

Prize Money and Privateering in the Traveller Universe

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The following is a discussion of prize money and privateering. This is a great way to outfit your players with a ship from a wealthy patron and allow them to raid, plunder, and adventure across the stars without turning to piracy. It is also very useful as an incentive for characters during a campaign in which they are still in the military. The system and information are based on the system used by the British during the Age of Sail.

Prize money

In times of war the officers and ratings of the Imperial Navy, have an extra inducement to capture enemy ships and their cargo. Captured ships and their cargo brought into a friendly system which has a Court of Admiralty where the matter can be judged and decreed that the ship and cargo are a Prize of War and to be sold with the proceeds to be Droits of the Emperor and as such, it is all to be given over to those responsible for their capture. **In 0625 the Emperor created the 'Cruiser and Convoys Act'. One of its effects was to formalize the process of prize taking, giving practically all the money gained from the capture of enemy vessels to the captors *'for the better and more effectual encouragement of the Space Service'*.**

Traditionally during times of war, belligerent states may attempt to interfere with space-born commerce to prevent vessels from transporting goods that will aid the war effort of an enemy. After ships are captured and brought to a friendly system, a local tribunal called a prize court (see below) will determine the legality of the seizure or the destruction of the vessel and cargo if the vessel cannot be sailed to a friendly port. All vessels of an enemy state are subject to seizure at any time by an opposing belligerent. Warships may be destroyed immediately. If possible private merchant vessels are to be taken to a friendly system for adjudication by a prize court (if it is not possible, well that's too bad for them then isn't it). Enemy vessels which have landed or are docked in enemy controlled systems are likewise subject to be captured or 'cut out' by enterprising crews. If it is suspected of carrying contraband, a neutral vessel in unclaimed space or in an opponent's territory may be stopped and searched. It may be taken as a prize of war if any is found.

Prizes include captured ship, cargos, and ship's stores.

Distribution of Prize Money		
Rank	Share s	Definition
Captain	2	Officer in command of the capturing vessel (irrelevant of rank)
Ship's Officers	1	All naval or marine officers of rank O3 or higher
Junior Officers	1	All naval and marine officers of rank O1 or O2
Petty Officers	1	All naval and marine enlisted of rank E4 or higher as well as midshipmen
Crewmen	2	Naval and marine enlisted below the rank of E4
Flag Officer	1	Admiral under whom the vessel was acting at the time the prize was taken whether he was present or not

Each member of the crew receives an equal share of the money for the portion of the prize money to be distributed among crew members of their category. If the prize was captured by more than one vessel, the prize money is divided among the crews of both ships. For example, if 2 ships took a prize, and there were 3 ship's officers on one of the ships and 2 ship's officers on the other the share for ship's officers would be equally divided five ways).

Legitimate Prizes

1. Enemy vessels of war
(this includes mercenary vessels in the employ of the enemy and military vessels of the enemy including system and subsector navies)
2. Non-Combatant Enemy vessels
(those vessel belonging directly to the enemy government as well as system and subsystem governments of the enemy)
3. Enemy merchant vessels
4. Enemy privateers
5. Neutral vessels supporting the enemy (caught running an established blockade with proscribed contraband items such as military hardware aboard)
6. Vessels engaged in piracy, smuggling, or slavery (this must be explicitly stated in the letter of marque or imperial orders).
7. Any other purpose specified in the letter of marque or imperial orders

Head Money

When an enemy vessel of war is captured in addition to the prize money for the vessel, cargo, etc. an additional bounty is paid for each enemy combatant captured. This is typically in the range of Cr 50-100 per crewman and Cr 500 per officer. This is to help encourage attacks upon the enemy's military vessels as well as their commercial shipping. As this award comes directly from the government it can be provided to crew within a week of disembarking the prisoners at a naval base. These monies are divided among the crew using the same system as prize money.

Prize Courts

A prize court is a court (or even a single individual, such as an ambassador, governor, or consul authorized to consider whether or not a ship has been lawfully captured or seized in time of war or under the terms of the seizing ship's letter of marque and reprisal. A prize court may order the sale or destruction of the seized ship, and the distribution of any proceeds to the captain and crew of the seizing ship. A prize court may also order the return of a seized ship to its owners if the seizure was unlawful, such as if it was from a country which had proclaimed its neutrality.

After a vessel has been captured it must be taken to a friendly system which has a prize court. Prize courts are typically found in subsector capitals or in any system containing a naval base.

Prize Agents

Typically, a ship's captain will contract with a Prize Agent to manage the condemnation of his prizes in a prize court. The agent is responsible for seeing that the prize is condemned and managing the sale of the prize and her cargo. To have a vessel condemned, the process required 2D months (-1 per admin skill of broker). At the end of that period, role 2D against the target number below to determine whether the vessel has been condemned. The most successful prize agents often have representatives in several of the systems with prize courts where prizes are most likely to be sent for condemnation. Prize Agents. If a prize court exists in a system, the quality of prize agent available depends on the starport type

Type A starports have broker/legal/admin levels 1 to 4

Type B starports have broker/legal/admin levels 1 to 3

Type C starports have broker/legal/admin levels 1 to 2

Type D starports have broker/legal/admin level 1

Type E and X starports typically do not have prize agents available

To be condemned as a legal prize:

7+

+ Broker's legal skill

+3 Enemy Vessel of War

+2 Non-Combatant Enemy Vessel

+1 Enemy Merchant Vessel

+2 If the crew of the prize was found guilty of engaging in piracy

-2 Neutral Vessel

Broker Fees: 2% of final value of vessel for each point of legal, admin, and broker skill a broker has.

