

Decopedia

volume 2

TRAVELLER

Compatible Product

Requires the use of the Traveller(TM) Main Rulebook,
available from Mongoose Publishing.

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Introduction

This second volume in the Decopedia series has been written for use with *Mongoose Traveller*, more specifically for use by a *Traveller* referee. It's designed to give the referee "drop ins" for their game. Each entry is separate and self contained so you can take it and squeeze it into your own game.

Planets: In this section are descriptions of ten planets. Each is unique and crosses the gamut of nearly-barren to heavily populated, and all the way from low through to high tech. This kind of drop in is ideal when your PCs misjump into the middle of who knows where and you suddenly need a place to land.

Story Seeds: In this section I present ten story seeds. Short succinct ideas for a gaming scenario that can be used for one-off sessions or the start for entire campaigns. Once again they're not linked at all, so you can use only the ones you want, or all of them in any order you wish. If your players have taken a left turn from where you thought they were going and you're stuck for a scenario to throw at them, these can give you a brief hit of inspiration.

Creatures: The creatures section details ten interesting animals that you can drop on to your *Traveller* worlds. Each has a unique twist or an unusual character that will add colour to any game that includes them.

People of Interest: The galaxy is a big place and its full of people, and many of them come to prominence for any number of reasons. In this section are details of ten people whos reasons for notoriety cross the full spread of good and bad. Whether you use them directly as NPCs in your game or as background people who the players never directly interact with, using them will add depth to the universe you create.

10 Planets

The ten planets presented in this section all come from the Tircesoë subsector, which I constructed for my own Traveller campaign. The subsector is not Traveller cannon and you won't find it referenced in any other line of books. A subsector map and UPPs for all of the planets in the subsector can be found at <http://BehindTheClaw.BlogSpot.co.uk>

PLANET 1 – QUKAR

UPP: C9AA56A-9

Qukar is an unpleasant world. It is categorised as a water world but don't let that fool you into imagining a world with warm water waiting for you to go swimming. It is a cold world, a frozen world almost a wasteland. The planet's orbit is beyond the normally acceptable range for human habitation and as it orbits erratically beyond an asteroid belt that often blocks what little sunlight there is, the world is beyond frigid. Its ice covered surface is home to around half a million people who manage to make a comfortable life for themselves.

The starport at Qukar has all of the usual features but only provides unrefined fuel lifted from the planet. Purchasers of this fuel are advised to ensure they do not use the fuel in its unrefined state as the impurities are noted for their untowards effect on jump drives, although for in-system use there is unlikely to be a problem.

The reason this unforgiving planet was settled at all was for the same contaminants that make the fuel supply unreliable. The ice of Qukar contains minute trace elements of a number of important elements. Not enough to make corporate mining operations viable, but enough to allow people with time on their hands to mine the ice on their own. Thus in came the homesteaders and the mining began on a small scale, carried

out by people who lived there and could run a mine for their entire life.

It didn't take more than five generations before raiders found Qukar and started taking from the people. The planet erupted with fear and aggression in response to the first raids and only stopped when Imperial forces arrived to protect the people from the raiders. It became necessary to install an Imperial Governor in order to suppress the violence and unrest.

The system remains under direct Imperial Governorship which is administered from the subsector capital. Although the people are living within a very strict system on imposed laws, they seem relatively happy and continue to live their lives without fear of the raiders.

When jumping into the system travellers are advised to immediately contact the local system patrol and report their presence. Failure to do so will cause patrol cruisers to be aggressively dispatched to intercept and you WILL be charged for that. Visitors are also warned not to leave the starport with any weapons as carrying weapons on the planet is strictly prohibited.

PLANET 2 – GEFAR

UPP: UPP A325489-E

Gefar is a world with one purpose, science and research. When Gefar was discovered hopes for a inhabitable world were quickly dashed as the atmosphere was discovered both too thin and too high in nitrogen to naturally support human habitation. Its land mass being split into a large number of small continents made it suitable for a purpose that the leadership of the subsector had in mind.

Within a few years of discovery habitation stations were set up on the surface and scientific units installed. Researches and experiments that would be unpalatable on an inhabited world

were easily carried out without objection on a world dedicated to the purpose. The large watery expanses between each continent mean that large scale experiments can be carried out without them interfering with each other or the populous.

Each continent is now settled, and not just with scientific staff, but also with their families and a security contingent. The total permanent population of Gefar was logged at around 9000 during the last Imperial census. Despite that small count, the planet supports a fully featured starport. The configuration of the starport however is unusual. Rather than being in a geostationary orbit it follows a path that carries it over every continent so that it is convenient to use from every land mass during some part of the day. As each continent supports an independent research station owned and managed by a separate corporate conglomeration that all require access to a working starport, The cost of operating it is spread amongst all of the interested parties.

Many of the projects being researched on Gefar are sealed under the secrecy of the corporations carrying them out. However some things can't be hidden and other projects are in the public domain. Of those known to the public, the following are the most noteworthy. Much of one continent appears to be the subject of a partial terra-forming, with many forms of flora having been planted. A near constant series of explosions on another suggests weapons research. A series of closed and heavily guarded domes in one location are noted for very little traffic, some have theorised these contain a treasure horde, or possibly a human isolation project. Rocket experiments have been noted in a number of locations.

Of especial interest however is an apparent attempt at the construction of a space elevator. A large asteroid has been pushed into orbit and a tail of a few miles in length is under construction. The aerodynamic nature of this tail is what has convinced many observers that this is an elevator in progress

There is no government as such, but a committee of corporate representatives from the companies carrying out research on Gefar act as an authority. There are few laws on Gefar, but there are a number of guidelines agreed to by the various parties. One of these agreements, is that weapons are forbidden on the planet. Although there is no police force on the planet to enforce these laws, you should note that the various companies run their own security forces in any way they see fit on the continents they have control of. Anyone falling foul of the weapons decree or any of the other decrees will be subject to the whims of the companies.

PLANET 3– MAMAROS

UPP: B5A6212-9

Today we're looking at Mamaros a world of middling size and frankly not a lot to commend it to visitors. The entire planet is owned by the InDes corporation and serves as a private residence for the corporations executives and immediate families. It seems that some live here and others use it as a retreat. The population of the planet rarely grows above a hundred or so except when workers are brought in for a building project.

The atmosphere is unbreathable and contains a large concentration of argon mixed with nitrogen and hydrogen. There is a lot of water in the extremely active atmosphere which tends to keep the land masses constantly wet. However, the water and air in it's natural state is undrinkable and unsuitable for standard refining for starship fuel.

The planet does have a number of lower indigenous life forms and a thriving collection of diverse flora, especially in the equatorial regions.

As you might expect, the residences of the Indes mega corp executives are grand in design. There are at the last survey fifteen habitation domes on the surface. These are extremely

large and encompass what would be considered large estates on any other world. Within each dome large houses exist surrounded by standard terran flora and fauna. One dome is reputed (although not confirmed) to contain an indoor lake that is so large that tidal forces act upon it like a sea.

A grade B starport services the planet and acts as a refuelling point for transiting starships. However the planet itself is off limits to visitors and a couple of guard boats patrol the system to enforce this prohibition.

Recent news broadcasts from across the subsector have noted how InDes executives from various planets has disappeared without notice. Some have theorised that they may be meeting on Mamaros for some nefarious purpose, a suggestion strenuously denied by the InDes press corp.

PLANET 4 – KESZAJEXEOS

UPP: E400354-7

The colony on the planet is small and its history is a little murky. The population of around five hundred is very reticent to speak of why the colony was established over two hundred years ago, and indeed many wonder why it still exists today

It's a small, airless, waterless world with no starport and no industrial or farming exports. Apart from the small community the world is in fact rather bland and empty, a hostile wasteland.

The majority of the population live in a single area of the planet that might be described as a town, although that name is a little misleading. The inhabitants have avoided the usual practice of sharing a single dome and instead all live within small individual prefabricated cubes. Each cube is only a matter of meters square and is comfortable for an individual but not large enough for a family. A child born on Keszajexeos lives with it's mother until aged eight, at which point a new cube is fabricated and the child becomes independent. Family

members will frequently visit until the child reaches the age of consent.

Visitors will not find a friendly welcome in any of the habitation cubes. the people of Keszajexeos value their peace and privacy. Although not actively hostile to the few visitors they receive, off-worlders find them short, brusque, even to the point of rudeness during all interactions, and this may account for the very limited amount of trade that takes place.

As an insular society they can be quite gregarious via audio communication. They maintain an active community based on the radio network across which they can be heard chatting and interacting just like any other Imperial society. However this does not extend to physical interaction and meeting people in person. They are also reluctant to use video communication as this is considered as invasive as a physical meeting.

There does not seem to be any shortage of children amongst the population so they must be meeting up at some point. This is a taboo subject and visitors are warned to avoid the subject lest they be roughly escorted to the nearest air lock.

On arrival a trader is advised to introduce themselves on the community radio network and offer details of any items they have for trade. The trade goods should then be left on the surface at a designated point with no guard for twenty four standard hours. The people wish to avoid physical interaction and the face to face bartering process is abhorrent to them. Thus if anyone wishes to buy the goods they will replace the goods with cred-sticks which you should pick up at the end of the designated twenty four hours.

PLANET 5 – ROFAHOQU

UPP: C787ABA-C

Rofahoqu has recently had its Imperial Amber warning to visitors lifted. the warning was originally applied because the

planet was in a state of political and civil turmoil. It had been under the rule of a charismatic leader who engendered and enforced a cult of personality that controlled the populous and created a constant state of threat based on xenophobia. Visitors were not welcome and when they did visit were under constant threat and surveillance.

This state has recently changed with the overthrow of the previous leader and the creation of a popular democratic government. Although described as popular there are a number of dissenting groups that have subsequently tried to instigate a coup and take control. Each attempt has failed but it has left a state of political paranoia that had led to a crackdown on some personal freedoms.

Visitors are welcome but the importation or carrying of any weapons is strictly enforced with port inspections. Unregistered landings away from the starport are also strictly forbidden.

The atmosphere of Rofahoqu is breathable but dense. It is possible for visitors to acclimatise to the atmosphere over a period of weeks, but the casual visitor should purchase or rent a hard shelled environment suit to avoid discomfort. You are also warned that habitation and industrial buildings are not pressurised but share the same pressure as outside.

Although the population of the planet is in the billions these reside in a relatively small area of the planet's surface. The capital conurbation is simply called Such and houses the majority of the population. The city is surrounded by a series of smaller satellite towns that are rapidly growing to join with Such.

Much of the planet's surface is considered wasteland, and as yet unused. There are a few remote mining stations that are scattered across the globe to make use of the natural resources and one or two religious communes that are far from the crowded city, but for the most part the people of Rofahoqu like their crowded cities.

The favoured architecture is for tall closely clustered buildings which make quite a stunning impression on visitors, especially at night when the buildings are externally lit.

There is much for the visitor to enjoy as the previous leadership had a propensity for grandiose projects that has left a series stunningly large entertainment venues. The recently renamed Peoples Stadium is built around three low-gee-ball playing fields and is capable of sitting just over one and a half million people.

Base jumping and submersible tours are extremely popular with both visitors and locals.

A cultural warning for visitors. It can feel crowded and close in the cities where the people frequently stand close to each other and often touch arms, face, and torso of the people they are communicating with. Also, they do not maintain the "personal space" around themselves that is common in Imperial society. Visitors should not be offended or aggrieved by this behaviour, it is simply their way.

