

HELLION'S HOARD

by

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REFEREE BRIEFING

The PCs, who must be in control of a starship, are approached by a history professor from the far-off Imperial University of Antares who is studying the Reavers. He has recently found a pocket computer belonging to Hellion Murdoch's 1st Officer, Harald Birk, and has managed to crack the password. The computer contains the whereabouts of the legendary "Hellion's Hideout". Unfortunately his research grant is almost used up, so he proposes that the PCs provide transportation to the hideout in return for a share of any valuables found at the hideout.

The trip takes the PCs to sunny Danelag and is complicated by several factors: The professor is actually Harald Birk himself, a 'winkle' revived after spending 720 years in cold sleep aboard the last prize Hellion took before he was destroyed. Furthermore, another of the prize crew survived; Birk believes that he has killed him, but he survived and has teamed up with a criminal organization. Birk knows the location of the hideout but not of the hoard itself; the other crewman knows neither, but does know which planet it is hidden upon. The PCs thus face danger both from without and within.

THE PROFESSOR

The adventure can begin at any Class C or better starport coreward and trailing of Danelag. A large, blond man in his mid-thirties approaches the captain of the PCs' starship and proposes a partnership in what amounts to a treasure hunt. He gives his name as Erasmus Riske, a history professor from the University of Antares currently on a field trip to study the history of Reavers' Deep sector. He has recently come into possession of a pocket computer that used to belong to Harald Birk, first mate upon the notorious pirate Alison Murdoch's ship, "Black Widow." How the computer escaped from the "Black Widow's" destruction is unknown; possibly Birk was not aboard at the time, possibly it had been lost or stolen shortly before he embarked on that last trip. What Riske can attest to is that all his tests indicate that the computer is genuine. Moreover, he has managed to crack the password and the computer shows where Hellion's Hideout is located. Unfortunately Riske's university research grant is almost used up, so he offers a half

share in anything found at the hideout in return for transportation to the location.

Referee: In one sense the 'professor' cares little for what deal he strikes for the division of the loot since he intends to kill the entire crew anyway. The so-called professor is in reality none other than Harald Birk himself!

Birk is a 'winkle,' someone who has survived all his contemporaries through cold sleep or similar methods. Shortly before "Black Widow" was destroyed with all hands by Caledonian ships under Commodore Channing in 393, Hellion had captured a Free Trader, killed its crew, and sent it off under his trusted henchman Birk to be sold. The ship misjumped and wound up far into the Great Rift. It has taken the prize-crew over 700 years' of traveling in cold sleep to get back to civilization. After such an ordeal the ship is now in poor shape, as is the prize-crew, only two of which have survived the revivification procedure. Salvage fees and medical bills forced Birk to sell the ship and did not leave much left over. Learning of Hellion's fate and comparing dates, Birk has concluded that Hellion's Hoard may very well still be intact. Since reaching this conclusion, Birk has been making his way towards the hideout. By the time the PCs meet him, his funds are running low and he has decided to find a bunch of suckers with a ship and spin them a tale.

In order not to arouse suspicions Birk will bargain spiritedly if the PCs try to beat him down. The least amount he will settle for is a quarter share of the Hoard.



GETTING THERE

The hideout is located on Danelag/Eakoi (1136). The professor realizes that the ship cannot go straight there but must earn a living along the way. He offers to help in whatever capacity he can on the way, but has no shipboard skills.

Referee: The 'professor' will not willingly display any of his ship skills. He will help out as a very inept steward if needed and will also help enthusiastically with any fights the crew gets into. Try to play him as a space-age Indiana Jones. He carries a blaster (which, to keep in character, he will turn over on entering the ship without waiting to be asked), but there's nothing suspicious about that. In Reavers' Deep even scholars go armed.

If possible run some small adventures on the way to Danelag with the 'professor' as the loyal NPC henchman. His aim for the moment is to gain the trust of the crew.

DANELAG

A world brief for Danelag can be found towards the end of this adventure scenario. The "Pilot's Guide to Eakoi Subsector" mentions that any starship that lands anywhere outside the regional starports on Danelag will be treated as a hostile raider and will cause the militia to turn out. Danelag has no less than 303 starports, all of them class E and each one marked by a radio beacon. The guide lists the names and frequencies of all of them.

