

PIRATES OF DRINAX:

THE CORDAN
CONFLICT



TRAVELLER

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T R A V E L L E R INTRODUCTION

Cordan in Borderlands subsector is potentially a rich world, and a real prize for whoever controls it. Baroness Lux intends it to be her, but she has powerful rivals who must be eliminated or sufficiently reduced in power that they cannot challenge her dominance. Unable to act directly, the baroness engages the Travellers to cause trouble for her rivals, resulting in a small but nasty civil war.

THE SETTING

Cordan has a breathable, if dense and tainted, atmosphere and a reasonable amount of surface water. This makes it a good prospect for colonisation and eventual growth into a highly productive world. Cordan was settled long ago but its development took a different path. For reasons now lost to history it became a vassal world of Arunisiir, producing large quantities of low-value foodstuffs. It was not in the interests of the ruling elite on Arunisiir to encourage any activity that might make Cordan capable of independence.

The world was divided into zones each ruled by a baron appointed by the elite of Arunisiir, and the general population was restricted to a lower Tech Level than that enjoyed by the barons' households. When Arunisiir was overrun by Aslan *ihatei*, the support received by these barons was largely cut off and Cordan had to chart its own path. Lacking the resources to become a major interstellar state, Cordan simply went on as before with the barons as de facto planetary rulers.

The world is officially listed as a representative democracy, though this is a rather creative interpretation of the actual situation. The people of Cordan elect representatives who form a parliament headed by whichever baron is in charge of their zone. Representatives are also sent from each barony to the world parliament which meets at the starport. However, the power of these parliaments is very limited since the barons control all high-technology manufacturing facilities, and the world parliament is hamstrung by rivalries between the baronies.

The relationship between the barons and their people is also peculiar. The official world population is just two thousand people, but this only takes into account members of the baronial households. They are known as citizens, whereas the much larger population outside the households are referred to as subjects and have a distinctly lower status.

As with all leaders, the barons have some popular support among their subjects and also a measure of dissent. The barons have at times provided good leadership and won the trust of the people, and on other occasions lost it by acting out of blatant self-interest. No baron can afford to alienate too many of their people, but neither do they act as the people want if they have a different agenda.

The Imperium, which sends ships through Cordan's starport on a regular basis, does not really care how the world is run so long as the port remains open for business. It is widely assumed that the Imperium would act against anyone upsetting the status quo, and the Imperials are happy enough with the balance of power on Cordan. The barons themselves have cooperated at times but often maintain a policy of polite hostility towards one another. Each knows the others would take advantage of any misfortune, eroding power or annexing as much as they could get away with.

THE PATRON

Baroness Lux is extremely popular with her people, enjoying overwhelming support due to recent actions. This was in part due to her personal leadership of a campaign to dislodge Aslan *ihatei* from areas near her holdings, and partially due to what amounts to bribery. Lux has provided a certain amount of TL9 goods and machinery to her subjects, particularly in hospitals and population centres, which has had an impact on quality of life for people who normally only have access to TL5.

This largesse is not really sustainable in the long term; the cost of maintaining these facilities is beyond the modest budget of any baronial household. It is not merely out of spite or to maintain the barons' position that the majority of the populace is denied access to high technology; it is simply not affordable. This means that Baroness Lux has bought herself a few years of popularity but will rapidly lose it when equipment breaks down or the people start expecting another round of investment. She needs to make use of the advantage she has gained as soon as possible.

The baroness has created a situation where her own people will follow her anywhere, and the subjects of other barons are looking enviously at their improved lifestyles and wondering if they might not be better off under a different ruler. The next stage of her plan is to destabilise the other barons' domains and take advantage of the ensuing chaos. If one or both can be overthrown that would be ideal, but Lux would be satisfied with reducing their power and perhaps gaining additional followers. She hopes the gains will outweigh the investment, but to achieve them she needs to take bold action.

Simply attacking the other barons would be a losing proposition; the balance of power is too close to ensure a victory at any affordable cost. Offworld mercenaries would be a possibility were it not for the certainty of Imperial intervention. The answer, of course, is to subtly trigger 'internal' problems for the other barons, using deniable assets.

HIRING ON

Whilst passing through Cordan or any world in the region, the Travellers are approached by a representative of Baroness Lux. Initially, she has a trivial task for them – transporting a small cargo of high-value medical equipment to a landing site close to the baronial capital for a slightly-better-than-reasonable fee. The representative tells the Travellers that security and discretion are important.