Once a ship has been condemned as a lawful prize, the sale of the vessel and its cargo will then take 2D weeks (-1 per broker skill of broker) to complete. Role 2D on the Vessel Valuation Chart to determine the final sale price of the ship. Cargos should be sold per the rules in Book 7 (or Book 3 if Book 7 is not being used). Military vessels will frequently be 'bought into the service', meaning that the imperial navy will purchase the vessels and then recommission them as Imperial naval ships. If the commanding officer of the vessel is in the navy and of appropriate rank he will frequently be given the ship to command.

Vessel Valuation Chart

<2	15% (Scrapped)
2	20%
3	30%
4	50%
5	50%
6	75%
7	75%
8	90%
9	100%
10	100%
11	100%
12	110%
13	120%
14	150%
15	150% +1 Social to Captain

+ Broker skill

-1 to -3 If the prize was seriously damaged in combat

+3 Enemy Vessel of War

+1 Class A Starport

-2 Class C Starport

-3 Class D Starport

As the process of condemning and selling a prize typically takes time, the prize agent will often (for an additional percentage), forward a portion the projected value of the prize up front to the captain and crew in anticipation of the sale. Of course, if the ship is not condemned or the final value of the sale (minus broker's fees) is less than the amount forwarded, the captain is solely responsible for paying the difference back including the fee for forwarding the money. The fee for forwarding money is 2% of final value of vessel for each point of legal or broker skill the broker has (which ever is higher).

The Honourable Firm of Burrows and Black, L.L.C. of Regina is one of the best known ship and cargo brokers in the Spinward Marches. B&B, as they are affectionately known, maintain agents and representatives in all of the subsector capitals in the Marches as well as most of the major systems with Class A starports. During times of conflict (which means just about all the time) they extend their normal brokerage services to include prize agency. At B&B's main office in Regina, the staff has skill levels of Legal-4, Admin-4, and Broker-4 requiring a fee of 24% of the final sale of captured prizes sold through their offices.

At the Captain's Peril

One of the biggest problems a ship's captain can face is the failure of a prize court to condemn a prize. As mentioned above, if the captain received an advance on the expected prize money he is solely responsible for repaying the advance even if he has made distributions to the crew. In addition, the Captain's may also be responsible for restitution to the owners of the seized vessel and cargos for damage, lost wages and profits, and other miscellaneous expenses which may include the equivalent of today's "pain and suffering". In the extreme case, the captain could be charged with criminal charges including negligence, piracy, and murder.

Vessels captured after the end of hostilities are no longer considered lawful prizes even if the captain was unaware that hostilities have ceased. This is especially hazardous when news travels only travels at the speed of jumps, it may take some time especially for ships in outlying systems to receive the news.

Letters of Marque

A letter of marque and reprisal is an official warrant or commission from an interstellar government authorizing the designated agent to search, seize, or destroy specified assets or personnel belonging to a party which had committed some offense against the assets or citizens of the issuing government. It is usually used to authorize private parties to raid and capture merchant shipping of an enemy nation. Obviously naval vessels are always empowered to perform these tasks with additional authorization.

The formal statement of the warrant is to authorize the agent to pass beyond the borders of the state, and there to search, seize, or destroy assets or personnel of the hostile foreign party, not necessarily a nation, to a degree and in a way that was proportional to the original offense. It was considered a retaliatory measure short of a full declaration of war, and by maintaining a rough proportionality, was intended to justify the action to other nations, who might otherwise consider it an act of war or piracy. As with a domestic search, arrest, seizure, or death warrant, to be considered lawful it had to have a certain degree of specificity, to insure that the agent did not exceed his authority and the intent of the issuing authority. Without such authorization, the citizen could be treated under interstellar law as a pirate. A private ship and its captain and crew, operating under a letter of marque and reprisal is referred to as a privateer.

Letters of marque are most commonly issued during times of war to help interdict enemy shipping. They may also be issued at other times when the Imperial government wishes to act directly against governments, organizations, or individuals without a declaration of war or which are beyond easy reach of Imperial forces. They may be issued to hunt down pirates, smugglers, or slavers. For example in 1023, the Marukisha Shipping Line, a small interface line operating between Imperial and Vargr space was found guilty of shipping almost a hundred thousand sentient beings into slavery beyond the Imperial border. In addition to authorizing the seizure of all Marukisha vessels by Imperial, subsector, and system navies, a number of letters of marque were issued allowing private parties to hunt down and seize these vessels even beyond Imperial borders.

