

TRAVELLER

H I G H A N D D R Y



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

MARCHES ADVENTURE 1 : HIGH AND DRY

CREDITS

CLASSIC TRAVELLER

Marc Miller

Loren Wiseman, John Harshman, Frank Chadwick, Darryl Hany, Winston Hamilton, Tony Svajlenka, Scott Renner, Doug Poe, David MacDonald, Wayne Roth, Paul R. Banner.

MONGOOSE TRAVELLER

Author

Martin J. Dougherty

Editor

Matthew Sprange

Layout and Graphic Design

Will Chapman

Interior Illustrations

Amy Perret

3D Model Design

Sandrine Thirache

Special Thanks

Marc Miller, Tom O'Neill, Brian Caball, Aidan Rafferty, Robert Eaglestone, Loren Wiseman, James Maliszewski, Donald McKinley, Constantine Thomas, William Hostman, Martin Costa

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
THE BOWMAN ARM	4
THE WORLD OF WALSTON	6
FLAMMARION TO WALSTON	13
WALSTON STAR TOWN	18
CENTRAL LAKE	20
MOUNT SALBARI	23
IN THE CRATER	27
ERUPTION!	31
FIGHTING MOUNT SALBARI, PART ONE	33
FIGHTING MOUNT SALBARI, PART TWO	36
AFTERMATH: AS THE DUST SETTLES	42

Traveller ©2016 Mongoose Publishing. All rights reserved. Reproduction of this work by any means without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden. All significant characters, names, places, items, art and text herein are copyrighted by Mongoose Publishing.

This game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. To learn more about the Open Game License, please go to www.mongoosepublishing.com.

This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United Kingdom and of the United States. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organisations, places or events is purely coincidental.

Traveller is a trademark of Far Future Enterprises and is used under licence.



T R A V E L L E R INTRODUCTION

This adventure provides the Travellers with a starship (and a whole bag of problems to go with it) and a mission to carry out once they have the ship. The latter is not the focus of this adventure; it is more of a hook. The adventure, in the main, concerns getting the ship and resolving some subsequent issues. The ship is not lying handily in dock nearby, as it turns out, but is located on a nearby world where it has become stuck due to an equipment breakdown. All the Travellers need to do is travel to the ship's location and pick it up, after making a few minor repairs and dealing with any incidental problems along the way.

Simple enough on the face of it. However, this is the Imperial frontier and not everything goes to plan out here.

While self-contained, *High and Dry* is intended as an introductory adventure for the forthcoming Metal Worlds campaign which begins with *Project Steel*. By playing *High and Dry*, the Travellers will be in a perfect position to start the Metal Worlds campaign.

THE THIRD IMPERIUM

High and Dry is set in the Spinward Marches sector of the Third Imperium, in the Sword Worlds and District 268 subsectors. It is a complete and self-contained adventure, requiring only the *Traveller Core Rulebook* to play.

This adventure involves very little combat, though it is always possible that the Travellers will get involved in a brawl or fight somewhere along the line. One possibility for Travellers who are itching for some action is to have them run into someone harbouring a grudge against the previous crew of the scout ship, resulting in aggression that may seem incomprehensible to the Travellers at first. Sooner or later they will figure out that their ship is a trouble magnet – the previous crew made a lot of enemies. Alternatively, here are a few creatures on the world the Traveller will visit who may resent humans getting too close.

However, it is entirely possible to complete this adventure without drawing a gun or throwing a punch. This is not a deliberate policy on the part of the author, nor is it an indication that Traveller games should not involve combat; but it is a good indication that an exciting and action-filled adventure need not feature combat. This adventure certainly does not lack in action!

Of course, any written adventure is subject to the interpretation of the referee and Travellers. As written, *High and Dry* does not have an alien invasion or an apocalyptic gunfight at the end but that does not mean a referee who added these things would be doing anything wrong. This is a framework for a Traveller campaign. Campaigns are supposed to be fun. So change whatever you think necessary to make the game fun and everything will be fine. Trust us, we are professional game designers...

TRAVELLERS AND EQUIPMENT

This adventure can be played (and completed successfully) by almost any group of adventurers if they are able to think creatively and maximise their strengths. However, they will need to be able to pilot a starship, run its engineering plant and plot a jump if they are to make use of the ship in this adventure. The Traveller skill package (see the *Traveller Core Rulebook*, page 48) will provide everything needed in this regard and the adventure will suit just about any group of starting Travellers.

Other than the requirements to crew the ship, there are no encounters or challenges in this adventure aimed at any specific type of Traveller. Different Travellers will use different approaches and may struggle in some circumstances, but this game is not about having the right weapons, skills or equipment to meet a challenge; it is about meeting what the universe throws at you with what you have and finding a way to win – or at least survive.

INVOLVING THE TRAVELLERS

The default opening to this adventure has the Travellers given their task at Flammarion Starport. The 'hook' in this case is that the Travellers are tasked with picking up a starship and bringing it to Flammarion on behalf of the new owners – themselves.

Ex-Scouts

For newly created Travellers, just setting out among the stars, this can be perfect. In the best of all possible worlds, an ex-scout among the Travellers will have been given the use of a scout ship as a Benefit when he mustered out – if this is the case, do not simply give the scout his ship. Tell him he must report to the Scout office in the Flammarion Starport. From there, the adventure can start smoothly with Mr Casarii (see page 13) telling him where ship is and what he must do to claim it.

If there are no scouts due a ship among the Travellers, there are two good alternatives.

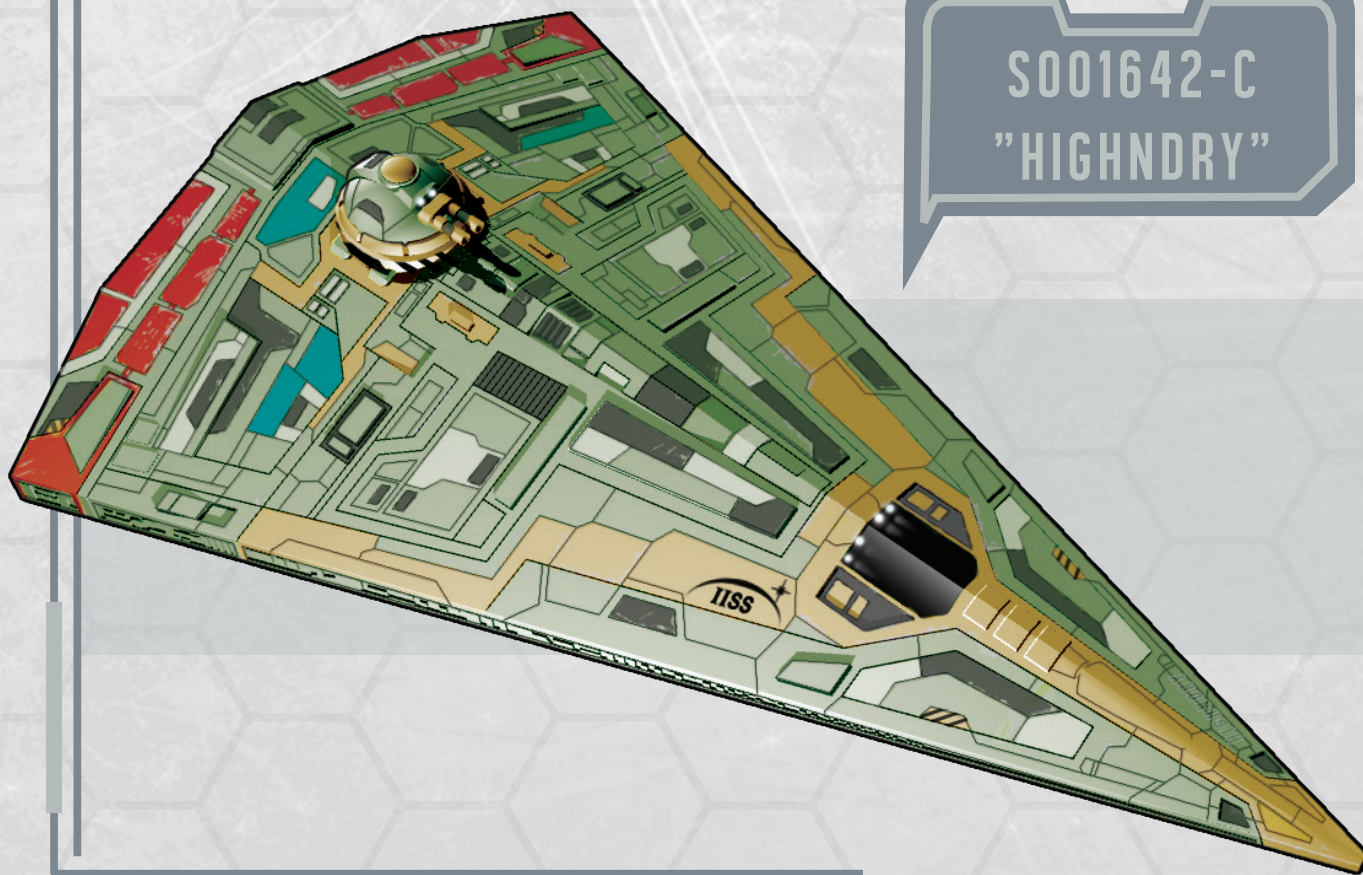
Free Scout Ship!

