
TRAVELLER

THE PIRATES OF DRINAX

Written By Gareth Hanrahan

BLOOD OF THE STAR DRAGON

Prince Harrick's injuries are considerable... several damage to all internal organs, 100% burns, exposure to radiation and toxic chemicals from breached shuttle drive... It is both miraculous and a testament to his strength that he is still alive...

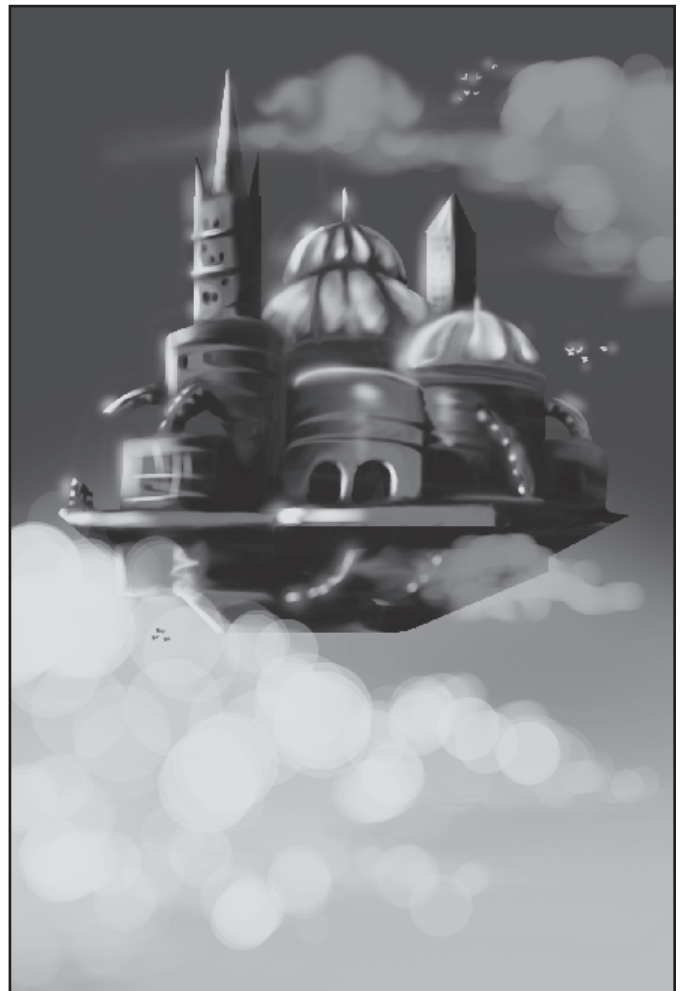
It will take all our art and skill to restore him. Even his brain must be rebuilt, the damaged sections carefully excised and repaired with synthetic neurons and cybernetics. Every cell must be individually examined and repaired, or we risk cascading cancerous growths when the time comes to begin the regeneration process. We can restore him, my lord, but it will be a very slow process. I estimate at least ten years before we can remove him from suspended animation.

*To be perfectly honest, o king, when the Prince first arrived at the Scholar's Tower, I assumed that he was dead. I have never seen such ghastly injuries. It was only when we fitted a Neural Activity Scanner to his capsule that we detected rudimentary brain activity even in suspended animation.
Your son sleeps, o king. He sleeps, and he dreams.*

Private communication between Scholar Voha and King Oleb

Blood of the Star Dragon is the ninth adventure in the Pirates of Drinax campaign. If you are a player in this campaign, **STOP READING NOW!** If you are a referee, then you should first read The Pirates of Drinax Campaign document to get an overview of the campaign.

This adventure takes place in the Tliowaha subsector. The year is assumed to be 1105. The adventure begins on Drinax.



1. ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

When the campaign began, the Kingdom of Drinax was a joke – an absurd flying palace, floating aimlessly through the skies of a bombed-out world. Its one glorious conquest was Asim, a planet of low-tech farmers. Now, with the aid of the player characters, it is about to reclaim something of its former glory.

But the Kingdom hangs by a very narrow thread indeed. Virtually everyone on the Floating Palace is a second-or-third cousin of the royal line. Everyone has some claim to the throne. For centuries, that throne was a meaningless honour, but as Drinax's power grows, so too does the value of the Dragon Throne – that monstrous chair, forged from three thousand years of defeated spaceships. The existence of the royal line keeps Drinax from falling into anarchy and civil war. As long as King Oleb sits on the throne, his reign is unquestioned.

The King has two prospective heirs. Prince Harrick was once the heir, but he was terribly wounded decades ago, and spent twenty years in suspended animation as the Palace's scientists rebuilt him, cell by cell. Princess Rao is the heir-presumptive; she spends more time actually ruling Drinax than her father does.

What happens when all three vanish suddenly?

The King's grav-belt fails, and he crashes into the radiation-scarred wilderness. At the same time, Prince Harrick leaves on a mysterious mission to Asim, and Princess Rao disappears. After helping rescue the mortally wounded King, the pirates must find the missing princess. The evidence points at her brother Harrick – and with the Floating Palace in chaos, the characters must choose their sides in a mounting palace coup.

Once Drinax is secure, the pirates follow Harrick's trail to Asim, where they must find the wayward prince. Once they track him down, he claims that his sister is in the thrall of the Zhodani, and that he needs their help in stopping the Zhodani from turning Drinax into a puppet of their designs against the Imperium.

Existing Loyalties

If the players have already established relationships with one of the two prospective Drinaxian heirs, then this adventure may unfold somewhat differently. Instead of calling on them to choose which of the two is the more suitable heir, their task may be to cement their existing alliances. If the players are especially close to Prince Harrick, then consider rewriting the adventure so that Harrick asks them to help seize the Floating Palace and then meet him at Asim; if they have already pledged themselves to Princess Rao, then perhaps they already know about her Zhodani allies.

It's also possible, of course, that your players' loyalties to Drinax are weak or even non-existent. Maybe they took the Harrier in the first adventure and haven't looked back since. You can still run this adventure for them – it becomes their chance to seize the Floating Palace for themselves and gain control over the Kingdom!

1. THE LOST KING

Ever since the Ahroay'if bombed Drinax from orbit, the planet's weather has been temperamental. Huge dust-storms in the upper atmosphere cause sudden temperature drops, resulting in fierce flash storms below. Regions that were once covered in thick forests are now empty desert, with nothing to catch the rain or break the winds. These flash storms are spasms of atmospheric violence, tearing the skies with gale-force winds and rain like icy spears. The mighty Floating Palace is strong enough to withstand even the wildest hurricane; below, the Vespexers who still eke a living from the blasted soil know to take shelter.

Only a fool goes walking in the teeth of a flash storm.

Only a madman goes flying on one.

King Oleb and six of his Hawk Warriors flew out from the Floating Palace two days ago, on one of the King's impetuous hunting trips (there aren't any animals worth hunting left on Drinax, so he has them imported from offworld). Now, the Palace has received a distress call from the hunting party – the King's grav belts malfunctioned, and his bodyguards lost sight of him in the storm. They think he spiralled down into a region called the Pillars of Night, but can't be sure. The Pillar region is awash with electromagnetic interference that blocks sensors, so they need all the help they can get finding the King.

Every ship and shuttle that can be launched without causing a panic leaves the Floating Palace and flies towards the Pillars of Night.

The Pillars of Night

The Pillars are all that remains of one of the great cities of Drinax. Millions of people once crowded into TL15 arcologies that reached towards the sky like artificial mountains. When the Aslan bombed these cities with artillery, the massive bonded superdense support struts and frames of the arcologies survived, now sheathed in the melted and bubbled remains of the rest. The Pillars resemble the fingers of a blackened corpse, reaching towards the burnt skies above. There are thousands of them, rising from the wreckage below at random angles. The strong ferromagnetic content of the Pillars makes the place

a huge field of lightning rods – a bolt might jump between a dozen pillars before it finds its way to earth. The Pillars make navigation of all kinds difficult, and jam sensors.

They are, however, great to fly through if you're in a wing-harness like the Hawk Warriors.

Interrogating the Hawk Warriors

The commander of the Hawk Warriors bodyguard squad is Brie Tollar; she's been King Oleb's chief bodyguard for several years, and is well used to the king's eccentricities. Now, though, she's genuinely worried. This isn't one of Oleb's pranks, where he'll show up again in a week's time with a hangover the size of a megafreighter. She heard the King's last distress call over their short-wave comm, and Oleb was not in control.

The Hawk Wing was scattered over nearly fifty kilometres of territory as they searched the Pillars for the hunt's quarry – an imported Fungal Vole from Burgess (0702/Hkea'as). This exceedingly dangerous lifeform was released into the Pillars a month ago so the King could hunt it. From a distance. With a gauss rifle. From the air. For that is the only safe way to hunt a Fungal Vole.

Another Hawk Warrior from the squad went missing at the same time as King Oleb, a strapping young chap named Hurgon. He may have fallen victim to the same misfortune as the King, or...

Accident or Design?

What happened to King Oleb? Did all three of his grav-belts fail simultaneously, or was he the victim of treachery? That's up to the referee, and it isn't a question that needs to be answered immediately. You can delay the revelation until later in the adventure, or leave it as a lingering mystery. Let's run through the potential suspects:

Misfortune: No-one needs to be responsible for the King's doom. His grav-belts were century-old heirlooms. It's a wonder the Floating Palace doesn't fall out of the sky, let alone one fat man who presses his anti-grav supports beyond their design limits. For a random equipment failure to kill a key NPC... well, it's a very Traveller result.