Assuming the Travellers perform adequately, they are invited to dine with the baroness at her residence. Like the other baronial halls, this is a fortified structure within a restricted zone where the household citizens live. Beyond its walls the ordinary subjects go about their daily lives in what appears to be a contented manner.

Baroness Lux explains there used to be more barons on Cordan, but they met with misfortune of various sorts. Aslan *ihatei*, bad luck and conflict between the barons have whittled their number down to three. She tells the Travellers she suspects the other two are colluding to destroy her – a claim not completely untrue but hardly the imminent threat she makes it out to be.

If the Travellers can help her prevent this unfortunate set of circumstances she will permit them to use her private landing field whenever they like. More importantly, perhaps, she will help them reclaim the old baronial hall once occupied by a minor rival, and set up a small estate there. In short, they will become minor nobles on Cordan with their own small holdings.



THE CORDAN CONFLICT

It is not possible to act overtly or directly, and hoping the Imperials will intervene to protect her interests is a bit of a gamble. So instead the baroness wants to ferment dissent and unrest in the lands of her rivals, and sabotage their military assets. This will be the Travellers' task, and she will consider they have succeeded if either or both of the other barons are forced to deal with an uprising or significant rebel activity. If they can be induced to fight one another, she will be delighted and will consider the operation a resounding success.

Baron Fero is at present on the brink of hostilities with his rival Baron Halley (the Travellers might find this an odd statement, since Baroness Lux just said the two were about to gang up on her; she waves a hand and dismisses any queries with the claim that the situation is very complex) over a border area that has been in dispute for years. Fero is moderately popular with his people and his barony is at present stable in both a political and economic sense. Fero has the largest population base of the three barons, giving him a manpower advantage.

Baron Halley has an extremely well fortified hall, which most people refer to as his castle. He seems to have access to more TL9 manufacturing equipment than the other barons, and a slightly larger personal guard than Lux. Despite this, he seems to have suffered a setback recently. Baroness Lux thinks that perhaps Halley has offended the Imperials and been quietly admonished. His trade income is down, though exports are much the same. This suggests he has been hit with a tariff or simply offered a lower price for his goods. Since most of the ships his bulk grain and foodstuffs are sold to are Imperial, this fits with the possibility that he has done something to upset the Imperium.

The plan is to cause an incident in the disputed area which will spark an insurgency against one or both barons. If their personal forces can be drawn in,

this will impose a cost in terms of replacements and maintenance for high-tech equipment. If the two forces can be made to fight one another, that would be ideal but Baroness Lux would be quite happy to create a quagmire that neither can afford to withdraw from. The longer this goes on for, the greater the cost to her rivals and the smaller the chance of them attacking her.

The incident will be triggered by the assassination of a highly unpopular local official in the disputed region, which is currently under the control of Baron Halley. The assassination will be carried out by the Travellers, and need not actually succeed (though Lux would prefer it to) in order to trigger the desired chain of events. There will be no shortage of possible suspects, and the most likely response is a security crackdown that will further alienate the local population. It will also increase tensions with Baron Fero, who has many supporters in the region and is just looking for an excuse to 'rescue' them from the oppressive rule of their current overlord.

Once forces from both factions have been drawn into the area, it should not be hard to create another incident that will get them shooting at one another. If this cannot be achieved, some sort of popular insurgency will keep both sides busy for a long time, which suits the purposes of the baroness.

Referee's Note

There is no plan for the other two barons to gang up on Lux, though it could happen someday. Halley has been receiving support from the Zhodani Consulate for some time, and the Imperium cannot 'officially' notice this as it would create a diplomatic situation they do not wish to confront. So instead they have found reasons to impose economic sanctions upon Halley; reasons they do not want too closely investigated. The situation is becoming quite volatile, though not in the way that Lux has presented. Still, her plan is workable and would indeed weaken her rivals. It might have other consequences not yet apparent.

THE ASSASSINATION

The target official is one Josephus Agraaki, a taxation assessment supervisor who has become notorious for corruption and other rumoured misdeeds. He is tolerated by Baron Halley because he is very efficient at getting money out of people and also has information about various members of the baron's household (some say the baron himself) that can be used against them at need.

