TRADERS

Trade stories for *Uncharted Worlds*
Malcolm Harbrow

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INTRODUCTION

Merchants shipping goods between the stars. Smugglers landing illicit cargoes in the dead of night. Speculators buying low on one world to sell high on another. All are traders, leveraging supply and demand to make their fortune.

Traders is a story supplement for the *Uncharted Worlds* roleplaying game which provides additional material on trade and cargoes in the *Uncharted Worlds* system. It is intended to be used as a source of ideas for trade-related stories, especially when complications arise. *Traders* includes:

- Common rules interactions around trade
- Example complications, opportunities, and cargoes
- Three trade-related Jump Points

Because every planet needs something...

TRADE IN STORIES

The default setting for *Uncharted Worlds* is a Starship campaign. A plucky band of adventurers crammed together on a small ship, travelling from planet to planet, getting into trouble, and running away from it. The fictional inspiration is *Firefly*, but could also be *Blake's 7* or *The Expanse*.

Trade is a common feature of this sort of campaign. Whether they try to make their living that way, or whether they just dabble, whether legitimate traders or dubious smugglers, the characters will often acquire and barter cargo in an effort to improve their assets, make their fortunes, pay off Debt, or just keep on flying. Because *Uncharted Worlds* does not track wealth, this can seem a little abstract. The key is to view trade not as a way of building up piles of Credits, but as a way of driving the fiction. The need to acquire cargo or find a market to sell it in is a perfect opportunity to trigger a new Jump Point. The complications which arise from trade negotiations naturally generate story. In both cases, it's an opportunity to ask "what do you do?" and play to find out what happens.

MARKETS AND EXPORTS

Uncharted Worlds divides markets into Minor, Standard, and Major. *Far Beyond Humanity* replaces this system with one based on Origins. In both, the focus is on what sorts of personal Assets a character can acquire. For cargoes, this system should be supplemented with the following classifications:

Frontier markets are focused on resource exploitation. They export food or raw materials, and import anything that cannot be sourced locally. Subtypes include:
- **Exploited** frontier markets are underdeveloped and dependent, whether by accident or design. They often import food and medical supplies.
- **Expanding** frontier markets are developing. They may export some goods besides raw materials, and import manufactured and industrial goods to help in their development.

Developed markets have moved beyond resource exploitation to establish their own industries. They are generally capable of meeting their own needs, though they often trade a mix of raw materials and manufactured goods. Alternatively, they may be specialised in a particular area. For example:
- **Agricultural** markets are focused on food production. They export food and import manufactured goods.
- **Industrial** markets are focused on manufacturing. They import raw materials and export manufactured or industrial goods.

Core markets are the primary population, financial and government centres. They import food, manufactured and luxury goods, and export luxury goods.

Trade hubs are focal points for trade and transshipment. They may produce some goods locally, but most are imported and re-exported. Goods of almost any type can be found here.

Isolated markets do not engage in trade, whether by physical isolation, social choice, or lack of any valuable exports. Cargoes may be difficult to acquire, or may not be available at all.

ACQUIRING CARGO

Filling a starship hold full of local Class 0 or Class 1 cargo is a standard Acquisition using the Acquisition Move:

> **MECHANICS: ACQUISITION (+Cargo)**
> When you demand important services or assets from a market able to supply those demands, Roll+0. If you offer a cargo unit as part of the deal, Roll+ that cargo's Class.
>
> <u>On a 13+</u>, the deal goes through; you get what you asked for.
>
> <u>On a 10-12,</u> the deal goes through if the seller/market is amiably disposed toward the deal. Otherwise, as 7-9.
>
> <u>On a 7-9</u>, the deal will only go through if you accept a cost, a task or a lesser asset/service instead of what you asked for.
>
> <u>On a 6-</u>, the deal will only go through if you call in a Favour.

Normally this will produce 4 units of Cargo. The type of Cargo should be suitable to the market (see "Markets and exports", p 4), and can be chosen from the example cargoes on page 11. Possible complications that can arise are listed on p 7.

Getting involved

Characters may use the Get Involved Move to assist or impede an Acquisition or Barter. This must be appropriate to the fiction, but could be by researching the market first (+Interface), assessing the quality of the goods (+Expertise), stepping in to influence negotiations (+Influence), or in some markets by physically intimidating the other party (+Physique). A successful Get Involved will upgrade or downgrade the success of an Acquisition or Barter by one category. Possible costs, complications, or hard choices could include being asked to perform a small favour or task, being recognised by someone the character would rather avoid, making enemies, or simply having to acquire Debt to a relevant Faction to make the deal go through.