Suicide: King Oleb is a man of great passions – and great sorrows, when a black mood takes him. He clearly has a death wish, between his chosen sport and his decision to gamble his entire kingdom on a bunch of pirates. Maybe he switched off his grav belt in a moment of despair.

The Vespexers: The tribes that dwell on the surface of Drinax are technically subjects of the king, but there's a bigger gulf between their miserable existences and life in the Floating Palace than there is between galaxies. One of them might have taken a snap shot at one of the despised Hawk Warriors, and hit the king.

Prince Harrick: The resurrected Prince wants to claim the throne before his sister's plans to revive Drinax come to fruition. He has allies in the Scholar's Tower who could have sabotaged the King's belt.

Princess Rao: The secretive, scheming Princess intends to use Zhodani agent to secure her plans for Drinax. Maybe she feared that her father would object, and so eliminated him before he could stop her.

A Rival In Court: Any of the schemers in the Floating Palace might object to the King's crazy schemes to restore Drinax. For want of a grav-belt, the king fell; for want of a king, the renewed Kingdom of Drinax never happened.

The Imperium: If the pirates have an especially low standing (-40 or worse) with the Imperium, then perhaps an assassin was sent from Tobia to kill the King. The assassin might have sabotaged Oleb's grav-belts, then traced the king down to finish the job.

The Aslan: Similarly, if the pirates are enemies of the Aslan, then a Syoisuis assassin was responsible.

The General Development Corporation: GDC's psychohistorical projections call for Drinax to almost succeed, but fail at the last moment (see Adventure 7: The Vorito Gambit), so the dream of a kingdom inspires the rest of the Trojan Reach to unite against the Aslan. They might have dispatched an assassin to kill the King and set that disaster in motion.

An Enemy of the Pirates: If the pirates have made any special enemies over the course of the campaign, one of them might be responsible.

The referee's choice will not materially affect the rest of the scenario.

Locating Oleb

If the player characters are of suitable standing in Drinax, then command of the search party may be turned over to them. Otherwise, they merely participate, and Brie Tollar takes overall command of the search.

Ask the players how they intend to find Oleb. The likeliest approaches are:

Scanning: It's a Formidable (-6) Education + Sensors test to locate the king's lifesigns. The PCs could possibly set up task chains to get a better DM – using Flyer or Pilot to weave through the Pillars, or bringing in Life Science to calibrate the sensors. Tracing the King's Trajectory: Returning to the point at which the Hawk Warriors lost sight of the king and making a Hard (-4) Intelligence + Pilot check lets the PCs follow the King's course. Then they need to make a Difficult (-2) Intelligence + Recon or Sensors to spot Oleb.

Ground Search: If the PCs have contacts with the Vespexer tribes, they can ask them for local guides and assistance. Then it's just a Hard (-4) Intelligence + Recon test to actually scout the Pillars to find where the King landed.

If the characters fail a test, then either hit them with one of the dangers, or increase the difficulty of healing the King when they find him.

Dangers

Threats the PCs might encounter while searching for the King include:

Hostile Conditions: Another flash storm could hit at any moment. PCs in flying vehicles must make Pilot or Flyer tests to stay in control if a storm does hit; those on the ground had better take shelter with Survival tests.

Dangerous Airspace: Huge jagged spikes of superdense metal, with bolts of lightning arcing between them – only a madman would fly around here.

Vespexers: Even if the Vespexers didn't shoot the King, some of the tribes in this region don't welcome flyers of any kind, and take pot-shots at passing ships with surface-to-air missiles or laser rifles. In contrast, they welcome travellers on the ground – fresh meat is so hard to find in this post-apocalyptic wasteland. Assume there are d6 Vespexers for every 2 PCs, rounding up.

Vespexers

STR 8 DEX 6 END 9 INT 6 EDU 4 SOC 3
Gun Combat (slug rifle) 2, Recon 1, Stealth 1 Survival 3
Armour 4 (Vespexer hazard suit), Long Rifles (3D)

Assassins: If an assassin attacked the king, he or she might still be lurking in the area, trying to find the king to confirm the kill. Two sets of statistics are presented below – one for a human assassin, one for an Aslan. Either way, the assassin has a suicide charge implanted that detonates when the assassin is killed or knocked unconscious. If you've more than three PCs, then it's a two-assassin team. Optionally, the missing Hawk Warrior Horgan might be an assassin.

Human Assassin

STR 7 DEX 10 END 8 INT 8 EDU 7 SOC 7
Recon 2, Stealth 2, Gun Combat (slug pistol) 2, Melee (small blade) 2
Armour 10 (Hostile Environment Vacc Suit w/IR chameleon), Gauss Pistol (4D), Blade (2D) Neural Comm, Combat Drugs

Aslan Assassin

STR 13 DEX 6 END 10 INT 6 EDU 6 SOC 5
Stealth 1, Gun Combat (slug rifle) 2, Melee (large blade) 2, Leadership 2, Tolerance 1
Armour 10 (Hostile Environment Vacc Suit w/IR chameleon), Autorifle (3D), Reaver's Axe (4D) Neural Comm, Combat Drugs.

The Fungal Vole: A Fungal Vole resembles a cockroach, only it's the size of a small elephant and its shell is full of lethal fungal spores that puff out when it's injured. Oh, and it likes hiding underground amid the debris before bursting out to gobble a victim, and it can jump high enough to snap at an aircraft flying overhead.

Fungal Vole

STR 25 DEX 4 END 30 INT 1 INS 5 PACK 0
Melee (claws) 3, Recon 2, Survival 3, Stealth 2
Armour 4, Claws 4D

Spores: If the Vole takes 10 or more damage in a single attack, it releases a cloud of spores. Anyone near the Vole who isn't wearing protective gear (filter mask or better) must make an END check or suffer another 2D damage.

Finding the King

The last refuge of Oleb, monarch of the Floating Palace, King of Drinax, lord of the Star Dragon Throne of Sindal, is a blasted cave at the base of one of the Pillars. Despite falling from the sky and landing on a pile of spiky scrap metal, the king still lives. Cue the players saying...



2. OLEB'S ALIVE!?!

The king stirs as the PCs enter. He's battered and broken, with jagged spikes of superdense metal protruding from his abdomen. 'Starcursed grav belt gave up on me,' he mutters, 'and I fell. I dropped my emergency medical supplies out there somewhere. Go fetch it, and I'll make you a bloody Archduke of somewhere.'

The emergency medical pack turns out to contain a bottle of red wine. The PC may pick any world within the old Empire of Sindal as their dukedom, although the current inhabitants may not necessarily recognise their new ruler's authority.

'Gah. I'm dying. That's boring,' mutters the king. 'Listen, don't let those vampires from the Scholar's Tower get their claws into my carcass. I saw what they did to my boy Harrick. I don't want to end up like the Duke of Albe, pulled out of stasis once a century to sign a form and take a dump. No, let me die. You, come up with some really good last words. I appoint thee court poet in extraordinary of Drinax, Bard of Sindal, and grand high tum-ti-tump of the Outrim Void.' Oleb coughs up what appears to be most of a lung. *'Want to be space pope too, and absolve me of all my sins?'*

As the wine – and the painkillers – take hold, he becomes less lucid, although it may be hard to tell given Oleb's regular sense of reality.

'We can't stay here. The Floating Palace... it's a joke. A cage. A... stupid thing. We were dragons once. We will rule the stars again. I gave you a Letter of Marque when we started this campaign... of piracy. It's still good. Bring back the Kingdom, and all will be forgiven.'

Listen, listen lads, listen. Tell Prince Harrick...no... he's not right for it. Rao... she'll be Queen, but she needs someone to... warn her... there's too much of the Sindalian in her... warn her... no more...'

With that, Oleb lapses into unconsciousness, and starts to snore.

Treating Oleb

Oleb is severely wounded. To keep him alive for the rest of this adventure, the PCs need to make a Difficult (-2) Education + Medic test. That doesn't cure his injuries, but ensures he doesn't die immediately. Increase the Difficulty if the PCs were slow to locate Oleb.

Theoretically, the TL15 medical facilities of the Floating Palace should be able to cure Oleb's wounds, but the king just gave the equivalent of a royal do-not-resuscitate order. It's up to the players if they wish to keep him alive against his will or honour his wishes. Either way, he's mostly dead for the rest of this adventure.

Returning to the Palace

If the PCs haven't dealt with any lurking assassins, vengeful Vespexers and/or Fungal Vores, then they need to fight their way clear of the Pillars of Night while carrying Oleb's not inconsiderable weight.

If the player characters are not in command of the search effort, then Brie Tollar commands them to bring the king back to the Palace as quickly as possible. They are to land at the Royal Dock, a private docking pad reserved for the king and his immediate staff only.

As the player characters approach the Palace, however, they see a trio of atmospheric flyers coming in on an intercept trajectory. The lead fighter hails the PCs, ordering them to divert course to the main starport dock instead. This command comes straight, the fighter pilot says, from Lord Wrax himself.

A Routine (+2) Education + Comms check picks up lots of traffic from within the Floating Palace; a Sensors check even detects weapons fire on board. From the sounds of the comms traffic, it appears that partisans supporting Prince Harrick have prematurely declared the king dead and are trying to secure the Floating Palace before Rao can muster allies. There's confusion over who's in charge, as Prince Harrick jumped for Asim that morning and no-one can find Princess Rao.