The professor can pinpoint the hideout exactly. It is located in an extinct volcano on Vanaheim, the second largest continent, in the Jotun Mountains, about four hundred kilometers west of the nearest big city, Mimersby. He suggests a cover-story wherein they pretend to be a group of companions who are touring the subsector looking for new and exciting hunting opportunities. After clearing the perfunctory customs inspection, he suggests they leave the ship in the starport and proceed by grav car into the mountains where the elusive spring-ged (jump goat) can be found.

MIMERSBY

The Mimersby starport is a large concrete-covered field located about two kilometers outside the city outskirts with one small concrete hut containing the landing beacon. A small, neat wooden shack like a bus shelter stands next to it. Inside the shelter are a few wooden benches and a telephone mounted upon the wall. A sign reads: "Please call the Port Captain upon arrival" in Galanglic as well as a half-dozen other interstellar languages.

The phone will be answered by someone speaking good, but heavily accented, Galanglic. She will ask the visitors to remain at the starport; and informs them that the Port Captain will be there inside half an hour.

About twenty minutes later a black and white TL 5 car with the word POLITI printed on it in large letters will arrive. It is driven by a man in a black uniform with a small amount of braid. Next to him sits a woman in a similar uniform but with a lot more braid. She gets out and presents herself as Gerda Vinter, Mimersby's Chief of Police and who also serves as the Port Captain.



She asks them a few questions, mostly medical, explains the local laws and customs, and then inspects their ship

to make sure they are not carrying a bunch of armed raiders. She does not wish to look inside anything that cannot contain a full-grown man. After the inspection she hands them a pamphlet containing a number of useful addresses and telephone numbers (taxi services, bars, restaurants, and hotels, doctors who can inoculate them against local diseases, and the bureau of licenses) and wishes them a pleasant stay.

Weapons: One law deserves special mention. Except for licensed hunting rifles, no weapons may be carried outside one's home. In addition, no weapons of any kind may be carried inside the city limits.

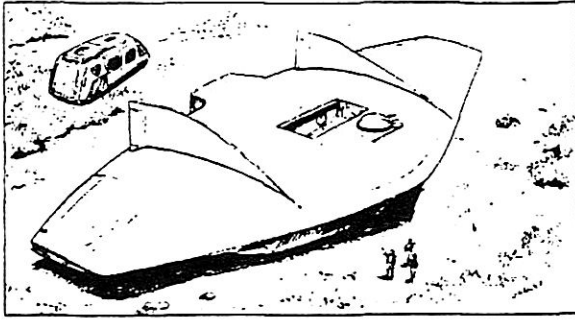


Referee: As long as visitors land in a designated starport, don't carry weapons while off the ship, and don't molest anyone, the locals don't much care who they are, what they want, or where they go. There are no customs tariffs or port fees. If the party is carrying along a grav car and the camping equipment they expect to need, they only need licenses for their guns before they can take off. If not, they have to buy supplies locally and rent a suitable vehicle. If none of the party can fly a helicopter and they do not want to hire a pilot, they may be able to find a grav car or van to rent. Some of the richest farmers import grav vehicles (one of the few high-tech items considered superior to the local equivalent), though more out of ostentation than for practical use.

Payment will be a problem, however. It is a basic tenet among the locals that Outsiders are unreliable. They don't necessarily doubt the Outsiders' good faith (though many do that too), but they don't really need or want to buy anything from offworld – the planet imports practically nothing, except for the aforementioned grav vehicles – so foreign currency is of little interest to them. The PCs will have to sell something to obtain local currency. Here again the locals will be skeptical of advanced technology, convinced that most of it will cease working the moment the Outsiders have been gone for a day. The PCs will be able to sell communicators (in pairs), electronic binoculars, etc., but not for anything near their true value. The best results will be obtained for TL 6 items of obvious usefulness and evident sturdy construction (Even that trusty standby, luxury food items, is not as valuable as expected; why develop a taste for luxuries you can't be sure of getting a regular supply of?).

THE COMPETITION

Six hours after the party lands in Mimersby a Safari Ship fitted out as a private yacht lands there. It is carrying a nobleman who is anxious to add a jump goat to his collection of hunting trophies.