There is little to amuse the visitor outside of Such, the landscape is bland and rocky. Flora and fauna is unremarkable. Grasses and low bushes predominate. Lizards make up the majority of the animal life, with the notable exception being a small deer-like animal called a "jillbuck".

PLANET 6 – RAPREOOS

UPP: A762444-D

Rapreos is a terraformed planet. It was discovered a couple of hundred years ago and purchased by the long lived Fudine Industries mega corp as a development project. The reason Fudine grabbed the planet so soon after discovery is that they saw a lot of potential in the barren planet. With no existing occupants and a thick nitrogen rich atmosphere they deemed it suitable for a terraforming project.

Over the following two hundred years they worked on the atmosphere converting it and making it suitable for habitation. It has now reached a sustainable, self-sustaining state and colonists are being encouraged to set up residence. In only a few months of being open to applicants the planet has already reached around five thousand inhabitants and every ship that arrives brings more. The population is expected to be in the millions before the end of the decade.

There is a brisk trade at the starport in colonist and homestead materials that are being sold for a premium. A number of guide services are also in place to help new arrivals find a place to set up. Fudine have promised every family that moves there a minimum of 10 acres of ground, although what type of ground is based on what's available at the time of arrival.

Fudine are running Rapreroos as a business, all land belongs to and remains the property of Fudine in perpetuity. It is their intention that every transaction that takes place on Fudine will be subject to a Fudine one percent levy. Thus people arriving and purchasing housing, and the guide services are already paying Fudine. Although Fudine remain quiet about actual numbers some estimates suggest that they will recoup the costs of terraforming within fifty years and from then on, it will all be profit.

An elected colonist committee is currently in charge and taking the place of an established government and the colonists are free to make what they want of the planet in the future, the only stipulation being that Fudine will always own the planet and take the levy.

Although some speculators have suggested that Fudine might just be waiting for the planet to get established before kicking everyone off, this has not stopped the flood of colonists arriving and seeking passage to the planet.

At present the population is spread so thinly across the planet that the strength of the committee is really only felt around the

starport, meaning for all intents the colonists are on their own when set up on their plot of land. Nothing is set, there is no central government structure for people to appeal to, seek help from, or even demand protection from. It is a prime time for independent traders to visit although you will have to seek your own customers as there is not a central network to tie your computers into.

On more civilised worlds it has been noted that various religious cults are taking note of Rapreos and are actively raising funds to transport their members to the planet. At least one fraternity have expressed a wish to migrate all their members to the planet and have a dominating majority.

At present the flora and fauna is very limited. Fudine have accomplished their terraforming by limiting their fauna to insects with no other animals having been imported.

PLANET 7 – ZAPMANUS

UPP: C9C8ABC-A

Zapmanus is a thriving planet, if not a particularly happy one. It is open to trade and visitors although always under strict surveillance. The planetary government is very invasive in behaviour. It is possible that visitors will face an intensive questioning as they arrive and leave, as well as being followed during the visit. This is not usually aggressive or dangerous but can be persistent and annoying. Visitors are advised not to show annoyance as this would be considered suspicious by authorities. This is simply normal practice to the inhabitants, and any show an animosity toward it suggests to the authorities that you have something to hide.

The atmosphere of Zapmanus does contain a degree of oxygen and can be breathed for a short time although it is extremely dangerous. The plant life of the planet exudes a substance into the air that is hallucinogenic to humans, vargr, and aslan. It is this substance that makes exposure so

dangerous. Those people that breath the air are immediately thrown into intense hallucinations that overwhelm the conscious mind to the point of forgetting to replace masks or return inside. The hallucinations themselves can take a number of hours to wear off and are very unpredictable. Sometimes the individual will find themselves in a state of bliss, at other times unimaginable horror.

The growth of the government's invasive policies can be charted through the media archives. After a few highly publicised leaks that allowed entire town domes to become overcome by the atmosphere the people demanded better protection from the forces that threatened their safety. This protection at first took the form of a growing police contingent and edged into various invasions of privacy before ending up in a total surveillance state. The people of Zapmanus do not seem to find the situation disagreeable and have elected a number of governments all of which follow the same general policy.

There have been a number of attempts over the years to effectively bottle the hallucinogenic qualities of the atmosphere however these have always been unsatisfactory. The chemicals involved tend to break down very quickly and thus do not store well, and as already mentioned the effects of breathing it vary widely.

The flora and fauna are varied and include the two hundred pound hexoped Slatherun, a vicious and dangerous pouncer animal that many hunters consider a prize. Such hunts have been known to be reversed with the hunter becoming the prize, or rather the dinner, of the Slatherun. Anyone wishing go on a hunt must seek license and overseer from local government offices.

Landing on zapmanus is strictly controlled but freely given at any of the designated landing sights.

PLANET 8 – SYLARSYIA

UPP: C3305AF-A

Sylarsyia is a large planetoid without a permanent population yet there is always a large number of people on the planet at any one time. The planetoid is a place of worship for a technology cult and thus has a constant flow of people flowing onto and off the planet.

The Ninth Level cult were originally attracted to the planetoid because of a particular mountain range that when viewed from above appeared to spell out a religious sigil of their belief. In their eyes this made the entire planet a message from their god. Over time the planetoid has been hollowed out to make vast halls of worship and places to stay temporarily while worshipping. The surface of the planetoid is virtually unchanged from its natural state, it being considered holy to the cult.

The starport is noted as being one of the busiest starports in the subsector. The constant coming and going of the cult members mean there is a near constant flow of shuttles and ships into and out of the system. Huge transport vessels bring thousands of cult members in low passage from across the sector and hundreds of private vessels constantly jump into the system making the management of the space above Sylarsyia very tricky.

Visitors are welcome in-system provided they are cult-members. Non-cult members are actively chased from the system. There are even rumours that a ship that attempted an act of piracy in this system was smashed as cult members suicided their ships in order to kill the infidels. No casual visitors will be welcome.

A number of supply vessels owned by non-cultists do provide a constant supply of goods to Sylarsyia, but these vessels are stopped well beyond the usual jump distance and have to

subject themselves to a cleansing ritual lasting two or three days before being allowed to trans-ship the cargo to a cult shuttle.

The thin atmosphere of the planet supports a fragile eco system. The holy mountains are home to a number of life forms that exist only on those mountains and each of these life forms is a figure of worship to the cultists and none of them may be removed from the planet. This has of course intrigued collectors who offer exceedingly high sums for flora and fauna taken from the planetoid. This market exists only as part of a secretive cabal, as anyone openly offering bounties will find themselves enemies of the cult.

The Travellers Aid Society has issued an amber warning for Sylarsyia with a strong recommendation to avoid the system except in case of extreme need.

PLANET 9 – JADOBUOS

UPP: E444300-7

This planetary system is not really a destination, not somewhere a tourist or a trader would aim to end their journey . It's a stop over for transitioning ships. It sits within one jump of the Zapmanus system a thriving world in the subsector and only a 2 jump from other destinations, thus it is placed perfectly placed for ships with a lower jump capability.

There is no planetary population in the system and only the semi resident crew of the fuel station to act as any kind of market to traders, hence it is not really a place you would want to visit. The E class star port is abandoned, consisting of nothing more than a flat area of bedrock and a fading beacon. All activity in the system is focused on Jade station above the planet.

The station itself never sleeps. Crews are constantly working to skim the two gas giants and keep the tanks full on the station,

to sell to passing traffic. Travellers are warned that this unrefined fuel is priced considerably above the standard rates, and Captains with fuel scoops will have to make the choice between time or money.

The only notable features on the station are the spacers bar on level two called Nathan's Backstop that serves a wide variety of food, and the daily junk-market where those travelling through can offload or pick-up miscellaneous trinkets. Other than these two entertainment facilities the station itself is purely functional.

The station is owned and run by the Jarviss Corporation who built the station some eighty years ago. All processing and policing in system is carried by Jarviss and individuals are subject to their orders. There is no direct Imperial representation in system.

There have been rumours that the Navy has stashed a number of refined fuel pods amongst the outer belt of asteroids. Jarviss have never offered any response other than "no comment" when asked about the existence of these pods. A report by an Imperial survey of the asteroid belt made no mention of the fuel pods but did contain a small item at the bottom of the report that simply said "twelve other items were indicated." This mysterious comment has never been expanded and has helped prolong the rumour.

PLANET 10 – HOSQQANAVOS

UPP: A79A310-F

Hosqqanavos is privately owned or rather privately leased from the Imperium by the Nakitomi Corporation. This unusual leasing situation came about because the world was nominated as a subject for terra forming and settlement in the Imperial catalogues. So rather than sell the world into private ownership the Imperial negotiators agreed to lease the world exclusively to Nakitomi for a period of one thousand five hundred years.

There has been much speculation about the reason for the arrangement and what Nakitomi aim to gain from the situation, but as yet no facts have been released by Nakitomi, and the Imperial representatives who took part in the negotiation simply say that they don't know the reason for Nakitomi's interest.

Hosqqanavos is a water world of average size and gravity, its atmosphere is thick and unbreathable, and there is no land mass at all. However there is a solid ice cap of thousands of miles diameter at the northern pole. This ice is not permanent as the cap travels constantly in the same direction, pushed by water currents. Ice constantly forms on the trailing edge and calves off the leading edge.

Observation from space reveals that Nakatomi have built a habitat on the ice and it appears to be mounted on a crawler base that allows it to maintain its position as the ice moves beneath it. One observer noted how large the base is and compared that to nine hundred odd employees that Nakatomi claim work on the planet. It seems the base is sufficient to maintain housing for many thousands of people and of course this has led to speculation that the statements Nakatomi make about the operation are all lies.

What is confirmed, is that a well appointed starport provides service to ships in orbit but that only Nakatomi shuttles are allowed within the atmosphere, no landing of any other vessels is allowed. There is no trade with the surface but ships hopping through the system are welcome to use the starport.

A series of autonomous drones have been seen constantly patrolling the watery surface across the entire southern latitudes. These seem to be small probe size vehicles but as noone is allowed within the atmosphere their purpose can only be guessed at.

The Imperial catalogues show that the world has an active ecosystem in which many thousands of life forms have been

listed and categorised. A perusal of this list shows that there are no flying creatures on the planet. Aquatic animals and floaters exist in profusion and even a few mammal-like taxons were logged on the ice cap, but nothing that flies.

The Scout reports also list floating sargasso islands in motion around the equator. Large, floating mats of plant matter that might be a hazard to boats.

10 Story Seeds

These story seeds are offered as inspiration for the referee. Even if you don't use them directly, you may find that the ideas presented here become insinuated into your own games, perhaps as side missions or as a twist in your ongoing campaign. Read them, absorb them, and use them as you will.

STORY SEED 1 – IT'S MINE

The planet Tohilum is on the outskirts of the Imperium and was colonised millenia ago. However it did not stay in the Imperium. For administrative reasons it was removed from the x-boat routes and as it manufactured no special trade goods it simply fell off the map.

It has only recently been put back onto the map, but in the intervening years its populace has fallen back to a tribal culture. Its now primitive tribes eke out a living in wooden towns set amongst the rotting buildings of its previous civilisation.

The reason for contact being re-established is the ore known as Coovane. This used to be pretty worthless, but has recently become valuable enough to make mining operations viable.

