

PIRATES OF DRINAX:
REVOLUTION
ON
ACRID



TRAVELLER

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T R A V E L L E R INTRODUCTION

The workers on Acrid are on the brink of revolution against the Pax Rulin Quartermasters (PRQ) megacorporation. Downtrodden, trapped into unfair contracts that make it impossible to get offworld, the workers have tried all other means and now have one last, desperate chance at a better life. They hope to gain control of their world and become, in effect, an independent state. That is no small feat, and to do it the workers must fend off the inevitable retaliation from PRQ. The answer to that problem is to obtain some means to defend their world against attack from space.

THE SETTING

Acrid is a nasty hell-hole of a world with an insidious atmosphere that leaches into everything sooner or later. Survival is a constant round of seal-replacement and suit-decontamination interspersed with atmosphere purges and the occasional crisis.

There is absolutely no reason to live somewhere like Acrid other than to make money, and there is money to be had. Unfortunately, although the mines and chemical-extraction plants run at a profit, this is eaten into by the constant repairs and heavy maintenance. The only way to make the world's industry profitable is to keep worker salaries as low as possible.

Low is a very kind term for salaries on Acrid. Nominally, workers are paid quite well but there are many deductions such as a surcharge for clean air and water. Workers must also buy their equipment from the company shop, which grants credit against future salaries in return for necessary items such as suit spares and filters. Since most workers are heavily in debt to the corporation that runs their world, few can afford to leave Acrid.

For many years, a safety valve existed in the form of what is known as the 'around a thousand', i.e. the official population of Acrid. These fully registered citizens are exempt from most of the surcharges and get preferential rates for necessary items. Most of them also occupy the better-paid jobs at Acrid's port and various industries. A worker could hope to be elevated to the 'around a thousand', i.e. be made a full citizen, at which point he or she could start making real money.

The carrot worked well enough for a time, but eventually the workers stopped buying it. True, some did get elevated to citizenship each year, but eventually it became apparent that the official population of Acrid was falling despite this upward mobility. It became obvious that very few workers were being granted citizenship, and at the same time salaries were being cut and costs were increasing. Living conditions, never good, declined rapidly and worker disaffection began to get out of hand.

The current situation on Acrid is explosive. There are, as noted, around a thousand full citizens and about twenty-five times that in debt to the PRQ and thus little more than slaves. They are treated as such, though this is disguised within the trappings of workplace discipline and sugar-coated by the offer of highly-paid special duties. Some of these are little more than suicide assignments in highly dangerous areas, but in some cases workers are given overseer and security jobs which place them above the rest of the workforce. The citizens and PRQ rely on this buffer population to keep the rest of the workers down and, so far, it has worked.

THE PATRON

Gera Hollis is a leader among the workforce on Acrid. Until quite recently she and her family were comfortably off as citizens, making a very good living from her skills as an industrial chemist and enjoying a high quality of life in the elite section of the world's main settlement. That ended for reasons she is unclear about, and Gera was suddenly demoted to a non-citizen worker. Her savings soon evaporated, and former friends were unwilling to help.

Fortunately for Gera, she has a natural talent for leadership and what can best be described as manipulation. She is not a particularly nice person, motivated more by the desire to regain her comfortable lifestyle than any sense of justice. However, whatever her reasons, she has managed to pull together a revolutionary council among the workers and direct what was previously despairing grumbles in the direction of concrete action.

Gera Hollis wants nothing less than to overthrow the bureaucratic and uncaring government of Acrid, and replace it with one more concerned with the welfare of the workers. In short, she is committed to doing right, but not for altruistic reasons.

Gera handles many aspects of her planned revolution in person, which is a big risk. She does so partly because she does not completely trust anyone else to get it right, and partly because she is committed to coming out on top. For this reason alone, she does not like to see others getting credit that she could be claiming. The risks are worth it because her present life is simply not worth living.

Gera knows that to succeed her revolution must do more than simply taking control of the governmental apparatus. The PRQ megacorporation will not easily accept the loss of a major economic asset, and will certainly send its security personnel to retake Acrid. Thus, a means of defence against incoming starships – as well as some way to neutralise the two system defence boats currently in system – must be obtained.

HIRING ON

Whilst in port at Acrid, or perhaps on a nearby world where sympathisers can speak for the downtrodden workforce, the Travellers are approached by a representative of the workers' revolution. The representative's affiliation will not be advertised at first, of course. The pitch is a simple one – if the Travellers will meet with Gera Hollis on Acrid they will be offered a deal they will find most suitable. Discretion is important.