Referee: Besides Birk only one member of the prize-crew, a man named Ian Feth, survived the revivification and subsequent complications. Concluding that Feth knew too much about him and that the money he had was insufficient for two, Birk killed him one dark night and dumped his body. At least, that is what Birk believes. In reality Feth survived and went to a local criminal organization with his tale. He managed to convince the leader who assigned a group of his best men to find the Hoard. They followed Birk's trail until he joined the PCs' ship, at which point they went directly to Danelag and hid out on the surface of the inner moon, waiting for the PCs' ship to arrive in-system.

The rival party is roughly the same size as that of the PCs. It is led by a 'noble' – in reality a clever, ruthless gangster called "Big Mac". The rest of the men are ordinary thugs from his gang, except for Ian Feth who is tagging along in the guise of the nobleman's secretary, heavily disguised with skin dye and a wig to prevent Birk from recognizing him.

If the PCs have already gone into the mountains, Big Mac will attempt to track them, otherwise he will wait until they do depart and attempt to follow them.

THE VOLCANO

Hellion's Hideout is located in the crater of an extinct volcano. It is a small fertile spot deep in the inhospitable Jotun mountain range with lush vegetation and a crystal-clear lake in the middle. It appears to be inaccessible except from the air. There is one other way in, but it is well hidden. As a child Harald Birk found a natural tunnel through the volcano wall and kept it a secret. Later he told Murdoch about it and helped him build a hideout there. The tunnel was concealed at both ends to provide an emergency exit.

The volcano crater is about 15 km across. From the air it resembles a bulls-eye target. In the center is a lake about 3 km across. The crater floor is covered with vegetation and rises gently until about 1 km from the rim where it rises in a 30-45 degree angle for 50-100 meters until it reaches a fairly flat ledge next to the rim. From there the volcano wall rises up almost vertically for about 300 meters. Although roughly concentric the target 'rings' are somewhat irregular. To the north a 50 meter notch in the wall has left a ridge below it stretching down into the crater.

An alternate way out is through the underground river that drains the crater lake. Birk has actually been through it once wearing diving gear and several sets were kept in the hideout. These are unlikely to be useable after 7 centuries, so Birk has

bought a set with him and keeps it hidden in the bottom of his trunk.

THE HIDEOUT

The hideout itself is hidden under a rocky outcropping on the inside crater wall and cannot be seen from above. Next to the building is a flat space large enough to accommodate a starship of up to 1000 T or so.

The building is large and luxurious. It was built by skilled slave labor especially kidnapped by Murdoch (Their skeletons can be found in a small ravine not far away). It is in one plane, roughly circular, with about two thirds buried inside the crater wall. It is divided into three sections. To the front are the "public" rooms with a large banquet hall, a dormitory for the crew and individual rooms for the officers. To the back are Murdoch's private suite, the armory, and a private supply of food, all of which are sealed off from the rest of the building. The third section is the servants' quarters with dormitories, kitchen, and pantry. This part could be locked from the outside, imprisoning the servants. Murdoch kept a dozen beautiful women prisoner here to serve him and his crew when he visited. The pantry was stocked with enough food to last them for the many months between his visits. Their pitiful remains lie inside showing that they survived for several years before they starved to death when the food ran out.

UNWANTED VISITORS

After the PCs have had time to explore the volcano and the hideout for a short while, Big Mac, who had temporarily lost track of them, will spot the volcano and decide to check it out. They will set up camp in a suitable spot on the rim some 10 km from the hideout and start looking around.

Referee: If they meet any of the PCs they will keep up the charade of being a hunting party. Presumably, the PCs will do the same. It is a thin story, since there are no large animals in the crater's small, isolated ecosystem, but it is better than nothing.

TRAPPED!

Harald Birk was on the verge of getting rid of his allies when the other hunting party arrived. He quickly rearranges his priorities and decides to eliminate the newcomers first. His first step is to sneak into the other camp at night and sabotage their grav van. That same night someone from the other group sneaks up to the hideout (it is pretty easy to spot once someone is actually down in the crater) and sabotages the PCs own vehicle. This leaves both sides trapped inside the volcano. Calling for help is impossible. The volcano walls block radio transmissions and there are no communication satellites around Danelag.