Some enterprising individuals have discovered that Tohilum is rich in the ore. The O'phily mining corp (actually a ten man operation with a big sounding name) have set up a small mine and hired the PCs as security and handy-men.

The mine is set directly in the overlapping territory of two tribes that share animosity towards each other, and both want payment from the miners. The PCs are to protect the camp from angry natives, who'll steal anything not locked down. At the same time they should try to negotiate amenable terms with both tribes.

If the party look like they're about to wipe out a tribe with

modern weapons you might consider having a Imperial Patrol boat enter the system and come investigate the mining operations.

Rather than negotiating for goods with the tribes (creds are no good to them as they don't use them) the leaders could ask for favours, which can lead the party off on some unlikely missions. Rescuing a tribal princess for instance, or perhaps killing a dangerous predator. Maybe they can come up with a way to bring the tribes together so everyone can live happily ever after.

Whatever else you do in this regard to side missions, make the mine owners demanding, but fair, and make the on-site operations director a bit of irritating ass willing to blame the PCs for everything that goes wrong.

STORY SEED 2 – FUEL FOR THE GLAX

Fuel for starships is big money, with every aspect of it represents a huge investment. From skimming craft, to powered fuel processing, to storage and all of it requiring crew and a lot of man hours to run and maintain. Thus it also attracts every kind of subterfuge and skulduggery.

The fuel station, known as “Glax” by those that are familiar with it, is a fuel processing and filling space station positioned above the ecliptic of its home system very close to one of the common jump points. By placing itself so far out, it avoids orbit fees and is the fuel station of choice for people passing through the system as no time is lost diving into the gravity well just to collect fuel. The station is part of a large operation that collects raw fuel from the local gas giant and processes it for sale.

There are three parts to the operation. At the gas giant a skimming operation collects raw fuel and pumps it into cargo pods which are then fired on a slow ballistic trajectory towards Glax. Each pod runs a small processing plant that spends the six month journey from the gas giant to the station slowly

processing the fuel. The second part of the operation collects the pods at the end of their journey and tugs them to the station. The final part is of course the station itself where ships can dock, fuel-up, and purchase overpriced snacks.

The problem that the PCs need to solve for the owners of Glax, is that the fuel is being sabotaged. At this point they don't know where it's being done, at the source, on the journey, or at Glax itself. They want the person or people responsible. System checks on all of the equipment have returned negative, so it must be someone inside interfering.

At the source of the fuel the operation is run rather like a oil well. Hard non-nonsense men doing hard work. They are all under daily pressure to get the raw fuel compressed, packaged and pushed off towards Glax. There's no time to deal with nosey investigators, they all have hard to reach quotas to fill.

At Glax, the capture crews that collect the pods and take them to the station are likewise under pressure. If they miss a single pod or waste any time they all lose bonuses. Likewise the crews that service the customer's ships are always in a hurry.

One possible cause for complaint from the workforce was a change to pay rates eight months ago. They were changed from hourly rates to entirely bonus, meaning they can end up working for nothing, or for very high rates. Unfortunately any breakdown in the equipment can lead to a loss of bonus, it has happened a couple of times, and it makes everyone very angry.

The planetary starport has lost a lot of trade since Glax started up. The crews that used to come in to the station and stay a while spending their credits, no longer bother. This has made some very powerful people rather angry at what they perceive as unfair competition.

Is someone dropping an additive contaminant into the fuel at the gas giant, or interfering with the pods in transit, where they are completely alone and vulnerable. Or is it happening on Glax

itself? Is someone contaminating the fuel tanks or injecting something into the pipes when a ship is being fuelled?

STORY SEED 3 – VARGRTOWN

Vargrtown is the common name for a relatively small area in the city of Neo-Sandun. Vargrtown got its name for the number of Vargr that live in that area, a strange situation in Imperial space. The planet itself is in human space and the city of Neo-Sandun a human habitation. The city is enclosed in a dome as the planet's atmosphere is unbreathable.

The Vargr community are the descendants of a small fleet of vargr freebooters who were cornered by the navy and marooned on this planet amongst the very people they had been raiding. That however was a number of generations ago and things are pretty normalised now.

In addition to those original free-booter crews other Vargr from nearby systems have tended to find their way to vargrtown so as to be amongst their own kind.

The community is not a run-down area, but nor is it a well-to-do. There is pretty much full employment and the Vargr embrace the curiosity of their human neighbours and run a number of tourist businesses, including a well known and well loved brand of plush soft toy Vargr called Vargr babies. Like most societies there is a darker underbelly of illegal activity, including some pit fighting between Vargr and human opponents.

There are many domes on the world other than Neo-Sandun, most of them run by independent farmers, raising the Julehard beasts that are kept for their fur and meat. Many of the farmers use dogs to help keep control of their Julehard, and of course that need for dogs has caused the business of puppy farming to appear in one of the domes.

Kile Pointoo is such a puppy farmer, and he is the one who is

looking for someone to guard his dome-farm and find those responsible for the recent raid.

A few days ago someone broke into his dome and stole all of his breeding animals, some of which were extremely valuable. The poor quality security camera in the public airlock showed some vacc-suited individuals entering the lock before they covered the camera. From studying the few seconds of video, Kile is convinced that at least one of the vacs suits had a tail, so he's sure that the raiders were Vargr.

It seems that Kile has recently had some bad press when a worker secretly took footage of him throwing a new born malformed pup into a recycler. Although unpleasant, this action was not illegal. However it did create a lot of outrage in the press. There are a number of possible people responsible for the raid.

There have been some articles in the press where Vargr representatives have said that they morally object to the use of dogs as slaves. Animal rights activists appeared in the press objecting to the concept of a puppy farm. Angry individuals have appeared on the vid channels ranting and making threats against Kile.

Kile is also recently divorced and the split has been acrimonious. His wife was a full working partner in the farm so she would know how to establish a new farm and make use of the missing animals.

STORY SEED 4 – THE MISSING VICTIM

The party come into contact with Sameon Justtak who is in trouble and needs help. Depending on your party how you get in touch with him will vary, perhaps he's a rich executive coming to the PCs with a bounty, or maybe he's a factory manager crying into his beer in the local pub. Whatever method you use, he should be upset and desperate.

The story he tells is simple. He'd suspected his wife, Diane, was having an affair. One day he returned home and found his wife in a smoochy hug with his brother "Harten". He was furious, there was a shouting match, blows were swapped. Sameon reached into the kitchen draw where they kept a snub pistol for home defence (a relic of Sameon's service in the Navy) and shot his brother. His brother dropped dead to the floor. Angry and upset Sameon fled the house and walked through a park thinking furiously. When he had calmed down he returned home and called the police intending to give himself up. When the police turned up and he took them through to the kitchen, there was no body and his wife said no such killing had taken place.

The police charged him for wasting their time. His wife has called social services thinking he needs to be taken in to psychiatric care.

The truth that needs to be discovered by the players, is that Diane and Harten are having an affair, and Harten is not dead, or even injured. The confrontation was planned by the pair of them and she had swapped the bullets in the snub pistol for blanks. They plan to get Sameon committed for insanity, at which point she will take control of his inheritance or business and have a very nice life with his brother Harten.

While the players are investigating, the lovers will set up events around Sameon trying to upset his mental balance. Silly things will be done, such as his car keys being moved into different rooms. Digital documents he's written will be deleted. He'll get replies to communications he never made. Goods and services he never requested will be delivered, and all of these things will be organised by Diane or Hartan in his name.

Here are some further suggestions.

The cops are reluctant to get involved in what they perceive as a social issue, they don't want to waste any more time and will be aggressive if they are drawn in.

Diane and Harten can try and repeat the whole murder scene.

Sameon has a business partner that is in on the scam being run by the lovers.

If the PCs start to uncover the plot, then one or more of them might be the victim in an attempted hit and run, or even a shooting. Perhaps Harten will pay a thug to put pressure on the PCs to leave well alone.

STORY SEED 5 – HIGH TENSION SAFARI

The party are hired-on as escorts, drivers, beaters and general handymen on a safari to take place on an untamed world. The man paying the bills is Youtid Towski, a very rich individual who wants to take some trophy heads from the large fauna on the planet Theengullan. As well as the PCs there will be a number of non-player characters going along on the safari, including a long time friend and army buddy of Youtid, his wife, his secretary/lover, and his legal advisor who is also a good friend.

The kicker, is that Youtid has brought some problems along with him, dangerous problems, that he will have to survive if the PCs want to get paid. For instance, there are the relationships between Youtid, his wife, and his lover that may blow up into a jealous rage at any moment.

Youtid is not a pleasant man, he is brusque and rude to employees, and anyone of the employees brought along on this trip may have grievances. Are they practically indentured servants, longing for freedom, and additionally he recently cut their wages?

The legal advisor has a secret that may boil into violence. He was charged with crafting Youtid's Will a few months ago. Youtid's wife does not know that she has no part in the will, that the majority of his estate has been granted to his lover. An additional problem here is that the legal advisor has a soft spot for the lover himself. He's also not particularly honest, when he

crafted the will, he made a more than generous allowance to himself. With his large debts, coming into that money round about now would be pretty handy. Perhaps he might make a violent attack himself, or pay one of the other crew members, or even hire mercenaries to make a raid against the safari party.

Will the oxygen on board the ship be sabotaged, what about the bullets for the hunting rifles? Will a subtle alteration be made in the navigational software?

Additionally there are a great many large animals on Theengullan that will challenge the hunter, including a number of Pouncers that have valuable skins, and a number of semi aquatic marsh lurkers. Any of these creatures may present a real and present danger to the patron. Maybe one of the creatures will start hunting the hunter.

STORY SEED 6 – GET THE MESSAGE OUT

Lord Itheeka is of noble birth and an accomplished scientist. He and his family are not rich, not having any great fortune to hand down to heirs, but he is comfortably well-off because of the success of his scientific work.

His claim to fame is the invention of a drug called Crystinopollo that has the power to revolutionise human society galaxy wide, as it has on his homeworld. Crystinopollo allows the person taking it to simply not feel the need to go to sleep. People are able to take the drug for up to a fortnight. This allows them to work for up to three times as many hours during that period. This has made employers and employed happy and productivity to increase dramatically.

Unfortunately there is a serious side effect. There is a relatively low chance that individuals who take the drug on a regular basis can develop a psychosis that leads to extremely violent behaviour. Lord Itheeka is fully aware of this and has been trying for months to stop the drug being used.

Chemical-Inducements-Inc have been trying to placate Itheeka and prevent him from going to the press with this information as they're making a tremendous amount from its sale. Starting with a gentle cajoling and promises that they would tell the world, the relationship between the company and Itheeka started breaking down. As he realised that they had no intention of warning the world he has become more and more outraged until he found himself under a corporate house arrest.

This is where the PCs come in. They might be friends of Itheeka, or he might hire them to spirit him away from under the thumb of Chemical-Inducements-Inc. He is desperate to get the word out via the news channels or the press, but Chemical-Inducements-Inc have operatives everywhere. They also have men in the local police, meaning the PCs will have no one they can trust. Don't tell the players this up front let them discover it through play.

You'll be able to have any number of chases, maybe even a jailbreak if the company choose to levy some trumped up charges against Itheeka that get him incarcerated.

Itheeka isn't just looking to get away, he wants to go public. He can't just post a message on a message board and hope people read it, he needs to get onto some sort of world-wide media and broadcast his warning. You might achieve this by getting him in to see the CEO of a media outlet and convince him to help or even hack into a satellite network and transmit his own message to the world.

