a mercenary unit arriving in Aldia City to help with the incursion, or are visitors to the city caught up in the action. There is room for both. If some Travellers want to play soldiers and others are inclined to more traditional adventuring styles, both can be accommodated by having civilians co-opted to assist the mercenaries in whatever capacity they can handle. If the Travellers are mercenaries, the Aldia City Ticket is all that is necessary to involve them – and also ensure they cannot simply leave when things get difficult.

THE ALDIA CITY TICKET

Security, Platoon. Cr50000 plus bonus. Limited Support

Aldia City is situated in a dry temperate area on Paradise of El. Its population of around 50,000 are mostly employed in agriculture and forestry, or supporting industries. The city is connected to the starport region by rail link. Until recently, the city and its surrounding communities have not been subject to any significant threat. Occasional incursions by Pokoss, a local creature, were dealt with by security forces. However, the Pokoss situation has escalated rapidly from a minor but sometimes destructive nuisance to a major threat. Other regions are also experiencing similar attacks.

The Waystation Congress, which administers Paradise of El, is seeking to hire mercenary forces to assist the local security service in driving back the Pokoss threat. Infantry-based formations are strongly preferred, although vehicular mobility will be useful. The Congress is offering Cr50000 per month for each platoon-sized or equivalent unit, with a Cr25000 hiring bonus and Cr50000 success bonus. Limited support, in the form of supplies and ammunition, will be made available.

The opposition is a non-intelligent animal native to Paradise of El. No aerospace or armoured threat is present but combat against large numbers of Pokoss is to be expected. Mercenary units will be under command of the local administration and tasked with eliminating the threat to Aldia City. This may require a combination of defensive measures and active removal of infestations.

The Pokoss

Pokoss, or ‘spider-ants’ are native to Paradise of El. They are omnivorous but rarely attack humans. It is probable that their habits have been altered due to a combination of climatic factors, with the result that the Pokoss have begun making massed incursions into inhabited areas. Some settlements were overrun in the early stages of the emergency and Pokoss have been observed killing and eating humans.

Pokoss are around 2 metres long from head to the rear of their body, with a ‘tail’ of varying size depending on the creature’s specialisation. General Pokoss are workers, scouts and nest-builders for the most part. They have a small tail with sacs that can be used to carry food or other items. Breeders are similar in appearance, with more pronounced sacs often containing eggs. Warriors are larger, with a long whip-like tail that can deliver a mild but unpleasant neurotoxin. All Pokoss have powerful mandibles.

Pokoss can be considered to be cold-blooded creatures but are capable of bursts of great speed. They will attack by charging or leaping to knock down a target and can tear an adult human apart when acting in concert. They are not normally aggressive but will defend territory and have recently begun behaving differently. This is thought to be caused by hunger. Internal organs are arranged in a conventional manner, so shots to the frontal torso region are likely to puncture lungs or the heart. Targeting the head will reliably stop a Pokoss but hits to the rear of the torso midpoint are unlikely to be immediately effective.

Pokoss live in communities of between 20 and 300 or so, averaging around 100–150 individuals. They create burrows but are apparently willing to move into an above-ground structure and ‘improve’ it with additional materials. Burrowing is also used to gain access to food sources and can be extremely destructive even if the Pokoss do not settle in the area.

Referee's Information

The client has not concealed anything but the severity of the situation is not apparent when the mercenaries accept the job. This will be a harder fight than expected but that is just a fact of life for mercenaries everywhere.

Ticket Success Indicators

The criteria for ticket success are as follows:

- 1: CRITICAL:** Drive off the Pokoss currently infesting the Aldia Mesa and the city.
- 2: CRITICAL:** Ensure the city’s main infrastructure (administrative area and rail terminal) remain intact.
- 3: IMPORTANT:** Protect the city’s civilian population.
- 4: ROUTINE:** Prevent the destruction of the city’s agricultural stockpiles.
- 5: ROUTINE:** Determine the reason for the incursion or devise effective countermeasures.

With two Critical, one Important and two Routine criteria the maximum TSI for this operation is 15. The client will pay the bonus if either Critical criterion is met.

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

GATEWAY SECTOR

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

THE MEGUSARD CORPORATE

The Megusard Corporate was once a large corporation – Megusard Interstellar – based out of Sardis. At its peak the Corporate had holdings across the sector, although its assets were primarily concentrated in the region of its headquarters at Sardis. Changing conditions resulted in a gradual shift from corporation to interstellar state, albeit one with many corporate trappings. All services, including the military, are run on corporate lines and obsessed with getting the most value from their budget. In the case of the military, this has resulted in a force with too many complex rules to follow and equipped for long-term budget stability rather than capability.

Each world of the Corporate has its own government, with the capital at Sardis. It has an extensive TL9 industrial capability at Megucorp Alpha and Beta and smaller TL11 manufacturing facilities at Sardis. Goods are traded across the sector and many mercenaries are outfitted with 'Megusard-Standard' TL9 weaponry.

THE VIYARD CONCOURSE

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

The Concourse is engaged in a dispute with the Galian Federation over the ownership of worlds lying between the two, and with the Trindel Confederacy over Coralee. These disputes have led to many free-fire incidents and occasional 'war-like situations'. Tensions are not likely to relax in the near future, and trade between the two is almost non-existent. One result of this is that whilst the Concourse's military attention is drawn spinward, its trade fleet has been ever more active in subsectors to trailing.

CINDER SUBSECTOR

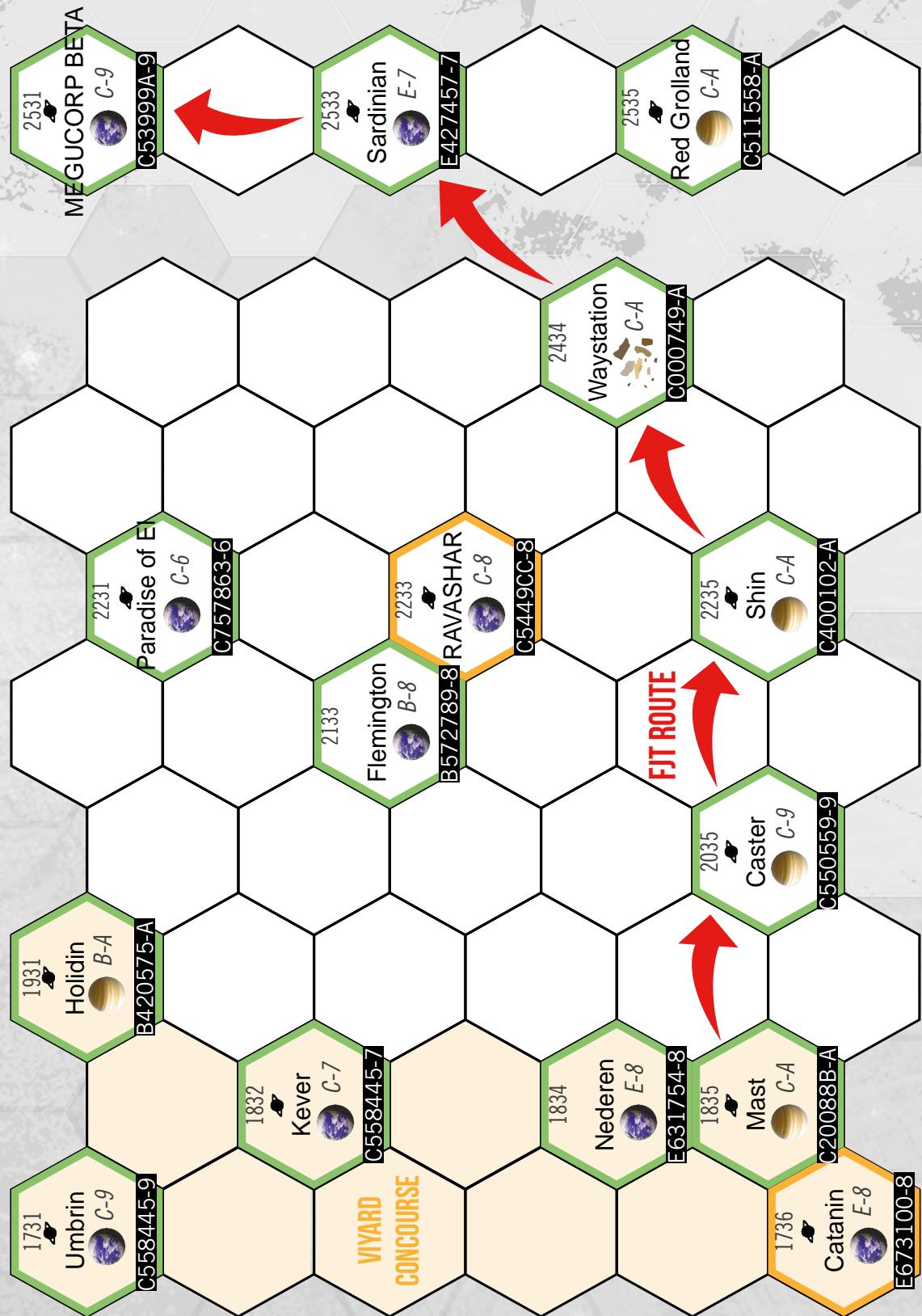
Cinder contains 20 star systems, of which 12 lie within the Viyard Concourse. All other worlds are independent, though Waystation claims ownership of Paradise of El. Around 12 billion people live in the subsector, the vast majority human, though local Minor Races are represented in small enclaves on some worlds. The average Tech Level is 8, with several worlds at TL10 and none above.

The subsector provides several markets for goods from the Concourse and Corporate. Competition between traders is high but generally amicable, since both states benefit greatly from trade with one another across the subsector. The 'FJT' (five-jump-two) route from Mast to Megucorp Beta is used for most direct trade, but the majority of goods are shipped to the neutral port at Waystation and traded there.

Waystation

Waystation started out as an expedient port built on an asteroid, intended to foster trade across the subsector. Over time it has grown into a small city, with a modest industrial base and very high standard of living. This is due to the port's location and its use as a neutral trade hub by the Viyard Concourse and Megusard Corporate. A takeover of Paradise of El created a secondary source of income, allowing Waystation to sell bulk agricultural goods, luxury foodstuffs and the like in its portside brokerages. The world's small flotilla of starships are mostly freighters, and almost exclusively assigned to the run to and from Paradise of El.

Farina Subsector



- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)
- Asteroid Belt
- Secure System
- Amber Zone
- Gas Giant
- Starport Class & Tech Level
- B-6

THE WORLD OF PARADISE OF EI

The world of Paradise of EI lies at the coreward end of Cinder, midway between the Viyard Concourse and Megusard Corporate. It provides a quick link between the two for those ships capable of making a three-parsec jump but these are rare in the region. Jump-2 traffic has to take the long way around by way of Flemington. Most ships that do so are owned by Waystation, although bulk transports sometimes make the journey to pick up agricultural goods direct from the source.

Paradise of EI lives up to its name... mostly. It is a temperate, well-watered world with a thin but acceptable atmosphere. Oxygen content is a little higher than average, compensating for low pressure at sea level. High ground can be uncomfortable or even dangerous for those not acclimatised. Much of the land is covered by forests or coarse moorland, making overland travel outside cleared areas a difficult proposition, although there are extensive grasslands at some latitudes. The population of some 900 million mostly dwell in small cities and their surrounding towns. The layout of these is generally similar; a central hub with concentric rings of villages and farming hamlets or ranching stations. Cities are linked by rail or river transport to regional capitals and thence to the world's administrative centre at the starport.

Paradise of EI was colonised during the Long Night. Although technology was rapidly lost the generally welcoming nature of the world allowed the new human population and imported species to thrive. The world never descended into barbarism but achieved a comfortable low-mid-tech industrial base, which supported the rail and sea networks. This went on until traders from Waystation arrived around year 180. The potential for Paradise of EI to become a breadbasket for the region prompted a major investment programme. Land clearances and the creation of carefully planned cities create opportunities for the world's workers, who moved to the new cities and their rich hinterlands from older and less comfortable settlements.

Naturally, the leaders of these new cities were not natives of Paradise of EI; they were appointed officials from Waystation. The best jobs went to those who supported them and within a few decades they were the new ruling class. A dedicated capital was constructed at the downport – again, led by officials from Waystation – and without anyone really noticing the takeover was complete. There was little dissent, since quality of life improved for almost everyone whilst life changed very little. The average worker still had the same job but

earned more and could spend it on a wider range of goods. Even with Waystation raking off the best of the profits, annexation was good for Paradise of EI.

Waystation's leaders kept tight control over imported technology elevating the local industrial base to a solid TL6 but retarding further progress. At the same time, key sectors were given imported equipment; whilst cities are mostly powered by locally-built fission reactors there are a handful of more advanced power facilities at key locations. Certain cities are designated as advanced medical centres and treatment for ailments and injuries that would not be curable elsewhere on the planet are available to anyone who needs them.