Assessing the market

Characters engaged in trade may wish to assess the market before attempting to acquire or barter cargo. Such an Assessment is typically rolled using Expertise (for research), Interface (if using the SectorNet), or Influence (if using contracts

and rumours). A successful Assessment will result in information on what is cheap, the best place to buy or sell, or on what markets need or have particular goods. It may also yield a Data Point, which can be used on a subsequent Acquisition or Barter roll.

Unwelcome information from assessing the market could include news of shortages, embargoes, or other disruptions to trade, of trouble befalling regular contacts, or of bounty hunters or other hostile parties seeking the characters.

Space trucking

The rules in *Uncharted Worlds* assume the characters will be buying and selling cargo for their own profit. Alternatively, they could simply transport it for a third party. This is less profitable, but also less risky.

Negotiating a contract to transport a hold full of cargo can be treated as a Face Adversity using Influence. On a success, the contract is to a nearby market, and if it is delivered on time, the characters gain a +1 on a single Acquisition or Barter roll at that market. On a partial success, there is a complication: a tight delivery timeline, a mandatory customs inspection, the goods are not what they seem or require special care in transit, or similar. There could be attempts by third parties to seize the goods, or they could be illegal and have to be hidden in some way from authorities at either the origin or destination.

A transported cargo can of course be stolen by the characters and sold elsewhere. This is likely to result in Debt when the theft is discovered.

Passengers

A Class-2 vessel can carry dozens of passengers, depending on how it is configured. The characters may want to use their surplus space to try and pay the bills. This can be handled in a similar way to transporting cargo, with a load of passengers found using a successful Face Adversity on +Influence, and providing +1 to a single Acquisition or Barter roll at the destination market. Complications could include a tight timeline, being in some sort of trouble and needing to be smuggled aboard, or unusual cultural or life-support requirements while in transit. They could be irritating, or dangerous. They could even try and hijack the ship.

If a passenger is used as the target for a Cramped Quarters roll, prompt another member of the group for a question.

Passengers are an opportunity for story. Prompt the players for information about what they do, why they're travelling, what they're running away from or towards. Use the answers to build the setting and introduce plot as appropriate.

COMPLICATIONS

"The deal will only go through if you accept a cost, a task or a lesser asset / service instead of what you asked for..."

Costs:
- The seller demands an Asset from the characters. What is demanded depends on what the characters have and who they are buying from. Traders could demand cargo, black marketeers a favourite weapon.
- Alternatively, the seller could demand the characters acquire something (ideally, something specific) for them.
- The trade could incur Debt to a faction of the GM's choice.

Tasks:
- The seller could demand assistance with a problem e.g. criminals or competitors threatening their business.
- The seller could demand that cargo, passengers, or a small package be transported for free along with the cargo.
- The seller could require appropriate licences or permits before completing the transaction. Whether the characters decide to fill out the paperwork and wait, or hasten things along somehow is up to them.

Lesser assets:
- There is less than a full hold of cargo - two or three units rather than the usual four.
- The goods are defective in some way. Minerals could be impure, food or medical supplies could be past their use-by date, manufactured goods could somehow have failed quality control. This may cause problems with future buyers.
- If Class 1 goods are sought, there may only be Class 0 available.

The characters can always walk away rather than accept a cost, task, or lesser asset, but this may affect relations with the seller in future.

TRADING UP

Once a cargo has been acquired, the next step is usually to transport it to a different market and trade it for cargo of higher value using the Barter Move:

> **MECHANICS: BARTER (+Cargo)**
> When you exchange a foreign unit of cargo for local trade goods, Roll + the Class of the cargo unit.
>
> <u>On a 13+</u>, you attract the attention of a faction or individual with a unique item or service to trade.
>
> <u>On a 10-12,</u> you get a higher Class cargo of local goods in exchange, to a max of Class 4.
>
> <u>On a 7-9</u>, On a 7-9, you get a higher Class cargo, to a max of Class 4, and the GM chooses one flaw:
> - The negotiations take many days to complete.
> - The goods need special care (fragile, hazardous, etc).
> - The goods are very odd, distasteful or bizarre.
> - The provenance or legality of the goods is dubious.

The type of cargo obtained from a successful Barter depends on the type of market where the trade is conducted. Consult the list of example cargoes on page 11 for inspiration.

Some suggestions for unique opportunities and flawed cargoes are on pages 9 and 10.

A failed barter may result in obtaining local goods of at-best equal, or more likely lower Class, possibly with a flaw. Alternatively, it could result in the deal being obstructed in some way, or in someone trying to relieve the characters of their cargo by legal means, or simply by seizing it at gunpoint. The "Betrayal", "Missing Person" or "Smuggling Deal" Jump Points in *21 Jump Points* could be used here.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES

"You attract the attention of a faction or individual with a unique item or service to trade…"

Sometimes, traders hit the jackpot, and have a chance at a once-in-a-lifetime deal which will set them up forever. Exactly why someone would offer such a thing to the characters or why they are willing to accept a much less valuable cargo in exchange will depend on the fiction, but "crime" is usually a good excuse. Note that this is an excellent chance to set the characters up for further story, as previous or would-be owners attempt to obtain the item for themselves.

