

TRAVELLER

REACH ADVENTURE 5: THE BORDERLAND RUN



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

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INTRODUCTION

This adventure takes place in Borderland subsector of the Trojan Reach. It requires the Travellers to own or have access to a starship, though the adventure could be modified so the Travellers must escort their cargo rather than transporting it.

Other than the requirement for skills necessary to run a starship, almost any group of Travellers will be suitable for this adventure. The Borderland region can be dangerous, so combat skills and problem-solving abilities (such as being adept at dealing with bureaucracy or talking a way out of a bad situation) will be useful.

In *The Borderland Run* the Travellers are engaged to pick up a cargo from a remote outsystem world and convey it to the starport at the Aslan world of Tyokh; a simple enough delivery job, with the chance to engage in a little speculative trading along the way. However, there are those who do not want the cargo to be delivered... and the cargo agrees with them.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure begins on the world of Argona, in the Voidsedge Cluster between the Imperium and Aslan Hierate. There are many reasons why the Travellers might be given a reason to go there by the referee. Argona's starport sees a considerable volume of traffic and a great deal of trade is done there, so it is not unreasonable that someone would want to charter a ship to take them to Argona.

Whatever the reasons for being on Argona, the Travellers will be given their mission there, after which they are free to chart their own path to the final destination. This is not a flowcharted or 'railroaded' adventure. The Travellers are free to make their own decisions and the referee must adjudicate them. Additional encounters can be added, or the Travellers may find an entirely different path to the story's climax. In other words, this adventure dumps the Travellers into a situation and outlines what is happening around them; subsequent events are at the discretion of the referee.



BORDERLAND ALLIANCE

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

The following information is for the use of the referee. How much of it is made available to the Travellers, and in what manner, is for the referee to decide. Much of this data is commonly known or available through data terminals, info feeds to Travellers' comms, and so forth. The referee has the whole story; if the Travellers want accurate information they may have to search for it.

THE VOIDSEDGE CLUSTER

The Voidsedge Cluster is the only star cluster lying completely within Borderland subsector. The neighbouring Wildeman Cluster forms part of the region sometimes known as the Borderland, and some spacers also include the worlds lying between the Voidsedge Cluster and border of the Aslan Hierate. These are more commonly considered to be part of the Drinax Chain however.

The Voidsedge Cluster is bounded to trailing and rimward by the Great Rift. To coreward lies Imperial space and to spinward-rimward are Aslan holdings. The cluster is therefore of considerable strategic importance to both powers. However, it is also a long way from the main centres of power for both the Hierate and Imperium, and local polities exert enough influence to guide the fate of their nations.

The cluster was largely bypassed for colonisation by the Vilani Imperium and later the Third Imperium. It was difficult to get to and not en route to anywhere, so was given a cursory survey and more or less forgotten about. This neglect was compounded by the unusually high rate of misjumps experienced in the region, a phenomenon currently attributed to poor-quality fuel.

Some colonisation was undertaken, on a patchy and underfunded basis, and many of these colonies had a short or troubled history. By the 500s, the Voidsedge Cluster had become notoriously lawless, resisting sporadic attempts by both the Imperium and Hierate to bring it under control. In the end, it was the arrival of big business that brought stability to the Voidsedge Cluster. The General Development Corporation (GeDeCo) constructed several high-quality starports to facilitate trade, and deployed vessels to protect the ships that used them.

GeDeCo's influence in the region has waned since its heyday in the 800s, but it maintains interests on some worlds. GeDeCo also owns the orbital components of several starports, in part or in whole, and directly or through a subsidiary. The corporation is more interested in trade through the region than development of its local economy, though economic expansion has been a natural result of increased commerce.

The Voidsedge Cluster is occasionally patrolled by the Imperial Navy, and slightly more often a warship or task force from the Aslan Hierate will make a sweep. The usual reason given for these incursions is suppression of piracy but there is a political element as well. Often one power will feel the need to 'show the flag' just after the other has sent an impressive force through the cluster.

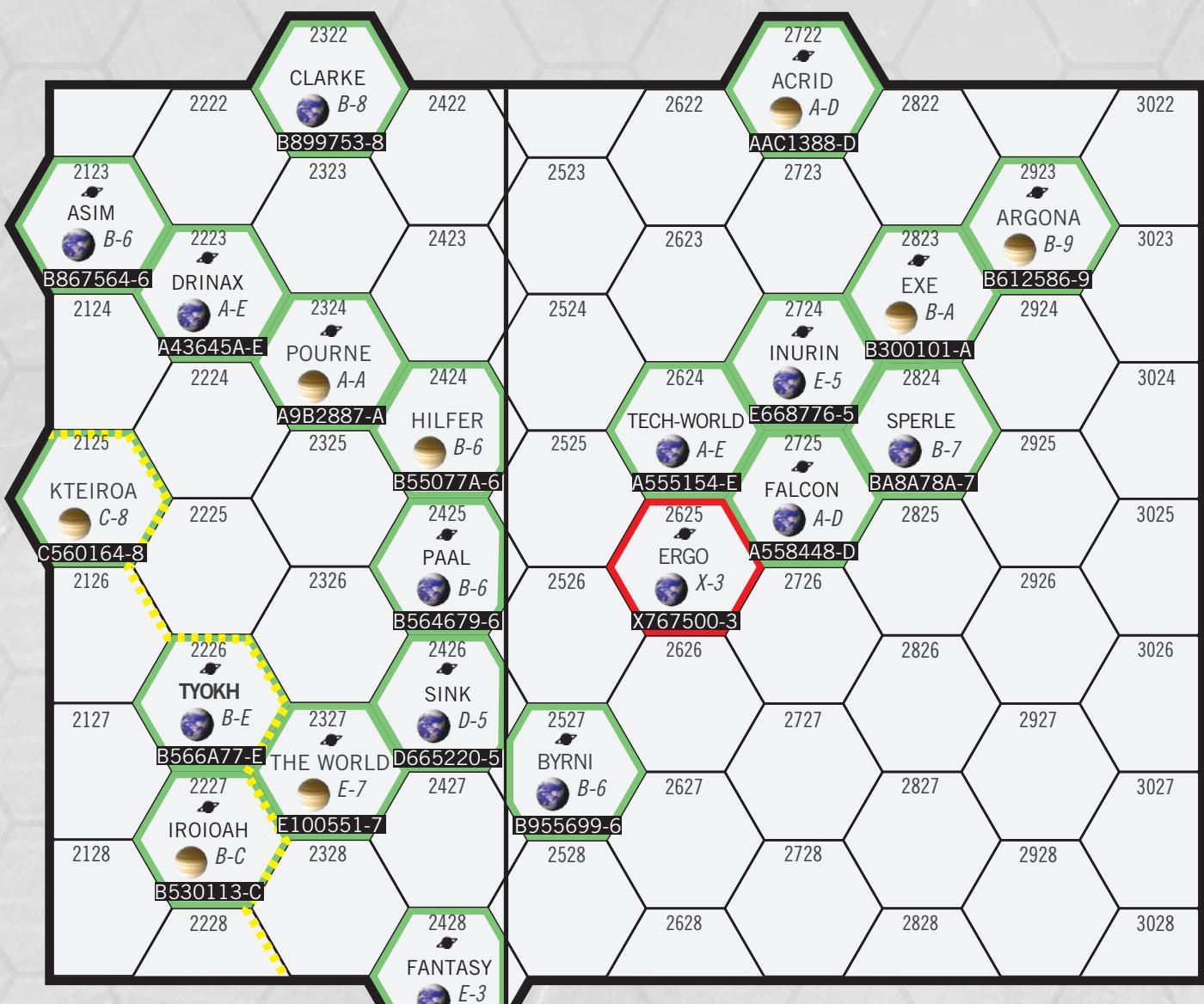
The Borderland Alliance is active within the Voidsedge Cluster. It is not a military alliance but a group of influential figures and organisations whose general aims coincide. The Borderland Alliance primarily wants to foster stability and prosperity in the region, though disagreements have hamstrung efforts to date. The present situation, triggered by the Arunisiir Incident, threatens local stability, so some elements of the alliance have decided to take action.

THE BORDERLAND RUN

The Borderland Run is a term used loosely by some and quite specifically by others. It refers to any trading voyage passing through the Borderlands, i.e. the Wildeman and Voidsedge clusters, though there are many who claim the only true Borderland Run is from Imperial space in Tobia sector to the Aslan Hierate, or vice versa. This usually implies a transit from Fist to Tyokh and back again.

The term is mainly used as shorthand, indicating that a vessel is operating in the Borderlands. It was once a badge of honour, however – making the Borderland Run was a dangerous undertaking and those who survived it on multiple occasions were near-heroes to other Travellers. The region has become far safer in recent times, but figures of speech from that era still remain in use. 'Ready for the Borderland Run' implies a well-equipped and alert status, whereas 'that was a Borderland Run' suggests a recent experience was a lot rougher than expected.

PARTIAL MAP OF TLAIOWWAHA & THE BORDERLAND SUBSECTORS



Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Gas Giants
Argona	2923		B612586-9	Ic Ni		G
Byrni	2527		B955699-6	Ag Ni		G
Ergo	2625		X767500-3	Ag Ni Lt	R	G
Exe	2823		B300101-A	Ni Va Lo		G
Falcon	2725		A558448-D	Ni Ht		G
Inurin	2724		E668776-5	Ag Ri Lt		G
Sperle	2824		BA8A78A-7	Ri Wa		
Tech-World	2624		A555154-E	Ni Lo Ht		

THE ARUNISIIR INCIDENT

Teeieahailaoa Hteleitoirl Aiyuwaisaltourlaeiuuya is a child of the lord of the *luwoi* clan. Given the difficulty of pronouncing Aslan names, most humans refer to him as Prince Hteleitoirl. This is not really accurate – a minor son of a clanlord is not the same thing as a prince in human feudal society, and the name Hteleitoirl is used more for linguistic convenience than concern for a correct title. However, the practice is acceptable; Aslan know their language is simply too awesome for non-Aslan to cope with, and are quite willing to make allowances that let them feel superior. Anyone who actually uses Hteleitoirl's full and proper name will receive at least some respect – but only if they do not mangle it too badly.

As a junior son, Hteleitoirl was expected to make a name for himself and find his own fortune rather than inherit his father's position, but he was always something of a favourite to his father. Prince Hteleitoirl took the usual *i hatei* route, setting out with a band of friends and followers. His target was Arunisiir, where he hoped to oust the weak *i hatei* figurehead-overlords and install his own dynamic and effective regime instead.

Hteleitoirl's ambitions proved rather bigger than his capabilities, though he made a credible attempt. Many of his followers perished in pitched battle with human mercenaries, and the collateral damage resulted in an incident that soured trade relations between clan *luwoi* and some of its partners within Borderland.

That was unfortunate but acceptable. However, the incident resulted in a collapsed deal which embarrassed the clan greatly.

The incident had consequences for other clans with interests in Borderland, and they reasonably enough blamed clan *luwoi*. Some went as far as threatening war, which the clan could not survive. To placate them and preserve his clan's honour – and indeed, its existence – the clanlord of *luwoi* reluctantly ordered the execution of his favourite son.

If Prince Hteleitoirl is not at the palace by the required date, he can still be hunted down by his clan's enemies but his father will be seen to have broken an agreement. War would be inevitable. This suits the purposes of *luwoi*'s enemies, and so they are seeking to prevent his return. Their first gambit was to ensure Prince Hteleitoirl was incarcerated on Arunisiir.

His enemies did not count on Prince Hteleitoirl's determination. Knowing that only he could save his clan, by presenting himself for execution, he escaped custody and crossed the Wildeman Cluster before being run to ground at Gibraltar Station. He is now in the terrible position of having to battle tremendous odds just to get home and be killed, but has set himself to the task with great resolve.

Prince Hteleitoirl has few allies. Some members of the Borderland Alliance enjoy good relations with clan *luwoi*, and are willing to assist Prince Hteleitoirl on his mission of self-destruction. Few know the whole story; only that he needs to be at his father's palace on a given day or the clan faces devastating consequences. Information has been compartmentalised to the point where some of those assisting his return think they are helping recover a clanlord's missing regalia rather than a person.

However, these allies are greatly outnumbered by those who would prefer to see clan *luwoi* destroyed. Most of the latter are Aslan, but they have their own contacts in Borderland. If the prince can be prevented from reaching his execution by the due date, his enemies have a pretext for destroying clan *luwoi*.

The Travellers will essentially be helping Prince Hteleitoirl kill himself, whilst his clan's enemies could be seen trying to save his life. All the same, the Arunisiir Incident has resulted in a tangled political and moral situation which the Travellers must navigate with care.

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Gas Giants
Drinax	2223		A43645A-E	Ni Ht		G
Hilfer	2424		B55077A-6	De Po		
Iroioah	2227		B530113-C	De Po Ni Lo Ht		G
Paal	2425		B564679-6	Ag Ni Ri		G
Pourne	2324		A9B2887-A	FI		G
Sink	2426		D665220-5	Ni Lo Lt		G
The World	2327		E100551-7	In Ni Va		G
Tyokh	2226	ACF	B566A77-E	Hi Ht		G

THE BORDERLAND RUN

The Borderland Run starts out as a simple starship charter. The Travellers are instructed to pick up a cargo and deliver it. However, that cargo turns out to be an Aslan of noble descent, and is less than easy to get along with. Along the way, it becomes apparent that others do not want the Aslan to reach his home. The Travellers will encounter bureaucratic obstacles as well as direct threats to themselves and their ship. As they get closer to Hierate space, the interference becomes more blatant, eventually resulting in a direct attack upon their ship.

The Travellers will have to overcome a range of obstructions and hazards, not all of which can be solved with force. They may also learn a little more about their ‘cargo’ and why they are to deliver him, though he is not forthcoming with information at first. If the Travellers can win his trust, he will reveal that he is essentially being taken to his execution. The reasons for this are morally dubious but quite legal, presenting the Travellers with an interesting question.

By the time the Travellers exit the Voidsedge Cluster and are close to Aslan space, their cargo has become resigned to his fate and is almost eager to meet it – he will urge the Travellers to push through dangers they would prefer not to confront. If the referee plays this well, the Travellers might come to like and respect their sort-of-prisoner, and may regret what will happen to him if they make the delivery. By then, however, it is too late.

Finally, the Travellers reach Aslan space and are rewarded for their efforts. The situation will be made clear to them and they are invited to witness the execution by formal duel of their prisoner. They have a final chance to save him, but that means threading a path through the complex web of Aslan court politics and customs. Success will earn them the gratitude of both their prisoner and his father – the Aslan clan-lord who reluctantly condemned him to death. This in turn opens up the possibility of further adventures within the Hierate or in human space on behalf of an Aslan clan.



ON APPROACH: ARGONA STARPORT



The Borderland Run begins at Argona, in the Voidsedge Cluster. It is not important how or why the Travellers come to be visiting Argona, and the referee can work the visit into an existing campaign by any means that seem plausible.

As a default option, the Travellers are offered the job elsewhere but must travel to Argona to obtain the details and necessary paperwork. The Travellers are asked to meet Joachim Streussen, a client who has a charter mission for them, at Argona Downport.

ARGONA

Argona lies at the trailing-coreward end of the Voidsedge Cluster, ‘looking out into the void’ as some locals like to say. This is a reference to Void 8 subsector, lying to trailing, which is part of the Great Rift and has no star systems. The Argona system itself is a binary, with three gas giants and five terrestrial (rocky) planets in addition to the Argona mainworld. Argona is the only habitable world in the system, and then just barely. Surface temperatures are very low, with thick pack ice and glaciers covering most of the surface.

The majority of the 400,000 or so inhabitants of Argona are employed in mining or mining-related industries, or support occupations dependent on cash from the primary industry. The mines are almost without exception owned by the PRQ corporation. What population there was when PRQ came to Argona was largely co-opted into the mining colony, though a few independent communities do exist.

Company folk (i.e. anyone employed directly by PRQ or living and working in one of the towns dependent on the mines) tend to look down on outsiders. This is perhaps the result of deliberate social manipulation on the part of the corporation, which prefers to limit outside influences in order to reduce employee disaffection.

Standards of living are good for the people of Argona, but their culture is rather bland. Talented individuals are guided into good jobs within the corporation or the bureaucratic government that runs the world on its behalf. As a result, anything exotic or luxurious coming through the port commands a high price but tends to be quickly snapped up by the corporate elite.

Mining on Argona is something of a challenge. A common solution for shallow deposits is to burn away the nearby ice using orbital mirrors then conduct rapid open-cast mining operations before allowing the site to simply freeze over again. Water is a problem in such mines, requiring powerful pumps and vehicles capable of operating in a semi-frozen slurry of muddy water. Deeper deposits are extracted by tunnelling techniques which do not have to contend with surface water so much, but even so the area above the mine head has to be kept ice-free whilst work is in progress.

Argona’s starport is a decent Class B installation geared mainly to serving big ore freighters. Several spaceports serve the main mining centres, with heavy-duty shuttles carrying minerals from the surface to loading docks. Smaller vessels use a number of dispersed docking areas around the periphery of the orbital port. The port sees a fair amount of traffic both from within the local cluster and as a jump-2 crossing point into the neighbouring Wildeman Cluster. However, piracy has been a problem in the area for some time, not least since Imperial ships bound for the Aslan Hierate typically use a jump-3 route that bypasses Argona.

Security is provided by a small mercenary force which also deploys troops planetside when the local law enforcement agencies cannot cope. Defence of orbital space relies mainly on missile batteries mounted on the orbital component of the starport, backed up by a handful of armed small craft which more commonly serve as patrol and law enforcement assets. The power projection range of this force is extremely limited, ensuring that starships are only safe when very close to the port.

Elsewhere in the system there are small outposts on various worlds, resulting in a modicum of in-system traffic using the starport as a hub. These ships are occasionally attacked by pirates, though according to rumour some of them *are* the pirates.

LANDING AT ARGONA

Argona is not a pleasant world to look at. Vast icy wastes are broken only by expanses of bare rock or jagged mountains. High winds and snow or hail are near-constant, buffeting any ship making the descent to the surface. The landing approach is taxing for any pilot, and numerous ships have been damaged after clipping the walls of ice chasms leading to the underground landing area.