The meeting takes place at the starport on Acrid, in a back room of a workers' bar that has bad food and worse beer, and not much else going for it. Gera is not particularly subtle about the situation. She knows the Travellers are not paragons of law-abiding virtue, and

that they might make themselves unwelcome in ports from time to time. They need places they can rest up, repair their ship and take some downtime without looking over their shoulders. She can provide that for them... eventually.

The short version, Gera says, is that she is the future leader of Acrid. It has a Class A starport with repair facilities, a modest industrial base, and a population who will adore the Travellers as heroes... if they help. Help with what? Why, making Gera Hollis the *current* leader of Acrid, of course.

There is a revolution brewing, she says. In fact, it is going to happen sooner or later no matter who helps or hinders it. With help, Gera can lead a *successful* revolution, limit bloodshed, and make Acrid a haven for the Travellers. Without their help, well, maybe she will succeed anyway. But the death toll will be high and retribution from PRQ will be savage.

What Gera needs from the Travellers is some means of neutralising the two system defence boats already in-system, and fending off any attempt to retake the planet. The port has a couple of missile turrets that would be a useful deterrent, but everyone who can operate them is part of the 'about a thousand' or their immediate supporters. She has little faith in the willingness of these people to defend a world that has just been snatched away from them.

If the Travellers can provide additional assistance, such as weaponry for the revolutionaries or other means of evening the odds, that would be very useful. Gera says (and seems to genuinely mean it) that she does not want a bloodbath but the present situation is intolerable. Either the workers launch an organised revolution or there will be a series of uncoordinated and incompetent risings that will be bloodily crushed – and conditions are bound to get worse.



P a x R u l i n Q u a r t e r m a s t e r s

REVOLUTION ON ACRID

The workers of Acrid include chemists and mining engineers who can put together an exciting array of improvised explosives. They can also arm themselves with a variety of hand weapons, some of which have been knocked together in workshops. What they do not have is a lot of guns.

If the revolution goes ahead without guns, the workers will have to make extensive use of their explosives. They can be creative and nasty, drawing response teams into explosive ambushes or using volleys of improvised grenades. This is a rather random way to fight, and will cause a lot of collateral damage. Worse, in a sealed environment like Acrid, there is a real chance of letting the atmosphere in and killing everyone in a section of the city.

The only way to avoid this is to obtain suitable weaponry for fighting inside a sealed city. Shotguns and submachineguns are likely the best choice, and there are plenty of those in the security stations on Acrid. However, stealing weapons from the armouries will highlight something is amiss and possibly cause a clampdown that will force an early rising. Either the guns have to be stolen without anyone realising they are missing, or they will have to be smuggled in from outside.

Smuggling through the port is not hard, at least in theory. The workers there include many potential revolutionaries, who will be only too happy to help. However, the PRQ security services are not idiots. They are alert to smuggling and work hard to prevent it. After all, keeping the workers down requires denying them access to goods from outside the company's shops. Whenever a ship comes in, its crew are watched closely.

Any attempt to bring in weapons and body armour must therefore be covered by a clever deception to throw security forces off the trail. Allowing them to intercept a smuggled package of luxury (or necessary) goods is one option – if they think they got the contraband and it was fairly innocuous, they will not try quite so hard to find anything else. If they believe workers are bringing in guns, they will start tearing the place apart.

Other preparations are possible. The workers are determined but have no military experience, so anyone who has been in a gunfight has wisdom to offer. It may be hard to carry out any sort of proper training but the Travellers may be able to improvise tactical exercises. Any attempt is better than nothing.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Gera Hollis wants the Travellers to assist in her revolution – directly, that is, and in several ways. Their armed ship could make all the difference in fending off a response or preventing system defence boats from blasting rebellious areas. In the longer term, she knows the Travellers cannot or will not stay to defend her world, so she needs defensive measures set up. She is also painfully aware that Acrid will not remain independent without trade.

Thus, Gera is considering how to build an economy after she takes control of the world. Acrid can export minerals, metals, chemicals and a few odds and ends manufactured in the settlement's workshops. It can also provide technical schooling in subjects such as hostile-environment mining and the chemicals industry. This might be enough to get the trade ships coming, but only if they know about it.

Gera wants the Travellers to quietly spread the word that Acrid will very soon be open for business. They must be discreet, but ideally they will be able to convince a couple of trader captains that a decent profit can be made. That was not the case previously; the world's economy was very much a closed shop, with products going to PRQ outlets rather than the general market, and goods coming in through 'preferred suppliers'.