There are any number of problems you can throw at the players to keep things interesting. Are local enforcers, the police, or even a military hit team sent after the scientist. Other people might be after him, perhaps other companies who want to monopolise his brain. Does he have family that might be kidnapped in an attempt to leverage him. Does he have any other cool drugs in the pipeline, is he still working on a cure for

the problems the drug has brought on?

STORY SEED 7 – KEEP MY BOY SAFE

The PCs are approached by a well-off patron who wants to keep his son safe from kidnapers. The country they reside in is fairly wild with kidnapping for ransom a common occurrence.

The son is a rebellious brat in the later years of teenagehood who is not interested in anything except hedonistic pursuits. He goes to college because his father has threatened to cut him off from funds, not because he wants to learn anything. This young man also rejects the oversight of a bodyguard or chaperone and when one is allocated to him, he tends to give them the slip and disappear leaving his parents frightened and worried.

The father wants the PCs to keep an eye on him during the last week of college, known locally as "party season". The PCs are commissioned to keep a close eye on him, to know where he is at all times and protect him from danger or self harm. How the PCs do this is up to them, but the youth will reject their presence if he discovers them or realises they are working for his father. Thus they might try to befriend him, become a part of his social group, or mount a stand off surveillance.

The target will not be an easy person to get along with. He is often rude and abrasive not caring for others feelings. This means that he often finds himself at loggerheads with strangers and in positions that could easily lead to fights.

To aggravate things, he is a secret base jumper, illegally leaping off standing structures wearing a flying suit. He has a small group of associates who all engage in this hobby and they will be resistant and suspicious of any new comers.

There are quite a few opportunities here for the players to have fun. If they become a part of the base jumping group they could find themselves in trouble with the law. If the target

blows their cover he'll actively try to escape them. The whole scenario might be played as an undercover surveillance job. Kidnappers can appear at any time, perhaps one of the base-jumping crowd is in league with kidnappers who'll make a mid-air snatch of the target.

The father figure could be a legitimate businessman genuinely worried for his son or he could be behind the kidnapping. Imagine that he wants to split from his wife but doesn't want her to get half his money. He organises the kidnapping pays all his worldly goods to the kidnappers who are really just a shell company that he owns through an offshore arrangement. Then his son is returned. He splits penniless from his wife and then takes back possession of the shell company.

STORY SEED 8 – BUILDING THE SUN

A patron approaches the PCs wanting a little investigation work done on the third moon of an in-system planet. The patron owns the mining operation that's taking place on the moon and has had some strange acts of sabotage that he'd like investigated.

The mine has had a number of accidents in the last few years but the ones that caused concern involved people in vacsuits on the surface working on maintaining the facilities. A number of such accidents are expected but of late the work force have become concerned and there have been walk-outs and strikes over the issue. In order to placate the work force he has authorised the erection of a number of sun-towers. Each sun tower is a fifty meter tall steel construction mounting a number of daylight-bright lights designed to illuminate the ground around the mine thereby making the environment safer. Only the erection of the towers has been plagued by sabotage and its this that the patron initially wants investigated and stopped.

The reason for the sabotage is that amongst the workers is a secret cabal that are making a fortune on side work. They have

found a mineral pocket on the moon packed with extremely rare Duodaedium crystals. A single low quality crystal can be worth over a thousand credits. This pocket of crystals is located in a small crater just outside the mining area and if the company discovers its existence they'll lay claim to it. So members of the cabal are slowly excavating and smuggling the crystals off the moon. Unfortunately for these smugglers other miners keep discovering the secret operation and they have to be disposed of. Hence the high number of vaccsuit accidents.

Additionally, the erection of the sun-towers will throw the existence of this secret operation into stark relief. It'll be discovered by someone seeing the operation from the mine or the from a shuttle flying in to land. Thus there have been a large number of "accidents".

The people involved in the cabal includes a few of the actual miners who work the face, but has grown to include a few overseers, one or two in middle management and a single executive. Of these everyone not directly involved in digging up the crystals is either part of the smuggling side of things or taking a graft from those that do.

The buyers of the crystals include a number of underworld groups who would also be most unhappy if the source of the crystals dried up. They have made their own efforts to ensure the flow of crystals continues including holding a few family members hostage (or so they claim). Anyone trying to interfere with the operation had best not have any family on a nearby world.

STORY SEED 9 – SCIENTISTS RULE

The planet Pilander has recently had a revolution. The revolution started a few years ago and at its core was a collection of scientists tired with the constant anti-science stance of the ruling global government. The government enforced a number of religious strictures that prohibited certain

areas of research. Not only that, but a number of discoveries and developments that could have improved the situation of the common man, were banned with those involved in the work being unjustly imprisoned with the retro application of new laws.

Thus a revolution led by scientists started and eventually overthrew the religious government replacing it with what many are now saying is an even worse situation. The new governance is strictly science based and this means that anything that causes harm is banned, anything that inhibits rationality is banned, anything that the rulers consider too dangerous is also banned.

This of course means that many of the drinks that were previously enjoyed have been banned. This is where the PCs come into the picture. The expensive and exclusive Hotel Varsius close to the planet's main starport has the sort of clientèle that are able to pay for off-world products, even prohibited goods.

The manager of the hotel is willing to pay for crates of various drinks and even has a contact off world that can supply them. The manager is not only supplying clients of the hotel but to help finance the purchase has linked himself to an underworld criminal that wants to shift a few hundred crates himself.

The PCs could make a lot of money if they can get the goods into the hands of the manager and the criminal. Unfortunately the manager of the hotel has become suspicious of some of his guests and believes that one or two of them may be police plants.

When the PCs arrive on planet he will ask for them to investigate the suspected plants, they will be able to discover that one of them is indeed a police plant. The other is innocent of being a plant, but is an ex-doctor who recently murdered his wife and hid her inheritance. The police plant is here to watch the doctor as they want to discover where all of the money has

gone. Of course the police man will report any illegal activity he comes across.

The criminal who is also waiting for the goods will be rather put-out by the delay in the delivery schedule caused by the investigation and he will start pushing the PCs and the manager to make the delivery, this could easily escalate to a raid on the PCs ship.

STORY SEED 10 – BLASTED TOURISTS!

Duo Floret is a man in his mid twenties. He has never worked a day in his life because he is the son of a powerful and immensely rich politician who's the power behind the throne of an Imperial sub sector capital. He has acquired a desire, almost a need, to travel the Imperium and experience it as normal people do. He has done the tourist thing to death and tired of it. Now he wants to see how normal people live and of course he'll need bodyguards and tour guides, and that's where the PCs come into the picture.

Duo is rather introvert, not good at socialising and tends to rub people up the wrong way because he is simply ignorant of other peoples motivations. He also hasn't reached that level of maturity where he can foresee danger to himself. Rather like a teenager he thinks he'll live forever and nothing can hurt him.

But now in his drive to try what he call "authentic life" he has packed his grav trunk and intends to make the most of his time. Unfortunately for his body guards and guides he's going to get into a lot of trouble and they need to keep him safe.

If there's a bar fight, he wants to stand in the middle of it, even throw a bottle or two at the participants so he can get the "authentic" feel of the thing.

If there's a seedy dive full of cut throats and mafia he'll walk in and start loudly asking them what it's like to be a criminal.

In dodgy neighbourhoods he'll take out his wallet display wads of cash and ask a stranger to "run along to a store and purchase me a sandwich my good man".

On a train he'll decide he needs a nap and insist that everyone be moved out of his carriage.

He'll treat the captain of a space going liner like his personal chauffeur, perhaps insisting that he fly closer to the black hole so he can get a really good look.

The PC's will struggle to keep him safe and cover-up any of his indiscretions for a month or so. The rewards for them should be simply-ok, not too much, but they will be able to fleece him of much more cash during the time they're keeping him safe. Of course if he is hurt or worse, then the PCs will have a very powerful enemy in the form of his father.

10 Creatures

In this section I present ten of the alien animals that can be found around the Imperium. Each is designed with the idea that they can form the core of an encounter or scenario. They're not linked to any particular location from the canon so you can use them as required.

CREATURE 1 – FLUFFTER

The Fluffter is a carefully bred pet animal that has spread across the full reach of the Imperium. It is a small quadrupedal rodent. There are many breeds of the animal in varying colours. This colour variation is purely cosmetic and not a survival trait. Indeed it has been suggested that the Fluffter would not be capable of surviving in the wild, but more of that shortly.

A fully grown adult Fluffter is no more than six inches long in the body, although its furry tail can add up to three additional inches. It has teeth and claws but represents no threat to a human. It is omnivorous but its meat eating is restricted to small insects rather than meat.

The original world on which the Fluffter was found has long been lost in human history but it can now be found right across the Imperium. Its natural habitat as such, is in a cage, that is to say it is entirely bred as a pet with a special aptitude to space travel. The Fluffter is often kept by those that travel the vacuum for a living, providing friendship, amusement, and company to those in transit between systems.

As a pet the Fluffter is exemplary. It is quiet, takes up very little space and its dietary and hygiene needs are minimal. It is diurnal, and active for much of its waking hours. They are easy to handle and rarely bite.

They are allowed in limited numbers aboard many navy

vessels at the discretion of the ships Captain and even some X-boat pilots have been known to sneak a Fluffter aboard.

The reasons the Fluffter is allowed this special dispensation are that they were bred for the purpose, and they find a particular high pitched sound irresistible. Thus should the animal escape its cage, it can be quickly recaptured and returned to captivity.

It has been commonly thought that the Fluffter could not survive on any planet in the wild, and indeed many experiments at introducing them have repeatedly failed. However on one planet they do live in the wild. The planet Ithniane is currently undergoing a terraforming process, and already has the lower forms of edible flora taking a foothold along with the necessary insecticide life. During a visit by an imperial ship one of the crew released a number of Fluffters to see what would happen. This was not part of the terraforming program nor even an Imperial experiment but rather, the curiosity of a private individual.

When the same ship returned a year later for official inspection they discovered that the Fluffters had survived, even bred. Although many generations of Fluffter must have come and gone while the ship was away, they showed no natural fear of humans or human equipment. A tertiary study was made and it was discovered that the Fluffters were living on a predominant insectoid diet and in the absence of any natural predator were able to survive and even do well. The study of this Fluffter colony is now a matter of official process. However the records show that the colony may have retarded the terraforming process by a number of years and so after the completion of a five year study it is planned to exterminate the unusual colony.

CREATURE 2 – OUPILANDER

The Oupilander is considered one of the ugliest fish in existence not only by the people on its home world but by an actual vote within the subsector, a vote funded by a media

company promoting their product. Every aspect of the animal seems designed to be unpleasant to human perception. It does not have any symmetry along or across its body. It does not have eyes, but does have feeding organs so positioned to appear as eyes. Yet the oozing nature of the organs is revolting to see. It is not smooth skinned as are most aquatic animals. Although some of its surface is smooth, much of its surface appears to be rotting and flaking. This however is its natural state. It has a symbiotic relationship with a microbe that causes this effect, and the Oupilander breathes through this flaking skin. The beast also has a number of tentacles spread across its body varying in number from five to ten. Individual Oupilanders seem to be able to grow and discard tentacles as needed. These tentacles can be as long as eighteen inches and serve a number of purposes. Noted purposes for them include insemination, tasting, defence, and most surprising tool use.