The Contacts of one of the Travellers has arranged a favour with the Scout Service to grant the detached duty use of a scout ship. All the Travellers have to do is collect it...

Other Traveller Ships

If another Traveller has gained a ship as a Benefit, you can simply swap the Scout/Courier for the appropriate vessel. In this case, the Traveller owns the ship (or whatever percentage of it he managed to accrue as a Benefit), but it will not be as simple as picking it up from the nearest starport. Instead, the Scout Service will inform the Traveller of where the ship actually is.

Changing the type of ship the Travellers are sent to collect will have no fundamental effect on the adventure itself, but the ship will need to be capable of entering an atmosphere.



C H A P T E R - O N E

THE BOWMAN ARM

As noted elsewhere, the Coreward arm of the Spinward Main in District 268 is named the Bowman Arm. The region lies outside the Imperium but close enough to it that Imperial influences are fairly strong. Ships bound for Five Sisters subsector navigate along the Arm, though Jump-2 ships normally make the transit by hopping from Dattrillian to Walston, then Bowman to Asteltine rather than going through every backwater system on the way. The Caladbolg-Enos- Flammarion run is much quicker but politics can interfere at Enos, which is owned by the Sword Worlds Confederation. The thumbnails presented here are thus simply that; an overview of the world and its place in the Bowman Arm's complex economic and political development.

This is a brief summary of the worlds on the Bowman Arm that will be relevant to this adventure.

FLAMMARION

Flammarion is an important link on the Xboat route to Five Sisters subsector, and the site of both an Imperial Navy base and a Scout Service Way Station. The Naval base is a small affair intended mainly to support patrol ships and destroyers. It is unusual to see even a cruiser, let alone a capital ship, passing through the region in peacetime. The Scout Base is considerably larger, with full Way Station status. This makes it an important center for Scout Service activity in the region, ranging from training and routine communications duty to exploration and survey missions, and probably (though the Imperial authorities will neither confirm nor deny) surveillance and reconnaissance missions into the Sword Worlds Confederation.

Flammarion itself is a fairly unappealing world with a thin atmosphere despite its size, and little surface water. Most Travellers stop over at the large and well equipped Highport and never set foot on-planet.

ASTELTINE

An average sized world with an exotic atmosphere unbreathable by humans, Asteltine is home to around 2,000 people whose origins vary considerably. People tend to come to Asteltine to work rather than to live, so the population tends to be somewhat variable. Most of the residents are typical Imperial humans, but there are small numbers of Darrians, Sword Worlders and Aslan at any given time. There is some tension between these groups.

While Asteltine itself is a fairly unpleasant world, the system supports a fairly large belting and mining community. This was sufficient to support the development of a decent starport which employs nearly all of the world's inhabitants. The port is also used by ships plying the Spinward Main in the direction of Five Sisters subsector.

For decades Asteltine's mining and processing industry has been a chaotic mess of small firms and entrepreneurial individuals. However, there are rumors that some of the larger corporations or even the Megacorps may want to move into the system now that access has become easier.

567-908

A dry world with a thin atmosphere, 567-908 has little to recommend it to colonists or businesses, and thus far has remained just a number (not even a name) on the map. There is a rudimentary starport operated by Scout Service personnel and some private contractors. With little more than a few huts and a small lake to draw water from (for drinking and to crack for hydrogen fuel) there is little reason to stay. Few visitors remain on planet longer than it takes to refuel their ship.

Name	Location	Bases	Profile	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Gas Giants
567-908	0201		E532000-0	Ba		
Asteltine	0101		B7A7402-A	Fl, Ni		
Bowman	0302	S	D000300-9	As, Lo		Yes
Flammarion	0110	2	A623514-B	Po, Ni		
Walston	0402		C544338-8	Lo, Ni		Yes

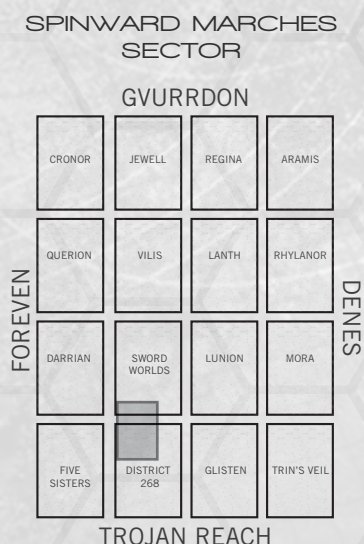
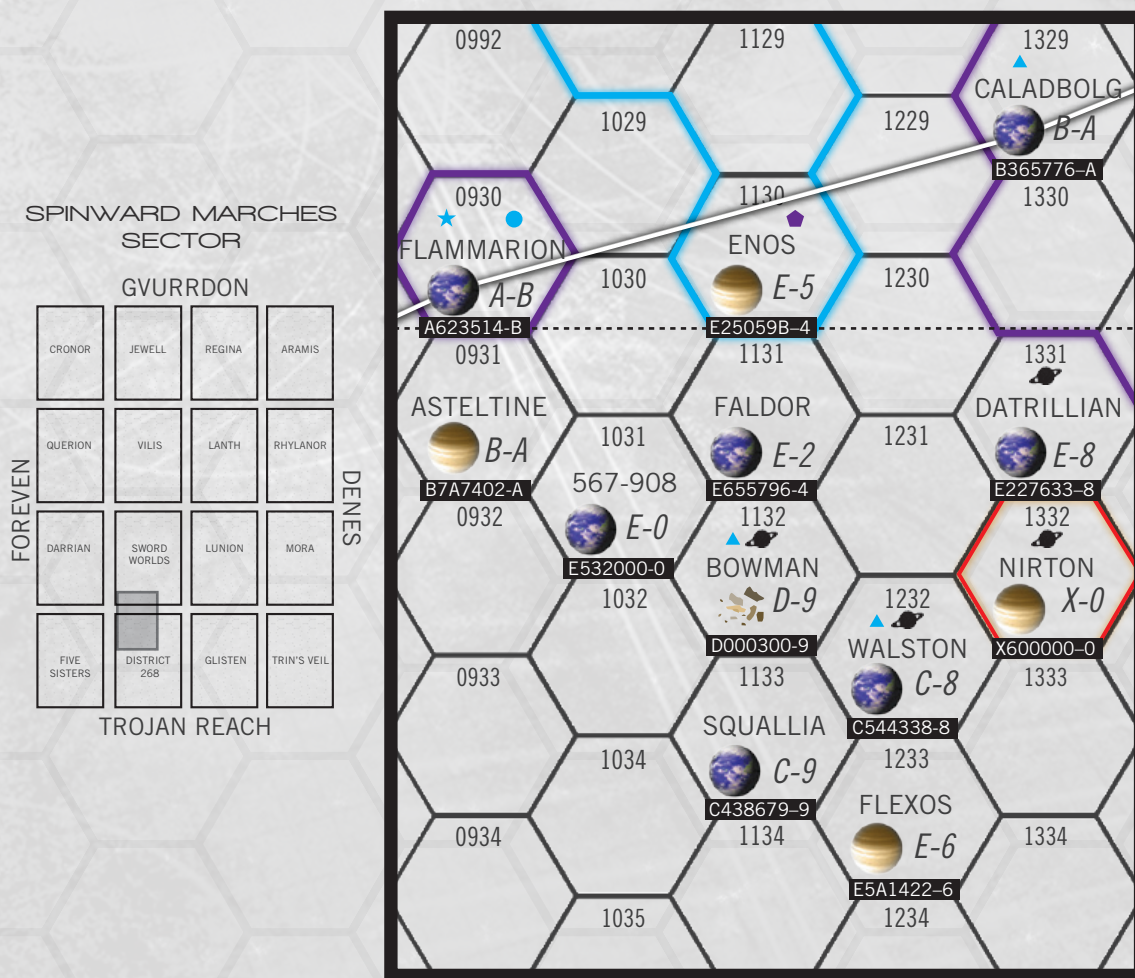
BOWMAN

The Bowman Belt is one of the wonders of the Spinward Marches. It is one of the most extensive planetoid belts ever discovered, occupying the equivalent of five planets' worth of orbits in one contiguous belt. The Bowman Belt is home to an unknown, but probably large, number of Belter communities. There are also rumours of other inhabitants – pirates, renegade Sword Worlders and the like.

The only actual planet in the system is the gas giant Bowman Prime, whose moons are designated by Greek letters. Alpha is home to a tiny IISS base staffed by a dozen or so personnel, and Garrison Starport, the system's Class D port.

Ling Standard products moved into the Bowman system some time ago, and now have extensive operations in the Trojan asteroids. This has led to friction with the independent beltlers who work the system. There have already been incidents of violence and things look set to get worse.