Imperial letters of marque may be obtained in subsector capitals or in any system containing a class A starport or naval base. They may also be obtained from senior government officials and flag officers on extended duty and independent commands. They are typically issued for periods of 1 year. The letter should specify the captain and specific vessel for which it was issued. In addition the letter should specify the exact parties against whom the bearer may act.

To obtain a letter of Marque:

8+

+ Legal or admin skill

Cost: Cr10,000

A Prize agent can assist in acquiring a letter of Marque for a fee of Cr 200 per level of admin or legal skill, whichever is higher. Social – 10 can also be used as a modifier in place of legal or admin skill.

Privateersman

It costs a great deal of money to outfit a ship for war, even more than a typical merchant vessel. As a result privateers are typically outfitted by a wealthy sponsor(s). While it is not unheard of, it is not typically done by captain/owner of a single vessel. This is due to the high risk and costs involved. Once the ship is outfitted, a captain and crew can be hired.

Ships outfitted or designed specifically for privateering are usually designed for speed and firepower. They need to be able to out maneuver the slower merchantmen which are their prey and be able to flee the heavily armed warships likely to be encountered in combat zones. High jump ratings are also desirable, to allow the privateers to penetrate as deep into enemy space as possible. The farther from the border a privateer raids the less well defended the space lanes tend to be. They typically include as many hardpoints and weapon bays as possible. In most cases it is better to intimidate your prey into surrendering than to fight it out as repairs cost money and damaged prizes are worth less. Privateers often include large numbers of low berths to house the additional crew required to man the prizes and to keep prisoners. Some include small cargo bays to store highly value cargoes which have been captured.

Crews are typically larger than those of normal merchant vessels. Due to the additional weaponry carried by privateers, they tend to carry more gunners than a merchantman of equal size. In addition, they include a surplus of officers and crews to man the captured prizes and return them to friendly space. Some privateer crews also include ship's troops to act as boarding parties and guard the large number of prisoners.

Privateer crews typically receive pay equivalent to their contemporaries on merchant or naval vessels (typically the higher of the two). In addition they receive a share of the prize money. Traditionally, prize money on privateers is split identically to the shares for naval personnel, with the flag officer's share going to the owners and outfitters of the vessel. However, as these are private ventures, the actual break down may differ from one ship to the next. One common variation is for the captain to receive 1 share instead of 2 and the owners to receive 2 instead of 1. Privateers must also have their prizes lawfully condemned and sold following the procedure. The owners of the privateer are generally responsible for contracting with a prize agent to manage the condemnation and sales of the prizes.

Subsector and System Governments

Subsector and system governments may also issue letters of marque with the limitation that they are only valid within the confines of that government's purview. For example, if a civil war were taking place within a system, the system's primary government could authorize privateers to capture or destroy vessels belonging to, in the employ of (e.g., privateers, mercenaries), or supporting (e.g., blockade runners) the rebellious factions. System, subsector, and small galactic governments also frequently use letters of marque to authorize private citizen's to capture and destroy pirate vessels operating within that space. This is an inexpensive way for them to handle such problems on their limited defense budgets.

Example Letter of Marque

His Excellency

Sir Alistair Yarbarrow, Baronet, L.L.D.

Lieutenant-Governor and Commander in Chief, in and
over His Imperial Majesty's possessions of the Jewell Subsector, and it's
Dependencies, etc. etc. etc.

Be it known, this commission authorizes the ship's compliment of the private armed vessel *Warbird* of 5000 tons burden, registered in the system of *Mora*, commanded by *Sir Morgan Henry* and owned by *Messrs. Jonathon Smith and Joachim Allen of Mora* to board, seize, and destroy the vessels, personnel, and agencies of His Imperial Majesty's Enemies, the Zhodani Consulate, the Sword Worlds Confederation, their agents and allies, both public and private, armed or unarmed, as well as any neutral vessels found giving aid or succor to these parties for a period not to exceed *One* year from the data of this commission.

I do by virtue of the Power & Authority given to me conformable to His Imperial Majesty's pleasure expressed to me by the Right Honourable and Most Noble His Grace the Duke of Regina, and having received his Imperial Majesty's Commands to encourage all His Imperial Majesty's Subjects by every means in their power to distress and annoy the trade of all His Imperial Majesty's Enemies, Authorize and Empower the said *Sir Morgan Henry* in and with the said Ship called the *Warbird* to cruise against His Imperial Majesty's Enemies, and am fully authorized to assure him and all others involved in said private Ship of War, that His Majesty will consider him and them as fully entitled to having a just claim to all vessels and property of every kind which he or they shall make prize of from His Majesty's Enemies, provided the same shall have been first condemned as lawful prize to His Imperial Majesty in His Imperial Majesty's High Court of Admiralty or in some of His Imperial Majesty's Courts of Vice Admiralty having lawful authority to take cognizance of the same.

Given under my Hand & Seal of Arms at Jewell this 175th day in the year 1107 in the 36th Year of His Imperial Majesty's Reign

Signed:

Sir Alistair Yarbarrow