Subsequent events depend on just how our heroes decide to tackle the situation. The professor, displaying a hitherto unsuspected ruthlessness, will suggest taking the other party out with a preemptive strike, citing the sabotage as proof of

their evil intentions. Scouting will reveal that Big Mac and his people have smuggled in some superior firepower, though nothing major. The hideout on the other hand is extremely defensible and as long as the PCs stay inside it, the situation is pretty much a stand-off, but the PCs can't stay in there for ever.



Murdoch's armory contains some powerful weapons of its own, but they are in poor shape after 700 years. However, a skilled armorer or a clever jack-of-all-trades might be able to repair one or two weapons. Any explosives will be very hazardous to use unless the referee decides that the armory contains some of the really sophisticated (and expensive) TL 12 explosives that have a half-life measured in centuries. Even then, much of it will be useless.

THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

If the PCs take any prisoners they have a chance of finding out about the professor's true nature, provided they interrogate them and ask the right questions. Otherwise they are in for a nasty surprise when Birk finally makes his move once the other group is defeated.

Birk will figure out some almost foolproof plan for killing everybody with the least amount of risk to himself and will carry it out with ruthless efficiency. The referee should arrange for some accident to give the players a last minute warning. Some scavenger eating the poisoned stew, for example, or someone waking up at night to catch him rigging a booby-trap. For maximum effect it should be clear that but for this accident, everyone would have died.



Birk is a realist. Once odds turn against him he will try to escape. If he succeeds he may have another try later, if he

can find a suitable place for an ambush. He may attempt to recruit local thugs to back him up. Otherwise Birk will lie low until he can escape from Danelag, and he can be used again as a recurring villain.

AFTERMATH

There remains the problem of getting out of the volcano. Either of the vehicles may be repaired; one of the hidden escape routes may be found (the diving gear in Birk's luggage may provide a clue, or the secret door to the tunnel may turn up during the search for the hoard). It may be possible to climb out of the notch in the north side of the volcano, if climbing gear can be improvised. Finally, the Mimersby police will arrange a search after a few weeks and will find them provided the PCs have made distress signs that can be seen from the air.



It is up to the Referee to decide just how much wealth is hidden in Hellion's Hideout. Hellion's Hoard consists of the choicest valuables from a lifetime of looting, so it could be worth anything from tens to hundred of millions of credits. Certainly the amount is enough to upset a normal Free Trader campaign (where the constant struggle to meet the next bank payment is a recurring theme). However, if the referee is planning to change the focus of the campaign such riches may be appropriate. If not, there is no reason why the whole hoard should be at the hideout. Birk is convinced that it is, but Murdoch might have been fooling him, keeping only a small part there and the rest stashed somewhere else.

The Referee can use the content of the hoard as a starting point for a new adventure. If only a small part is stashed in the hideout, then perhaps there is a clue to where the rest could be.

Here are a few suggestions for special specific items that could be in the hoard:

The content of the principal Shrine of Heroes of an Aslan clan, captured by Murdoch and held for ransom. The loss broke the spirit of the clan and it became vassal to another clan. Regaining the content might be just the spark they need to try to regain their independence.

A crystal key that may or may not fit certain locks on Doom/Caledon. (See Library Data).

A richly ornamented *eakhyasear* (Aslan hunting rifle) made by a legendary gunsmith. It belonged to a famous Aslan hero who was travelling on a ship captured by Murdoch. If returned to his clan it will earn the PCs the friendship of the clan. Alternatively, they could sell it to an antique collector for a six-figure amount.

Of course, there is always that trusty old standby, the mysterious Ancients artifact. Learning what it does and how to activate it could require tracking down old records and scholars while simultaneously fending off acquisitive artifact collectors and Droyne anxious to recover an old heirloom.

In addition to the hoard the volcano itself may prove to be worth money. If the PCs can acquire title to it, they could probably sell it easily. It would make a nice country estate for some reclusive millionaire.

Final note: Much of the adventure depends on both parties leaving their spaceship behind and going to the hideout by grav vehicle. Nevertheless, it is possible to sneak a spaceship down into the volcano. It is risky, because there is always the chance that some lone forest ranger or mountain man will spot the ship and sound the alarm, but it is possible. After all, that was what Hellion Murdoch did 700 hundred years earlier when he needed to lie low for a while, and Danelag has not changed much since then. Should the players decide to run the risk of landing directly at the Volcano, the whole adventure is in danger of being derailed. The best way to get the adventure back on track is to let the rival gang do the same and then instigate a duel between each starship that will leave both ships crippled.