PARTIAL MAP OF SWORD WORLDS SUBSECTOR AND DISTRICT 268



- Gas Giant
- Sword Worlds Border
- Sword Worlds Military Base
- Starport Class & Tech Lvl
- Imperial Border
- Imperial Scout Base
- Planet
- X-Boat Route
- Imperial Naval Base
- Asteroid Belt
- Red Zone
- Imperial Way Station

C H A P T E R - T W O

THE WORLD OF WALSTON

Walston lies on the most commonly used route through the Bowman Arm of the Spinward Main, and possesses one of the best ports in the immediate area. This, and the broadly habitable nature of the world, makes it a popular stopover point on the route. Under the right circumstances Walston might become the economic centre of the Arm when the region joins the Imperium. At present, however, it is a backwater of little importance.

WALSTON

Walston orbits an M2 primary which is named Albin's Star for the captain of the first exploration ship into the system from the Imperium. The system contains two small gas giants named Insive and Greenish (the latter for its colour, apparently) plus five rocky bodies in fairly standard orbits. There are no planetoid belts as such, but the system does have the usual comets and planetoid collections at the Trojan points of the gas giants. Walston itself lies on the outer fringe of the Life Zone, occupying the innermost orbit of Albin's Star.

Lying in the closest orbit to the system's primary, Walston is the only inhabited body in the system.

Walston is not the most inviting of worlds. It is rather dry, with highly variable temperatures thanks to the thin atmosphere, which requires a filter mask to breathe safely. Lying on the outer edge of the Life Zone, Walston does not get excessively warm, even during the day, and at night temperatures plummet well below freezing in all regions.

Somewhat less than half the planetary surface is under water, though not all of this water is in liquid form. In the polar regions the seas are constantly frozen to a considerable depth, and icebergs are common even close to the equator.

Nightly freezing of fresh-water bodies and the surface of some seas is a fact of life. Rainfall tends to be minimal since there is little evaporation of frozen water. Walston has no satellites, so there are no tides to contend with. There is little erosion on land, due to a combination of thin atmosphere and relative dryness. Walston has a number of fairly impressive mountain ranges which create windshadows and further deprive inland regions of rainfall. Thus the landscape tends towards being rugged and impressive, but inhospitable. Rocky

badlands and dusty plains are common, though most coastal regions are better watered.

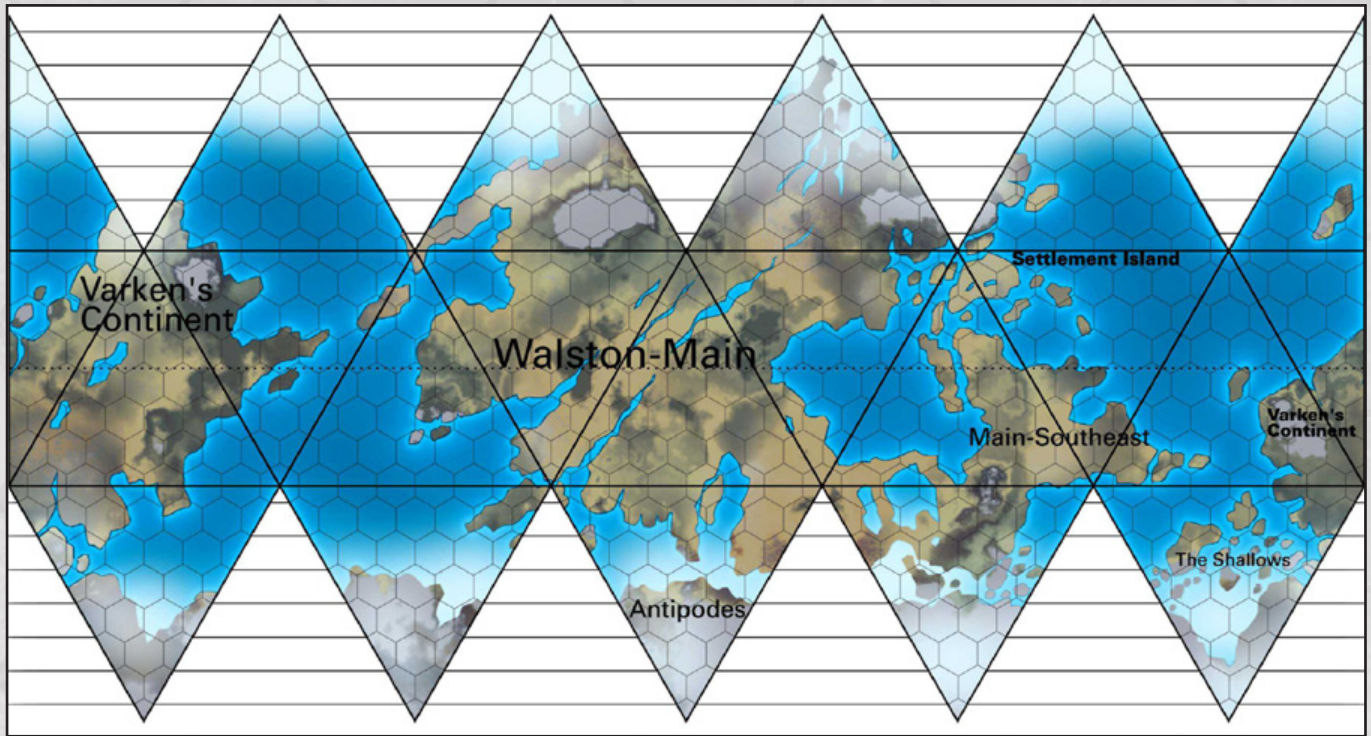
A number of major deep-sea thermal vents exist, giving rise to warm currents that make some areas much more habitable than others. Indeed, there are several obvious sites for settlement, though at present there is only one centre of population. This lies on Settlement Island, off the eastern coast of the world's largest continent, Walston-Main.

Settlement Island is fairly large; some 200km from north to south and 350km from east to west. The sea between it and Walston-Main is shallow and dotted with small islands. A drop in sea level of just a few meters might create a land bridge, though this is not likely to happen. The island itself is not particularly high above sea level except in the southern extreme where a huge extinct volcano (Mount Salbarii) and its surrounding hills rise steeply from the coastal plain. The island is washed by a warm current which creates a zone of higher than average rainfall and fertile seas; Mount Salbarii traps some of the rain over the island, feeding two great lakes which then spill over into northward-flowing rivers. These rivers not only make the island's interior the most habitable part of the planet, but they also serve as highways between the main and northern settlements.

Walston-Main is large, cold and uninviting. Mountain ranges (with the odd active volcano) are interspersed with dusty plains. A number of deep canyons run roughly east northeast across the continent. These have never been explored. Erosion seems an unlikely explanation for their presence; tectonic activity or some ancient cataclysm may be the cause.

Walston-Main contains about 50% of the world's land mass. Most of the rest is split between the Main-Southeast Subcontinent, Walston-Antipodes, the Shallows and Varken's Continent. Main-Southeast is connected to Walston-Main by two narrow isthmuses. One is more or less impassable, consisting of a chain of volcanic mountains; the other is a frozen desert. Thus Main-Southeast is effectively a separate land mass.

Walston-Antipodes lies mostly in the Southern hemisphere and includes the great Antarctic ice shelf. It is not known how much land lies under the ice cap. The Shallows is a vast region of very shallow sea with many



islands and mountain-tops protruding above the surface. The region would be extremely hazardous to seagoing navigation if any were undertaken. Much of the Shallows can be considered to be a vast saltwater swamp rather than an archipelago, land mass or sea area. In some areas it is possible to walk for hundreds of kilometres between islands, never encountering water deeper than a man's waist. Varken's Continent is a horrible place, with some of the worst terrain on the planet. Some small areas may be marginally habitable but these are surrounded by mountains and rocky deserts which effectively turns them into islands surrounded by an ocean of desolation and reachable only by air.

Countless small islands dot the surface of Walston's oceans. Most of these are either covered in ice or near-vertical; few offer any real prospects for habitation.

SOCIO-POLITICAL DATA

Walston is home to around 3,000 individuals. Of these, some 90% are Vargr, and are second-class citizens. The ruling elite of the world (a hereditary dictatorship) are humans who claim ancestry all the way back to the early settlement of the region during the Rule of Man. This claim is disputable, but certainly the ruling families have held Walston for many centuries.

The only inhabited region of the planet is Settlement Island, which has three major 'towns' of about 600 people each and a scattering of small hamlets in addition to the capital at Central Lake. Central, as the settlement is called, is home to about 300 or so inhabitants, most of whom do work connected with the

government in some way. Expeditions occasionally visit Walston-Main for various reasons, prospecting being the most common, but until now there have been no attempts to create a permanent base on the mainland.

The Law Level is moderately high, but not excessive. It is true that Vargr are subject to more laws and regulations than their human neighbours, a fact that has caused concern among Imperial observers given the world's client status. An IISS mission in 1101 concluded that while Vargr are subject to racist restrictions they are 'not unduly oppressed' and their status does not contravene any Imperial High Laws.

As noted, Walston is an Imperial Client world, and receives protection from the Imperial Navy; this is more notional than real at present given the lack of naval forces in the subsector. A small subsidy is paid to the world government to maintain and operate a Class C starport. This is located at Walston Startown, the northernmost of the settlements, rather than at the capital.