The Travellers may have an interesting problem if they are pirates, and are trying to talk merchant captains into jumping into a backwater system. Smugglers and shady starship operators are the most likely to try the new markets at Acrid, which is not really what Gera wants. However, she is enough of a realist to accept the situation. Any trade is better than no trade at all, and Acrid needs ships coming through its port.

This attraction of trade ships to Acrid can be carried out after the rebellion of course, but the sooner ships start to come in, the sooner conditions on the planet will improve and thus the new government is more likely to keep control. In addition, Gera hopes the Travellers can obtain some navy-grade missiles to ensure the port's defences are well-stocked. She does not know how many are available at present, nor their condition, and cannot guarantee they will be in a useable condition after the revolution.

Ideally, the Travellers will be able to obtain missiles and maybe even a launcher or two. These can be set up on a temporary basis, perhaps outside the city, and tied into an improvised fire control and tracking system. Naturally, the rebels have no idea how hard this would be to do, and simply toss the idea out as part of their wish list. The Travellers may be able to put together an effective defence network at a low cost, though the rebels might not want to know where it came from.

These measures are not a prerequisite to launching the revolution – it is likely to happen sooner or later no matter what preparations have or have not been made – but they will greatly increase the chances of Acrid surviving for more than a couple of months as an independent society. Gera knows this very well, and is prepared to make a deal with the Travellers she might regret later. She is willing to offer them no-questions-asked shelter and repairs, essentially making Acrid a Haven and possibly something beyond even that – a friendly world that owes the Travellers a favour.

NEUTRALISING THE SYSTEM DEFENCE BOATS

There are two PRQ system defence boats in the Acrid system (you can use the system defence boat on page 124 of *High Guard*, or the one on page 142 if your Travellers need a greater challenge). At any given time, one is on patrol close to the mainworld. The other might be down for maintenance or crew training, or might be sent off to investigate something of interest elsewhere in the system. This is rare, but occasionally the order is given to conduct a sweep for smugglers or pirates.

A plan to neutralise the boats is necessary to a successful revolution. Ideally, a 'soft' neutralisation would make the boats available to the rebels after they have seized power, and might be carried out ahead of time without alerting the authorities to the developing situation. A 'hard' neutralisation, involving sabotage or other violent means, would probably trigger an alert

unless suspicion can be diverted. For example, a boat disabled by a missile fired from a suspect vessel it was inspecting might not be attributed to an internal uprising.

Options include drawing off one of the boats to a distant location from which it cannot be brought quickly back on-station, persuading the crew it needs repairs and getting into dock with important components removed at the time of the revolution, or sabotage. Alternatively, shooting it out with one or both of the boats remains an option.

Gera's fall back plan for taking out the boats involves home-made missiles, which can be set up outside the settlement in container/launchers and fired in a massed salvo to orbit. Even with rudimentary targeting, a sucker-punch fired at an unsuspecting boat at the beginning of the revolution may result in enough hits to disable it.

This is not much of a plan though, and Gera would be very happy to hear better ideas. The same plan, carried out with proper anti-shipping missiles, would be far more likely to succeed. Gera and the rebels would much rather capture the boats (and not kill their crews) than destroy them, however. They know little about military and naval matters, and have not thought of ideas like disabling Acrid's communications system to prevent the boats learning what is happening on the surface. Gera will be very impressed with any plan of this sort, which she will (correctly) see as being far above her own level of strategic ability.

If one or both boats are not neutralised, their crews will do their best to oppose the revolution. There is a limit to what they can achieve directly, unless they fire on rebellious sections of the city. This will cause breaches and the insidious atmosphere will kill hundreds of inhabitants and wreck critical infrastructure. It would be a useful threat, but it is unlikely the boat captains would be willing to carry it out expect under extreme circumstances. The boats can, however, hold the world under siege, preventing ships coming in or going out. Their own supplies are limited, of course, so there will come a point when the boats need to surrender, negotiate or take drastic action.

The two boats are thus more of a long-term complication than a threat to the revolution's immediate success. However, something will have to be done about them and the best outcome for the rebels is to have control of them, or at least put them out of the picture before the revolution is launched. The aftermath will be complex enough without having to deal with armed spacecraft overhead as well.

SEIZING THE TURRETS

The port at Acrid is defended by two dual missile turrets, set up atop heavily armoured bunkers close to the landing area. The bunkers can be accessed from underground tunnels which permit work crews and maintenance personnel to keep most of the port's systems running without a hostile environment suit. These tunnels could be used to gain access to the turrets themselves or their magazines and fire control centre. Taking any of these out of the equation will nullify the port's launching capability.