Agraaki routinely tours his areas of responsibility 'assessing' the tax liability of local businesses and farms. In fact he extorts almost as much in bribes not to increase taxation as he does tax money, and in recent years has become increasingly rapacious. This affords him good personal security, of course, and a heavily protected residence away from the main baronial centre of power.

Agraaki publishes his intended itinerary before making a tour of the region, but almost never follows it. This is public knowledge – he is notorious for turning up somewhere unexpectedly whilst another 'inspectee'

nervously awaits his arrival. His tours are typically two to three weeks long, after which he conducts other business (the locals call that 'lurking in his lair counting his money') for a few weeks before venturing out again.

Agraaki's security detail consists of a driver for each of his vehicles and four bodyguards, plus two attendants. The latter handle the routine aspects of his business and any small errands required, and are dressed in the same smart-but-intimidating manner as Agraaki himself and his bodyguards. In the event of an incident, it might be difficult to determine who is who in the few seconds it takes to get Agraaki to his vehicle.

The team travels in two identical ground cars, which are lightly armoured to resist mid-tech small-arms fire. All members of the entourage are armed with autopistols, and there are additional weapons available. Each vehicle has a shotgun and a submachinegun aboard, and it is standard practice for two of the guards to remain with the drivers, with the heavier weapons handy, whilst Agraaki, his attendants and two guards carry out their business.

Josephus Agraaki

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		-
STR	6	INT	6	SKILLS
DEX	8	EDU	7	Admin 2, Advocate 1, Carouse
END	7	SOC	8	1, Deception 1, Diplomat 1, Electronics (computers) 1, Gun Combat 0, Persuade 1
EQUIPMENT		Autopistol (3D-3)		



Bodyguards

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		-		-
STR	8	INT	7	SKILLS
DEX	8	EDU	6	Athletics 0, Drive (wheel) 1,
END	9	SOC	6	Electronics 0, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Melee 0, Recon 0
EQUIPMENT		Autopistol (3D-3), Shotgun (4D, Bulky), or Submachinegun (3D, Auto 3)		



ARMoured CAR

TL	9
SKILL	DRIVE (WHEEL)
AGILITY	+0
SPEED (CRUISE)	HIGH (MEDIUM)
RANGE (CRUISE)	500 (750)
CREW	1
PASSENGERS	3
CARGO	-
HULL	15
SHIPPING	3.5 TONS
COST	CR25300

ARMOUR

FRONT	15
REAR	15
SIDES	15



EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS

Autopilot (basic), Communications System (improved), Computer/1, Entertainment System, Fire Extinguishers, Life Support (short term), Navigation System (basic), Wet Bar

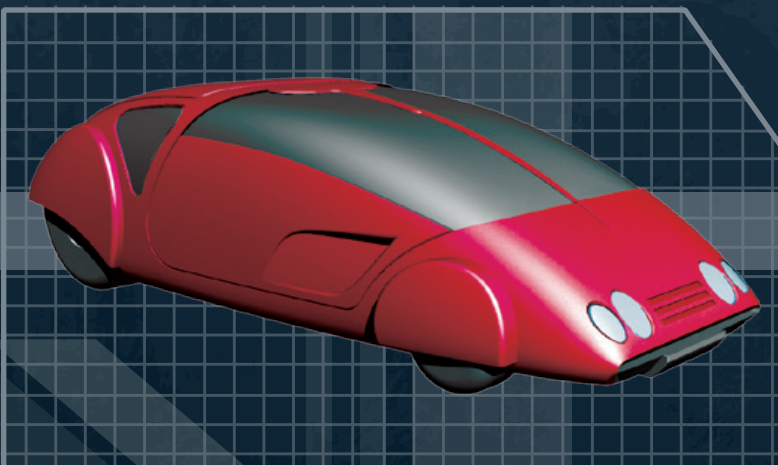
Autopilot (skill level)	-
Communications (range)	500 km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+1
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	-
Camouflage (Recon DM)	-
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	-

TRAITS

None

DESCRIPTION

A comfortable armoured transport intended to ferry mid-level personnel in relative safety, this ground car looks normal enough from the exterior, but a close inspection will show it sits a little heavily on its suspension. The car is armoured against small arms fire but offers little protection against heavy weapons. It is generally used to protect VIPs from an unruly populace or low tech enemies rather than opposing militaries, and its life support systems mean it can function in a variety of atmospheres.



