

PIRATES OF DRINAX:

FRIENDS

IN

DRY PLACES



TRAVELLER



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# T R A V E L L E R INTRODUCTION

The world of Kteiroa is the largest *ihatei* camp in the subsector, located just two parsecs from Drinax. Since eradicating this potential threat is not a viable option, the only course of action is to foster friendly relations. The usual trade-and-gifts approach is out of the question; *ihatei* respect strength and daring far more than wealth and largesse. The Travellers must impress their potential allies with deeds, which leads to particularly daring piracy.

## THE SETTING

Kteiroa is a frozen desert, though it does have a breathable atmosphere. What little water is available must be drilled out of deep aquifers or more-or-less wrung out of the rocks. This is one of several reasons why Kteiroa has never been a hot prospect for colonisation or *ihatei* landgrab. However, there are those who can see past the forbidding landscape and appreciate Kteiroa for what it might be – a staging post for raids and annexation of the Sindalian Main.

The world has been settled by a family of Aslan outcasts, who brought with them sufficient equipment to create a rather basic starport and town to support it. This has grown into a thriving *ihatei* camp, with several leaders and their followers present at any given time. These transients are not counted towards the world's official population figures, though some of them are a lot less transient than others.

As the camp has grown, so have its requirements for basic supplies such as water and food, as well as luxury items – not to mention accommodation. Word is getting around that Kteiroa is a good place to pick up additional followers – usually from another *ihatei* band whose leader has failed to impress – and to rest up before launching an expedition. The world's *ihatei* population is on the cusp of an explosion in more senses than one.

*Ihatei* groups come in on a frequent basis, and so do individuals or small groups hoping to find a charismatic and successful leader to follow. The success of some operations has enabled the outcasts to bring in additional equipment, but it is becoming impossible to keep pace with the expanding population. Aslan being what they are, competition for scarce resources is fierce, and tensions are running high on Kteiroa.

The answer is not simple or easy. The camp's overstressed life support plant must be augmented with additional water recycling equipment, storage tanks and even basic items like piping. Ideally, the camp also needs additional power generation systems, distribution components and workshop machines. Without these mundane items, the camp will be unable to support its population. The best possible outcome of that is a rapid abandonment and loss of prestige for the outcasts. More likely, there will be serious and large-scale violence. Whether the camp is destroyed in the expected bloodbath or merely damaged, the long-term prospects are not good.

## THE PATRON

Utea is an outcast from Aslan society, one of a family who have settled Kteiroa and made it their own. Despite stereotypes about Aslan males being unable to understand anything more technical than a hand grenade, Utea knows very well what is needed to prevent his family's project from collapsing onto carnage. He is not opposed to a violent cull of the numbers, but his family would almost certainly come off badly in such a fight as several of the *ihatei* bands at the camp outnumber his warriors.

Utea's economic and technical advisors (who happen to be two of his wives) have presented a rather bleak picture of the situation. Kteiroa needs a large amount



of the sort of equipment used to set up a frontier colony, and cannot afford to buy it. Nor can Utea ask for assistance from any Aslan clan. He must solve this problem using only his own resources. Fortunately, a solution is at hand. Utea will take what he cannot afford to buy, and use it to turn his worthless frigid desert of a world into one capable of supporting huge numbers of *ihatei*.

The concept is simple, but the execution of Utea's plan will require considerable effort and a little inventiveness. He has the additional problem that he needs to be seen as the undisputed lord and master of Kteiroa, dispensing gifts and necessities as the fancy takes him. Asking any *ihatei* leader to help him provide basic services would undermine his own position and would be a major political risk even if his pride let him consider it.

Utea therefore needs someone outside the society of Kteiroa's *ihatei* camp; someone creative and bold but who cannot possibly supplant him as leader. Humans, say perhaps a band of pirates out of Drinax, would be a perfect choice.

## HIRING ON

During a visit to Drinax (or perhaps in some other port along the Sindalian Main), the Travellers notice a bit of a stir. This is caused by the arrival of some Aslan bigwig or other, who turns up in a 600-ton ship acting like he is the Emperor of Everything. Wearing splendid garments and surrounded by well-armed bodyguards, he makes a lordly peregrination around the port before grudgingly settling upon barely-suitable lodgings. From there, word goes out that the lord Utea invites bold and adventurous souls to come into his presence. He has a proposition for the right group; one that carries with it great rewards and the patronage of the lordly Utea.

The Travellers will no doubt have seen this routine before. The humblest of Aslan officials or leaders will act like a great lord in the presence of outsiders, and many of them (if not all) seem to genuinely see themselves as better than humans. Be that as it may, this Utea seems to have money and at least a modest amount of prestige, so it might be worth listening to his offer.

