

Comstar Games Presents...

Type S



Approved for use with Traveller

TYPE S - AN ADVENTURE FOR TRAVELLER

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Type S*, a Traveller adventure from Avenger Enterprises. This book is intended to be used with the Traveller roleplaying game from Mongoose Publishing. Other versions of the Traveller game, and indeed entirely different rules sets, can be used with this adventure with only a minimum of effort, but the contents of this book are specifically designed to be compatible with Mongoose Traveller and with the 'Spinward Marches' background published to accompany those rules.

This adventure 'gives' the travellers a starship (and a whole bag of problems to go with it) and a mission to carry out once they have the ship. The latter is not the focus of this adventure; it is a 'hook' for the future. The adventure in this case concerns getting ship. It is not lying handily in dock nearby, as it turns out, but is located on a nearby world where it has become stuck due to an equipment breakdown. All the characters need to do is travel to the ship's location and pick it up... after making a few minor repairs and dealing with any incidental problems along the way.

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin J Dougherty is a freelance author specialising in military history, space travel and related topics. He has written or contributed to over three dozen books and book-like objects (depending on what you count as a book) plus online copy, magazine articles and related scribbles. He has previously worked as a teacher, an engineer, a self-defence instructor, a fencing coach and a defence analyst.

When not randomly poking at a keyboard, Martin coaches the University of Sunderland Fencing, Kickboxing and Ju-Jitsu classes. He is heavily involved with the Self-Defence Federation, with whom he holds three black belts and a Master level instructorship. Despite all this, the majority of people involved with Avenger Enterprises refer to him as 'some hack writer we met' and steadfastly refuse to take him seriously. This is probably for the best.

Martin's website, such as it is, can be found at <http://www.martindougherty.co.uk/> and he can be contacted by email at martin-j.dougherty@virgin.net. Just don't expect an intelligent reply.

AVENGER ENTERPRISES

Avenger Enterprises is a loose collection of semi-random individuals who have seen fit to involve themselves in producing Traveller materials. Or if you prefer, Avenger Enterprises is a design house co-owned by Martin J Dougherty and William Andersen of Comstar Games, representing

some of the finest Traveller and RPG writing talent worldwide.

Avenger's writers have written and edited Traveller materials for publication since 1994, and have an involvement in the games industry stretching back a decade more. Avenger people (using the term 'people' very loosely) have written, edited and otherwise freelanced for many other game systems and for publishers including Mongoose Publishing, GDW, FASA, Imperium Games, Steve Jackson Games, Hekaforge Productions and PBM Scroll Magazine. Most relevant to this adventure; Avenger staff were heavily involved in the production of the Mongoose Traveller Spinward Marches sourcebook.

The Avenger website is at <http://www.avengerenterprises.co.uk/> and hosts a forum for Traveller and related matters at <http://www.traveller.comstar-games.com/>.

Note that Avenger is not a publisher but a design house. All Avenger Enterprises products are published through Comstar Games and are listed in the Comstar Games catalogue.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Type S is set in the Spinward Marches sector of the Third Imperium, part of the Official Traveller Universe (OTU). It is a complete and self-contained adventure, requiring only the Traveller rules to play. However, additional materials may be useful. In particular the Spinward Marches Sourcebook from Mongoose Publishing presents details of the surrounding area and will add greatly to the gaming experience.

This particular adventure involves very little combat, though it is always possible that the characters will get involved in a brawl or fight somewhere. One possibility for characters who are itching for some action is to have them run into someone harbouring a grudge against the previous crew of the scout ship, resulting in aggression that may seem incomprehensible to the characters at first. Sooner or later they will figure out that their ship is a trouble magnet – the previous crew made a lot of enemies.

However, it is entirely possible to complete this adventure without drawing a gun or throwing a punch. This is not a deliberate policy on the part of the author, nor is it an indication that Traveller games should not involve combat (given that our unofficial company motto is 'roll dice, blow stuff up' it's pretty obvious that we'd not want to be involved with a game called Peacenik Tree-Huggers In Space); it is simply the way this adventure turned out.

And of course, any written adventure is subject to the interpretation of the Referee and players. As written, *Type S* does not have an alien invasion or an apocalyptic gunfight

at the end (hmm, maybe we could change the ending...?) but that does not mean that a Referee who added these things was doing anything wrong.

This is a framework for a Traveller game. Games are supposed to be fun. So change whatever you think necessary to make the game fun and everything will be fine. Trust us, we're professional game designers...

SETTING UP

This adventure is self-contained. Once the game starts, little further setting up is required. However, the Referee may have to do some preliminary work to ensure that the characters have a suitable range of skills and equipment for the challenges they will encounter. The following section deals with a few preliminaries to get things going.

STANDARDS AND ASSUMPTIONS

In order to play this adventure you will need one or another of the Traveller rules sets. Stats are included for the current edition of the game, published by Mongoose Publishing, though other rules sets can be used with a minimum of work. We assume that the adventure will take place in the Spinward Marches of the Official Traveller Universe (OTU), or in a game setting where the normal Traveller conventions (one-week Jumps, no FTL communications and so forth) apply. If your game universe varies significantly, some tweaking may be necessary.

You will also need some dice as appropriate to your chosen rules set. Pens, pencils and paper are useful, plus suitable furnishings and a climate-controlled gaming environment for your comfort. An enhanced gaming experience is possible with the addition of something to drink and munchies of some kind. Avenger Enterprises recommends corned beef & potato pie to pacify ravenous players, but tastes vary and we cannot be held responsible for player rejection of the munchies on offer...

Dates: All dates correspond to the standard Imperial calendar. The start date of this adventure is 016-1105 (i.e. the 16th day of the 1105th year since the founding of the Third Imperium). Time will follow normally once the adventure begins. If a different date is required, for example to fit the adventure into an existing campaign, then the start date can be altered with little or no disruption to the adventure.

Place: The adventure takes place in the Sword Worlds and District 268 subsectors of the Spinward Marches.

CHARACTERS AND EQUIPMENT

This adventure can be played (and completed successfully) by almost any group of adventurers if they are able to think creatively and maximize their strengths. However, they will need to be able to pilot a starship, run its engineering plant and plot a Jump if they are to make use of the ship in this adventure. Characters with these skills (either player-characters or NPCs) should be available.

Other than the requirements to crew the ship, there are no encounters or challenges in this adventure aimed at any specific type of character. Different characters will use different approaches and may struggle in some circumstances, but adventuring is not about having the right weapons,

skills or equipment to meet a challenge; it is about meeting what the universe throws at you with what you have and finding a way to win – or at least survive.

This adventure best suited to new characters who have ship shares to their name. If one of the characters is an ex-Scout then this would be ideal but it is not 100% necessary.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

The characters can be presented with their task almost anywhere, perhaps necessitating a long journey to begin the adventure proper. If so, they may have other adventures along the way at the Referee's discretion. The default opening to the adventure has the characters given their task at Flammarion Starport. The 'hook' in this case is that the characters are tasked with picking up a starship and bringing it to Flammarion on behalf of the new owners – themselves.

The characters are offered the use of a Type S Scout/Courier, but they must go to its current location and pick it up, bringing it back to Flammarion for necessary maintenance before it is released for them to use as they please. Thus the reward for success is use of a starship, which should motivate most groups to make an effort.

For groups that already have a starship, a modified version of the 'hook' can be used. The travellers are offered something they need for their ship – an upgrade, refit or some hard-to-obtain spares perhaps – if they will recover the Scout from Walston and bring it to the base at Flammarion.

REFeree'S INFORMATION

The following information is provided for the use of the Referee, who should decide how much of it is freely available to the characters, and also how distorted any information they may discover should be. Note that what is presented here is not the whole story in many cases, and is open to a certain amount of interpretation.

THE THIRD IMPERIUM

The Third Imperium is a large and very powerful state consisting of thousands of star systems. It is, however, a fairly loose organisation. This is made necessary by the long lags in communication between star systems many parsecs apart. As a result, worlds govern themselves, with the Imperium as an over-arching structure. On the plus side this grants wide latitude to member worlds and allows them to grow as their population please. However, it means that backwater worlds can be vulnerable to exploitation or even attack if they cannot afford to provide for an adequate level of defence.

The Third Imperium is 1105 years old. It has weathered civil war, frontier conflict and some rather serious internal crises but remains as strong and stable as ever; at least on the surface. There is no reason to suppose that any of the many problems facing the Imperium and her Emperor, Strephon, are serious enough to merit extreme measures, let alone that they might threaten the peace and stability of the Imperium. However, there are always troubles somewhere in such a huge area.

Spinward Marches sector is one of the most remote regions of the Imperium, many weeks' travel from the Imperial Core even by the fastest ships. As well as being something of an underdeveloped backwater, it is also the location of Imperial borders with states that have rarely been friendly and have at times fought against the Imperium.

The most recent of these conflicts, the Fourth Frontier War, was fought 20 years ago against a coalition of Vargr, Sword Worlds and Zhodani (and led by the latter) was both short and brought to a reasonably successful conclusion. The war, which lasted from 1082-1084 was more or less an accident. It resulted from a border incident in a period of tension. Although things are more stable now, there is always the danger of a repeat incident.

The borders with the Zhodani Consulate and the Sword Worlds Confederation are both regions where it is necessary to tread carefully. Keeping the peace is a full-time job, and sometimes compromises have to be made in the interests of long-term security and stability. This works both ways; sometimes the Imperium has to grant concessions and sometimes it gains from a bargaining session. The region around the Sword Worlds is therefore rather tense at

times. Sometimes local politics intrudes into wider issues, and sometimes the opposite happens.

SPINWARD MARCHES SECTOR

The Spinward Marches (more correctly, Spinward Marches sector) has relatively little significance in Imperial affairs, except that it is the Imperial border with the Zhodani Consulate and also with certain Vargr states. Lying fully 44 weeks' transit from Capital by Express Boat (a little less by Jump-6 courier, but not much), and separated from the Imperial core by the upper claw of the Great Rift, the region is considered to be a fairly unimportant backwater that serves as a convenient buffer against the Zhodani. However, the Spinward Marches were also the origin of Admiral Olav Hault-Plankwell's bid to become Emperor. The last thing Emperor Strephon wants is another Civil War, so the government of the Marches must be strong... but not *too* strong.

This may be one reason why no Archduke has been named for the region, nor a Sector Duke formally appointed. That role has been fulfilled by the dukes of Mora for centuries and their precedence over other Subsector Dukes is accepted by many, but not all, of the Imperial nobility of the Spinward Marches.

The de facto ranking noble in the Marches is Duchess Delphine of Mora, whose interests lie more in the protection and development of the region around Mora subsector than the improvement of backwater worlds on the border. This is obvious from the generally low level of naval patrols and development initiatives. These are not entirely absent of course, but for the most part if there is nothing major happening on the border the Duchess is content.

SWORD WORLDS SUBSECTOR

Sword Worlds subsector lies on the Imperial border, though there are some allied worlds and states, and a small enclave of Imperial territory, beyond. To Spinward is Darrian subsector, home to the Darrians. The Darrian civilization is a remnant of its former glory; relics of TL-G are found on the Darrian homeworld though the useable technology of the Darrian Confederation is lower.

To Spinward-Rimward lies a small enclave of Imperial territory in Five Sisters subsector, which includes two interdicted Droyne worlds, Andor and Candory. To Rimward lies District 268; non-Imperial territory for the time being. Trailing-Rimward is Glisten subsector; an important outpost on the Imperial border. Rimward of that is the so-called Outrim Void and the Great Rift.

To Trailing of Sword Worlds subsector is Imperial territory all the way back to Corridor Sector and ultimately to the Imperial core. Coreward and Spinward are the remnants

of the Sword Worlds (the political entity as distinct from the subsector of the same name), then a belt of Imperial territory bordering the Zhodani Consulate.

Imperial influence in the Sword Worlds subsector is minor. Most of the subsector lies outside the Imperial border, in the territory of the Sword Worlds. Imperial vessels do pass through Biter and Caladbolg on the way to Five Sisters subsector, but the overall Imperial presence is minor. Indeed, the Xboat station at Biter is something of a bone of contention between the Imperium and the Sword Worlds Confederation.

The Sword Worlds were settled long ago by (mainly European) settlers from Terra. A strong empathy with the Germanic traditions of honesty, courage and 'manliness' resulted in a chauvinistic but well-intentioned society that prized strength over stability; the Sword Worlds have been united at times and at one another's throats at others. Although prone to brawling among themselves, the Sword Worlders have always been willing to stand together against outsiders, and so for centuries have been a powerful force in the Marches; sufficiently so that the subsector is named for them.

The Sword Worlders have fought against the Imperium as part of several 'Outworld coalitions' as the popular media likes to call them. Relations at present are normal, which could be better stated as 'no worse than usual'. Cultural differences and a long history of mistrust ensure that there will always be some degree of instability along the border.

In that respect, the divided nature of the Sword Worlds Confederation is both a blessing and a curse. It is virtually impossible to create an agreement that is acceptable to all of the highly individual Sword Worlds planetary governments, and just when one dispute is settled, someone else decides to take issue over the same or a different matter. On the other hand, at least this means that at any given time some of the Sword Worlds are not in dispute with the Imperium; at least, not all over the same issue.

On the rare occasions when something was deemed serious enough for the Sword Worlders to put aside their own rivalries and act together, the result has usually been war. It is an axiom of politics in the region that 'peace with some or war with all' are the only choices regarding the Sword Worlds.

DISTRICT 268

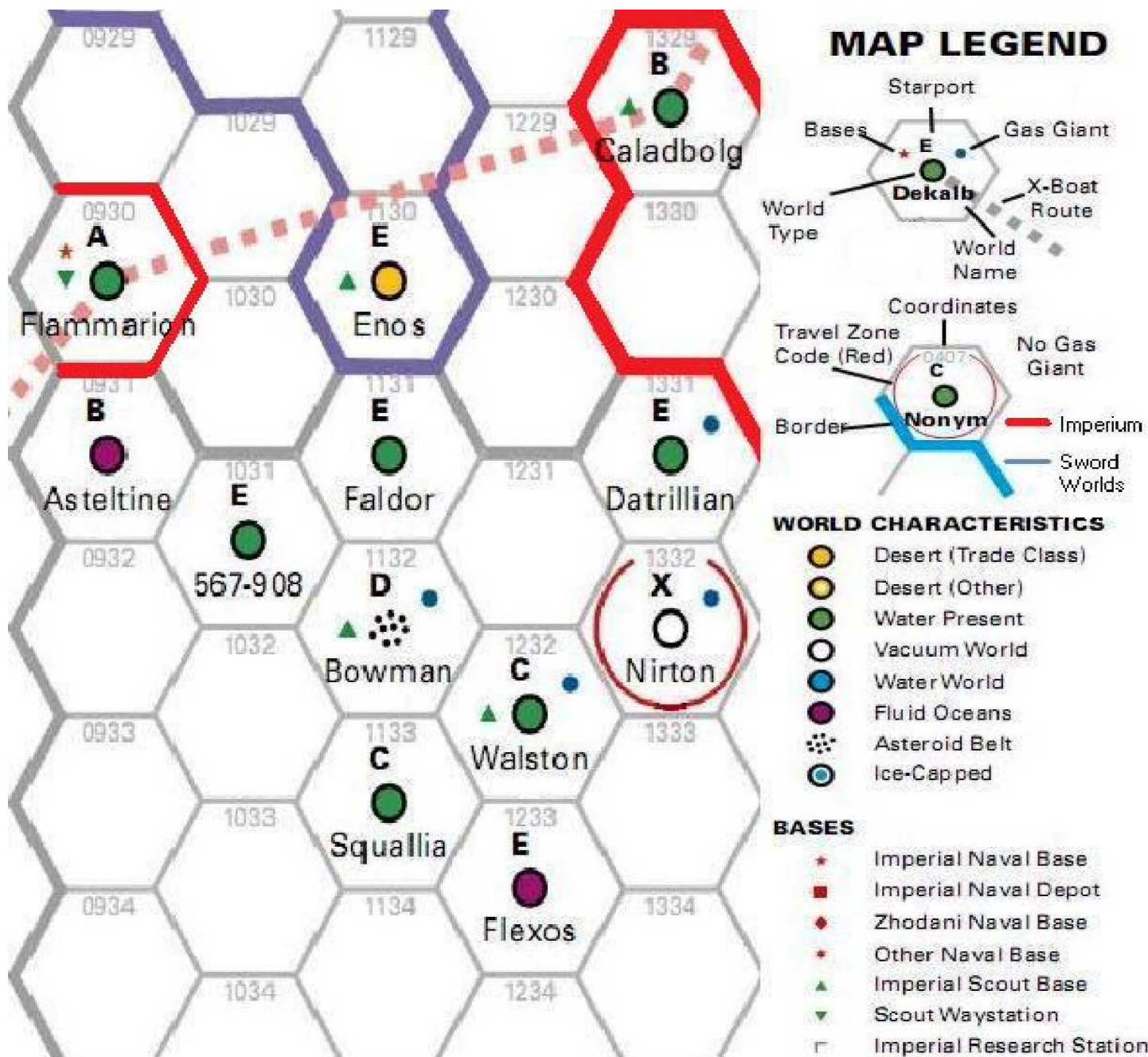
District 268 lies almost entirely beyond the Imperium, with only two member worlds. Some of the worlds of the subsector are potential members, some are client states and others are actively anti-Imperial. The main pro-Imperial world is Collace, a strong contender for subsector capital when the region is finally absorbed into the Imperium. Nearby Trexalon, on the other hand, is determined to derail that

process if at all possible and is involved in what amounts to a cold war with Collace.