Until recently the Oupilander was treated as a trash-fish by fishermen. If caught they were simply cut up for bait or thrown back into the water. People were reluctant to eat its greasy meat and its look did not work as an appetiser. This changed about ten years ago when the son of a fisherman asked to keep a mistakenly captured Oupilander as a pet. The creature was placed in a household tank despite the remonstrances of the child's mother. The child noted how the fish could use some of its tentacles to move objects in its tank, but it was actually something more than just searching for food.

The fish was actually building a small cave out of the stones in its tank. This behaviour has since been recognised as a hunting technique. The Oupilander in the wild build a line of similar caves which attract small crustations into its depths. Much like a human trapper, following a trap line in the woods, the Oupilander operates a line of such caves.

This behaviour was curious to the child but when the fish grabbed one stone and used it to split another stone, actually shaping the stone for the purposes of building, the child

realised he had discovered something special. When the story made it into the local press it exploded across the planetary scientific journals with headlines proclaiming an intelligent fish had been found.

Research was immediately started and it was discovered that the fish was indeed intelligent. Not human level intelligent but certainly clever enough to understand and follow a small number of commands. Training of Oupilander became quite a craze for a while. On its homeworld the animal is now trained and used in a number of aquatic roles. Fisherman use it to protect traps, tidal engineers use it to watch and even maintain some parts of their equipment. Sub surface explorers use it to carry cameras into cave systems, and the military even use it for a number of unrevealed purposes.

CREATURE 3 – KILLEROOM

A common name for this animal is the “killeroom” derived from killer-mushroom. It’s an apt name for such a strange creature that does indeed look like a mushroom and that kills hundreds of people every year. Unlike some other mushrooms, it’s not through eating the killeroom that people die, it’s the other way around.

Like many life forms the killeroom has a number of stages and a number of forms that it passes through. It starts as an airborne spore, settles like a seed, spreads and grows like a mycelium but from that point it starts to become unusual. When conditions are suitable the life form sprouts what appears to be a normal fungal fruiting body, it’s grey, roughly spherical and a half inch in diameter. This however is merely the next phase of its life. The sphere sprouts tendrils which it uses to move. The round body pops free of the stem and using the tendrils the sphere rolls itself across the ground and more surprisingly is capable of climbing over even vertical surfaces.

In the wild the killeroom seeks out any static animal. Any

sleeping or hibernating animal is a suitable candidate and when one is found the tendrils change from being a form of locomotion to being a way of pushing a type of spore into the sleeping animal. The injected spore grows rapidly through a series of root like growths that push between the host's cells. The roots grow rapidly often able to completely pass throughout a small animal within half an hour. These roots then start feeding on the animal. The result is a mushroom like growth sometimes many inches across forming on the animals skin. Within twenty four hours this mushroom will grow up to six inches in height before blossoming and throwing out a whole new generation of airborne spores.

On its home world the killeroom has a very bad reputation amongst the populous, but is considered fascinating by the scientific community. The reason for the killeroom's bad reputation is the number of human deaths it causes yearly. The mobile portion of its lifecycle has repeatedly brought it into contact with sleeping individuals. Campers, people sleeping outside and even some young children have become infested by the killeroom. For adults this is most often non lethal, but for smaller children it can easily be fatal as their systems become quickly overwhelmed.

Remote properties often erect small electric fences or laser zappers to keep killeroom away, and those sleeping out of doors should take precautions to keep themselves safe from this little beast.

The export of the Killeroom and its spores is strictly prohibited under the imperial dangerous native species control orders.

CREATURE 4 – BURPING DRAGON

The Burping Dragon is a hexopedal hard skinned animal that weighs up to two hundred pounds when full grown. Its most striking feature is the middle pair of limbs which oppose the

other legs by rising from the animals long back. These limbs are linked to large flaps of skin that reach back to the base of the tail. These act as residual wings which are used in mating displays and as a partial air-braking mechanism when the animal drops from tree tops and rocky heights.

Normally the Dragon walks on four legs but is capable of standing and walking on its rear legs for short distances. When threatened the Dragon often rears onto its rear pair of legs and spreads its wings to create an intimidating spectacle.

The Dragon is fast and uses this speed to run down prey. Normally it restricts this hunting to smaller prey of ten pounds or less. However if hungry it has been known to attack much large animals. Its serrated beak is quite capable of tearing the flesh from larger animals as well as masticating its more normal prey animals.

When threatened by the larger animals of its home world the Burping Dragon lives up to its name and expels a very unpleasant vapour from special sacks within it's nostrils. This vapour is visible and expelled with an audible pop. The smell of the vapour is revolting to all native animals including other Burping Dragons, but smells sweet to humans. However you should not breathe the vapour as it is toxic and can cause damage to lungs.

Normally a Burping Dragon is not a threat to humans but if injured or trapped they can become very dangers. The beak, the burp, and the claws are all dangerous.

CREATURE 5 – BED BUDDIES

On the planet of Chiast was a generally peaceful species of monkey-like bipedal ground-living mammals. They were commonly called "bed buddies" because of the way they communally slept in group nests. I say "were" because this is not a name that is used to refer to them any longer.

The "bed buddies" were most often likened to the common monkey, except hairless and with a lizard-like face. Like Monkeys they had prehensile hands, feet, and a strong tail that they used for gripping. As already hinted at they were actively communal and showed a high-animal level of intelligence. They lived in packs roaming the open veld by day and taking to the short forest-like spinneys that dotted the veld at night.

The native bed buddies however, no longer exist. Colonists took to bed buddies early on as pets, and soon moved to training them for simple tasks around their homes and on their farms. This in turn led to a process of intensive deliberate selective breeding that quickly twisted the species from its native path. The result was a larger animal with an increased brain capacity and greater intelligence. It also changed them from being predominantly vegetable consuming and opportunistic scavengers, to predominant meat eaters.

When the inevitable escapes took place and the new breed of "Bed Buddies" reached the wild populations, they quickly became dominant and started out competing their wild cousins which led inevitably to their disappearance from Chiast. Some small populations exist on human controlled preserves and within the managed pet-breeding businesses, but the wild bed buddies no longer exist.

The new breed have become a nuisance and a danger to the populations food supply. They are commonly referred to as "buzzards" which is itself a derivation of a local expletive. The buzzards new aggressive nature has led it leave the homeland veld and encroach upon human farmed land, even to the point of hunting human food animals. Any animal of 15kg or less can be a target for hunting buzzards. Their intelligence means that they are able to cross any normal obstacle that have not been specifically designed to prevent buzzards using them. Heavy bars and staples have been found to be effective. Although the buzzards work as a group when hunting, they do not cooperate on individual tasks, thus a single heavy bar can keep them in

out. On the open plains it has been necessary to install tall electrified fences in order to keep out the buzzards. Although there have been some unsubstantiated reports of the buzzards digging under the fences.

There have not been any reported deaths from buzzard attack, but a number of injuries from claw and bite are reported every week, and many flocks of food animals wiped out. The local population have instigated weekly buzzard hunts to control the numbers and this does appear to have caused the population to shrink. However, some have noted that the buzzards are now spreading across the planet's single continent away from the human population centres, thus moving into territories that have never been home to the bed buddies.

CREATURE 6 – SPIT CAT

The Spit-cat is an arboreal mammal that can be found on many terranic-like planets. It has managed to spread around the galaxy partially because it is a versatile omnivore, but mostly because it is cute. At least, to many humans it appears cute.

This animal's home world includes many types of terrain, of which the following categories are inhabited by spit-cats. Mountains, forest, scrub, and sea shore. These are the natural habitats, but as has been proved on a number of worlds the animal is very adaptable and has taken up residence in many unexpected locations.

A full grown spit-cat can weigh as much as eight pounds or as little as four. It is a quadruped, covered in scales with each scale being fringed with hair, giving the animal a soft downy look. It has four legs, two prehensile tails that emanate one from either end of its spine. With small protruding eyes and large pointed ears the animal is considered cute by many, with the only detracting feature being the end of its snout which gives the cat its name.

Pouches in the animal's neck collect a mildly acidic fluid. As a defence mechanism muscles can squeeze these pouches and force the liquid under pressure up through a channel in the skull and along a bony tube that extends to the end of its snout. This liquid is capable of hitting a target up to three yards away with a stinging spray. The bony tube is covered by a sphincter but in older animals the strength of this tends to weaken and leads to a slow but constant dripping that the spit-cat will shake its head to try and relieve giving the impression that it is sneezing. Many find this adorable and it often excites the mothering instinct in humans.

The spit-cat is an efficient hunter of small game. Its ability to climb near sheer surfaces and to leap to more than four times its own height mean it can seek game in the air and on the ground. Domesticated spit-cats can be fed on dead or processed food stuffs, but they prefer live food. This has led to a lot of owners using a process called "playing-bait" where by the processed food is tossed or kicked around in play with the spit cat until it is excited enough to consume the dead food. On some worlds the provision of live foods for spit-cats has become an secondary pet industry.

Although spit-cats can not be trained in any significant way, they have been used in many locations as a vermin hunter. For instance on the world Giast many of the starport warehouses have their own semi-domesticated spit-cats which are encouraged to hunt the local vampiric insects that cause such a headache for the inhabitants and visitors.

Wild spit-cats are not usually a danger to humans. As a rule they attempt to avoid and escape from humans, however if they turn at bay, you should stay out of range of the animals spitting attack. Although not particularly acidic if the spit gets into the eyes it can be extremely uncomfortable and there is a good chance of infection. The bite and claws can very nasty but are easily avoided as thick cloth can block both.

CREATURE 7 – ITHINAR

A centuries long breeding program has increased the intelligence and size of the Ithinar. In its wild undomesticated state it's considered a pest, but early settlers saw some potential in this beast.

The Ithinar is insectoid in appearance yet is not an insect, but rather an armoured mammal. It moves on eight pairs of legs and has a segmented appearance along its body. The insectoid appearance is reinforced by the structure of its head. It has ears but they are recessed, it has a pair of small eyes that at first glance are overlooked, but the reason it is mistaken for an insectoid are the two large bulbous bony protuberances on its upper head that look like faceted eyes. These bulbs are used for butting heads with others of its race.

The domesticated Ithinar is roughly twice the size of its wild cousin and is easily familiarised to human contact. The animal has been domesticated for a number of purposes including as a beast of burden and for drawing vehicles, although this is only done in the poorer circles of society on its home world. It is used as a riding beast in the higher circles of society with particular skin colours being preferred and focused on when breeding couples are joined.

There are two downsides to the keeping and use of Ithinar. The first is a periodic event that happens on an irregular prime number based yearly cycle. During this period all wild and domesticated Ithinar strive to climb to higher ground. In the wild the beasts climb mountains, domesticated animals will climb whatever their constraints allow them to. Trees, buildings, even vehicles. In towns and cities this can be quite destructive to property.

Why this need to climb exists is a mystery at present. Some theorise that it may be down to some past cyclical event, that no longer takes place, such as an infestation of some sort, that

could be avoided by climbing mountains. Whatever the cause, it's no longer apparent. Any Ithinar that is penned during such an event and unable to reach a high point becomes extremely agitated and often violent.

To deal with this unpredictable behaviour it is normal practice to always have a highpoint, such as tree or man-made tower in an Ithinar paddock.