DANELAG WORLD DATA

Below is a world brief for Danelag (Reavers Deep 1136) E686889-5.

Danelag was settled during the Rule of Man by a Racial Purity Group from Scandinavia (tall, blue-eyed, blonde humans only). Since the Rule of Man did not permit member planets to control immigration it was necessary to move outside its borders. During the Long Night the planet was plagued by Reaver attacks due to a technology high enough to be tempting and too low to allow an effective defense. Eventually the planet switched to less portable (and thus less attractive) energy sources, especially wind and water driven electric turbines. Overall technology also declined and stabilized around TL 5. After this they were left alone, except for occasional slave raids, until invaded by Aslan of the Eakoi Corporation around -900. The Aslan left the humans pretty much alone, but their high-tech industry inevitably reduced the humans to a much-resented second-class status. During the Eakoi Trade Conflict, the Soloman Hegemony overran the Aslan on Danelag and established an advance base there with the enthusiastic support of the local humans. For over a hundred years Soloman poured trillions of credits into the world. Then, when the Eakoi Corporation withdrew from Eakoi, the overextended Soloman Hegemony pulled out of Danelag and as a result caused a massive recession. Since then the population of Danelag has been very insular, thoroughly convinced that Outsiders (they spell it with a capital O) are nothing but trouble.



This attitude is not helped by the fact that Danelag is still, even today, the occasional victim of slave raids, although seldom twice by the same slavers. Nearly all cities, villages, and individual farmsteads are connected to deep tunnels filled with various traps and, while no one except the police and hunters carry weapons outside their homes, every household has one or more heavy weapons hidden away. These weapons can include anything from crunch guns to rocket launchers, and each high-tech heirloom is lovingly preserved and maintained, as is anything that can give an armored raider a hard time. Raiding Danelag is seldom cost-effective. After an attempted raid the planet is usually left alone for a decade or two until the rumors are forgotten and the lesson has to be taught to a new generation of slavers.

Danelag has a population of 400 million organized in 303 regions of roughly 1 to 1.5 million inhabitants centered on cities of 100-150,000 inhabitants. The largest region is Valhalla on Asgard with 3,000,000 inhabitants centered on the city of the same name with 800,000 inhabitants. Most political and administrative activities take place on the regional level. What qualifies Danelag for a class 8 government rating is the number of supra-regional organizations that blanket the planet. Such organizations include the Legal Standards Committee, which ensures compatibility between the various regional legal systems, the Interregional Police Coordinating Agency, the Trade Balance Board, which compiles trade statistics and offers advice to the differing regions about what future crops will be most profitable, the Uniform Weights & Measures Commission, the Cultural Exchange Committee, as well as others not listed.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS



Harald Birk a.k.a. Professor Erasmus Riske
Pirate Lieutenant A85A83 Age 755 4 terms Cr 50,000
Brawling-2, Gun Cbt-3, Engineering-1, Navigation-2, Pilot-2

Harald Birk is a large, cheerful man with blue eyes and flaxen hair, a handsome, charming extrovert who gets along well with everybody. He is also a ruthless, cold-blooded killer who will go to any lengths to achieve his goals.

The greatest weakness with his disguise as a history professor is his lack of academic background and his unfamiliarity with high stellar technology. He is well aware of this and tries hard to avoid situations that would force him to expose his ignorance. At least his knowledge of the 4th Century is impressive...



Ian Oscar Feth

Pirate 4A4884 Age 751 3 terms Cr 0
Brawling-1, Computer-1, Gun Cbt-1, Pilot-1

Ian is a small weasel of a man with shifty eyes and a nervous twitch. He is torn between hatred of his erstwhile officer and distrust of his new associates. If caught by the PCs he will try to make a deal with them only to betray them in turn if a good opportunity occurs.



Macabeus "Big Mac" McGinley
Gangster 885B44 Age 38 5 terms Cr 100,000
Gun Cbt.-2, Leader-2, Streetwise-3

Big Mac is a tall, powerful man, in many ways a dark-haired counterpart to Harald Birk. He is a prominent member of a criminal organization on Khakhan (Reavers' Deep 3220), the world where Birk decided to ditch Ian Feth. He was sent by his boss to track down Hellion's Hoard and he does not intend to let anything stand in his way.