The fighter repeats its order to head to the starport dock. If the PCs refuse, the fighter locks weapons and tries to intimidate them into changing course. It won't fire unless it believes that the king (or the king's corpse, if the PCs don't confirm that Oleb's alive) won't be harmed, but if the PCs continue to the Royal Dock instead of the Starport Dock, they're implicitly declaring against Prince Harrick...

The Factions

Why does the Floating Palace descend into civil war so quickly? The roots of that conflict go back to the disastrous invasion of Asim, and Prince Harrick's ghastly injuries. Drinax was able to conquer the nearby planet of Asim despite not having any fighting ships, and despite odds of nearly 100 to 1, because the Star Guard invaders were using TL15 gear and the Asimi could muster a few imported TL10 weapons at best, and the majority of their forces carries TL6 slug throwers. Friendly fire and equipment failure did far more damage to the Drinaxian forces than the enemy ever could. As a result of a shuttle crash, Prince Harrick spent decades in the care of the Scholar's Tower.

Prince Harrick and Princess Rao, therefore, learned very different lessons from Asim.

Prince Harrick grew to appreciate the quiet contemplation of the Scholar's Tower, and the virtues of peace and tranquility and simply living. He lost his ambition to be a great conqueror and hero, and decided to become a good king – a gardener of worlds, as he put it. Without meaning to, he became a rallying point for those who opposed King Oleb's plans for Drinax – a coalition of peacemongers, of those who objected to the use of piracy and terror as a tool of statecraft, and those loyal to the Scholar's Tower.

Princess Rao saw that the glories and prestige of Drinax could be restored by a small number of skilled warriors, if they

were equipped with high-tech equipment and picked their battles carefully. Her plan to use piracy to unite the former worlds of the Kingdom was born from the war for Asim.

King Oleb always favoured his younger daughter. Now, with the king gone and both heirs absent, Prince Harrick's followers believe this is their only chance to seize power and put Drinax back on the right course. They don't intend for this to be a violent coup; their plan is to take control of the key sections of the Floating Palace, so that when Harrick returns he can take his father's place and become the de facto, and then de jure, king of Drinax. They don't want to hurt anyone if that can be avoided, though once guns enter the equation that cannot be guaranteed. Their plan is premature and misguided, and was launched without Harrick's approval, but the deed is done. Now all that remains is to play out the coup.

Harrick's forces are opposed by Princess Rao's own supporters, who were caught off guard, and by those who don't support either of the prospective heirs.

PLAYER CHARACTERS & FACTIONS

The likeliest scenario is that the player characters are supporters of Rao, in which case they have a fight on their hands. The same is true if the player characters decide to make their own bid for power. If the PCs choose to support Prince Harrick, then they can secure the palace easily enough and skip the hunt sequence in scene XX – but their decision may come back to haunt them in Adventure 10: Finale.



3. THE PREMATURE COUP

Place the map of the Floating Palace in front of the players. (pg.22) Then, place dice to indicate the presence of forces loyal to one side or another on the various regions. Ideally, have several sets of different coloured dice, and use one colour for each faction, so that all of Harrick's dice are blue, Rao's red, neutral white and the PCs' black. If you don't have suitable sets of dice to hand, then you can either use counters, or just note on the map which side controls which region.

Each die is an abstract representation of that faction's ability to project power in that region. A die might represent a single charismatic or highly skilled individual, a squad of soldiers, a mob of blood-thirsty but untrained inbred aristocrats, or something even more abstract like the support of the population in a particular section of the palace.

Initial Disposition

1. **Royal Dock:** 2 Rao Dice
2. **Great Hall:** 2 Neutral Dice
3. **Ambassador's Wing:** 4 Neutral Dice
4. **Palace:** 2 Rao Dice, 4 Neutral Dice
5. **Starport Docks:** 2 Harrick Dice
6. **Starport Control:** 2 Rao Dice
7. **Bazaar:** 1 Rao Dice, 3 Neutral Dice
8. **Life Support:** 1 Harrick Dice, 1 Neutral Dice
9. **Star Guard Barracks:** 2 Harrick Dice, 2 Neutral Dice
10. **Scholar's Tower:** 4 Harrick Dice
11. **Gallery:** 1 Harrick Dice, 1 Neutral Dice
12. **Royal Apartments:** 1 Rao Dice, 2 Neutral Dice
13. **Court Chambers:** 2 Harrick Dice, 2 Neutral Dice
14. **Gardens:** 1 Rao Dice, 1 Neutral Dice
15. **Throne Room:** 2 Rao Dice

Next, add dice based on the major NPCs and how their stories have unfolded over the campaign.

Lord Wrax: By default, he's a supporter of Prince Harrick. If the PCs have won Wrax's respect or friendship, then turn the Neutral dice in the Star Guard Barracks to whichever faction the PCs support (if the PCs support Rao, then make all the dice in the Barracks Neutral).

Scholar Voha: By default, he's a supporter of Prince Harrick – and that's not going to change. However, if the PCs have weakened Voha's position, then reduce the number of Harrick dice in the Scholar's Tower to 3.

Lady Hil: By default, she's a supporter of Princess Rao. If the PCs have impressed her or, conversely, if she was killed or discredited, then change the Rao dice in the Palace to Neutral Dice.

Kasiyl of the Ahroay'if: If Kasiyl is an ally of the PCs, add one die of whatever faction the PCs support to the docks.

Rachando the Merchant: Rachando was likely discredited and arrested after the events of Adventure 7: The Vorito Gambit. If the PCs kept him alive, then add one die of whatever faction they support to the docks.

Thao Poloc: The Imperial Ambassador is neutral – unless the PCs have an Imperial Standing of 6+, in which case change one Neutral die in the Ambassador's Wing to whatever faction they support. If their Standing with the Imperium is 20+, then change 3 Neutral Dice there to support the PCs.

Sal Dancet: If the PCs have helped or supported Dancet in the past, he'll assist them; add one die of the PCs' chosen faction to the Starport Docks

Cleon Hardy: The representative from Asim is of no use in fighting a palace coup.

Chieftain Galx: If the PCs have helped Chieftain Galx in the past, roll two dice. On an 8+, she and her warriors happen to be on the Floating Palace right now – add two dice supporting the PCs' chosen faction to the Gardens.

In addition to these NPCs, the player characters may have other allies or enemies on the Floating Palace. Are there other pirate ships here? Have the pirates brought other strangers or refugees back to the Palace in previous games? Conversely, if the PCs have made more enemies on the Floating Palace, then those enemies might support a rival faction out of sheer spite. The referee may add 1-4 dice to any faction based on the PCs' past actions.

Finally, add a token to the map showing the location of King Oleb (or his corpse).

Playing the Coup

This section of the adventure incorporates a board game, but the referee should not neglect the roleplaying elements. Describe the action from the viewpoint of the player characters – those aren't counters moving from one part of the board to another, they're Harrick's space marines smashing through bulkheads and storming a corridor, using thousand-year old statues for cover. Describe portraits and tapestries burning as lasers sear the air; describe refugees fleeing the combat; describe the ancient palace shaking as the civil war engulfs it.

While the rules below explain how to incorporate certain player actions into the board game, other actions must be adjudicated by the Referee. For example, jamming enemy communications with Comms, or taking a starship outside and using its turret weapons on the Floating Palace are both perfectly valid choices for the PCs, but outside the scope of the board game.

The PCs play their chosen faction (or factions, if some PCs support Rao and some support Harrick). The referee controls any other factions.

Winning the Coup

To win the coup, a faction must either seize and hold key locations within the Palace, or wipe out all other dice except Neutral Dice.

Holding Locations: Hold any three of the following four to win:

- Throne Room
- Palace
- Life Support
- King Oleb

A location is held if the only dice there are dice of your faction (so, if you support Rao, you need to remove both Harrick and Neutral Dice from that location). Check for hold at the start of your turn.

Wiping Out Rivals: A rival faction is eliminated if all its dice are destroyed with Attacks, or Persuaded to surrender.

The referee may choose to end the coup prematurely if it is evident that the player characters are in a hopeless or unassailable position.

Coup Turn

Play proceeds in turns, starting with the Harrick faction. In each turn:

1. Choose a region on the map where that faction has at least two faction dice
2. For every two faction dice in that region, take one of the following actions: Attack, Persuade, Secure, or Lockdown.
3. Choose another region where that faction has at least two faction dice and act there. Keep acting until you run out of valid regions.
4. Finally, any faction dice that have not been rolled may Move to an adjacent region.

Actions

If a player character is present, then that player character may aid the faction by adding a relevant skill to their roll. Each player character may only support an action once per turn.

Attack: You attempt to eliminate enemy forces through superior firepower and/or antique duelling sabres. Roll the acting dice. On an 8+, remove one enemy faction die from that region. On a 12+, remove 2. On a 4-, remove one of the acting dice. A player character may add his or her Leadership or Tactics (military) skill to the roll.

Persuade: You try to rally support. Roll the acting dice. On an 8+, turn one Neutral Die in that region or an adjacent region into a faction die. On a 12+, recruit two Neutral Dice or one enemy dice in that region or an adjacent one. A player character may add his or her Persuade or Leadership skill to the roll. Gain DM+1 to the roll for every adjacent region you hold.

Lockdown: You order non-combatants to clear the halls and take cover. Roll the acting dice. On a 4+, remove one Neutral Die from the region. On an 8+, remove two. On a 12+, remove three.

Secure: You dig in. You may only secure regions that you hold. Roll the acting dice. On an 8+, note that all Attacks against your faction in this region suffer DM-1. On a 12+, it is at DM-2. A player character may add his or her Tactics (military) or Medic skill to this roll. This advantage is lost if you lose hold of the region.