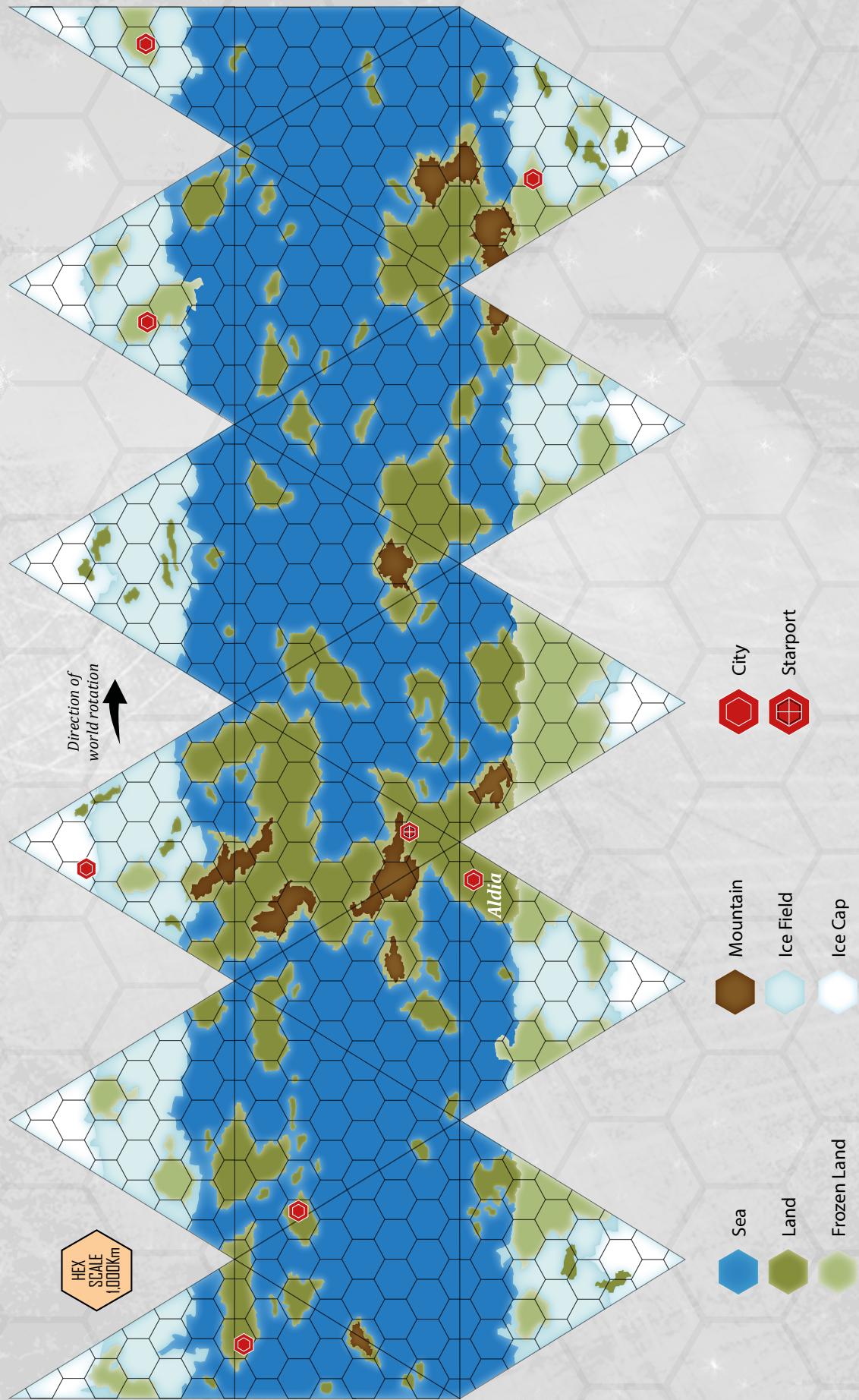
The average worker has TL6 tools and domestic labour-saving devices but knows they will be taken care of by a high-tech medical service if they need it. There are few grav vehicles on Paradise of EI but many of those that do exist are ambulances and specialist firefighting appliances. This is characteristic of society on this world – the administrators from Waystation have carefully cultivated a mindset whereby the local population are content with modest benefits. This way there is no need to build a hugely expensive TL10 society, yet the availability of some items still increases contentment. That situation could change, possibly with great speed but for now the Waystation administration has created a near-ideal situation.

Paradise of EI does not have much in the way of conventional armed forces, nor does it really need them. A unified police and security service handles the slightly unusual requirements that do exist. Crime levels are low but there are always some problems but mostly the security service protects transport links between cities, and occasionally the cities themselves. The threat is rarely human, other than the occasional over-ambitious gang of armed criminals. Instead, the security service must contend with a native creature called the Pokoss.

The starport is protected by a small detachment of troops from Waystation, equipped to TL10 standard. Their role is almost entirely defensive, crewing anti-aerospace weapons and providing an armed response in the event of a raid or similar minor threat. They are backed up with a force of conventionally equipped locals, which as a whole is more than sufficient to counter a raid. Power projection beyond the port would be difficult and commanders are unlikely to consider offensive operations if there was any threat whatsoever to the capital.

PARADISE OF EL

UWP: C757863-6



PARADISE OF EL

C 7 5 7 8 6 3 - 6

Starport	C	—
Size	7	11,200km
Atmosphere	5	Thin
Hydrosphere	7	70%
Population	8	Hundreds of millions
Government Type	6	Captive Government/ Colony
Law Level	3	Machine guns & automatic rifles prohibited
Tech Level	6	Nuclear Power

Paradise of El Militia Company

Characteristic	Value	DM
Force Name	Militia Company	—
Unit Size	Reinforced Platoon	—
Unit Type	Infantry	—
Unit TL	6	—
Mobility Type	Infantry	-3
Combat	4	-2
Bombardment	0	—
Aerospace	0	—
Support	1	-2
CEI or DEI	4	-2
Morale	5	-1
Reputation	7	0

SECURITY AND MILITIA FORCES

The security Paradise of El service is equipped at TL6, with locally-produced small arms and general equipment. Organisation is on a regional level, with no large formations embodied on a permanent basis. Indeed, the force runs more like police than a military unit, with most personnel assigned to patrols or static duty such as inspection points along the rail and water transportation network. Patrols vary in size from a lone officer to four, with two being the standard deployment. When on patrol and general policing duty, officers are armed with a baton and a sidearm, and wear discreet body armour.

Where serious conflict is expected, helmets and flak jackets are donned and personnel are formed into ad-hoc squads of six to ten officers. The weapon of choice then is a semi-automatic battle rifle, with small numbers of TL6 machineguns as backup. The security service has few anti-vehicle weapons, mostly unguided shoulder-fired rockets, but does not provide much training in their use.

Larger forces have been formed in response to recent events, with security personnel assigned to militia companies to lead and teach the populace. The term 'company' in this sense is a noun rather than a descriptor; a 'company' can be anything from 10 to 100 strong. On average, a militia company can be considered equivalent to a reinforced platoon, with no military vehicles or artillery support.



Within the security service there is a specialist role that comes close to a pure military one. These personnel are known, predictably perhaps, as rangers, and specialise in dealing with the Pokoss. Rangers come through the same route as everyone else in the security service and can in theory undertake a policing role but are more commonly deployed to the outback where they monitor and occasionally cull the Pokoss. Rangers are equipped with a sharpshooter's variant of the standard rifle, a sidearm and a pack of explosives to block Pokoss tunnels. Most carry a large knife, machete or tomahawk for use as a tool and emergency weapon. There are only a few hundred rangers on the entire planet, so the largest formation likely to be deployed is a squad of 10–12. More commonly a section-equivalent of 6–8 is considered sufficient.

The ranger teams make use of light offroad vehicles and occasionally motorcycles. They have no artillery weapons or armoured vehicles but have stashes of machineguns and grenade launchers for breaking up larger concentrations of Pokoss. More commonly they will simply snipe from beyond the creatures' detection range, much in the manner of gamekeepers culling a herd. Until recently, that was the closest approximation to the rangers' function.

Paradise of El Militia Rangers

Characteristic	Value	DM
Force Name	Ranger Squad	—
Unit Size	Section	—
Unit Type	Infantry	—
Unit TL	6	—
Mobility Type	Infantry	-3
Combat	7	0
Bombardment	0	—
Aerospace	0	—
Support	1	-2
CEI or DEI	8	0
Morale	9	+1
Reputation	8	0

WAYSTATION SECURITY PERSONNEL

The downport and some critical locations are protected by personnel answering directly to the government of Waystation rather than Paradise of El, mostly recruited on Paradise of El, with only a few officers coming from Waystation. Although equipped to TL10 and more military in nature, this is still first and foremost a defensive security force.

Weaponry is based around the same battle rifle as the weapons used by the local forces but put together to a higher standard from more advanced materials. Some personnel carry a sharpshooter variant with a long, heavy barrel and basic optical scope.

The port security force has access to multiple emplaced aerospace defence and medium support weapons but has little in the way of mobile support equipment and no armoured vehicles. When mobility beyond the port is required the force can co-opt a few grav trucks. Nothing more has ever been necessary. A standard 'truckload' would be the basic force, numbering 8–12 personnel plus the vehicle crew. This is equivalent to a reinforced section and would probably include a support gunner armed with a TL10 machinegun.

Waystation Security Detachment

Characteristic	Value	DM
Force Name	Waystation Security Detachment	—
Unit Size	Section	—
Unit Type	Infantry	—
Unit TL	10	+1
Mobility Type	Infantry/Grav	-3/+8
Combat	9	+1
Bombardment	0	—
Aerospace	0	—
Support	3	-1
CEI or DEI	9	+1
Morale	10	+2
Reputation	8	0

THE POKOSS SITUATION

The Pokoss have been a nuisance ever since the world was settled but for the most part were easily controlled. If a community of Pokoss grows too large some of its breeders will lead a search for a new location and create their own community there. The same happens when habitats are destroyed by natural or artificial factors. So long as this activity takes place away from human habitation the authorities do not care in the slightest.

Communities close to human-inhabited areas are ‘managed’ by a variety of means. Typically this involves rangers from the security service monitoring numbers and conducting a cull if necessary. Culls are usually carried out by rifle fire from a couple of hundred metres away, with part of the team acting as security in case a Pokoss wanders close. Pokoss are unable to comprehend that they are being attacked from a distance but can correlate loud noises with sudden death.

Breeder Pokoss will flee from noise, as will general Pokoss most of the time. Warriors will search for the source of the sound but rarely move far or fast enough to encounter the shooters, assuming the operation takes the form of a few quick shots and retirement. If necessary, a stronger force may be sent to secure and collapse entrances to Pokoss burrows. This is little more than an inconvenience for them but a series of collapses often causes the whole community to move to another location.

More dramatic management measures include dropping timed charges onto a burrow location. These are not really intended to harm the Pokoss, although they often do. Instead, the intent is to cause a series of loud noises and vibrations through the ground. Combined with damage to the burrow this is usually enough to force relocation. Larger charges have sometimes been used to demolish burrows, dropped off by a grav vehicle, carried by a fast-moving demolition party or – occasionally – delivered from a specialist artillery weapon.

Other measures have been tried, including poisoning burrows or introducing chemicals that make the locality unpleasant for Pokoss. This can be effective but has been something of a hit-and-miss proposition. Another attempt, intended to create a long-term solution, has been made by a freelance scientific team operating out of the Viyard Concourse. This has gone rather badly awry.

The science team are typical ‘freelance experts’ – essentially mercenaries operating in a non-military field. They were contracted by elements within the Concourse to find a solution to the Pokoss problem, which could then be offered to the government of Waystation for a fee. Speculative solving-of-problems in this manner is not uncommon, although in this case there are additional motives. The scientists’ backers are hoping to negotiate a deal with Waystation to set up industries creating luxury foodstuffs in areas too heavily populated with Pokoss.

The scientists introduced a tailored disease into some Pokoss populations. It was not intended to be heavily transmissible, enabling them to target specific communities without harming others. The disease was also highly – and quickly – lethal, which would also limit its spread. In the event, the disease turned out to be far less potent than expected and more transmissible. Rather than killing Pokoss quickly it disrupts their digestive processes. This means that low-value foods such as vegetation, which would normally form the basis of the creatures’ diet, cannot keep them alive. High-value foods such as meat are sufficient, at least for most individuals, and the Pokoss are on the move searching for a suitable feeding ground. Individuals will continue to eat vegetation, sometimes in a frenzied manner but cannot derive sufficient nourishment from it.

So, rather than quickly eliminating the population of a small area the scientists created a ravenous horde. The most plentiful sources of food on Paradise of El are the cities, with their herds and agricultural stockpiles also being highly attractive. Once reports of attacks on settlements began coming in the world’s administration responded by sending security and militia groups to threatened areas. This was a disaster, with many groups overwhelmed by a threat they had greatly underestimated. Evacuations of outlying areas began but not everyone was willing to leave and in many cases evacuees were overrun on the move.

Currently, the authorities on Paradise of El and those of Waystation do not know why the Pokoss are attacking human settlements, nor why they are doing so in some areas and not others. The disease has broken out at several points due to the scientists’ movements, creating multiple epicentres. The authorities do not know there is a disease, so cannot plan countermeasures until they do. In the meantime, the populations of several cities are pulling back from threatened outer regions and moving into the cities themselves. Militia and security personnel are trying to push the Pokoss back and mercenaries have been hired to deal with the problem.

INVESTIGATING POKOSS DEPREDATIONS

If the Travellers have some means of remote reconnaissance available, or are able to send out a team to investigate, they observe the results of the Pokoss' incursions. They are indeed attacking humans and also livestock and wild animals. Where previously meat was only a small part of their diet, some Pokoss are now ignoring plentiful vegetation to pursue prey. Others are voraciously eating every scrap of plant matter within reach but these too will abandon their easy meal if an animal chances by.

The reason for this may not be apparent to the Travellers at first. The infected Pokoss will starve to death with a belly full of plant matter and instinctively know this. They are attracted to high-value foods such as meat or sugars and will fight over a source. Thus is highly unusual for such a species, which is cooperative to the point of resembling a hive of insects. This might be used against the Pokoss by inventive Travellers.

The Pokoss are capable of smashing through the walls of a typical plank-built structure or causing it to collapse by pushing against the walls in a group. They have breached the homes of many families who chose not to evacuate and are coming to associate wooden structures with food even if they cannot detect people inside.

Travellers investigating the Pokoss will eventually discover specimens suffering from severe malnourishment despite them feeding and some that have died of starvation despite a full stomach. Investigating this will require a medical examination or post-mortem, which the typical mercenary might not think to do or have the skills to attempt. An after-action field examination by the Travellers' medic might yield some clues but the Travellers should not be given all the information straight away. If they are alert enough to realise there is something amiss about the Pokoss' behaviour they should be rewarded with a gradual trickle of information until the situation becomes clear.