The moment when the Travellers' ship enters the ice chasm is particularly tricky, as near-hurricane-force crosswinds are suddenly blocked by the chasm sides. A Difficult (10+) Pilot check (1D minutes, DEX) is necessary to avoid clipping the icy sides of the chasm. This is unlikely to cause much more than cosmetic damage (2D damage upon failure), but is an alarming moment.

Once in the chasm, it is a relatively simple matter of flying along the narrow chasm and entering a landing port cut into a vertical rockface at the end. There are several such channels, most suited only to smaller ships, and all are kept navigable by frequent ice cutting operations.

The ice chasm is spectacular, with a river of meltwater at the bottom and occasional chunks of ice falling from above to splash into it. These are rarely large enough

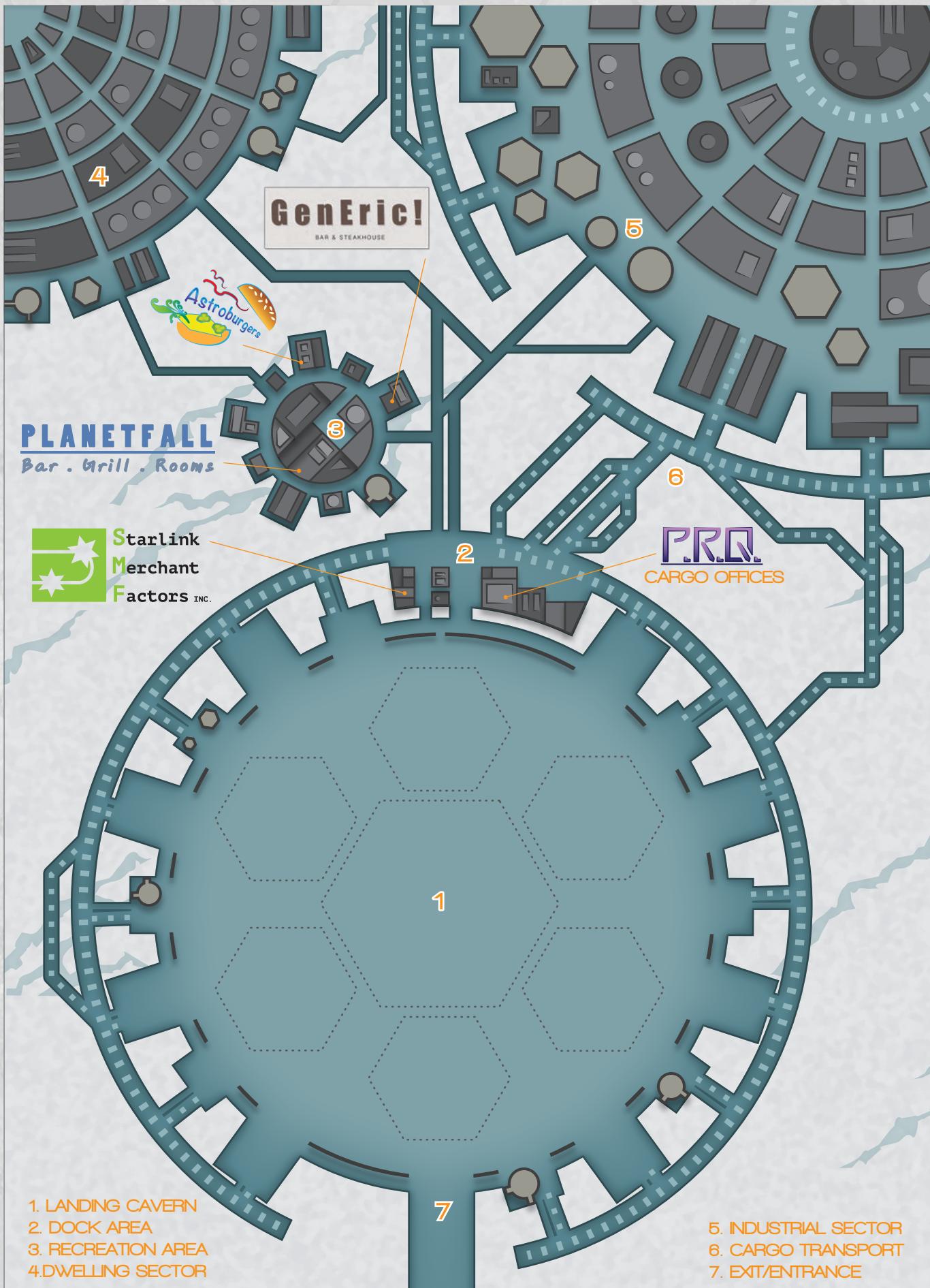
to endanger a ship, but air turbulence from a passing vessel often causes a rain of small fragments and icicles to fall behind it; spectacular but a little alarming for those who have not seen it before. The Travellers' ship will not be given permission to use a wider entry point; those are expensive to keep ice-free and cleared only when a larger vessel needs to use them.

Just getting into the landing cavern at Argona is therefore something of an achievement, leading to a local tradition whereby any pilot who manages it without a prang is entitled to request any person aboard his vessel to buy him a drink. Those who bought drinks are entitled to request one in return if the pilot does not make a clean exit.

The Travellers may want to explore this fascinating piece of local culture after they land. There are few of the usual spacers' bars at Argona Downport – most crews conduct business at the highport and leave planetside transfers to local shuttle pilots. These individuals can be found in the few 'pilot bars', drinking far too much and being deliberately unwelcoming to outsiders, though a pilot who has flown the approach without incident is worth grudging courtesy. Anyone else will get little from these hard-bitten shuttle crews.

Away from the docking area, there is a small recreation and entertainment area, surrounded by dwelling and industrial sectors. Each is in a separate artificial cavern, linked by a fast moving-walkway pedestrian transfer system and rather slower cargo facility. There are a few vehicles, mostly light ground transports, but the small cities of Argona do not require extensive personal transport.





STREUSSEN'S MISSION

Joachim Streussen is a businessman with interests in shipping and heavy industry. He has relatively few solid assets, dealing mainly in shares, buying and selling cargoes, contracting ships for specific jobs, and the like. He is a member of the Borderland Alliance, a loose organisation dedicated to promoting stability and prosperity in the region. As he will ruefully admit, the alliance's internal politics are so crippled by cross-cutting agendas that it rarely achieves anything,

However, the Borderland Alliance does have the potential to do some good, Streussen maintains, and right now there is a problem the Travellers can solve. There is a cargo waiting at Gibraltar Station in the Inurin system. It is not large, but rather sensitive. It must be delivered intact to the palace of clan *Iuwoi*, at Tyokh. There may be those who would prefer it did not arrive, so the plan is for an independent ship to make what looks like a trading voyage, avoiding suspicion by acting like any other vessel trying to make a profit on what is known as the Borderland Run.

The cargo is not large, Streussen says, so there will be room for freight or speculative trading aboard the Travellers' ship. They would be advised not to take on passengers, however, to avoid revealing what they are carrying. Streussen is not sure of the nature of the cargo, but understands it is 'items important to the clan-lord; Aslan stuff of some kind'.

Likewise, Streussen is not certain anyone will try to interfere. His sources indicate that groups with anti-Aslan sentiment wish to seize the cargo and hold it for ransom in return for money or concessions – or maybe just destroy it out of spite. That would likely cause an incident which the Borderland Alliance would prefer to avoid.

The Travellers' best option is to pose as a typical commercial starship and meander through the systems of the Borderland rather than charging straight for the Aslan border. The later the opposition realises what they are carrying – and ideally they never will – the less likely it is the Travellers will face any serious attempt to stop them.

The cargo must be delivered within 16 weeks, and the Travellers will be paid for this time even if they get the job done quicker. Taking longer than 16 weeks might be a problem; the Travellers' fee will be reduced by 10% for every two weeks or part thereof they take beyond the deadline unless they can provide a good reason why they failed. Not delivering at all could be unhealthy; Aslan clanlords are not known for their tolerance.

The Travellers are offered a charter fee for the mission, based on the tonnage of their ship. The fee is Cr500 per ton of the ship per week, or Cr900 per ton of cargo space, whichever is higher. This comes out at Cr8000 per ton or Cr14400 per ton of cargo space for the full 16 weeks. 25% of this fee is payable up front, 25% on collection of the cargo at Gibraltar Station, and the rest upon delivery. Anything they make on the side from trade is theirs to keep, of course.

Streussen genuinely has no more information than this. He is simply obtaining the services of a ship and crew for a task passed to him by other members of the Borderland Alliance. This is a business transaction to him and little more, though he would prefer it if the clanlords of the Hierate were not antagonised. The aims of the alliance and his own agenda of making money coincide here – stability is better for commerce than turbulence, which is why he joined the Borderland Alliance in the first place. He does not know the cargo is a person, let alone that he is facilitating an execution. Nor is he aware that the 16-week limit is not a business agreement; it is a deadline for avoiding war.

STARTING THE MISSION

Joachim Streussen supplies the Travellers with the necessary paperwork to take possession of the cargo at Gibraltar Station, along with a recorded introduction which he says will make the people who run the station friendlier to the Travellers – they are very standoffish, and generally happier to do business with those working on behalf of the Borderland Alliance.

The Travellers will also receive the first instalment of their payment in whatever form they want it. Credit plaques, electronic funds or cargo purchased on Streussen's account at the highport are all possible, or a mix of all three. There is time to do some trading at the highport before the Travellers leave, though there is little or no cargo and freight to be had at the downport; it all goes up to orbit aboard local shuttles and sold or trans-shipped from there.

The Travellers will need to go to Inurin at some point, but do not need to head there directly. Trading stops along the way will disguise their intentions, especially if they go past Inurin towards Aslan space and then come back. The less their movements look like a purposeful journey from Argona to Inurin to Tyokh, the less likely the Travellers are to have problems along the way.

CROSSING THE VOIDSEdge CLUSTER



The journey to Tyokh is in two halves. The first part takes place within the Voidsedge Cluster, and requires a stop at Gibraltar Station in the Inurin system. The second part begins when the Travellers leave the Voidsedge Cluster and cross the jump-2 gap to the Drinax Chain, eventually taking them to their final destination.

The Travellers have 16 weeks to complete the journey, which could be done in 5-6 weeks by a jump-2 ship going flat out and making minimal stopovers. There is thus sufficient time to trade along the way, engage with patrons, and adopt an innocent-looking, meandering path which will not tip off interested parties that the Travellers are making this delivery.

There is thus no set path to the first part of the journey. Indeed, the more random the Travellers' movements are, the easier their mission will be. The second part of the journey does include some necessary stops, but even here the Travellers have some leeway. Impatience equates to greater risk; it is true that the Travellers are getting paid for a 16-week mission and completing it in half the time allows them to make more money elsewhere, but this must be balanced against increased difficulties and possible expenses of a recklessly direct approach.

Each star system within the Voidsedge Cluster visited by the Travellers before they pick up their cargo at Inurin diminishes the response made by the opposition. Each system visited after the pickup is made also helps mitigate the response, but not as much. It is highly unlikely the Travellers will succeed in completely covering their trail but efforts at misdirection may help them avoid trouble.

The referee will need to maintain a Misdirection Index. This starts at zero and is used to determine if opposition is encountered at particular points in the mission.

- Each star system visited before the pickup is made adds +2 to the Misdirection Index.
- Each star system visited after the pickup adds +1 to the Misdirection Index.

- This applies only to systems in the Voidsedge Cluster.
- The initial visit to Argona does not count.
- Additional modifiers to the Misdirection Index will become available along the way

Data is presented below on the systems of the Voidsedge Cluster, along with incidents that may occur on the way. These can happen at any point on the journey, and should be imposed whenever the referee feels it is appropriate.

ERGO

Ergo is the mainworld of a system that also includes nine other terrestrial planets, two gas giants and a planetoid belt. The belt and moons of the gas giant see the usual small amount of belter and corporate mining activity, but this is unconnected with Ergo itself.

Ergo is designated with a Red Zone travel code, off-limits to everyone who does not have proper authorisation. However, this has more meaning in the Imperium where it can be properly enforced. Here in Borderland, interdiction takes the form of a pair of armed tracking satellites which may fire upon vessels ignoring the Red Zone, but whose coverage is limited. As a result, ships can visit Ergo if they have reason to do so. Few do.



Two centuries ago, Ergo was a prosperous mid-tech world regaining a measure of space capability. Long beset by raiders from the remnants of the Sindalian Empire, Ergo's ruling Council of Barons finally established a measure of security using crude nuclear missiles. The total destruction of a few raiding vessels persuaded the rest of the attackers to look elsewhere for an easier target.

In 802, the General Development Corporation offered to construct a high-quality starport over Ergo, which was seen as being of great mutual benefit. However, before construction was complete the Council of Barons had disintegrated into factions, all of them sufficiently determined to gain sole access to the port and its revenue that they were willing to wreck their world doing it. The ensuing war was long and bitter, with nuclear weapons used as quickly as they could be constructed.

The starport was destroyed early in the fighting, and GeDeCo pulled out to build its port at Tech-World instead. The factions of Ergo battled on for nearly a century, resulting in a nuclear winter and destruction of most major settlements. The collapse of Ergo's technological base finally brought the war to an end, by which time it was impossible to halt the downward spiral.

Today, much of Ergo is wasteland, with radioactive craters marking the sites of former cities. The lands in between are home to low-tech tribes, some reported to be cannibals. The only 'civilised' (using the term loosely) area is around the ruins of the old starport. There, a largely ineffectual Council of Barons postures and hatches plans to reconstruct the starport, hoping to reap the riches of interstellar commerce. There are said to be pirate bases on Ergo as well and, given the desperation of the Council, it is entirely possible that some sort of deal is in place.

EXE

Exe is the mainworld of an extremely sparse star system; two other rockballs and a gas giant orbit the system's primary. Exe was chosen for the designation of mainworld only because there were no suitable moons orbiting the gas giant as it has little to offer except a convenient gravity well to anchor the orbital port.

The world's population consists of a single settlement at the (very small) downport. There may have been plans once to exploit mineral resources or otherwise develop the world, but nothing ever came of this. A few small mining operations are dotted across the surface, but these are mostly just a handful of personnel working an



easy-to-reach deposit. Typical of those working far from law enforcement or any other form of assistance, the miners of Exe are not welcoming and very suspicious of strangers.

The staff of the orbital port are more friendly, largely because they are very bored. The station is highly automated and has little to offer visitors other than fuel, so most ships make a quick stopover and move on, reducing opportunities for interaction still further. Life for the crew is an endless round of maintenance and shuttle runs to skim liquid hydrogen from the gas giant to top off the starport's fuel tanks.

At any given time there will usually be a shuttle or two making the skim run, and perhaps a few ships at port. Exe is the main entry point to the Voidsedge Cluster for ships out of Acrid in the Wildeman Cluster, but little or no commercial activity takes place at Exe starport. The port could not come close to paying its way, even with docking fees and fuel, but is maintained by GeDeCo to foster trade to other ports. As such, it is a valuable asset but also a financial drain on the company. This is reflected in the run-down nature of the port in general and the crew areas in particular.

There is little or no in-system traffic other than the fuel shuttles, but pirates have been known to prey on ships using the port. However, attacks on the fuel ships are very rare despite the value of components on the black market. It is widely presumed that GeDeCo's policy of putting large bounties on those who attack its holdings generally deters pirates who want to retire on the profits. It has also been suggested that maybe GeDeCo is paying off some pirate bands to police others, or that it has an agreement with some pirates. It may be that the ability to conduct repairs and obtain fuel with no questions asked makes it worth keeping Exe starport in business rather than robbing it once and losing the benefits. There is, of course, no proof of this.

FALCON

Falcon is the mainworld of a system with five gas giants and five other terrestrial worlds. It is often listed in navigational databases as a hollowed-out asteroid, an error which is understandable given the circumstances of the world and its people.

Falcon is in fact a wet world, small and with a thin atmosphere. Whilst not a Terra-Prime candidate, it was certainly inviting for colonists, and chosen for a large-scale development operation during the Solomani settlement of the region. This proved to be a fatal mistake – literally – for most of the population. Falcon's ecosystem contains a number of compounds which are subtly toxic to unadapted humans. The adaptation process itself requires lengthy exposure and often proves fatal.

Those who adapt to the world's toxins become dependent upon them. It is possible for someone from Falcon to be deprived of these substances for a few weeks without coming to harm, but sooner or later they will become sick and begin to deteriorate. The process can be slowed or deferred by creating an artificial environment where these substances are available but this requires significant investment in technology and equipment.

Once deterioration has begun, the only way to halt it is to go home to Falcon and stay for an extended period. Even this will not always reverse the process – even a short time outside Falcon's unique environment can start a process that resists all attempts to halt it. Most inhabitants of the world choose not to leave. The population stays low because even among people acclimatised to local conditions by many years of exposure may have children who are not, and whose bodies cannot survive the toxic environment long enough to be adapted. To avoid this tragedy, the people of Falcon practice strict population control and provide what may be the most intensive system of pre-natal medical support in the sector.



Falcon highport is a hollowed-out asteroid, crewed mainly by workers from other systems, and with an enclave of Falcon locals who usually wear encounter suits to avoid contaminating visitors. Small doses of Falcon's unusual contaminants are unlikely to cause harm, but might affect offworld trade if anyone were to be made ill by a visit. Since offworlders almost never visit Falcon itself and its people rarely leave, the highport is widely considered to effectively *be* Falcon. Indeed, some databases claim make no mention of the inviting but deadly planet it orbits.

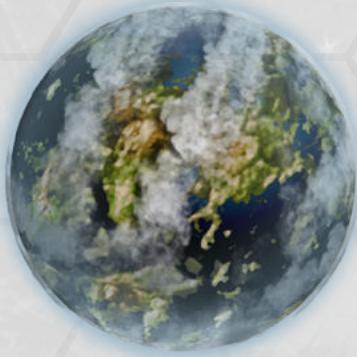
The port is owned and operated by GeDeCo, which also maintains a local-operations administrative centre. This, among other functions, controls the operations of GeDeCo assets on neighbouring Sperle, which in turn owns the government. The misconception has arisen that Falcon maintains Sperle as a colony, whereas in fact the situation is that GeDeCo more or less controls Sperle from a location usually thought of as being Falcon.