Thus the Travellers find themselves in the august presence of Utea himself. He is haughty and disdainful of... pretty much everything really, and makes it clear that anything not Aslan is inherently inferior. Nevertheless, he provides his guests with fine food and drink, and asks them for their story. He even deigns to listen to the answer, and seems genuinely interested at some points.

What Utea wants to know is: are the Travellers smart, armed and willing to do what it takes to get the job done? Do they have a starship available? If they present him with a tale of their exploits suggesting these things are true, he will be favourably disposed towards them. On the other hand, if the Travellers choose to downplay their illegal and violent exploits – i.e. they talk to Utea like they were trying to wriggle out of criminal charges – he will be far less impressed. No human can ever be the equivalent of an Aslan *ihatei*, but they can aspire to be something similar – if lesser in all ways. An *ihatei* is proud of his exploits or at least prepared to answer for them; weaselling and deception might be useful but they are hardly the hallmark of notable warriors.





# FRIENDS IN DRY PLACES

Amid all the pomp and self-importance, Utea's proposal comes down to this: he needs a crew to obtain several pieces of equipment, and deliver them to his holdings on Kteiroa. If the Travellers can meet his needs in a reasonable time frame he will decree they are always to be welcome on Kteiroa, and will even permit Aslan warriors to sign on aboard their vessel or *ihatei* vessels to accompany it on its missions. In fact he has no real control over any of this, but if the Travellers succeed in their mission, Kteiroa will move one step towards being a Haven. It will move two steps if the Travellers impressed Utea with their bold and forthright statements about who they are and what they do. In addition, Utea will pay for the items he wants the Travellers to source for him, based on their suitability and condition.

There are three key pieces of equipment Utea needs;

1. A large power source capable of supplying power for a long time. A starship reactor would be eminently suitable.
2. A water recycling plant of the sort used on rockball colonies or large space vessels.
3. A very large quantity of piping, cabling, and conduits to build a distribution network.

Whilst the Travellers are engaged in attempting to obtain these items, Utea will refuel their ship each time they return to Kteiroa. Given how scarce water (and therefore liquid hydrogen obtained from it) is on the world, this is a grander gesture than might at first be apparent. He will also dispense gifts totaling up to Cr1000 x 2D. These take the form of furs, ornamental weapons, jewellery and similarly ostentatious items, and are given as much to demonstrate Utea's (largely illusory) wealth as for their value. Of course, Utea will want an update on progress each time the Travellers come through. He will tolerate a couple of empty-handed arrivals but after this he will withdraw his favour, which translates in this case to ignoring the Travellers and looking for someone else to fulfil his mission.

Utea will not handle the grubby details of handing over money for the things he needs – that is beneath the dignity of an Aslan lord. Instead his wives deal with such matters. They will pay a reasonable price – in hard currency – for the three necessary items.

**The Power Source** will more than likely come from a salvaged or pirated starship. Utea needs a reactor capable of generating at least Power 60 plus sufficient spares to keep it running. He will also need fuel tankage, though this can be improvised locally, and a set of fuel processors to convert water into liquid hydrogen. A small powerplant, such as that from a Free Trader or Scout/Courier, would be worth KCr200 to Utea if stolen or pirated, and perhaps half as much again if he can be sure it was legitimately obtained.

**The Water Recycling Unit** could be pulled from a starship or orbital station, or colony on a world with no breathable atmosphere. Of course, that suggests that someone might be using it which could raise other complications. Getting the system out of a vessel or installation would be quite a lengthy engineering job, requiring several days at least after which it would have to be dismantled, transported and put back together in a working condition. A suitable unit would take up about 20 tons of cargo hold and would be worth KCr100 to Utea.

**The Piping and Conduits** are not especially glamorous but will be necessary to get power and water where they need to be. Enough to get the job done properly would take up 40 tons of cargo space, and could be delivered in more than one batch. Utea will pay KCr50 when presented with enough piping, though first his engineering-minded wife would have to pronounce it sufficient. Utea himself has no interest in a pile of pipes, however vital they may be, and will not even take a look at them.

These requirements could be met by plonking a pirated starship of at least 400 tons down on the landing pad at Kteiroa, but there are other ways to go about getting the *ihatei* what they need.



## THE POWER SYSTEM

As noted elsewhere, it would be possible to meet most Utea's needs by bringing a stolen starship of at least 400 tons (or ships and small craft totaling that much) to Kteiroa. This would certainly be an attention-grabbing way to solve the problem, and might result in the Travellers gaining status with some of the *ihatei* groups using the camp. However, it would require stealing entire vessels and to do so the Travellers might have to breach the Code of the Stars. This solution could be more trouble than it is worth.