The planetary ruler (currently Dictator Masterton) is involved in negotiations with one or more Imperial corporations with a view to licensing mining and other economic installations in remote areas of the planet. There is absolutely no way for the people of Walston to exploit these resources, or to stop any group that felt like it from simply moving in, but Masterton still insists upon stupidly high licensing fees, stalling the whole process to no-one's advantage. Meanwhile, offworld surveyors have begun to do their work. Perhaps the dictator wishes to hold out for a good deal when the surveyors find something that simply must be exploited. However, he runs the risk that a corporation may lose patience and simply move in without permission. With no ability to dislodge such an operation by force and too little money to make a challenge in the Imperial courts, there is a real risk that Masterton will provoke a fait accompli that cuts the world population out of any benefits of offworld investment.

The Vargr population of Walston are accepting of their status. They get little say in government and cannot hold certain posts, but on the whole are left alone to live their lives as they will, other than paying lip service to the idea that humans are their social superiors. Since most of the people of Walston live comfortable, unambitious lives and get along well enough, this is not a problem. Offworld Vargr tend to become extremely offended at both the human 'overlords' and the contented Vargr 'peons' of Walston, which can lead to issues.

While Walston has been a client world of the Imperium for many years there are no plans to apply for full membership.

Change is unwelcome on Walston, and Imperial membership might upset the 'natural order' of things. Certainly the status of Vargr as a lower order would be unacceptable to most Imperial citizens.

ECONOMIC DATA

Walston has a mainly subsistence economy based on shallow-water seabed farming off the island's ice-free western coast and more conventional agriculture along the river valleys. What manufacturing there is operates as what are effectively cottage industries in the three main settlements.

A mature TL8 industrial base is quite sufficient to provide a high standard of living and to meet the needs of the undersea farming industry. Virtually everything is craftsman-made to order, and even utilitarian equipment tends to be of a high standard.

The starport employs a few dozen people and brings in a modest income from passing vessels, crews stopping over and so forth. Ships come through fairly regularly – sometimes two or more in a single day – and the part-time port brokerage even turns a profit on speculative cargoes from time to time. Walston imports little and exports even less; the port is purely an external commercial installation.

MILITARY DATA

Walston cannot be said to possess a military of any consequence. The dictator maintains a security formation equipped with TL8 small arms and vehicles, which acts as a law-enforcement agency, fire/rescue department and starport security force in addition to protecting the ruling elite. Other than a couple of support weapons at Central, the security force has nothing more potent than an assault rifle at its disposal.

There is no offworld defence capability whatsoever. Even the starport's single utility boat is unarmed and serves only as transport for maintenance personnel servicing the orbital mooring beacon. Walston does not even possess a ground-to-orbit missile battery.

Similarly, there is no way to project force beyond the coastal waters of Settlement Island, and no real force to project. While a militia could be raised and deployed aboard the utility boat or seagoing craft such as coastal farming submarines, it unlikely that much could be achieved. Walston has no history of conflict and no warrior traditions amongst its people.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The seas of Walston are home to a variety of hardy life. Most of this is on a microscopic level, though a wide range of fish species, seabed crawlers and free-floating

ALDERSON'S COASTAL HUNTER

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Alderson	16	6 m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Melee (bite) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2	
ATTACKS	Bite (2D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+3), Camouflaged, Small (-1)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Pouncer	

DEEP-WATER BRAKARR

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Brakarr	33	10 m
SKILLS	Athletics (endurance) 3, Melee (bite) 2, Recon 1, Survival 2	
ATTACKS	Bite (3D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+4)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Chaser	

invertebrates exists to feed upon them. Only two species of seagoing animals pose any real threat to humans.

The first is Alderson's Coastal Hunter, more commonly referred to as an Alderson. It has a broad body about 0.5m long, which is covered in thick scales, plus a whip-like tail roughly the same length as the body. The Alderson has a pair of puny lobster-like claws, but normally hunts by either surging from cover to grab small prey or entangling larger invertebrates with its tail. Aldersons can give a human a nasty bite and are very tenacious if they feel threatened enough to fight over territory or if they mistakenly entangle a human diver's limb with their tail. Their armour plates make them difficult to kill with a knife.

The other seagoing threat is more dangerous. It is known as the Deep-Water Brakarr for its similarity to a shallow water dwelling beast encountered on some other worlds; in fact they are not related. The Brakarr is a sinister-looking beast which looks like a fish with an armoured head from just behind which several manipulative tentacles extend. When moving at speed these are swept back but on the attack they grab prey and haul it into the Brakarr's mouth. Brakarr over 1.5m long and massing as much as an adult human have been sighted in coastal waters. They are aggressive and can decimate farmed fish stocks if not driven off. They are also quite willing to take on a diver, and usually win.



Fortunately, they seem to prefer much deeper and colder waters and are rarely sighted near Settlement Island. Despite the harsh conditions there is a fair amount of life on land. Much of it is small; crawling insects and so forth. Terran creatures seem not to have gained much of a foothold on Walston, whose local fauna is fairly primitive. There are no major flying creatures, though several species of insect possess the ability to spread a 'wing' membrane and drift on the thin air currents. Some of these tiny flyers drift in swarms which can pose a hazard in inland areas. Prevailing winds keep the western side of Settlement Island clear of them.

Most of the land-dwelling animals on Walston are fairly harmless egg-laying burrowers of one sort or another. Most species can hibernate for long periods to survive a drought, and most possess a coat of coarse hair to insulate them. There is nothing on land that can directly harm a human, though some of the burrowers can be a nuisance. Favorited tricks include climbing into awkward spaces on vehicles to enjoy the warmth from the power plant or burrowing under fences into a cultivated area, then engaging in a devastating feast.

One species of burrowers, known simply as Walstons, are kept as pets by many families on Walston. Sociable and loyal beasts the size of rabbits, Walstons are vegetarian and easy to care for, and seem to like living in the homes of humans and Vargr. They have absolutely no value as guard or working animals, being slow-witted and lazy when well fed. They do, however, emit a pleasing humming sound when petted and will snuggle up to anyone in emotional distress, apparently to offer comfort.

LIFE ON WALSTON

Daily life on Walston is slow and, for the most part, comfortable. Filter masks and thick clothing are needed when venturing outside, but otherwise there are no serious hazards. Dwellings are kept at an uncomfortably warm temperature (as far as offworld visitors are concerned) by humans; less so by Vargr.

Within the three towns and Central, buildings are blocky with rounded corners, and sunk into the ground rather than built upwards. Thus very few buildings have more than one story aboveground, but larger ones may have two or even three levels below the entry floor. Within a settlement, structures are grouped close together and connected by semi-sunken tunnels at the entry floor level. Most clusters have only a couple of ground-level entrances for personnel and a common vehicle garage. Outlying hamlets are mostly a single structure, though some have three or more independent buildings if the settlement has expanded since it was constructed.

Indoor clothing on Walston tends to be light. A kilt and a light shirt/tunic is the commonest dress for both sexes, with light sandals or bare feet. Vargr tend to wear bright colours, with humans favouring more sober outfits in grey, white, black, blue or dark red. This makes humans look a sombre lot compared to the Vargr, but in truth both groups are easy-going and friendly.

Although the Vargr are disenfranchised and must defer to humans in many situations, they do not seem to be unhappy with this situation. There are few decisions to

WALSTON

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Walston	2	4 m
SKILLS	Athletics 0, Stealth 1, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	None	
TRAITS	Small (-2)	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbivore, Grazer	



make anyway and everyone has a high standard of living. People of both races tend to be unambitious and find many offworlders to be more than a little bit manic with their go-getter attitudes. Asking most Walston citizens why they do not go offworld to seek their fortune, or set off into the wilderness to find mineral riches usually results in a blank look and the oft-repeated phrase 'but it's *nice* here!'

Most of the population work in farms close to the settlements, with smaller numbers employed as divers or submarine crews in the coastal seabed farms. A small percentage work at the starport (usually part-time alongside a craftsman or farming job) or are employed in the world's tiny bureaucracy and security force. Vargr work in all these industries and can hold fairly high positions, but humans are always given precedence.

Vargr are not required to be obsequious to humans; merely to acknowledge that they hold a higher place in Walston's social structure. This idea has become ingrained to the point where it is thought of as the natural order of things. The locals are quite comfortable with the idea that offworld Vargr might have different values, but here humans are superior. Offworld Vargr tend to find this idea more than a little creepy.

The people of Walston are not good at reacting to problems, and are nervous about their responses until they are approved by whoever is perceived as being in charge. A few individuals are quite dynamic, such as the security managers at the underwater farms. These people deal with divers in trouble and other crises on a fairly regular basis and are comfortable with thinking on their feet. Most individuals prefer to get together with friends and neighbours and have a good talk about the issue. Hopefully one of the more usual troubleshooters will deal with the problem in the meantime. Thus if confronted with a minor disaster (e.g. a waste bin fire) the average Walston local will deal with it well enough. However, all the time he or she will be looking around for someone to defer to, and will not be comfortable until someone takes charge of the situation and approves whatever action was taken.