The turrets cannot hit a vessel on the landing pad or close to it; not without launching a missile on a trajectory that loops back and endangers the port itself. They can, however, target a vessel in orbit providing targeting data is available. The port's sensors only cover the sky above it; a ship that is over the horizon, i.e. around the curve of the planet, cannot be tracked from the port. A system defence boat or some other vessel in system could provide mid-course guidance for indirect missile launches.

The turrets could be neutralised by cutting off their power. Acrid is not a military base and does not have complex backup systems. The defences are run from the starport power grid, which can be interrupted or simply switched off if the control room is captured. Power conduits could also be targeted, perhaps with explosives. Alternatively, the turrets themselves could be simply blasted, perhaps by a ship positioned so they cannot return fire – again, this is not a military installation and defences are not comprehensive.

Gera is keen to do as little damage as possible, though she will weigh this against any reduction in the chance of success. Magazine explosions under the turrets would cause collateral damage to the port and make it impossible to use the turrets against any future threat. Ideally, she wants a solution that gives her control of the weapons and keeps them in working condition for the future.

The best idea on the table at present is to approach the turrets under the pretext of routine maintenance, then seize them at gunpoint. They are always guarded, and there are security patrols in the sensitive areas of the port, but if there is no alert it should be possible to catch the defenders by surprise. There will only be a handful of them, probably more technicians than guards, but they can be expected to put up at least some resistance. If an alert is sounded, additional personnel will be assigned to secure the turrets unless they are drawn off by some crisis elsewhere.

Gera has no way of knowing how many missiles are available, but the answer is 'not many'. There are six 'ready rounds' stored in each turret and ten more in a magazine located in an adjoining chamber. These reloads must be transported manually on large trolleys. This has never been a problem to date – Acrid has never fired more than a single warning shot before – but it could be an exploitable weakness in the world's defence.

As with the system defence boats, the turrets are a potential asset if they can be seized and a complication if not. They are not likely to play much part in a fight for control of the starport, other perhaps than as a refuge



for the defenders, but can effectively impose a siege on the port by keeping out ships coming to assist one side or the other. To have proper control of the port, Gera's revolutionaries need at least one turret working and in their hands, and certainly they need both out of the equation before any ships can land; and without ships, the port is useless and Acrid's new independence will simply be strangled.

Gera does not quite appreciate this situation. She sees the turrets as a necessary objective in the revolution, but is only partially correct in this. If there is no spaceborne component to the revolution then the turrets are largely irrelevant in the short term; a noose that must be removed from the revolution's neck at some point. Gera is fixating a little too much on the turrets, and would benefit from an appraisal of the true situation.

REVOLUTION!

With every passing day, the chance increases that someone will launch an ill-coordinated attack on the world's security apparatus or its government. The revolutionaries will then have to proceed as best they can or attempt to weather the inevitable crackdown and begin their preparations anew. Ideally, the revolution is launched as coordinated series of attacks and seizure of critical installations such as security armouries, control rooms, power and life support installations and, of course, the turrets and system defence boats. The chances of everything going this well are rather slim.

More than likely the phases and segments of the revolution will be launched in the wrong order, spreading out from some trigger incident as groups rush to their starting positions and try to carry out their part of the mission. Gera has tried to plan for this eventuality, compartmentalising the various missions and assigning backup teams wherever possible. There are never any guarantees though; she is aware the revolution will be a bloody business, probably taking the form of confused but escalating violence all over the port and main settlement.

The ruling elite and their security people are likely to fight hard, since they are unlikely to expect much mercy. Their fighting will be at close quarters and very nasty, using hand weapons and improvised grenades, handguns, shotguns and submachineguns for the most part. There are few heavy weapons and fewer places they could be used. Either side might use the environment as a weapon, perhaps deliberately breaching a section of the access tunnels to make them inaccessible without the proper suit. However, both sides have good reasons not to do this unless they are utterly desperate.

Assuming the revolution is not immediately crushed or quickly successful, fighting for key areas will go on for some time. In some sections of the city, the situation may degenerate into armed bands of workers and security teams hunting one another in some sort of multi-team deathmatch, whilst in others the defenders of a secured area will face repeated assaults from different directions.

The most likely outcome as the situation begins to stabilise is that neither side has completely won, but an endgame is becoming possible. If either or both sides think they have a shot at total victory, they will regroup and try to eliminate the remaining opposition, but it is just possible that negotiations might begin. The city cannot function without its amenities so if one side can deny the other power, but the other faction has control of the water supply, then the outcome is in serious doubt.