The alternative is to obtain the necessary equipment through some means less likely to be troublesome. One option is to steal (or even buy) a powerplant from a starship breaker, either as a complete unit or parts of several. It is not necessary that the completed powerplant fit neatly into the drive rooms of any specific vessel, after all. Many systems with a Class A or B starport have starship breakers yards where spares can be obtained from dismantled ships.

Before a ship gets to the yard it is often placed in a holding orbit for some time whilst preparations are made to receive it. Some systems have large 'starship graveyards' in distant orbits, where hulks await their final transit to the breakers yard or are stripped in space. There are also illicit 'ship-chop' operations that do the same with stolen or otherwise 'hot' vessels.

It might be possible to enter one of these graveyards (Utea can supply a list of suitable locations) and strip out a powerplant. This is quite a lengthy operation, requiring the plant be dismantled and transferred to the Travelers' cargo bay. A better alternative would be to remove whole small craft and pull the powerplant at leisure.

These starship graveyards are not undefended. At the very least, there will be remote sensors which, if triggered, will result in a response from the yard owners or local system defence vessels. Wrecks might also be booby-trapped, and it is entirely possible that the breakers might have salvaged a working missile launcher or two. This is more likely for illicit ship-chop operations, whose owners are keen to discourage pilfering by rivals or investigation by authorities. A lethal response is far more likely if the operation is illegal, and word might get around that the Travellers delivered powerplant components to Kteiroa not long after similar items went missing. The Travellers might run into an attempt at retribution some time later when they have forgotten about the incident.

Obtaining the powerplant is only part of the problem. It must then be conveyed to Kteiroa and installed. Utea's people have some technical skills but are for the most part not experienced with starship equipment, especially systems made by humans. The Travellers will initially be greeted with gifts and praise, but it soon becomes apparent that they are expected to present a *working* powerplant rather than a collection of parts. If they leave Kteiroa without setting up the plant, Utea will not be pleased and their next visit may be a little frosty.

On the other hand, if the Travellers take the hint and start work on the plant, they will have to contend with galactic-level impatience from Utea and visits from various *ihatei* leaders who want to know why the system is not already up and running. Responses of a 'because you keep interrupting' nature will not go down well. Note that these leaders are Aslan males and do not actually care in the slightest why the plant is not running yet – what they really mean is why have they not got power yet.

Each of the *ihatei* leaders is also concerned that he is not somehow cheated or left out of the distribution grid, and uses a combination of threats and vague promises of largesse to ensure that the Travellers know he is to get his fair share (and a bit more) and get it before his rivals. Some will offer incentives to try to cut those rivals out of the distribution grid.

## THE WATER RECYCLING SYSTEM

In theory, a recycling system could be pulled from a starship and augmented with additional components, but such systems tend to be buried deep in a ship's innards and are even more time consuming than power systems to remove. Persistent Travellers could manage it, but unless the salvage operation were conducted legally (which would cost a lot more than scavenging from a derelict) this would be an expensive undertaking.

There is an alternative. A few years ago a small prospecting-and-mining company went bust, pulling out of its various operations and selling them to anyone who would pay to take them over. One of these installations, although bought at a rock-bottom price, has never been properly taken over and now stands derelict. It is on a gas giant moon or rockball planet in a nearby system (the referee should decide which one) and, to the best of everyone's knowledge, remains undisturbed.



The installation is now owned by Arenson Investments, which is no mining company. Arenson has never managed to put together a crew for the installation, but it did send a team to mothball the plant and set up deterrents for unwanted visitors.

As the Travellers approach, they will be detected by an automated defence system which will broadcast a warning to stay away. This repeats and becomes more strident, before a missile is launched from the surface somewhere close to the installation. The automated system only ever had three missiles, and it fired one some time ago, so there is only one shot to follow this. However, the Travellers will not know that. The launcher is not a proper turret, but a one-shot container stood upright in a hole drilled in the rock, coupled to a rather basic sensor system.

Once past the missile system, the Travellers can easily gain access to the prospecting site. This consists of a few prefabricated base segments linked by flexible tunnels. It is a bit of a maze, but not very large. When operating, the site had an accommodation building, utilities structure and power centre plus workshops and ore sampling lab. The power centre is disappointing; its reactor and key systems were removed when the station was mothballed.

The water recycling unit is mainly modular, but contains components scattered across the complex. Getting the main unit out is a big, heavy job; removing the additional systems is easier work but time-consuming. All work has to be done in vacc suits unless a power feed is rigged from the Travellers' ship; life-support and lights are completely dead without the reactor.