Falcon's port sees a fair amount of in-cluster traffic, with a considerable amount of commerce in its auction halls. A portion of the revenue thus earned goes to the government of Falcon, but the lion's share is taken by GeDeCo, which also provides local-orbit defence and security on the station. GeDeCo's personnel have no jurisdiction on-planet and never go there.

INURIN

Inurin is the mainworld of a complex trinary star system, with bodies orbiting each of the system's three stars. The primary of the system is officially named Petersen's Trinary Alpha, but known to locals as Pamsk. Some starmaps use the mainworld-star designation system and instead call this star Inurin Primary. Whatever its designation, the primary is orbited by four gas giants and nine terrestrial planets including Inurin itself. The two companion stars also have their own planetary systems.

Inurin is a habitable world with a standard atmosphere. Its population of some 40 million is divided into several largish nations and a vast array of minor settlements, enclaves, city-states, outposts, camps and a few nomadic groups. Tensions run high between many of these, often for reasons of tradition lost in the mists of time. There is no officially designated main starport on Inurin; any ship approaching will be bombarded with offers, inducements and threats to try to get it to land at one or another group's port. A few settlements are aggressively isolationist, however, and will shoot at anyone trying to land unless they are a well-established friend.



There is no GeDeCo-built orbital starport in the Inurin system. Jump-2 and higher traffic tends to bypass the system, whilst fuel is available from a variety of sources. Many vessels visiting the system have business elsewhere Inurin, and many Travellers forget the mainworld even exists.

Notable among the ports of Inurin is Gibraltar Station, which orbits the gas giant Pamsk Five, essentially an independent city-state in space. The station has factories, hospitals, shops and one of the better universities in the region. Its inhabitants are distinctly isolationist, except when dealing with long-term allies and friends, and rumoured to have seeded mines in the atmosphere of Pamsk Five to make it unattractive as a fuel-skimming destination. That may or may not be true, but fighters from Gibraltar Station have been known to chase off or even fire upon vessels attempting to skim fuel.

Although Gibraltar Station wants no part of anyone else's politics, its operators are receptive to money. The station conducts a fair amount of business with passing ships and will refuel and resupply any vessel willing to pay higher-than-average (+20%) fees. This has led to accusations of being a pirate haven, but whilst dubious ships do come through, the operators are aware that piracy harms their primary source of income – interstellar trade – and are not inclined to support it.

Thus, Gibraltar Station has a dubious reputation but is home to honest dealings. Those who have established themselves as friends to the station are welcome; others are tolerated so long as they behave themselves.

SPERLE

Sperle is the mainworld of a sparse system, with no gas giants and just three other terrestrial (rocky) planets. There are two planetoid belts in the system, however, and these have communities of belters scattered among them along with larger mining operations. The rockball worlds of the system are officially uninhabited but may have unregistered outposts.

Sperle itself is a water world, with very little land above sea level. The ninety million or so inhabitants are mostly located in cities scattered among the world's few island chains or in seabed cities under shallower water. The majority of transportation is by means of submarines and surface ships, with heavy-lift dirigibles used for most air travel. These are highly efficient due to Sperle's dense atmosphere and well suited to long voyages over open ocean.

Indigenous life on land is very basic, and has been almost entirely supplanted by imported species. The seas are home to a mix of local and imported plant life, supporting a large-scale aquaculture industry. Sperle is primarily known for the harvesting of a creature known as the Sperle Whale, huge amoeba-like clusters of single-celled organisms which can be processed into a variety of useful biochemicals.



'Whale' harvesting is undertaken by driving remotely operated or manually piloted submersibles through a whale and filtering the organisms into holding tanks. When full, a filter-sub returns to its parent vessel and pumps out its tanks before returning for more runs until the whale is too dispersed to be of further use. The harvesting business is owned almost entirely by the General Development Corporation, mainly through various subsidiaries or businesses in which GeDeCo owns a controlling share.

Similarly, GeDeCo more or less owns the starport outright. It was built as part of the GeDeCo remit to foster trade and commerce in the region, and now ostensibly owned by the planetary government. However, the government owes so much to GeDeCo for the port that essentially the corporation now also owns the government.

The port is busy, with local trade as well as ships moving through the Voidsegde Cluster to and from the Aslan Hierate. However, most of the profits go to the owning corporation, making it hard for the world government to reduce its debt to GeDeCo. As is the pattern with GeDeCo-built ports in the region, Sperle's Class B starport is mainly an orbital facility with several local spaceports serving cities on the surface. The main planetside port is Sperle Downport, but receives relatively little traffic. Most ships conduct their business at the highport and move on, with cargoes transferred planetside aboard shuttles also used to bring exported aquaculture products to the highport.

Sperle Highport is defended, much like other GeDeCo holdings, by a strong missile battery at the port itself and a small number of fighters and armed small craft. The corporation has no interest in projecting power elsewhere in the system, and has neither the means nor the will to interfere with pirate attacks on ships in the belts. Occasionally, however, a force of small warships operated by a GeDeCo subsidiary will make an anti-piracy sweep through the cluster. Sperle is a preferred stopover where crews can take planetside leave. The usual practice is for some ships to stand down and others to patrol the system on a rotating basis, ensuring that at least part of the time Sperle is a hostile and unhealthy place to engage in piracy.

TECH-WORLD

Tech-World orbits an F8 (yellow-white) main sequence star, along with six terrestrial planets and a planetoid belt. There are no gas giants in the system. Although the atmosphere is thin, Tech-World is entirely capable of supporting a large population and was a target for Solomani colonists. This early society was all but annihilated by the Sindalian Empire's Punitive Armada, leaving the world more or less uninhabited for centuries. It is possible that there were small-scale efforts to settle the planet, but until the arrival of GeDeCo in the 500s there was no official government or offworld contact. Thus, little if anything is known of anyone who lived on what is now Tech-World during those years.

Seeking to facilitate trade though the Borderlands, GeDeCo set up orbital ports above several worlds, usually with a small planetside enclave. The port at Tech-World was something of an oddity, as the corporation contracted out much of the construction in order to reduce costs. Renegades from the technologically advanced world of Neumann in Gazulin subsector, keen to escape the oppressive control of the Shield Church there, undertook construction in return for being granted the world as their own. Technically, GeDeCo did not own the planet to give away, but no serious opposition emerged and the deal went ahead.

The resulting starport is something of a marvel; a huge black ovoid that reconfigures itself dynamically to cope with rising or falling traffic. The interior walls are actually curtains of a smart bioplastic that move and reshape themselves to create larger or smaller landing bays and warehousing. Every visitor is assigned a guide



robot programmed to their needs, and security is assured by keying everything to the user's genetic code. Most visitors find the convenience and simplicity of using Tech-World starport pleasant, but others consider the place rather creepy.

The human population of Tech-World is around four thousand, supported by a robotic population numbering around a million and rising. Actual numbers vary, depending on how one tallies distributed-intelligence computers with numerous slave bodies. Experiments in using nanotechnology, cloning and other technologies of questionable legality are ongoing, and Tech-World is attracting increasing numbers of researchers who wish to pursue lines of inquiry not permitted within the Imperium. GeDeCo refuses to put pressure on the Tech-World rulers to rein in their scientific experimentation, claiming its contract with the Tech-World government begins and ends with the starport.

The remainder of Tech-World's surface is largely uninhabited, though small communities and research bases are popping up here and there. It is widely believed that remnants of the original population are

still living somewhere on the planet, but concrete data is hard to come by.

The human population of Tech-World have little interest in interacting with offworlders. Visiting starships are encouraged to conduct their business at the starport and move on, and even when there is a need to deal with outsiders it is often done by way of robotic intermediaries. There are exceptions, of course; some research groups build relationships with starship crews who help them achieve their goals.

Those who try to settle on Tech-World without permission tend to do badly, not always for obvious reasons. There have been incidents of combat between robots and interlopers, but just as often some incredible piece of bad luck causes an *ihatei* settlement to collapse or unauthorised colony to pack up and leave. The government of Tech-World does not comment on such incidents, so all there is to go on is rumour. There are those who firmly believe that trying to set up home next door to a bunch of mad scientists is a bad idea, whether or not they want rid of you. The fate of those willing to try seems to bear out this hypothesis.



INCIDENTS



The following incidents can be used just before or just after they arrive on Inurin to pick up their cargo.

RUMOURS OF WAR

Whilst the Travellers are in port, they become aware of an incident that took place on Arunisir a few months back. This might be an overhead conversation in a bar or feature on the evening news. According to the current version of the tale, a large force of Aslan *ihatei* launched an unprovoked attack on the people of Arunisir and were only defeated by the heroics of the local population and a mercenary unit named Planetside Security Services which was conducting training operations on-planet.

If the Travellers look into the rumour, they will discover it has been blown out of all proportion, perhaps in the interest of a good story. The ‘sky full of ships’ was actually two Aslan vessels and a shady far trader whose crew took the opportunity to make a quick raid on an outlying settlement. Hundreds of battle-hardened warriors turns out to be dozens of headstrong, idealistic but inexperienced *ihatei*, and the huge casualty figures seem to be completely invented.

Planetside Security Services has a reputation for being where *ihatei* are about to land or arrive soon after, usually under the pretext of conducting training for a future contract. They have a strong anti-Aslan stance and will not work alongside Aslan units or any force that contains Aslan personnel. The fact that they just happened to be there when the *ihatei* arrived seems to suggest there is more to this story than meets the eye.

HELPING AN OLD SCOUT

As the Travellers arrive at or leave a world, they pick up a sort-of-distress call. It is not the usual all-channels GK emergency signal, just a request for ‘sort of emergency assistance, if you’re not too busy’ repeated in a bored and weary tone. The signal is coming from a scout/courier with the transponder identity *Sam’s Leaky Bucket*. The ship is drifting, quite far out from the mainworld, after a poor jump emergence and some sort of drive failure.

If the Travellers render aid they find not some clever pirate deathtrap but an old ex-scout named Samuel Kegii, who greets them with weary embarrassment. He does indeed have m-drive trouble, which can be fixed with the spares he has aboard by a skilled engineer. Sam is not much of an engineer, though he can handle most other jobs about the ship. He explains that he had a couple of passengers at his last stop, one of them overhauling the drive as part of a working passage – nobody pays to travel aboard a beat-up old wreck like *Sam’s Leaky Bucket*.

Sam got boarded by a mercenary vessel on temporary customs and enforcement duty. They arrested his passengers and left him without an engineer, and a half-rebuilt drive. He fixed it up as best he could but clearly not as well as he should. Sam has no idea why the mercenaries were suddenly interested in customs work, which really does not pay well, but they had legitimate paperwork saying they were operating out of and on behalf of Falcon Starport – so more than likely they were being paid by the General Development Corporation. That makes sense; GeDeCo tries to keep the spaceways clean because crime and piracy is bad for business.

Sam had a suspicion, though, that the mercenaries were looking for someone in particular. They were happy enough to detain his passengers, since they had arrest bounties on their heads, but Sam got the impression the mercenaries really wanted to find a specific person. He is correct in this assumption, though the Travellers may not realise the significance of that until later.

MOST WANTED

Travellers who are plugged into the underworld rumour mill or have contracts in the bounty hunting trade will become aware that an unofficial bounty offer has been placed on a male Aslan, probably travelling alone, headed towards Aslan space on the quiet. This is rather vague, suggesting that whomever has put out the bounty does not want to make it too obvious who they are looking for. Instead they are paying a small amount of cash for anyone who can point them in the right direction.

This sort of thing is not uncommon. Large amounts of low-level information is collated and promising leads are followed up. It is less efficient than putting out a specific bounty but suits the purposes of someone with the resources to process the raw data. If the Travellers keep an eye out, they will become aware of incidents of Aslan being harassed or questioned by unofficial agents.

WHERE HAVE THE SECURITY SHIPS GONE?

The Travellers may become aware that several star mercenary vessels which have been on long-term security contracts in the cluster have recently been reassigned; indeed, they may well spot some of these vessels along the way. There is a general movement towards the Aslan end of the cluster, though when the Travellers pass through those systems they will find the ships are not there and have not turned back. They must have redeployed to the Drinax Chain.

There are many reasons this might happen, notably an upsurge in piracy in the area. However, the Travellers may infer the vessels have been positioned to prevent their cargo from reaching its destination. They will also be able to discover that mercenary ships tend to hire out in 4-week blocks. The practice is by no means universal but is the standard boilerplate of a contract. If so, it is likely that some of these ships will be rotating to some other station after four, eight or twelve weeks. The Travellers may be able to make use of this information, which boils down to the later they make the transit into the Drinax Chain the less likely it is they will encounter opposition.

A SYMPATHISER

Somewhere on their voyage, the Travellers encounter a group of Aslan sympathetic to Prince Hteleitoirl, or at least his clan. If the Travellers can win them over, they may be willing to go to Tyokh as quickly as possible. There, they can spread rumours that Prince Hteleitoirl has already arrived and is in hiding somewhere. If the opposition think he has already passed through the Voidsedge and Drinax Chain bottlenecks, they may be less attentive about watching them.

Prince Hteleitoirl cannot order anyone to do this for him – he has no official rank and is basically an outlaw under death sentence. However, his honourable quest to get home and be executed to preserve his father's honour will strike a chord with fellow Aslan if presented the right way. If the Travellers can persuade the sympathetic Aslan to do this, they may add +2 to the Misdirection Index once four weeks have passed since the meeting.



GIBRALTAR STATION



The ‘cargo’ is waiting at Gibraltar Station in the Inurin system. Inurin is listed as having a Class E starport, which is true of the mainworld – though there is no widely recognised main port on the heavily balkanised world. Inurin is the fourth major body out from its primary. Gibraltar Station orbits the next body out – Pamsk Five, a small gas giant.

The Inurin system is detailed in *Borderland Profile: Inurin* and has great potential for adventures if the Travellers choose to explore it before or after picking up their cargo. Sooner or later, however, they will need to go to Inurin and make the pickup.

All vessels in the vicinity of Gibraltar Station are sternly warned against attempting to skim fuel from the gas giant due to an unspecified ‘severe hazard’. According to rumour, this hazard is a minefield laid by the station’s operators, though there is no hard evidence that it exists. Some ships approaching the station are escorted by a fighter or armed boat. This is not done in a threatening manner but the station’s operators are clearly very keen to ensure visitors know they can enforce their rules.

The station is not large by the standards of an orbital port, but can accommodate several small starships in its bays and has an extensive recreation and commerce zone. The Travellers’ ship is directed to a docking bay where a smart and efficient ground crew performs a distinctly perfunctory spaceworthiness and customs check. This takes just minutes; in some ports, the paperwork alone can require a day to wade through.

Once this is done, the Travellers are free to explore and enjoy the station, which is clean, efficient and safe. A Law Level of 4 is maintained on the station; essentially it is permissible to carry handguns and hand weapons in public, provided the owner is discreet and does not attempt to enter an area where weapons are forbidden. Weapons are not permitted in most entertainment

establishments or business premises, and anyone who is intoxicated or rowdy whilst in possession of a weapon faces a stiff fine and deportation at least.

Deportation translates to confinement to the docking area in which their own ship is berthed, or a holding suite until a ship can be found to take the offender off station. This is usually the next available vessel, which can result in an unexpected trip to one of the system’s minor outposts. The station’s administrators do not care where the deportee goes so long as they are gone. Re-entry is not normally permitted for several months; in some cases an individual is permanently denied permission to return.

The Travellers’ instructions are to drop a data code into the station’s net and await contact, so until it comes they are at liberty. The port has a pretty fair selection of restaurants and entertainment facilities, and is notable for the high proportion of Vargr among its staff. There are those who equate Vargr with corsairs and pirates, and thus assume that Gibraltar Station is a hotbed of piratical activity. There is no sign that this is the case.

Gibraltar station sees a fair amount of in-system traffic; mostly ships from mining outposts or small settlements on the system’s many worlds. Ships from other systems come and go at a rate of about one or two a day, mostly far traders, free traders and subsidised merchants plying the Voidsgate Cluster or making the Borderland Run from Fist to Tyokh. There are thus plenty of opportunities for trade or to pick up additional freight before taking delivery of the Travellers’ own cargo.

As the Travellers go about their business on the station, they will receive a call from one Amaldae Oghztueaek, a rather formidable female Vargr who runs a shipping business out of Gibraltar Station. She sends a curt text-only message with a time to come to her office and does not respond further. The time is painfully early the next morning by the station’s clock, which may or may not be in sync with the Travellers’ personal time.

VISITING AMALDAE

The offices of Eanzuearrgzoerraer Freight and Brokerage, more commonly referred to as ERB for obvious reasons, are quite large for the station, and richly decorated in bright colours. Several works of art which might be politely described as 'vibrant' ('lurid' is another possible word) adorn the walls. Weapons are not permitted in the offices; security boxes are provided at reception.

The Travellers are shown in by a receptionist, to a meeting room where a power-breakfast has been laid out. Travellers plugged into the corporate culture of the region will recognise that all of the latest fads and brilliant new thinking have been incorporated – this is the sort of breakfast that impresses other corporate officials. The Travellers are invited to help themselves, and are soon joined by a very well-dressed female Vagr who introduces herself as Amaldae and indicates which combination of foods provides the ideal mix of energy release and nutrition for any given body type or activity. This sort of thing is common in corporate culture at present, and is as important as arriving in the right vehicle or wearing the right suit.

Amaldae does not have much time for chit-chat but gets straight down to business. She looks over the Travellers' paperwork and runs it through her hand computer, nods briskly and declares a 'slight problem'.

The problem is this. The cargo is not 'cargo' in the usual sense, inasmuch as it is a person and a few items of luggage rather than a shipping container. The Travellers are contracted to deliver this person, whose identity is not made clear by the documents, to Tyokh as per the original agreement. There really is no difference between delivering a person and a shipping crate, Amaldae says, other than the fact that shipping crates do not get themselves deported.

It turns out that the cargo, whoever it may be, got involved in a fight and seriously injured at least two people with some kind of bladed article. Although a case was made for self-defence, the station's administrators ordered the individual to be deported. The first ship available was a cargo barge bound for the next body out in the system; a dismal rockball named Herno's Claim. Presumably the person the Travellers are to transport is still there. His (or her; Amaldae says she does not know) luggage is still in a holding unit at the docks. The Travellers will be able to claim it with the paperwork they have.