Move: Move a dice to an adjacent region. As movement comes after acting, the die can't be used until your next turn.

Note that means when attacking a region occupied by the enemy, the defenders get to fire before the attackers. (The attackers move in at the end of their first turn, the defenders act on their first turn, and then the attackers get to act in their second turn).

Example of Play: *Three player characters support Princess Rao, but the coup isn't going well for them – they've been pushed back to the area around the Court Chambers. They've got 1 Rao die in the Royal Dock, 2 in the Great Hall, 3 in the Gardens and 3 in the Court. The Gardens are contested by 4 Harrick dice who moved in last turn.*

They choose to start with the Great Hall, and pick the Persuade action, targeting the Neutral Dice in the Ambassadorial Wing. One of the player characters chooses to support this action, adding her Diplomacy skill of 3 to the roll. The player picks up the two Rao dice and rolls them, for a total of 11, converting one of the Neutral Dice into a Rao die. The Referee asks the player to describe what actually happened, and the player says that her pirate goes through the corridors of the Ambassadorial Wing, hammering on doors and shouting that the enemy is coming, and that they've got to fight to survive.

Next, the players pick the Court. They have three dice here, but they want to take the Throne Room next turn. So, the players decide to Secure the Court as a line of retreat. None of the

player characters has a useful skill, so they don't bother aiding the action, but it's still a success with a roll of a 10. As long as Rao's side controls the Court, Harrick's attacks in that region suffer a -1DM. There's still one unrolled die in the Court, but a single die can't be rolled – it can only move.

Over in the Gardens, it's three Rao dice against four Harrick dice. The players choose to Attack, and one of the player characters leads the assault, adding his Gun Combat of 4. He rolls two of the Rao dice, plus his skill, for a total of 12, destroying two Harrick dice. The third Rao die cannot be rolled.

Finally, it's time to move. The players abandon the Royal Dock, and pull their unrolled dice from the Royal Dock, the Gardens and the Ambassadorial Wing to the Court Chambers, giving them 6 dice there – next turn, they'll move those dice into the Throne Room. The third player character launches the players' Harrier from the Royal Dock instead of participating in the battle – she plans on using those particle beam turrets to distract the traitors over in the Scholar's Tower.

Optional Complications

Throw in any of these as needed.

- **Return of the Searchers:** The Hawk Warriors who were engaged in the search for the missing King Oleb now return to the Floating Palace. They're worth six dice – but whose side are they on?
- **Fire in the Palace:** A section of the palace catches fire. Any dice in that section that roll a 1 when acting are destroyed. The fire spreads to a random adjacent section each turn. Securing a section puts out the fires in that section.
- **Through the Underlinth:** One of the players' allies suggests taking the perilous route through the underside of the Floating Palace via the Underlinth. They'll need to navigate pockets of intense gravity generated by the palace's anti-grav engines – but if they make it, they can emerge and take the enemy in another part of the palace by surprise.
- **Voha's Weapons:** Scholar Voha believes that the Scholar's Tower – and by extension, Drinax – should be a beacon of culture and learning for the Trojan Reach, not a sleazy piratical hive of scum and villainy. He's a scientist and a librarian, not a warmonger, but with TL15 equipment, he can turn his hand to the art of warfare if needs be. Voha deploys four dice worth of high-tech combat androids to turn the tide against Rao's followers.
- **Self Destruct:** If Harrick's side still control the Palace's life support systems as the coup seems certain to fail, then some young and foolish supporters of his threaten to overload the palace's fusion reactors if Princess Rao does not yield the throne to her brother. These idiots must be taken down before they endanger everyone in the Palace.

After the Coup

How did the Coup end? Did the players manage to outmanoeuvre Harrick's forces and avoid needless casualties? Did they use deadly force without hesitation or remorse, and flood the Floating Palace with the blood of their enemies? Did Harrick's faction seize the palace and force the pirates to flee?

Analysis of the security systems in Princess Rao's quarters show that she was kidnapped by her brother Harrick, who then smuggled her onto his private yacht. The kidnappers used stealth suits to remain unseen, and either sabotaged the security monitors or had their own allies manning the relevant monitoring stations, but now that the coup is over, there's no need to keep this a secret any longer. Regardless of how the coup resolved, the player characters must go to Asim.

- If Rao's faction won, and the PCs supported Rao, then they are entrusted with the mission of rescuing the princess from her brother's clutches. Harrick must either be convinced to publicly condemn his followers' attempted coup and swear eternal loyalty to his sister's regime, or else eliminated, but finding Rao is much more important.
- If Harrick's faction won and the PCs supported Harrick, then they are commanded to go to Asim and tell the Prince the good news – remember, the coup was started without Harrick's knowledge, so he has no idea that his followers have seized the palace. The Princess must be convinced to endorse her brother's regime – or else she must meet with a suitable accident.
- If the PCs supported either faction, and that faction lost, then the Palace is in the hands of their enemies and they've got to flee – but they can turn the situation around by capturing Harrick or Rao, and leading their chosen faction in a glorious reconquest of the Dragon Throne.
- If the PCs tried to seize the Palace, and failed, then their only chance for legitimacy in Drinax now is to rescue Rao and support her. That assumes, of course, that they don't fly off into wild space and stay renegade pirates forever.
- If the PCs tried to seize the Palace for themselves, and succeeded, then the best way to secure their rule is to marry the Princess. Or the Prince. Or both. Second-best is to ensure that neither Harrick nor Rao is in a position to challenge them in future, and that means a trip to Asim. Uneasy squirms the arse that sits on the remarkably uncomfortable Dragon Throne.

All astrogations lead to Asim...

4. To Asim

Asim is a low-tech agricultural world; from orbit, it's brown and dull. On landing, a traveller discovers it's equally brown and dull. It's likely that a close analysis of the planet's soil would, under magnification, reveal that to be brown and dull too.

Asim was ruled by the Foundation, a two-hundred-year-old scam perpetrated by a cabal of bureaucrats. The Foundation claimed that they had a psychohistorical plan that would take a thousand years to come to fruition, but would eventually lead to Asim becoming the capital of a new Fourth Imperium. The bureaucrats were kicked off easy street when the Kingdom of Drinax invaded; they're still running the show locally, but pay tribute to King Oleb. There's a local governor, Lady Telwax, who was a commander in the Star Guard when they invaded; she's an old friend and army buddy of Prince Harrick. So, do the PCs land at Asim's paltry excuse for a star port and ask Telwax for aid, or do they land outside the capital city of Capital City (never get a bureaucrat caste to name your cities) and approach more covertly?

Veterans of Drinax

If any of the player characters come from Drinax and spent at least one term in the Marines, Army or Navy, then they've heard of the secret Dragon Fortress and know its rough location, allowing them to skip the hunt for Harrick and go straight there.

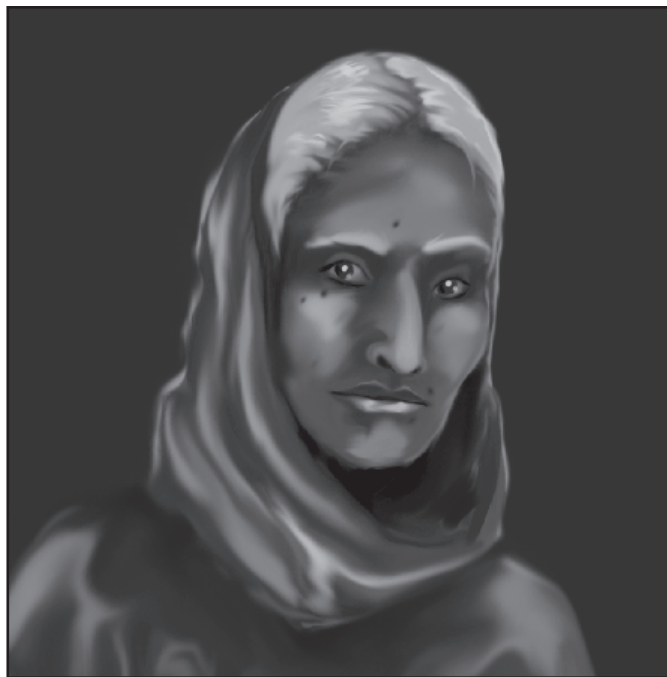
Lady Telwax

Telwax lives at the Governor's Palace; it is luxuriously appointed and absurdly overstated, just like Drinax. She lives there with her wife, their youngest child, a few servants, and a dozen Hawk Warriors to keep the bureaucrats in line. You don't need many troops when you've got flying TL15 battle dress and plasma rifles, and they've got slug rifles on a good day.

If the PCs land openly at the star port, then Telwax insists that they visit her at her palace. If they ask about Prince Harrick without any preambles, then she lies and tells them that he's already departed for Torpol.

Playing Telwax: Telwax is part of Harrick's faction, but her time as governor has taught her how to play politics. If Haricots' coup attempt looks like it's going to fail, then she'll side with Rao or the PCs. If she gets the impression that the PCs are on the run from Harrick's victorious coup on Drinax, then she'll pretend to help them until her Hawk Warriors can arrest them. Telwax therefore interrogates the PCs as subtly as she can, under the guise of asking for news from Drinax (the PCs are the first ship to jump in since the coup). A successful Intelligence + Deception check reveals that Telwax is pumping the PCs for

information and that she probably knows where Harrick is. The PCs can use Deception or Persuade to get Telwax to aid them. Alternatively, monitoring her Comms traffic can point the PCs to Harrick's location – he's in the secret Dragon Fortress north of the city.