Negotiation might be used to eliminate some pockets of resistance, especially if they cannot communicate with others. It might be possible to convince the defenders of the air processing plant that they are the last remnant of a defeated faction and should surrender, when in fact they are the main bargaining chip for the other side. There is room for trickery and deception in this phase of the revolution, as well as clever plans to sneak into a secured area and catch the defenders unawares.

The Travellers may have a key part to play here. As outsiders, they have no history of resentment or fearing what might happen if the workers gain control of the city. They might even be seen to be honourable brokers of a surrender or new social order. That might amuse people who make their living as pirates, but on the flip side there is no certainty that either faction will honour a deal made in good faith by the Travellers. Revolutions are never pretty, and there is a great deal of anger and resentment behind this one.

COUNTER-REVOLUTION

PRQ, former owner-operators of Acrid, cannot simply accept the loss of a major business asset as well as the deaths of many personnel. On the other hand, PRQ is in business, and any attempt to reclaim the world or at least recoup losses must be cost-effective. When damage to the firm's reputation and increased likelihood that someone else will try a similar revolution elsewhere is taken into account, it is clearly worth the firm's while to try to get its asset back.

The first attempt is likely to be straightforward; an attack on the port by a mercenary cruiser or similar vessel full of PRQ security troopers or mercenaries. This could be stopped by an armed offworld presence – one or both system defence boats, plus any ships the Travellers can bring to help – or if Acrid's orbital defence system is functional. If so, the attackers will stand off from the planet, effectively blockading it, and begin negotiations.

Their negotiating position is a bit one-sided; PRQ offers an amnesty for anyone involved in the rebellion if they lay down their arms, and will address the workers' grievances in good faith. This is not much of an offer, and will be accepted only if the world is being strangled by a blockade or has serious internal problems. Additional ships, such as merchants chartered to resupply the first arrivals, will begin to reach the Acrid system after a few weeks, until eventually the blockade is unbreakable. Acrid can only survive for so long before its systems need spares not available on-planet, especially if there was a lot of damage in the revolution.

The PRQ response team will more than likely be able to contact sympathisers on-planet. These may include former privileged employees, disaffected workers unhappy with Gera's leadership, or those who believe the rebellion is bound to be defeated. They will cooperate with the PRQ response force in the hope of being rewarded or at least spared retribution.

Morale among the revolutionaries is a key factor here, as is the condition of the world's critical systems. The response team will know they have support on-planet as soon as contact can be established with sympathisers planetside. Hunting down covert transmissions will deprive them of this information and the ability to coordinate an assault with a counter-revolution on the planet. This does not mean there will not be attempts to seize key installations and force the revolutionary government to surrender, but it will not be well orchestrated.

There is an additional problem here; Gera has visions of a completely independent Acrid, and is unlikely to accept any form of compromise. This is unrealistic, for several reasons. PRQ is will not accept the situation

unless the alternative is far too expensive, and Acrid needs external support. If the Travellers can obtain external support, perhaps from Drinax or another of the local powers, then Acrid will be able to survive without its former corporate masters, providing the attempt to take it back is defeated or deterred. If not, then it will be necessary to negotiate some sort of agreement with PRQ.

The biggest obstacle to that is Gera herself. She hates PRQ, perhaps rightly, but this will prevent her from seeing the necessity of a compromise. If PRQ cannot retake Acrid within a few weeks, a negotiator will be sent to offer a deal which saves face for the company and brings the matter to an acceptable conclusion. The deal is that Acrid will become an autonomous business unit of PRQ, run by a corporate administration appointed by the revolutionary government with the assistance of experts sent by PRQ as needed. Investment will be made into improving conditions among the workforce and increasing productivity.

The short version of this is that Acrid will govern itself but PRQ gets to pretend it was not kicked out of its holdings. The corporation will provide funding for development and repairs, which will be used as directed by the new government. How much money PRQ is willing to put into Acrid depends upon the situation – if the rebels are strongly in control then the company will offer more. A bold front might be useful here, convincing PRQ that the situation on planet is better than it actually is. Again, depriving them of reliable information by hunting down sympathisers would assist in this endeavour.

Unless the revolution has gone very well and external support is available from some other source, this outcome is the most likely. It is actually a reasonable deal that lets everyone get out with their skin intact. The trick is going to be persuading Gera to accept it. If she will not, there are others who might and Acrid could see a further round of revolt and negotiation before the dust finally settles.