Amaldae is being very guarded, but does know a little more and can be persuaded to reveal a few facts. She knows the cargo is an Aslan male who goes by the name of Ergneuel. This is almost certainly a pseudonym since Ergneuel is a Vagr word meaning a long and dreary road. He arrived a few weeks ago aboard a mining ship, and initially kept his head down other than contacting Amaldae to arrange discreet passage towards the Hierate. Payment was on account from an Aslan clan and not disputed by the clan, though why they paid for this person to travel is a mystery. Amaldae does not really care; a contract is a contract.

Not long ago, this Ergneuel person got himself deported after a fight. Amaldae does not have any details, but is suspicious that it might have been a botched robbery attempt. Not long afterward, someone began making inquiries about an Aslan matching Ergneuel's description. They were obviously trying to be discreet but not very good at it.

In short, the cargo is on Herno's Claim, an in-system flight away, and someone is looking for him on the station.



INTERFERENCE

Before the Travellers leave Gibraltar Station, they are approached by a pair of what are widely known as 'rentavestigators', private detectives who undertake a variety of investigative tasks on behalf of clients who prefer to remain anonymous. The approach is not hostile but rather too clipped and world-weary to be very polite.

The 'vestigators are searching for a male Aslan travelling alone or with a small party. They have pictures, most of which are taken from a distance and not very clear. In these pictures their quarry is typically wearing military combat gear and holding a rifle, usually standing atop a vehicle or in some other dramatic pose, surrounded by other Aslan. He seems to be someone important.

The 'vestigators do not have a name for their quarry but can tell the Travellers he is a war criminal of some sort – they 'don't know the details and don't care, pal. It's just a job'. If the Travellers have information about their quarry their employer will pay for it. The offer is just a few hundred Credits for information that helps track the quarry's movements.

After the Travellers have talked to the 'vestigators, they can go about their business. Ergneuel's luggage is stored on Gibraltar Station; the Travellers will need to pick it up which is no problem as they have the correct paperwork. However, they may begin to realise something is amiss; if they have hotel rooms at the station, there is evidence that they have been searched. Not ransacked like thieves might do whilst hurriedly searching for valuables, but searched with a mind to obtaining information or a specific item. Nothing seems to be missing.

When the Travellers go to the docks and are about to leave Gibraltar Station, they must pass a checkpoint to enter the dock area. This is not unusual, but the questioning is less cursory than would be expected, especially if the Travellers recall how easy it was to get through customs onto the station. Travellers who make a Difficult (10+) Recon or Average (8+) Streetwise check will note that there are an unusual number of janitors, clerks and other unobtrusive workers around, and many places where weapons could be concealed.

The staff will deny that there is a security alert in progress, which is mostly true. There is no official alert, but the station authorities have been paid to watch for an Aslan matching Ergneuel's description leaving the station. A ship crew that arrives without an Aslan and leaves with one would be worth detaining for some further investigation. However, since the Travellers do not have an extra Aslan with them the authorities content themselves with concealing their intentions by asking questions about destination, cargo and the like.

If the Travellers mention they are headed for Hernon's Claim, there is no immediate reaction other than a sympathetic nod and an ironic suggestion that they will like it there. However, the referee should modify the Misdirection Index by -2. The opposition will eventually figure out that Ergneuel was the Aslan deported to Hernon's Claim and will draw a connection to any ship that visited the world after leaving Gibraltar Station.

POWER-BREAKFASTS

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HERNON'S CLAIM

Hernon's Claim is almost 4 AU (Astronomical Units), or 600,000,000 km, from Gibraltar Station. A transit would take 136 hours for a 1G ship and much less for a faster one, making a jump there unnecessary and counterproductive; Not only would it require a great deal of fuel, which would increase costs, but it would actually take longer than just making the transit in normal space. The Travellers might decide to jump anyway either because they have not thought about the time saved by a normal-space transit or to make it look like they have left the star system. Either way, the transit to Hernon's Claim will probably not be impeded. Random encounters with corsairs preying upon the in-system traffic are possible but not likely this far from the main internal trade routes.

Hernon's Claim (C9105C9-B) is a typical outsystem rockball in many ways. The planet is large, but has little atmospheric gas. It was originally settled by a mining corporation which built a single large town with a basic starport, plus several outlying settlements over promising deposits. These are now abandoned and the entire population lives in the startown. The corporation went out of business many years ago, bequeathing its assets (and de facto ownership of a not-very-valuable planet) to its shareholders.

Today, Hernon's Claim is a semi-independent inhabited world, though it is usually considered a colony administered by its shareholders. Some of these live on-planet but most are located on Tech-World or one of the other major worlds of the cluster. Hernon's Claim still has a small mining operation and some TL11 manufacturing equipment which allows it to contribute to the overall economy of the Inurin star system. Enough profit is made to allow goods and foodstuffs to be important, and thus standards of living are fairly high.

The general populace is content and for the most part prefer to be left alone. They are not at all welcoming to outsiders unless they bring something of value. Thus, a trade ship with something the locals want is welcome, but someone looking for a job will largely be ignored unless they have skills that are in demand.

The starport at Hernon's Claim is basic but well run, with staff who are courteous but not friendly. The Travellers are expected to furnish a reason for coming to Hernon's Claim, especially if they arrive with an empty cargo hold. They can tell the truth if they want – the

locals really have no interest in outside events and have not been given a reason to care about the Aslan dumped in their midst a couple of weeks back – but if a false reason is given, the Travellers need to make it plausible; the locals will have no problem telling the truth in turn if someone asks them about the Aslan and the ship he left on.

A successful Average (8+) Diplomat or Persuade check (SOC) will suffice to create a suitably believable story. Failure will result in further questioning which could land the Travelers in trouble. If they manage to conceal the reason for their visit to Hernon's Claim there is no effect on the Misdirection Index. Telling the truth results in a -2 modifier to the Misdirection Index.

ON HERNON'S CLAIM

With a population of around 30,000 in a single settlement, Hernon's Claim has a reasonable selection of entertainment possibilities. It is unlikely the Travellers will make new friends in town; most people have no real reason to interact with the few outsiders who come through the port. Asking around will provide some information, however. There are a few Aslan on planet, most of whom have been there for some time. The only newcomer is 'some big surly guy who keeps to himself'. This individual fits the general description of the deportee from Gibraltar Station.

Finding this Aslan is not hard, though it may take a while to find someone who knows exactly where he is. It is quite possible that in the meantime he will make contact. Prince Hteleitoirl has accepted the hospitality of one of the planet's few Aslan families, and is staying in a spare room of their modest dwelling. He does not go out much but monitors traffic at the spaceport. Whenever a ship comes through, he undertakes a discreet investigation of the vessel's history and the possibility that it might be a suitable way out of the system. As yet, none of the few ships to arrive have been bound for anywhere but back to Gibraltar Station, where Hteleitoirl cannot go.

If the prince makes contact, it will be by way of Uilr, an immature female Aslan who is the eldest child of the family he stays with. She can scope out new arrivals without attracting suspicion, and is glad to do so. Her family think highly of Prince Hteleitoirl, although they are not of his clan. He has behaved with great courtesy

towards them and has told them of his mission – they respect what he is trying to do as much as they regret the necessity.

This assistance has been offered without any thought of reward. Prince Hteleitoirl has little money and is more or less an outlaw. Unless his allies can find him before the opposition and give him funds, he has nothing with which to reward his hosts. They know this, but consider the chance to be part of his grand and tragic story to be reward enough – ‘honour deserves to be honoured’ as Prince Hteleitoirl’s clan says.

Uiir is smart enough to form a reliable opinion of any newcomers, and knows that Prince Hteleitoirl’s life (or rather, his ability to go to his execution in an honourable manner) may depend on not being found by his enemies. She knows enough people around the city to get a good impression of the Travellers before she makes any form of contact.

MAKING CONTACT

Ideally, Uiir will observe the Travellers and report back to Hteleitoirl, who will then decide to make contact on his own terms. This will take the form of a message sent anonymously to the Travellers, suggesting a meeting. There is a real possibility for misunderstanding here – Hteleitoirl does not know the Travellers are there to help him and is concerned they may be looking for him for quite the opposite reason; whilst for their part the Travellers may become aware that someone is watching them and try to catch Uiir.

This in turn might have some interesting consequences – pursuing a teenage girl of any species through the back streets of her home town is likely to result in a confrontation. Her father Khtiiyaheieao is a worker, not a fighter, but is still a protective father with a dewclaw. Hteleitoirl feels he owes Uiir for helping him and will not allow her to be mistreated in any way.

Assuming the situation does not dissolve into chaos, eventually Hteleitoirl will decide to make contact with the Travellers (or they may track him down). He suggests meeting in a public place, selecting his host’s place of work as the most suitable, a small robotics-and-

electronics sales and repairs outlet where he is the senior sales and business liaison representative. Most of his work involves visiting mining operations – sometimes elsewhere in the system – and advising them on repairs, maintenance schedules or upgrades, but what he really enjoys doing is selling shipboard robots to passing vessels. He frequently makes sales trips to Gibraltar Station and comes back with a few orders.

Hernon Robotics and Electronics has a modest storefront but a large repair and demonstration bay, where at any time there will be various pieces of robotic machinery under repair or ready for demonstration. Khtiiyaheieao and his employer have agreed to help out Prince Hteleitoirl partly because it costs them nothing and it seems like the right thing to do, and partly because it brings a starship crew into the showroom.



A visit to an electronics outlet is reasonable cover for a meeting, and of course Khtiiyahieao does his best to make it look authentic – ‘just in case anyone is watching’ – by offering various utility robots to the Travellers (examples of their wares can be found on page 45-46). They may have to sit through a demonstration of the robots’ capabilities whilst they wait for Hteleitoirl to show up. He can hardly arrive at exactly the same time as the offworlders, now can he? That would be too suspicious...

Eventually Hteleitoirl does arrive, and begins cautiously approaching the subject of obtaining discreet passage offworld. Anywhere will do as far as he is concerned, since he stands a better chance of getting a ship onward if he can reach a world with a decent port. He will be a little surprised to hear someone has sent a crew to convey him, and may be suspicious. Once he is sure the Travellers really are under contract to get him to Tyokh, he asks for a day to sort out his affairs – such as they are – and suggests the Travellers find some way to smuggle him aboard their ship.

GETTING OFF HERNON’S CLAIM

Hteleitoirl has become aware that someone does not want him to reach his destination. As a son – even a minor one – of a clanlord he has enemies, but given his present circumstances it seems far more likely to him that someone is trying to derail his mission. He knows what is at stake here – he is going to his execution to prevent it – and is determined to take whatever measures are necessary to get past the opposition. His instinct is to fight, but after the events on Arunisiir he knows there are some fights he cannot win and this is one that he must not lose. The best way to do that is to be subtle and avoid his enemies.

If the Travellers want, there is no reason they cannot just walk through the small starport and back to their ship with Hteleitoirl. However, this makes no attempt to conceal the fact that he has left with them and results in a -4 modifier to the Misdirection Index. Completely concealing the fact that Hteleitoirl is with the Travellers results in no modifier, with measures in between gaining a modifier of between -1 and -3 at the referee’s discretion.

One option is to use the robotics business as a cover. A couple of guys going outside the settlement in suits to check out a broken-down mining robot will attract no attention, though if only one of them comes back there might be questions asked. However, it would not be hard

for Hteleitoirl to go outside with someone, and for one of the Travellers to replace him when he comes back in. Two out, two in, and the Travellers’ ship can then pick Hteleitoirl up after leaving the starport. Sneaking out of a maintenance airlock is also an option.

Other approaches range from bribing an official not to log the Aslan’s departure, to sneaking him through the port concealed inside a piece of equipment. A reasonable-sized robot might be an option – Hernon Robotics and Electronics sells a range of cargobots and shipboard robots, and would be happy to arrange a demonstration aboard the Travellers’ ship if they like. They could even buy one if they want...

However they do it, the Travellers will need to get Hteleitoirl and his few personal effects aboard their ship. He has little more than a couple of changes of not-very-expensive clothing and the contents of an overnight bag. The rest of his luggage – which is still not a lot for a clanlord’s son – was left behind at Gibraltar Station. If the Travellers brought it with them, Hteleitoirl will be delighted, though he may not show it around strangers.

TRAVELLING WITH HTELEITOIRL

Hteleitoirl is a complex person in a difficult situation. He was born into wealth and power, with an expectation that some day he would carve out a place for himself in the universe. He is accustomed to leading others and having them obey him, partly out of duty and partly from loyalty. The relationship between an Aslan leader and his immediate household might be difficult for the Travellers to understand; those who give their loyalty to a leader impose upon him in turn a duty to protect them and provide wise leadership. It is not the same thing as a strict chain of command or loose band of adventurers who cooperate with one another.

On the other hand, Hteleitoirl is aware that he failed his followers on Arunisiir, and this troubles him. Some were killed, many captured and deported, or sent home in return for considerations from the clan. Some remain on Arunisiir, and the fates of a few are unknown. Hteleitoirl still has a duty to these people, and bitterly regrets that he had to abandon them. His duty to his clan made this necessary, but he can be moved to violence by taunts about abandoning his people.

Since Arunisiir, Hteleitoirl has made his way across the Wildeman Cluster unaided, and this has been very difficult for him. For the first time in his life he had no

authority, no friends, and no money. His treatment at the hands of the people he encountered was not racist, but a lone drifter of any species is not welcome in many places. A series of lonely voyages aboard second-rate free traders got him as far as the Voidsedge Cluster, but Hteleitoirl then became stuck on Gibraltar Station.

All this is extremely frustrating for him, especially since he has no reward waiting for him at home; only execution. As a result he is aloof, bad-tempered and morose much of the time. In short, Hteleitoirl is not good company at all, but the Travellers are stuck with him. He will not, initially, discuss the reason for his journey other than to say he needs to return to his father's palace. The order to do so was given and he must obey. He will not mention anything about the execution order unless he has grown to like the Travellers, and that will take some time.

Hteleitoirl will offer some advice, typically in an offhand and almost uninterested way. This may come over as condescending, but is actually a result of his growing despair and an inability to be very enthusiastic about plans to get him to his execution. He advises caution in general, and suggests at least one or two stops before attempting the transit from the Voidsedge Cluster to the Drinax Chain. This increases the chance of someone recognising him, but he is willing to stay aboard ship or at least out of sight. His enemies will expect him to make straight for home, so a ship that wanders around a bit first may escape their notice.



Hteleitoirl also says that he needs to stop at Sink and The World before heading for Tyokh. He has business at both worlds that must be completed before he gets home. If asked whether he could not deal with this later, he growls darkly that there will be no opportunity later and refuses to say more.

If the Travellers treat their passenger decently, he will warm to them. He is too proud to accept criticism of any action or anything he says, but the truth is that he is desperately in need of companionship. He can be completely alienated by the Travellers' actions, in which case he simply points out their contract requires them to carry out a mission and conducts himself with sad dignity for the rest of the trip. However, given any reason, he will begin to crave the Travellers' acceptance and envy their friendships. If it seems like there is a chance he can enter into their social circle, Hteleitoirl's attitude becomes less offhand and much friendlier over time.

One result of this thawing of relations is an increasing willingness to talk about himself. If asked by a friendly group of Travellers, Hteleitoirl will explain how his clan faces threats from several others, and his journey to Tyokh is necessary to prevent conflict. He does not mention the fact that he is to be executed, but is willing to grudgingly admit that his attempted takeover of Arunisiir precipitated the crisis. Had he succeeded, his clan's enemies might even now be petitioning for closer relations.... But there is no point in wondering about that now.

Discussion of Hteleitoirl's failure at Arunisiir is unpleasant for him, but might cause him to consider if his attempt was not sabotaged from the beginning. The presence of mercenaries who specialise in opposing *i hate i* operations might not have been a coincidence. If so, the list of people who might want Hteleitoirl to fail is still extremely long, but the number who knew his target and timing is rather smaller.

Interactions with Hteleitoirl should be worked into the journey by the referee. It is, after all, several weeks at least from Inurin to Tyokh. If possible, the Travellers should be given reasons to like their passenger. This is not always possible with some gaming groups, but those who like to roleplay may come to regard Hteleitoirl as a friend rather than a package to be delivered. That may have implications towards the end of the journey.

LEAVING THE BORDERLAND



The jump-2 transit from Tech-World to Hilfer or Paal is favoured by most merchant traffic crossing from the Voidsedge Cluster to the Drinax Chain or back the other way. If Hteleitoirl were travelling aboard a commercial starship he would almost certainly go that way, which makes it highly unlikely that some sort of interception is not in place. He thus advises the Travellers not to use this route unless they absolutely have to.

Tech-World has no gas giant in its system, making it necessary to obtain fuel at the starport or search for water in the form of ice on one of the system's secondary bodies. That would be a time-consuming business and probably not feasible. The Travellers would have to go through the starport and be vulnerable to delays or intervention. Even something as minor as stalling the Travellers' progress by insisting on inspections and a mound of bureaucracy could result in Hteleitoirl reaching his destination too late.

Thus Hteleitoirl recommends leaving the Voidsedge Cluster by way of Ergo rather than Tech-World, and jumping to Sink since he has business there. A jump-1 ship will need to prepare for the transit by obtaining temporary fuel tanks with sufficient capacity to make a second jump. Tanks of this sort are commercially available, and are designed to fit into a vessel's cargo space (see page 36 of *High Guard* for options). When a ship fits such tanks it loses cargo capacity, so it is rather obvious that transit to another main is intended. The Travellers would be well advised to be discreet about obtaining the capacity to make the transit.



TRANSIT BY WAY OF ERGO

If the Travellers decide to transit via Ergo, their chances of doing so undetected are good. The world's ruined starport has no tracking capability and there are few ships in the system at any given time. These tend to be belters or mining vessels, whose operators have no interest in monitoring traffic and reporting ship movements. The Travellers' vessel, if noticed at all, would be simply another starship passing by; unless it attracts attention in some way...