ALDIA CITY

Aldia City is typical of the planned settlements of Paradise of El. It lies over 200 kilometres from the nearest large settlement, which is not uncommon. Cities tend to be spaced out and surrounded by a ring of farming villages. Like most cities, Aldia has a small industrial base geared mainly to supporting the needs of the populace but imports most of its manufactured goods. Its primary export is grain, with timber and vegetable crops as important secondaries.

The city was constructed on the shoulder of the rather grandly named Aldia Mesa, an area of high ground some 100 metres or so above the surrounding plains. The mesa is not as steep as most high ground given that name, although the eastern side is mostly cliffs and presents a significant obstacle. The western side slopes more gently, with occasional steep ridges here and there. Few of these are more than 5 metres in height, however, and are mostly grassy rather than exposed rock.

The city was built from a central hub on the main body of the mesa. A rail line used only by local traffic climbs to a higher shoulder where the rail terminus is located. This is a bulk freight terminus, from where cargoes of agricultural goods and occasionally a few passengers will depart north-eastwards across a high viaduct towards the capital and starport. A second local rail line climbs steeply up to the city's administrative annex, located atop the highest point of the mesa.

To the east, the wide River Telry runs under the steep side of the mesa and on the far bank is thick forest. There is some forest on this side of the river as well but is being gradually removed by industrial-scale logging. To the west and south of the city, farmland has been created by systematic clearance of the land. A network of canals leading to the river provides adequate water in what is otherwise a dry area.

Although the city was well planned, not everything played out as expected. As a result the city's two primary land routes are designated Goods Route Alpha and Goods Route Aldia-Delta. Beta and Gamma were planned but never built, although here and there signs of early roadbed construction remain. The shift in naming conventions between the construction of Alpha

and Aldia-Delta is reflected within the city as well. This can make maps confusing to visitors, since a 'street' is a minor local thoroughfare whilst a 'road' connects to the two main routes – but sometimes the convention is not followed. This has led to large trucks trying to negotiate 'roads' not meant for them and blocking local traffic for hours.

Transport within the city uses TL6 electrically-powered ground vehicles, with almost all traffic outside the city being large trucks carrying bulk goods or vehicles connected with agriculture or logging. There is a gravport atop the administrative annex but it is rarely used. Most transportation needs are met by the rail line. Aldia does not have a river port.

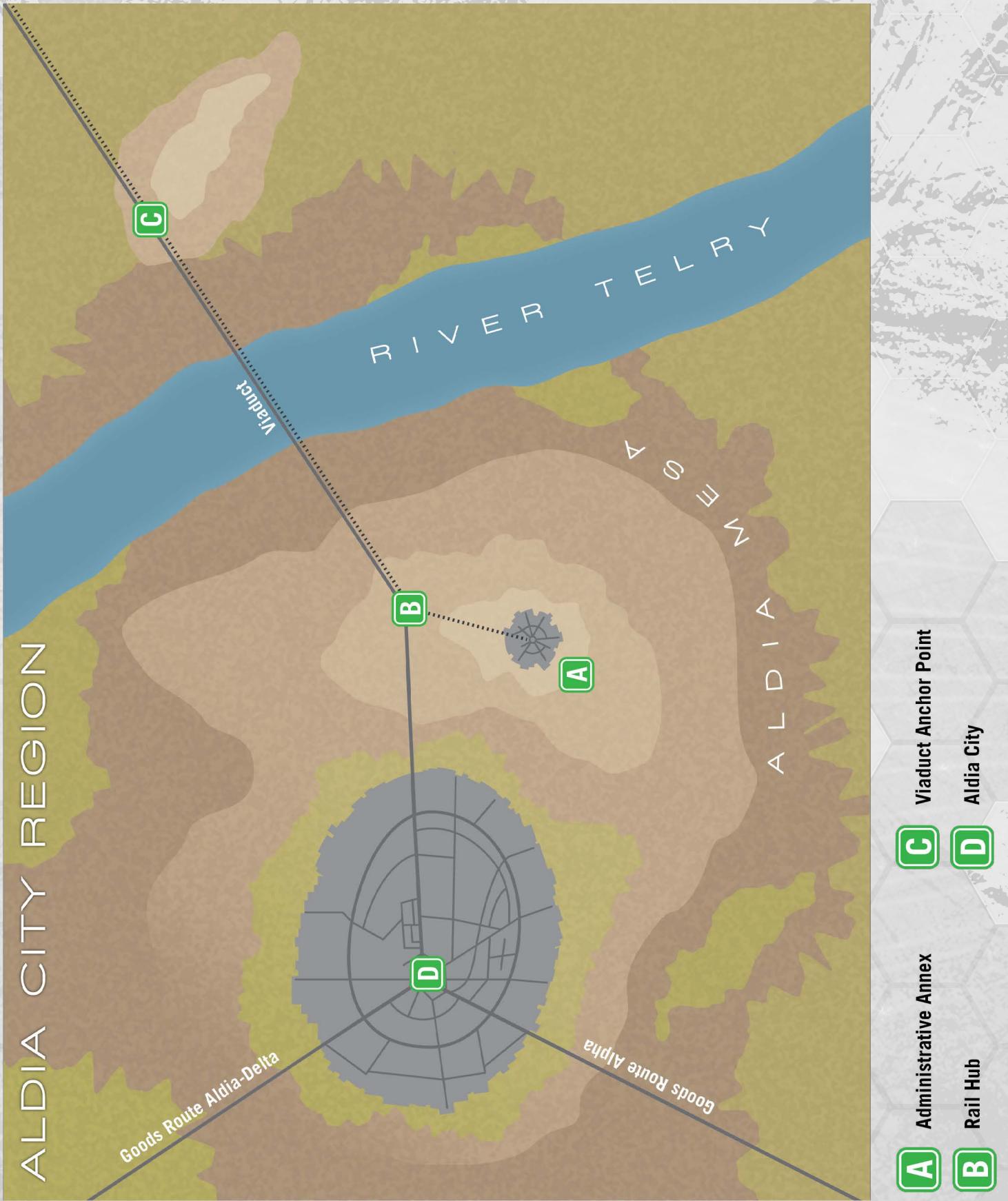
A: Administrative Annex

The city's administrative complex is located high above the main part of the mesa, roughly circular in shape, with several large buildings interspersed with gardens. These are kept watered from an artificial reservoir deep under the mesa, which is in turn fed with water piped in from the nearby River Telry. The city's main power source is also under the complex, in a secure chamber cut into the bedrock. This is a hybrid nuclear fission reactor, maintained using locally available technology but designed and built using TL10 equipment from Waystation. The plant is automated and will run for at least another decade without refuelling.

The annex includes accommodation for 2,000 people, most of whom are administrators, engineers and similar important personnel as well as their families. The annex is connected to the rail hub by a funicular railway, of a smaller gauge to the main line. Unlike the main line, the funicular railway does not use conventional locomotives and its cars are powered directly from the city's supply. They are noticeably more comfortable than the main line's carriages and even goods wagons are of higher quality.

B: Rail Hub

The city's rail hub is the terminus for a line running all the way to the capital. The passenger terminal is small and backs onto the funicular railway running up to the



administrative annex. The goods handling facilities are far more extensive, with grain containers constantly being lifted on and off trains by a network of gantry cranes. The rail hub is also the main storage area for agricultural goods, timber and anything else the city requires or exports. There are huge warehouses and holding areas, plus smaller administrative buildings. Most of these areas can be accessed from overhead by climbing along the crane gantries.

The trains that use the main rail line are electrically powered, using internal fuel cells imported from Waystation. Trains tend to be large and either exclusively made up of goods wagons or with a small passenger component. This is usually positioned at the very rear of the train and dropped off to be moved into the passenger terminal by shunter engines whilst the main body proceeds to the freight terminal.

C: Viaduct Anchor Point

The Great Telry Viaduct is the city's link to the rest of Paradise of El, an impressive structure built on pillars of local rock carved out by TL10 equipment, with a conventional steel bridge across the top. Twin rail lines are paralleled by a roadway, which is rarely used other than by maintenance vehicles. The viaduct ends with a tunnel through the top of a small mesa, beyond which the rail line runs through forest for several kilometres.

D: Aldia City

The city is described below.

River and Forest

The river is deep and wide but not fast-flowing. Pokoss could swim across it if they had to but are unlikely to try unless driven by some major factor such as a forest fire. The forest itself is thick and largely unexplored, although there are logging trails and camps on the city side of the river. Beyond the river lies virgin wilderness other than where the railway runs.

ALDIA CITY

The city is roughly oval, east to west. It was built out around a central core, with additional districts added over decades. All structures are built with TL6 equipment and materials, with timber used for much of the construction. This timber came from land cleared to the east of the city, which is now farmland.

There is no solid outer edge to the city nor any form of defence. Urbanised areas give way to grassy plains with a few bushes and trees here and there. These are not well watered and have sparse vegetation. The city itself is much greener, with small parks and many trees lining

its streets. Water for these is pumped up from the river and mostly delivered by sprinkler systems, although some areas have small canals radiating out from one of two artificial lakes.

The three main local thoroughfares meet at the transportation hub, about one-third of the way from west to east across the city. From these, a grid of local roads serves the communities and a ring road allows quick transit around the city. The ring road also marks the former boundaries of the city. It is built on an embankment, which places it some three to four metres above the roofs of nearby residences, although it is overlooked by taller apartment buildings. The road has some merit as a defensive installation but mainly serves to delineate the inner, and older, part of the city from more recent builds.

The city's power and sewage systems are integrated with the road network. Power comes in through heavy-duty cables running under the eastern highway embankment to a substation in the eastern end of the central goods hub. Distribution uses a local underground grid and heavier cables under the other main road embankments.

A: Goods Hub

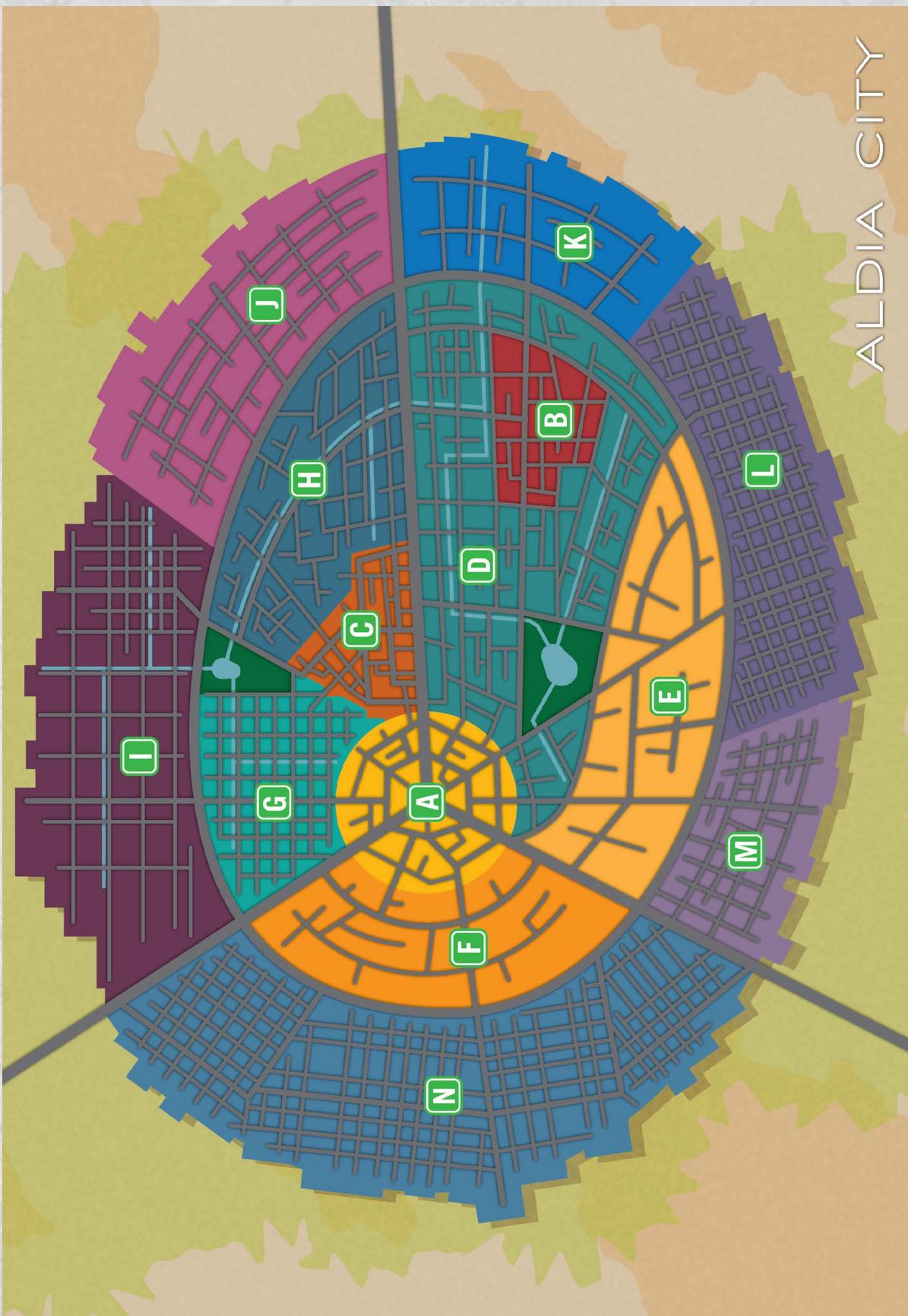
This consists mainly of storage yards for timber, agricultural warehouses and depots for trucks using external roads to bring in more goods or transporting them to the rail hub. There are also minor and specialist businesses such as high-quality meat packagers or wine merchants, concentrated at the eastern end of the hub. The goods hub is heavily subdivided due to walls enclosing various depots and properties, and always has a number of heavy vehicles that could be commandeered.