WALSTON'S SCOUT BASE

Current maps of the region show a scout base present at Walston. This is, strictly speaking, inaccurate.

There was a scout installation there about 20 years ago, and it has never been removed from the maps as the IISS has always planned to follow up the work done there and perhaps even set up a permanent presence. To date there are no signs that this will happen in the foreseeable future.

The scout base, such as it was, took the form of a landing field and a few huts that housed a handful of scientists.

Its role was to undertake research into the erosive effects of a thin, dry atmosphere and to support the occasional scout vessel that came through. The station was located in a remote area, high in the mountains. It was hurriedly withdrawn during the Fourth Frontier War and never re-established

SCOUT/COURIER HIGHNDRY

Many small vessels operated by the Scout Service or major shipping lines are registered under a number rather than a name, but even those usually gain a name sooner or later. The Scout/Courier known as *Highndry* is one of those. Officially still designated IISS S001642-C, *Highndry* is identified by both number and name in her transponder but only by number on her official papers.

Originally built in 892 at a yard in Gushemege sector, Scout/Courier S001642-C has seen service with all three major branches of the Scout Service (Exploration, Survey and Communications), though most of her time was spent on Communications duty, hence the -C on the end of her registry. She has also been loaned out as a detached-duty ship more than once, has suffered collision and combat damage, been rebuilt twice and has even crossed the Great Rift both ways as well as going around via Corridor sector.

The last 92 years of her service life have been spent in the Marches or just beyond, out in the Outrim Void or the Vargr Extents. Despite regular refits and the occasional complete overhaul S001642-C has acquired innumerable dents, dings, incomprehensible minor modifications and more than a few idiosyncrasies. This is not atypical in ships of this kind, though there usually comes a point where the vessel is so worn out that it is not feasible to make repairs.

C H A P T E R - T H R E E

FLAMMARION TO WALSTON

The adventure begins at Flammarion Highport. With new Travellers, it is assumed that they have recently mustered out of their careers and are due to pick up a ship.

STARPORT LIBERTY

With credits burning a hole in their pockets and time on their hands, the Travellers are free to enjoy what Flammarion Highport has to offer, which is quite a lot. There are plenty of shops, bars and restaurants as well as recreation facilities ranging from squash courts to prize-fighting arenas.

The port has a similar Law Level to the planet below (Law Level 4). In practice this means sidearms can be carried, as can blade weapons. Although shotguns are legal, anyone wandering around with one would attract the attention of the portside security force. Similarly, while discreet body armour is acceptable for people who perceive the risk, someone stomping about in a flak jacket will be viewed with suspicion. There is simply no need, in the eyes of the port authority, and thus anyone wearing overt armour is assumed to be up to no good.

Most bars and other facilities require that weapons be checked at the door. This can be inconvenient when shopping, and many visitors just leave their weapons aboard ship or in their hotel. Violence is very uncommon in the clean and well-lit corridors of the Highport, other than the occasional punch-up in a sports bar. Such occurrences are one reason why most bars prohibit guns.

Society is generally cosmopolitan and easy-going. By far the majority of people are human, though they come from several cultures and can seem quite alien at times. The largest minority are Vargr, with smaller numbers of Aslan and odd members of other species.

The referee should allow the Travellers as much time as they want to explore the Highport, buy anything they need (rich Travellers will be eager to spend credits gained as Benefits from their careers), read library data from public-access terminals, and generally get used to their environment before beginning the adventure. However, aimless wandering about a starport can become boring fairly quickly. Once the Travellers run

out of self-imposed direction the referee should get the adventure moving before the Travellers become bored.

A GIFT HORSE

At least one of the Travellers will have an appointment to keep with a Mr Anders Casarii of the Imperial Scout Service office on the Highport. Mr Casarii has a proposition for the Travellers. During the meeting, he explains that one of the Scout Service's detached duty vessels is stuck on a nearby world and needs bringing home to Flammarion. The ship has suffered a major problem with its electronics systems and needs a crew to deliver some replacement parts. They will also need to download a replacement operating system into the ship's computers to ensure that any corruption caused by the failure does not endanger the vessel.

Once the ship's systems are up and running, it must be brought back to Flammarion Highport where a proper systems overhaul can be made. There may be unexpected complications of course, so ideally the crew sent to pick up the ship will be multi-skilled and flexible enough to deal with whatever crops up.

The ship is downed at Walston, four parsecs away, where the previous crew abandoned it. The ship was a detached duty Scout/Courier assigned to them and has apparently been mistreated. There are penalties for abusing detached duty ships since they still belong to the Scout Service, so presumably the crew decided it was in their best interests to disappear. In any case, the ship legally belongs to the Scout Service, which will provide appropriate documentation to allow the Travellers to pick it up and bring it home.

The Scout Service will also provide vouchers for refuelling at Asteltine and Bowman on the way back and tickets aboard a passenger ship to Walston. All necessary spares and software will be provided, along with override codes that will allow the Travellers to delete the ship's operating system and install the new one. The old system may be badly corrupted and in any case it is still keyed to the old crew. Operating the ship with that system still in place would be hazardous if it were possible at all. The new system is temporary. It will work for three months without an update and then ground the ship at the first planetfall after expiration; for obvious security reasons.

THE BASIC OFFER

The Travellers are offered middle passage to Walston and Cr1000 each for 'incidental expenses' up front, plus all costs for life support, fuel and so forth during the recovery of the ship. Once the vessel is brought back to Flammarion, the Travellers will then be given hotel accommodation and another Cr1000 for expenses during the week or so it will take to check over the ship and make sure its software is properly updated. They will then be given use of the ship for one year, initially.

A one-year lease of the ship is on standard Scout Service Detached Duty terms, more or less. The Travellers will have to meet their own life support and fuel costs and must keep the ship in good order in case it is needed. The vessel's logs will be examined whenever it passes through a Scout Service installation, providing information on starports and ship movements in the area. The Scout Service will overhaul the ship at the end of the year, at which time it may or may not be reassigned.

In addition, there are some ways to make a few credits on the side. For example, the Scout Service pays – though not much – for first-hand reports on starports, cities and outposts a ship has visited. For the sake of typing up a few lines detailing the Travellers' impressions and experiences of the places they visit they can cover at least their bar tab in any given port.

ACCEPTANCE

If the Travellers accept the mission, they are given the equipment they need – three flight cases full of circuit panels and tools for swapping them out, plus a portable diagnostic/software download unit the size of the other cases. Their ship will leave in a day or so, allowing some time to finish up anything the Travellers need to do before they head off on their mission.

The Cr1000 expenses award is credited to the Travellers' accounts, and can be used as they please. What they spend it on, and whether or not there is anything left for actual expenses on the trip, is their own problem.

EN ROUTE

The Travellers have mid-passage tickets for the Type-A2 far trader *Autumn Gold*, under Captain Michelle Corelli. The ship is bound for Elixabeth, a few parsecs to Trailing of Walston. Its route is via 567-908 and Walston, with drop-offs at each point.

Autumn Gold is not a Scout Service ship, but she has been affiliated with the scouts for a few years and takes on charters like this from time to time. Her captain will not discuss the deal in more than very general terms, but essentially *Autumn Gold* has been chartered to deliver a couple of crates of supplies to the tiny starport at 567- 908 and the Travellers, as well as a container of general spares and components, to Walston. Most of her other cargo is bound for the naval base at Elixabeth. It is fairly mundane stuff; uniforms, boots and a few cases of wine for senior officers, but captains wishing to get naval contracts of any sort learn not to talk about what they are shipping or who to as a matter of basic security. The crates are not marked as bound for a naval installation; they look like any other shipping crates.

The crew of *Autumn Gold* are a typical mixed bag of free trader personnel. Some are ex-navy, ex-scouts or former employees of large merchant lines. Others signed aboard at a port and were trained on the job. The medical officer is in fact a college kid gaining experience as a shipboard medic before beginning a proper degree in medicine. The ship is also a typical far trader; functional rather than luxurious. The accommodation is a bit worn and the food is, well, edible. The passenger area is clean enough but there is little that is new or expensive. Similarly, the crew are polite enough but they are spacers first and foremost, not public-service workers. Those that are expecting what amounts to a luxury hotel travelling through space tend to be very disappointed in such vessels (though the big liners usually live up to their expectations), but for those simply trying to get from place to place *Autumn Gold* is an entirely acceptable conveyance.

There is not that much to do aboard a far trader for a week. It is very unlikely that passengers will be permitted access to the ship's critical areas (engineering and the bridge), and the available space tends to be somewhat limited. However, there are video games on the ship's entertainment consoles, educational materials on the same consoles, entertainment shows on, yes, those consoles again, and a common area to sit about in and shoot the breeze. This is economy travel, and nobody should really expect more.

On the plus side, the Travellers can catch up on reading and sleep, get to know one another and are not disturbed by disasters, explosions or hazards more serious than a dropped coffee cup. There may come a time in their adventuring careers when they pine for a week of humdrum but safe travel...