The security team is efficient enough, and has dealt in the past with incidents ranging from a handful of easily intimidated protesters, an enraged landowner armed with a fencepost, and a lone gunman seeking revenge for some past offence. The team have a set of well-rehearsed drills, which Agraaki is smart enough to comply with. If a serious incident presented itself, the bodyguards would try to extract Agraaki to the vehicles under cover of the enhanced firepower waiting there.

Having dealt with minor threats in the past, and very easily, the security team is a little complacent, and Agraaki's own contempt for the people he robs – he calls it 'taxes' of course – has resulted in him taking greater risks and becoming a little sloppy.

The Travellers might try to assassinate Agraaki as he stays in a small town on his tour, or ambush him on the road. In the latter case, his driver will focus on getting away whilst the other car provides cover; Agraaki has no interest in fighting it out with assailants, and will sacrifice his guards to do so. They are loyal enough to put up a good fight but are not fanatical. Wounded or abandoned guards will escape or surrender once they have ensured Agraaki's escape or it is clear they are overmatched.

THE RESPONSE

Even an unsuccessful attempt on Agraaki's life will trigger a response from Baron Halley's security services. Although the baron is not a fan of Agraaki or his activities, an attack on baronial officials cannot be tolerated. Halley has a small force of paramilitary guards equipped to TL9 standards, which he will deploy without hesitation. The guards are mostly equipped with ground vehicles (typically lightly armoured wheeled patrol vehicles such as the Parthian Wheeled Scout on page 89 of the *Vehicle Handbook*, or the Socrates Field Car on page 111) but they also have a handful of air/rafts mounting light support weapons, such as machineguns. These may be used to position a fast-reaction force to block roads or close escape routes.

The response, for all it is made by well-armed security troopers, is not particularly heavy-handed. One reason for this is that Baron Halley's force was trained by advisors from the Zhodani Consulate, and is of a higher quality than the troops of other barons. Whilst quite willing to shoot anyone who needs it, the security force understands the need to avoid alienating the populace. Thus the response is robust but not trigger-happy.

Paramilitary Guards

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Human		-		-	
STR	8	INT	7	SKILLS	
DEX	9	EDU	7	Athletics 0, Drive (wheel) 1,	
END	8	SOC	7	Electronics 0, Flyer 0, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 1, Melee (blade or bludgeon) 1, Recon 1, Survival 1	
EQUIPMENT		Flak Jacket (+5) Laser Carbine (4D) or RAM Grenade Launcher (frag, 5D, Blast 9)			



Militia

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Human		-		-	
STR	7	INT	7	SKILLS	
DEX	7	EDU	5	Carouse 0, Drive 0, Gun Combat 0, Melee 0, Profession (various) 1, Streetwise 0, Survival 0	
END	7	SOC	5		
EQUIPMENT		Rifle (3D)			



The most likely response lies somewhere between a police and military operation. Troops will cordon off an area whilst investigators question the inhabitants. Meanwhile, detachments will search likely hiding places for anyone who looks like they might be armed. Travellers might well be able to talk their way out of this situation, but they need a plausible story for just why they are in the vicinity. If caught with weapons, especially weapons matching those used in an attack, then bluff is not likely to work.

There is a limit to how much of a response can be made by the baronial forces. Local law enforcement is involved too, but its personnel are small-town sheriffs not fond of Agraaki; not all of them will search for his attackers with any great diligence. The situation is further confused by a series of allegations that Baron Halley's forces are persecuting known Fero sympathisers. It is possible that there is some truth in this, but whatever the case it results in several days of sabre-rattling and posturing.

Baron Fero moves some of his own household troops to the border and offers to help with the investigation. When this is rebuffed, he suggests his personnel might observe the investigation and protect what he calls 'displaced citizens of his barony' – i.e. those who live within Halley's lands but support Fero.

Amid all this tension there are public displays of sympathy for the attackers, in the form of loud statements that the people are better off without crooks like Agraaki, and either satisfaction he is dead or regret that he is not. Although this is really little more than venting on the part of the populace, some of those who talk toughest are arrested and taken away for trial. There is some violence at this point as outraged locals resist or impede the arrests.

This would be an ideal moment for the Travellers to do some rabble rousing. It would not be hard to cause an incident that would trigger wider events. Even if they do not seize the opportunity, the situation will continue to spiral out of control when Baron Fero mobilises his militia. The militia are nothing more than subjects who live along the border, armed with TL5 small arms. They are inexperienced, poorly led and nervous, a dangerous combination at any time. In the present climate it is a disaster waiting to happen.