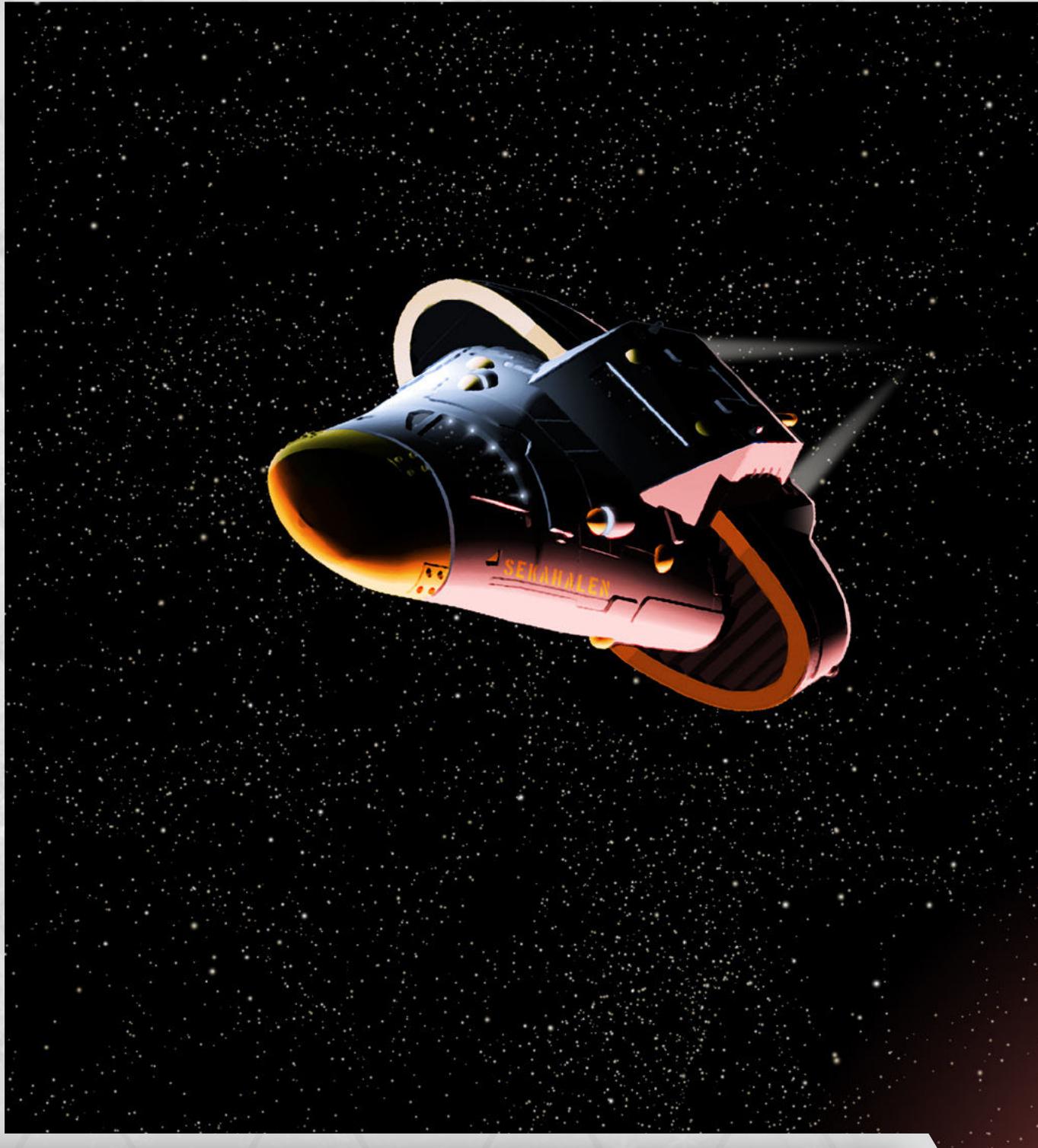
Refuelling by skimming at one of the system's two gas giants, then jumping on without making planetfall offers the best security, though it does mean spending a long time aboard ship. This can make a crew restless and cranky, especially aboard a small vessel. There is also a possibility of running into pirates in the outer system, preying on mining ships and belters. Ergo is not a prime hunting ground – pickings are slim for the most part – but it is a safe place to practice piracy. Travellers trying to operate stealthily may be mistaken for pirates, or may run into someone else doing the same. However, for the most part, a low profile and an appropriately cautious approach should suffice to prevent any unexpected encounters.

Landing on Ergo is no more dangerous in terms of meeting pirates, although the world's ruling council is suspected of making deals with raider groups. The Travellers will not be attacked; indeed, they will be welcomed by the Council of Barons and treated to a regular dog-and-pony show intended to win them over to the idea of making more trade stops at Ergo.

This is the barons' latest attempt to bring in some offworld cash. Passing crews are shown grandiose plans for reconstruction of the port along with trade income projections that are clearly the product of wishful thinking. They are offered the chance to build a relationship with the Council of Barons now, before everyone else spots this golden opportunity. There

is little substance to this plan, and it comes over as rather tragic instead of inspiring. However, there are a few opportunities for those so inclined. The barons are willing to enter into a partnership with ship crews, offering them a re-registry of their vessel. This is of interest mainly to those whose existing paperwork has awkward discrepancies, and will not bring in the sort of ships a burgeoning trade port would want. It is all the Council of Barons can manage at the present time however, so they are giving it a go.

If the Travellers talk to the council or other ship operators in the Ergo system, they will learn that several star mercenary vessels – mostly patrol corvettes and converted merchants – have passed through the system recently. A few weeks ago, a small flotilla of five vessels took up orbit over the port, but moved on without incident. The crews of these ships were tight-lipped about their mission, giving only vague responses along the lines of a piracy suppression contract. It is not known where these ships went.



ENCOUNTER AT ERGO

As the Travellers pass through the Ergo system, they encounter the *Seskahalen*, a far trader whose crew have been hauling cargo back and forth from Sperle to Byrni by way of Ergo for some months. They are not excessively trusting – nobody is beyond the frontier, not if they want to live long enough to retire, but are happy to engage in a little chit-chat. This might be in person if the Travellers landed at Ergo – the *Seskahalen* has a berth set aside for her there, and is one of the world's few regular visitors.

Seskahalen's crew are bored of their repetitive route. They make a modest profit and have no pressing reason to head off into the unknown, but theirs is a rut that many free traders get stuck into and most try very hard to avoid. New faces and a chance to swap tall tales would provide at least some relief from the boredom, so they are as sociable as they can afford to be.

Seskahalen's crew know all the old spacer jokes and friend-of-a friend-it-really-happened stories, and are good company. However, there is one story they all know which may seem a little too pat. Travellers who make a Difficult (10+) Carouse, Persuade or Diplomat check (only one attempt can be made by each Traveller) will realise that one of their tales seems a little too well-rehearsed. Each crewmember tells it almost word-for-word, which seems a bit off.

The tale is as follows: Whilst passing through Byrni, their ship was boarded by a group of star mercenaries with a valid anti-piracy warrant. They searched the ship thoroughly, but were polite and courteous. During the search, one of the mercenaries let slip that they were not really looking for pirates – though they would be very happy to capture some – but were in fact trying to catch a dangerous fugitive. Their target was an Aslan, some kind of big shot in the Hierate. He is wanted for leading a particularly vicious *i hatei* attack, and killing several security personnel in his bid to escape. There is a substantial bounty for his capture.

Some elements of the story are true, which may cause the Travellers to wonder about the rest. The tale has several purposes; it may inspire whomever Hteleitoirl is travelling with to turn him in, or at least mistrust

him. Failing that, the Travellers' reaction may indicate whether they are carrying a secret passenger. Indignant denial of the false details would confirm contact with Hteleitoirl, and the crew of *Seskahalen* are looking for any response that suggests they have found their quarry.

The crew are not experienced star mercenaries; just a far trader crew trying to make extra money. Their judgement is not that of professionals and their execution of any plan is likely to be haphazard. If they come to believe Hteleitoirl is aboard the Travellers' ship, they will try force to get him. Their vessel is a far trader with two single beam laser turrets; if they think this is sufficient armament to force a surrender, they will try. If not, they will have to settle for passing on information about Hteleitoirl's movements.

On-planet, the crew of *Seskahalen* are willing to use force – or rather they are willing to use the threat of force, which may escalate into a serious fight – to seize Hteleitoirl. Their plan is to act naturally until they can take some Travellers hostage at gunpoint, demanding Hteleitoirl be handed over in return for them.

If they knew about this attempt in advance, the Council of Barons would be divided on the subject – like every subject – with some wanting to help Hteleitoirl in the hope of winning favour with his clan, whilst others might prefer to seize him and see who is willing to grant concessions in return for handing him over. Thus, a response by the council will be slow and disjointed, though a gunfight in the starport area could escalate into a small civil war if things go badly wrong.

The crew of *Seskahalen* will try to achieve surprise, but anyone making an Average (8+) Recon or Streetwise check will realise they are planning something or spot weapons in time to react. The hope is to avoid violence but this may be naïve; once fighting starts, it will be difficult to stop.

This incident should indicate to the Travellers that they face serious opposition, if they did not already know. They may also need to vacate Ergo quickly, in case the council decides to detain them after all. The incident may also raise questions that Hteleitoirl must finally answer, such as exactly why he faces opposition to his trip home.

REVELATIONS



If the need arises, or he has become friendly with the Travellers, Hteleitoirl will explain the situation to them in more detail. Yes, he admits, he did lead an *ihaeti* takeover attempt at Arunisiir. It was not, however, a vicious and cowardly attack like the one portrayed by his enemies. He made a formal declaration of his intentions upon arrival and fought a fair fight – and lost it fairly, he believes. Within the code of honour observed by his people, he has done nothing wrong. What is taken by force in a fair fight belongs to the victor, and he had no intention of mistreating the vanquished, especially if they put up a good fight.

Hteleitoirl does not know for sure but it seems likely to him now that his target was forewarned by someone who knew where he was headed. He believes that person is a representative of his clan, currently based on Sink. He thus intends to go there and obtain proof. This is partly to recoup some of his lost prestige – losing a rigged fight is less of a stigma than being beaten because you failed to plan well – and partly to eliminate a traitor to his clan. It has not occurred to him that proof of betrayal might save his life.

After Sink, Hteleitoirl needs to visit The World, where some friends of his are waiting. His reasons are purely personal; he wants to see them once last time before he dies. This may be the first time Hteleitoirl mentions the execution order, prompting Travellers to ask what he means. He explains dispassionately that he faces execution – not for his failure but for the consequences it brought down upon other clans and their resulting hostility to his own people.

Hteleitoirl is adamant about going home to face his fate. He simply cannot consider any other option. If he does not get there in time to face judgement and execution, his clan may be at war with several others and could not survive. In short, his failure would mean the disgrace and destruction of his entire clan, and he cannot consider any action that might make this more likely.

Hteleitoirl is a prisoner of his own duty and honour. If the Travellers decide not to take him home, they would be in breach of their contract and would forfeit their second payment as well as making enemies within the Borderland Alliance. Hteleitoirl himself would fight them if necessary. If the Travellers do succeed in, say, drugging Hteleitoirl and putting him in a low berth, they will save his life at the price of his clan. He will never forgive them for this and may dedicate himself to hunting them down.

Hteleitoirl is entirely willing to make all this plain to the Travellers. He may be a friend to them by now but is still willing to kill them if it gets him to his goal, or if they try to stop him. In fact, as friends, he feels the Travellers are honour bound to assist him. He is sure his clan will respect their efforts as well. Hteleitoirl is willing to ask, threaten or fight, but any way it happens, he needs to get home. If the Travellers are not willing to help, they are an obstruction that must be removed.

OPPOSITION AT SINK AND THE WORLD

Hteleitoirl's enemies have been trying to find him for some time. Some of their assets will be reassigned after a while, or contracts will run out. Thus, the longer the Travellers take to get to Sink and The World, and the more convoluted a path they take to get there, the less opposition they will face. If their ship behaves like a typical merchant vessel innocently conducting trade, they may escape notice entirely. The Misdirection Index will indicate how well the Travellers manage to fool the opposition, if at all.

When the Travellers arrive at Sink and then later at The World, the referee should roll 2D and add the Travellers' Misdirection Index to the total, then consult the Misdirection table:

MISDIRECTION

2D + Misdirection Index	Result
2-	Major Opposition
3-6	Serious Opposition
7-10	Moderate Opposition
11-13	Slight Opposition
14+	No Opposition

Major Opposition indicates that Hteleitoirl's enemies know what ship he is travelling on and where he will be at what time. They can plan ahead and set a trap for him. A force of mercenaries will be waiting at the port and will make an attempt on his life using military weapons and tactics. In addition, four starships have been assigned to intercept the Travellers as they leave the port. These will not all be warships; a mix of patrol corvettes, armed free traders and scout/couriers is likely. The mercenaries will demand surrender before opening fire if possible, but are quite willing to launch a surprise attack. They have no doubts about their target and will show no hesitation or mercy.

Serious Opposition indicates that Hteleitoirl's enemies are reasonably sure of their target and have been able to position forces ready. A force of mercenaries (as above) will be waiting at the port, and a single starship will attempt an intercept as the Travellers leave. The opposition has no doubts about whether they have the right target and will attack on sight.

Moderate Opposition indicates that Hteleitoirl's enemies have a pretty good idea that he will pass through this world's port and has not yet done so. They have bribed starport officials to delay the Travellers' ship with unnecessary inspections and paperwork, requiring the Travellers to negotiate a maze of bureaucracy. Meanwhile, a small team of assassins is in place and will attempt to eliminate Hteleitoirl. If the Travellers stay or are detained for more than ten days, a patrolling mercenary ship (a patrol corvette) will arrive and take up position outside the port. If the Travellers try to leave, it will attack. If not, it will pin their ship there until the deadline for Hteleitoirl's return is past.

Slight Opposition indicates that Hteleitoirl's enemies have been successfully misdirected and positioned their forces elsewhere – or perhaps they have decided Hteleitoirl has slipped past and redeployed. Port officials have been bribed to harass and delay the Travellers, and observers are in place who will alert the opposition to the Travellers' movements. Staying or delaying longer than ten days risks a patrolling ship arriving as above. The chance is 10+ on a straight 2D roll. The roll is made on the tenth day and then another every D3 days thereafter until the Travellers leave or a ship arrives.

No Opposition indicates that Hteleitoirl's enemies have been completely fooled and have no measures in place to slow or stop him. It is quite possible the opposition think Hteleitoirl is still somewhere in the Voidsedge Cluster, or that they have been convinced he is already home. There are still events as mandated by the adventure storyline (see Unclogging the Sink and All the Time in the World) but no additional problems will be encountered.

THE MERCENARY ATTACK

Mercenary attacks can occur at The World and/or Sink, if Major or Serious Opposition is encountered. The mercenaries have an exit strategy and are reasonably sure they can get away with a blatant attack without suffering legal consequences. They use military hardware but are in civilian clothing in order to obtain surprise.

The mercenaries (see page 44) are not assassins, and not very skilled at pretending to be innocent passers-by. However, once the pretence can be dropped they are in their element; a straight-up gunfight with no concern for collateral damage. Ideally, the mercenaries will try to spot the Travellers and wait for them to walk into some suitable ambush location, such as an open plaza or port concourse. This requires surveillance followed by a direct attack.

There will be two mercenaries assigned to spotting and surveillance, equipped with concealed handguns. The strike team will be at least two mercenaries, and as many more as the referee feels necessary to challenge the Travellers. The strike team have cloth body armour in the form of coveralls, and conceal their weapons in a cart full of tools. If not looked at too closely, they resemble a work gang conducting maintenance, which is their intent.

The mercenaries are armed with military weapons and quite willing to use grenades in a public place – they are simply not concerned with the fallout of their actions and have been paid very well to ensure the death of Hteleitoirl and any companions. Some local security personnel will have been bribed not to raise the alarm or interfere, while others will have no idea what is going on and may feel unable to intervene without backup. Thus, the Travellers are pretty much on their own.

Spotting the surveillance operatives requires a Routine (6+) Streetwise check. The mercenaries blend in well enough but are not skilled at appearing to be occupied in some innocent activity. Alert Travellers may spot something amiss before the attack begins. If they do not, there is a chance to notice the strike team breaking out their weapons, though they will try to do it out of sight. A Difficult (10+) Recon check detects that ‘those people over there’ are suddenly moving with far too much purpose, enabling the Travellers to react before the mercenaries get their weapons ready.

THE ASSASSIN ATTACK

An attack by assassins (see page 44) can take place at Sink or The World (or both) if Moderate Opposition occurs. The assassins are more skilled at blending in and hiding their intentions than the mercenaries, but do not have the firepower a combat unit can bring to bear.

The assassins will not make a massed attack or anything so crude. Instead, they will attempt to eliminate Hteleitoirl or trap him by killing a key member of his crew. If the Travellers are fixated on threats to Hteleitoirl’s life, they may not consider the possibility that someone might try to take out their pilot and thus delay their mission.

The assassins’ first attempt relies on complete surprise. It takes place in a public area with no obvious threats. The assassin hopes to use a poisoned spike-like knife by brushing past the target and jabbing him in the lower back. The blade is so sharp that it will not be immediately apparent there has been a stabbing; the victim will feel nothing more than a slight bump as someone moves past, giving the assassin a few seconds to slip away.

Subsequent attempts will be less subtle. The assassins would prefer to use the environment to kill their target, such as by causing a seal to fail on The World and exposing the target to vacuum, or locking them in a compartment and disabling life support equipment. However, the assassins are less willing to cause collateral casualties (perhaps only out of professional pride) and will not simply blow open a part of a space station. Simple short-range gun attacks are also possible.

Spotting a skilled assassin as they approach is not easy, requiring a Difficult (10+) Streetwise or Recon check to realise something is amiss, notice a weapon, or spot threatening movement. A completely unaware target is automatically hit by the assassin’s first attack if it is made from within touching distance – whether it is a hand weapon or a gun that is used.

If the Streetwise check is made, the target and anyone else who makes the check has one combat round to react. An assassin who realises they have been ‘made’ will probably just stroll innocently past and disappear into the crowd, hoping to lose any pursuit.

BUREAUCRATIC ENTANGLEMENTS

If the Travellers face bureaucratic opposition, this will be aimed at delaying them until one of the mobile assets passes by or the deadline for Hteleitoirl to present himself at his father’s palace expires. The people causing these problems for the Travellers are not their enemies; they are ordinary portside workers, officials and administrators who have been paid or induced to make life a little more difficult for the Travellers. Harming any of these people will result in a response from the world’s security apparatus, and may cause the Travellers to be incarcerated or their ship impounded. Indeed, the opposition hopes the Travellers will do something stupid out of frustration and take themselves out of the equation. Failing that, any delay increases the chances of being caught by a patrolling asset or at the very least makes it more likely that Hteleitoirl will fail to get home in time.