B: Business District

The business district contains most of the offices and non-manufacturing business premises within the city, as well as homes for some of those who work here. A few are luxury apartments but the majority are relatively modest dwellings for low to mid-level employees. Most buildings are of solid construction, typically the concrete, steel and glass found on most mid-tech worlds and are several storeys tall. There are no skyscrapers but a few 20-storey apartment blocks stand higher than anything else in the city.

C: Industrial Zone One

The city's original industrial zone lies along the north side of the main highway to the rail hub. This was constructed or at least laid out early in the city's growth, using concrete and metal. Today, the primary industries based here are sawmills and construction companies,



- A** Goods Hub
- B** Business District
- C** Industrial Zone One
- D** Residential Zone North South-Central
- E** Residential Zone North-East
- F** Residential Zone North-West
- G** Residential Area South-West
- H** Residential Area West
- I** New-Build Area
- J** Suburban Zone South
- K** East Town
- L** Suburban Zone South
- M** Heavy Industrial Zone
- N** Manufacturing Zone

which build and maintain most of the city's dwellings. A series of large transport bays backs onto the highway, with trucks regularly coming and going. This area is unofficially known as Logtown by local residents. Like most non-residential areas it is bounded by an open area with a low earth berm and wood fence featuring 'Warning – Industrial Zone' signs at intervals.

D: Residential Zone South-Central

The original residential zone of the city was built along the south side of the main highway. Early construction close to the road used concrete, and is rather drab, but as the zone filled out south and east the city was beginning to mature. Dwellings change from apartment blocks at the north side to small plank-built houses farther south. These are typical of homes throughout the city; modest but comfortable and built with easily obtainable local resources. Most of the population of the south-central zone work in areas C or E. An artificial lake stands at the centre of a large public park and sports area, with canals running in all directions except south into the industrial zone.

E: Heavy Industrial Zone

This was planned to be rather large but relatively little of the land was ever occupied by major industries. There are a few factories here and there, with estates of small manufacturing businesses in between. Much of the remaining land is officially designated 'common parkland', which means it is left semi-wild and cut back when necessary. There are few dwellings here.

F: Manufacturing Zone

The city's planners intended this area to house most or all of the light engineering and manufacturing industry expected to be set up. Whilst uptake was greater than in the heavy industrial zone, there was no major investment. Today, this region is mostly an open expanse of concrete with small manufacturing firms widely spaced across it. There is little that would be an obstacle to an incursion.

G: Residential Zone North

The northern residential zone was built after south-central and consists almost entirely of neat grids of identical wooden houses, with small shopping and recreational centres. Most residents work within the city. The area is bounded to the south by the outer wall of the central goods hub and to the east by an artificial lake and its associated parkland.

H: Residential Zone North-Central

This zone is in many ways similar to south-central, with grim apartment blocks along the road giving way to wooden housing to the north and west.

I: New-Build Area

Plans to expand the northern residential area were put on hold for many years and it was not until quite recently that construction finally began. This area is laid out as a gridwork of roadbeds but only in the south-eastern corner has construction been carried out. Canals from the artificial lake provide water to the open spaces between dwelling clusters, creating a curious mix of parkland and foundations. Earthmoving and construction equipment is dispersed around the area along with stockpiles of sawn timber and building materials.

J: Suburban Zone North-East

This area contains a well-developed pattern of dwellings, most of which are larger than the standard but not as impressive as those on the south side of the main highway. Dominated by middle-class, well-off workers in skilled jobs this area has most of the city's higher-quality shopping and recreation facilities.

K: East Town

East Town was one of the first areas to be laid out for construction, although much of the land was not used until later. The dwellings here are of wooden construction but are for the most part rather grand. East Town was always intended to be home to the city's managerial elite – other than those privileged to live in the administrative annex.

L: Suburban Zone South

This long, wide strip of suburban housing is home to a large population of workers, most of whom are employed within the city. It is not dissimilar to area G.

M: Residential Area South-West

This is the most densely populated area of the city, with apartment blocks standing 15–20 metres high. Its rather basic bulk housing was created for the workforce setting up local industries as well as constructing the city itself but today is simply where the poorest residents live.

N: Residential Area West

This is generally similar to areas L and G but many of its inhabitants work outside the city. The remainder are typically employed in manufacturing and industry on the western and southern sides of the city.

ENTERING THE FRAY

The mercenaries will probably arrive at Aldia City by train unless they have their own grav transport. There are few roads suitable for ground vehicles between Aldia and the capital, which would make an overland transit quite a slog. The client is not paying the mercenaries to faff about in the backwoods, so will provide rail transport for non-grav vehicles. The trip overland is tedious, with nothing to look at except walls of vegetation either side of the line. Here and there a crew are cutting the trees back where they have begun to encroach but activity of this sort has been largely curtailed since the Pokoss began to attack people.

Arriving at Aldia City, the mercenaries will have to detrain and organise their equipment. This is a complex business but routine for experienced troops. The process can be abstracted with an ECEI check, which may influence the impression the mercenaries make. Meanwhile, Travellers gain their own impressions of the city.

Aldia City is not unpleasant to visit. It is well laid out for the most part, with attractive wooden houses in most neighbourhoods. Experienced mercenaries might find themselves imagining what might happen to this place if it becomes a war zone. They will also notice an evacuation failing to take place. Trains leave from the main hub every few hours, with a mix of passenger cars and converted freight wagons. There are marshalling points for large numbers of people, all well organised, but few residents are actually leaving.

The mercenaries will also notice attempts to form or expand a militia. There seem to be plenty of guns, at least some of which must have been bought offworld and freighted in, and no shortage of volunteers to carry them. Most of these militia groups seem enthusiastic but clueless; a dangerous combination at the best of times. The Travellers may well have seen this before – a lot of the militia are enjoying the excitement rather than working to solve a problem. The Pokoss threat seems distant and warnings are largely ignored by people who think they know better.

BRIEFING AT THE ANNEX

The Travellers are requested, at their earliest convenience, to meet with the city's leaders in the administrative annex. They will be escorted to the funicular railway and up the steep rise to the annex by paramilitary security professionals, a completely different class to the militia. At the annex the Travellers are ushered into the presence of Amex Kildaire, head of the city's security force. Kildaire is personable and seems competent, although he does have a habit of talking over anyone saying something he does not want to hear.

Kildaire outlines the situation briefly. The long and short of it is that the mercenaries are under his orders as he is the commander of the city's security force. This is correct and in keeping with the contract. He initially wants the mercenaries to assist in conducting a forward defence, thereby preventing the Pokoss from reaching the city itself. The surrounding area has been largely evacuated but only about 10% of the city's population have accepted the offer of relocation to safer areas. With workers from the outlying areas that puts about 60,000 people in the city and if the Pokoss are really eating humans there is a potential for great loss of life.

Kildaire is concerned about the militias that are forming. He is trying to assign security officers to lead and advise them but there are large numbers of people toting small arms without any training. There have already been accidents and it is a matter for speculation what will happen when the Pokoss arrive. Will the militia be any use? Kildaire is doubtful, although he is sure anyone with a gun will fight for their life if they have to. His nightmare scenario is the militia using their weapons to get on an evacuation train rather than defending it.

The better militia formations – those with a history of assisting the security forces or at least training with them – are already deploying forward to intercept the Pokoss' advance. Kildaire wants the Travellers to provide assistance with whatever strength they can immediately bring to bear. They are to advance to Transit Station Seven (TS7) and deploy to secure it. Reaching TS7 will require a move of about 40 kilometres overland, making use of logging roads and highways serving the agricultural region.

Once the rest of their force arrives the Travellers will join the main defensive line and, ideally, turn back the Pokoss before they reach the city. If the defence fails, standing orders are to make a fighting retreat along the line of Goods Route Aldia-Delta. Additional forces will be sent to create a fallback line. Units retreating from the forward defence will fall in along this new line.

Forward Defence

The Travellers are expected to gather as much of their unit as is ready and push up the highway to the forward defence line. If they dither or insist on waiting for their entire force to be in perfect fighting order they will receive a series of increasingly strident demands to get moving, followed by threats of lawsuits for breach of contract. This is not entirely unreasonable on the part of Kildaire but he is already showing his character. He does have the right to give the Travellers orders, however, and there are no reasonable grounds for refusal. Given the difficulty of unloading the mercenaries' equipment and sorting it all out, only a platoon-sized element of their force will be immediately available. The remainder (assuming their force is larger than this) will become ready in stages over the next day or so and can follow as required.

The Travellers can choose what part of their force to expedite but this is all they have for the initial engagement. It does not have to be a formed platoon; the Travellers could put together any force of this general size with whatever weapons they choose to assign, although heavy equipment such as vehicles and artillery will take too long to deploy and will not be available.

Moving up the road, in their own transport or trucks provided by the city, the Travellers pass through an area of well-regulated farmland with few people about, eventually arriving at their marshalling point about 40 kilometres from the city. This is Transit Station Seven, a truck depot with some storage and offices. From here local roads wind out to various farms and ranching stations. The defence line is about 500 metres northwest, atop a low ridge. From that direction can be heard intermittent firing. The frequency and intensity of gunfire suggests the immediate threat is minor.

TRANSIT STATION SEVEN

The station supports trucks and the occasional piece of agricultural or logging equipment, serving as a transport and vehicle maintenance hub for the surrounding area. It does not have an outer perimeter fence as such, just a point where the staff stop clearing local vegetation.

A: Original Parking Area

The original parking area was constructed of concrete. Although now cracked, it presents an obstacle to Pokoss trying to burrow up into the transit station. Beyond the limits of the concrete, the surface is packed earth that can be penetrated by Pokoss. A number of large trucks and some smaller vehicles are parked around the concreted area.

B: Secondary Parking Area

The secondary parking area is simply an overflow, packed down by heavy vehicles and churned to mud when it rains. There are a couple of trucks parked here along with the SUV-type vehicles used by the rangers and security contingent. This is an ersatz supply depot at present, with ammunition and supplies unloaded from trucks coming up from Aldia City. The SUVs are used to transfer these munitions up to the line and along it, sometimes getting pretty busted up driving overland.

C: Offices and Living Space

The transit station's small administrative staff are housed in this wooden-framed building. The ground floor has work spaces and a canteen, with the upper floor used for accommodation.

D: Storage Warehouse

This is a general warehouse used to store goods. The building frame is steel with overhead hoists but the walls are the same wood panels as other structures at TS7. There are openings in the side to allow trucks to be backed in and loading bays for them.

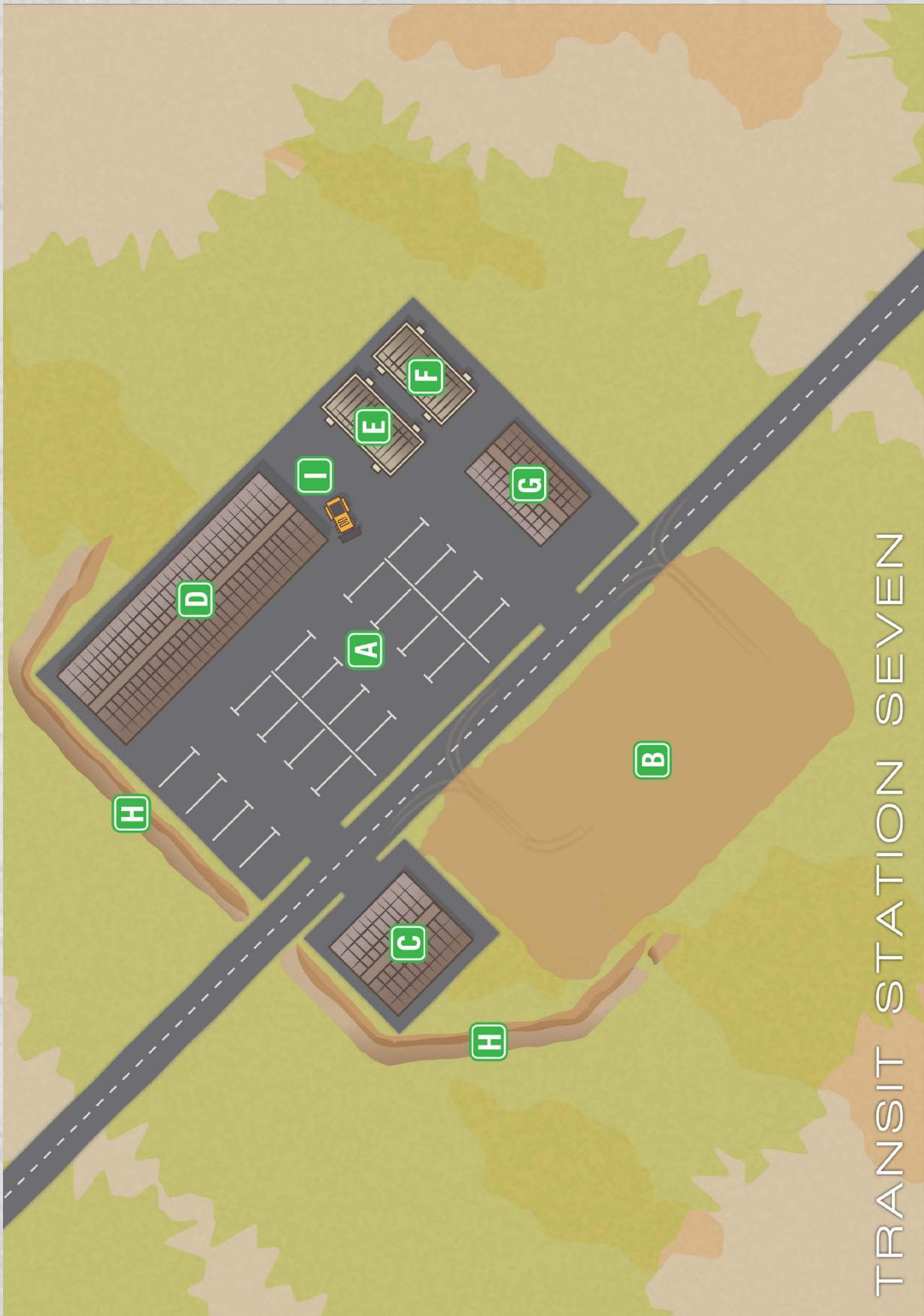
E/F: Battery Station and Generator Hut

Most of the vehicles using TS7 are electrically powered. The generator (F) feeds into the battery station (E), which can either charge vehicles by means of a cable or swap in whole batteries. These are large, capable of powering a truck, and will not fit smaller vehicles.