Starport Control

The Asim's starport monitors all traffic visiting the system - if Harrick jumped in here, then his ship's course must have been logged, and from that the characters can determine a rough landing area. Gaining access to the starport logs requires either a hacking attempt (Hard (-4) Intelligence + Comms or Computers), sneaking in (Difficult (-2) Social Standing + Deception) or taking the tower by force – it's guarded by four Hawk Warriors and two platoons (40 soldiers each) of local infantry. If the PCs simply request the logs, that's a Hard (-4) Social Standing + Diplomat or Comms roll; failure gets an apologetic response that only Governor Telwax can release the logs.

Records show that Prince Harrick's ship jumped out soon after jumping in; she arrived, landed in the mountains to the north, then took off again and transmitted a flight plan to the starport before jumping for Torpol. They were still broadcasting the Imperial callsign, implying that Prince Harrick was still on board. However, any PC with 1 or more skill ranks in Deception or Comms guesses that might be, literally, a false flag.

If the players gain full access to the logs, then they also discover that Princess Rao's private yacht visited the starport here at Asim roughly once every two months, starting two months before the campaign began. In each case, her ship landed, refueled, and took off again. Then, several days later, the starport picked up the telltale flash of a jump, suggesting that she visited some other body in the system instead of travelling onwards.

Rumours on the Streets

Asking around on the streets (Social Standing + Carouse or Persuade) gets a accurate rumour – roll 1D on the Semi-Accurate Rumours of Asim table and add the Effect (failure get useless, false or wholly irrelevant rumours – roll on the Rumours of the Reach table in the Pirates of Drinax Campaign Overview for inspiration, and beware Scurrilous Dave.)

Semi-Accurate Rumours of Asim

1D	Rumour
1	The Foundation are plotting to overthrow the Governor! They'll strike any day now! (<i>True, but it's been true ever since Drinax reconquered Asim</i>)
2	King Oleb's dead and his children are fighting for the throne (<i>probably true, not hugely useful</i>)
3	Princess Rao's yacht landed here to refuel several times recently. She has a secret escape route on Asim (<i>true-ish</i>)
4	There's a secret psionic institute hidden on Asim, in the mountains north of Capital City (<i>false, but interesting that they should mention psionics</i>)
5	The General Development Company are meddling on Asim, and doing experiments on people in the mountains north of the city (<i>equally false, but getting closer</i>)
6	A free trader coming in from Torpol claims she saw a giant warship in the system when she misjumped into the asteroid belt (<i>true. Not immediately relevant, but true.</i>)
7	There's a secret Drinaxi military base somewhere in the mountains north of the city, established when those space bastards conquered us and destroyed the dream of the Fourth Imperium by overthrowing our beloved Foundation.
8+	There's a secret Drinaxi military base in the mountains north of the city. Here are its co-ordinates. It's called Fort Dragon, and it's there to reconquer Asim if the Foundation ever strikes back. Knowing Drinax, it's also probably sitting on top of some atomic bombs or something to burn the planet. Orbital bombardment's in their blood, you know, and searing us with a self-destruct is the next best thing.

Cleon Hardy

If the PCs befriended Cleon Hardy, the representative of Asim to the court of King Oleb, and brought him with them to Asim, then Hardy can give them the 8+ Rumour information – but he may ask for a favour in return. When the time comes and the PCs hold the balance of power in the resurgent Kingdom, he wants Asim to receive better treatment than it has in the past.

The Prince's Plan

So, why did Prince Harrick kidnap Princess Rao?

The Prince believes that his sister is working with enemies of the Kingdom. Blinded by ambition, she's made bargains with foreign powers. His original plan was to kidnap Rao, force her to confess, and return to their father King Oleb with proof of Rao's duplicity. He knows that she's meeting with her mysterious allies in the Asim system every few months.

He sent his yacht away after landing to throw any pursuit off his trail. It very obviously and blatantly jumped for Torpol – but it's actually doing an in-system jump. It's going to reappear in orbit of Asim in a week's time.

What if the Players Take the Bait?

If your players seize on the Torpol lead and never question the evidence (even after you ask a few variations of 'are you sure?' when they declare they're jumping out immediately in pursuit), then here's how things play out.

Rao tells Harrick where she's meeting her mysterious allies
Harrick's yacht returns and picks up Harrick, Rao and a few of Harrick's troops. They head to the rendezvous site. Rao's allies turn up. There's a misunderstanding, then a frank exchange of views, which leaves the yacht and the next generation of Drinaxian royalty as a rapidly expanding cloud of debris. Move onto Adventure 10: Finale with none of the Drinaxian rulers surviving.

Optionally, you could let the players switch to temporary characters, and let them roll up troops in the Dragon Fortress who aren't committed to either Harrick or Rao. They learn that the Princess is being held captive in this very castle, and must decide what to do about it.

5. THE DRAGON FORTRESS

Conquering a planet is easy, especially if you've got nine Tech Levels on your opponent.

Holding it is a lot harder.

Hence, the Dragon Fortress. It's Drinax's first and last resort against an Asimen revolt. Prior to the discovery of the Harrier and the whole grand plan to rebuild the Kingdom through strategic privateering, Drinax had no jump-capable ships of its own – the Aslan saw to that. They had suits of TL15 battle dress and plenty of firepower, but no way to reach other systems. Their only visitors were the occasional tramp trader, bargain hunter, or traveller seeking the fabled high-tech sages of the Scholar's Tower.

The 'invasion' of Asim involved hiring a few free traders, with the elite Hawk Warriors crammed into the cargo holds like cattle. The Hawk Warriors conquered Asim without significant resistance (Prince Harrick was mortally wounded in an accident, not as a result of enemy fire). However, once they had Asim, they had no reliable way of getting supplies or reinforcements from the Floating Palace if the Asimen fought back. While battle dress and plasma cannons might be capable of fighting for days, the humans wielding them still need to sleep and eat. The biggest threat to Drinax's hold on Asim has always been a prolonged guerrilla war.

The Dragon Fortress is a theoretically impenetrable refuge where the Hawk Warriors can retreat and hold out indefinitely. If the Asimen ever rose up, the Hawk Warriors pull back to the fortress, then keep flying plasma-spitting sorties against their enemies until Asim is theirs again. To paraphrase Archimedes, give me a place to stand and a secure forward operating base, and I will nuke the world.

The fortress is hidden in the mountains. From the surface, the only signs of the base is an unnaturally flat landing area, big enough for a ship to land, and a number of narrow, perfectly vertical shafts cut into the rock. It turns out you can do really effective mining with a man portable plasma gun, contra-grav technology and a densitometer.

If you can fly or have gravity sleds, then vertical shafts are no obstacle. You just sink down the shaft in perfect safety. They're a much bigger obstacle to infantry or other TL6 weapons. The shafts twist and turn inside the mountain, with plenty of kill zones and strong points where invading forces can be stopped.

Prince Harrick's own ship took off again soon after landing, and has jumped out of the system. It's due to return in one week. See The Prince's Plan sidebar for more details.

Princess Rao is secretly being kept prisoner in the fortress by Prince Harrick. Most of the garrison are unaware of this; only Harrick and the crew of his ship know about his secret prisoner.

Finding the Fortress

If the characters know roughly where the fortress is, they can find it with an Intelligence + Sensors or Recon roll. If the roll fails, then they don't spot the flying Hawk Warrior patrol stationed above the base. The Hawk Warriors won't engage the PCs' starship unless they have no other choice – even battle dress and advanced laser rifles don't stand up against starship armour or weapons. PCs on the ground or outside the ship, though, are fair game.

If the characters know precisely where the fortress is, then they get a roll with DM+4 to spot the lurking Hawk Warriors.

The Fortress Commander

The commander of the Dragon Fortress and head of the Drinaxi military forces on Drinax is Colonel Sedelti Wrax, the daughter of Lord Wrax. Like her father, she's a supporter of Prince Harrick by default. She grew up on tales of Sindalian martial glory, and absolutely despises pirates and freebooters. She is unaware that Prince Harrick has kidnapped Princess Rao – the princess was smuggled into the fortress in a cryoberth, and Colonel Sedelti is not about to search the baggage of a member of the royal family. Harrick told Sedelti that he has returned to Asim to revisit the place where he nearly died, and she has accepted this explanation at face value.

Entering the Dragon Fortress

As Allies: If the characters are allies or supporters of Prince Harrick, then they can just land at the Dragon Fortress and be escorted in by Harrick's retinue. Skip straight onto Splitting Heirs, below.

As Guests: If the PCs are willing to be disarmed and searched, then Harrick agrees to meet with them to discuss the situation on Drinax. A successful Social Standing + Diplomat roll allows the PCs to keep basic equipment with them; succeeding with an Effect of 4+ means Harrick trusts them to behave appropriately and does not ask his troops to disarm them. Harrick claims that he has always acted in the best interest of Drinax, and will explain the disappearance of his sister, Princess Rao, once the PCs are in the Dragon Fortress.

Sneaking In: Entering the fortress covertly is possible, but tricky. The PCs need to overcome the following obstacles:

- The Hawk Warrior patrol outside. Sneaking past them requires a Hard (-4) Dexterity + Stealth test; countering their thermal and light intensification sensors ameliorates the DM.
- Climbing down the vertical shaft; it's Difficult (-2) Endurance + Athletics using climbing tools.
- Avoiding the first set of internal sensors: Intelligence + Sensors to disarm
- Getting past the kill zone, where there's another pair of soldiers (Harrick's men, not Hawk Warriors) at the top of another vertical shaft, in a pillbox.
- Getting past the second set of internal sensors.