There are Imperial interests on many worlds of the region, and even some bases for naval and scout vessels in the region. However, for the most part the presence of Imperial warships is intermittent at best, making District 268 somewhat more hazardous than most areas within the Imperial border. Local powers do patrol their systems, but the level of protection for shipping is lower than within the Imperium, even where local agendas are not anti-Imperial.

Many worlds of District 268 are backwaters with poor starports and little traffic, although most of them lie on the Spinward Main. There are two branches of the Main in District 268. The Coreward branch, known as the Bowman Arm, sees somewhat more traffic than the Collace Arm to rimward. This is due to ships using the Main as a link to the Coreward end of Five Sisters subsector. The volume of traffic is low, however, and as yet there has been no financial incentive to expand the ports of the area.

A PARTIAL MAP OF SWORD WORLDS SUBSECTOR AND DISTRICT 268



THE BOWMAN ARM

As noted elsewhere, the Coreward arm of the Spinward Main in District 268 is named the Bowman Arm. The region lies outside the Imperium but close enough to it that Imperial influences are fairly strong. Ships bound for Five Sisters subsector navigate along the Arm, though Jump-2 ships normally make the transit by hopping from Datrillian to Walston, then Bowman to Asteltine rather than going through every backwater system on the way. The Caladbolg-Enos-Flammarion run is much quicker but politics can interfere at Enos, which is owned by the Sword Worlds Confederation.

The thumbnails presented here are thus simply that; an overview of the world and its place in the Bowman Arm's complex economic and political development.

FLAMMARION/SWORD WORLDS (0930)

A623514-B B Po Ni (Imperial)

Flammarion is an important link on the Xboat route to Five Sisters subsector, and the site of both an Imperial Navy base and a Scout Service Way Station. The Naval base is a small affair intended mainly to support patrol ships and destroyers. It is unusual to see even a cruiser, let alone a capital ship, passing through the region in peacetime.

The Scout Base is considerably larger, with full Way Station status. This makes it an important center for Scout Service activity in the region, ranging from training and routine communications duty to exploration and survey missions, and probably (though the Imperial authorities will neither confirm nor deny) surveillance and reconnaissance missions into the Sword Worlds Confederation.

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

ASTELTINE/DISTRICT 268 (0931)

B7A7402-A FL NI (NON-ALIGNED)

An average sized world with an exotic atmosphere unbreathable by humans, Asteltine is home to around 2000 people whose origins vary considerably. People tend to come to Asteltine to work rather than to live, so the population tends to be somewhat variable. Most of the residents are typical Imperial humans, but there are small numbers of Darrians, Sword Worlders and Aslan at any given time. There is some tension between these groups.

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

For decades Asteltine's mining and processing industry

has been a chaotic mess of small firms and entrepreneurial individuals. However, there are rumors that some of the larger corporations or even the Megacorps may want to move into the system now that access has become easier.

567-908/DISTRICT 268 (1031)

E532000-0 Ba (CLIENT STATE)

A dry world with a thin atmosphere, 567-908 has little to recommend it to colonists or businesses, and thus far has remained just a number (not even a name) on the map. There is a rudimentary starport operated by Scout Service personnel and some private contractors. With little more than a few huts and a small lake to draw water from (for drinking and to crack for hydrogen fuel) there is little reason to stay. Few visitors remain on planet longer than it takes to refuel their ship.

ENOS/SWORD WORLDS (1130)

E23059B-4 M PO NI DE (SWORD WORLDS)

Enos is something of an oddity, being a member of the Sword Worlds Confederation yet lying far from the Confederation's heartland. Even just reaching Enos from the Sword Worlds is something of an undertaking given the Sword Worlders' technology level, and one that necessitates the use of deep-space refueling points or tanker support for vessels making the crossing. This would make sense if Enos was worth anything, but in truth it is not.

The world itself is thought to be a rogue body captured by the system's star, and is the only borderline-habitable world in a very empty star system. A population of some 700,000 or so individuals scrape a precarious living mining petrochemicals from the world's unusually large reserves. This is a hazardous undertaking, as seismic activity has weakened the rock trapping these deposits, causing occasional gas escapes which can be ignited by human activity or other causes.

A Sword Worlds base is listed as present on most maps. This is a rather grand term for what amounts to a refuelling station for ships making the long transit from Narsil or Anduril. A handful of patrol vessels are sometimes based out of Enos but their activities are restricted to the local system in peacetime.

Faldor/DISTRICT 268 (1131)

E5936A7-2 NI (NON-ALIGNED)

An unappealing world with a thick, soupy atmosphere, Faldor sees little in the way of offworld trade. Most ships passing along the Arm go via Bowman and bypass this backwater world. Indeed, Imperial databases contain only a surface map and the most cursory entries.

Faldor is chiefly known for The *Tapperheten* Incident, which occurred in 1083 during the Fourth Frontier War. A Sword Worlder commerce raider, the heavy cruiser *Tapperheten*, was chased down by three Imperial Navy light cruisers and brought to action in the Faldor system. The *Tapperheten*, which had been operating along the fringes of Glisten subsector, was destroyed after a furious action in which the Imperial ships also suffered severe damage.

It was long presumed that the *Tapperheten* was making for Enos when she was cornered, but rumors from Naval personnel suggest that alternative explanations were at one point being investigated. This turn gave rise to wild rumors about Sword Worlder secret bases in District 268.

BOWMAN/DISTRICT 268 (1132)

D000300-9 S As LO (CLIENT STATE)

The Bowman Belt is one of the wonders of the Spinward Marches. It is one of the most extensive planetoid belts ever discovered, occupying the equivalent of five planets' worth of orbits in one contiguous belt. The Bowman Belt is home to an unknown, but probably large, number of Belter communities. There are also rumors of other inhabitants – pirates, renegade Sword Worlders and the like.

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

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

SQUALLIA/DISTRICT 268 (1133)

C438679-9 NI (NON-ALIGNED)

Squallia is a Balkanized world which actually boasts several small Starports. Each has its own advantages and quirks since each serves a different state. Some of the nations of Squallia are pro-Imperial in outlook. Most are fairly neutral.

Not all the states on Squallia possess the TL of 9 listed in IISS charts. Some are TL 7 or 8. Exports are limited, mainly due to low production, but all the same the world serves as a convenient source of mid-tech spares and equipment for those working within the Arm. Ships from Bowman are fairly common, exchanging metal ores for spares and foodstuffs.

FLEXOS/DISTRICT 268 (1233)

E5A1422-6 FL LO (NON-ALIGNED)

Flexos is a low-population backwater typical of the region. With only 60,000 people in its mid-tech communities, and further handicapped by having to contend with an exotic atmosphere, the world exports little and can afford few imports. Without substantial offworld investment Flexos will probably remain at the subsistence level forever.

Investment in such a marginal world tends to be cheap (though it is often not worth doing anyway). This may be one reason why a variety of survey teams and explorers have recently arrived on Flexos. There are rumors of chemical-extraction processes that may turn Flexos' fluid oceans into an economic asset, but no hard data is available.

CALADBOLG/SWORD WORLDS (1329)

B365776-A S Ri Ag (Imperial)

Caladbolg is one of three Imperial worlds in the region (the other two are Gunn and Caliburn) and is an important communications link on the Xboat route to Five Sisters subsector. The Scout base at Caladbolg is not as large as the one at Flammarion but serves the same purpose; facilitating communications with distant Imperial holdings and (probably) covertly monitoring the doings of the Sword Worlders.

Caladbolg itself is Balkanized, with most states being Imperial members. The world is pleasant and habitable, with enough people and a good enough technological base to become an important economic center someday. However, lack of unity causes sufficient inefficiency that Caladbolg is economically significant only in the local region.

DATRILLIAN/DISTRICT 268 (1331)

E227633-8 NI (NON-ALIGNED)

Lying at the entry point to the Bowman Arm for most Jump-1 ships, Dattrillian is an obvious candidate for investment and development. This will however require winning over the ruling caste, who are opposed to expansion on the sensible grounds that they might lose control of their world.

At present, Starport facilities at Dattrillian are extremely primitive, though work is underway to improve them for use as a base for orbital combat assets. These at present consist of some very old PAD (Planetary Aerospace Defense) missiles and a pair of orbital interceptors purchased surplus from an Imperial mercenary squadron. The recent acquisition of a utility cutter and training of a crew suggests that Dattrillian is about to begin conducting orbital customs checks rather than inspecting vessels on the ground as is current practice. The reason for this departure from established procedure is unclear.

NIRTON/DISTRICT 268 (1332)

X600000-0

BA VA (NON-ALIGNED)

Nirton is Red Zoned. The reasons for an interdiction of this sort are not usually made public, and this case is no exception. The fact that a mid-sized world has no atmosphere, no water and no life on it is intriguing in itself; it seems likely that there is a connection between the state of the planet and its Red Zone status. The Red Zone is normally enforced by Navy ships, but these were withdrawn in 1082, leaving only a battery of automated satellites.

To facilitate passage through the system, a refueling station has been set up far from Nirton, in orbit around the gas giant Ditake. Originally little more than an orbital mooring station served by a pair of fuel-skimming shuttles, the fuelling facility has grown into a collection of stations and modules – some of them physically attached and some not – which is slowly becoming a freeport in its own right. Navy couriers pass through the station once every couple of months, staying a few days to download the interdiction satellites' logs before moving on.

THE WORLD OF WALSTON

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

WALSTON/DISTRICT 268 (1232)

UWP DATA: C544338-8S LO (Client State)

SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Walston orbits an M2 primary which is named Albin's Star for the captain of the first exploration ship into the system from the Imperium. The system contains two small gas giants named Insive and Greenish (the latter for its color, apparently) plus five rocky bodies in fairly standard orbits. There are no planetoid belts as such, but the system does have the usual comets and planetoid collections at the Trojan points of the gas giants. Walston itself lies on the outer fringe of the Life Zone, occupying the innermost orbit of Albin's Star.

In order out from the star, the system contains:

ORBIT NAME	TYPE
0 Walston	Rocky, Habitable
1 Roberts	Large Rockball
2 (Empty Orbit)	
3 Greenish	Small Gas Giant
4 (Empty Orbit)	
5 Victir	Iceball
6 Temine	Iceball
7 (Empty Orbit)	
8 Scales	Iceball
9 Insive	Small Gas Giant

ROBERTS

Roberts was named for the Astrogator of the first colony ship into the Walston system. It is a large (size 7) rocky body with no satellites. It has an atmosphere of sorts, but it is too thin to breathe unaided. To date there have been only a handful of landings on Roberts, and little in the way of surveying. An expedition some years ago claimed to have found ruined structures on Roberts, but these have not been located again.

GREENISH

Quite a small gas giant, Greenish is named for its sickly yellow-green coloration. Its atmosphere is very turbulent,

making fuel skimming somewhat hazardous. Greenish has no less than seven significant moons, plus a picturesque ring system that contains few bodies larger than a tennis ball. There is nothing very unusual about the moons of Greenish; most have more or less 'textbook' orbits, though the empty orbits each side of Greenish suggest that the system was once somewhat more vigorous.

Belters from Bowman have at times explored the moons of Greenish and her Trojan planetoids. Only a handful of prospectors remain, suggesting that no big strikes were made.

VICTIR

Victir is a fairly typical outsystem iceball; airless and inhospitable. Like much of the system it has only been cursorily charted by official expeditions. It is possible that unofficial exploration has been undertaken, but the results of such a survey would not be available to the authorities, assuming it existed at all.

TEMINE

Another iceball world, Temine was the site of a (failed) mining operation in the 750s. Initial indications of high concentrations of rare earth metals (such as lanthanum) turned out to be inaccurate, but only after large sums were sunk into a surface mining installation and supporting town; over 2000 workers came to Temine, only to leave again in less than a decade. The Temine Bust put investors off sinking money into transborder exploitation projects for many years and remains an embarrassment to all those firms involved.

SCALES

A large and forbidding rocky world with very low surface temperatures, Scales has never been fully surveyed, let alone exploited.

INSIVE

Insive is located at the very outer edge of the Walston system. Less turbulent than Greenish, it lies too far out to be worthwhile skimming fuel at. Insive has a handful of small moons plus one very large one, named Insive Alpha. Alpha seems to be a captured body. One theory suggests that it was originally located in orbit 2 or 4 and was flung outward to be captured by Insive's gravity before it could leave the system.

WALSTON

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

PHYSICAL DATA

Walston is not the most inviting of worlds. It is rather dry, with highly variable temperatures thanks to the thin atmosphere, which requires a filter mask to breathe safely. Lying on the outer edge of the Life Zone, Walston does not get excessively warm, even during the day, and at night temperatures plummet well below freezing in all regions.

Somewhat less than half the planetary surface is under water, though not all of this water is in liquid form. In the polar regions the seas are constantly frozen to a considerable depth, and icebergs are common even close to the equator. Nightly freezing of fresh-water bodies and the surface of some seas is a fact of life. Rainfall tends to be minimal since there is little evaporation of frozen water. Walston has no satellites, so there are no tides to contend with.