Red Tape

The simplest gambit used by port officials to delay the Travellers is to make them wade through a lot of red tape and general bureaucratic hassle. Officials will find every form that could possibly need filling out, including some that have not been in use for years. They will nitpick details and bounce forms back to the Travellers for the slightest imperfection – and not necessarily straight away. Indeed, the red tape fiasco can be dragged out for days if the person who signs off on the paperwork happens to be unavailable, busy, blind drunk or otherwise unable to determine if the administration has been performed satisfactorily.

The likely form this will take is to give the Travellers a load of paperwork – cargo release forms, fuel quality inspection forms, passenger and cargo manifests in horrible levels of detail, and so forth – which then goes to someone who takes at least several hours (perhaps a day or two) going over it before sending back some or all of it to be done again, or querying minor discrepancies. The Travellers might find themselves having to clarify what they meant by ‘crew shoe and hat locker’ or ‘automated cheese slicer’ on their shipboard equipment declaration.

Getting the forms right requires a Very Difficult (12+) Admin check (INT). Each time a batch of forms goes in, it is 3D+6 hours before they are processed, after which the requests for resubmission and clarification arrive if the Admin check was failed. The difficulty of each repeated Admin check goes down by one level (e.g. Difficult to Average, then Average to Routine) each time, unless the Effect was -6 or worse, in which case it goes up one level instead. Once the check is made, the paperwork is accepted and the Travellers are cleared to unload cargo, leave port, or otherwise go about their business.

Travellers who weary of this back-and-forth can cut through the red tape by various means. Shooting the officials will result in other, rather more immediate, problems, but a Traveller who makes a successful Difficult (10+) Advocate check (D3 hours, EDU) can reduce the difficulty of the Admin check by two levels (e.g. Very Difficult to Average) by providing legal reasons why various forms are not required. Bribery can also be used; a successful Average (8+) Persuade check (SOC) can be used to bribe officials. Each Cr250 offered grants DM+1 on the next Admin check, to a maximum of DM+6.

Once the Admin check is successful, the Travellers are free to proceed. The vast file they leave behind might puzzle auditors when they look over the port’s accounts, but otherwise there will be no further bureaucratic hassles.

INSPECTIONS & CERTIFICATION

Minor ports are notoriously lax about inspecting a ship’s paperwork and its crew’s credentials. Similarly, spaceworthiness checks tend to be cursory, if they are made at all. One way to impose a delay upon the Travellers is to implement a full set of procedures when they enter port. The Travellers will be required to demonstrate they are properly qualified to operate their ship and that it is not a hazard to navigation. Most minor port officials do not really know how to test flight crew credentials, but there are computer packages that have a standard test. One will be dusted off and applied.

Each member of the crew will be required to demonstrate competence in their official role. If the crew have no official roles, it will be obvious that they must pretend they do in order to tick all the boxes in the test. Each Traveller must make an Average (8+) check relevant to their role (such as a Pilot check for pilots, Engineer for engineers, and so on). The ship’s official master (a ship legally must have a master, even if the crew take no notice of them) must in addition make an Average (8+) Leader, Advocate or Admin check.

If any of the crew fail their check, they will be quizzed at length about why they lack key knowledge by someone who obviously has no idea about that knowledge and is using a computer database to come up with sensible questions. It is possible to bluff through this quizzing with an Average (8+) Persuade check, or alternatively the referee should use the opportunity for some fun roleplaying, asking faintly ridiculous questions in a deadly-serious manner and then earnestly listening to whatever convincing nonsense the Traveller comes back with.

Certification tests can be dragged out for a day or so at most, but when combined with a spaceworthiness inspection carried out by people who do not really understand what they are doing but who want to take as long as possible over it, the process can go on for several days. Again, the spaceworthiness inspection can be roleplayed, perhaps using the ship’s deckplan and asking relevant crewmembers to explain what goes on in a given compartment or why there is no handle on the aft fresher’s door. Most difficult questions can be answered with an Average (8+) Engineer skill check or bluffed with an Average (8+) Persuade check. Bribery and other methods can also be used to shorten the inspection.

UNCLOGGING THE SINK



Sink is the mainworld of a system containing three gas giants, a planetoid belt and three other rocky worlds. It is in some ways a barrier to jump-1 trade along the Drinax Chain into the Aslan Hierate, as neither Sink nor The World are receptive to visitors. Jump-1 ships tend to turn around at Paal, whilst those making the jump-2 transit into or out of the Voidsedge Cluster usually go by way of Paal and Tech-World, bypassing the two unimportant stops by jumping directly to Tyokh.

Sink is officially designated a garden world, which might imply that it is temperate and a nice place to settle. In fact much of Sink's land is low-lying and damp, creating a landscape of swamps and swampy forests. Although this is hardly prime real estate, any world with a 'shirtsleeve environment' is likely to be attractive to land-hungry Aslan *i hatei*. There has been little attempt to seize territory on Sink, however. The locals might claim this is due to divine providence but it is more likely the politics of the Aslan Hierate, which sometimes results in rushes to colonise a world that has been previously ignored, and on other occasions results in a good prospect being left for decades at a time.

Sink itself has had other designations in the past, but current star charts use the common and rather tongue-in-cheek name given by the first spacers who visited the world and observed its rather odd culture. Sink's only major settlement – officially the only settlement that exists at all – is a religious community of about 800 people located in a particularly damp part of the planet. The locals' religion venerates bodies of water, and follows a curious practice of sinking objects of value in nearby lakes. This may be related to ancient Terrain religious practices, but the locals do not discuss details of their beliefs with outsiders.

Whatever the reason, these water-offerings prompted visitors to rename the world Sink. If this offends the locals, they do not show it. They care little for the world outside their little community of about 800 people; something happening a hundred kilometres away might as well be on the far side of the universe.

Most locals have nothing to do with outsiders, and prefer not to have contact with them. They are not hostile, just completely indifferent; indeed, most locals simply do not see the point in speaking with an outsider and will ignore questions or attempts at conversation. A few will deal with outsiders, and there is a (very small) community of offworlders, most of whom have jobs associated with what passes for a starport.

Some of these offworlders have a better relationship with the locals, and can sometimes arrange meetings with senior religious figures who are receptive to what the outsiders might say. There are also some odd tales among offworlders who have made Sink their home; tales of dangerous things living in the damp forests. It may be that there is a practical reason why Sink has not been overrun by *i hatei* settlements and, if so, this raises the question of why a religious community of 800 people can survive but well-armed Aslan settlers cannot.

ARRIVING AT SINK

When the Travellers arrive at Sink, they find the starport empty. This is not uncommon at small ports of this type, especially off the main trade routes. Hteleitoirl needs to meet a contact here, a member of his clan assigned to Sink some years ago. It was hoped at the time to push a regular trade run up the Drinax Chain and perhaps create a clan enclave on Sink to facilitate it. The project ran into difficulties and never really went anywhere, but the clan's agent was left in place as an intelligence gathering asset.

The agent, Ehfyohoikoaleai, is an old friend of Hteleitoirl's father, one of his early supporters when he was a young male trying to make a name for himself. Hteleitoirl suspects that Ehfyohoikoaleai leaked information about his forthcoming operation at Arunisiir. He does not want to believe this of a trusted clan-member but there are few other explanations. It has occurred to him that there might have been no outside influence; Hteleitoirl might have made mistakes of his own or perhaps been unlikely. It would give him some comfort to know he was betrayed, however; a hero can fall victim to treachery whereas inadequacy is a poor legend to leave behind.

The offworlder enclave at Sink is built using offworld materials and designs. The rest of the community is a small TL5 town of a good but basic standard. The locals have some advanced technology but cannot maintain it, so tend to rely on their own locally made equipment. The offworld enclave, on the other hand, has a high proportion of gadgets and devices of a sort available in most starport shops.

When the Travellers arrive at Sink, the referee must determine the situation based on the Travellers' Misdirection Index. If they have escaped notice, there will be no response waiting for them; if not, they could have a serious fight on their hands. Either way, they have a chance to investigate Ehfyohoikoaleai's involvement in the Arunisiir fiasco. The Travellers have no reason to do this other than Hteleitoirl might ask them to, though they may find the idea aligns with their own self-interest. If they have become friends with Hteleitoirl, the Travellers may help him without thought of reward.

INVESTIGATING EHFYOHOIKOALEAI

Ehfyohoikoaleai has a very modest dwelling by the standards of his homeworld, but on Sink it is considered palatial. His house is surrounded by a small garden looked after by robots and members of his all-Aslan staff. The staff is not large; just half a dozen domestic servants, bodyguards and clerks. They are all long-term employees of Ehfyohoikoaleai and loyal to him. Ehfyohoikoaleai treats his staff well enough, though to a human he may come across as haughty, ordering them around and criticising the tiniest failings. This is normal behaviour for high-status Aslan, and his staff would be uncomfortable with a more relaxed situation.

Hteleitoirl plans to distract Ehfyohoikoaleai by requesting a tour of the community on Sink. Ehfyohoikoaleai will take this as a rather obvious tactic to get away from Hteleitoirl's pesky human companions and talk freely, and is unlikely to suspect Hteleitoirl is setting him up. However, he is a seasoned intelligence agent with a healthy natural paranoia. He has lost his edge over the years on Sink, which is hardly a challenging intelligence environment, but still maintains decent security.

If the Travellers need it, their ship's computer contains a translation package which will allow them to read data in various languages, including the Aslan tongue. Cracking the security on Ehfyohoikoaleai's computer might be difficult, but Hteleitoirl can furnish a set of passcodes known only to members of the clanlord's family. These should allow at least partial access to the files, though additional layers of security must be overcome if they are encountered.

Once Ehfyohoikoaleai and his two bodyguards are away from the house, the Travellers will be able to break in and get access to his computer. It is not possible to do this remotely, as Sink has no datanet, though there is a network within the house which would allow access from anywhere within – it may not be necessary to physically use Ehfyohoikoaleai's computer.

The staff remaining at Ehfyohoikoaleai's house are not security professionals; they are household servants. They received training, since security is a responsibility of every member of the household, but this was some time ago and the staff are complacent.

Sneaking into the house will not be difficult for anyone with a decent Stealth skill; a successful Routine (6+) Stealth check (DEX) will suffice to avoid detection. It is quite likely that doors will be unlocked during the day as the household staff go about their business, though this does create a risk of detection as someone comes in to clean a room or refill decanters.

Alternatively, the Travellers might try bluffing the staff to gain entry to the house or garden. The household network is accessible from close to the building, so the Travellers need only find an excuse to hang around for a few minutes. A successful Average (8+) Persuade check (SOC) will enable some suitable scheme to be carried out, providing the Travellers do not take too long about it.

Getting into the household network requires defeating standard security – there is nothing about the surface layer of Ehfyohoikoaleai's computer security to indicate he is an intelligence operative. Hacking into the network requires a Difficult (10+) Electronics (computers) check (3D minutes, INT), after which the Travellers will encounter Ehfyohoikoaleai's own security. This is overridden by the passcode Hteleitoirl supplied or bypassed with a Formidable (14+) Electronics (computers) check (2D x 10 minutes, INT), allowing the Travellers to pull data from the secret files. It will need to be examined at some length (1D hours), as there is a lot of information of which most is mundane and innocuous.

Incriminating Data

The data found on Ehfyohoikoaleai's computer is damning. His position as a clan official requires total loyalty, and as a friend of the clanlord he is also bound by personal ties. Correspondence in his files indicates increasing disaffection with his posting on Sink, until routine interclan messages – of a sort Ehfyohoikoaleai would normally send and receive – begin to contain undertones that he is open to a better offer.

This offer comes in a roundabout way from clan *Htyowao*, couched in vague terms referencing Aslan cultural heroes who faced difficult choices when their clanlord disrespected them or failed to reward loyalty. Then a sudden change takes place in the tone of communications. Ehfyohoikoaleai begins openly sending information on his clan's ambitions and future projects. Among these is the failed Arunisiir takeover, which is the subject of a lengthy exchange regarding times, force strengths and projected routes to the target. It becomes obvious that Ehfyohoikoaleai provided clan *Htyowao* with information to derail the raid, and in return is promised high office and transfer to a posting more appropriate to his talents and service to his new clan.



For his part, Hteleitoirl will try to get Ehfyohoikoaleai to slip up and reveal some wrongdoing, but he is not skilled in this field and will succeed only in making Ehfyohoikoaleai suspicious. He cuts their tour short and returns home with his bodyguards and Hteleitoirl in tow; if the Travellers are still there, they may have some explaining to do. Sink has no official security force, but some offworlders living at the port handle troublemakers. If the situation at Ehfyohoikoaleai's house escalates, the Travellers may find themselves confronted by several concerned citizens armed with an array of basic weaponry.

The best option is to sneak away or make some semi-plausible excuse and leave promptly. If the Travellers remain, Ehfyohoikoaleai will have one of his staff alert his offworld neighbours that he is in trouble (not exactly true, but they will take the request for help at face value), resulting in an initial response within a few minutes. The offworlders are not law enforcement officers and not skilled at questioning suspects. As a result, the Travellers will face a barrage of questions, some of which are relevant and some not. Most are repeated in different forms, several times over.

It is not necessary to provide a legal argument here – indeed, one would be worthless. All the Travellers need to do is to confuse the issue sufficiently that the offworlders cannot decide what is going on. Most of them just want the problem to go away, so if the Travellers return to their ship and leave that will be enough to resolve the situation. Persuading the offworlder posse that the Travellers are just leaving is relatively easy – a Routine (6+) Persuade or Streetwise check (SOC) will suffice. Convincing them that the Travellers are not doing anything wrong requires a Difficult (10+) Persuade check (SOC) but allows the Travellers to remain at large on Sink. This may be necessary if the attempt to obtain data was interrupted.

If data is not obtained from Ehfyohoikoaleai, Hteleitoirl remains suspicious of him but cannot prove anything. This may be a problem later. However, for now the Travellers need to move on to The World.

ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

The World is an airless rockball barely large enough to be called a planet. It is the mainworld, if that is the right title, of a system with two planetoid belts, three gas giants and four other terrestrial planets. The belts see a fair amount of belter and mining-company activity, but most operations are temporary. Aslan firms have a tendency to move into a section of a belt and run everyone else off, which makes this an unhealthy place to work. These miners and prospectors have nothing to do with the mainworld; the Aslan never visit it and non-Aslan do so only rarely.

The mainworld is uninhabited, but orbited by an ancient and highly decrepit space station known to both its inhabitants and few visitors as The World. Most inhabitants do not know they live in a space station, and are convinced it is the entire universe. Only a small, privileged class are allowed to meet outsiders or given the 'secret knowledge' that there is a whole universe out there. The main inhabited areas are segregated from the rather basic starport section of the station by heavy doors and depressurised areas, making it virtually impossible for a citizen of the world to come into contact with outsiders by accident.

The citizenry know no other existence than one of decaying metal corridors and power outages, and accept their way of life without question. Their leaders know the truth, as do those privileged to be elevated to the ruling households. Revealing the truth would probably

be catastrophic for the people of The World. Some might not be able to cope with the destruction of their limited world-view and, more seriously, a population that knew there was a better life elsewhere might revolt against their overlords.

The leaders of The World and their supporters are well aware of this, and keep their subjects ignorant by carefully ensuring outsiders are limited to a small section of the station which – not coincidentally – is the part in the best repair. Those citizens that offworlders do encounter are part of the elite and know it is in their interests to ensure the real state of society on The World does not become known.

There is a small 'offworld' community at The World's starport area. Many of the residents are temporary, providing some technical function to The World's leaders or training local technicians and engineers. Others are merchants who deal with the few ships that come through the port, and a few are just living there for a while before moving on. Some members of this community suspect the main population of The World is oppressed or otherwise disadvantaged but access is very difficult; most are willing to let their suspicions stay under their radar.

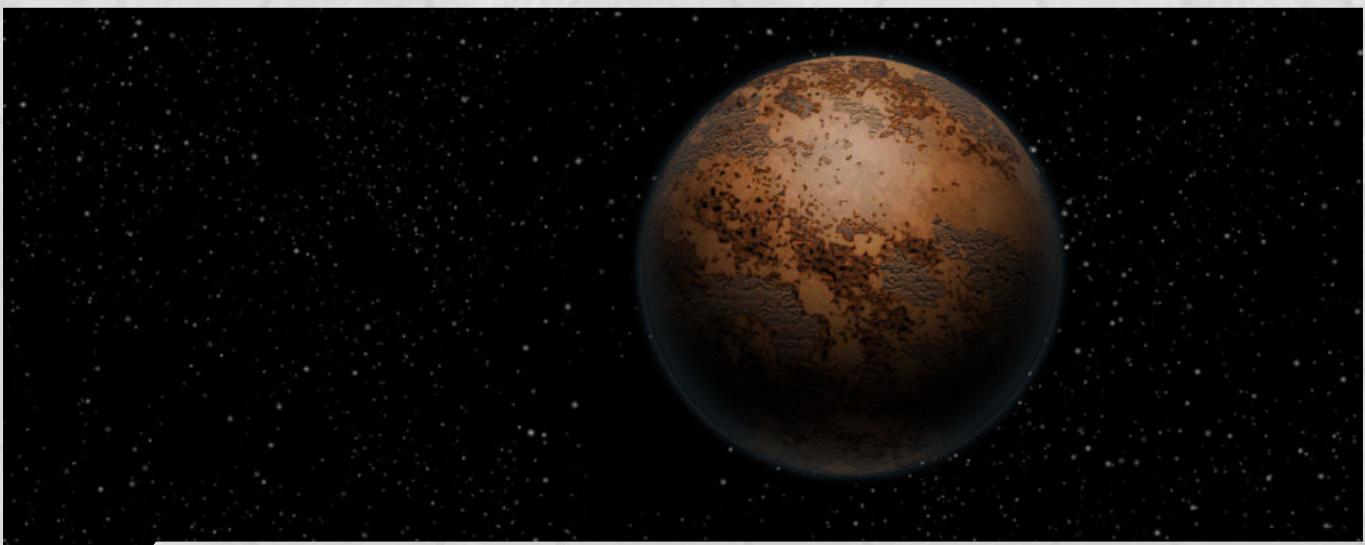
In recent years, a small contingent of Aslan personnel has been stationed at The World's starport, providing security for the port. These personnel are provided by the *luwoi* clan, as part of a deal which was hoped would increase the clan's influence. The hoped-for benefits never emerged, largely because an expected upswing in local trade simply failed to materialise, but a presence is maintained because a deal must be honoured. The Aslan are bored and tend to over-react to any sort of trouble. The odd officially-sanctioned brawl relieves the tension for a time, but sooner or later the Aslan get too restless and do something that cannot be smoothed over by their superiors.