Possible options:

- Capturing some Hawk Warriors and stealing their armour
- Finding some natural caves that connect to the Dragon Fortress shafts and sneaking in through there (Asim's local fauna is mostly harmless, but there are some nasty parasitic cave worms; the real danger is rockfalls and hidden crevasses)
- Convincing Governor Telwax to smuggle the PCs in. The Governor outranks Colonel Sedesti, and can request to inspect or take refuge in the fortress.
- Convincing Colonel Sedesti to investigate Prince Harrick's quarters, possibly by providing proof of the coup attempt on Drinax.
- Stage an Asimen rebellion, convince Governor Telwax to call for aid from Harrick, and then sneak into the understaffed fortress.
- Wait for Harrick's ship to return in a week, and intercept it as it leaves (see The Zhodani Base, below).

Storming the Fortress

The fortress is defended by two dozen Hawk Warriors and another fifty lower-quality soldiers (local mercenaries), and they're dug into a position that's explicitly designed to hold out for long periods. Winkling them out of there won't be easy. If the PCs are determined to go in, guns blazing, then possible options might be:

- Dying horribly in a narrow chokepoint, because you attacked an entrenched position on foot, you dolts. Did you really think 'kick in the door and charge the orcs' works against trained soldiers?
- Telling the Hawk Warriors in the base that Prince Harrick has kidnapped Princess Rao. Convincing them that they're in the middle of a civil war requires a Social Standing + Comms or Persuade roll (with a DM if the PCs have the support of authority figures like Governor Telwax or Lord Wrax). If successful, the confusion makes attacking the fortress survivable.
- Organising an actual revolt on Asim. They'll need someone like Cleon Hardy or another native of Asim as a rallying figure, but Asimen warriors backed by a few armed starships and elite player characters might be able to take the Dragon Fortress.

Finding Prince Harrick

Prince Harrick's apartments are at the very heart of the fortress – right above the vault that would be filled with planet-searing weapons of mass destruction if the Drinaxi had any, because this fortress was built using schematics inherited from the dark old days of the Kingdom, back when Drinax kept its vassal worlds in line with the threat of orbital bombardment. (If the PCs recovered the biological doomday weapons from Adventure 5: The Treasure of Sindal, and gave the weapons to King Oleb, then one of the bombs has been stashed here).

He stays closeted here with his closest allies (one Hawk Warrior and one average soldier per two PCs) while he tries to convince his sister to confess and for his yacht to return.

Defenders of the Dragon Fortress

Hawk Warrior

STR 7 DEX 7 END 8 INT 6 EDU 9 SOC 9

Battle Dress 0, Gun Combat (energy rifle) 2, Melee (blade) 1, Recon 1, Tactics (military) 1, Zero-G 2
Armour 18, Laser (4D+4), Cutlass 2D+4

Mercenaries

STR 8 DEX 7 END 8 INT 5 EDU 6 SOC 4

Stealth 1, Gun Combat (slug rifle) 1, Melee (unarmed) 2, Recon 2
Armour 2, Autorifle (3D6)

6. SPLITTING HEIRS

The context of this scene depends largely on the events if the previous section – are the players meeting Harrick as fellow conspirators? Are they here as guests? Have they crept in, and are now eavesdropping on Harrick as he interrogates his sister? Have they conquered the base, and are now holding Harrick at gunpoint?

In all cases, though, the two royals both petition the PCs for support. Both Harrick and Rao plead or present their cases; the player characters must then decide what action to take.

Both are shocked and stunned if the PCs come bearing word of King Oleb's death.

Prince Harrick, the Gardener of Worlds

Prince Harrick speaks simply and humbly. When playing him, halt every so often and search for words. Keep a stiff military bearing, but occasionally wince in discomfort as old phantom pains wrack your cloned body.

STR 5 DEX 6 END 8 INT 8 EDU 10 SOC 14

Battle Dress 1, Gun Combat (energy rifle) 1, Melee (blade) 1, Leadership 3, Persuade 1, Zero-G 1

- The prince was mortally wounded in the first conquest of Asim, and was still in the care of the healers in the Scholar's Tower when his father and young sister came up with the plan of hiring privateers to restore the kingdom of Drinax.
- He supports the restoration effort – the Floating Palace is a government without a nation, a head without a body. Drinax's high technology and culture could help the worlds of the Tlaiowaha subsector. They should go forth as teachers and gardeners, though, not pirates and conquerors, and use force only when it is justified. He would prefer a small kingdom of a few worlds – maybe just Asim, Pourné, Torpol, Clarke, Hilfer, Paal, Blue and Byrni at most.
- He is clearly horrified at the news that his followers launched a pre-emptive coup on the Floating Palace. He never wanted to become king through bloodshed – that's why he acted in secret to thwart Rao's plans. If he had accused her openly in court, he feared it would have led to civil war. Far too many of the Floating Palace's nobles have come to believe in Rao's plans, and greedily dream of having their ancestral territories restored to them.

- Harrick believes that his sister has (or had) far too much influence over King Oleb, and that the two were locked in a destructive and unhealthy relationship. The more Rao tried to impress her father by reaching for the stars, the more Oleb retreated into pleasure-seeking, into hunting and drinking, forcing Rao to come up with even more impressive schemes, which meant that Oleb withdrew even further from the 'boring' business of government as he assumed Rao would take care of everything.
- Harrick and Scholar Voha kept a close watch on Princess Rao, and noticed that she had several mysterious trips to the Asim system. Harrick believes that his sister is secretly meeting with some external power. Depending on how Adventure 7: The Vorito Gambit turned out, he might suspect GeDeCo, or the Pirates of Theev, or even the Glorious Empire or the Strend cluster – whoever they are, they are such a shameful ally that she will not even admit her treachery to King Oleb!
- The player characters are the lynchpin of his sister's schemes. If they condemn her and reject her plans, she will have no choice but to abandon her shadowy alliance.

Harrick's Yacht

Prince Harrick's yacht is a refitted standard yacht (if the PCs captured the *Lyonesse II* during Adventure 5: The Treasure of Sindal, then it might have ended up in Harrick's possession. Otherwise, he obtained it with his share of the wealth brought to Drinax by the recent privateering operations),

With sixteen staterooms on board, there's plenty of room for the PCs and the two nobles. Another four staterooms go to the crew. Fill any remaining staterooms with Hawk Guards.

Of course, if the PCs came in the *Harrier* or some other ship, they can make their own arrangements as regards crewing.

Princess Rao, Architect of Empire

When playing Rao, be as charming and persuasive as you can manage. Speak smoothly and eloquently; make gestures to emphasise your words. Never doubt yourself.

STR 8 DEX 6 END 6 INT 11 EDU 12 SOC 14

Carouse 3, Diplomat 4, Persuade 3, Social Science 2

- The Sindalian Empire once ruled the Trojan Reach. Drinax is the last surviving outpost of that empire, heir to a legacy three thousand years old. Sindal – and the old Kingdom of Drinax – were flawed and made terrible mistakes, but they brought trade and technology and the rule of law to dozens of worlds. The Empire can rise again. They can drive back the raiders and slavers, hold firm against the Aslan, offer an alternative to the mercantile dullness of the Third Imperium.
- Drinax has only two possible futures – greatness or obscurity. Her brother's vision of a little kingdom is folly – a little local league doesn't require the Floating Palace or treaties with the great powers of the Reach. Drinax will fall into dust or rise to the stars once more, with nothing in between.
- In answer to her brother's... accusations, Rao admits that she has made overtures to many other powers and potential allies. She will happily introduce the player characters to these allies. She refers to them as 'distant friends'.

- If pressed, she admits that her allies are emissaries from the Zhodani Consultate. The Zhodani claim that they would welcome a strong Kingdom of Drinax on the rimward side of the Spinward Marches, to draw the Imperium's attention away from the Consultate border. However, as revealing that her contacts are Zhodani will allow her brother to prepare for a confrontation with telepaths, she keeps that information secret if possible.
- She is due to meet with her Zhodani allies in the next few days. They have a regular arrangement to meet in the Asim system.

If Harrick has the upper hand here (the PCs are his supporters, or are here as his guests), then he suggests that the PCs accompany him and Rao to this meeting with the Zhodani, so they can see his sister's perfidy at first hand. He wants the PCs' support for when he returns to the Floating Palace.

If Rao has the advantage, then she orders the PCs to bring Harrick along. She'll prove to him that she was justified when she made a secret bargain with the Zhodani.

If the PCs are in charge, then they get to decide whether or not anyone goes to the rendezvous.



7. COREWARD GHOSTS

Princess Rao provides co-ordinates for the rendezvous – it's out near the Asim system's lonely gas giant, Calvin.

As the PCs approach, call for Sensors tests at DM-4; if successful, the PC detects a stealth-hull ship lurking near the co-ordinates. It's the Zhodani ship.

The Tozjabr Operation

The Tozjabr are the Consulate's intelligence and special operations arm. Their usual field of operations is closer to home, in the Beyond and Foreven sectors, but to put it mildly, the Zhodani are very good at running long range operations. Sending a few ships on long patrols out as far as Reaver's Deep isn't difficult for them. For some years now, they've been scouting out the Trojan Reach. Sometimes, they capture passing vessels and abduct the crews for telepathic interrogation, then wipe their memories. Coupled with their ship's stealth technology, this gave rise to the myth of the Ghost of the Reach (see Pirates of Drinax Campaign Overview).