BORDER CLASHES

Even without the Travellers' involvement, some kind of incident is likely. The referee should allow the Travellers to be the instigators of what follows if they are making any real attempt at it, but if not then these events will unfold and the Travellers will have to react. The most likely scenario for an incident is an unauthorised attempt by Fero's militia to protect friends and sympathisers over the border from aggression by Halley's household troops. Once gunfire has been exchanged, Halley hurriedly calls up the rest of his militia and begins operations of his own.

The first stage of the conflict takes the form of skirmishes between poorly led militia groups, with household troops acting as a reserve and dashing from one fight to another. The intensity of this stage is low, with no territory changing hands. Most of the fighting is nothing more than patrols exchanging shots. Casualties are minimal and some even find it all rather good fun.

However, there are more serious clashes here and there. Some of the towns close to the border are fortified, more or less, with earth embankments and concrete bunkers. One such is Ellaton, which lies just within the territory of Baron Halley. Ellaton has been the subject of dispute for some years, and has a larger than average militia contingent plus a couple of artillery pieces to defend it. Its position in the crook of a river makes it more logically part of Baron Fero's territory – he has argued for some time that the border should follow the river rather than an arbitrary line on the map, and if so Ellaton is his. It is certainly much easier to enter Ellaton from the Fero side than to cross the long and narrow bridge from the rest of Halley's territory.

This places Ellaton in a difficult strategic position, and Halley's strategy in any conflict is to rush reinforcements into the town as quickly as possible. Once there, they need support which can only be provided over the bridge or by grav vehicles. Ellaton is thus a critical point, and one where real fighting starts escalating almost as soon as the conflict breaks out. Baroness Lux advocates that the Travellers engineer a setback for whichever baron is winning here.

Both sides have vulnerabilities – Halley must use the bridge or risk his few grav vehicles to resupply the garrison, whilst Fero has moved artillery up and committed a significant part of his force. He is thinking in terms of a siege, with his forces surrounding the town on the landward side and interdicting the bridge with shellfire. He is not expecting a significant counterattack and might be caught by surprise if one emerged. A small, grav-mobile force might destroy some of his artillery or ammunition stocks, which are not well guarded. This might tip the balance in favour of Halley, at least in this area, and force him to commit additional troops to a battle he could lose... or perhaps withdraw and allow Fero to have Ellaton.

Control of Ellaton is not, in and of itself, of any great consequence. The town has little industry and the river crossing is not particularly important. However, the political fallout from its loss would be extremely bad for Halley, more than likely prompting an uprising in other pro-Fero areas. It is not certain that the militia would resist such a rising.

The border squabble at Ellaton is thus more important than it might at first seem. Halley knows he cannot afford to lose here, but winning at a high cost would also be disastrous. Fero, for his part, can retreat at any time but senses he has a real opportunity to harm his rival. He is willing to stake a lot on the outcome.

ESCALATION

Baroness Lux is keen for the conflict to escalate, and has sent other agents into the territories of her rivals to create incidents. The Travellers have the capability to ensure the conflict becomes an all-out war between Halley and Fero, if they strike at the right spot. There are several possibilities.

Assassination of key figures will intensify the conflict. The barons and their immediate households are too well guarded to be likely targets, but the regional governors and militia commanders are more vulnerable. An assassination might throw local forces into disarray or cause militia to become disheartened. How the Travellers go about this depends on their skills. Infiltration is always an option, though a team with access to a grav vehicle could use mobility to set up an ambush in an unexpected spot or get into a lightly defended area from a direction that would not normally be considered. Whilst all of the barons have access to a few grav vehicles, their field commanders are accustomed to skirmishing with militia rather than dealing with modern battlespace mobility.

Surprise Attacks on targets located well behind the battle lines are another option, especially for teams with grav vehicles. Artillery positions and even headquarters are vulnerable to a sudden strike, and supply lines might also be a useful target. These could be attacked by ambushing transport convoys or attacking the supply dumps themselves. Actions of this sort will force the barons to pull troops back from the combat zones, a necessary measure but not a particularly effective one. The militia are simply not very good at this sort of thing, and their ineptitude is likely to result in unnecessary casualties or critical gaps in the defences.