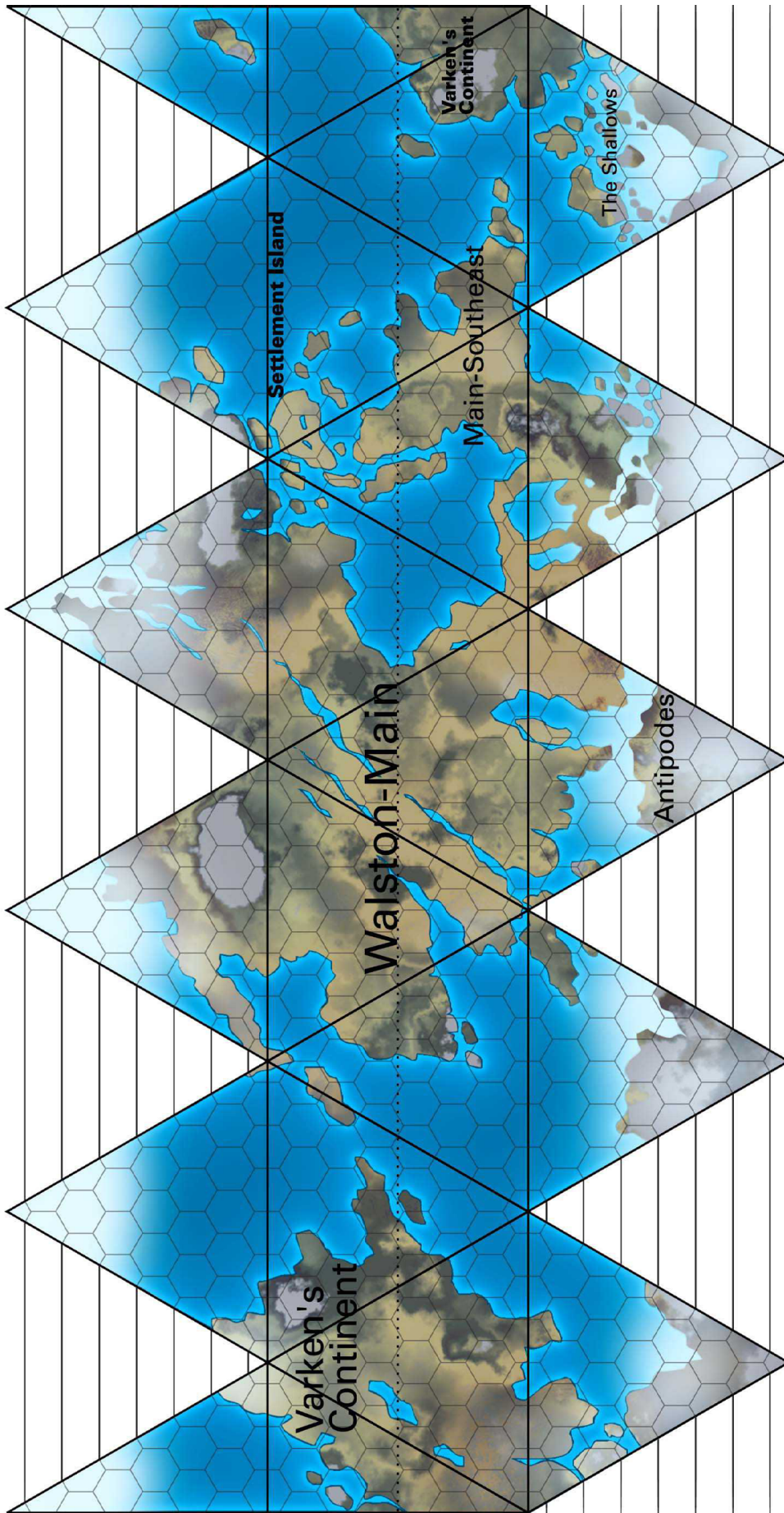
There is little erosion on land, due to a combination of thin atmosphere and relative dryness. Walston has a number of fairly impressive mountain ranges which create windshadows and further deprive inland regions of rainfall. Thus the landscape tends towards being rugged and impressive, but inhospitable. Rocky badlands and dusty plains are common, though most coastal regions are better watered.

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

Settlement Island is fairly large; some 200km from north to south and 350km from east to west. The sea between it and Walston-Main is shallow and dotted with small islands. A drop in sea level of just a few meters might create a land bridge, though this is not likely to happen. The island itself is not particularly high above sea level except in the southern extreme where a huge extinct volcano (Mount Salbarii) and its surrounding hills rise steeply from the coastal plain.

The island is washed by a warm current which creates a zone of higher than average rainfall and fertile seas; Mount Salbarii traps some of the rain over the island, feeding two great lakes which then spill over into northward-flowing rivers. These rivers not only make the island's interior the most habitable part of the planet, but they also serve as highways between the main and northern settlements.

Walston-Main is large, cold and uninviting. Mountain ranges (with the odd active volcano) are interspersed with



dusty plains. A number of deep canyons run roughly east-northeast across the continent. These have never been explored. Erosion seems an unlikely explanation for their presence; tectonic activity or some ancient cataclysm may be the cause.

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

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

Countless small islands dot the surface of Walston's oceans. Most of these are either covered in ice or near-vertical; few offer any real prospects for habitation.

SOCIO-POLITICAL DATA

Walston is home to around 3,000 individuals. Of these, some 90% are Vargr, and are second-class citizens. The ruling elite of the world (an hereditary dictatorship) are humans who claim ancestry all the way back to the early settlement of the region during the Rule of Man. This claim is disputable, but certainly the ruling families have held Walston for many centuries.

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

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

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

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

The Vargr population of Walston are accepting of their status. They get little say in government and cannot hold certain posts, but on the whole they are left alone to live their lives as they will, other than paying lip service to the idea that humans are their social superiors. Since most of the people of Walston live comfortable, unambitious lives and get along well enough, this is not a problem. Offworld Vargr tend to become extremely offended at both the human 'overlords' and the contented Vargr 'peons' of Walston, which can lead to problems.

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

ECONOMIC DATA

Walston has a mainly subsistence economy based on shallow-water seabed farming off the island's ice-free western coast and more conventional agriculture along the river

valleys. What manufacturing there is operates as what are effectively cottage industries in the three main settlements. A mature TL8 industrial base is quite sufficient to provide a high standard of living and to meet the needs of the under-sea farming industry. Virtually everything is craftsman-made to order, and even utilitarian equipment tends to be of a high standard.

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

MILITARY DATA

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

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

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

FLORA AND FAUNA

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

The first is Alderson's Coastal Hunter, more commonly referred to as an 'Alderson'. It consists of a broad body about 0.5m long, which is covered in thick scales, plus a whip-like tail roughly the same length as the body. The Alderson has a pair of puny lobster-like claws, but normally hunts by either surging from cover to grab small prey or entangling larger invertebrates with its tail. Aldersons can give a human a nasty bite and are very tenacious if they feel threatened enough to fight over territory or if they mistakenly

entangle a human diver's limb with their tail. Their armor plates make them difficult to kill with a knife.

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

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

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

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

LIFE ON WALSTON

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

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

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

Although the Vargr are disenfranchised and must defer to humans in many situations, they do not seem to be unhappy with this situation. There are few decisions to make anyway and everyone has a high standard of living. People of both races tend to be unambitious and find many off-worlders to be more than a little bit manic with their go-getter attitudes. Asking most Walston citizens why they don't go offworld to seek their fortune, or set off into the wilderness to find mineral riches usually results in a blank look and the oft-repeated phrase 'but it's NICE here!'

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

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

The people of Walston are not good at reacting to problems, and are nervous about their responses until they are approved by whoever is perceived as being in charge. A few individuals are quite dynamic, such as the security managers at the underwater farms. These people deal with divers in trouble and other crises on a fairly regular basis and are comfortable with thinking on their feet. Most individuals prefer to get together with friends and neighbors

and have a good talk about the issue. Hopefully one of the more usual troubleshooters will deal with the problem in the meantime. Thus if confronted with a minor disaster (e.g. a wastebin fire) the average Walston local will deal with it well enough. However, all the time he or she will be looking around for someone to defer to, and will not be comfortable until someone takes charge of the situation and approves whatever action was taken.

WALSTON'S SCOUT BASE

Current (1105) maps of the region show a Scout Base present at Walston. This is, strictly speaking, inaccurate. There was a Scout installation there about 20 years ago, and it has never been removed from the maps as the IISS has always planned to follow up the work done there and perhaps even set up a permanent presence. To date there are no signs that this will happen in the foreseeable future.

The scout base, such as it was, took the form of a landing field and a few huts that housed a handful of scientists. Its role was to undertake research into the erosive effects of a thin, dry atmosphere and to support the occasional scout vessel that came through. The station was located in a remote area, high in the mountains. It was hurriedly withdrawn during the Fourth Frontier War and never re-established.

SCOUT/COURIER *HIGHNDRY*

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

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

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

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

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

Highndry has been part of the Scout Service 'Detached Duty Pool' of small star ships for decades now. These vessels are loaned to Scout Service personnel for private use on the understanding that the ship can be recalled to duty at any time even if the user is not. Detached Duty ships tend to get a lot of abuse, and even with annual refits paid for by the IISS, they tend to go downhill over the years. This is true of *Highndry*. Her upholstery is torn and the corners are knocked off pretty much everything with corners. Some of the tables have ragged sharp edges with literally

decades of fibers from the clothing of passing crewmembers caught on them.

Up until recently, none of this was a problem. However, a few months ago *Highndry* suffered a serious failure in her control electronics which essentially rendered her drives useless. She was at that time parked in the crater of an extinct volcano on Walston in District 268. After several attempts to get her flying, the crew gave up. Boarding the ship's air/raft they travelled to the starport and made their way offworld, intending to make their way to the Scout base at Flammarion and obtain whatever was needed to get their ship off the ground.

The crew got a nasty surprise at Flammarion. They had brought the ship's records with them as proof of what was needed, expecting to just be given a set of spares and sent back. After all, they were Detached Duty Scouts and the ship was assigned to them. The Scout base commander saw things somewhat differently. The records showed that the crew had seriously neglected the vessel – over and above the usual abuse that ships of the same type tend to get – and had almost certainly run a scam on their last refit.

The scam was not a new one. When the time came for a Scout Service funded refit came, the crew bribed the dockyard crew to install parts scavenged from breakers' yards, and sold the components provided by the IISS for a profit. This sort of thing is frowned upon, and not merely because it is fraud. It also puts the next users of the ship in danger and could deprive the IISS of a vessel if it is not available to answer a reactivation order. So, the crew found themselves in the slammer and the ship stayed where it was until someone could be assigned to pick it up and return it to Flammarion for a proper repair.

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

Other than a great deal of wear, minor glitches in several systems and a thoroughly messed-up electronics setup, *Highndry* is a standard Scout/Courier as detailed in the Traveller rulebook.

ADVENTURE: TYPE S

This section is for the Referee only. How much of the information contained herein is released to the players, and in what form, is a matter for the Referee to decide upon.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The characters are given their mission at Flammarion Scout Base and proceed to Walston aboard a merchant ship. Arriving at Walston, they discover that the ship is not as accessible as they had expected. The characters climb up to the downed ship and commence repairs. Their sensors warn of an imminent eruption from the mountain, involving the characters in a struggle to save local people from the volcano. Eventually the travellers manage to get the ship spaceworthy and head for Flammarion.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

It is not the place of adventure writers to tell Referees their business, nor is it possible to cover every possible outcome of every conceivable skill roll. An adventure that was written in this style would have to be immense and would probably resemble a giant flow chart with a script for every possible event and its many outcomes. This is obviously unworkable, and in any case a player group would instantly find an option that was not covered. The only way to avoid this problem is to create tightly railroaded adventures where the characters are only allowed certain options. This is entirely contrary to the spirit of roleplaying games, which are all about making choices.

There are a couple of scenes which are dealt with in detail but for the most part rather than try to script everything we are going to assume that the Referee has a working knowledge of the rules and is competent in his craft. Thus if the characters try to tackle a problem one way the Referee can decide on appropriate skill rolls and difficulty levels, and if they do something totally off the wall then this can be resolved using the game rules – that is, after all, what they are there for.

Most of the time this sort of resolution is obvious. A character climbs up a rockface – that would be Athletics (Co-Ordination)... tries to blag his way past the guards – that would be Deception... dives across a starship corridor under fire in zero gravity to grab a weapon from a wall bracket, hoping to bounce from the wall and hurtle back into his cabin with the weapon in hand – well, that one comes under 'good luck' but the relevant skill is Zero-G.

How hard should any given skill roll be; how many skill rolls are necessary to get to the top of the cliff? What sort of modifiers apply because the guards are at a state of heightened alert? This is a decision best left to the Referee. Every Referee has their own style and ideas about how hard a given task should be.

In some places the adventure does make suggestions for how to resolve a given situation, but the Referee is always free to amend, alter or ignore such suggestions. If the characters cannot progress any further because they lack a critical skill to overcome a particular obstacle then they should be able to find another way around, or the Referee may amend the difficulty level of the hazard to suit the characters. Having to abandon the adventure for lack of a single skill is a good candidate for a 'not fun' label and should be avoided wherever possible.

This does not mean that the characters should be always allowed to succeed, or that obstacles should be removed simply because a group is too bull-headed to look for an alternative route. Thinking on your feet is an important part of gaming. Indeed, the Referee is encouraged to make obstacles harder than those presented in an adventure if that seems suitable.

In short, this adventure presents a series of challenges and an indication of how difficult they are likely to be. The players will almost certainly find some convoluted, ass-backwards way of tackling these challenges, and the Referee should use the rules to resolve their antics in a manner that is challenging and plausible yet entertaining. This is what refereeing Traveller is all about, and it almost invariably requires departing from the adventure as written. It is simply not possible to predict how a given group of players will tackle any given situation without excessive railroading, and that's not fun.

So, what follows is the adventure as written by the folks at Avenger Enterprises. It's a framework, not a straitjacket. How it plays out is something for you and your players to determine.

FLAMMARION TO WALSTON

The adventure begins at Flammarion Highport. With new characters, it is not hard to create a reason for being there. The most likely one is that they have recently mustered out of the Imperial forces or a career and are passing through on their way home, or looking for a new job. This ties in well with characters who have ship shares – the vessel they are assigned is the Scout/Courier *Highndry*. If none of the characters is a Scout, this is not a problem. The Scout Service has decided to divest itself of a number of surplus vessels including *Highndry*, leasing or selling them on to private users at a deep discount.

If the players do not want a Scout, then they will be offered a slightly different deal – if they pick up the Scout and return it to Flammarion their own ship acquisition attempts will be facilitated by the Scout Service.

STARPORT LIBERTY

With credits burning a hole in their pockets and time on their hands, the travellers are free to enjoy what Flammarion Highport has to offer, which is quite a lot. There are plenty of shops, bars and restaurants as well as recreation facilities ranging from squash courts to prize-fighting arenas.

The port has a similar law level to the planet below, i.e. 4. In practice this means that sidearms can be carried, as can blade weapons. Although shotguns are legal, anyone wandering around with one would attract the attention of the portside security force. Similarly, while discreet body armor is acceptable for people who perceive the risk, someone stomping about in a flak jacket will be viewed with suspicion. There is simply no need, in the eyes of the port authority, and thus anyone wearing overt armor is assumed to be up to no good.

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

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

The Referee should allow the characters as much time as they want to explore the Highport, buy anything they need (assuming it is available), read library data from public-access terminals, and generally get used to their environment before beginning the mission. However, aimless wandering

about a starport can become boring fairly quickly. Once the players run out of self-imposed direction the Referee should get the adventure moving before the players become bored.

A GIFT HORSE

While the characters are going about their business, they are contacted by a Mr Anders Casarii, an official of Borderline Shipping LIC. Despite the firm's tongue-in-cheek name it is a reputable firm that operates on the Imperial border (hence the name) and also operates a starship, crew and component clearing system on behalf of the Imperial services. This involves a range of operations from disposing of surplus spares for the Scout Service to facilitating the purchase of obsolescent ships by world governments.

Mr Casarii has a proposition for the travellers. Naturally, this proposition is best presented over lunch in a nice restaurant. During the meal, he explains that the firm he works for is closely involved with the Scout Service and other Imperial institutions and often handles things like assignments for detached duty scouts seeking a job with shipping firms. In this particular case, Borderline Shipping has a slightly unusual contract on hand.

The short version is that one of the Scout Service's detached duty vessels is stuck on a nearby world and needs bringing 'home' to Flammarion. The ship has suffered a major problem with its electronics systems and needs a crew to deliver some replacement parts. They will also need to download a replacement operating system into the ship's computers to ensure that any corruption caused by the failure does not endanger the vessel.

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

The ship is downed at Walston, four parsecs away. The previous crew abandoned it there. The ship was a Detached Duty Scout/Courier assigned to them and had apparently been mistreated. There are penalties for abusing Detached Duty ships since they still belong to the Scout Service, so presumably the crew decided that it was in their best interests to disappear. In any case, the ship legally belongs to the Scout Service, which will provide appropriate documentation to allow the travellers to pick it up and bring it home.