G: Maintenance Station

TS7 has a small maintenance station for servicing large vehicles. Its stock of spares is modest but most likely components are carried.

TRANSIT STATION SEVEN



- A** Original Parking Area
- B** Secondary Parking Area
- C** Storage Warehouse
- D** Battery Station
- E** Offices and Living Space
- F** Generator Hut
- G** Maintenance Station
- H** Generator Hut
- I** Broken-Down Bulldozer
- Berm**

H: Berm

Attempts have been made to set up a defensive berm, with a ditch in front of it and wire entanglements along the top. Only part has even been begun and some sections are little more than laid out. No fortifications have been begun around the rest of the station. The heavy work – indeed, almost all of the work – is being done by a small earthmover. A handful of personnel with shovels have contributed but the undertaking is clearly half-hearted.

I: Broken-Down Bulldozer

A large bulldozer originally used in the construction of the station has been parked here for years. It is unserviceable and been converted to a raised platform from which to address people. A tradition has emerged of gathering around the ‘dozer to conduct impromptu markets or hear work assignments. Those who work at the station – not newcomers such as the security contingent – know that when someone climbs up on the ‘dozer, something important is about to be said. This can lead to misunderstandings if the Travellers use the bulldozer as a vantage point... they may find a dozen workers dropping what they are doing to hear a pronouncement.

DEPLOYING

When the Travellers arrive at Transit Station Seven they find what might be described as a hive of inactivity. There are about a dozen workers and a few drivers at the station who are supposed to be digging defensive fortifications. Whilst there is some effort, the work is going slowly. A contingent of militia, led by a handful of security personnel, is deployed to the station but fully occupied trying to get supplies and ammunition to forces on the ridgeline. Nobody is officially in charge but the leader of a team of security service rangers has appointed himself de facto commander of the station pending clear orders from Albia City.

The ‘commander’ is Sergeant Olyt Liron, a grey-haired veteran with little time for amateurs. He is frustrated with the lack of progress and his own inability to organise logistics but has put together a plan for defending the station if – as he correctly supposes – a few Pokoss leak past the defensive line. He has at his disposal his own section-sized force of rangers, about 20 militia forming two more sections and some armed drivers who might be some use in a fight. The mercenaries are a very welcome addition to this force.

Liron plans to put his own people in the higher locations – the warehouse roof, office and the bulldozer – as sharpshooters, forming search and destroy teams to chase down incursions. He expects a few individual Pokoss will get through and if he is correct it will be a simple matter to locate them and move a sharpshooter to where they can be targeted. Unfortunately, Liron has underestimated the level of the threat. He has only ever dealt with small numbers of Pokoss and as yet the defence line is encountering only small groups. His plan is adequate for the threat he anticipates but the mercenaries will need to do some planning of their own.

The fortifications being dug are laughable, although they might bolster morale and inspire defenders to stay at their post rather than running for a building when threats emerge. The Travellers only have a few hours before the situation worsens – although they will not know this – but in that time there is much they could achieve. Exhorting workers to dig faster might produce results but there are simply not enough people to create a useful position. Other measures might be undertaken, such as moving trucks to create barriers or positioning them with walkways between to allow personnel to move out of reach of the Pokoss. Whatever the Travellers do, they have just a few hours to do it.

THE BATTLE OF TRANSIT STATION SEVEN

The Travellers will become aware of increased sounds of firing from the defensive line but will be unable to determine what is happening unless they are able to send up a drone or take some similar measures. In fact, pressure is mounting on the line as groups of Pokoss advance out of the forest to the northwest and move semi-purposefully towards the line. This behaviour is unusual for them, especially since they would normally forage in the forest rather than moving into the open cleared area, which has less food.

Sergeant Liron will mention this if he is made aware of the situation but will not give permission to send troops to the defensive line. The Travellers are needed to secure the station. Once the rest of the force arrives they can move up but not until. He has received word that increasing numbers of Pokoss are advancing southeast but the defenders are confident that so long as they have sufficient ammunition the attacks will be stopped.

Ensuring the flow of ammunition is one reason the station must be secured; security service SUVs are shuttling ammunition to the line as soon as it is unloaded from the trucks it arrived on. Liron is worried about what will happen after nightfall. Up until now the Pokoss have rarely been active at night but their behaviour has changed so nothing is impossible. He comments that there are rumours wounded Pokoss have been eaten by their fellows. This is something that has never previously been observed.

The first Pokoss incursions at TS7 begin a little before nightfall. Individuals and small groups have managed to bypass the defensive positions along the ridge and are converging on the centre of activity. If the Travellers are alert and diligent they have a chance to spot the first assailants as they close in with an Average (8+) Recon check. If they are not so diligent, the rangers will notice and engage but Sergeant Liron will want to know why his main defensive asset is not functioning properly.

At first, the attacks will be a bit of a turkey-shoot. There is a good, wide field of fire around the installation and plenty of high places to shoot from. This element of the defence could be abstracted with an ECEI check or played out as a series of intermittent encounters with Pokoss moving in ones and twos. The latter approach makes a useful 'tutorial' for the Travellers, allowing them to figure out how to deal with the creatures and perhaps gather specimens for research.

It should be obvious that the base personnel are reasonably safe if they stay up high and shoot the Pokoss from a distance. However, if the defensive line is to be kept supplied, trucks must be unloaded and SUVs filled. The Travellers may wish to consider whether they should create defensive measures for the munitions crews or curtail their activities overnight, when the Pokoss are more difficult to spot.

As sundown approaches there is a sudden rush of activity from an unexpected direction. A veritable mob of Pokoss is rushing towards the station. The initial engagement can be modelled as a combat between a platoon-sized force of Pokoss using an Aggressive Close Assault tactic. One round of combat should be resolved without the Pokoss inflicting any casualties, as they are charging across the fields onto the waiting guns of the defenders. After this, resolution can continue using the system in *Mercenaries in the Far Future* or the action can move to personal combat at the Referee's discretion.

However this assault is resolved, the Travellers will have to make decisions. Should they pull the munitions crews back into a building or defend them as they work? Anyone downed by the Pokoss will be torn apart and eaten, which may shake the morale of the defenders. Indeed, it may be difficult to get anyone to go outside once they have seen a Pokoss feeding frenzy. Sergeant Liron is horrified at this turn of events – he has never seen anything like it in a long career fighting the Pokoss.

There will be repeated attacks during the night, occurring intermittently at random intervals. Most are small; lone Pokoss or a handful of them but there will be some platoon-sized incursions from time-to-time. The station has a reasonable set of lights as it was intended to handle trucks at night but they do not illuminate much of the surrounding area. Travellers using thermal sensors encounter an additional problem. During their approach the Pokoss are moving quite slowly. Their body temperature is little different to that of their surroundings, so they are hard to spot. When one attacks or begins a charge its body temperature soars, creating the illusion of blazing giant insects suddenly appearing and hurling themselves at the station.

The fight could play out in a variety of ways depending on what the Travellers do. Combat against Pokoss outside the illuminated area suffers DM-2 due to the darkness and their partial invisibility to thermal sensors. The simplest option is to put a significant force on the ground covering the munitions party and others in high locations, passing warnings of Pokoss entering the lit area and engaging from a distance whenever possible. This creates a layered defence where the attackers are thinned if they are not stopped and any 'leakers' are dealt with by the ground force. Alternatively the Travellers might mount a more aggressive defence at ground level.

Either way, if the Travellers can keep the Pokoss from becoming established in the station they can ride out the attacks without too much difficulty. The situation will become more complex if some Pokoss get inside the buildings undetected or an incursion is not eliminated before some members go out of sight among the trucks and buildings. These will need to be hunted down or they will become a threat to anyone nearby.

Movements in the Dark

The fight goes on intermittently for several hours, during which time worrying signals come in from the defensive line. Some positions have been breached, although they are mostly retaken in counterattacks. Others have gone silent, necessitating a response that thins the line elsewhere. These too are retaken but always at a cost. It is not possible to know how many Pokoss have slipped through before the line is re-established and many defenders are becoming nervous.

Not all of the 'silent' positions were overrun. In some cases the defenders have chosen to retreat before the line collapses, leaving others to act as an involuntary rearguard. The Travellers are unlikely to be aware of this, nor that some of the retreating defenders are approaching the station on foot. Thermal sensors will make them easy to identify but there is still a chance that someone may open fire without checking their target.

The retreaters may also come under attack and use their weapons, which could potentially draw a mistaken response from the Travellers or their allies. These are the sort of people willing to abandon their positions without telling anyone, leaving comrades in the lurch, so are not likely to be choosy about targets when defending themselves. They may well shoot towards the station at a suspected Pokoss and hit a defender.

This creates a potentially dangerous situation and even if there is no friendly fire incident the retreaters will need covering fire if they are to reach safety. If they can be conveyed in, the Travellers may try to get information out of them but the retreaters have reasons not to tell the truth. Some may genuinely believe the defensive line has collapsed or been told this is so and gone along with the general retreat. Others are deliberately lying to cover the fact they bugged out and left a hole in the line. Likewise, some may be amenable to joining the defence of the station but the majority will push for an evacuation all the way back to Aldia City; given the slightest chance they will commandeer vehicles and make good their escape.

The Travellers will have to decide how best to deal with this. Allowing retreaters to go on their way is dangerous as each group will want transport and there are a limited number of trucks and SUVs. Persuading some to join the defence and others to wait until there is a truckload could work but this relies on cooperation. Those who do agree to join the defence may be a liability, jumping at shadows and firing indiscriminately. Others may desert their posts a second time, sneaking off to commandeer a vehicle at the first opportunity. Few are bad people, just scared, but some may be willing to use force.

Meanwhile, if there is still radio contact with the defenders, the Travellers hear of a bad situation getting worse. The line is getting thinner and thinner as positions are retaken and defenders assigned, and it is obvious that a retreat is going to be necessary. This is a difficult undertaking, with inexperienced personnel retiring across open ground with enemies behind as well as in front of them. There is no viable alternative, however. The defence line commanders do their best to set up an orderly retreat, with the ends of the line moving back first and the defence as a whole falling in on the transit station in a concentric manner. The Travellers will be well aware that this is a risky endeavour but the alternative is positions being overrun one-by-one in the dark.

The Travellers may be able to come up with a way to help and if so the retreat may be more successful. However, they also have to secure the transit station against attack and prevent the original retreaters from stealing all the trucks. The worst-case scenario could occur because of the Travellers' heroic intentions. If they leave the station weakly guarded the most cowardly of the retreaters will depart in most of the transport, leaving too little for everyone else to get out. The only option in this case is to wait for reinforcements to arrive with sufficient transportation to evacuate the station... and since the station is weakly guarded it might be overrun whilst the Travellers are trying to help defenders fall back to it.

A successful strategy accepts that the retreating defenders will suffer casualties but things will be worse if the transit station is not secure for them to fall back to. Casualties could be minimised by advising the defenders to form large groups and move back in the manner of a 'roving pocket' in hostile territory. The line does not need to be abandoned all at once. Instead, the defenders can fight their way to rendezvous points and move one group at a time. The Pokoss are not making an intelligent assault on the line, after all, they are simply pushing towards where they think food can be found.

The Travellers might be able to advance a short distance into the hostile darkness to clear Pokoss from the retreat route of each group in turn, then convey them in. This will keep casualties down, although stragglers stand little chance. One way or another the Travellers will be joined by least some of the defenders. They should be able to deal with the nearest Pokoss in order to break contact cleanly and depart aboard a convoy of trucks. There is, however, another complication.

Bugout Boogie

As the Travellers and their allies prepare to evacuate the station, a commotion from the storage shed attracts the attention of everyone nearby. If there are people inside they will be heard shouting in alarm, firing guns and, in some cases, being torn apart and eaten alive by Pokoss who have burrowed into the storage sheds, attracted by the grain stored there, but humans are far more attractive.

At least a couple of dozen Pokoss are in the shed, with more moving along the tunnel. If unchecked they will begin bursting through the shed's many exits or climbing up its frame to get at anyone above them. Panicky gunfire from the militia poses an additional hazard, which might compound the situation more if stray shots take out lights or the battery array.

In the middle of this chaos, some of the defenders will try to seize trucks to escape. They are not going to wait until the trucks are full; they will simply jump in and drive away. The last of the ridgeline defenders are still entering the northwest side of the station as this unfolds. They are fighting a rearguard action against pursuing Pokoss, struggling to reach the 'safety' of a station that may be in the process of being overrun. The Travellers will have to solve these problems – secure the trucks, deal with Pokoss running amok in the station and marshal defenders for evacuation. If they are successful they will be able to escape in a relatively orderly fashion; if not they may end up trying to hold out in the wreckage of the station until relief arrives. This will be in just a few hours but that may seem a long, long time.



WHACK-A-BUG



After the Travellers leave Transit Station Seven, they are informed that the intended fallback line is unviable and they are to return to Aldia City. They will arrive at least a day or two ahead of the advancing Pokoss, with time to set up defensive positions. At least, this is the plan. When the Travellers reach the city they are immediately called to a meeting with Kildaire, who is understandably concerned about the situation.