The Ithinar also has a rather unfortunate and unpleasant breeding cycle. They hatch a brood of between five and ten babies within their bodies and the parent dies as part of the birthing process becoming food for the young. As an Ithinar can live for upwards of twenty years it is normal to prevent domesticated individuals from breeding at all. Special brood strains are kept for the purpose of keeping society supplied. The birthing process is unpleasant and owners find the whole thing distasteful.

CREATURE 8 – TITHILLIAN GHOST

The Tithillian Ghost is a unique creature that has become a creature of legend. The idea of the existence of ghosts has been a constant human cultural meme since the beginning of time. Yet only on Tithillian can people see ghosts on a daily basis. Not real human spirits of course, but rather a creature that is so similar to the perception of ghosts that it immediately appropriated the name when it was discovered.

The Ghosts are native to Tithillian and were there long before humans first discovered the planet. The slow process of transforming the atmosphere to fully human breathable does not appear to have affected the creatures at all.

The typical Ghost weighs no more than a few grams, is extremely thin and all but completely transparent. When describing a Ghost it sounds almost comical but this is the reason they acquired the name. Their outline when seen from

the front is that of a man with arms stretched out sideways and covered with a sheet.

They hunt only at night feasting on a tiny moth. They are only seen out and about during the hours of darkness. When the sun sets a ghost unrolls itself from its daytime hibernation during which it looks like a tiny grain of sand. It raises itself like a sail and catches the evening winds and commences drifting and catching its prey.

The tissue of the Ghost acts rather like a spiders web. It is not sticky like a spider but it is sensitive. When a moth touches the surface the Ghost contracts a part of itself around the moth and sinks to the ground to digest it's meal. Anything larger than the moth tends to tear through the tissue of the creature leaving a ragged hole. A single Ghost is likely to have many such holes or even to have entire sections missing.

Studies have shown that segments torn from a Ghost can often continue to live and as no method of breeding has been observed it's been theorised that the creature reproduces in this way.

It's motive power is limited and very dependent on atmospheric activity. However it is capable of transiting horizontally and vertically by a slow undulation of its entire body. They have never been seen above tree top level except in extreme weather conditions, and then rarely. A study has shown that when weather becomes inclement Ghosts tend to try to hibernate. The current theory is that when a ghost is seen at higher levels it is because it was caught by a sudden gust. before it could collapse itself.

There have never been any reported deaths caused by Ghosts. People frequently walk through or drive through creatures with no ill effects to themselves.

CREATURE 9 – DEATH NET

In the mercurial seas of Thiandus there are many strange and unique animals living in the toxic lakes that form the planets only liquid bodies. One in particular has come to the notice of the planet's human occupants.

The locals somewhat dramatically call the creature "Death net", because it has caused so many deaths over the years. The death net as the name suggests looks like somewhat like a net. They vary in size from a few inches across to hundreds of yards.

The appearance of a net is based on the basic building block of the creature, being a series of yellow rings each just a few inches across. Each ring starts as a hard cased egg no more than an eighth of an inch across. This then hatches into a single ring about an inch across.

The new born rings live and grow during a solitary life living on the smaller animals they drift into. Once they reach a few inches across they start looking for other rings and join to them creating large frameworks that resemble the net that gave them the name.

The early settlers of Thiandus were mining the mercury for the small krill-like animals that teemed in the liquid and these fishermen were subject to inexplicable disappearances. Vessels would disappear, or be found with the crew missing and it was a few years before the death nets were discovered as the culprits.

What was happening was that the boat would run into a death net, and the net which lived by engulfing its prey, would start slowly climbing up over the boat, capture the crew and drag them beneath the surface to drown and be consumed.

Each ring is covered with barely visible sticky-ended feet that allow it to grab hold of prey, or in this case a boat, and slowly walk itself over the prey until it is completely engulfed. Once

engulfed the rings contract until the prey is crushed and it is subsequently consumed.

As humans were alien to Thiandus the death nets did not realise that humans were toxic, thus every time a human was taken the death net would poison itself.

Many of the larger death nets have been found with large ragged holes, and it's theorised that this may represent either the death of individual rings, damage from predator attacks, or evidence of poisoning by a meal of human at some time in the past.

The mining vessels on Thiandus are now fitted with special hulls that can be charged with static electricity which has been found very efficient at throwing off death net attacks.

CREATURE 10 – T'ARK

The T'ark is pretty much hated by everyone on its home world of Selaine. The planet was discovered and declared human-habitable without any terra forming being required. It had a vast and active eco-system that had given rise to millions of life forms on land in the sea and the air. The farming communities set up to support the corporate factories have a particular and enduring hatred of the T'ark.

The T'ark is a semi quadruped that predominantly uses its rear legs to hop and its forelegs for balance and manipulation. It's body is dark green striped with lighter green, has a hard shiny carapace and looks to most people like an insect. It weighs about one hundred and twenty pounds when full grown, most of this weight being made up of its hard shell.

It does not have a definable head, rather it has a mouth at the front recessed into the carapace. The mouth is surrounded by small tentacles on the end of which are various taste and sense organs. It's vision apparatus is made up of a network of translucent rigid bubbles in its shell. There are usually

seventeen of these vision bubbles scattered across the back of its shell giving it very acute three-sixty degree vision. It sees in visible and infra-red spectrums.

Its strong rear legs allow it to jump considerable distances and over obstacles. Farmers estimate that only way to keep T'ark out is a fifteen foot electrified fence. Fifteen feet to ensure it can not jump over, and electrified to prevent it from attempting to batter its way through.

Although they do not tend to travel in packs, during the four annual mating seasons they congregate into massive packs that are a grave danger to any that approach. During these meetings local food supplies are often consumed quickly and the T'arks will attack anything when hungry.

The reason for the farmers hatred of the creature is that if one of them gets within grazing fields the creature will attack cattle, often killing an entire herd. In these circumstances the T'ark claims the territory which it has found rich in food, and can not be driven or scared away. In these cases the farmers have to kill the T'ark to reclaim the field.

The tough carapace means killing them is difficult. Only a straight shot into one of its few soft spots is likely to injure a T'ark. A number of shots are usually required to bring the creature down. Due to their high speed and aggressiveness shooting one is a dangerous proposition. Thus a few individuals have started offering T'ark elimination services using some very expensive and licensed military hardware.

10 People of Interest

What's your game universe without interesting people to populate it? Pretty bland, I guess. Well, here are ten people that have something to make them interesting. You could drop the character into your game as an NPC or have an NPC tell the story as an adventure hook.

PERSON 1 – JOSH SYNTHANA

Josh Synthana is an author, or rather that is what he describes himself as, other people use a plethora of descriptions. What is certain is that he has written a lot of fiction, and has two separate story series published under his name. Although he had some mild success with those writings it was one particular book that sprung him to fame.

His book "Yakault's Tale" purported to be a story about the rise to power of a barbarian princess with a ruthless streak that left a trail of dead in her wake. However the book is not looked at as fiction any longer but almost as a religious text book.

When the story was published one reviewer noted how the death of one of the antagonists mirrored the death of a real world politician. The story written six months prior to the politician's death did indeed carry many similar circumstances. The press coverage lead to the book becoming very popular as they blew-up the story of this similarity. Josh appeared on many broadcasts and told people how amazingly lucky he had been for this similarity to have happened as it had boosted the book's popularity and was making him a mint.

Then another event took place that shocked both Josh and the world at large. When the president died in a boat accident, the similarity of the accident to another event in the book was noticed by the press. In the book a pilot of a sailing vessel had

been led into a drunken stupor and allowed the ship to run aground. In the case of the president, the ship's captain was drinking with one of the president's entourage when the ship collided with fishing vessel.

After this people started looking at the text of the book in detail, seeking for other foreshadowing of real world events. They found many, all of them disclaimed by the author who thought they talking nonsense. Yet the more he disclaimed the magical properties of his work the greater the praise and belief seemed to grow.

As crowds of believers started forming outside his residence Josh Synthana went into hiding. Unfortunately this only added to mystery and a cult quickly formed and proclaimed him a martyr.

Considering all of the acclaims around his fiction nothing but nonsense Josh left the planet completely a couple of months later and took up residence on a nearby world. In his absence the cult became a religion and a belief system quickly evolved based up on his work.

Josh unwilling to come out of hiding remains to this day a fiction writer, but uses a series of pen names that are not linked in any way to his true identity. Only a small group of his friends and employees know the truth, and they avidly guard his secret.

PERSON 2 – KARLIONA HEUL

Karliona Heul is a scientist who has dedicated his life to research of the X-beam. The X-beam is a pulse based energy beam capable of cutting through any known substance.

During an interview with the light-science magazine "Repoxy Invented", he was asked why he named his new beam the X-beam. In response he laughed and said he chose X-beam because X represented the unknown and the irony of that appealed to him. The interviewer didn't question that any

further but we can suppose that his in-depth knowledge of the x-beam development was what powered the irony.

After announcing his invention and going on a publicity tour to raise funds, he was the subject of a kidnapping. A local crime boss wanted to get control of both Karliona and his invention, for nefarious purposes. The crime boss wanted to be able to cut his way into bank vaults and other similar secure locations and wanted to have Karliona build a portable x-beam for his hired thugs. The criminals also attempted to get hold of Karliona's equipment but found themselves out-gunned by the military that had taken over his laboratories. Thus they stuck Karliona in a basement laboratory and set him to work building a new x-beam emitter.

During the three months that he was out of sight Karliona set to work, but not building an x-beam emitter. He told the crime boss that he building a new and better x-beam, but in reality he simply constructed a pulse-capable plasma emitter which he used to blast a tunnel out of the basement and make an escape. He also rigged the plasma device to overload shortly after his escape which caused enough confusion and damage to allow him to slip away.

The gang did chase after him, but by that time he'd reached the inner city and was able to seek safety in a police station. Of course the whole incident catapulted him to fame as the kick-ass scientist hero, a role he deprecates, but it has been noticed that anyone mentioning that title causes a wry smile to cross his face.

The military that had protected his laboratory during the criminal attack soon lost interest in the technology when Karliona used mathematics to prove that the technologies high energy use and extremely short range, of less than a thousandths of an inch, made it unviable as a weapon. To avoid a repeat kidnapping he moved his laboratory to an orbital facility.

However this was not the end of Karliona's adventures. A pirate raid into the system where he was working led to a situation that once again forced him into the limelight. A local naval vessel, a ten ton fighter was blasted and hurtling towards the station where he was working. The station itself had no weapons so could not destroy the disabled fighter, and no other ships were within intercept range. Karliona, being a man of action jumped into a vaccsuit and crawled out onto the surface of the station. Once there, he disconnected one of the external water tanks and opening a valve, used the contents of the tank as a propellant. Once he had it moving he set the tank on a collision course with the incoming fighter and rode the tank almost to the point of impact, only leaping clear in the last few seconds. The impact threw the dead fighter onto a new trajectory away from the station and saved the lives of thousands. Karliona was picked up by shuttle some hours later just before his oxygen ran out. Once again he was a hero, but rather than seek adulation, he dived back into his work, and continues to this day on turning his invention into a device for use by rescue services.

PERSON 3 – DR SALI GEHANSH

Dr Sali Gehansh is a human that has earned a special place in the hearts of the Vargr race. Dr Sali is a biological researcher. A few years ago he was part of research team that was collecting samples from every planet and moon in an unsettled system called F'lark. The mission was sponsored by a nearby settled system that was looking for new territory to be claimed and settled. The mission was scheduled to take five years and was to include not only sample collection but also analysis, hence the duration. The starship was a specially modified colony vessel that had sufficient room to support such an extended mission.