The Scout Service will also provide (via its subcontractors at Borderline Shipping LIC) vouchers for refuelling at Asteltine and Bowman on the way back and tickets aboard a passenger ship to Walston. All necessary spares and soft-

ware will be provided, along with override codes that will allow the travellers to delete the ship's operating system and install the new one. The old system may be badly corrupted and in any case it is still keyed to the old crew. Operating the ship with that system still in place would be hazardous if it were possible at all. The new system is temporary. It will work for three months without an update and then ground the ship at the first planetfall after expiration. This is for the obvious security reasons.

Depending on the characters' circumstances (i.e. do they have a ship, do they have ship shares, are they amenable to being given a Scout/Courier to use?), Mr Casarii's offer may vary somewhat. The basic offer is below:

THE BASIC OFFER

The characters are offered Mid passage to Walston and Cr1000 each for 'incidental expenses' up front, plus all costs for life support, fuel and so forth during the recovery of the ship. Once the vessel is brought back to Flammarion the characters will then be given hotel accommodation and another Cr1000 for expenses during the week or so it will take to check over the ship and make sure its software is properly updated. They will then be given use of the Scout Courier for one year initially, or could trade their ship shares for the vessel on a permanent basis.

A one-year lease of the ship is on standard Scout Service Detached Duty terms, more or less. The characters will have to meet their own life support and fuel costs and must keep the ship in good order in case it is needed. The vessel's logs will be examined whenever it passes through a scout service installation, providing information on starports and ship movements in the area. The Scout Service will overhaul the ship at the end of the year, at which time it may or may not be reassigned.

A permanent purchase of the vessel is slightly different. Basically the vessel is quite old and not strictly necessary, so is available for disposal (i.e. sale to a private user). The characters will own the ship outright but will be responsible for maintaining it.

THE ALTERNATIVE OFFER

If the travellers do not want a Scout/Courier, Borderline Shipping will instead help them find a vessel more to their requirements and assist in negotiating a suitable price. Alternatively, if they already have a ship of their own, Borderline will offer a refit and discounted spares, to be taken immediately or when needed. This equates to half the price of the annual maintenance required on the travellers' ship.

THE ADDITIONAL OFFER

On top of the basic or alternative offer, Mr Casarii, has an additional proposal. His firm undertakes a lot of odd-job courier and personnel transport characters from the Scout

Service. Sometimes this is because suitable ships are not available, at other times it is because the Imperial services are rather obvious whereas a trade ship or courier from an independent firm may not be immediately connected with the authorities.

Casarii suggests that his firm can always use reliable sub-contractors and would be willing to put some work the travellers' way. This will normally be of a very mundane sort, such as delivering a cargo of boots and uniforms to an Imperial Navy outpost or transporting a handful of personnel to a deep-space observatory. It's not 'spy stuff', he assures the travellers, just decent-paying contracts from the biggest business group in Charted Space – the Third Imperium itself.

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

ACCEPTANCE

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

The expenses money they are given is in the form of cash or credited to the characters' accounts, and can be used as they please. What they spend it on, and whether or not there is anything left for actual expenses on the trip, is their own problem.

EN ROUTE

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

Autumn Gold is not a Borderline ship as such, but she has been affiliated with the firm for a few years and takes on charters like this one from time to time. Her captain will not discuss the deal in more than very general terms, but essentially *Autumn Gold* has been chartered to deliver a couple of crates of supplies to the tiny starport at 567-908 and the characters, as well as a container of general spares and components, to Walston. Most of her cargo is bound for the naval base at Elixabeth. It is fairly mundane stuff; uniforms, boots and a few cases of wine for senior

officers, but captains wishing to get naval contracts of any sort learn not to talk about what they are shipping or who to as a matter of basic security. The crates are not marked as bound for a naval installation; they look like any other shipping crates.

The crew of *Autumn Gold* are a typical mixed bag of Free Trader personnel. Some are ex-Navy, ex-Scouts or former employees of larger merchant lines. Others signed aboard at a port and were trained on the job. The medical officer is in fact a college kid gaining experience as a shipboard medic before beginning a proper degree in medicine.

The ship is also a typical Free Trader; functional rather than luxurious. The accommodation is a bit worn and the food is, well, edible. The passenger area is clean enough but there is little that is new or expensive. Similarly, the crew are polite enough but they are spacers first and foremost, not public-service workers. Those that are expecting what amounts to a luxury hotel travelling through space tend to be very disappointed in such vessels (though the big liners usually live up to their expectations), but for those simply trying to get from place to place *Autumn Gold* is an entirely acceptable conveyance.

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

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

DRAB, DREARY AND DEPRESSING

Roughly 168 hours out of Flammarion, *Autumn Gold* makes a Jump emergence at 119 diameters out from the planet designated 567-908. Data on the world is available on any of the ship's consoles, and there is not very much to tell. The world is dry, has a thin atmosphere, and is officially uninhabited. Census data takes note only of permanent residents, and 567-908 has none. There are, however, slightly less than two dozen people currently on-planet. About half are members of the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service. The remainder are civilian contractors working with the Scouts.

Autumn Gold is only stopping over for a day at 567-908. Once the cargo is delivered and refuelling is completed

the ship will be moving on as soon as possible. Other than a chance to get out of the ship for a while, there is really no reason to go groundside at 567-908. The landscape is drab, dreary and depressing and there is nothing to do planetside anyway. However, the chance to wander around for a while may be attractive after being cooped up for a week.

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

However, the sheer browny-grayness of 567-908 is impressive. There is just so very much of it in all directions. The colors of the landscape vary so little that it can be hard to make out details or even estimate distances to a given object. Not that there is much worth looking at anyhow.

The starport, such as it is, consists of a cleared area of bedrock which has been smoothed off to make a landing area capable of handling ships up to 600t or so. The ground rises to the north and falls away somewhat to the south. There is a small lake – quite a large body of water for this world – a kilometer to the southwest. Pipes run from the lake to a holding tank at the port, providing both drinking water and a source of hydrogen for fuel. Refueling is a lengthy process as the ship's tanks must be first filled with water which is then cracked for the hydrogen content. Oxygen is bled off and the hydrogen cooled until it reaches its liquid form. Then another load of water is taken on and the process repeated until the main tanks are full of liquid hydrogen.

While this is going on and the cargo is being shifted to a big hut that serves as a warehouse, the characters are free to look around. What they find is simply a collection of pre-fabricated living quarters, an ATV garage constructed the same way and a couple of buildings used for communications equipment. There is another building visible on a ridge about 3-4 kilometers northwards. This appears to be more permanent than the port. Anyone can tell the travellers that it is an observatory, which seems likely given its shape.

The building really is an observatory and if the travellers really want, they can look around if they stay out of the way. The building is mostly finished. It already has a multi-wave-length telescope and a number of specialised instruments for measuring things like cosmic radiation, gravitic turbulence and the like.

Anyone asking will be treated to an extremely technical (and boring) exposition of how when a starship emerges from Jump its mass causes gravitic 'ripples' which interact with other matter in a very scientific and utterly incomprehensible manner. Those who have not lost the will to live

by this point can (correctly) draw the conclusion that the observatory is there mainly to try out new instruments and scientific techniques to see if they are any use for something other than boring visitors to death.

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

If anyone wants to look around the planet, they can stare at as much drab brownish-gray rock as they like. The Port has three ATVs available, one of which is fitted with a bulldozer blade. However, these are not available for sightseeing tours. Exploring on foot is somewhat limited and taking water along is a good idea. There is not much to see, other than a few interesting rock formations and a strange sculpture made by some of the Scouts from the remains of an ATV. They call it 'Mandel's Prang' after an incident a couple of years back when one of their number remodelled the ATV beyond its working tolerances by driving too fast over rough ground.

By the time the ship is refuelled and is ready to move on, chances are that the travellers are more than ready to depart. They may have some sympathy for the people who have to work on 567-908. Death by boredom is not a pleasant way to go, after all.

PLANETFALL AT WALSTON

After the dreariness of 567-908, expectations at Walston may be fairly low. However, the place is rather nicer and more interesting. True, it is another dryish world with a thin atmosphere, but Walston is far more interesting than 567-908.

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

Data on Walston is available on the ship's data consoles. The Referee can decide how much or how little information to release to the players but at a minimum the approximate population, the fact that the entire population lives on one island, and an overview of local conditions should be available.

There is little turbulence as *Autumn Gold* dives through the thin atmosphere towards Settlement Island, and soon the Far Trader is on the ground at Walston Starport. The associated Startown has a population of about 600 people and resembles a semi-underground village rather than a major city. It is, however, one of the world's three main settlements.

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

To enter the town, it is necessary to pass through customs. Although the locals have a sustainable TL of 8, they have an imported weapon scanner and can detect most weapons. Local laws prohibit private ownership of most weaponry. Any guns or blades longer than a dagger must be placed in storage at the port for a fee of Cr10 per week. The guards at the port carry handguns and wear light flak jackets. They do not see a lot of trouble and would probably be caught by surprise if someone did something stupid like trying to shoot their way through customs. A response team equipped with assault rifles would respond in fairly short order to such an incident.

If the travellers are not stupid about handing over their weapons, passing customs is a matter of signing a couple of forms and answering the usual questions about length of stay and business on planet. The customs people deal with a starship every day or two on average, and rarely remember much about those that pass through. However, the crew of *Highndry* were unusual in that they left without their ship, and memorable for their general lack of courtesy towards everyone around them. A character with good social skills (e.g. Persuade or Diplomat) may be able to tease some information out of the customs personnel.

See 'information in town' for what data can be obtained in this locality.

WALSTON STARTOWN

The Startown is, as already noted, only big enough to be a village on most worlds. However, its occupants make a fair amount of money from passing starships. Some work at the port, others in the hospitality industry. About half of the working population of the town are dependent on offworld credits for their income.

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

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

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

The characters will probably want to find out what has happened to 'their' ship. Pretty much anyone in town will suggest asking at the Port Authority office, which maintains records of passing ships. These are freely available to anyone who wants to look, but Walston has a policy of not placing such data on the general datanet. Thus it is necessary to go to the office (which is next to the port and thus within five minutes' walk from any point in town) and look at the records in person. There is no fee for this. Access is granted for the asking, but the information is not left lying around. This is not a deliberate security policy so much as

the easiest way for a small staff to do things. It is rare for anyone to want information of this sort so a policy for making it available has never been created.

INFORMATION IN TOWN

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

The vessel came through the port a couple of times in the past year. The last time was about 3-4 months ago. The crew were real jerks, loud-mouthed and offensive. They apparently did not like anything about Walston. They were displeased by the food and the beds in the hotel, hated the décor, found the local practice of wearing a kilt somehow hilarious, and made a mess everywhere they went. Simple concepts like putting trash in a bin eluded these people, who seemed to think that they were better than everyone else put together and set about putting everyone they met in his place – whatever they perceived that to be.

The scout was in a fairly dilapidated condition when it came through, but seemed flyable enough. In any case it came and went a couple of times over the months running up to its final visit. On that occasion *Highndry* spent a couple of days in port here before moving on. Its destination is recorded as 'In-System' but there are no details other than a note that the ship was on charter to the World Government of Walston.

A couple of weeks later the crew turned up at the Starport in an air/raft and hung around making a nuisance of themselves until a ship bound for Caladbolg came through. This was the Far Trader *Maverick Spacer*, according to records. Apparently the crew of *Highndry* took passage aboard this vessel for Caladbolg via Dattrillian. Their subsequent destination is unknown. They took their air/raft with them but left behind a few thoroughly trashed hotel rooms. Nobody was sorry to see them go.

In short, the ship seems to have gone somewhere on Walston and met with difficulties. The crew seem to have dumped it and left the planet, though it is possible that they went in search of some critical spares they needed. What seems apparent is that the world government chartered *Highndry* to do whatever she was doing when the final systems failure occurred. Her location, or at least her destination, is almost certainly known to the government at Central Lake.

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

REFEREE'S NOTE

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

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

TO THE CAPITAL

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

The trains themselves are short, just a small electric locomotive and a carriage or two at most. There are often a couple of freight cars attached to the back of a train but these are usually empty; they are simply not uncoupled when not needed because that would require someone to do it and already the railroad staff (all 17 of them, serving three main and a few more minor stations plus the rail depot at the capital) are overworked just running a train every day.

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

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

The palace is rather grandly named. Like other buildings on Walston it is largely underground, with just the top floor above the surface. In fact the 'palace' is in four parts. Two

are semi-separate accommodation wings for the employees of the government, the security force and the personnel that support them. Between these lies the governmental building where the world's tiny bureaucracy work and accessed through it (there is a private entrance at the other side but guests are not allowed to use it) is the home of the dictator and his immediate family.

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

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

The entryway leads to a reception area decorated in the locals' idea of a tasteful and businesslike manner. Pastel blue and light to mid gray seem to be the colors of choice. There is a reception desk which is manned most of the time. Travellers from a high-population world might be stunned by this. The seat of government for a world does not have a full-time receptionist? Incredible...

In fact, everyone in the world government has more than one job. With just 3000 people on the entire planet, it is difficult to provide all the trappings of a civilization. Law enforcement, fire and rescue, the railroads, industry and the starport all need personnel. As do the hidden but necessary jobs like sewer maintenance and road-mending. As a result, everything has to be done on a shoestring or when someone with three other jobs is available to see to it.

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

Within a few minutes a government official – the Minister for Offworld Affairs, Public Relations and Fisheries, as it happens – enters the room and apologises for the delay. He listens to the characters' story, looks over the papers, and thinks for a moment.

The Minister, whose name is Alan Greener, explains the situation, which may not be entirely to the characters' liking.

REFEREE'S NOTE

Astute characters may note that there are several Vargr working in government jobs, some of them reasonably important. However, the only Vargr to hold a ministerial post is the Minister for Vargr Affairs, Civil Defence and Urban Planning. This is quite an important post but only the fact that the minister spends most of her time dealing with Vargr-related issues allows her to hold high office. There is otherwise something of a glass ceiling for Vargr on Walston. This is accepted as the natural way of things and any attempts to point out that it is unfair and racist are met with a shrug and the statement that that's how things have always been. It works, everyone is content and it only upsets offworlders, so what's the problem?

Fact is, the system does work passably well and in an unambitious society like that of Walston it is not much of a problem. Vargr are not oppressed and forced to be obsequious, they are instead conditioned to believe in the system that bars the best jobs and important positions to them. This is likely to make people from more egalitarian societies grind their teeth. It may drive visiting Vargr nuts to see members of their own kind, who are often all but obsessed with advancement, prestige and personal betterment, living contented lives as second-class citizens.

This may present an interesting moral question for the travellers. Walston is a racist society, there is no doubt about that, yet it is also a contented and peaceful one. Is equality more valuable than contentment and peace? The travellers may think that it is, but for those whose society and way of life would be ripped apart and probably replaced by something less comfortable, the prospect is not so attractive.

Note that the Dictator is highly unlikely to agree to a meeting with offworlders, especially ones who want to harangue him about the perceived evils of Walston society. The Vargr of the world don't really want to hear that either. Self-appointed reformers will have a hard time here.

THE SHIP IS WHERE??

Minister Greener explains the situation regarding the Scout/Courier. Its crew were, frankly, a bunch of troublemakers, but for lack of anyone better the government chartered their vessel for a fairly simple job. They somehow managed to botch the task and disable their ship into the bargain. They then departed in the direction of the starport aboard an air/raft before anyone knew what was happening. They took a ship out of the system a couple of days later and have not been heard from again.

Now, the travellers' documentation seems to be in order, and with no way to verify it 100% Greener is willing to accept it at face value. He will tell the characters where the ship is and help them get access to it... if they agree to complete the mission the original crew were supposed to have carried out. Greener can offer a flat fee of Cr3000 in

cash – a case full of Imperial Credits is it happens – for the job, but it is important and he is not willing to cooperate unless the characters finish the job.