Items:
Unique items can be either a Class-3 Asset, or can be treated as a Class-4 cargo. Examples could include:
- Rare artefacts (alien, religious, or historic)
- Secret military weaponry or propulsion systems
- Unique or endangered creatures (an alien sample, or a pet tiger)
- An Artificial Intelligence
- Weapons of mass destruction

Information:
- A back door / access credentials to a vital information system
- Coordinates for a secret jump route(s)
- Faction IFF transponder codes
- The inside word on a complex financial scam
- The location of a valuable planet or resource

Services:
- The creation of a perfect new identity, allowing Debts to be escaped.
- Training for an otherwise unavailable career (e.g. The supernatural careers in *Far Beyond Humanity*)
- Experimental medical techniques (e.g. bio- or cyber mods which do not produce debilities; a full personality backup allowing resurrection in a cloned or artificial body)
- Elevation to nobility or other important position

FLAWED CARGO

"You get a higher Class cargo, to a max of Class 4, and the GM chooses one flaw..."

Sometimes a cargo is troublesome in some way. The following suggestions expand on the basics of the barter move:

Time-consuming:
This is best used when the characters have somewhere else they need to be in a hurry, or are trying to keep a low profile. Alternatively, it can be used to present an opportunity to adventure on-world while the deal is going through. *"What do you do while the brokers are talking?"*

The additional time can be due to local business practices, requirements for permits or licensing, negotiations with third parties such as suppliers or cargo-handlers, or a need to transport the goods a long distance to the character's ship. The characters may be able to intervene to reduce the wait.

Special care:
Cargo requiring special care could be:
- Actively hazardous e.g. explosive, flammable, or pressurised
- Dangerous if disturbed e.g. infectious, radioactive, or toxic
- Need extra care and attention while loading or in travel e.g. fragile, living, or perishable

Odd cargoes:
These should be handled by prompting e.g. *"what is disturbing about the cargo"* or *"what is disgusting about the cargo"?*

Stolen or illegal cargoes:
This is a good option if the characters are dealing on a black market or with criminals, but could also be used to highlight the differences between worlds: what is legal on one world might be illegal on another.

Stolen or illegal cargoes may need to be hidden from local authorities or traded on a black market. The original owners or authorities may learn of their location and attempt to retrieve or seize them.

EXAMPLE CARGOES

Example raw materials:
- **Beasts:** Usually carried in suspended animation for safety.
- **Fluids:** Organic chemicals, or just plain water.
- **Gases:** Usually compressed and therefore hazardous.
- **Metals:** Bulk ingots or rolls of processed metal or alloy e.g. iron
- **Minerals:** Unprocessed ores, decorative stone, uncut gems.
- **Organics:** Plant, animal, or other organic fibres e.g. cotton, fur, wood, wool.
- **Slaves:** Human, non-human
- **Unprocessed Food:** Algae, fruit, grains, meat, spices. Anything fresh or frozen.

Example manufactured goods:
- **Consumer goods:** Personal electronics, home appliances, books.
- **Electronics:** Computers, alarms, sensors, transmitters
- **Medical supplies:** Medicines, pharmaceuticals.
- **Polymers:** Artificial polymers, bulk plastics,
- **Processed food:** Cheese, chocolate, ice-cream, wine. Anything in a bag, bottle, or packet.
- **Textiles:** Natural, synthetic, raw fabric, clothing, floor coverings.
- **Tools:** agricultural, construction, vehicle maintenance.
- **Weapons:** personal weapons, military weapons, explosives, body armour.

Example Industrial Goods:
- **Computer components:** data storage, input devices, AI cores
- **Industrial waste:** Scrap, toxic, radioactive.
- **Machinery:** Agricultural, construction, environmental, mining, processing.
- **Machine tools:** Fabricators, lathes, presses, shapers.
- **Power plant components:** Fusion cores, generators, solar panels, transmission cables.
- **Processed chemicals:** coolants, dyes, feedstocks, fertilisers.
- **Starship components:** drive components, hull plating, life support.
- **Vehicles:** crawlers, flyers, speeders, walkers, wheeled.

Luxury goods are usually class-2 or 3. Pick an appropriate category.

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCT

Themes: Trade
Campaign types: Starship

Outline: The characters are offered a deal on a rare and valuable trade good. But they'll have to work hard to get it. This Jump Point is inspired by the chapter "Zilan Wine" in *The Traveller Adventure*.