The Tozjabr support Princess Rao's plan to restore the Kingdom of Drinax. If the plan works, it'll interfere with the Imperium/Hierate trade and be a thorn in the side of the Spinward Marches. If the plan fails, it should fail catastrophically enough to still be a distraction. It's win-win, and all it has cost them so far is a little information-sharing, passing on intel about trade routes and the disposition of planets.

Harrick's Plan

Harrick needs proof of his sister's treachery. Her confession might not be enough – she's always been able to persuade King Oleb and the court of anything. So, his original plan was to show up for the rendezvous, then send his Hawk Warriors across to the other ship to capture his sister's allies.

If he knows that the Zhodani are involved, then he takes four psionic shield helmets from the Dragon Fortress armoury, to protect himself and the three lead warriors on the boarding detail.

If the PCs support Harrick, then he hands the tactical decisions over to them – they have more experience with piracy and capturing ships. All that he asks is that the PCs keep at least one of the enemy crew alive.

Rao's Plan

Rao intended to ask the Zhodani for further assistance. The crux of her whole plan is rapidly approaching. Soon, it will be time to draw Drinax's allied worlds together under a single banner and restore the kingdom (in Adventure 10: Finale). The Zhodani telepaths are capable of subtly adjusting personalities and implanting thoughts and emotions. If they were to telepathically influence key leaders on a few planets whose support for Drinax rests on a knife-edge, then they could push those worlds into committing to the reborn Kingdom.

Now, her plans depend on her current situation:

If she's a prisoner of Harrick and/or the PCs, then she intends to think very, very hard about warning the Zhodani, and hope that this gives them a few moment's warning. She knows, from experience, that the Zhodani routinely run telepathic life scans of ships as they approach, and have learned to recognise the pattern of her thoughts. She hopes they'll be able to respond in time to thwart her brother's plan to board the ghost ship.

If Harrick is her prisoner, then she intends to ask the Zhodani to telepathically adjust her brother's mind so he forgets his suspicions and supports her unreservedly. The Kingdom needs a united ruling family, one way or another.

The Zhodani

As far as the Zhodani Tozjabr agents are concerned, this is a routine meeting with Princess Rao, where they intend to reaffirm their support for her plans.

The Tozjabr commander is a veteran intendant, Chbradklodgiepr Dlmshar. He considers the inhabitants of the Trojan Reach to be irredeemably and utterly insane, and so has no compunctions about murdering or manipulating them. The whole sector is tainted in his eyes.

Playing Chbradklodgiepr Dlmshar

- Curl your lip in scorn at the degenerate minds around you
- Throw people off balance by insinuating they have already been mind-controlled. Play on the myths about the power of Zhodani psions
- Clench your fists just before blasting someone with your mind beams.

Chbradklodgiepr Dlmshar

STR 7 DEX 9 END 7 INT 10 EDU 11 SOC 10 PSI 10

Gun Combat (slug pistol) 2, Deception 3, Persuade 2, Telepathy 3

Armour 6, Snub Pistol (3D-3)

Zhodani Marines

STR 8 DEX 7 END 7 INT 8 EDU 9 SOC 9 PSI 10

Gun Combat (slug rifle) 2, Heavy Weapons 1, Leadership 1, Telekinesis 1, Teleport 2, Zero-G 1

Armour 18, PGMP-13 (12D) or Accelerator Rifle (3D)

Tozjabr Crew

STR 7 DEX 7 END 8 INT 7 EDU 8 SOC 7

Comms 0, Gunner (turret) 2, Engineer (varies) 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 2, Gun Combat 0

Armour 6, Snub Pistol (3D-3)

Combat with the Tozjabr

The Tozjabr's main priority is secrecy – they don't want knowledge of their covert activities in the Trojan Reach to become public. Therefore, their goals in this encounter might be summarised as follows:

Best: Assisting Rao (or the player characters) in securing the Kingdom of Drinax. The new kingdom owes the Consultate a favour; no-one else ever knows they were there.

Good: Killing or memory-wiping anyone who attacks their ship

Acceptable: Triggering their self-destruct sequence to avoid exposure

If the PCs don't intervene, here's how the encounter plays out:

- The yacht approaches the ghost ship and signals the intent to dock
- If Princess Rao is a prisoner, roll 2D; on a 10+, Dlmshar detects her telepathic distress call and orders his marines to prepare to teleport onto the other ship. Yachts have an easily isolated engineering bay – two jump marines with scuttling charges can take out the power plant easily.
- The ghost ship manoeuvres for docking, aligning itself with the yacht's starboard airlock.
- Roll 2D; on an 8+, the Zhodani do a lifeform scan and detect the large number of life signs on board the yacht. They realise they're in danger and prepare for battle. The Hawk Warriors will have to board by flying across using thruster packs.
- If the yacht does dock, the Hawk Warriors charge across as soon as the airlocks open.

Quick Boarding Resolution

If using the Quick Boarding Resolution rules on page 148 of the Traveller Core Rulebook, then the two sides are roughly equal in terms of Armour and Weaponry. The Zhodani have a marginal edge in Skills and Tactics, while the Hawk Guard have the weight of Numbers on their side. The deciding factor may be the Zhodanis' lack of Ready Marines – they'll only have troops ready to fight if forewarned of Harrick's forces.



8. *THE HEIR TO DRINAX*

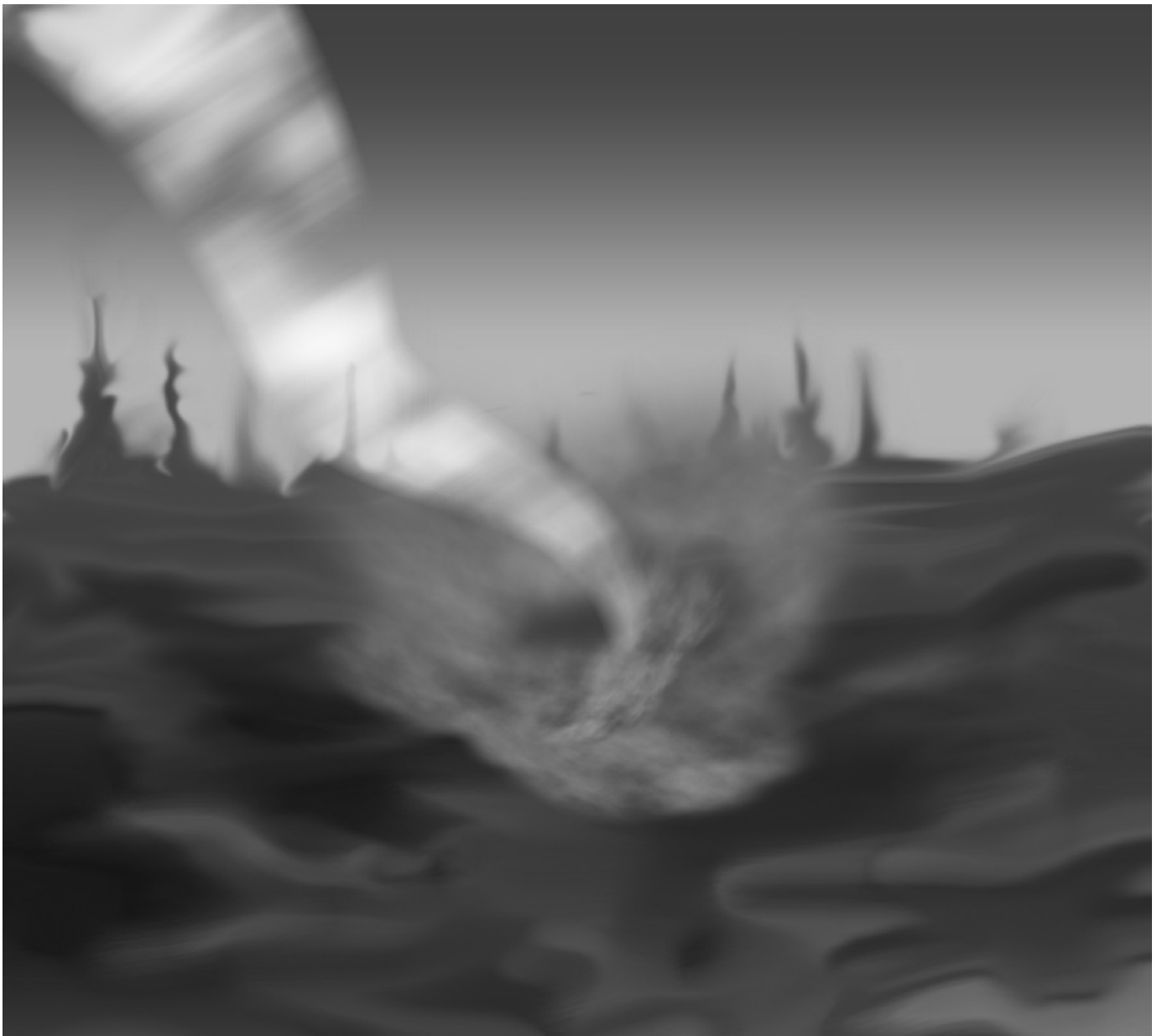
With the Zhodani captured and proof obtained of Rao's treachery – or, alternatively, with the Zhodanis' friendship assured and Prince Harrick 'adjusted' to support his sister, or whatever solution the players end up choosing – it may be time to return to the Floating Palace.

Is King Oleb still alive? If not, who is the heir to the Dragon Throne? Who rules the Kingdom of Drinax, the last outpost of the old Empire of Sindal?