ARRIVING AT THE WORLD

The Travellers should have no problems upon arrival at The World, though they may have reservations about docking at such a decrepit looking installation. Once inside they find portside technicians over-eager but not very skilled. Simple tasks are made complex by too many people trying to help at once. Clearly, there is not much traffic through here and The World's leaders wish to impress crews who use their port. The hapless over-enthusiasm of the portside crews tends to have the opposite effect, however.

Hteleitoirl is eager to meet up with his friends at the port. They are all young, with dreams of being big players in Hierate politics someday. The males mostly provide portside security – which means lounging around a lot of the time – whilst females are either technicians or merchants; one of them has taken over traffic control for the port. Whilst this is not a challenging role most days, she is certainly a lot more efficient than her predecessors and highly valued by The World's leaders, who feel that clear directions about when and where to berth create a good first impression. This is the highest any of the Aslan at The World have managed to climb, however, and they are all very aware that they are wasting their youth on a dead-end station.

The arrival of Hteleitoirl causes a bit of a stir among the Aslan. If the Travellers are introduced as friends they will be accepted, though they will need to be careful about their manners around restless young Aslan males. If Hteleitoirl is nothing but a cargo to be delivered, the Travellers may see some aspects of what passes between Hteleitoirl and his friends, but may never know the details.



HTELEITOIRL & FRIENDS

First meetings between Hteleitoirl and his friends are a mixture of joy and awkwardness. He was the leader of this group when they were very young, and set off to do great deeds. Now he is back, carrying only failure with him. He is more concerned about this than they are; most are just glad to see their childhood friend. Some of them disappear to prepare a celebration.

The moment when Hteleitoirl encounters the female traffic controller, Elehasei, is particularly difficult for him. He had hoped to return in glory and ask her to be his wife; now he must tell her that he is going to his death. The Travellers may not follow the full exchange but it will be painfully apparent something is wrong. Elehasei goes off alone after this, returning a while later with a storage case.

The case contains Hteleitoirl's formal robes and regalia, befitting the son of a clanlord. Hteleitoirl's friends insist he wear his full regalia and preside over a feast they are preparing. If he is friendly with the Travellers, they are also invited.

The feast is a fair effort, given that it was thrown together at two hours' notice with what was available in a decrepit space station. There are formalities, honours and speeches, and a chance for the Travellers to offend some of the Aslan with a gaffe. If *The Pirates of Drinax* is available, the reaction rules on page 32 Book 2 can be used to determine if the Travellers begin a confrontation. If it is not, the Travellers should make an Average (8+) Diplomat check (SOC), with DM+4 if they are friendly with Hteleitoirl and DM+2 if they are not but have spent a fair amount of time with him or other Aslan. Aslan Travellers do not need to make a check.

Anyone who fails this check commits a social faux pas (such as talking loudly in the pause during a formal speech, or failing to show proper respect to those around them). The most likely outcome of this is the Aslan equivalent of sniggers and nudging of one another, followed by deliberate attempts to make the barbarians embarrass themselves further. A very serious failure (Effect -6 or worse) indicates one of the Aslan is sufficiently annoyed to throw the Traveller out of the room. This will also happen if someone is crass enough to make racist 'follow the laser pen, cat-people' jokes.

The feast is joyful but tinged with sadness, and during it Elehasei approaches one of the Travellers – quite possibly the one who clearly has the least idea how to act in Aslan society. She asks to speak privately, and makes a difficult request.

Elehasei cannot ask Hteleitoirl to flee instead of going home to face execution. A wife who would ask such a thing of her husband would not be a fit companion for him, so suggesting he turn aside from self-destruction would lose him as surely as letting him die – and it would disgrace him too. Elehasei simply cannot do this... but the Travellers could.

Elehasei asks the Travellers to persuade Hteleitoirl to turn back, or perhaps head up the Drinax Chain and out into Sindal subsector. All his friends would follow him if he allowed them to, preferring to live as outcasts than see Hteleitoirl executed. She even goes so far as to suggest simply lying about the ship's destination and taking Hteleitoirl somewhere else, or abandoning him here.

The Travellers have a choice to make. Of course, if they fail to deliver their cargo they will not receive the second half of their payment and may acquire a reputation for unreliability. However, given the efforts currently being made to stop Hteleitoirl from getting home, it would not be difficult to make it look like the Travellers made a determined effort; that should preserve their reputation and might even earn them some of the payment.

If the Travellers approach Hteleitoirl, he instantly rejects the idea, with what is obviously a statement he has prepared beforehand. He does not stop listening however, and could be persuaded. If the Travellers choose to do this, it will take a Very Difficult (12+) Diplomat or Persuade check (SOC) to convince Hteleitoirl not to do his duty, reduced to Difficult (10+) if the Travellers mention that Elehasei would go with Hteleitoirl into exile.

If the Travellers do not take Hteleitoirl home, the adventure ends here. Hteleitoirl may feature in future adventures but this particular Borderland run is over. If the Travellers do intend to press on, there is one last scene to play out at The World.

DEPARTURES

Late at night, shortly before they depart for Tyokh, the Travellers become aware of a disturbance. It soon becomes apparent that Hteleitoirl is trashing the port. He is easy to locate both by the sounds of his rage and the gaggle of nervous port workers following him around. When they get too close, Hteleitoirl chases them off with savage roars and threats of violence.

Hteleitoirl started out by just kicking things around, but has worked himself into a real fury. Portside security would normally love to get involved, but they are his friends and sympathise with his feelings. Thus, when Hteleitoirl begins to destroy a utility robot with his bare fists, the head of portside security hands him a crowbar and points out some good places to hit it.

The disturbance begins to draw a crowd, and soon it becomes apparent that whilst Hteleitoirl has limited himself to violence against objects so far, some onlookers are making hesitant attempts to intervene or protect property. There is a real chance that someone could get hurt or that Hteleitoirl's friends may have to use force to stop him.

The Travellers might choose to intervene at this point. Persuading Hteleitoirl to calm down requires a Very Difficult (10+) Persuade check, with a negative Effect causing his fury to escalate. He might even attack the Traveller. Other measures are possible, such as convincing Hteleitoirl's friends to intervene or perhaps shooting him with a tranquiliser round. He will have to be stopped somehow, before he hurts someone.

Hteleitoirl has already caused a fair amount of nuisance but so far has not done much material damage. Despite this, the leaders of The World treat the incident very seriously. They demand replacement of the damaged robot and various other items that will be difficult to obtain, greatly exaggerating the degree of damage done. Essentially, they are attempting to extort things they need out of Hteleitoirl and the Travellers.

The demands are difficult to meet, but The World will not allow the Travellers' ship to leave until reparations have been made. The Travellers may need to negotiate

a solution or make some suitable settlement. If they bought a shipboard robot earlier in the adventure, the port at The World will find it useful and accept it as settlement. One other option is a little more direct – Hteleitoirl's friends more or less control the port and direct its traffic. They could open the docking bay despite orders not to. This might cause conflict with their employers but the worst that can happen is they will get fired – and they have already decided they are long overdue for a change of location.

One way or another, the Travellers depart The World and head across the border into the Aslan Hierate.



TYOKH



Tyokh is the mainworld of a binary system containing six other terrestrial planets and four gas giants. It is a major shipping hub and industrial centre, and the destination of most trade entering the Aslan Hierate from the Imperium or worlds of the Borderland. The system is heavily defended by warships of several major Aslan clans, and often used as a staging point for *i hatei* operations.

With a population in excess of 20 billion and a high-tech manufacturing base, Tyokh is a major influence on the local economy and source of many goods. Its factories have a voracious appetite for raw materials, some of which come from mining bodies elsewhere in the system. Superfreighters filled with ore or other basic industrial materials go straight to the spaceports of the main manufacturing centres. General trade and commerce is done at the immense highport which orbits Tyokh.

The world is balkanised, with several major and many minor clans controlling various parts of the surface. As might be expected, these enclaves are highly militarised and clashes between clans can be very bloody. There is an overall framework of cooperation between the clans intended to reduce the chance of a devastating conflict, meaning that even clans at war with one another refrain from major military operations on Tyokh itself or within orbital space. There have been exceptions and breakdowns of this agreement, however, and skirmishes are not uncommon in disputed parts of the planet.

Even with 20 billion people, Tyokh has a significant amount of wilderness, populated by ferocious creatures. This suits the Aslan, who maintain hunting preserves and areas where young Aslan can experience a traditional outdoor lifestyle. This usually takes the form of extreme camping, with young Aslan heading off into the reserves with minimal equipment or taking on challenges such as mountaineering or transits of dangerous terrain. Growing up on Tyokh can be a hazardous undertaking, and every clan has lost family members to the natural dangers of the world.

Society on Tyokh is more cosmopolitan than most Aslan worlds as a result of greater contact with humans and other non-Aslan. This means the inhabitants are slightly less intolerant of outsiders' strange ways, and slightly

more forgiving of social gaffes, than those of worlds deeper into the Hierate. It is still possible to end up in serious and possibly life-threatening trouble because of a misunderstood custom or failure to observe some nicety of etiquette but by the standards of many Aslan worlds, Tyokh is startlingly permissive.

As might be expected from a high-population world, there is a significant criminal underclass within the large cities. According to rumour, several large crime syndicates exist which rival some clans in terms of power and influence. Whilst wilder tales of criminal neocorporations are unlikely true, there is a large amount of organised crime on Tyokh.

ARRIVING AT TYOKH

The Tyokh system is extremely busy, and slots for approach to the starport are assigned in an order based largely on prestige and clan relationships. A lowly independent ship like that of the Travellers might wait days for berthing permission. Hteleitoirl can short-circuit this process, however, by directly contacting his clan. Although not a major player in Hierate politics, *Iuwori* has its own small spaceport and some offworld assets. The Travellers are instructed to take up a holding orbit and ask for permission to land at the main orbital port. They remain in limbo for hours (giving the clan time to make hurried preparations, but the Travellers will not yet know that) before a flight of *Iuwori* fighters approach and instruct the Travellers to proceed to their spaceport. Permission is immediately granted by highport traffic controllers.

As the Travellers begin their approach to Tyokh, some vessels in orbit shift position then return to their previous heading, as if their captains considered attempting an intercept, then were ordered to stand down. This impression is correct.

The Travellers' ship is ordered to land at the spaceport, where it is obvious a guard of clan warriors is waiting. If the Travellers are not friendly with Hteleitoirl, they will be excluded from further events and witness them at a distance. Hteleitoirl is taken to a flight of grav vehicles and driven at speed to the clan palace nearby. There, the events of his execution unfold. The outcome for the Travellers is a reasonable one – they are paid

as per Outcomes on page 41, and can go their own way. What they think of their role in the affair is their own business.

If Hteleitoirl has become friendly with the Travellers, he asks them to function as his honour guard; in part a deliberate act of defiance against his fate, since it goes against custom for a clanlord's son to be guarded by barbarian outsiders. Hteleitoirl explains that from the moment he sets foot on the territory of his clan (at the spaceport) he is not permitted to speak to anyone until the execution begins. He is under death sentence and has already been judged. He will be permitted to make ritual responses to the duel challenge, but in the eyes of his clan he has nothing to say for himself. Honour requires he observe this restriction.

Before stepping outside the ship, Hteleitoirl sends a message to his clan that he has come to surrender himself for execution and accept his fate as deserved. He adds that he will be accompanied by an honour guard of chosen and worthy companions, as is his right. He cuts the channel before any response can be made, and asks the Travellers to prepare themselves. His people are impressed by ostentation and achievement, he reminds the Travellers, so this would be a time to be at their most impressive in terms of dress, swords, medals and so forth. Sidearms and weapons that fit with a costume are permitted, but a good rationale would have to be found for more powerful or bulky and inelegant weapons like an advanced combat rifle or combat armour.

This done, Hteleitoirl thanks his new friends for standing with him, then leads them down the boarding ramp. The guards greet him with respect and honour. He is not restrained in any way, and if there is any surprise at who Hteleitoirl has chosen as his honour guard, there is no obvious sign. The Travellers are taken by grav car to the palace where they will walk beside their friend to his execution.

HTELEITOIRL'S FATE

The approach to the palace is impressive to say the least. A grand plaza is lined with finely-dressed Aslan (and a few other species), interspersed with heavily armed clan guards. The scene is a riot of colourful clothing and bright jewellery, contrasting with an eerie silence. No-one speaks; the only sounds are heavy footfalls as the condemned prince walks towards the palace. Atop its steps stands his father, in full regalia and flanked by his wives and guards. The executioner waits at the bottom of the stairs, ready to carry out the sentence in a formal duel.

Those who know Aslan culture will realise that the execution will take the form of unarmed combat which Hteleitoirl is expected to lose gracefully and courageously. He may wound his executioner, but is not permitted to disable or kill. He can win glory by putting on a display of courage and skill; a warrior who looks like he could have beaten his executioner but still dies with honour will become a legend among his people. However, he must die in the ritual manner. He has been judged and sentenced already. There are no words left to say.

Not by Hteleitoirl, anyway.

The Travellers Speak

Hteleitoirl presents himself and waits silently. His father speaks quietly to an aide, who descends the steps and approaches the honour guard. To each of them he asks the same question.

'Who are you, and by what right do you stand with a clanlord's son?'

The answers given by the Travellers will decide Hteleitoirl's fate. Each of the Travellers is required to present himself (or herself) in a manner that impresses the Aslan. Long-winded speeches are not a good idea; a short statement of bold facts (which might be entirely fabricated!) will be more suitable.

The ideal answer to this question comes from someone who looks impressive by Aslan standards, perhaps with uniform and medals, and a story to match. If the Traveller tries to fake it, they may still succeed if their story is plausible-sounding. Thus, someone in a smart suit wearing the Darrian Star for Intellectual Excellence (an entirely imaginary decoration) who looks and sounds like an eminent scientist will impress, providing they can carry off the deception. A Difficult (10+) Persuade check (SOC) is necessary; the referee might grant DM+1 or +2 for good preparation or particularly excellent props.

An alternative approach is belligerence. Someone who stomps up in field fatigues and body armour, holding a rifle and announcing he is there to fight by the side of his friend will attract a mix of surprise and grudging admiration. On the other hand, someone who announces he is Hteleitoirl's lawyer is likely to be forcibly removed from the vicinity.

If the Travellers put on a good show, Hteleitoirl's father will permit them to speak before the execution begins. They may, he says, recount their adventures at his son's side and tell the clan how Hteleitoirl came to make such friends. This is the Travellers' one chance to explain that Hteleitoirl was betrayed rather than a failure.

If the Travellers have examined the data obtained on Sink, they will know it contains proof that clan *Htyowao* suborned their agent on Sink and derailed the Arunisir mission. The *Htyowao* ambassador at the execution will admit this if challenged, providing that proof is given.

This changes the situation. *Htyowao* is leading the call for war against clan *Iuwori*, and their involvement in creating the trigger incident makes their grievance less legitimate. A war fought now would not be on honourable grounds, which would have serious implications for *Htyowao*'s standing among its allies.

Hteleitoirl's father has a difficult decision to make. He might be able to spare his favourite son's life and still avoid war, but the execution order has been given. It cannot simply be rescinded. The only option is for someone to stand in Hteleitoirl's place against the executioner. That person would not be bound by rules requiring them to die with honour, and is not under sentence of death. Providing they put up a good fight and behave honourably, the requirements of the duel of honour would be satisfied.

If none of the Travellers is willing to fight, Hteleitoirl puts on a memorable show and dies well. There are many who think he could have actually won but chose to follow the honourable path; he will be remembered as a hero of the clan.

If one of the Travellers is willing to face the executioner, they will be permitted a dagger or similar weapon. A human who decides to fight unarmed against the executioner's dewclaw will draw gasps of admiration from the onlookers.

Duel of Honour

The duel is a formal affair, supposed to be conducted with a certain decorum. After an exchange of salutes, the duellists begin. The executioner initially makes formal and easily defended attacks, allowing the opponent to demonstrate skill at arms. The opponent is expected to reciprocate; if they go flat-out straight away, the executioner will respond in kind. If not, the first few rounds of the fight are essentially symbolic, with Melee checks made to look good rather than seriously trying to harm the opponent. The executioner is not permitted to speak to the opponent, so cannot convey this directly, but an experienced fighter may be able to read his intentions and realise he is putting on a show rather than trying to kill.

Sooner or later, though, the fight gets serious. The referee should let it go on for a while, ideally with wounds taken on both sides, and should not allow the Traveller to believe this is anything but a fight to the death. Indeed, it might become one if the Traveller has not behaved well according to Aslan custom. However, if the Traveller has impressed his opponent, the executioner will give him a way out, allowing a blow to hit by just marginally failing to defend. It will look like a real hit to the onlookers, but the Traveller will realise the executioner allowed it through his guard. Damage is taken as normal, and the executioner stumbles and falls, momentarily open to a killing blow.

If the Traveller takes this opportunity, the executioner will die for his clan, taking the path of honour in serving his clanlord's best interests. If the Traveller refuses to strike, the executioner gets back to his feet as if to fight on, then bows and lowers his guard, conceding both a moral and physical victory. The Aslan are warriors, not killers, and respect a warrior who keeps sight of his goal. The Traveller needed to win the duel; they did not need to kill to do it. Sparing the executioner shows wisdom as well as strength, and will win the Traveller a friend.

The duel satisfies the requirements of honour even if nobody dies, so long as the Traveller conducted himself appropriately. This brings the immediate crisis to an end, though it will be necessary to urgently send a delegation to Sink in order to plug the leak there. If the Travellers volunteer for this duty they will be granted it, though the deed itself needs to be performed by an official executioner. This may be a chance to travel with their new friend, if he is alive.