Set the scene: (Read this first)
"A chance encounter in a bar has presented you with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: a chance to get some high-end luxury goods cheap. All you have to do is ship them offworld, and you're in the money. But there are a few complications…"

Questions:
- What rare and luxury product have you just been offered, and by whom?
- What nearby world do you know you can get a premium price for it?
- What special handling does the shipment require?
- What bureaucratic barriers are there to shipping it offworld and making a fortune?
- What Faction currently controls the product's trade and will oppose any attempt at breaking their monopoly?

MILK RUN

Themes: Trade
Campaign types: Starship

Outline: A seemingly easy trade deal gets complicated.

Set the scene: (Read this first)
"Things were looking good. You picked up a hot cargo at your last stop, and you knew you had a guaranteed buyer a few systems over. Nothing went wrong on the voyage - no pirates, and nothing broke. Now you're on final approach to make the delivery, and you can almost taste the credits.

Of course, it couldn't last..."

Questions:
- Where are you? What wretched backwater system have you come to for this deal, and why are traders cautious about doing business here?
- What's the cargo? What slightly shady product is burning a hole in your cargo bay? Why is this the only place you can easily sell it?
- Who was your guaranteed buyer and what unpleasant fate have they met which will stop the trade from happening?
- Who else might be interested in your cargo, and how have you pissed them off in the past?
- Which Faction doesn't like your cargo and will attempt to seize it if they learn of it?

UNEXPECTED CARGO

Themes: Trade
Campaign types: Starship

Outline: A cargo the characters are transporting turns out to be trouble. This Jump Point is inspired by the *Firefly* episode "Serenity".

Set the scene: (Read this first)
"It was a routine run. A few passengers, and some cargo you just had to quietly ship from A to B to pay off an old debt to a contact. But halfway through the trip, one of you got suspicious, and now you're staring into a bunch of open cargo crates that very definitely do not contain what they are supposed to. Instead, its something dangerous, which probably belongs to someone else. And the original owners probably want it back.

Worse, just as you're trying to work out what to do, the lights flicker and alarms start wailing…"

Questions:
- Which of you opened the cargo, and what made you investigate it in the first place?
- What dangerous and/or illegal product is inside the cargo crates? What did your contact say it was?
- Which Faction is it obviously stolen from, and how do you know? Which other Faction are you supposed to be delivering it to at your destination?
- Which ship system has just been sabotaged, and how long will it take to repair?
- How many passengers do you have aboard? Which of them are you the most suspicious of? Which of them seems completely harmless?

COLONIES

Settlement stories for *Uncharted Worlds*
Malcolm Harbrow
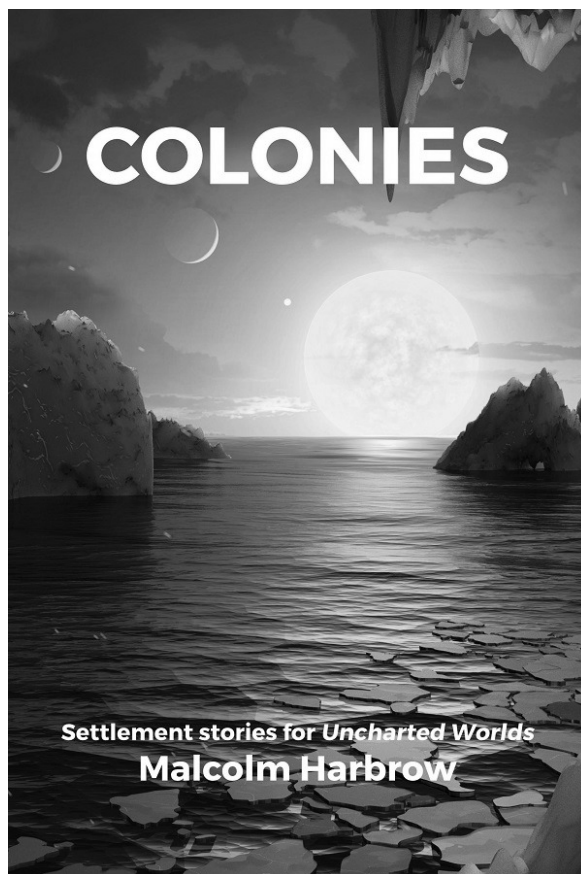
Hab-domes clustered around atmosphere processors. Pressure shelters built into underground caverns. Tin shacks under an alien sky. Every colony world is different. But every one of them is a community, full of people trying to make a new life in a new place.

Colonies is a story supplement for the Uncharted Worlds roleplaying game which provides additional material on running campaigns set on colony worlds. It is intended to be used as a source of ideas during campaign setup. *Colonies* includes:

- Advice on campaign setup
- Optional rules for colony campaigns
- "Frontier Hellhole", a quick-start campaign.

Because people live in all sorts of places...