After a year spent in systematic work collecting and analysing they moved onto the next subject body, a moon that orbited

the fifth planet from the star. The scientific crew were very excited about starting work on the moon as their initial visual observations showed a thriving ecosystem, the first such discovery in the system. The doctor was on the moon's surface collecting soil and rock samples from a small forest when he came across a starship half buried in ground. Its upper surface was overgrown and that was what had kept it hidden from the initial scans.

After returning to the ship to log the discovery, they did some research on the vessel and found that it was registered to a Vargr entrepreneur and that it was listed as missing some one hundred and fifty years earlier. On returning to the surface Dr Sali found evidence that someone had been to the site of his discovery. Following the trail he found it led to a small Vargr village of some one hundred and twenty eight Vargr, the descendants of the crew who had survived the crash.

From a purely anthropological point of view the discovery of a lost Vargr tribe was a huge find and the doctor could have been made for life on that discovery alone. However Dr Sali was a consummate professional and wasn't prepared to give up his research. The research project was however over. The discovery of an existing colony, even one cut off and technologically backward, meant that the system was effectively claimed by the Vargr and of no further use to the system that was funding the mission. The mission overseer called it to an end and wanted to withdraw from the system and return to the home system. Rightly the overseer realised that the existence of the alien colony meant that the issue was now political and legal rather than purely scientific.

Dr Sali refused to leave the surface of the moon. He'd found that the small colony was suffering terribly from a number of biological sources. Sickness was rife amongst the Vargr and their lifespan much shorter than was normal. Thus it was that Dr Sali was marooned on the moon with his scientific equipment and supplies for a year, when the research ship left. Dr Sali fully

expected to be back in touch with the modern world when a rescue ship was sent back to pick up himself and the Vargr. However the scientific ship was never heard of again. What happened to it has been theorised about, but no one knows for sure.

Dr Sali's expected maximum stay of one year on the planet turned into ten before another ship entered the system. However he'd not wasted that time. Starting by befriending the Vargr, he followed that up with investigation into the various infections and diseases that had been afflicting the Vargr. He even established treatments for many of them, thereby making the lives of the lost tribe much better.

He'd also spent a lot of time in noting how the colony had progressed as the technology failed and they had to rely on themselves. His cultural notes have since become one of the de-facto work studies in cultural academic courses.

With the arrival of another ship communication was re-established and a Vargr ambassador dispatched to the lost colony. The Vargr on the moon praised the work of Dr Sali greatly and the Vargr ambassador presented him with a virtual membership of the prestigious Vargr scientific university world, Arrgtoo. On a visit to Arrgtoo some years later Dr Sali accepted a residency and continued his work into Vargr diseases.

PERSON 4 – BAYISS HIMICH

Bayiss Himich is a man who's name has become legend amongst those who have made space travel their career. He was not a heroic leader of men, nor a great doctor bent on saving millions. No. He is a survivor. He survived 18 months abandoned in the vacuum.

He was an engineering crewman on the freighter Lucky-Dips where he worked for upwards of six years prior to the incident. He was intimately familiar with the ship and its systems and by

all accounts was a treasured member of the crew.

The incident referred to was nothing less than the complete destruction of the Lucky-Dips. She was attacked while on a long in-system transport haul to a scientific base that was orbiting beyond the system's furthest planetary body, a trip due to take around three weeks. They had left the last inhabited planet far behind and were passing over a collection of orbiting asteroids when the ship was attacked. At first the captain of the ship thought the attackers were nothing more than pirates. The system had been plagued by a band of pirates that often settled for being paid in gold rather than taking the ships themselves. The captain therefore made overtures to the intruder but only when it was too late to escape did he realise the ship was launching missiles. The captain had time to warn his crew and even make a few manoeuvres, but in the end the missiles hit and blew the Lucky-Dips apart.

Bayliss was at his monitoring station in engineering when the ship came apart. He doesn't remember the explosion, but remembers coming round in free fall. His suit was still tethered to the stanchion he'd fixed himself to when the alert started. He was gently spinning through the void in unison with an airlock. The stanchion he'd attached himself to was close to the airlock and he found that the entire airlock and the nearby wall where he'd been attached was tumbling towards the asteroids. When he flicked on his suit lights he found he that he was actually surrounded by the debris of the ship which had been blasted apart in large segments. He tried his radio but got no response. After a few hours he and the airlock gently collided with an large asteroid. It was the collision that work him up from his awestruck stupor.

He found the airlock was still working on emergency batteries, and started looking around to see if he could find anything else of use. During the next few hours he found a number of useful items amongst the debris of the ship, including other vacc suits, a hand cranked air recycler, frozen rations and water.

He set himself up inside the air lock's smaller outer postern chamber and piled stores of anything he could scavenge into the larger main chamber. He spent some weeks living in the postern chamber, which he occasionally pressurised so that he could de-suit and take care of cleanliness. He had nothing to do with his time expect breath shallow, and worry about where he could get more air from. Yet in the end he found himself running out water long before anything else.

Bayliss went on a scavenging search through asteroids and ship debris and found a number of the asteroids were dirty ice rather than rock. He put all of his engineering know how to work and was soon able to produce potable water, and was even splitting the water to create more oxygen to supplement his supply.

It was eighteen months before Bayliss was picked by a passing supply ship that was repeating the run he had originally been on. The channel used by his suit radio was only picked up because the ship itself was running an EVA maintenance job with men in vaccsuits.

Bayliss' experiences have become an evergreen hit when telling spacer stories in starport bars.

PERSON 5 – ROBB ANSTOOR

Robb Anstoor is a mining engineer with attitude. Asteroid mining, which was his chosen career requires attitude. It's hard dirty work in a hostile environment where the individual must be tough, self-reliant and willing to put in the extra effort and take risks. Any other attitude means you won't be in the mining business for long.

Robb was an employee of Barsom Minerals, a corporation that was the only asteroid mining company in the system. He was head tool pusher on an asteroid known as "ole 67" to the company. The minerals being extracted were reasonable

valuable and the operation had been hollowing out "ole 67" for around ten months, leaving the asteroid riddled with tunnels used for the extraction.

Some interest had been shown in purchasing the asteroid for use as a ship's hull so the company had shipped in pressurising equipment to test its viability. It was during a pressure test that Robb's heroic nature came to the fore.

The pressure test involved pumping the mine full of hydrogen and checking that one atmosphere of pressure could be maintained. While this was taking place mining operations continued on the few remaining unexhausted veins. Robb was on the surface when the accident took place. The pressure opened a weakness in the structure of the remaining rock and caused a collapse down near the face of the mining operation trapping the miners working the face, and also incidentally failing the test.

The company executive on the site did some calculations and determined that it would be cheaper for the company to leave the men trapped paying the life insurance and simply close down the mine. Without the sale as a ship's hull the viability of continuing to mine the asteroid or even of rescuing the men was not a positive figure.

The executive commenced the evacuation. Horrified and not prepared to simply leave the men to die Robb leapt into action. Without saying anything he slipped out of the mine head and started moving equipment and resources he needed away from the mine so that it wouldn't form part of the evacuation.

In only a few hours the company and much of its serviceable gear was gone. Robb went to work. Alone for the next 3 days with only four hours sleep, he worked to clear the collapse and work a way down to the trapped men. When he found them, he discovered that two had been killed in the collapse and a further two had died while he was digging them out. He led the survivors to the surface, resupplying their working vacsuits

from the emergency supplies along the way.

At the surface he re-pressurised the offices and saw to the men's needs while jury rigging a transmitter to call for help. When a ship swung by to pick up the fifty survivors and the story hit the media, Robb was lauded as a hero and Barsom Minerals became pariahs and slipped into bankruptcy.

PERSON 6 – PAULOS MILLET

The planet of "Hasturs Third" was in serious trouble. It's occupants had long since fallen to calling the planet by the nickname "smoker", because the atmosphere was so polluted. For over three hundred years the inhabitants had been burning hydrocarbons in an unrestricted manner to power their society. The result was that the atmosphere became more and more polluted.

The accumulated effects of this pollution were disastrous. As the atmosphere darkened, the air heated up becoming more violent. Storms raged for weeks that had previously lasted for days, and were much stronger, sometimes demolishing entire towns. Crop yields were dropping, natural habitats were degrading and life for individuals was becoming worse.

As there was no strong central government, there was no forced impetus to move away from the hydrocarbons and to seek for cleaner sources of energy. The population began to shrink as the number of health issues caused by the pollution took their toll, and those that could afford to leave the planet, did so.

This crisis situation was reversed by a scientist-engineer called Paulos Millet. Paulos worked for an engineering company on Hasturs Third that produced ground vehicles that ran on hydrocarbons. Like everyone else he was aware that the planet's atmospheric issues were linked to the very vehicles he was producing. On his own time he decided to investigate

resolutions for the planet's pollution problem.

Others had also spent time and many newspaper column inches, in ranting about the list of problems and demanding that someone fix them. No one did. The usual responses were that it was all too big, any suggested resolutions infeasible and too expensive, so in the end no one had done anything.

Paulos looked at and discarded all of the proposals that had been mentioned in the scientific and news press. Having thus ruled out all of the big projects he turned his mind towards smaller issues and spent some years investigating the problems caused by the pollution and the approaches taken previously to deal with these issues on a local level. His conclusion was that up to this point the only things that had been done were attempts to treat the symptoms rather than the cause.

His moment of genius was a small revelation, with a big impact. Households were already using air filters and cleaners to pump clean air indoors, but he noticed that the result was that the impurities were simply dumped back outside into the air. He crunched some numbers and came up with a solution that would be cheap to implement and could start to make a real difference. After a few months tinkering in his garage he developed a prototype that could be fitted onto any standard household filter. The difference this device made, was that it solidified the carbon that was being vented by existing filters. When the device had collected five hundred grams of carbon pollutants it ejected the it in the form of a brick, thus removing the pollutants from air.

The clever part of Paulos's plan however, was that he went on a round of the talk shows, and other media, explaining that this cheap device would mean that the outside air was cleaned as it cleaned the indoors air. If only 10% of homes in the cities fitted his invention there would be a visible clearing of the air. If 40% fitted them, inner city parks could be replanted and would bloom. If 100% fitted them, people would be able to remove

their masks in the middle of the city on hot days.

He explained how the device could be manufactured for 150Cr and that he would not patent the system. "Think of our children" he said appealing to the families.

It worked. People wanted them, and they were soon in mass production. Paulos didn't stop his campaign, he used his fame and his message to convince people to move away from hydrocarbons in little ways. He expanded his design to create a wind turbine that helped to power the filters. These could even be fitted to stand alone filter devices. There were more designs and devices all promoted under his "think of the children" banner.

Soon, subscriptions were taken out by towns to fit larger filter/cleaners of his design onto hill tops upwind of the town. Thus the air blowing over the town was cleaner. And so it continued. Slowly, in bite size easily affordable devices, his machines and the accompanying social campaign-work spread across the planet and the air started to clear.

The people of Hasturs Third became healthier, more sunlight reached the surface, the plant life began to recover and life became better. The planet has not fully recovered, and probably won't for another century or so, yet Paulos Millet has become a hero of the people. He never made any great fortune from his work, but lives comfortably and wants for nothing.