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

Greener is willing to admit that he cannot stop the characters from fixing up the ship and making off without holding up their end of the bargain, but he thinks he is offering a fair trade; help in getting the ship and a little hard cash in return for a job that's important to Walston but will take only 2-3 days to complete for a suitably equipped ship. He will not even discuss the ship's location until and unless the characters agree to his proposal. If the travellers are honorable people they will surely be willing to keep their end of the bargain.

Greener is not willing to part with more cash – he already paid a lot to the previous crew and Walston does not have money to throw around. However, the job is important so he might be talked up a bit. If the characters are greedy Greener will decide to wait for another Scout/Courier or similar vessel to come through the port. After all, they are hardly uncommon.

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

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

Which is, of course, parked in the crater of a possibly active volcano.

OBTAINING THE SCOUT SHIP

The characters have just learned that their ship is parked on top of a mountain, and one that may possibly be an active volcano.

The nearest settlement to Mount Salbarii is, unsurprisingly, named Salbarii. It lies on the western shore of Settlement Island about 20km north of the volcano, which is a little inland from the coast. The island has a few big hills but Mount Salbarii is by far the highest peak, at about 1500m above sea level. It rises more or less directly from the coastal plain, with only a ridge running southeast by way of foothills. This makes the mountain an imposing sight and fools the eye into thinking that it is a little higher than it actually is.

All the same, 1500m is a considerable climb in an already thin atmosphere, and not something that should be attempted on an idle whim. There are no mountaineers as such in the town of Salbarii, though a few people have occasionally climbed nearby hills. Some offworlders took it into their collective heads to go up Salbarii a few years back. Apparently they made it and came back OK, but they did not leave any maps or useful information. In short, while the local shops will be able to sell the characters things like rope and backpacks, they are going to have to improvise their way up the mountain.

MOUNT SALBARI

Getting to the base of Mount Salbarii from the town is not too much of a challenge. The characters are on government business, so it is not too hard to arrange to be driven to the mountain in an offroad vehicle. Indeed, the first 500m of the ascent can be undertaken aboard a vehicle, albeit not quickly. After that, it is not really feasible to drive a wheeled vehicle any higher. An ATV could do it, but there is not one available. Nor is an air/raft which would make the trip very easy indeed.

However, the climb up Mount Salbarii is not as bad as the characters might have expected. The early stages are little more than a walk up a fairly steep slope, though there are boulders and outcrops to be detoured around. The thin air will begin to be a problem after a while, even for those who are acclimatized to some extent. Characters will tire and become irritable more quickly than expected. Altitude sickness may worry medically-minded characters but it will not be a problem just yet.

It is not possible to just go straight up towards the peak. Instead the travellers will have to follow a snaking path around boulders and scree slopes, following ridges and working their way higher. On average with detours, steep bits, slow going in places and the odd easy section the characters will be able to ascend about 100m per hour. They would be well advised to rest or camp overnight on

the way up rather than simply charging at the peak in one go, though it is doable for those who like an 'ironman' type challenge.

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

800-900M

This segment of the climb is characterised by a lot of steep slopes and tumbled rocks, resulting in many frustrating detours. It takes 2 hours or so to ascend 100m vertically. Or rather it would but for an obstacle in the form of a volcanic outcrop that runs around much of the mountain. After some investigation the travellers will realise that they have a choice of following a long looping ridge around the outcrop or climbing up a 10-meter more or less sheer rockface which, while hazardous, could cut hours off the journey and perhaps avoid other problems further on which are as yet out of sight.

The climb is not unduly difficult for a character with suitable Athletics skills. Once a rope is established at the top, less skilled travellers should be able to scramble up. While resting at the top, the characters make an unpleasant discovery – the bones of two humanoids, probably humans, along with a forlorn collection of very decayed mountaineering gear. The bones show obvious signs of a fall. It seems that one of the climbers fell and injured himself very badly. His companion was attempting a rescue when some sort of disaster befell and they died together on the mountainside. The remains are half a century old and little of their gear is any use now, though some pitons and the like might be salvaged.

If the characters choose not to climb it will take them 1d6 hours of frustrating walking to follow the ridge round to a point where they can get past the difficult area.

900-1100M

The going is easier on this section, enabling the characters to make better time. However, this would be a mistake. They are on a thin-atmosphere world to start with and have ascended 1000m from sea level in a fairly short time. Ideally they need to rest a lot and take the climb slowly to avoid altitude sickness.

A good decision here can save a lot of problems later on. The Referee might allow a character with medical skill to make a skill check to realise that the ascent needs to be paced. If any player points out that the characters are climbing a mountain in an already thin atmosphere, then the Referee might point out the risk of altitude sickness and ask if the team are deliberately going slowly to avoid it.



Salbarii

Hople

Thrulton

Barvinn

Mount Salbarii

- Roads
- Railways
-  Hamlets
-  Town

0 20

Scale in Km

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

A party slows down will make the usual 100m per hour in terms of altitude. A party that does not will manage 200m in an hour or so, but each traveller will have to make an average Endurance check with no DMs (other, obviously, than his Endurance modifier) unless the character is somehow not acclimatized to the thin atmosphere. This would only happen if the travellers had come from a world with a standard or thicker atmosphere and the climate of the ship they travelled on was not adjusted en route. This is unlikely, but a character who is not acclimatized makes a difficult Endurance check instead (i.e. with a DM of -2).

Those that fail the check now have mild altitude sickness. The result is that they will begin to tire faster than they expect and may begin to experience symptoms such as faint nausea, headache and a tendency not to react quickly to changing circumstances. This will not yet be a serious problem, though the travellers will tend to snap at one another find simple tasks like retying a bootlace both tricky and intensely annoying. This translates as a -2DM on all skill and characteristic tests, even when undertaking purely mental tasks.

1100-1200M

This section is steep and rocky, with little vegetation. There is clear evidence that the mountain was a pretty active volcano in the distant past, with fields of hardened lava and obvious paths where it has flowed. The travellers are slowed by the terrain but can take a fairly direct route, so can make 100m per hour vertically without undue strain.

1200-1350M

This section of the mountain is really quite steep and has numerous hazards in the form of loose rocks, overhangs and sections where there is no alternative but to climb or scramble up a more or less sheer rock face. It will take 1d6 hours to traverse this section. This might actually be quicker than on the lower slopes since the characters are now able to go more or less straight up. No skill roll is needed as the climb is not especially tricky. However, there is another problem.

Another test for altitude sickness is necessary at this point. This is a difficult (-2 DM) Endurance check for anyone not already suffering and a very difficult (-4DM) test for anyone already suffering. Characters who fail the test are now suffering from mild altitude sickness if they were not suffering before, and moderate symptoms if this is the second test they have failed.

Moderate altitude sickness may cause nausea or even vomiting, headache and dizziness but worst of all is the strange mental numbness. Sufferers will sometimes just fail to react to obvious things. For example, a character might keep on plodding numbly forwards when everyone else stops for a rest – and might even walk straight off a ledge in extreme cases. Characters with moderate altitude sickness suffer a -4 DM to all tasks until they recover.

And of course, this is not a good time to be uncoordinated or confused. The travellers will need to make at least one Endurance check to scramble up this section. Anyone who fails will fall, skidding down a rocky slope and suffering 3d6 damage. Precautions like being roped together might mitigate this at the Referee's discretion, though this might put other characters in danger. Anyone who fails must try again, with another chance to fall and injure himself.

1350-1400M

This section is worse than the last one, but fortunately not that high. It will take another 1d6 hours to clamber slowly up the rocky face of the mountain, which at times is almost sheer. As the characters near their goal they must make a final endurance test to avoid altitude sickness. This is very difficult (-4) for anyone already suffering any symptoms and difficult (-2) for those who have not yet begun to suffer.

Characters who have failed a total of one test are now suffering from mild altitude sickness (-2DM to everything), those who have failed 2 are moderately afflicted (-4DM) and those that have managed to fail all three will be a danger to themselves and everyone else. They stumble about like zombies, suffering from a terrible headache and vomiting occasionally. They respond very sluggishly to changing circumstances – even crises – and struggle with even basic tasks. These characters have severe altitude sickness and suffer a -6DM to all tasks.

The climb itself requires another Athletics (coordination) roll to make without mishap. It may be that some characters are by now almost incapable of making the climb, in which case their friends will have to get inventive and find a way to help. Failing the Athletics check to make the climb results in another fall for 3d6 damage and the requirement to try again.

THE CRATER LIP

The highest point of the crater lip is about 1500m above sea level. However, it is not necessary to go over the highest point. There are several areas where the lip is a good 100m lower than the highest point. Most groups of travellers will enter by the easiest route they can find rather than determinedly conquering the summit.

The view from the crater lip looking outwards is most impressive. South and west are coastal plains falling away to the open ocean. North and east, if anyone travels

around the crater rim, the interior of Settlement Island can be seen. The interior of the crater is a good 1-2km across, with an outer zone sloping steeply down a good 200m (to a height of about 1250-1300m above sea level). There is a fair amount of vegetation in the crater including a scrubby bush-forest, and a small lake in a center. The lake has an island, and on that island is parked the familiar arrowhead shape of a Scout/Courier. It looks to be intact, though it is surrounded by trash.

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

RECOVERING FROM ALTITUDE SICKNESS

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

Artificial assistance is also possible. A few minutes of oxygen from a medical unit or vacc suit, or some time spent in the sealed environment of the starship, will dispel the penalty for an hour or two. It will, however, return after that until the character has acclimatized to the conditions properly. A character who can rest for a significant part of the day (say sleeping for 8 hours) in a suitable controlled environment will recover quicker even if he works outside the rest of the time. His DM will go down by 2 per day in this case.

If the characters were to acclimatize for several weeks, they would eventually become more used to the conditions atop Mount Salbarii, though they would still tire quickly due to the thin air and consequent difficulty in getting enough oxygen. However, they would at that point be capable of functioning more or less normally. Until then, everything they do atop the mountain is harder and more tiring than they would normally expect.

IN THE CRATER

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

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

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

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

THE LAVA TUBES

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

If the lava tubes are followed far enough down, most of them end at a deep cavern formed by a huge lava bubble in the distant past. It is an eerie and yet majestic place, with smoothed off walls and a gently sloping floor. Several lava tubes end here, and there are a number of dead end tubes leading away from the cavern. There is also one that eventually comes out in an ancient lava flow about 800m up the northern side of the mountain. This may offer easier access in the future if anyone came back for some reason.

COMPANY

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

The animal belongs to a species named Tensher's Wolf after its general appearance and the scientist who named it. Tensher's Wolf is not native to the Spinward Marches but is often imported as a guard animal. It is covered in sandy-brown fur which blends fairly well with the undergrowth and is adept at hiding from its prey. Tensher's Wolf is a pouncer and prefers to attack by surprise. Normally it will not attack humans but this example is desperate and starving, and on top of that may consider the characters to be intruders into its territory especially if they go near the Scout/Courier. If it chooses to attack someone it will try to pick an isolated

character if possible.

Tensher's Wolf 50kg Pouncer
Strength 7 Dexterity 18 Endurance 11
Instinct 10 Pack 5
Weapons: Teeth 3d6
Armor: 2 (thick hide and fur)

The behavior of this creature depends entirely upon the characters. If they are not aware of it or do not actively attempt to feed and befriend it, it will try to kill and eat them unless it can steal something to eat from them instead. An encounter where the creature steals food from the characters' camp might cause them to realise that it does not fear people and might in fact be an abandoned pet. If the characters leave suitable food for the creature and allow it to satisfy its desperate hunger, it can be approached. If treated like a member of the family, it will revert to being one and eventually become a loyal guard animal/pet. If the characters do not befriend the creature they will have to kill it before it kills and eats one of them.

THE SCOUT/COURIER

Once the characters reach the island, they can see that the Scout's hatches are all closed but just about everything inside it has been dumped outside in a huge mess made worse by some kind of animal raking through it looking for food. It would appear (and this is correct) that the crew attempted a repair then stripped everything of value that they could carry from the ship, dumped the rest and took off in the ship's air/raft. Among the wreckage is a forlorn metal food bowl licked clean long ago. The name 'Kimbley' has been hand-stamped into the metal of the bowl. Someone once cared for the poor starving beast now haunting the island, but not enough to take it with them when they left.

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

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

On top of that, virtually every access panel is open, the covers are off everything that has a cover and there are components strewn all over the deck. Putting it all back together will be a big job. Fortunately, some of the components can be bypassed or replaced with the gear the travellers brought with them up the mountain. The resulting lashup won't be pretty or safe for people walking past but it should suffice to get the ship to a dockyard where a proper repair can be conducted.

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

And so, having climbed to the top of the world, the characters can finally begin the job they came to Walston to do.

REPAIRS, SURVEYS AND TREMORS

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

There are four main systems needing repair:

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

Each of these jobs takes 1d6+2 man-hours to complete. Most of the work can be done by an unskilled person who has been shown how as it simply requires identifying a circuit block by its code number and a simple remove-and-replace procedure. However, the Referee should act as an Engineering (Electronics) skill roll at the end of each job. The players should not be told the difficulty level, creating a degree of uncertainty about whether the job has been done properly. In fact, between the diagnostic unit and a suitably skilled person offering guidance to those doing the actual work, there is no real chance of a disaster. In addition, the ship's computers need to be accessed and purged, then the temporary control software uploaded. This can be accomplished by anyone with Computer 0 or better, and again a skill roll should be made.

In the event of a really terrible skill roll, the players may want to redo the task, which takes another 1d6+2 man-hours. However, provided due care was taken there will be no serious problems with the ship's systems when the time comes to fire them up. Nothing ever works properly first time however, so a prudent crew will undertake a series of ground tests and a low altitude shakedown flight before blasting off into the unknown. It is all but inevitable that some sort of problem will appear and have to be fixed.

In the meantime there are two other jobs that need doing. The first is making the ship habitable. The general electronics systems dispersed throughout the vessel deal with things like life support, recycling and lighting, but there is also a fair amount of filth and mess that must be cleared out before the ship is really fit to live in. A number of quite

important components such as air filters are missing and must be located – the crew dismounted everything they might be able to take with them, selected the most portable and valuable, and left the rest scattered throughout the ship and on the ground outside. Locating and replacing important parts will take several people a couple of days, and cleaning up properly will take longer even than that.

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

THE SURVEY

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

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

To do a really thorough job, the travellers should emplace ground sensor units all over the crater and in some of the lava tubes. Charges should be set off in some of the tubes as well. The effects of the charge detonations will be used by the scout ship's computer to create a 3D model of the volcano. When matched up with readings taken by more sophisticated sensors like the vessel's high-penetration densitometer, this will allow the computer to predict if and when an eruption is likely. Other indicators include measurements of the lake temperature and samples of the gas mix around the crater area.

The survey will take about 10 man-hours to do cursorily and twice as long to carry out properly. Ideally characters with Sensors and Space Science (Planetology) will be available to carry out the data analysis and someone with Explosives skill to emplace the charges, but the system is reasonably idiot-proof and need not be too precise so a typical group of travellers can muddle through somehow.

After a few hours of blowing up small areas of rock and vaporizing the occasional bush, the characters will get a fright.

THE TREMOR

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

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

Astute characters may notice that the lake level is dropping. Not quickly, just a centimeter or two each minute, but the lake is slowly draining away. A small fissure has opened in the lake bed and it is draining into the lava tubes – which may be a problem for anyone in there at the time.

It will take hours for the lake to empty, as it is 30m deep in places. All that will be left is a few forlorn pools. By this time the fissure will have ceased to vent gas and the mountain will once again be quiet. However, these events may give the travellers cause for grave concern.

CONCLUSIONS

The scout ship's computers (and any characters with relevant skills) will come up with a prediction after a few hours. There are many variables, and nothing is certain but it seems likely that the mountain is indeed becoming active. It would appear that the lava plug deep in the volcano's innards has been breached and magma is seeking a way to the surface.