Rabble-Rousing is perhaps the most subtle yet effective means the Travellers can use to escalate the conflict. Whether they engineer a situation that makes one of the barons look bad or they simply spread rumours, if the Travellers can convince a baron's followers that he is incompetent or does not care about them, they may begin to resist his rule or even go over to another faction. Baroness Lux hopes that the Travellers can stir up several small rebellions here and there, further diluting the strength of the other barons.

At the Starport there are some additional possibilities. During this phase of the conflict the starport is declared closed to ground traffic, though it continues to operate more or less as normal in terms of ships coming and going. The port's workforce and population of the associated startown are more or less independent of the three barons, though there are supporters of each present. Some will try to obtain weaponry and smuggle it out through the closed frontiers of the port to their chosen faction. Others engage in propaganda warfare against their rivals or in favour of their own baron. In some cases, there is violence between groups of rival supporters, though these incidents tend to be small in scale and quickly dealt with by the port security force.

The Travellers could involve themselves in these events, though they may have a problem getting in and out of the port if they use ground or grav transport. There will be no interference with a starship that 'bounces' between a baron's landing field and the port, though the port authority will try to apply pressure to the crew not to become involved in the conflict.

The Imperial trade delegation at the port has no real power to stop the conflict. It has a handful of guards; sufficient to protect its assets and personnel, and not much more than that. The delegation can (and does) make threats about an intervention or Imperial sanctions, but this sort of pressure is all but meaningless in the face of the immediate threat faced by each of the two warring barons. Of course, each blames the other and says he is willing to end the conflict if his opponent stops attacking him.

FREE-FOR-ALL

Finally, the balance begins to tip. Which of the two barons starts to come out on top depends very much upon the actions of the Travellers. Enough setbacks, destroyed munitions and areas in rebellion will spread one of the barons' forces too thinly, and suddenly the front line begins to crumble. The opponent's army is too clumsy and amateurish to exploit this opportunity to its fullest, but the militia advances and grabs control of some border towns. A counterattack fails to dislodge them and morale collapses.

As additional areas attempt to switch sides or at least stop supporting their baron, it looks like the opponent has won. However, this is not in the interests of Baroness Lux. She does not want a polarised two-baron Cordan; she wants to maintain the illusion of a balance of power but with herself in a position of dominance. Thus far, all she has done is reinforce her own militia along the borders and make diplomatic noises about reconciliation and limiting the conflict – whilst stirring the pot to escalate it.

Now, Lux decides it is time to act. Claiming she is simply moving troops into part of the war zone to restore order and protect her borders – along with providing relief to those harmed by the conflict – she orders her militia to advance into the war zone. At first this goes well, with grateful people happily accepting protection from the chaos. However, both barons resist this incursion, and Lux is rapidly drawn into increasingly bitter fighting.

Although Baroness Lux is the strongest of the three factions, and the most unified, it quickly becomes clear that she has over-extended herself and is in a perilous position. At this point she turns once more to the Travellers to help her resolve the situation. What she needs is a quick end to the conflict which allows her

to retain at least some of her gains. She cannot afford not to come out ahead in this conflict, given what it has cost her to engineer the situation, but this cannot become public knowledge. If the Travellers can bring the war they started to an end, Lux will honour the deal she made with them. They will receive a small estate and some help getting it set up. How they go about ending the conflict is up to them.

A peace conference is a possibility, though persuading the barons to attend will be difficult. The Travellers have a better chance of this, as outsiders, than any local faction though the best option might be to talk the Imperial trade delegation at the starport into hosting a conference and guaranteeing the safety of attendees. The outcome of the conference is by no means assured, of course.

An alliance with either Fero or Halley would ensure the defeat of the other, though total victory is in fact not desirable. Lux wants a shifted balance of power, not a polarised world, and any division of spoils would be difficult to work out.

Individual surrender, or the surrender of one baron with the other as junior partner in an alliance, would suit Lux' plans best. The surrender would be more palatable to the baron if it is couched in terms of territory ceded to create a more rational border line or in accordance with the wishes of the populace. Putting a reasonable deal in front of Fero and Halley, and convincing them of the need to accept it, is left to the Travellers.

Continued Conflict is not in anyone's interests and Lux will not reward the Travellers if it happens. The war will eventually wind down with no clear victor and all parties exhausted. Life will become a little grimmer on Cordan, with occasional violence simmering on the borders, and the Travellers will have achieved nothing.