OUTCOMES

If the Travellers persuade Hteleitoirl not to go home or otherwise do not get to Tyokh in time, the enemies of clan *Iuwori* are not placated and conflict erupts. With multiple clans arrayed against them, *Iuwori* stands no chance and is destroyed. This has no large-scale effect on the Borderland region or the Hierate, but there will be sufficient ripples that the Travellers will become aware of what has happened.

Hteleitoirl may or may not be alive at this point. If the Travellers persuaded him not to go home, he does not blame them for what happened, though he will shun them as they remind him of his disgrace. He may become a recurring character in future adventures; a difficult ally or estranged former friend.

If the Travellers failed to get Hteleitoirl home or betrayed him (as he sees it) by deliberately preventing his return, he will devote himself to hunting them down. He is not especially patient but will take his time, build his resources, and only strike when he knows he can win. In the meantime, he will find ways to harass the Travellers.

If Hteleitoirl does not get home in time, the Travellers forfeit their payment unless they can find a way to weasel out of the blame.

If Hteleitoirl does get home and is executed, war between the clans is forestalled. Hteleitoirl's father thanks the Travellers for helping his son do his duty, but cannot be glad they succeeded. All the same, they will be considered reliable and honourable by clan *Iuwori*, which lead to future opportunities.

If Hteleitoirl avoids execution and exposes the betrayal of his mission, war is avoided although there is no real embarrassment for clan *Htyowao*. Derailing another clan's *i hatei* expansion is a normal part of inter-clan politics, and if the *Iuwori* are too weak to keep their agents loyal, that reflects more on them than their enemies – at least according to the *Htyowao* ambassador. However, there is a difference between failing an important mission due to inadequacy or incompetence, and being betrayed by an enemy. The difference, in this case, is life and death.

Hteleitoirl's father makes a great show of anger and disappointment about the Arunisiir mission, and announces that his son must be punished for failing his clan. He is to be exiled for a year. However, in recognition of his honourable conduct in returning for execution and his enterprise in uncovering the traitor at Sink, he will be permitted to rest and prepare before he begins his punishment. If Hteleitoirl marries, raises his children and finally dies of extreme old age before beginning his exile, no word will be said against him.

Hteleitoirl (naturally) states that he will begin his exile immediately, and will ask the Travellers if they can help him obtain passage to Arunisiir; he has unfinished business there. The Travellers may find themselves making another Borderland Run in the very near future.

For their part, the Travellers will receive their promised payment, and whilst clan *Iuwori* does not add any financial reward to this, they are impressed with the Travellers' conduct. They are still non-Aslan and therefore inferior, but will henceforth be considered friends of the *Iuwori*. The clan still has ambitions in the Borderland region, and could be a useful ally or powerful patron in the future.



CHARACTERS & OPPPOSITION

Prince Hteleitoirl

Teeieahailaoa Hteleitoirl Aiyyuwaisaltourlaeiwuiya

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Aslan	Male	-
TRAITS		
STR 9	INT 9	SKILLS
DEX 4	EDU 8	Athletics 1, Drive (wheel) 1, Gun
END 8	SOC 10	Combat (slug) 2, Melee (natural) 2, Recon 1
EQUIPMENT		
Autopistol (3D-3), Dewclaw (1D+2) Ballistic Cloth Inserts (+4)		



Ehfyohoikoaleai

Asian Agent on Sink

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Aslan	Male	-
TRAITS		
STR 7	INT 8	SKILLS
DEX 5	EDU 11	Diplomat 2, Electronics (computer)
END 6	SOC 9	2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1, Streetwise 3
EQUIPMENT		
Autopistol (3D-3), Dewclaw (1D+2)		



Luaktiikhea

Aslan Executioner/Assassin

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE		
Aslan	Male	-		
TRAITS	-			
STR	12	INT	8	SKILLS
DEX	6	EDU	6	Athletics 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1,
END	11	SOC	8	Melee (natural) 4, Recon 1
EQUIPMENT	Autopistol (3D-3), Dewclaw (1D+2)			



Crew of Seskahalen

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE		
Human	-	-		
TRAITS	-			
STR	7	INT	7	SKILLS
DEX	8	EDU	7	Gun Combat (slug) 1, Streetwise 1
END	6	SOC	5	and either Gunner (turret) 1 or Pilot (spacecraft) 1
EQUIPMENT	Autopistol (3D-3), Shotgun (4D)			

Assassins

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE		
Human	-	-		
TRAITS	-			
STR	6	INT	9	SKILLS
DEX	10	EDU	9	Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee
END	7	SOC	7	(blade) 2, Persuade 1, Recon 1, Streetwise 2
EQUIPMENT	Autopistol (3D-3), Knife (1D+2 plus poison)			

Poison	END Check	Damage	Interval
Compound Poison	Difficult (8+)	1D	1 round

Mercenaries

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE		
Human	-	-		
TRAITS	-			
STR	8	INT	7	SKILLS
DEX	8	EDU	5	Gun Combat (slug) 2,
END	9	SOC	4	Recon 1
EQUIPMENT	Autopistol (3D-3), Light Automatic Weapon (3D-2) Flak Jacket (+5)			

EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONRY

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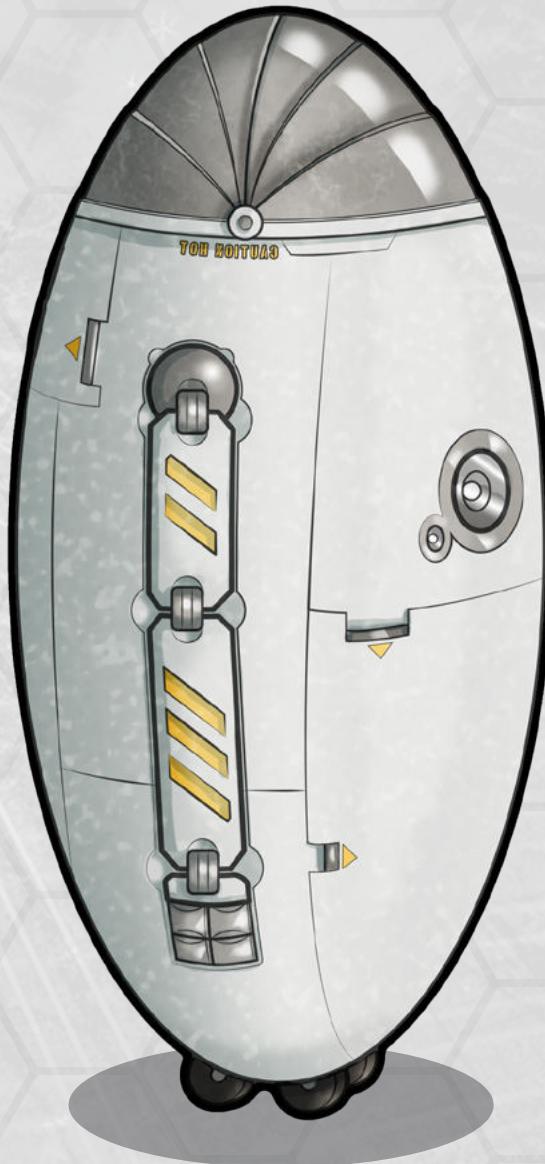
STEWAIID SHIPBOARD ROBOT

The Stewaid is a shipboard robot intended to assist in simple tasks such as keeping passengers fed and passageways clean. It has been criticised for trying to do too much on a single platform, creating a robot inferior at all tasks to a specialist device. However, the Stewaid has the advantage of versatility, enabling a crew to obtain a wide range of basic capabilities with a single purchase. Although it can do little more than bring whoever is on the bridge a sandwich and cup of coffee, this at least frees someone for more important tasks.

The Stewaid is a fairly bulky ovoid, taller than it is wide, running on four small wheels. The torso segment has a flat top protected by a retractable clamshell cover, creating a serving platform which can deliver a range of hot and cold drinks and basic dishes. An internal hotplate allows cooking of pre-prepared meals.

The lower half of the ovoid contains a tank of cleaning fluids and a directable pressure-hose. A pair of segmented arms allows manipulation of light tools. Manufacturers recommend that Stewaids be supervised by competent persons and not switched from cleaning and general-maintenance tasks to cooking without a thorough clean. However, it is not uncommon to see a Stewaid vacuuming floors on the way to taking the ship's engineer breakfast in the drive rooms.

	Hits	Speed	TL	Cost
	12	3 m	12	Cr27500
Skills	Steward 0, Mechanic 0			
Attacks	None			
Traits	None			
Programming	Basic			



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TYPE C CARGO LOADER

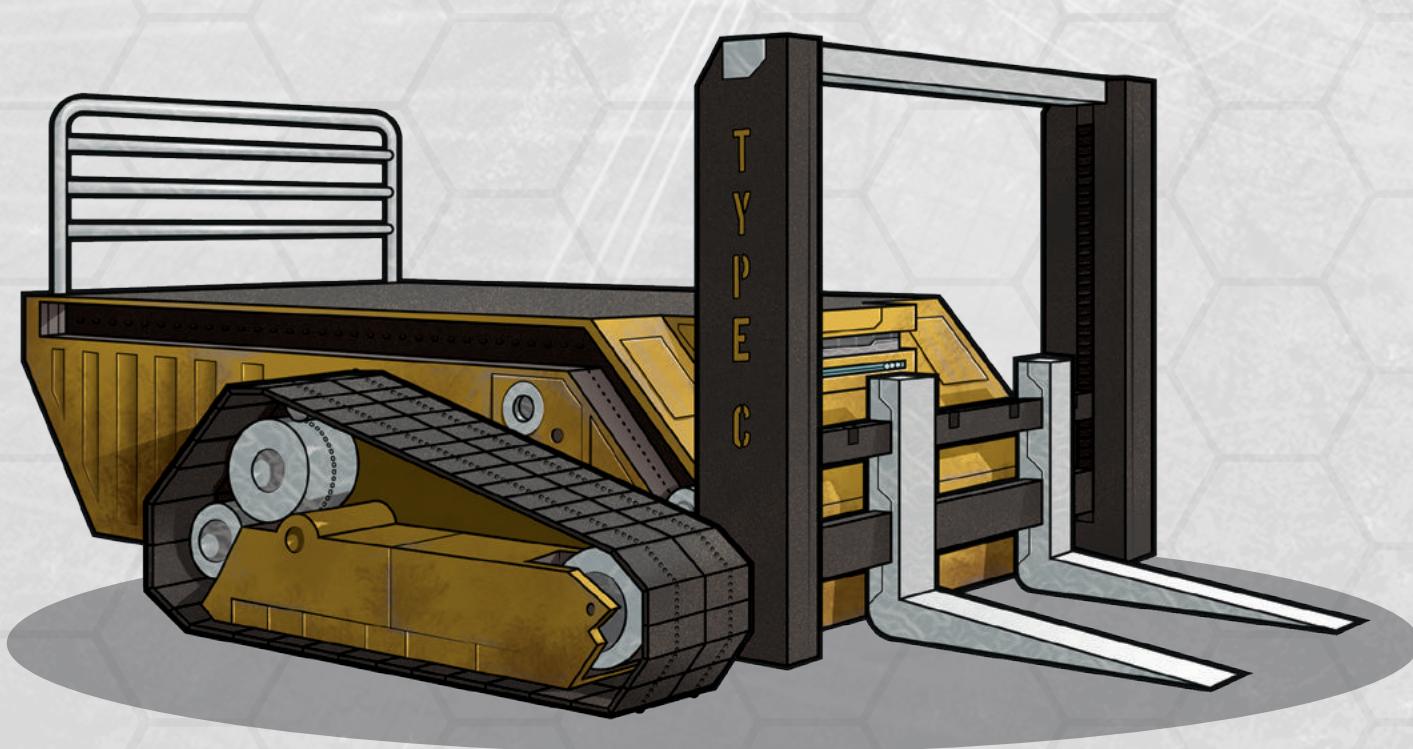
The Type C cargo loader is used in numerous ports and carried by commercial starships. It is not uncommon to encounter a fleet of these robots in a down-at-heel starport, where they have been kept working by borrowing systems from other units.

This robot runs on heavy-duty tracks optimised for smooth surfaces, but they do have some rough-ground capability. This enables loading and unloading under frontier conditions away from a starport, which makes these robots popular with crews trading around backwaters. The body of the robot is a blocky, low flatbed with a pair of forklift-type probes on a movable platform. These slide under a container and lift it, then slide back along the bed to deposit the cargo on the main carrying surface. A pair of light manipulator arms are used for smaller items.

Control is either by way of a handset or limited autonomous operation. An operator is required to set up a loading sequence or direct the robot where to take

its cargo, with the unit making decisions for route and speed. This semi-autonomous operation allows some users to convert their Type C cargo loaders to other users; field support conversions are not uncommon, using the loader's admittedly limited cross-country capability to transport spares, supplies, and the like. Frontier ranches sometimes use loaders to carry logs or fence-repair stores, and may have ingenious improvised devices attached.

	Hits	Speed	TL	Cost
	26	3m	10	Cr225000
Skills	Steward 0, Mechanic 0			
Attacks	None			
Traits	Large (+2)			
Programming	Basic			



11/62243

LIGHT AUTOMATIC WEAPON (L.A.W.)

The Light Automatic Weapon (LAW) is configured like a very short assault rifle and chambered for a common 6mm rifle cartridge, but is designated as a submachinegun by its manufacturer. It has a very short barrel, including a bayonet lug, with vertical foregrip and folding metal stock, and fed using a standard 30-round magazine which fits most other rifle-calibre weapons chambered for the same round or a handier 20-round magazine. Rate of fire is high, creating significant recoil issues for those unused to such weapons. Its short effective range is not a handicap in the urban assault role, whilst short length makes the weapon easy to handle in tight spaces. Although the short barrel reduces muzzle velocity and does not allow its standard armour piercing ammunition to function to full potential, the extra penetration is useful. This has led to an unfortunate connection with the sort of user who considers blindly spraying bullets through an internal partition to be a viable tactic.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
Light Automatic Weapon	9	50	3D-2	4	Cr500	20 or 30	Cr15 or Cr20	AP 2, Auto 3

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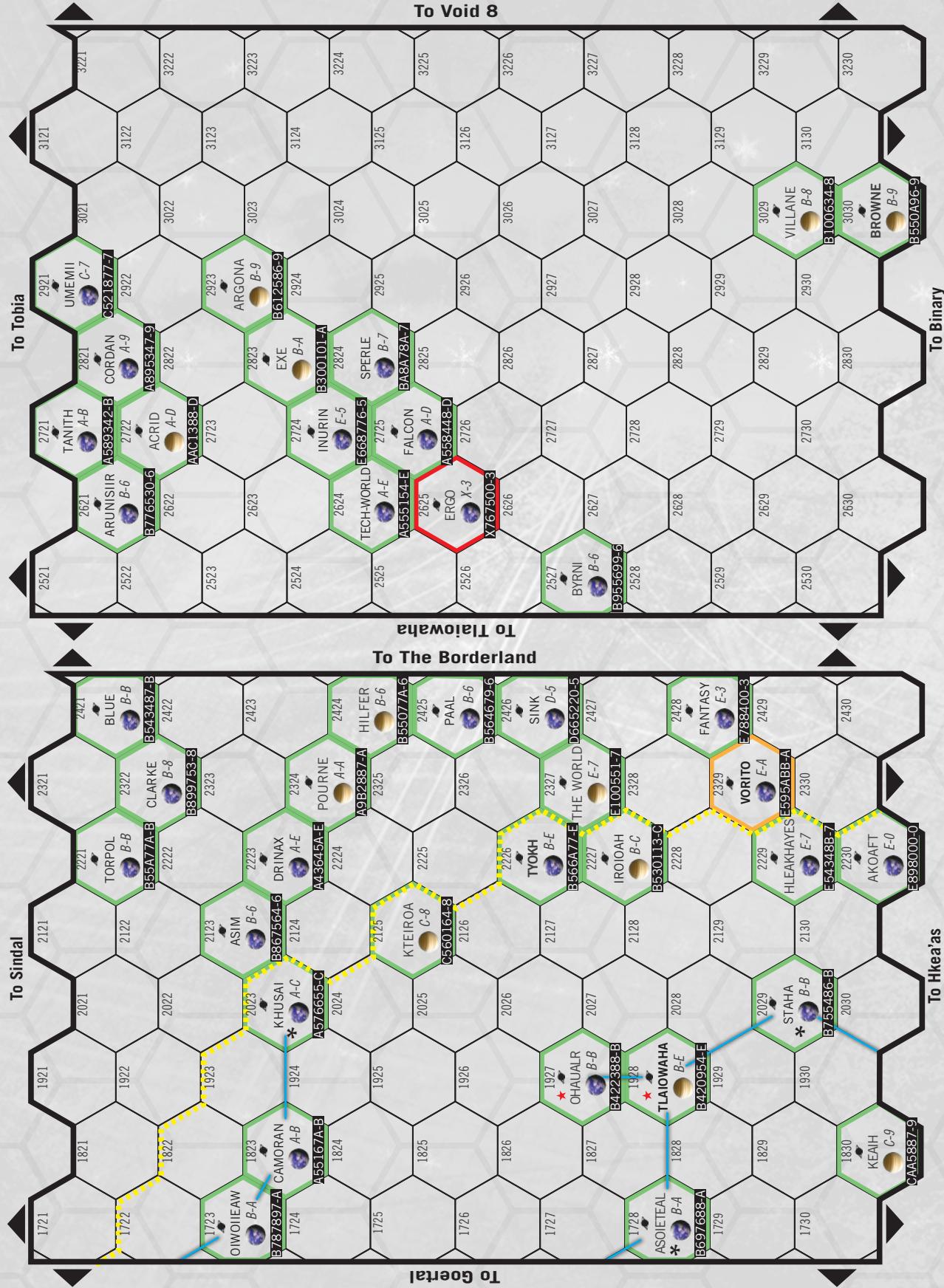
MONKEY KNIFE

Hi'asoi are ceremonial weapons used by humans who have integrated into Aslan society. The blade resembles a dewclaw, and is worn strapped to the wrist, allowing a human to fight in duels, using the blade as a proxy claw. The chances of survival against an Aslan male are, of course, minimal.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Traits
Monkey Knife	3	Melee	1D	-	Cr150	-

TLAIOWAHA SUBSECTOR



THE BORDERLAND SUBSECTOR