It is highly likely that there will be an eruption of some kind within a few months. However, the scale is not expected to be very large. Chances are good that there will be very little lava actually reaching the surface, and what does escape will cool long before it reaches the base of the mountain.

Gas and ash clouds are more of a problem, but again it is likely that the eruption will take the form of a steady release of pressure, with a plume of ash-laden gas escaping from the top of the mountain to be blown downwind (which means to the west, across the island and out to sea). This will look alarming but should not seriously threaten even the nearest town. It will be alarming but not excessively dangerous.

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

TEST FLIGHT

At last the scout ship is ready for a test flight. The travellers may be suspicious that the ship's systems are not in perfect working order. This is a reasonable conclusion as no-one ever gets a complete overhaul of this kind right first time. A prudent crew would use the training-mode simulators on the ship's controls to make a dry run before takeoff, and run low then full-power tests on the ground. A sensible approach of this sort will take a few hours but will iron out the worst of the faults before takeoff.

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

Once the faults are fixed, the ship can be operated without penalty, though it does not quite 'fly right'. It is sometimes slow on the helm, sometimes erratic. Autostabilization is wayward at best, and power systems are not 100% reliable. All of this makes operating the ship a nerve-racking and tiring business.

However, the travellers are going to need to fly, and soon.

ERUPTION!

Just as the travellers are preparing for their test flight, several things happen in fairly rapid succession. Most are alarming and the rest are downright scary.

The first sign of a problem is a gentle pinging from the sensor data processing suite. This may not even be noted unless someone is monitoring it or is in the same room. The suite wants to inform the crew that it has revised the eruption prediction based on new data. To the computer, this is a dispassionate exercise and of no real urgency. To anyone looking at the data from the point of view of, say, being sat on top of the volcano, the new data is a little more urgent.

The computer displays tables of temperatures and gas mixes and such, plus a helpful 3D model of the mountain which shows a huge lava plume smashing through the plug and filling the tubes. If asked for a prediction, the machine shows the top blowing right off the mountain in about six minutes' time. The characters just have time to realise that they cannot possibly get clear when the machine pings again to indicate revised data. Now it shows a much reduced lava plume simply pouring out into the crater and down the sides of the mountain, accompanied by a cloud of hot gas and ash. The first wisps of smoke can be seen coiling up from the lava tubes and the lakebed fissure. What water remains is beginning to boil. An eruption is obviously imminent, and the ground begins to shake to confirm this.

On-the-ball characters may have time to wonder what has changed, since the lava plume is now much smaller than the one depicted a moment ago. They will find out in due course. In the meantime, there is still lava rising up the inside of the mountain and seeking away out into the crater. The characters have a few minutes to take off.

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

The lava plume has found a way out, through a path that was too far down the mountain to appear on the survey. While this means that the characters will not be incinerated in the crater and that there will be no catastrophic release of pressure resulting in the top being blasted off Mount Salbarii, it does have other implications.

By now the air in the crater is becoming too hot and too laden with volcanic gases to breathe. As the ship lifts off, lava begins to boil out of the lakebed fissures. If the Tensher's Wolf previously encountered is still around and has not been adopted by the characters, it will run for the

ship seeking the safety of its home. If it has already been befriended, letting it aboard will not be a problem. On the other hand, if the characters have just allowed a terror-stricken carnivore into the ship, where it finds strangers instead of its human masters... problems are likely, to say the least.

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

TRANSMISSION ONE

The first transmission is coming in from the capital at Central Lake by way of the starport orbital beacon. Minister Greener wants to know what is happening. He has some garbled reports of smoke from the mountain and a tremor. He would like to know how serious the situation is and what the long-term implications are.

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

TRANSMISSION TWO

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

DECISIONS

The travellers could cut and run at this point, but for a minor problem. Their fuel tanks could be filled easily enough by taking on seawater and cracking it for hydrogen. However, there are a number of red lights on the Jump drive control panel. The drive is inoperable until a proper repair is undertaken, which will necessitate removing a number of bulky components to get at the critical systems. This really needs the sort of tools and hoists found at a starport. If the characters ask, Greener or any other government official on Walston will be happy to offer them use of the equipment they need if they will help with the present crisis.

For the time being, what the Walston authorities need is information. The world's handful of grav vehicles are en route to Mount Salbarii, and a special train full of security personnel, fire and rescue workers, and the like, is being assembled. But for now the only people able to make any real difference are the travellers. Greener wants them to make a flyby of the whole mountain and the surrounding region, and report what they can see. A direct video feed via

the starport beacon would be ideal. Once he knows what is happening, Greener will be able to decide what to do – or better, put a full picture in front of the dictator and let him formulate a response.

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

FIGHTING MOUNT SALBARI, PART 1

Assuming the characters decide to help, they will need to fly close to the mountain. There is a lot of thick haze caused by smoke and ash coming from the mountain, and the odd rock flung into the air (the ship's sensors insist on wailing a missile alert for these), making the flight tricky. All Pilot skill rolls are difficult while operating in this environment.

The ship's radar and other sensors make it possible to map the ground easily enough through the haze even though visual range is very short. A circuit of the mountain reveals the following facts:

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

RESPONSES

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

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

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

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

This comes down to three main tasks:

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

MAPPING THE TERRAIN

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

ESTABLISHING A FLOW RATE

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

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

MONITORING THE MOUNTAIN

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

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

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

Emplacing sensors takes half an hour or more, with a couple of hops from one point to another aboard the scout ship. Its air/raft would have been most useful for this job, but the ship itself can manage with a decent pilot. Fairly soon, the data begins to come in and there is good news. The lava flow is slowing and the temperature of nearby rock is dropping ever so slightly. It would seem likely that the eruption will be quite limited after all.

Paranoid characters might choose to recheck these findings, use different instruments and generally do a more thorough job. If so, they will realize that there is more to their findings than initially meets the eye. If not, the computer model will present the data listed below in a few minutes anyway.

THE BAD NEWS

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

According to the sensors and the computer model, Mount Salbarii is under rapidly increasing stress. Within just a few minutes the plug is going to fail and a massive eruption will take place. Worse, a huge cloud of super-hot ash and gas

will be ejected from the mountain and will hurtle out across the coastal plain. The town of Barvinn will be destroyed and anyone in it will die.

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

FIGHTING MOUNT SALBARI, PART 2

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

EVACUATION ORDERS

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

However, there are people still trying to get to the station, who will not be there by the time the train leaves. The submarine *Ocean's Bounty* is in port at Barvinn, and will take aboard anyone who can be crammed in before heading out to sea and submerging. It should be safe, though nobody really knows how bad things are about to get.

However, there are two groups that cannot reach safety in time. One is from an agricultural settlement, a farming hamlet well to the south. Ironically they might have been safe if they had stayed put or headed south, but then maybe not. In any case, they are now well within the threat zone and cannot be reached by anyone but the scout ship.

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

And so, the travellers are requested to help. They could fly to the refugees, pick them up and then take their ship out to sea and submerge it. The scout would not make a great submarine – keeping water out is different to keeping air in – but it could happily function a few meters down, which would surely be enough to protect it from the eruption.

But what of the other group the dictator mentioned? He regretfully says they are beyond help. In such a small population, he is acquainted with many of the planet's residents and this pair are particularly stubborn. Indeed, their daugh-

ter, who is on the dictatorial staff, is just as bad. Point is, the dictator knows these people. He can tell the travellers who they are and what they do. He can offer a pretty accurate prediction of their reaction to news of the eruption and their stubborn refusal to be worried or to run for it until it was too late. What he can't do is save them.

The dictator has to make a decision – eleven people or two, and the two probably can't be saved anyway, not even with the scout ship. So he asks the travellers to abandon them and pick up the larger group who are nearer the coast. The two have just lost the numbers game, it's really that simple.

But someone else has different ideas.

DECISIONS

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

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

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

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

A breathless, growly voice – obviously a Vargr – is broadcasting on the emergency channel. "Scout ship, get the big group. I'm going after mum and dad. I can get there before you can. Good luck."

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

The travellers still have to choose between definite safety and some risk in return for the chance to save lives. If they so choose, they can climb above the disaster zone or race out to sea and witness the final eruption from a safe distance. If, on the other hand they head for Barvinn they may find they get a closer view.

LAST TRAIN OUT OF BARVINN

Assuming the travellers decide to undertake the rescue at Barvinn, they arrive to a pitiful scene. The settlement is very small, just three dwelling complexes and a rail platform where trains down the single line terminate. There is also a concrete dock with a semi-underground warehouse and a small crane for unloading boats and submersibles. The area between the dock and the station is flat and concreted over to make transfer of cargoes (mainly fish) from dock to railroad car as easy as possible.

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

When the scout ship appears, people begin to run towards it, waving, which of course will interfere with landing. The two cars on the concreted area are an additional obstacle, and landing without crushing them will be tricky. Just avoiding killing any of the people will be challenge enough.

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

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

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

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

If the travellers pick either option, they will encounter only fairly mild effects. The scout will be buffeted about by a high wind pushed ahead of the cloud, and the pilot will struggle to maintain control, but there is no serious danger to the ship. If the travellers take to the water they will discover that the flow can travel a long way over water, and will turn the surface layer to steam but does not heat the water more than about 5m down to any great degree. It does deposit lumps of rock which sink and bang against the hull, creating a sensation similar to being depth-charged.

The scout ship will survive either of these options with a few new dents and scorchmarks to go with the many it already has. However, the valiant Vargr chauffeur and her parents will not. If the characters choose not to go to her aid (see below), the limo is forced down on the shore and overwhelmed by the pyroclastic flow. There is no chance for anyone to survive such an event.

DISTRESS CALL

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

The content of the call is plaintive and desperate: "May-day... mayday, this is Walston One. The car is damaged, drives are failing... windows are cracked and I can't see properly... I think I'm heading for the sea but we're losing speed and altitude. I don't think we're going to make it. Is there anyone? Please?" the voice gets weaker and then cuts off entirely.

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

If the characters ignore the distress call, a Vargr chauffeur they have never met and whose name they don't even know, and her parents, will burn to death and be entombed in ash, but they and their shipload of refugees will survive. If they go to the rescue, the pyroclastic cloud will engulf

all of them for sure and there is no way of telling what will happen.

INTO THE CLOUD

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

As soon as the three Vargr spot the scout ship (which is not easy, given the circumstances) they begin stumbling towards it supporting one another. The chauffeur's comments about not being able to see properly are given a different context when any character spots her face. She has been hit in the face by fragments of the windshield when it shattered and is blinded by blood coming from a great many small cuts. It looks worse than it is, but she is still largely blind and thus a danger to all if she keeps launching flares at random.

The falling ash is now moving almost horizontally. Even in the thin air of Walston there is a considerable wind picking up, driven before a 75kph cloud of superheated steam and volcanic debris. The cloud will bury the scout ship easily if it is caught on the ground, and the heat will overload its systems and broil the occupants alive. The only chance is to run for it. But there is less than one minute to impact and no chance to outrun the cloud.

There are basically three options. The first is to climb as high as possible and try to get above the cloud. This will at least avoid the worst of the debris, but there is no chance to get high enough to avoid being engulfed. The second option is to run for the sea and try to submerge. The cloud will catch the ship before it can enter the water, however. The third option is the best, but not by much. If the scout ship hits the cloud head-on its aerodynamics might lessen the impact and at least it will have its strongest axis pointing at the threat.

At the very least, everyone should strap in or grab something. The scout's bunks and cabin seats are all fitted with straps and crash frames, so eight people can be secured in the cabins as well as those on bridge chairs and emergency crash seats in engineering. The rest will simply have to cling on to something and hope for the best.

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

Physical Damage to the vessel itself will be fairly minor, but objects and people inside will be thrown around by the impact. Base damage for everyone inside is 3d6 at the initial impact, reduced by 1d6 if the ship is headed directly into the cloud and by another 1d6 if the character is properly strapped into a crash frame or seat. Those that are simply clinging to something must make a very difficult (-4) Dexterity check to gain this reduction. Those that fail take full damage and in addition are dislodged from their hold on whatever it was, causing them to bounce around inside the ship during the next few moments.

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

SAVE THE SHIP!

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

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

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

There are three segments to the fall: Going Up, Going Down, and Seconds to Impact. During each segment the pilot may attempt a Pilot skill roll if he has both controls and power. The more successful rolls he makes, the less severe the effects suffered by the scout ship will be. If other crewmembers make their skill rolls to supply power and control in a given segment, the pilot can immediately attempt to gain control of the ship.

To reboot the control systems: an average Engineer (electronics) skill roll or a difficult Pilot skill roll is needed. This can be done from engineering or any bridge console. If the pilot completes this task he may still attempt his Pilot skill roll to save the ship.

To get the powerplant out of emergency shutdown mode: An average Engineer (power systems) roll is needed. This must be done from engineering, and requires physical access to the power systems, i.e. the character will have to leave his seat and more or less cling to the powerplant as he works.

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

First Successful Pilot Skill Roll: The ship is stabilized and is at least falling predictably

Second Successful Pilot Skill Roll: The ship is under power and begins to respond to the helm

Third Successful Pilot Skill Roll: The ship is under full control and can avoid crashing

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

GOING UP

The scout ship is nearing the apex of its crazy tumble through the sky. It is spinning wildly during this segment and all attempts at skills or characteristic tests are made as if they were two categories harder (e.g. average becomes very difficult) unless the character is secured in some way.

Anyone who is not strapped into a crash frame or a seat is liable to be flung about and hurt. Characters simply clinging on to something and trying to avoid being hurt may make an average Athletics (coordination) roll to remain stable and not allow themselves to be bashed against the fittings. Failure results in 2d6 damage. A character clinging to something can grab someone else (requiring another Athletics roll, this time Athletics (strength) and save them from damage. These rolls are not penalised for the tumbling of the ship since the character is secured to something, even if it is merely by his fingernails.

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

GOING DOWN

The ship begins to fall and to stabilise somewhat. This is nothing to do with being under control; the vessel will tend to stop tumbling on its long axis due to its shape. It goes into a flat spin indeed, which is not much of an improvement in the grand scheme of things. Anyone not strapped in or otherwise secured makes skill rolls and characteristic tests as if they were one category harder (i.e. average becomes difficult) and suffers 1d6 damage from being bounced around.

SECONDS TO IMPACT

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

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

If power and control systems were already back online, the pilot simply gets a normal skill roll to get the ship properly under control. Anyone bouncing around unrestrained in this segment suffers 1d6 damage.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

What happens next depends upon how many Pilot skill rolls were made. Three attempts were possible, assuming that control and power were restored in the first segment. If the pilot made all three, the scout ship pulls out of the spin and lifts her nose, accelerating out of the dive over the sea and climbing unsteadily to a safe altitude. There is a fair amount of minor damage to internal components, people have been violently sick, and the ship is a bit the worse for wear but the ordeal is over.

If less than three Pilot skill rolls were made, things do not go so well.

Two Skill Rolls

The scout's spin is stabilized and she is answering the helm, but it is a little too late. She hits the surface of the ocean at the bottom of a shallow but high-speed dive, skipping on the surface before pulling up and climbing into the air in a triumphant spray of steam and minor debris. Everyone aboard takes 2d6 damage if loose, 1d6 if held or clinging to something and no damage if strapped into a crash frame or seat.

One Skill Roll

The scout is sort of under control, mostly, when she hits the water surface in a steep dive. She arrows deep into the bay and embeds her nose in the silt at the bottom, coming to rest stuck in the seabed a dozen meters down. Her hot hull boils water around her and hullplate groans under the stress of rapid cooling. Alarms are ringing and there is water getting in somewhere. Then the lights go out.

The initial impact causes 3d6 damage to anyone bouncing around loose, 2d6 to those secured by others or clinging to something and 1d6 to anyone strapped into a proper seat or crash frame. It is up to the Referee to decide how much to make of being stuck in the seabed. The simple option is for the crew to be able to restore power in a few minutes and to allow the ship to pull herself free. More sadistic Referees (the best kind) can create a whole mini-disaster movie out of this situation.