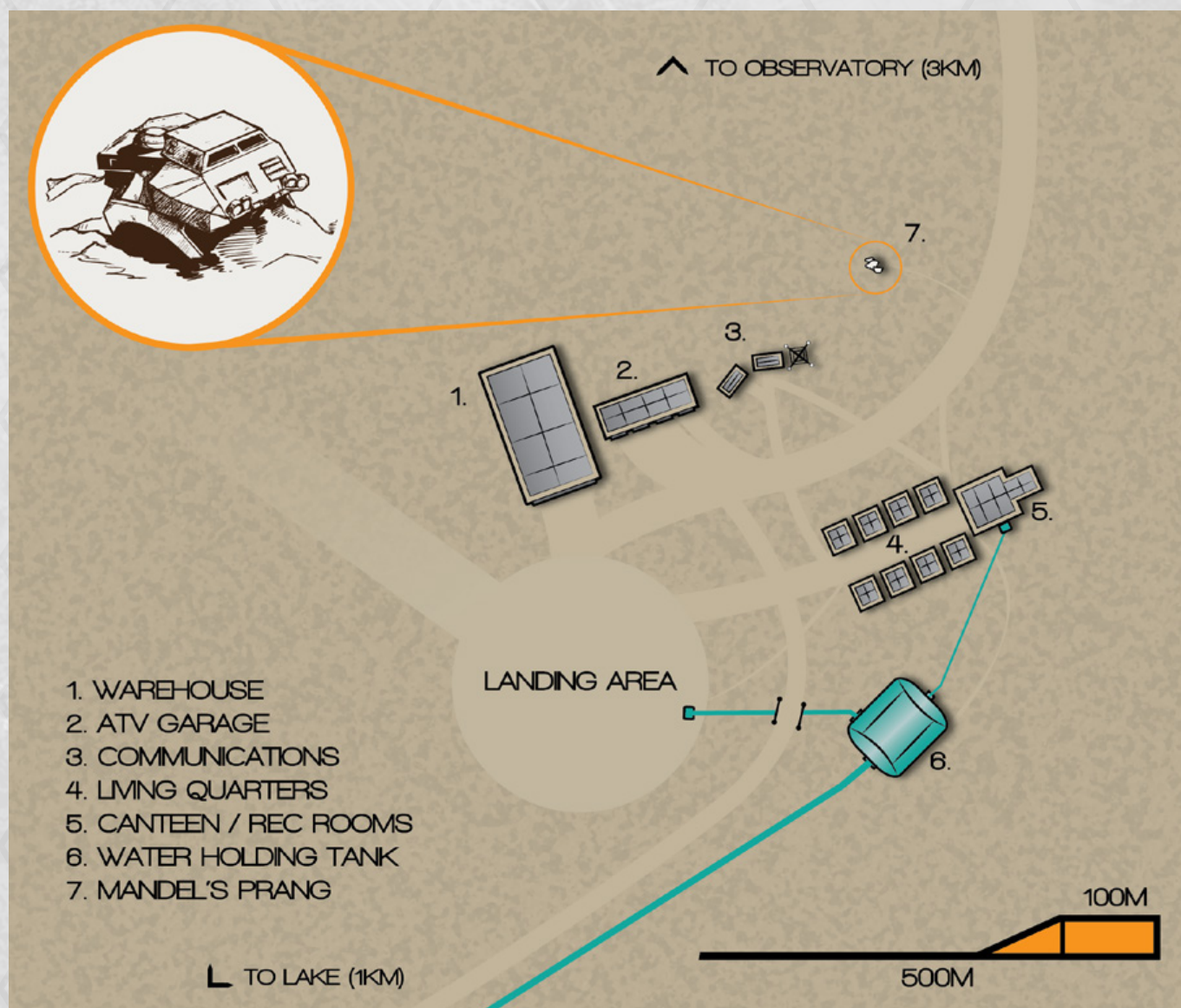
DRAB, DREARY AND DEPRESSING

Roughly 168 hours out of Flammarion, *Autumn Gold* makes a jump emergence at 119 diameters out from the planet designated 567-908. Data on the world is available on any of the ship's consoles, and there is not much to tell. The world is dry, has a thin atmosphere, and is officially uninhabited.

Census data takes note only of permanent residents, and 567-908 has none. There are, however, slightly less than two dozen people currently on-planet. About half are members of the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service. The remainder are civilian contractors working with the scouts. *Autumn Gold* is only stopping over for a day at 567-908.

Once the cargo is delivered and refuelling is completed the ship will be moving on as soon as possible. Other than a chance to get out of the ship for a while, there is really no reason to go groundside at 567-908. The landscape is drab, dreary and depressing and there is nothing to do planetside anyway. However, the chance to wander around for a while may be attractive after being cooped up for a week.

The thin air is not a problem and even the dryness is not a shock; it is common practice for a ship in jump to gradually adjust its climate controls to suit the next destination, so by the time they arrive the Travellers are more or less acclimatised to the conditions at their destination.



However, the sheer brownish-grey of 567-908 is impressive. There is just so very much of it in all directions. The colours of the landscape vary so little that it can be hard to make out details or even estimate distances to a given object. Not that there is much worth looking at anyhow. The starport, such as it is, consists of a cleared area of bedrock which has been smoothed off to make a landing area capable of handling ships up to 600 tons or so. The ground rises to the north and falls away somewhat to the south. There is a small lake – quite a large body of water for this world – a kilometre to the southwest. Pipes run from the lake to a holding tank at the port, providing both drinking water and a source of hydrogen for fuel. Refuelling is a lengthy process as the ship's tanks must be first filled with water which is then cracked for the hydrogen content. Oxygen is bled off and the hydrogen cooled until it reaches its liquid form. Then another load of water is taken on and the process repeated until the main tanks are full of liquid hydrogen.

While this is going on and the cargo is being shifted to a big hut that serves as a warehouse, the Travellers are free to look around. What they find is simply a collection of prefabricated living quarters, an ATV garage constructed the same way and a couple of buildings used for communications equipment. There is another building visible on a ridge about 3-4 kilometres northwards. This appears to be more permanent than the port. Anyone can tell the Travellers that it is an observatory, which seems likely given its shape.

The building really is an observatory and if the Travellers really want, they can look around if they stay out of the way. The building is mostly finished. It already has a multi-wavelength telescope and a number of specialised instruments for measuring things like cosmic radiation, gravitic turbulence and the like.

Anyone asking will be treated to an extremely technical (and boring) exposition of how when a starship emerges from Jump its mass causes gravitic 'ripples' which interact with other matter in a very scientific and utterly incomprehensible manner. Those who have not lost the will to live by this point can (correctly) draw the conclusion that the observatory is there mainly to try out new instruments and scientific techniques to see if they are any use for something other than boring visitors to death.

The observatory crew do have a supply of very decent coffee and are quite glad of company. If they can be persuaded to talk about something other than obscure astrophysical experimentation the Travellers might spend a pleasant afternoon with them. The same comments go for the port staff, for the most part.

If anyone wants to look around the planet, they can stare at as much drab brownish-grey rock as they like. The Port has three ATVs available, one of which is fitted with a bulldozer blade. However, these are not available for sightseeing tours. Exploring on foot is somewhat limited and taking water along is a good idea. There is not much to see, other than a few interesting rock formations and a strange sculpture made by some of the scouts from the remains of an ATV. They call it Mandel's Prang after an incident a couple of years back when one of their number remodelled the ATV beyond its working tolerances by driving too fast over rough ground.

By the time the ship is refuelled and is ready to move on, chances are that the Travellers are more than ready to depart. They may have some sympathy for the people who have to work on 567-908. Death by boredom is not a pleasant way to go, after all.

PLANETFALL AT WALSTON

After the dreariness of 567-908, expectations at Walston may be fairly low. However, the place is rather nicer and more interesting. True, it is another dry-ish world with a thin atmosphere, but Walston is far more interesting than 567-908.

The crew announces that their vessel will be making a brief stop at Walston, only staying over for a few hours. Experienced spacers can probably figure out why. The ship is on a charter which will be for a reasonable time given the distance that must be travelled. There is nothing that can be done about the time spent in jump but if time on-planet can be cut short then there will be days or even weeks at the end of the voyage when the *Autumn Gold* is essentially still being paid for the charter but is free to engage in other activities. The price tag is a tired and bad-tempered crew of course, but in the short term the vessel can make some extra cash.

Data on Walston is available on the ship's data consoles.

The referee can decide how much or how little information to release to the Travellers but at a minimum the approximate population, the fact that the entire population lives on one island, and an overview of local conditions should be available. There is little turbulence as *Autumn Gold* dives through the thin atmosphere towards Settlement Island, and soon the far trader is on the ground at Walston Starport. The associated Startown has a population of about 600 people and resembles a semi-underground village rather than a major city. It is, however, one of the world's three main settlements.

Astute Travellers will likely notice that there are no other ships at Walston Starport and although there are a couple of roofed berthing pits that might contain a vessel, a quick look suffices to assure the Travellers that there is no vessel present. The ground crew, if anyone thinks to ask them, may remember a scout/courier coming through a few weeks ago with a similar name to the one the Travellers are looking for. They do not know where it went after it left.