How did the coup attempt turn out? Is the Floating Palace still riven by dissent and mistrust, or is it united behind the player characters? Or do its fabled halls and galleries run red with blood?

For that matter, are the player characters still committed to Oleb's plan to resurrect the Kingdom, or have they built their own criminal empire?

And as the campaign hurtles towards Adventure 10: Finale, are they ready to reap the whirlwind?



APPENDIX 1: THE HAWK WARRIORS OF DRINAX

The Hawk Warriors were the ceremonial guards of the Dukes of Drinax, back when Drinax was a province of the old Sindalian empire and not a kingdom. 'Ceremonial' translates, in this case, to 'impractical', but back then, style was of the utmost importance, and when one has a giant flying palace, a duke's mind inevitably turns to flocks of elite guards soaring through the skies alongside, their majestic golden wings glittering in the sun.

The Hawk Warriors are not an elite fighting force. While they have become less ornamental and more practical over the centuries, their training regime is still absurdly outdated and hidebound; it's more important for a Hawk Warrior to know the correct protocol to herald the arrival of a ship bearing the second daughter of a Knight of the Order of the Sapphire Dragon than it is to know how to shoot straight, even though the Order of the Sapphire (and presumably, any second daughters of its members) has been extinct for a thousand years. For that matter, few of those recruited into the Hawk Warriors can really be considered exceptional. The marines of the Third Imperium recruit from a pool of ten trillion; the marines of Drinax take the cream of forty thousand souls or so.

Still, an antique TL15 laser rifle is still a laser rifle, even in untrained hands.

Equipment: The standard outfit for a Hawk Warrior includes:

- TL15 Light Combat Armour with integral grav belt – Armour 18, Grav Assist, Magnetic Grapples, Extended Life Support, IR/LI goggles.
- TL15 Convergence Beam Laser with integral laser targeting – 4D+4 damage, ignores 8 points of Armour
- Cutlass (2D+4)

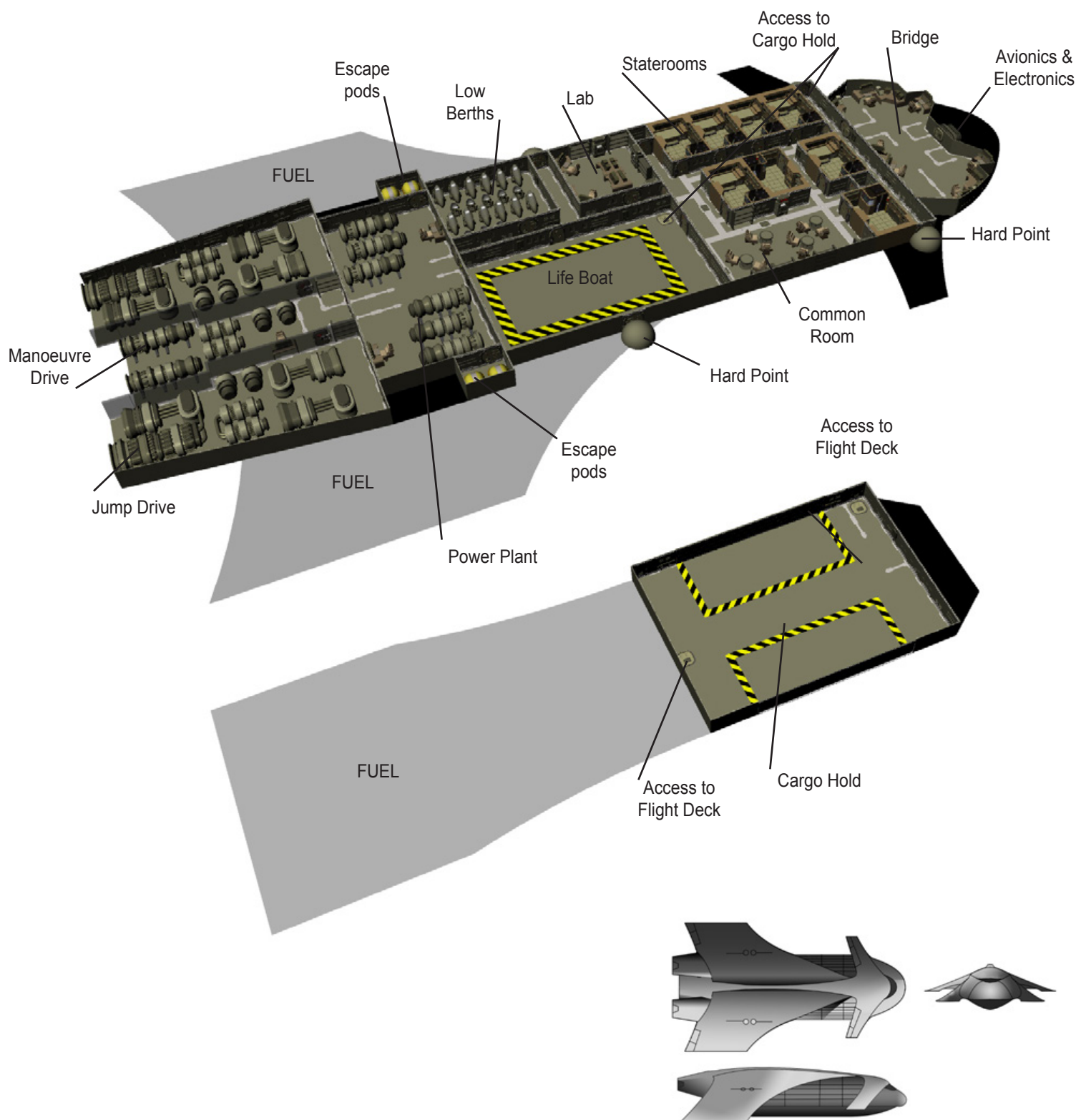
The ceremonial outfit adds an ungainly pair of wings, a decorative helmet, and enough medals to strain the grav-belt's carrying capacity.



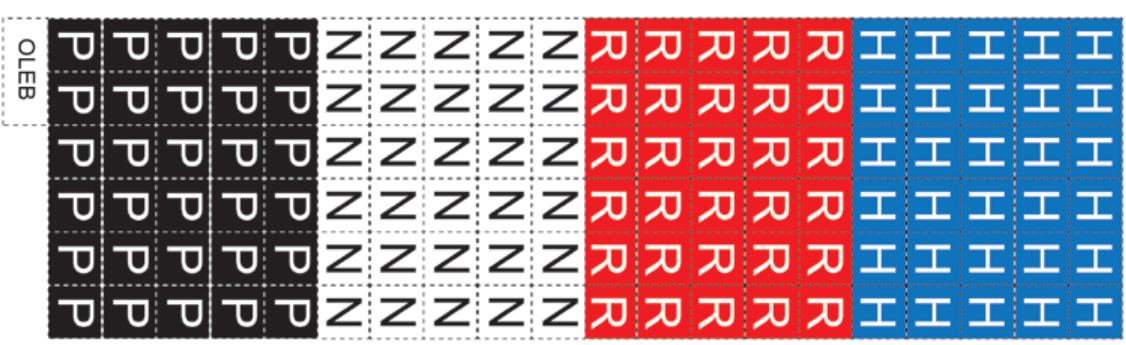
APPENDIX 2: THE GHOST SHIP

The 'Ghost of the Reach' is a long-range Zhodani heavy scout. It mostly uses standard components, although its hull is coated with sensor-baffling material (D-4M to Sensors checks to detect it), and it's fitted with cutting-edge TL countermeasures (-6 DM to Comms attempts to break through jamming). When it

closes on a target, there's little chance of the foe being able to transmit a distress call before the teleporting marines arrive. Fast-moving enemies that might be able to escape the Ghost Ship can be pursued by the ship's boat.



			Tons	Cost
Hull	400 tons	Hull 8		32,000,000
	Streamlined	Structure 8		3,200,000
Armour	Armour 6	Bonded Superdense	20	16,000,000
		Stealth Coating		40,000,000
		Reflec		
Jump Drive	H	Jump 3	45	80,000,000
Manoeuvre Drive	H	Thrust 3	15	32,000,000
Power Plant	H		25	64,000,000
Bridge			20	2,000,000
Computer	Model 3	Rating 15		2,000,000
Electronics	Military Countermeasures		20	25,000,000
Weapons				
	Hardpoint #1	Double Turret	1	500,000
		Beam Laser-TL13 x2		4,000,000
		Accurate, High Yield		
	Hardpoint #2	Double Turret	1	500,000
		Beam Laser-TL13 x2		4,000,000
		Accurate, High Yield		
	Hardpoint #3	Double Turret	1	500,000
		Beam Laser-TL13 x2		4,000,000
		Accurate, High Yield		
	Hardpoint #4	Double Turret	1	500,000
		Beam Laser-TL13 x2		4,000,000
		Accurate, High Yield		
Fuel	1 Jump-3, 4 Weeks of Operation		152	
Cargo		40 tons		
8 Staterooms			32	4,000,000
20 low berths			10	1,000,000
Extras				
	Laboratory		8	2,000,000
	Ship's Boat		30	16,000,000
	Fuel Scoops			
	Fuel Processors		4	200,000
Software				
	Manoeuvre/0			
	Library/0			
	Jump/3			300,000
	Evade/2			2,000,000
	Fire Control/3			6,000,000
Maintenance Cost (monthly)				28,117
Life Support Cost (monthly)				18,000
Total Tonnage & Cost			400	345.7



OLEB