Evil Referees might light to note that the ship is nose down and leaking slightly. The ship's bridge and avionics are at the front. The effects of seawater on the ship's electronics are up to the Referee, but it could be interesting trying to operate the controls in a space suit while underwater in a flooded bridge. There is an emergency helm station in engineering, which solves this problem in less dramatic fashion.

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

No Skill Rolls

If the crew were not successful in self-rescuing, all is not (quite) lost. As noted above the ship's automatics make a valiant if unsuccessful attempt to restore control. The result is a massive belly-flop onto the ocean surface, causing 6d6 damage to everyone aboard. This is reduced to 4d6 of anyone who is properly braced or held, and 2d6 for anyone in a proper crash frame or seat. The ship is badly damaged by the impact and initially plunges beneath the water.

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

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

The most likely assailant is an opportunistic Alderson. The Brakarr, a far more dangerous creature, is not commonly encountered in shallow water.

Alderson's Coastal Hunter	25kg Aquatic Pouncer	
Strength 7	Dexterity 15	Endurance 7
Instinct 7	Pack 0	
Weapons:	Claws 1d6	
Armor:	2 (Scales)	

AFTERMATH: AS THE DUST SETTLES

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

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

However, in the short term there is an atmosphere of celebration among the people of Walston. They have survived a disaster in better shape than might have been expected and have a few new heroes to adulate. The characters will find themselves invited to a number of parties all over Settlement Island and a reception at the dictator's palace. In the meantime the resources of Walston's tiny starport will be brought to bear on making the scout ship flyable, assuming it survived at all. Things quickly wind down however, and the party atmosphere fades to be replaced with the more usual comfortable ordinariness of life on Walston.

Note that with such a small population and limited resources, everything Walston has is going to be absorbed by dealing with the new problems faced by the town of Salbarii. There simply is not the cash available to shower the characters with gifts. The locals will make sure that the scout ship is well stocked with home-baked goods and the characters will probably acquire any number of home-knitted sweaters, but there will be no big buckets of cash for them.

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

Departing Walston

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

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

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

EPILOGUE: FLAMMARION

The Referee can make as much or as little as he likes of the trip to Flammarion. A Jump-2 ship such as the scout can make the trip in two Jumps via 567-908 or three if it goes by way of Bowman and Asteltine. The longer route is actually cheaper as Borderline Shipping has provided vouchers for refuelling and resupply, but at this point the characters can pretty much do as they please.

Upon finally returning to Flammarion Highport, the characters will be given accommodation in a nice hotel for a couple of weeks while the ship is overhauled, and it will then be handed over to them to use if this is the deal. They are reminded that it still belongs to the Scout Service and can be recalled at any time – and that they are supposed to look after it a bit better than the previous crew. If the deal did not involve the semi-permanent loan of the ship, the characters will be assisted by Borderline Shipping in finding a vessel more to their liking.

Either way, the mission is over. The characters will have made some useful contacts within the Scout Service and their civilian contractors, Borderline Shipping LIC. One or the other will surely have some odd jobs that need doing, from filling out a crew for a mission to recovering another starship – this one in the hands of a crew who do not want to give it back.

Further adventures await the travellers as soon as they are ready.

PLAYERS' INFORMATION

The following information represents the truth about the subject so far as it is known. Some aspects of the information may not be 100% correct, just as some of what is known and taught in the colleges of 21st-Century Earth may turn out to be untrue or subject to misinterpretation, over-generalization or other sources of unintentional inaccuracy.

In other words, what follows is merely an overview of the subject. Closer examination may yield some surprises, but the truth will not be too different from the information presented here. It is up to the Referee to decide how much of this information is commonly available, and how subject to distortion and/or propaganda the generally-known version might be.

SWORD WORLDERS

Each of the Sword Worlds has a somewhat different culture and outlook, but in general their overriding cultural virtues are personal integrity, honesty and courage. On the down side the Sword Worlders are chauvinistic, argumentative and frequently too busy fighting among themselves to get anything done. Their history has been a rollercoaster of rising empires and civil wars, of shifting power balances and daring coups.

Although unity and cohesive action are problematical for the Sword Worlders, there has always been a strong sense of 'family' among the various worlds. In much the same way as a family might rally to help out its no-good cousins against outsiders, internal feuds are often put aside to deal with external threats. The sudden re-emergence of these feuds has hamstrung several otherwise successful endeavors.

Currently, all the Sword Worlds are members of the Sword Worlds Confederation, with its capital at Gram. The Confederation is a rather loose organisation which at times wields considerable power and at others has been little more than a token framework. There are those that suggest that trying to create an over-arching government in the Sword Worlds is a bit like constructing a building specifically to have arguments in – at least everyone is shouting at one another in the same place, but that's about it. However, the Sword Worlders are capable of decisive, united action for the duration of any given crisis and it is when the Confederation as a whole is in danger that the Confederation government suddenly becomes a rallying point for the individual Sword Worlds.

TYPE S SCOUT/COURIER

A small (100t) utility starship capable of Jump-2, built on a distinctive arrowhead hull. The basic Type S design goes back to the First Imperium, though there have been several

variants in the past few thousand years. The ship is designed to fulfill a range of needs from exploration through personal transport to communications duties.

The Type S requires a very small crew. It can be operated in an emergency by a single individual, though this is exhausting and makes no provision for maintenance or emergencies. A more normal crew is three people; a pilot/astrogator and an engineer plus a multi-skilled person to take some of the load off both. A gunner is carried if the ship is armed, and sometimes specialists depending on the vessel's role.

Scout/Couriers are often extensively modified, and several standard variants exist which are optimized for certain roles. For example, the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service (IISS) uses a variant with enhanced sensors for survey and exploration work, while those intended to simply convey people and small cargoes around have no need of these expensive systems.

Scout/Couriers are often modified to fit individual needs. Many find employment as mail ships or prospecting vessels (in which role they are termed Seekers). Although the modifications to these roles vary somewhat, the needs of the task and the available space aboard the vessel tend to result in a similar set of mods. In other words, a Seeker encountered in the Spinward Marches and one from the Solomani Rim may have been altered in shipyards that have never heard of one another, and to no standardized plan, yet they will be surprisingly similar. Scout/Couriers are sometimes pressed into service as minimal escort or patrol vessels, and older ships are sometimes stripped of their Jump drives and refitted as in-system gunboats for local patrol work.

Literally thousands of these vessels are in service across the Imperium, and as a result spares are relatively easy to come by. In addition to being stocked by virtually all ports with a repair yard and made by almost all manufacturers, breakers' yards are a good source of cheap components. Not all of these components are in good condition, of course, so crews need a good engineer to help identify sound parts and fit them properly.

The Ship's Locker

The ship's locker on Highndry has been extensively cleaned out by the previous crew. Some of what is listed here might be found, possibly in usable condition, strewn about on the ground outside or dumped in odd corners of the ship. The locker will have to be refilled at some point if it is to be anything more than a junk storage area. Typical contents would normally include:

Tools and Emergency Equipment

1 Set, Bulkhead Patches (Cr150, TL10, 4kg)

A set of variously-sized rigid and flexible bulkhead patches, plus adhesives and sealant to allow pressure breaches in a starship or space vessel to be temporarily repaired. The patches are no substitute for a real repair, and tend to fail after 6-24 hours. They are mainly used to allow the crew to make a more permanent repair.

1 Cutting Torch (Cr500, TL5, 30kg)

A basic cutting tool using incandescent gas fed by a heavy canister. Cutting torches are effective against most metals and alloys, but will not work on starship hulls or armored vehicles constructed at TL10 or higher.

Duct Tape (Cr5, TL6, negligible weight)

A strong, fabric-based, multi-purpose adhesive tape. Useful for hasty repair work as well as for restraining and gagging prisoners, among many other things. Most ship's lockers contain several partially used rolls.

6 Emergency Softsuits (Cr1,000, TL9, 5kg)

A disposable emergency vacc suit including gloves and a soft, collapsible "bubble" helmet, the softsuit has no armor value and offers no protection against hostile environments. Starships are required to carry enough emergency suits or rescue balls to allow the crew and all passengers to survive depressurization. Softsuits are more difficult to use, and require vacc suit skill, so are normally used for crew only. Well-equipped ships include a softsuit at each crew position and a few spares at strategic points, in addition to the crewmember's own vacc suit.

The softsuit includes a small air bottle (4 hours' worth) and can be plugged into shipboard life-support points to prolong this supply. It is rather flimsy, and it offers no protection against radiation, making it a poor choice for repair work or routine duty and a desperate last resort for EVA work. It has no armor value.

Fire Extinguishers (Cr50, TL5, 5kg)

A simple handheld firefighting device. More advanced units reduce weight by 0.5kg per TL down to a minimum of 1.5kg, and can be tailored to specific fire types. The locker will normally contain 4-8 handheld extinguishers. Others can be found throughout the ship.

6 Flare, Distress (Cr12, TL6, 250g)

A free-standing incendiary flare that gives off a bright light and large amounts of colored smoke. The distress flare is designed to float upright in water. It is triggered by a lanyard and is very difficult to extinguish once lit. It will burn underwater.

1 Iris Valve Opener (Cr2,000, TL10, 10kg)

A crank device designed to allow Iris valves to be slowly opened or closed when no power is available. This task is slow and strenuous, taking 3-5 minutes.

2 sets, Magnetic Grips (Cr20, TL5, negligible weight)

A set of permanent magnets which may be attached to the gloves and boots of a vacc suit, allowing the wearer to cling to a metal surface, such as a starship hull, under zero-G conditions. Grips may be installed or removed in a few minutes.

1 Portable Airlock (Cr1,000, TL9, 6kg)

A flexible pressure tent kept rigid by a collapsible frame, the portable airlock has two openings and thus can be sealed to a bulkhead to create an emergency airlock. It is most commonly used when cutting into a starship hull for rescue purposes, to preserve the environment inside, but can be also used to seal a building against NBC conditions. The airlock is big enough for two vacc suited persons at once, and is reasonably robust. It comes with a small air bottle to inflate it, but normally relies on pressure from the area being cut into.

Rescue Balls (Cr150, TL7, 5kg)

A rescue ball is intended to allow personnel to survive a pressure breach in a space vessel. It consists of a 2m-diameter ball of reflectorized plastic and a small air bottle good for 4 person-hours. Rescue balls are mandatory aboard passenger-carrying starships. They are located at strategic points around the ship and in staterooms. Intended for untrained personnel, they are very easy to use. The character opens a zipped flap, climbs inside and zips the opening shut, then triggers the air bottle to inflate the ball. A clear section allows vision, and most rescue balls have a "glove" that a character can insert her arm into in order to manipulate outside objects in addition to a towing or securing tether.

The ball is reasonably robust, and gives a good radar return due to the metallic coating. A person inside one can move around (assuming there is some gravity) by walking on the inside, treadmill fashion. Balls are normally intended for the use of a single person, though more than one individual can get into one at need.

A ship's locker normally contains a few spare rescue balls, but they are also found in cabins and near workstations.

3 Thrust Pistols: (Cr1,000, TL7, 2kg)

A handheld reaction jet using compressed gas, a thrust pistol allows independent maneuver during EVA (Extra-Vehicular Activity, or "Spacewalk") operations. The pistol's internal reserves allow for an hour of moderate maneuvering or three minutes of continuous thrust.

1 Tool Set, Janitorial (Cr100, TL6, 5kg)

A basic set of cleaning tools. Includes a vacuum cleaner, chemical storage and dispensing systems, along with other basic cleaning tools and supplies.

1 Tool Set, Mechanical (Cr1,000 TL5, 20kg)

A set of standard mechanical and plumbing tools including everything necessary to repair and alter mechanical devices; wrenches, pliers and a largish hammer, among other things.

1 Tool Set, Metalwork (Cr3,000, TL5, 100kg)

A basic set of tools for working, welding and shaping metal.

1 Tool Set, Rescue (Cr2,000, TL7, 20kg)

A comprehensive set of supports, cutting gear and other tools used to reach and rescue trapped persons. The kit does not include any sensors.

1 Tool Set, Starship Engineer (Cr4,000, TL12, 5kg)

A full tool kit for shipboard engineering personnel, including Iris valve opener, electronic and gravitic test and repair equipment, wrenches, sockets and a large hammer.

3 Vacc Suit Emergency Kits(Cr500, TL8, 1kg)

A belt-carried pack, the emergency kit is designed to allow a vacc suit user to save himself or someone else in the event of an accident, and to increase the chances of a search finding him. Yanking a lanyard will release a tethered balloon reflector. This is somewhat similar to a rescue ball, but filled at very low pressure. It inflates into a 3m-diameter radar reflector which is tethered to the user's belt. It vastly increases the user's radar cross-section and makes a search more likely to find him.

The kit itself contains a radio beacon/repeater, a handheld strobe beacon, tethering cord, suit patches, spray sealant for multiple small holes, a 30-minute replacement air bottle and two hand-held gas thruster units. The latter are designed to allow the stranded spacefarer a last-ditch attempt to reach safety. The kit also contains a metallic reflectorized blanket that will increase radar detectability and somewhat reduce absorbed radiation in the event that the spacefarer is caught outside in a solar flare.

Field Equipment

2 Atmosphere Testers (Cr150, TL7, 1kg)

A hand-held device that monitors air breathability and quality. A simple readout indicates pressure ("Thin",

"Dense" etc) and whether the air is within breathable parameters. An audible alarm and flashing warning indicates unbreathable or toxic gas mixes, but the unit does not indicate what the hazard composition is.

6 sets, Cold Weather Clothing, Advanced (Cr500, TL10, treated as clothes)

Using quick-drying, waterproof and super-insulating materials, advanced cold weather clothing protects against frigid weather (-20° Celsius or below). The suit is not heated, but it is designed to allow temperature to be regulated by openings and partial removal.

Chemical Lightsticks (Cr1, TL6, 100g)

A 10cm rod of clear plastic containing chemicals which, when mixed by twisting the stick, give off a soft glow. Lightsticks last for about 24 hours and are bright enough to read by or find your way around in a cave. Lightsticks are purchased in large boxes. Locker contents normally range from 'a few' to 'absolutely loads' depending on how recently the ship has been restocked.

6 Cold Light Lantern (Cr20, TL6, 250g)

A fuel cell powered version of the standard electric torch, which will last 3 days with continuous use. Produces a wide cone of light up to 18 meters away with a radius of 6 meters at the end of the beam. Also capable of producing a tight beam of light up to 36 meters away with a 1 meter radius or be used to illuminate a 10 meter radius.

6 First Aid Kit, Basic (Cr125, TL6, 1kg)

A basic belt-carried kit containing clean bandages, safety pins and a small blade as well as a quantity of basic pharmaceuticals (antibiotics, painkillers and possibly alcohol to sterilize a wound). More advanced versions are available, which are basically similar in terms of contents. Beyond a certain point a first aid kit is a first aid kit, whatever the tech level of its components. Indeed, a basic first aid kit can be quickly thrown together by a knowledgeable person from handy materials.

4 Cables (Cr100, TL9, 3kg)

10 meters of strong fiber or metal cable suitable for climbing or light towing applications. Very similar to the cargo tethers used aboard merchant starships.

2 Climbing Kits, Basic (Cr100, TL4, 2kg)

A set of accessories designed to make climbing easier. Includes a safety harness, gloves and rock shoes, belt with secure holders for tools, and head protection.

Communicator, Short Range (Cr100, TL7, 0.3kg)

A belt-mounted radio capable of 10 km range (much shorter underground or underwater). Three separate channels. These units are not very impressive but they can survive a lot of punishment and continue to work adequately. Most starfarers carry a personal comm unit

which is much more capable, leaving these devices as backups.

6 Desert Kits, Individual (Cr450, TL5, 2kg) A basic desert outfit including loose-fitting trousers and shirt, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, large water bottle (2 liters) and mineral tablets.