To enter the town, it is necessary to pass through customs. Although the locals have a sustainable TL8, they have an imported weapon scanner and can detect most weapons. Local laws prohibit private ownership of most weaponry. Any guns or blades longer than a dagger must be placed in storage at the port for a fee of Cr10 per week. The guards at the port carry handguns and wear light flak jackets. They do not see a lot of trouble and would probably be caught by surprise if someone did something stupid like trying to shoot their way through customs. A response team equipped with assault rifles would respond in fairly short order to such an incident.

If the Travellers are not stupid about handing over their weapons, passing customs is a matter of signing a couple of forms and answering the usual questions about length of stay and business on planet. The customs people deal with a starship every day or two on average, and rarely remember much about those that pass through. However, the crew of *Highndry* were unusual in that they left without their ship, and memorable for their general lack of courtesy towards everyone around them. A Traveller with good social skills (such as Persuade or Diplomat) may be able to tease some information out of the customs personnel.



Passive Racism

If the Travellers are focussed on their mission, the treatment of Vargr on Walston may well slip their notice. If they have a Vargr among them though (not that we would suggest referees encourage at least one Traveller to try a Vargr...), then things can get a lot more interesting.

The key to remember is that on Walston, racism is *never* overt. A Vargr Traveller will never be singled out, will never be lynched, will not even have derogatory comments thrown at them. Instead, everything should be done by suggestion and implication.

For example, if a Vargr Traveller approaches a customs officer, government official or shop owner and asks a question, you should pause, consider the question, and then *deliver the answer to one of the human Travellers*. The assumption being made is that the humans are in charge of the Travellers' party and so they are the only ones worth talking to. If the Vargr Traveller insists on the answer being delivered to them (and they should), always be very polite but make the answer short – then deliver the longer and fuller answer to a human.

For specifics on how the people of Walston view Vargr (and how the Vargr here view themselves), see page 22.



C H A P T E R - F O U R WALSTON STAR TOWN

The Startown is only big enough to be a village on most worlds. However, its occupants make decent enough money from passing starships. Some work at the port, others in the hospitality industry. About half of the working population of the town are dependent on offworld credits for their income.

There are a couple of decent enough hotels and a rather more modest hostel offering barracks-like accommodation and basic meals at a very cheap price. In addition there are a couple of restaurants and a handful of shops selling local and offworld goods. It is possible to walk around the town in a few minutes.

Note that most buildings are underground, with just the top (entry) floor sticking up. Even that is usually half-sunken into the ground and accessed by going down a ramp or steps. Buildings are usually connected in complexes rather than standing alone, with one or two common personnel entrances and an underground vehicle garage serving a number of dwellings plus some amenities. The above-ground drabness is alleviated by the colourful surroundings and people inside the buildings.

The locals are friendly and welcoming for the most part, and there is little sign of the supposed oppression of the Vargr population. The social setup on Walston is more subtle than that, and it would require a fair amount of close observation to become aware of how it all works.

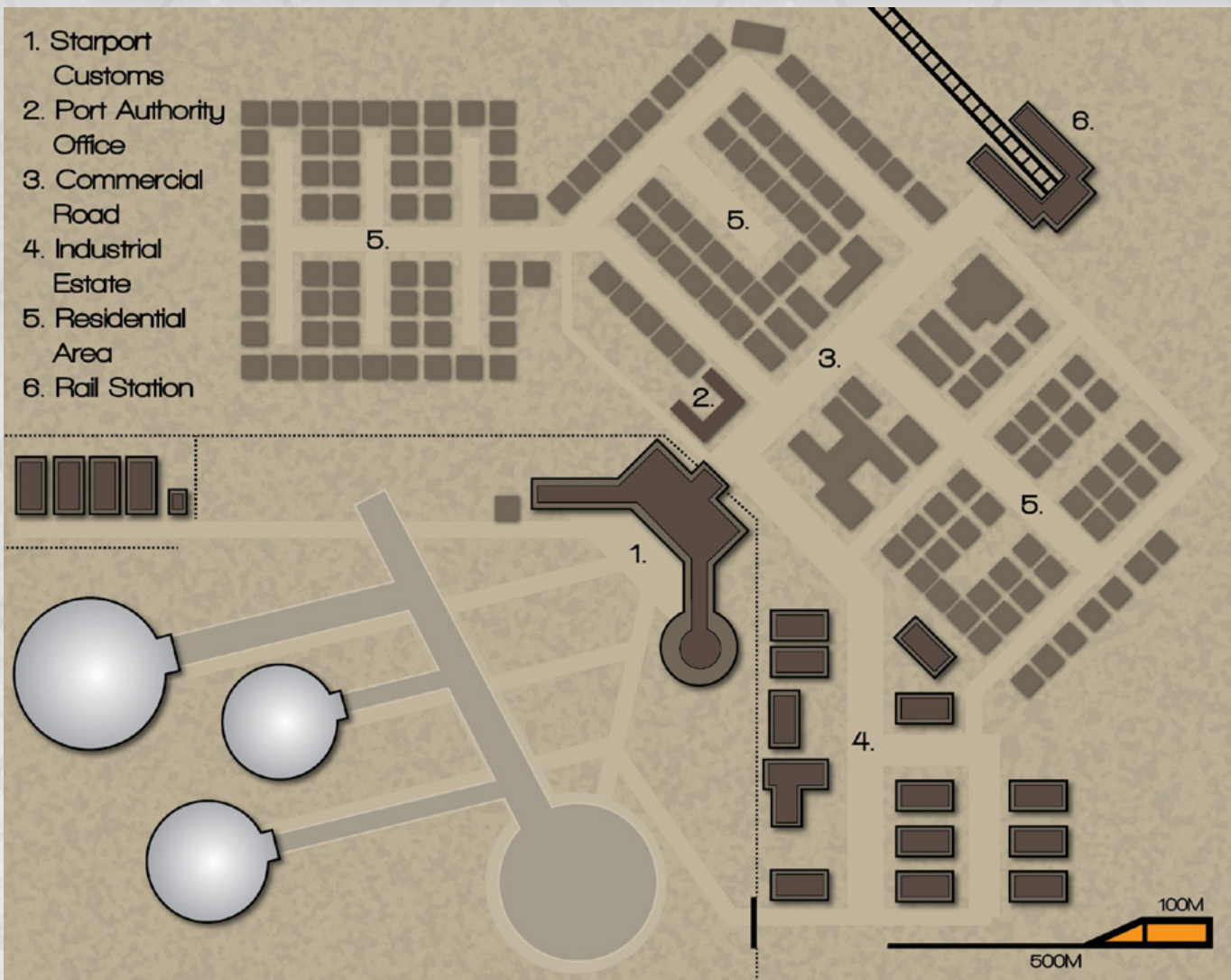
The Travellers will probably want to find out what has happened to 'their' ship. Pretty much anyone in town will suggest asking at the Port Authority office, which maintains records of passing ships. These are freely available to anyone who wants to look, but Walston has a policy of not placing such data on the general datanet. Thus it is necessary to go to the office (which is next to the port and thus within five minutes' walk from any point in town) and look at the records in person. There is no fee for this. Access is granted for the asking, but the information is not left lying around. This is not a deliberate security policy so much as the easiest way for a small staff to do things. It is rare for anyone to want information of this sort so a policy for making it available has never been created.

INFORMATION IN TOWN

From the ground crews, folks in town, official records and customs personnel, it is possible to find out the following information about the Scout/Courier *Highndry*:

- The vessel came through the port a couple of times in the past year. The last time was about 3-4 months ago.
- The crew were real jerks, loud-mouthed and offensive. They apparently did not like anything about Walston. They were displeased by the food and the beds in the hotel, hated the décor, found the local practice of wearing a kilt somehow hilarious, and made a mess everywhere they went. Simple concepts like putting trash in a bin eluded these people, who seemed to think that they were better than everyone else put together and set about putting everyone they met in his place – whatever they perceived that to be.
- The scout was in a fairly dilapidated condition when it came through, but seemed flyable enough. In any case it came and went a couple of times over the months running up to its final visit. On that occasion *Highndry* spent a couple of days in port here before moving on.
- Its destination is recorded as 'In-System' but there are no details other than a note that the ship was on charter to the World Government of Walston.
- A couple of weeks later the crew turned up at the starport in an air/raft and hung around making a nuisance of themselves until a ship bound for Caladbolg came through.
- They boarded the far trader *Maverick Spacer*, according to records. Apparently the crew of *Highndry* took passage aboard this vessel for Caladbolg via Datrillian.
- Their subsequent destination is unknown.
- They took their air/raft with them but left behind a few thoroughly trashed hotel rooms.
- Nobody was sorry to see them go.

In short, the ship seems to have gone somewhere on Walston and met with difficulties. The crew seem to



have dumped it and left the planet, though it is possible that they went in search of some critical spares they needed.

What seems apparent is that the world government chartered *Highndry* to do whatever she was doing when the final systems failure occurred. Her location, or at least her destination, is almost certainly known to the government at Central Lake.