The collapse of the defensive line to the northwest has finally stirred the local population to start evacuating. No longer struggling to fill trains, the authorities now risk being overwhelmed by people demanding a place on one. The security service is overstretched and there are rumours that some people may be planning to seize a train or take over the rail hub. There are also problems with armed groups acting as middlemen for people trying to get passage on a train.

Kildaire seems more concerned with profiteering and internal security than the Pokoss advancing on the city. This is a correct impression and the result of a common failing in those finding themselves out of their depth. Kildaire is demoralised and dismayed by the failure to hold the defensive line and does not know how to deal with that in a military context. He does know how to pass blame to someone else and is experienced in internal matters, so he focuses on local problems he can deal with at the expense of the big picture. He will take any mention of this as criticism and become defensive. If the Travellers push too far they will earn his quiet enmity. He is not a bad person in the sense of meaning harm but is adept at derailing the schemes of those he dislikes in order to make them look bad. In the present situation this could be life-threatening.

In short, if the Travellers seem critical of Kildaire he will see them as a threat to his career and he is the sort to be blinded by that even when the Travellers are trying to fix a much more widespread and serious problem. If the Travellers are diplomatic they may be able to work around his bias but at the heart of the issue is the fact that Kildaire's only idea was to stop the Pokoss short of the city and it is not his fault it failed. This translates to a fixation that someone else is responsible for stopping the Pokoss. If the Travellers look willing to try, Kildaire will be quite happy to let them – and make sure they get the blame for any failures or unnecessary casualties.

At present, undisciplined militia groups are scattered throughout the city, many ignoring requests to communicate or cooperate with the defensive plan – such as it is. Others, mostly those with a security service liaison, are deployed according to plan. This is not sophisticated but potentially workable.

Each district has a militia contingent assigned as a static defence force – static in the sense that it does not move out of its assigned district. In addition to this, there is a 'fire brigade' of security service personnel on call to assist with problems that occur within the city. Kildaire is thinking in terms of humans but this measure will work with Pokoss too. The primary defence of the city will be made by a line of militia groups deployed northeast of the city. They are unimaginatively set up as an attempt at a solid line, with their slight strength deployed evenly. Kildaire wants the mercenaries to join this defence and secretly hopes they will just go quietly and win the fight. There are also contingents guarding the rail hub, the administrative annex and the far end of the viaduct.

Preparations

The Travellers can contribute usefully to the preparations if they have a mind to. The present setup is inflexible and prone to collapse if the line is breached at any point. Ironically, the way Kildaire has arranged the city's internal security is a better approach to the forward defence but he has not thought to try it – he is still thinking like a security chief and ignoring the military problem.

Rather than a thin static line, a much better approach to the defence would be mutually supporting strongpoints with a mobile reserve. The former could be created from vehicles and shovelled earth, or make use of natural features such as the occasional low hill. This approach leaves gaps through which Pokoss could wander but the strongpoints themselves will attract the hungry creatures. 'Leakers' can be dealt with by mobile forces, perhaps in vehicles, or destroyed when they reach the city's militia.

Kildaire will not interfere in such a reorganisation of the defences, although the Travellers will have to sell the idea to those involved. A line of defence feels more

reassuring than a set of outposts that could be cut off, so much depends on the Travellers' ability to convince personnel they will not be abandoned. A professional-looking mercenary unit will have an easier time of this than a band of armed yahoos, so appearance will be as important as reputation.

If the Travellers have other ideas they can implement them over the next day or so. Obtaining cooperation from more of the militia is a good option, requiring meetings that should be played rather than resolved as a check. Militia leaders will, on the whole, respond well to being made to feel important. Some will not cooperate at all – they have their own agendas, good and bad. Others will not respond well to being ordered or expected to take actions that were not their own idea but could be manoeuvred into cooperation. It will be obvious, however, that the militia is of limited value and cannot be expected to take grave risks or hold positions under severe threat.

After two days, the first Pokoss will start to reach the outer defences. By then, several thousand people will have been evacuated on trains. Most of the remainder are crowded into areas J and K, and the eastern ends of D and H. Some are still refusing to leave their homes in the rest of the city but if the Travellers think of it they could save a lot of lives by concentrating defences around the main populated areas.

The Travellers should be encouraged to hold a planning session and think about how the coming battle might develop. They have a clearer idea than before about how the Pokoss behave and may be able to predict some movements. When the city's outer defences are first attacked, the Referee should note the City State Index (CSI). Its starting value is largely determined by the Travellers' preparations before the fighting begins. Setbacks will reduce the CSI, with consequences noted below.

City State Index (CSI)

CSI	Modifier	Consequences	Max. Aggression Level
12+	+3	Defenders are confident and citizens orderly. Obviously necessary instructions will be obeyed, although citizens will feel too safe to accept much inconvenience.	Reckless
11–10	+2	An air of apprehension covers the city, countered by a certain level of denial. Situation is otherwise as CSI 12+.	Aggressive
9–8	+1	Defenders are concerned but determined. Citizens are nervous and will be easier to convince they need to follow instructions.	Aggressive
7–6	0	Leaders (such as Kildaire) demand greater efforts. Defenders are nervous. Citizens are scared and angry. There is small-scale looting and disturbances along with demands for more protection and transport out of the city.	Bold
5–4	0	An atmosphere of impending terror grips the city. Tempers are frayed and rioting breaks out in some areas. Attempts are made to seize control of the rail hub or commandeer trains.	Bold
3	-1	Leaders start making dire threats if defenders do not start winning. Some people try to force their way into the administrative annex. Panicked groups try to seize transportation, weaponry or supplies for their own use.	Cautious
2	-2	The defence has mostly broken down. Most groups are ignoring orders and trying to hole up somewhere defensible or reach a place of safety. Persuading a group to carry out a mission or leave their holdout will be difficult and perhaps dangerous.	Cautious
1	-3	The defence has all but collapsed. Kildaire calls for evacuation by grav vehicle, taking a favoured few with them. The city is a free-for-all with armed groups trying to grab what they can and escape. Fires rage out of control in some areas.	Timid
0	-4	The city has fallen to the Pokoss. The last pockets of resistance are overrun one-by-one.	Timid

The starting value for CSI if the Travellers do nothing is 7. Reorganising the defensive line as noted above or in some other effective manner is worth +1 to +3 depending on how well the Travellers implement their plan. Co-opting a significant number of militia leaders and ensuring good communication with them is worth +1 to +2. Concentrating the population where they can be more effectively protected is worth +2. A good deployment of the Travellers' force is worth +1 or perhaps +2 if it is built into a good plan. The Travellers might come up with other options, which will typically gain them +1 to CSI. There is only so much time and materials to work with, so the Travellers will not be able to create Fortress Aldia. A credible effort will result in CSI 13 or so.

The table gives a general indication of the conditions prevailing within the city and also a DM to be applied to CBAS checks by the defenders as well as tasks by the Travellers. For example, ordering a militia group to make a sweep of its neighbourhood during CSI 12+ conditions is relatively easy compared to convincing one to stand and fight at CSI 2. The maximum aggression level is the degree of aggressiveness defenders – other than the Travellers' own unit – are willing to display. Initially, the (over) confident militia will pile in regardless but as things get worse they become increasingly reluctant to take risks. This could eventually lead to a situation where a force dare not take the decisive action it needs to survive.

Level of Pokoss Threat

2D	Level of Threat	DM	Pokoss Group Size
2–	Trivial. Occasional small bands of Pokoss. Apply DM-2 on next threat level check.	+4	Single creature
3–4	Minor. Many small bands of Pokoss. Apply DM-1 on next threat level check	+2	Section
5–6	Low. Many small and occasional large bands of Pokoss.	+1	Reinforced Section
7	Significant. Frequent small and large attacks. In addition, an Event occurs.	0	Platoon
8–9	Heavy. Frequent large attacks.	-1	Reinforced Platoon
10–11	Extremely Heavy. Near-constant large-scale attacks. Apply DM+1 on next threat level check.	-2	Company
12+	Overwhelming. Constant assaults by a veritable horde of Pokoss. Apply DM+2 on next threat level check.	-4	Battalion

The DM is applied to CBAS and combat resolution checks and morale checks for the defending militia.

FIRST INCURSIONS

The first incursions begin a little after daybreak; a few Pokoss at a time approaching defensive positions and not be hard for a determined force to repel. There is a chance for complete disaster nevertheless. The outcome of this initial skirmish is determined by fighting a round of combat between the defenders (represented by a militia unit unless the Travellers have put their own people at the point of contact) and a platoon-equivalent of Pokoss. The Pokoss will use an Aggressive Close Assault tactic. The defenders' default option will be Static Defence, probably at a Bold level of aggression.

The Travellers can adjust tactics and the level of aggression they are employed with. As the situation deteriorates, defenders not part of the Travellers' own unit will become increasingly unwilling to take risks and may abandon positions in the face of slight opposition. Initially, however, the Travellers can conduct the defence at their discretion. They might decide not to mount a defence at all but to counterattack the advancing Pokoss or skirmish with them rather than holding positions. The militia are not up to this sort of mobile operation but skilled mercenaries should have no problem fending off the initial attacks.

MOUNTING PRESSURE

It will become apparent that there are a great many Pokoss advancing on the city – a truly staggering number in fact. There is no pattern or strategy to their movements; they are hungry and marching towards a food source as quickly as they can. The initial defence takes place over four two-hour segments, during which the severity of pressure will vary. For each two-hour slot the Referee should roll 2D to determine the level of threat, which will be apparent to the Travellers. They can adjust tactics accordingly. The outcome of combat during this segment is determined by a representative combat between a Pokoss force and a

militia company. This gives a general indication of how things go all along the line.

Note that this resolution assumes the Travellers' unit is helping out or being held in reserve. What happens if it is committed to action is detailed on page 30.

The outcome of each combat phase will affect the overall status of the city as well as the forces involved. The Referee need not keep track of casualties suffered by the militia – the CSI value takes sufficient account of that. Pokoss casualties are likewise not relevant.

City Defence Combat Phase Outcome

2D + DMs	Outcome	CSI Alteration
0 or less	Rout: The force is totally defeated, suffering heavy casualties and a collapse of fighting power. This fight is lost and another attempt cannot be made without reinforcements, reorganisation and a period of recuperation.	The defensive line collapses, with heavy casualties in the confused retreat. CIS -4.
1–2	Defeat: The force is defeated and must abandon the objective or fall back to a safe rally point. Another attempt can be made almost immediately but without a chance to regroup and recover from the defeat any subsequent attempts are made with DM-2, increased by an additional -2 for every failed attempt after the first.	The defensive line must be abandoned but a retreat in good order is possible. CIS -2.
3–5	Setback: The force suffers a setback, losing some ground or taking casualties. DM-1 is applied to further combat resolution checks. This DM is cumulative.	The defensive line is compromised but partially still holds. The situation can be restored with a counterattack next segment, which must produce a result of Advance or better. Until this is achieved, DM-2 applies to all combat resolution checks on the defensive line. CSI -1 each segment.
6–8	Deadlock: The fight is deadlocked. No changes occur this phase.	The defensive line is heavily pressed and casualties are being suffered. CSI -1.
9–11	Advance: The force advances its position, perhaps literally or in some other way, such as the enemy becoming demoralised. DM+1 is applied to further combat resolution checks. This DM is cumulative.	The defensive line holds and some stubborn holdout Pokoss are cleared from their proximity to the defences. CSI +0.
12–14	Victory: The force has gained an obvious advantage that causes the enemy to break off, surrender or otherwise quit the fight. Pockets of resistance may remain and it is possible that not all objectives have been completely achieved.	The attacking force is driven back a short distance from around the defensive positions. DM+2 applies on combat resolution and CBAS checks next segment. CSI +0.
15+	Total Victory: The force has overrun or wiped out the enemy.	The current Pokoss are annihilated, giving the defenders time to take a breather. DM+2 applies on combat resolution and CBAS checks next segment and CSI +1.

EVENTS

Four events will occur during the fight for Aldia City. These should be implemented in order. On average, all four events will occur during the first 16 hours of the battle but longer or shorter periods are possible.

Event 1: Distress Call

The city's defenders receive a distress call on a civilian emergency channel. The call comes from a party of scientists-for-hire who were operating southwest of the city. They are unlikely to convey this information but will keep calling for help until overrun. The scientists are only about two hours' drive by ground vehicle; minutes if a grav vehicle is available. They say their own vehicles have been disabled and they are under attack. Gunfire – a mix of automatic weapons and civilian types – can be heard on the channel.

The city's authorities do nothing about this, although they make reassuring noises and say they will send a rescue as soon as possible. If the Travellers do not launch a mission of their own they will eventually hear the scientific party go off the air. The scientists are desperate enough to admit they know why the Pokoss are attacking and that they have important information to trade for a rescue. If the Travellers still ignore them, they will lose this source of information.

A rescue party arrives too late, in any event. The scientists had two ground vehicles. One has obviously suffered wheel damage from a hole encountered at speed and the other seems to have run into it. The vehicles have been breached by Pokoss and the party of scientists and bodyguards were overrun and eaten. However, their research was not deemed edible by the Pokoss and can be recovered from portacoms and data slugs. The Pokoss moved on after this feast, although there may be a few nearby. The Travellers may also infer there are Pokoss threatening the city from this direction.

Event 2: Fire

Reports arrive of a major conflagration in area L. There are a few buildings on fire here and there but this is much more serious. If the Travellers ignore the problem the local militia and firefighters will do their best but the fire will gradually spread within area L. The roads at its boundaries are sufficient to prevent other areas being affected, at least for now. Bringing the fire under control requires a success Operation (6+ on the Operation Resolution table, page 73 of *Mercenary Book*

1: Mercenaries in the Far Future). This task requires a platoon-sized unit. DM-4 applies to any attempt to bring the fire under control with a smaller force and DM+2 for each size class the force is larger.