There is an additional problem. Soon after arriving the Travellers will find two bodies, both in vacc suits and riddled with bullets. Stray rounds have smashed up equipment and punched holes in the less-than-

substantial outer walls of the building. It is not immediately apparent what happened here (apart from the obvious) but it does seem items have been taken from the two dead spacefarers. Tools, weapons and small salvageable items have been removed but the bodies have been left where they fell.

The casualties were caused by a security robot, one of two left to deter intruders. These are small devices, about 1m high, that run on fat balloon tyres and mount a submachinegun in a revolving turret. They do not issue any warning before opening fire; anyone in the installation has already got past the missile defence system so is assumed hostile.

The robots are smart enough to shoot and scoot, with one perhaps drawing the Travellers into an ambush by the other. Once they are dealt with, the recycling system can be removed at leisure. There are also some lab and workshop systems that can be looted, but everything small and valuable was taken when the site was mothballed. Still, the Travellers might be able to obtain some extra salvage for their trouble.

## PIPEWORK GALORE

Piping and conduits could be obtained from the same sources as the powerplant and water recycling equipment, though pulling them from ships in a graveyard would be a very lengthy process. If the Travellers have time to spare and like spannerwork, there is nothing to stop them dismantling a ship or installation. Spending a week extracting pipes and conduits from a derelict space vessel is a rather slow process.

The Travellers should find some more efficient way of obtaining pipes, conduits, connectors, pumps, filters and other entirely mundane but essential equipment. The Travellers might come up with all manner of

### Security Robot

| HITS        | SPEED                                   | TL | COST     |
|-------------|---|----|----------|
| 14          | 12 m                                    | 12 | Cr675000 |
| SKILLS      | Gun Combat (slug) 1, Recon 1, Tactics 0 |    |          |
| ATTACKS     | Submachinegun (3D Auto 3)               |    |          |
| TRAITS      | Armour (+3)                             |    |          |
| PROGRAMMING | Basic (security)                        |    |          |





extravagant ways to overthink this, in which case the referee can have some fun watching them collect a bunch of pipes. The simplest solution is to simply buy what they need. About 40 tons of pipes and conduits are needed, all told, to fully set up the camp with water recycling and power distribution. Some of what is needed will come with the power and water units. The rest could be bought for Cr1000 per ton or less if the Travellers are good at bargaining. This cuts into the profit margin, but it gets the most potentially time-consuming part of the job done quickly.

## THE GRAND UNVEILING

Once the components are in place, it only remains to connect it all up and throw the switch. Of course, Utea makes grand pronouncements as soon as the parts arrive, and everyone will be expecting the plant up and running straight away. The Travellers can expect another round of demands about what has gone wrong, even though in truth nothing really has. Utea has created an unrealistic expectation (or transferred his own expectations onto the camp in general) and now the Travellers are under pressure to instantly deliver something that takes time to set up.

While they are getting the plant up and running, the Travellers must deal with Utea and other Aslan males wanting to know when the power and water will be on, plus female Aslan technicians deriding solutions to technical problems. They will be under grave pressure to throw something together fast, but this does mean that some parts of the system will have to be redone later. Getting it right first time will take longer, but reduces the chance of a serious malfunction or major delay while a cobbled-together section is taken out and put back together properly.

Utea pushes for an immediate quick-and-dirty solution, but can be persuaded to take the time to do it right if the Travellers approach him correctly. He is receptive to the idea that a grand switch-on followed by some sort of failure would damage his reputation more than a few more days of methodical work. He is not in the slightest bit interested in details.

Finally, the system is ready and Utea announces that henceforth there will be sufficient energy to recharge every fuel cell and water to meet everyone's needs. He switches on the systems, and they work! Congratulations and gifts (another Cr1000 x 2D worth) come the Travellers' way, and Utea basks in the admiration of lesser *ihatei* for whom he has provided the fundamental needs.

The atmosphere of goodwill lasts about sixteen hours, before things start to go wrong. One problem is that Utea insists on irrigating land near his camp, intending to grow crops and wild vegetation where animals (introduced from offworld) can run free and be hunted. His plan is, naturally, far too grandiose and the system cannot cope. An *ihatei* leader rages about sewage in his washing water; another cannot recharge his laser weapons quickly without browning-out the power grid in his section of the camp. Disappointment turns to anger...

## THE FINAL PIECE

Utea is dismayed at this turn of events, though this manifests itself as condescending annoyance. A prodigious *ihatei* leader has decided to make Utea's camp his base; he will be arriving soon and Utea needs to have everything in order or lose prestige. That would be bad for everyone involved.