6 Field Kits, Personal (Cr100, TL3, 2kg)
A basic field operations and survival kit containing a bush hat, pants, shirt and a warm jerkin, a waterproof poncho/blanket, water bottle, belt pack with fire-starting equipment and 1 day's (almost inedible) iron rations, and a machete (treat as Blade). Boots must be purchased separately. Above TL6, the kit also includes half a dozen chemical lightsticks.

1 Fusion Still (Cr4,500, TL13, 65kg)
A fusion still is built around a small fusion unit which will run continuously for 5 years. The still has a hopper which can take fluids or organic matter. Collection areas within the still allow potable water to be extracted, or a just-about-edible nutrient product normally known as "glop". The exact composition of glop varies depending upon what is put into the still, and in some cases vital nutrients will be missing. The still's readout advises the user as to how good his or her glop will be today, but even the best technology cannot make glop taste any better. Glop can be output as dry, jaw-busting bars or a damp and fairly disgusting porridge. The still can also be set to simply produce pure water, or water with a high mineral content.

The still has a power output socket and a cable for recharging items like powered tools, and includes two rechargeable hand lamps which can be connected by cable or taken elsewhere. They will run for 6 hours if unplugged. It also has a built-in light unit and a heater that can be used to warm a shelter or to provide localized heat for cooking.

Marooned starfarers with a fusion still will usually find that their food and water needs are taken care of. However, many users cite the still 's food output as the single greatest drain on their will to live. Fortunately, the still can also be used to distil alcoholic beverages into spirits for medical or recreational use.

6 pairs, Goggles/Shades (Cr20, TL5, negligible weight)
Sunglasses or full goggles designed to protect the eyes from damage by bright lights. At TL7, reactive lenses are available that allow the user to keep his shades on while moving from dark to light conditions. At TL9, shades can (for ten times the cost) include automatic protection against very bright light such as lasers, nearby flares or nuclear detonations. The shades remain very dark for a full minute after protecting the user in this way, and must be removed if the wearer wants to be able to see anything.

6 Masks, Combination (Cr150, TL5, negligible weight)
A combination of both filter mask and respirator, which allows breathing of very thin, tainted atmospheres (type 2), plus all atmospheres listed under filter and respirator masks.

6 Ice Terrain Kit, Personal (Cr50, TL1, 2kg)
A set of accessories that make crossing ice or climbing icy surfaces a little less hazardous. Includes crampons for boots, snowshoes, rope and a brightly-colored "rescue blanket". The ice terrain kit does not include clothing.

6 sets, Pitons (Cr5, TL4, 300g)
Metal spikes designed to be hammered into rock crevices to secure a rope for climbing.

6 Piton Hammers (Cr10, TL2, 1kg)
A small hammer used for hammering pitons into rock.

2 Radiation Counter (Cr250, TL5, 1kg)
Indicates presence and intensity of radioactivity within a 30-meter radius. The indicating signal will grow stronger as the detector is brought closer to the source.

6 Ropes (Cr20, TL5, 3kg)
10m of strong but light rope made from natural or artificial fibers.

1 Scientist's Field Kit (Cr100, TL4, 1kg)
A basic set of scientific equipment for taking and examining samples. Includes a small microscope, sample containers, gloves etc. A metallurgist's kit will contain slightly different equipment to that used by a forensic scientist, but the basic cost remains the same. The field kit does not include any electronic sensors or similar complex equipment.

4 Spade/Shovels(Cr5, TL3, 1kg)
A basic digging tool with many uses.

6 Survival Kit, Personal (Cr50, TL6, 4kg)
A small backpack or belt pack containing personal survival equipment. Higher-tech versions include more advanced equipment, but basic functionality is the same. Contents include:

- Small knife
- Fire-starting equipment
- Blanket/poncho
- 4 days' preserved rations
- Water bottle
- Compass
- Light cord or string
- Mirror
- Water purification tablets
- Survival manual

2 Survival Kit, Vehicle (Cr8,000, TL7, 150kg)

A standard survival kit carried aboard ATVs, lifeboats and small craft throughout Charted Space. Each kit is designed to equip 4 people. Imperial Law requires that all spacegoing vessels include one kit per 4 passengers or crew. Contents include:

- 1 Survival Rifle, plus 50 rounds shot and 50 ball
- 1 Hatchet
- 1 Field Medical Kit
- 4 Personal Survival Kit
- 4 Field Kit, Personal
- 4 Sets/Emergency Cold Weather Clothing
- 4 Combination Masks plus extra filters
- Canned Field Rations for 60 person-days (15 days for 4 people)
- 4 Bulk water storage containers (5 liters each) with filters
- 1 Water Purification Kit, Group
- 2 Pressure Tent

These kits are self-contained but are designed to allow the relevant parts to be removed in their own carrying bags. Some vessels place survival kits externally, some place them near the airlocks. The simplest option aboard a small ship is to stick them at the back of the locker where they will not get in the way.

Towels (Cr10, TL1, 250g)

A thick cloth towel of 120 cm in length and 60 cm in width, having a wide array of uses, from drying oneself after falling into a muddy river, though serving as a makeshift wound-dressing to making a soft spot to sit on when resting in rocky terrain. A well-equipped ship will have an adequate supply of towels.

2 Water Purification/Distillation Kit, Group (Cr75, TL7, 1kg)

Designed to provide safe drinking water for 4 persons, the kit contains chemical tablets and filters, plus a collapsible still (which requires a heat source; normally this is heat tablets provided with the kit) to distil liquids.

6 Water Purification Kits, Personal (Cr5, TL5, negligible weight)

A basic set of filters and chemical purification tablets.

Weapons

Weaponry is very much a matter for individual taste, though most ships carry a few guns for self-defense. In a typical ship's locker there will be a revolver or autopistol for each crewmember, a couple of rifles or carbines, and a shotgun or two.

The survival rifles contained in the vehicular survival kits are likely to be present, but it is improbable that any other firearms will have been left behind by the previous crew. While the rest of the locker contents will be replaced at Flammarion as part of the mission deal,

weapons will have to be obtained at the characters' own expense.

Rifle, Survival (VL) (Cr50, TL6, 2kg)

The rather puny "survival rifle" is a simple double-barreled, collapsible weapon included in survival kits. It can fire a weak rifle cartridge (not compatible with other rifle ammunition) from one barrel and an equally unimpressive shotgun round from the other. Both cartridges are roughly the same in terms of performance, which is to say extremely poor. The survival rifle is really only any use for knocking over small game. Damage: 2d6-2.

The Crew

A Type S Scout/Courier can be operated by a single individual in a pinch, but this is exhausting and does not allow for even fairly basic maintenance. A more effective crew should number three people at least, though two can cope for lengthy periods.

Starships regulations (which are often ignored by small private vessels) require that someone be 'on watch' at all times. Officially this means on the bridge monitoring the ship's systems, and aboard a commercial or military ship this would definitely be the case. Aboard the Type S, 'on watch' can simply mean knowing that it's your turn to go and answer if the communication system starts making a pinging noise. Serious events will normally trigger an alarm that will bring the whole crew running.

The crew will need to fill certain roles in order to operate the ship.

Captain, Master, or Commander

All vessels are required to have a suitable person registered as the vessel's 'master'. This person is responsible for the ship and crew, and need not be the owner. Usually termed 'captain' even if this person holds no official rank, a vessel's master normally needs suitable qualifications and experience. However, there are many ports that will register just about anyone as a ship's master. This job can be doubled up with pretty much anything else. On a large ship this is not practicable; the captain is far too busy running the ship to do another job. On a very small vessel like the Type S, it is not merely possible; it is usually necessary.

A ship's master should be a qualified watchkeeping officer (which equates to having skills like pilot, astrogation, sensors, communications and the like) and ideally will have other skills dealing with leadership, law and administration. However in practice small ships are usually captained by the owner or whoever is in charge (for whatever reason) whether or not they have the proper skills on paper.

Pilot

In order to go anywhere, a ship needs someone to pilot it. Most of the time the pilot need not be on the bridge (it is hard to be very far away aboard such a small ship), leaving routine course-keeping to the ship's automatics. A pilot needs at least basic skills in that area, and ideally should be able to operate communications and sensors equipment. Skills like engineer (electronics) and computer can also be useful.

Astrogator

A starship that is going to go anywhere needs someone to plot its course with Astrogation skill. As with the pilot, the astrogator does not need to be constantly at his task so this job is often doubled up with other bridge functions.

Sensors/Comms Operator

Anyone can watch the sensors display or answer a communications call. However, it is helpful to have someone who understands the relevant systems and can fix problems as they occur. A skilled person is useful when dealing with interference or difficult conditions. The sensors/comms job is usually rolled into that of Pilot or Astrogator.

Engineer

A starship needs someone to monitor its drives and make sure they are running properly – and to fix them when they are not. It is difficult to double up engineering jobs with, say, piloting as this is done at the other end of the ship. An engineer/astrogator is feasible however, laying in a course then walking down to engineering to run the drives while someone else initiates the jump sequence – or doing it from the Jump controls in engineering.

Technician

In addition to running the drives and powerplant, the ship's systems also need to be maintained and occasionally fixed. On small ships this job is often rolled into that of the engineer, but characters with engineering (electronics) or engineering (mechanical) skill can do a lot of the routine maintenance and fixing work around the ship.

Gunner

An armed ship needs gunners. This is rarely a full-time job, however, so a character whose main job is 'gunner' may well spend much of his time doing other things. A gunner with good technical skills, who can help out with maintenance when he's not blasting enemies, is a useful addition to the crew.

Medic

A small vessel does not legally have to carry a medic unless it is a passenger ship, but it is always useful to have someone aboard with medical skills. This job is often done on a part-time basis. Much of the time a

'medic' aboard a starship has nothing more than a basic first aid qualification.

Steward

Stewards are normally carried by passenger ships. They cook, serve meals, keep the passengers happy and out of places they're not supposed to go. Stewards are not necessary aboard small non-passenger carrying vessels; crew can take care of their own needs. However, someone who can cook good meals and get them to busy colleagues on time takes some of the load off the specialists and can be a useful addition to the ship.

Purser/Administrator

Commercial ships often carry one or more people whose job it is to look after money, supplies and the like. Small ships cannot afford this luxury so the captain or a designated person deals with it. Ideally the purser has Admin skill but it is possible to cope without.

Deck Hands, Cargo Handlers and Security Personnel

Some ships carry personnel with few or no shipboard skills. These people can carry out odd jobs, move heavy stuff around or deter trouble by standing by the boarding ramp looking mean. Even just having someone around who can clean up and sort out simple odd jobs can take some of the load off overworked specialists.

Allocating Crew Personnel

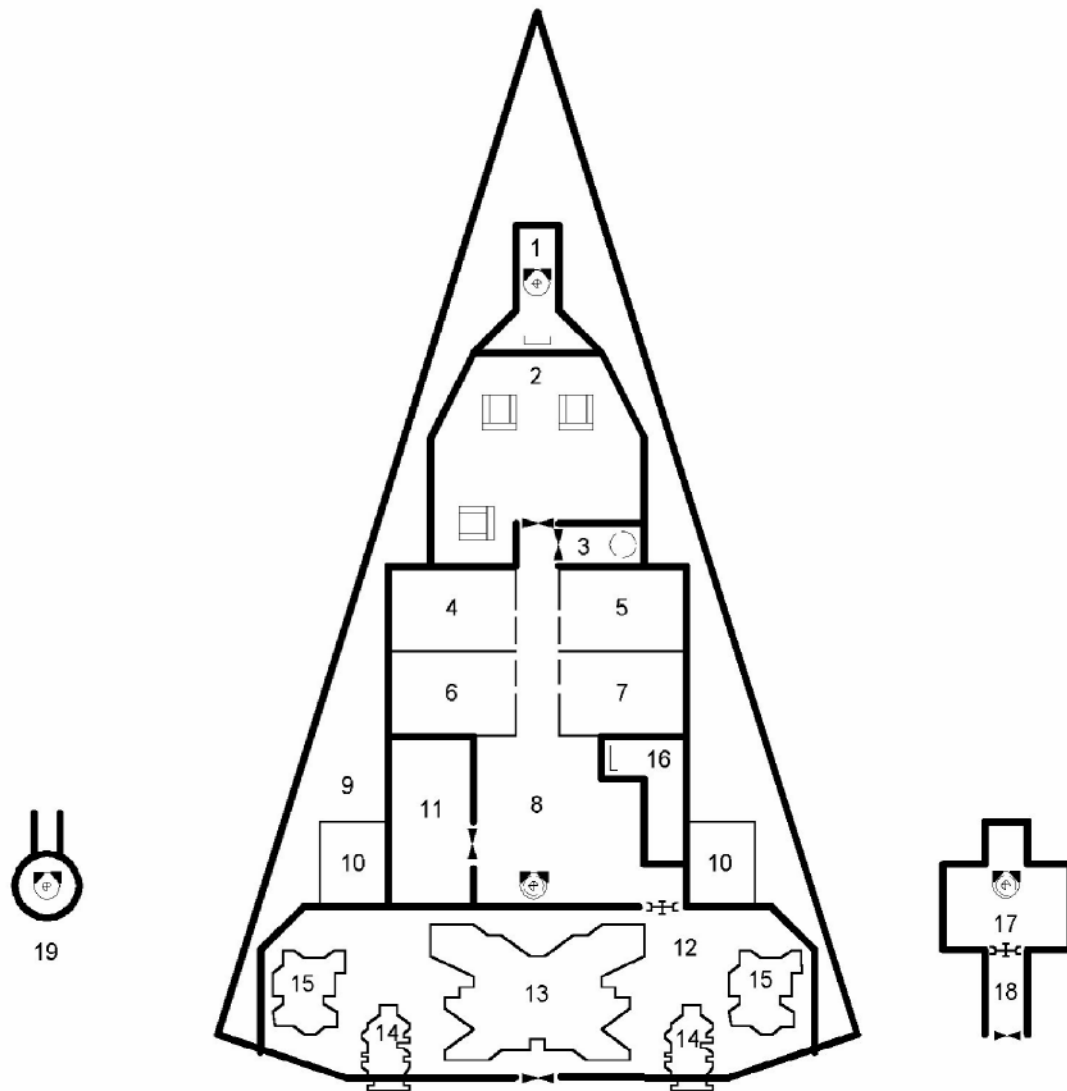
The Type S has 4 cabins, any or all of which can be used for double-occupancy though this is crowded. With up to 8 berths available, it is possible to carry a very complete crew. However, most ships get along with a rather smaller crew.

To be able to fly, the Scout/Courier must have a pilot and an engineer. An astrogator is necessary to plot jumps, and a gunner if the ship acquires some armament. Someone must be put in charge as captain, at least on paper. However, how these jobs are allocated is very much a matter for the crew to decide.

A common 3-person setup is to have a pilot/astrogator in charge of the bridge (ideally this person has sensors or communications skills too), an engineer doing engineering and maintenance technician tasks, and a third person taking the load off them as best he can. This third person will flit from purser to steward to medic, possibly handling cargo and doing some basic maintenance and cleaning as well. One of these people will nominally be in charge of the ship.

In the end, however, the crew can come up with any arrangement they like so long as all the jobs get done – or at least, so long as the ones that are neglected are not too vital.

IISS TYPE S SCOUT - DETACHED DUTY HIGHNDRY



- | | | | |
|----|----------------------|----|---------------------|
| 1 | Avionics bay | 11 | Air/Raft Bay |
| 2 | Bridge | 12 | Engineering |
| 3 | Airlock | 13 | Jump Drive |
| 4 | Stateroom | 14 | Manoeuvre Drive (2) |
| 5 | Stateroom | 15 | Power Plant (2) |
| 6 | Stateroom | 16 | Fuel Processor |
| 7 | Stateroom | 17 | Lower Cargo Hold |
| 8 | Common Area / Galley | 18 | Drone Bay |
| 9 | Fuel Tanks | 19 | Turret |
| 10 | Landing Legs | | |