In the segment where this event takes place and every segment thereafter until the fire is brought under control, CSI is reduced by -1.

Event 3: Pokoss on the Streets!

Significant numbers of Pokoss are approaching the city from the south. They are moving in small groups at present but greater numbers are following. Already some have infiltrated the city. This is mostly in areas K-M (if L is still on fire, at least that will keep the Pokoss out!) but some are spotted in other areas. It is not clear how they have managed to penetrate so deeply. When this event occurs, CSI drops immediately by -3 if it is currently 7+. If it is 6 or lower already, CSI drops by -1.

Even if CSI is still fairly high, this event sends a wave of fear through people waiting to move to the rail hub. Vehicles are going back and forth as quickly as possible but the transfer process is slowed by a need to keep order among the frightened population and mounting interference of Pokoss from north and south.

Event 4: Breakdown of Order

Throughout the battle, Kildaire and his staff have remained safe in the administrative annex. Access is limited to the railway and the mesa sufficiently steep that the Pokoss rarely try to climb it. Kildaire is protected by some of his own security people and a detachment of Waystation personnel. These could perhaps make a difference in the fighting below but Kildaire is holding them back to secure the vital administrative annex. He has a point, in that the annex is important to coordinating the defence, but Kildaire is neglecting that in favour of trying to run an orderly evacuation.

For various reasons, an armed party has decided to storm the funicular railway and force entry into the administrative annex. Some are convinced they will not be denied entry, whilst others are already dead-set on fighting their way in. The security personnel at the annex are reluctant to fire on their own people, allowing the mob to scramble up the rail line and start trying to force the doors. Kildaire demands the Travellers solve this problem for him.

If the Travellers intervene, they might manage to de-escalate the situation. If not, fighting breaks out. There are a few hundred people in the mob but most retire as soon as shooting starts. The remainder might get into the annex. This can be resolved by fighting a round of combat between a platoon-sized militia force and the Waystation security detachment leading the defence. There are more combatants involved than this but large and confused actions can often be abstracted using key participants. If the Travellers send troops and are willing to fight the mob, their own actions are resolved

separately to the defenders – it is entirely possible the mob will be overrunning the annex entrance even as the Travellers' force routs them from the rear.

This event reduces CSI by -1 even if the attempt is unsuccessful. CSI is reduced by a further -D3 if fighting takes place inside the annex. If the mob wins a clear victory they will be in control of the administrative and communications systems and Kildaire will likely be dead. A more probable outcome is some of the mob holding out in the annex and causing massive disruption.



THE EVACUATION ROAD

Some of the city's population is assembled at the rail hub, which is adequately defended. However, many more are still in the city. They are being shuttled along the rail terminus as quickly as possible but this is a big job. The road has to be kept open, which at first is not too difficult. If the Travellers do not think to prepare a defence, the default option is inefficient. Kildaire simply positions militia and a few security people along the road, creating a thin string of defenders.

There are better options if the Travellers think to try something. The road itself cannot be harmed by Pokoss, so it does not have to be defended – the ends do, and any vehicles or parties moving on foot, but not the road. It might be a better use of available forces to fight convoys through each time, especially since resistance is very slight at first. A handful of armed people in a vehicle can effectively sweep the road ahead of a convoy. Alternatively, a system of defended posts to observe the road and a mobile response force would also work.

Each segment the Referee should determine the level of threat to the evacuation road. DM-4 applies so long as the main defence line holds but DM+2 is applied once Pokoss begin pushing up from the south. If the road is defended at all, the effectiveness of this defence is determined by fighting a round of representative combat between a militia group and a Pokoss band. DM-2 applies to the resolution if the 'thin line' defence has not been replaced by something better.

If the defenders win even a marginal victory, the road remains open. If they lose, the road is cut and casualties are taken. CSI is reduced by -1 and is in addition temporarily reduced by -D3 more until the road is cleared. This requires a plan from the Travellers and a victory in a representative combat between whatever force is sent to clear the road and a Pokoss group of a size determined by the threat level.

Note that there is just about time to divert mercenaries from the defence line to the road or back the other way but troops anywhere in the city except areas J or K could not make it to the road in time to deal with the threat. They could clear the road next segment, however. If the mercenaries are deployed they resolve their actions separately to the local defenders, giving an extra chance to hold the road open.

For example, the Referee determines a very high level of threat to the road this segment. The Travellers detach a section from the defence line to assist. These personnel arrive in time to defend the road and resolve their actions separately to the locals. Unfortunately they fail and vehicles are overrun. CSI drops by -1 and is also reduced a further -D3 until the Travellers clear the road with a counterattack. Once the road is open, CSI recovers by this amount but the shock of its loss will have brought the defence a step closer to final collapse.

ACTIONS BY THE MERCENARIES

There is a lot going on in Aldia City and the Travellers will not experience all of it first-hand. They will have a general impression of things getting worse and of course the Referee can create additional incidents to illustrate this or what arises from the Travellers' actions.

The mercenary force is the key to the city's survival, providing it is well handled. The Travellers can split off elements of their force or keep it concentrated as they see fit but people and equipment cannot be in two places at once. A sub-unit deployed to one part of the city may find it difficult to move to another district quickly enough to make a difference. There are people panicking, crashed vehicles, buildings on fire, barricades set up by local defence groups and all manner of other impediments. The Travellers might even encounter armed parties trying to take control of an area to loot it or extort money from those passing through.

Whenever the Travellers commit all or part of their force, they should resolve its actions as an Operation or a Combat depending on circumstances. A platoon detached as firefighters will still be capable of self-defence but they cannot contribute to the defence of a different district in the same two-hour segment. For the most part the Travellers will be able to do little other than try to stabilise a deteriorating situation but an Impressive Success (11+ on the Operation Resolution table) may remove a problem or rally support sufficiently to be worth CSI +1. This should not be given out lightly, however. Impressively solving a trivial problem will not help the overall situation much.

FIRE AND FLOOD

In all probability the situation will deteriorate over time without the Referee imposing any additional events but at some point it will become desirable to move to the adventure's finale. Once all four scripted events have occurred, it is likely that the Travellers are about 16 hours (eight two-hour segments) into the defence.

Area C, universally referred to as Logtown, contains stockpiles of sawn and unprocessed wood. Fire prevention measures are normally good but in the chaos a major fire has started in a solvent storage area. Spreading quickly, it is far beyond the capabilities of the few available firefighters or volunteer civilians. There are significant firebreaks in the form of lakes, canals and roads around the industrial zone but there is still a chance the fire could spread to other parts of the city.

The authorities have done little more than direct all available equipment and personnel to the most threatened areas. They have decided on a policy of containment rather than suppression, which is probably the only option at this point. However, Pokoss have been sighted within the city that further complicates matters. These reports are as yet unconfirmed and may be the result of panic. Kildaire orders the Travellers to find out what is going on and determine if there is any way to put the fire out. If not, they are to ensure it does not spread to the rest of the city. North or south would be serious but survivable but if the fire moves west it will engulf the goods hub. Moving east, it will eventually overrun the marshalling areas for people moving to the rail hub and onto evacuation trains.

FIGHTING THE FIRE

The fire is out of control and beyond the available means to combat it. However, it can be contained. Concentrating firefighting equipment and personnel at the eastern and western ends of area C should be sufficient to keep the fire from spreading in the critical directions. The artificial lake between areas C, G and H is a natural barrier, along with the canals around it and the road along the south edge of area C is wide enough to act as a firebreak. A simple instruction to place the firefighting teams where they can do the most good will suffice to contain the problem, although the Travellers may come up with something clever.

The situation draws attention to the artificial lake and sooner or later someone will realise that the water level is visibly dropping. Suddenly, a great disturbance occurs and the water level plunges even further. The Travellers may not initially realise it but the bottom of the lake has collapsed into a tunnel burrowed by Pokoss. There is nothing deliberate about that; they are just trying to get into the city and feed. Hundreds of Pokoss in the tunnel are drowned and a few bodies float up in the lake. The water from the lake and surrounding canals continues to leak into the tunnel but it is largely blocked by Pokoss bodies. If the Travellers have a drone or similar source of remote reconnaissance data they may be able to find the tunnel's beginning. It lies a few hundred metres south of the mesa, in a natural cave formation.

FIGHTING THE POKOSS

There are Pokoss in all parts of the city now. Some have wandered in above ground but most are coming through caves from the south and burrowing up through lawns and open spaces. Pressure from the north is unrelenting and it may be that the Travellers no longer see the point of holding the line. If they pull back to the city they will have additional forces to work with but there will be no barrier to the Pokoss entering from the north or reaching the evacuation road from that direction.

There are 14 districts within the city, although of these district C (Logtown) is heavily on fire and mostly uninhabitable by humans or Pokoss. Each intact district can be assumed to have an intrinsic defence strength of 1, representing holdouts and local militia who refuse to leave. Other assets available to the Travellers can be deployed as they see fit, represented by a floating DM pool, applied to attempts to defend a given district.

The Travellers must allocate their forces. Militia scraped together from the city's defenders is worth a total of +2. Each of the firefighting groups trying to contain the blaze in Logtown is worth +1 but will not be available to deal with the fire. If the Travellers want to pull in the defence line, they can put together personnel totalling another +4 but the city will face additional attacks. Their own mercenary unit is treated separately to these forces.

The timing of the adventure now moves to one-hour segments. In each segment, the Travellers must decide where to allocate their forces and the Referee will determine which areas are under heavy attack. It can be assumed that there are incursions everywhere but local defences are sufficient to contain them. Each segment, one or more districts will be subject to a more significant attack. If the Travellers have established communications with local militia or can monitor the city they will know ahead of time which areas are under heavy threat, although they may not be able to predict how serious the attack will be. If they do not have communications in place the Travellers will have to guess.

If the defence line is still holding, there will be no attacks from the northern direction. If it is not, there will always be an attack from the north. Infiltration from the south, and from underground, may or may not take place in any given segment. At the beginning of each one-hour segment, the Referee should determine the location and strength of attacks using the Direction and Location of Attacks tables.

Direction of Attacks

1D	North	South	Underground
1	Yes	No	Yes
2	Yes	Yes	No
3	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	No	No
5	Yes	No	Yes
6	Yes	Yes	No

Location of Attacks

1D	North	South	Underground
1	I	L	A
2	J	M	B
3	G	K	D
4	I	D	H
5	N	N	A
6	H	L	A

When an attack occurs, the assigned forces will attempt to resist it. The chance to do so is Average (8+) with a DM equal to the value of forces assigned to the area. If this is just the local militia, DM+1 applies. If the Travellers have assigned additional forces, their DM may be applied as well. If an area is overrun, its militia force is assumed to be wiped out but assigned forces may fight their way free. Any force in an overrun area has its DM reduced by -1 and once DM+0 is reached the force is no longer any use as a combat unit. In addition, whenever an area is overrun the CSI is reduced by -1. If area A is lost CSI is reduced by -2.

For example, the Travellers have scraped together some militia with a total value of +3 and assign them as a single unit. They are in Area D when it is heavily attacked and join with the local forces to provide DM+4. This force should be able to make an Average (8+) check but it is failed; the area is overrun and local militia are wiped out. The diminished mobile force now has DM+2 available to it and pulls back to area D.

Militia and Mercenary Actions

Each segment, the militia pool and the Travellers' mercenaries can be assigned a single task. In addition, a unit may move into any adjacent district of the city providing it is accessible. An area that is heavily on fire is considered impassable.

Counterattack: Clearing an area of Pokoss requires a Difficult (10+) check using the force's DM. Defeat reduces the DM by -D3. If the Travellers' mercenary force is undertaking this action it is resolved differently. Fight a round of combat against a Pokoss force determined using the Level of Threat table. Victory clears that area, at which point some militia will drift in to try to hold it. A counterattack can only be made into an adjacent district or the one the unit currently occupies.

Dig In: A unit that does not move can fortify its position, gaining DM+2 if attacked in subsequent segments. DM +1 applies if the force is in the process of fortifying when attacked. If the force moves away and comes back it will need to dig in again.

Transit: A unit may move from any segment to any other providing it can trace a route through areas now overrun. If the unit is transiting through an area that is attacked it can join the defence and end its movement, adding its DM to the defence or attempt to push through to reach its intended destination. In this case the defence is resolved as normal without assistance from the moving force and it must fight a round of representative combat against Pokoss. Defeat reduces the force's DM by -1.

FIGHTING IT OUT

Each time an area is overrun, CSI is reduced by -1. Retaking a district improves CSI by +1. This will lead to a gradual fall in CSI until the defence collapses. Along the way, certain events will occur. Roll 1D every hour to determine the event; events can happen more than once.

SOLUTIONS

There is no winning this one by force of arms alone. Areas of the city will be overrun as time passes, eventually causing the defence to collapse. However, there are two possible ways the Travellers can survive. With other cities suffering similar attacks a response has been slow from the planetary administration but a train full of reinforcements is finally en route. The arrival time of this train is 2D hours after the beginning of Fire and Flood. If the Travellers are still alive at this time they will receive assistance from a scratch force of starport security personnel, rangers, Waystation security and even some volunteers from a Megusard Corporate trade ship that happened to be in port.

Events

1D	Event
1	The Logtown fire spreads. Roll 1D: Spread will be into H then J on 1–3; into G then I on 4–5 and into A then F on 6. If a firefighting team is present, the chance to prevent the spread is a straight Average (8+) check. The DM of any militia present can be added to this check. An area the fire spreads to becomes impassable and reduces CSI by -1.
2	Pokoss surge at the evacuation road. Determine threat level and resolve an additional attempt to defend the road.
3	Pokoss surge at the goods hub and begin gorging on the stored food. Area A is automatically overrun unless the Travellers defend and clear it. This requires winning a round of combat against a randomly determined threat level.
4	Panic at the transit hub. Order breaks down and large numbers of people try to crowd into trains or vehicles. CSI is reduced by -1.
5	A randomly determined district suffers an additional attack. Determine the area using the tables on page 32. Roll 1D: 1–2 North, 3–4 South, 5–6 Underground. This area suffers an attack at a randomly determined threat level.
6	No Event.