PERSON 7 – DR ROALD TERFIUS

The Maxine corporation were running a series of drilling and excavation tests on the moon Alpha 3 that orbited the planet of Ullapool. The moon at that time was relatively unexplored and no one had attempted to exploit it for any kind of resource. Maxine were hoping to uncover mineral deposits of some value that would allow them to strip mine the uninhabited moon. It was during these operations that they discovered what

appeared at first to be fossil remains.

Maxine's employees were trained to stop operations if anything unusual was found, and this discovery certainly fit that criteria. Executives were despatched to investigate the discovery to see if it might be exploited for any financial gain. The "bones" turned out to be just such an opportunity and they sent for Dr Roald Terfius, whose investigation into various other discoveries had made him a name across much of Imperial space.

Roald took charge of the site and the finds. He quickly demanded an immediate end to the excavations and drilling after getting a glance at what had been uncovered. After a day of investigation and a vacsuited visit to the site he declared a major archaeological find. The bones that had been uncovered were not fossilised, but were mummified remains.

He brought in a team of archaeologists and representatives of a few media corporations. As his team worked on the finds and new discoveries he created a series of daily summary broadcasts that caught the attention and imagination of the public. The broadcasts were found so fascinating by those watching that they were picked up and transmitted across the subsector and eventually across much of Imperial space.

His broadcasts were a mix of a daily find catalogues and scientific musings about the finds. The finds themselves were of an avian-like species about half the height of a human. These included not only some of the creatures themselves but also artefacts that seemed at first to indicate a simple stone-age tool-using race. Yet as the digging continued it soon became clear that the race were highly advanced. As powerful investigative tools were focused on the artefacts, it became clear that what were thought of as simple tools were far more advanced. In an example of what so fascinated the public about his broadcasts, one item thought to be a simple digging-stick was revealed on camera to actually contain sophisticated

electronic circuitry. It was a major revelation and it all took place on-air. This device turned out to be sonic broadcaster capable of gently moving liquid or dust. An ironic suggestion for its possible use, was as a tool for archaeologists, suggesting the race was itself investigating an even older civilisation.

There were many such discoveries all made on-air in such a way as to draw the audience into the material, making them feel a part of the story. As a result Roald has become a celebrity on many worlds. He is still touring the sector giving both scientific talks and making celebrity appearances.

PERSON 8 – DR BEN MILDREN

Dr Ben Mildren has a name that has become infamous but it was not always the case. Where today people mutter his name is distaste, they used to speak in acclaim.

Dr Mildren studied at the capital university Norton IV focusing his attention on biological research, with a speciality in animal gene therapies. He was not an outstanding student but when the press turned against him, no one was able to find a witness to anything untoward during his university years. In fact he was just a face in the crowd of students that none but his particular friends could place in a line up.

After completing his education he moved into industrial science, working specifically to create breeds of cattle better suited to the individual environments of the various planets. During his work at the Better-Cattle-Inc he hit upon an idea for an enhanced breeding process that could improve the rate at which new strains were produced. However rather than share his theories with his employer he sought venture capital investment in order to create a company of his own.

Within a year he launched his own company unimaginatively called "Better-Cattle-Quicker-Inc" and sought customers. He soon found them, because of the promises he made. We was

promising cattle better suited to particular environments in less than half the time of his competitors.

His breakthrough technique seemed to work and within a couple of years his company was a huge success and gaining customers from across the subsector. His technique involved a specialised breeding program that could rush through the generations. He raised an embryo in an artificial womb and before it reached birthing age he removed the proto embryo cells and quickly pushed them into another womb. In this way he could vastly speed up the breeding programs by jumping entire generations.

Unfortunately his business collapsed and his investors ended up losing millions when it eventually became clear that the products of his company suffered from curtailed longevity. This meant they were unable to breed sufficiently to be self-sustaining. This failure did push his name into the press but this was not the main reason his name has been washed in disrepute.

A few years later he was back in business but a different business. At the time there was a popular robot fighting sport in which technology teams from many worlds would have their robots compete in combat arenas until only one was left standing.

Dr Mildren sold the idea to one of the arena owners that robots fighting giant monsters would be an even bigger draw. Enough investors agreed with him and he set-to in his laboratory to create giant monsters. Using the techniques from his previous business he speed-bred creatures of huge size and ferocity. The fact that the creatures had such short lives didn't matter as they were only bred to fight in an arena to the death anyway.

It was tremendously popular and the new combat entertainment was a huge profit-making enterprise. He continued working to produce bigger and stranger animals for

the robots to fight. Every time a new creature entered the arena the audience numbers would peak. So there was a constant drive and pressure to create new ones.

This carried on until Mildren made an animal that looked very like a giant sheep. When this fluffy monster entered the arena there was a hushed silence. When a robot moved in and slaughtered the beast, there wasn't the usual cheering, instead there were gasps of horror. Somehow the giant had grabbed the hearts of the watching people. The organisations that had always fought to close down the blood sports seized on the reaction and closed down the entire sport. With the swing of public opinion Dr Ben went from being a scientific hero to being hated and even hunted by extremists.

The doctor went into hiding and hasn't been heard of for a few years. Some believe that he is now involved in illegal cloning in some far-flung mining operation but this is only rumoured.

PERSON 9 – RACE FINNUNGLAN

Race Finnunglan is a name that has had a conflicted public opinion in its past but is now thought of as a heroic rogue. Race was and is the leader of a mercenary company called "Phallanx Four". In the early days it was a simple guns-for-hire outfit with about two-hundred men

Mercenary units do not have a good reputation and generally they're disliked if not actually hated. They are usually the tools of the despot and oppressor. There are many stories of mercenaries running wild and pillaging. So the general attitude towards them is negative.

When Channel W56-IP News investigated past missions of the Phallanx Four when Race and his company came to prominence, they found a fairly average mercenary history. These included urban clearances, commercial assaults and even some licensed piracy. One particularly dark spot in the history

was the kidnap and murder of the Romanivs family, the exiled rulers of a small nation state on the Imperial fringe.

Yet despite these low points becoming known and brandished by some commercial news stations the incident that earned Race and his company the renown they now have out-shined the companies unpleasant history.

The planet Arktuous was under the rule of a despot, Cezrius IV, and he had come to power via a bloody revolution. The Phallanx Four were hired by Cezrius to keep the population in check in one of the major cities. This they did for six months. Race, realizing that his team would be living amongst the population for some time set a precedent of only using non-lethal force on the citizens. This was despite Cezrius authorising extensive executions should it prove necessary. Other mercenary units on the planet were by all accounts running amok and abusing the people they were supposed to be keeping in line. This was no different to Cezrius' own forces.

As it turned out Race's policy not only kept the populous quiet but it also formed some bonds of friendship between the company and the people of the city. However, the peaceful situation was not to last.

Cezrius became concerned when he got no reports of executions from the city and demanded that a proportion of the population be executed on pretences just to make sure they knew who was in charge. Race could not bring himself to execute the people he had become friends with, and his men felt the same. they refused the orders. Cezrius invoked a contract clause and reclaimed his funding to the Phallanx Four and then sent over his own forces to throw out the mercenary company and to execute the required number of the populous.

As the company was withdrawing the executions began and soon shots were exchanged between Cezrius' forces and the Phallanx Four who were outraged at the villainous behaviour of the leader's troops.. This culminated in Race reoccupying the

city and throwing out Cezrius' troops. A state of siege ensued. News got off planet about the heroic mercenaries protecting the populous against a despotic leader.

Cezrius sent other mercenary units to fight the Pallanx Four, but only one of them agreed to the terms, the others were part of the same union and sworn not to fight fellow members. The mercenary on mercenary fight was brief and half hearted, Race was left in control of the city.

The siege continued for two months and each time an attack was thrown back another city would rise in rebellion against Cezrius. Thus it was that the defiance of Race Finnunglan and the Phallanx Four, freed the planet from the rule of Cezrius.

Arktuous as a planet gifted the company with a huge financial bonus and granted Race an estate and honorifics.

Thus the company sprung to fame and was able to pick and choose the missions it wanted to take on. It grew to army size as its popularity grew, which Race fostered by choosing to support rebellions and the underdogs in future battles.

PERSON 10 – KIRTHUGA SHAMAN

Kirthuga Shaman was a spaceship pilot who was working the solar energy collectors in the Yulentidees system. A space faring job he had held for over twenty years. Much like X-boat pilots he spent the majority of his time in space on his own, running his tug backwards and forwards over the same area of the vacuum. His duties involved capturing the super dense solar blocks spun in towards the system's star and positioning them in orbit close enough to heat up to intense temperatures. Once the blocks were warm enough he would boost them back out to the settlements in the distant asteroid belt where they were a source of clean heat and energy. Each block would serve a habitat for up to six months.

He has been quoted as saying that his work was dull but

exacting. Only once or twice a day would he come out from sheltering behind one of the blocks. That would be either to spend an hour or so aligning vectors before boosting the block out to the belt, or manoeuvring to capture and position a block before taking cover behind it while his ship cooled.

His mother, his only living relative, had much to say to the papers about her son after his heroic efforts. Much of it however was merely sniping at his character, and after reporting that the two didn't get on with each other the press lost its taste for reporting such negativity about a hero.

The incident that pushed Kirthuga to prominence happened two years ago. The space liner "Gallant Invite" was cruising back from some of the systems outer bodies when it was attacked by a pirate vessel. Although the attack was repelled, there was damage done to the liner.

The damage included busted drive systems and a number of atmosphere leaks. The entire engineering crew had been killed in the attack and more than half of the escape pods were inoperative. Even if the remaining passengers had wanted to take to the pods they couldn't. The ship was already too close to the sun to make usage of the pods safe. It was estimated that the pods would fail within hours of being ejected.

The in-system police, navy, and scout bases were unable to launch a vessel able reach the stricken ship in time. Before they could reach it, it would have been reduced to molten slag.

Kirthuga picked up the distress call but at first thought there was nothing he could do. When he realised that the liner's track would bring it within his area of operation he started running the intercept calculations. His plan was detailed and complex but he put it into operation. He shunted a number of the dense solar blocks into the path of the liner. The carefully planned and gentle impacts slowed the liner and allowed Kirthuga to get his tug in contact with the side of the great ship.

What happened next was the ultimate act of sacrifice. He turned on the tug's thrusters and burned the fuel tanks dry. This altered the liner's vector enough to give it time for a navy destroyer to rescue the passengers and crew within a day or two. Sadly with the engines dry his little tug went dark and drifted away from the liner and was soon tumbling towards the sun where it eventually burned up.

No radio contact was ever made with Kirthuga's tug, he operated entirely on his own and died without speaking to anyone. His was lauded as a hero and his tale has become the subject for a popular musical lament. There are stories from conspiracy theorists that suggest Kirthuga survived this rescue mission, slipping himself in among the survivors and escaping his old life. When you hear his mother speaking, it seems to lend power to their arguments.

Epilogue

This book is derived from the production of a podcast called "Behind the Claw". The podcast is a mine of ideas and inspiration for Traveller referee's. The people, places and creatures listed in these pages represent some of the ideas presented in the second season of the podcast, episodes 11-20. Not all the content of the podcast appears in this volume, nor does all of this book's content appear in the podcast, although there is a good deal of cross over.

At the time of writing a third season of the podcast is being planned and out of that will come a third volume of this series. How many more seasons and volumes will there be? Only time will tell.

<http://BehindTheClaw.BlogSpot.co.uk>