The power issue is a secondary one; it results mainly from trying to force water into the barren soil of Kteiroa and extract it again. Since Utea will not give up the idea of a hunting preserve (the farms he will do without), the only answer is to reduce the strain on the system by giving it more water to work with. Easier said than done, perhaps... but perhaps not. There *is* water on Kteiroa, in artesian basins that can be reached by drilling a shaft and inserting pumps. The equipment to do this is rather specialist, but Utea has an idea for how to get it.

Utea has information on a company that specialises in drilling exactly this sort of artesian pump system. They have a ship that carries the necessary equipment, and are operating in a nearby system. All the Travellers need do is steal the ship and its equipment, drill a hole a kilometre or two in depth, and plug it in to the water system. That, or convince the *ihatei* that sewage is not a bad thing to find in your drinking water...

However they do it, the Travellers need that ship and its equipment at Kteiroa as soon as possible. Once they have achieved that, drilling the shaft is a simple enough matter – though there will be the usual barrage of questions about why the work is not already completed. Success will be obvious when muddy water starts to geyser out of the shaft, showering everyone nearby. This will create large numbers of irate, muddy-furred *ihatei* who cannot get a proper shower until the water system is fully operational. They will try, of course, but with low water pressure the system cannot cope.



The disputes that follow might provide an interesting insight into the Aslan psyche. Nobody likes being covered in mud, and remaining filthy is an obvious indication that the individual (and his followers) were behind someone else in the order of precedence. This is not accurate; it has more to do with how pipes are laid out, but the Aslan will not see it that way. Some find inventive ways of getting clean and strut about, taunting those who are still dirty. Others fling accusations around about bribery, corruption and underhand ways of getting a decent level of water pressure.

After the first death, the Travellers will realise that the *ihatei* are not actually fighting over who gets to use the bathroom first; they have translated the situation into a status contest. Being able to get clean is a commodity everyone wants, and those who have obtained it can flaunt their success by simply walking around without muddy fur. And they do, rubbing everyone's noses in the fact that they got the desired commodity long before others. The implication is that those who are still dirty are of lower status since they lack the influence or power to get what they need.

## SOLUTIONS

Bizarre as it may seem to humans, the *ihatei* camp is on the verge of ripping itself apart over shower rotas. A particularly important *ihatei* leader is due any time, and Utea's reputation is on the line. Meanwhile, the Travellers are approached by emissaries from *ihatei* bands of varying size, all wanting the same thing – privileged access to the water and power supplies, and occasionally the interruption of someone else's supply. The Travellers will have to tread a fine line when dealing with these requests – they cannot really afford to offend any of the *ihatei* leaders unless they have the wholehearted protection of Utea.

The Travellers will also discover the system is being sabotaged in places, cutting off some *ihatei* groups. They might have just come to a deal with Utea or the Travellers, and will be even more aggrieved if they think they have been cheated. Actually fixing all the technical problems would merely be a matter of time and manpower; the Travellers' real problem will be preventing a bloodbath until they can do so.

Of course, it may suit the Travellers' interests to let the camp at Kteiroa collapse into chaos. A major *ihatei* staging post just two parsecs from Drinax might be too much of a threat. If so, the Travellers might stir the pot a bit or simply sneak back to their ship and leave. They will make enemies of the survivors, of course, but the *ihatei* outpost at Kteiroa will more or less self-eradicate.

If the Travellers prefer to try to salvage the situation, they will need to apply persuasion and diplomacy – not least to stop angry *ihatei* from shooting them! It may be possible to persuade some warriors to guard the pipes and conduits, and technicians to help fix them. Anything that calms the situation down even a little will help buy time.

If they are successful, the Travellers will be able to provide the camp with enough water and power to keep everyone happy, or at least prevent a fight. Utea's prestige will be a little dented, but this is soon repaired when a large *ihatei* band arrives to find the camp well set up with the necessities of life. Soon the *ihatei* are plotting raids and landgrabs with those they were recently in conflict with.

Whether this is a good thing depends upon perspective. It is probably bad for nearby human-controlled worlds, but Kteiroa itself will become a friendly port. If the Travellers have made friends among the *ihatei* they may be able to join a raid or embark upon a joint venture. They may also have started a rivalry with some of the *ihatei*, and there may be individual's or whole bands who resent the Travellers' involvement in the recent situation at Kteiroa.

In short, unless the camp collapses into chaos (and probably even then) the Travellers' actions will have consequences. The *ihatei* will become part of the local political situation, one more variable in a complex equation. Smart Travellers will be able to make use of this; lucky ones may benefit by accident. Disaster is always a possibility.