This force is capable of securing the rail hub and protecting the people there but little else. If the Travellers can get to the station – or their own vehicles – they will be able to get out of the disaster zone. They will still be paid providing they made a credible defence, although Kildaire will try to blame them for the fiasco. This is not a win but survival is sometimes the best possible outcome.

There is an alternative, which might just allow the defenders to hold enough of the city to be considered a win. This makes use of the research data obtained from the scientific party or put together by the Travellers themselves. The Pokoss are going after high-value food and are releasing pheromones that attract others. If they could be fooled into congregating in an area, perhaps they could be eliminated.

To make this work, the Travellers will need to feed quite a lot of Pokoss in the same place. One rather dramatic and destructive option is to allow them to overrun the food stocks in area A. The best food – large amounts of meat from nearby ranches – is in the most secure buildings that have not yet been breached. If the Pokoss get access they will release pheromones that will cause most of those in the city to drop what they are doing and rush to the goods hub. Mass destruction with fire or explosives will greatly diminish the threat to the city – although blowing up its central hub will leave the Travellers with some explaining to do.

It might be possible to do something similar outside the city, either by providing suitable food or somehow inducing a Pokoss to produce the right pheromones. The scientists' information might provide some clues about this. High-voltage electricity will be messy but it will work. The Travellers might see this for themselves if they are fighting in area A – Pokoss that stray into the electrical distribution centre get zapped and others rush in as if frenzied. If the Travellers can grab some Pokoss, take them clear of the city and electrocute them they will draw off a large segment of the attacking force. If the Referee is feeling generous, there might even be samples of the necessary pheromone among the gear salvaged from the science team.

It will also be necessary to eliminate the other large Pokoss group, which is trying to get into the city through the tunnels. One solution to this problem involves a satisfactorily large amount of explosives planted in the lake in area D. Blowing the bottom out of it will send an additional flood down through the caves and kill hundreds if not thousands of the creatures.

Playing out the Finale

The adventure can end in various ways, depending on the Travellers' actions. The default option is a stubborn defence ending in either a breakout or escape on the last train out of the blazing ruins or rescue by Waystation security personnel. However, there are

ways the Travellers can earn a more positive ending. If they make use of the scientists' data they should be permitted to come up with a suitable lure. Combining this with some means of eliminating the Pokoss will tip the balance. Depending on their armament the Travellers may lure the Pokoss into an artillery kill zone or somewhere the Travellers can use heavy weapons mounted on vehicles. Incendiaries and explosives will work and indeed the burning city itself could be a means of getting rid of the Pokoss.

In order to create a kill zone and drop the bottom out of the second artificial lake the Travellers will need to secure the area whilst they work. These self-imposed missions will create a dramatic finale to the adventure so should be played out rather than abstracted. It is recommended that the Travellers fight a round of combat with the mercenaries to see how the defence goes, then switch to personal roleplaying with the Referee applying pressure according to the outcome.

It is also possible that the Travellers will come up with some other solution. Their defence might be so skilful that they simply hold the city until relief arrives. The referee should be prepared to roll with whatever plan the Travellers come up with rather than pushing for a particular outcome. If all else fails, it may be possible to escape across the river. Pokoss do not like water.



CHARACTERS AND OPPOSITION

The Travellers will encounter opposition mainly from non-human sources, although there is always a chance for encounters with armed people. These might be troops fleeing a defeat and disinclined to stop and listen to a speech about why they should stand and fight, or a group determined to save a secure area, stash of equipment or transportation for themselves no matter who else needs it.

POKOSS

The primary opposition are named Pokoss. This appears to be a garbled version of an old Terran word meaning something like ‘spider-ant’, which is a good general description of the creatures. The majority are about two metres long, with a three-segmented body covered in scaly hide. The main body section has eight legs in pairs spaced more or less equally along it. The central pairs are purely for walking, whilst the front and rear pairs are longer and more robust. These are used for digging and sometimes manipulation of objects.

The head is small, with mandibles capable of biting, holding or digging. These are used as tools by the ‘general’ Pokoss, which appear to be a worker caste. Four eyes, covered by protective membranes, give good all-round vision. Two eyes point forward and are used for close-focus work while a larger pair are located on the sides of the head and equipped mainly for peripheral vision. All eyes are surrounded by vibration-sensitive membranes that serve as ears.

The rear section is small on the ‘general’ Pokoss. It consists of a short but powerful tail-like protrusion from the rear of the main body that supports a series of sacs that can be used to carry objects. The rear legs are able to manipulate an object in or out of the sacs, even on the move. Plant matter and other food is often carried when a Pokoss does not need the sacs for something else. This permits individuals to roam a large area, replenishing their food sacs as they encounter suitable vegetation or easy prey.

Although they appear insectoid, the Pokoss are closer to reptiles in their biology. They have lungs and a conventional circulatory system and are omnivorous. They are bradymetabolic, which means they have a low resting metabolic rate but are capable of increased activity. When in a resting or low-activity state, the

body temperature of a Pokoss is close to that of its surroundings, making thermal sensors ineffective. Metabolic rate increases at need, usually when attacking live prey but when gathering plant material the Pokoss operate in a leisurely manner, which raises their temperature only a little.

Operating at a higher metabolic level consumes energy quickly, so for the most part Pokoss are active in short bursts. When food is scarce they retreat to a lower energy level, slowly wandering around consuming any available food or stowing it in their sacs to take back to the community. However, in extreme conditions the community as a whole will shift to survival mode. Some individuals will be permitted to starve and then be eaten, or even eaten alive, fuelling others to find a new source of food. Individuals can also voluntarily expend their last reserves of energy in a final frantic burst of activity, sometimes dropping dead without any warning as they rush to complete a task.

In addition to the general Pokoss, which makes up the majority of the population, there are two other types. An obvious warrior caste exists, with enlarged bodies and more powerful mandibles. These have a longer and more pronounced tail, without carrying sacs. Instead the tail has poison glands and can whip about three metres in any direction. It is powerful enough to be painful without the toxin and is potentially lethal if skin is broken by the attack. There are also breeders, about the same size as the general caste but with a more prominent and larger tail/rear section. This contains sex organs and maturing eggs, which are laid after developing for a few weeks.

No other castes are involved in breeding but typically multiple breeders will pass genetic material back and forth among themselves and breeders are sometimes swapped between communities. It appears that all Pokoss hatch as members of the general caste. Most will spend their lives this way, as scouts, diggers, foragers and whatever else is needed by the community. All seem to have the ability to grow a breeder’s organs at any time or become a warrior if sufficient food is available. The mechanism for this is probably pheromone-based.

The Pokoss are not especially intelligent, although they can solve problems by trial and error then pass on knowledge to others; once a general Pokoss has learned how to perform a task, other members of its community will also be able to do so. The decision to bypass a problem or 'solve' it – which might mean attacking a settlement, building a dam almost any other activity – is made collectively based upon the community's perception of need and available resources. This makes the Pokoss predictable to those who have studied them.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
General or Breeder Pokoss	16	6m
SKILLS	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 2, Stealth 1, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Mandibles or Claws (2D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+4), Heightened Senses	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Eater	



The warrior caste is larger and more aggressive. In addition to mandibles and digging claws the warrior has a long, whip-like tail that delivers a stinging blow. If this penetrates armour and delivers any damage at all, the creature's poison is delivered into the target's bloodstream. This does an additional 1D damage immediately and causes disorientation. An intoxicated Traveller must make an Average (8+) END check or suffer a negative DM equal to the amount of toxin damage delivered to all actions for the next 2D minutes. Disorientation can be accompanied by panic or hallucinations, possibly resulting in wild firing and other detrimental actions.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Warrior Pokoss	24	8m
SKILLS	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 2, Stealth 1, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Mandibles or Claws (3D), Tail (1D + poison)	
TRAITS	Armour (+8), Heightened Senses	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Eater	

Pokoss in Combat

Pokoss are not difficult to kill with firearms and have no capability to attack at long range. However, they are stealthy and can hide well or sneak up on their victims. A still or slow-moving Pokoss is extremely hard to detect with thermal sensors, imposing DM-6 on all attempts to detect or track. They can creep slowly past thermal detectors and whilst not smart enough to do this deliberately, they use slow movements when hunting and may accidentally get past a sensor position. Once they go into attack mode the opposite occurs – Pokoss run hot, so to speak, granting DM+2 to track them with thermal sensors.

Individuals can spring up to twice their movement distance with a run or out to their normal movement distance from standing. This is a favoured attack mode. If possible the Pokoss will leap on a target from a

concealed position, knocking them down. Alternatively they will simply run into a target with similar effect. This is normally done by a general Pokoss, followed up by others or by warriors. Anyone in the path of such an attack will be knocked down unless they can make a Difficult (10+) STR or DEX check. A Pokoss standing over someone who has been knocked down gains DM+4 to attack them.

Getting up is not usually much of a problem unless a Pokoss is actively trying to keep a Traveller down. This is instinctive behaviour for them when on the hunt. The creature will bash with its legs and head, and bite with mandibles if the opportunity arises. Getting up requires an Average (8+) STR or DEX check with DM-1 for every Pokoss (to a maximum of six) trying to keep the Traveller down.



Pokoss as a Military Force

Pokoss cooperate with one another like smart insects. They have little concept of individual worth, although any Pokoss will fight for its life. When tackling a significant foe they tend to operate in groups of 5–10 centred on a warrior or perhaps at most two. General Pokoss will harry and attempt to hold a target whilst warriors finish them off. Their tactics are mostly based on ambushes or members of a group moving a short way off to make a charge or leap in the hope of knocking a target down. A group may flee if its warrior is downed and will usually scatter if it has taken 50% casualties and the warrior is out of action. General Pokoss will normally keep fighting as long as a nearby warrior is also doing so.

A band of Pokoss can be treated as a military force for large-scale action purposes. The typical band is a section sized force with the Close Assault trait but no ranged weaponry.

Pokoss Band

Characteristic	Value	DM
Force Name	Pokoss Band	—
Unit Size	Section	—
Unit Type	Infantry	—
Unit TL	0	-3
Mobility Type	Mounted	+2
Combat	7	0
Bombardment	0	—
Aerospace	0	—
Support	0	0
CEI or DEI	3	-3
Morale	6	0
Reputation	—	—

Larger forces can be modelled by looking at the number of bands or Pokoss present. CBAS and ECEI are unchanged; the force is simply treated as the relevant size when matched against the human defenders.

Pokoss Force Sizes

Number of Bands	Number of Pokoss	Treat As
1–2	5–15	Section(s)
3–4	15–35	Platoon(s)
10–15	50–100	Company
50–75	250–750	Battalion



AMEX KILDAIRE, COMMISSIONER OF ALDIA CITY'S SECURITY FORCE

GENDER		AGE	
Male		42	
TRAITS		SKILLS	
STR	7	INT	9
DEX	8	EDU	11
END	7	SOC	9
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3)	



Holding the grand title of ‘commissioner’, Amex Kildaire is young for his position. Like many local officials he is originally from Waystation, migrating to Paradise of EI as a career move at just the right time. Commissioner Kildaire is good at the parts of his job that get him promoted and is never shy of making sure others know how talented and important he is.

Kildaire has a solid record in the security service but has always been a corporate ladder-climber. As such he is quite willing to say anything to anyone if it furthers his agenda and will not tolerate being challenged. Over the years he has become adept at manipulating people and using his position to stay on top. His appraisal of the situation is accurate enough and his plans are competent but he always has a way to avoid blame for failure. He will defend ‘his’ security service against allegations of, for example, failing to do their duty and will usually find a way for the fault to lie with someone else.

SERGEANT OLYT LIRON, RANGER LEADER

GENDER		AGE	
Male		48	
TRAITS		SKILLS	
STR	9	INT	8
DEX	11	EDU	5
END	8	SOC	5
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3), Battle Rifle (3D+3)	



Olyt Liron is a long-serving member of the security service, who moved into the specialist anti-Pokoss role several years ago. He is aware that promotion is unlikely as he is not from Waystation but is content to protect the region from Pokoss. Liron is a common-sense leader and experienced in dealing with Pokoss but has no experience of military operations. He is smart enough to defer to the Travellers if they seem to know what they are doing.

HARDWARE

The hardware and equipment presented in this adventure is specific to the situation on Paradise of EI but similar items are available elsewhere under different designations.

Anti-Pokoss Armour

Most of the time, the security forces on Paradise of EI have to deal with human threats. A light bullet-resistant vest is generally deemed sufficient, with a flak jacket and helmet for serious situations. When dealing with Pokoss close up, however, specialist armour is desirable. This consists of a set of lower-leg and forearm protectors, which can be worn alone or with other armour such as a flak jacket. They are of a tough but flexible material, interlaced with metal strips to resist the crushing effects of a Pokoss bite. This armour is of little value against firearms (giving only Protection +1) but against a claw or mandible attack it is worth Protection +6. Since most attacks land on limbs, many users simply strap on the protectors over their clothing but a light, flexible slashproof coverall is used by the rangers, to which heavier limb protectors are added. If anti-Pokoss limb protection is used with other armour, the best protection is applied against any given type of attack.



Armour Type	Protection	TL	Rad	Kg	Cost	Required Skill
Anti-Pokoss Limb Protection	+6 (+1 vs firearms)	6	0	2	Cr100	None
Ranger Anti-Pokoss Armour	+8 (+2 vs firearms)	6	0	3	Cr250	None