Although Walston has a perfectly good communications net, the government will not release information unless the Travellers go to the capital in person and meet with a government official. They are promised reimbursement for the cost of their travel, accommodation and a full explanation over dinner. It looks like the travellers must go to the capital.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

The crew of *Highndry* really were a bunch of obnoxious jerks, who managed to land themselves in the slammer on Caladbolg. This is how the Scout Service learned their vessel was downed on Walston. The ship was on loan, and the Scout Service decided it would be more usefully assigned elsewhere. The crew explained the ship had problems but failed to volunteer information about its whereabouts. The Scout Service genuinely believes the vessel is parked at the Starport.

The former crew are out of the picture now and their loan of the vessel has been legally revoked since they have allowed it to fall into disrepair. However, they see it rather differently and may someday show up wanting 'their' ship back...

C H A P T E R - F I V E

CENTRAL LAKE

Reaching Central from the starport is not difficult. There is a regular rail service which runs once a day. The railroad is not in the best of condition as there is insufficient labour available to properly maintain it, but so long as the trains do not go very fast it is safe enough.

The trains themselves are short, just a small electric locomotive and a carriage or two at most. There are often a couple of freight cars attached to the back of a train but these are usually empty; they are simply not uncoupled when not needed because that would require someone to do it and already the railroad staff (all seventeen of them, serving three main and a few more minor stations, plus the rail depot at the capital) are overworked just running a train every day.

However, despite the somewhat primitive transport, the journey does not take very long and soon Central Station comes into sight. It is located on the edge of the capital, a town that looks remarkably like the one the Travellers just left in many ways, though it is smaller. There is no starport, but there is a large lake with islands to the north. This is Central Lake, named because it lies more or less in the centre of the island.

Central is the rail hub for the island, with a line out to each of the larger towns. The town actually has a reasonable service industry as anyone travelling from one settlement to another by train will almost certainly have to stop over in Central as there is only one train per day to each destination. There are also a couple of government-owned factories and the dictator's palace, which serves as a governmental centre.

The palace is rather grandly named. Like other buildings on Walston it is largely underground, with just the top floor above the surface. In fact the 'palace' is in four parts. Two are semi-separate accommodation wings for the employees of the government, the security force and the personnel that support them. Between these lies the governmental building where the world's tiny bureaucracy work and accessed through it (there is a private entrance at the other side but guests are not allowed to use it) is the home of the dictator and his immediate family.

The entire 'palace' contains about 75 people all told. About the same number work in the factories and the railroad, all of which are owned by Dictator Masterton or his close family. The remainder of the settlement's population either work in service industries or small businesses in town. There are a few farms close to the town as well, plus a small lakeside dock where a handful of fishing boats are moored.

The palace is not really segregated from the rest of the town, except by a wider than usual open space between it and the nearest building complex. There is an obvious entrance facing the town, which is the direction almost anyone coming to the palace will approach from. There are no guards outside and during office hours the outer doors are left open.

The entryway leads to a reception area decorated in the locals' idea of a tasteful and business-like manner. Pastel blue and light to mid-grey seem to be the colours of choice.

There is a reception desk which is manned most of the time. Travellers from a high-population world might be stunned by this. The seat of government for a world does not have a full-time receptionist? Incredible...

In fact, everyone in the world government has more than one job. With just 3,000 people on the entire planet, it is difficult to provide all the trappings of a civilisation. Law enforcement, fire and rescue, the railroads, industry and the starport all need personnel. As do the hidden but necessary jobs like sewer maintenance and road-mending. As a result, everything has to be done on a shoestring or when someone with three other jobs is available to see to it.

The Travellers may have to wait around for a few minutes, but eventually they will be spotted by an overworked clerk who recognises them as 'not from around here' and tries to put together a suitable reception. The Travellers are offered comfortable seats in a side room, with coffee or wine to drink and a plate of pretty good biscuits – this is about the limit of hospitality that can be offered off the cuff around here.



Within a few minutes a government official, Alan Greener – the Minister for Offworld Affairs, Public Relations and Fisheries, as it happens – enters the room and apologises for the delay.

He listens to the Travellers' story (if Vargr are present, remember to concentrate on the humans), looks over the papers, and thinks for a moment.

The Minister explains the situation, which may not be entirely to the Travellers' liking.

THE SHIP IS WHERE???

Minister Greener explains the situation regarding the scout/courier. Its crew were, frankly, a bunch of troublemakers, but for lack of anyone better the government chartered their vessel for a fairly simple job.

They somehow managed to botch the task and disable their ship into the bargain. They then departed in the direction of the starport aboard an air/raft before anyone knew what was happening. They took a ship out of the system a couple of days later and have not been heard from again.

The Travellers' documentation seems to be in order and, with no way to verify it 100%, Greener is willing to accept it at face value. He will tell the Travellers where the ship is and help them get access to it... if they agree to complete the mission the original crew were supposed to have carried out. Greener can offer a flat fee of Cr3000 in cash – a case full of Imperial Credits as it happens – for the job, but it is important and he is not willing to cooperate unless the Travellers finish the job.

The task is not very complex. Greener needs the Travellers to use the scout's planetary survey equipment and a bunch of seismic charges (which are aboard the

ship, presumably, since they were given to the previous crew) to carry out a geological/seismic/tectonic survey of a region not far from the capital.

Greener is willing to admit that he cannot stop the Travellers from fixing up the ship and making off without holding up their end of the bargain, but he thinks he is offering a fair trade; help in getting the ship and a little hard cash in return for a job that's important to Walston but will take only 2-3 days to complete for a suitably equipped ship. He will not even discuss the ship's location until and unless the Travellers agree to his proposal. If the Travellers are honourable people they will surely be willing to keep their end of the bargain.

Greener is not willing to part with more cash – he already paid a lot to the previous crew and Walston does not have money to throw around. However, the job is important so he might be talked up a bit. If the Travellers are greedy Greener will decide to wait for another scout/courier or similar vessel to come through the port. After all, they are hardly uncommon.

If the Travellers agree, Greener outlines the problem. There is a volcano on Settlement Island, called Mount Salbarii. It was thought extinct for millennia but has recently rumbled a bit and caused occasional tremors. A geologist who was passing through a year back took a look and concluded that it was 99% or more certain that this was just 'twitch' on the part of the mountain, i.e. that there was no danger.

However, Greener wants a more detailed survey and a map of the interior of the mountain. Originally he intended to send this off for analysis at one of the high-pop-world universities but he recently became aware that a scout/courier's survey equipment could provide all the data he needs, such as the chance of an eruption within, say, the next decade. So, he hired *Highndry* to carry out the survey and something went wrong. Now that the travellers are here the job can be finished just as soon as they get to the ship and reactivate it. The only problem really, and it's not a major one or anything, is the location of the ship.

Which is, of course, parked in the crater of a possibly active volcano.



Vargr in Society

Astute Travellers may note there are several Vargr working in government jobs, some of them reasonably important. However, the only Vargr to hold a ministerial post is the Minister for Vargr Affairs, Civil Defence and Urban Planning.

This is quite an important post but only the fact that the minister spends most of her time dealing with Vargr-related issues allows her to hold high office. There is otherwise something of a glass ceiling for Vargr on Walston. This is accepted as the natural way of things and any attempts to point out that it is unfair and racist are met with a shrug and the statement that that's how things have always been. It works, everyone is content and it only upsets offworlders, so what's the problem?

Fact is, the system does work passably well and in an unambitious society like that of Walston it is not much of a problem. Vargr are not oppressed and forced to be obsequious, they are instead conditioned to believe in the system that bars the best jobs and important positions to them. This is likely to make people from more egalitarian societies grind their teeth. It may drive visiting Vargr nuts to see members of their own kind, who are often all but obsessed with advancement, prestige and personal betterment, living contented lives as second-class citizens.

This may present an interesting moral question for the Travellers. Walston is a racist society, there is no doubt about that, yet it is also a contented and peaceful one. Is equality more valuable than contentment and peace? The Travellers may think that it is, but for those whose society and way of life would be ripped apart and probably replaced by something less comfortable, the prospect is not so attractive.

Note that Dictator Masterton is highly unlikely to agree to a meeting with offworlders, especially ones who want to harangue him about the perceived evils of Walston society. The Vargr of the world do not really want to hear that either. Self-appointed reformers will have a hard time here.



C H A P T E R - S I X

MOUNT SALBARI

The Travellers have just learned that their ship is parked on top of a mountain, and one that may possibly be an active volcano.

The nearest major settlement to Mount Salbarii is, unsurprisingly, named Salbarii. It lies on the western shore of Settlement Island about 20km north of the volcano, which is a little inland from the coast. The island has a few big hills but Mount Salbarii is by far the highest peak, at about 1,500 metres above sea level. It rises more or less directly from the coastal plain, with only a ridge running southeast by way of foothills. This makes the mountain an imposing sight and fools the eye into thinking that it is a little higher than it actually is.

All the same, 1,500 metres is a considerable climb in an already thin atmosphere, and not something that should be attempted on idle whim. There are no mountaineers as such in the town of Salbarii, though a few people have occasionally climbed nearby hills. Some offworlders took it into their collective heads to go up Salbarii a few years back. Apparently they made it and came back okay, but they did not leave any maps or useful information. In short, while the local shops will be able to sell the Travellers things like rope and backpacks, they are going to have to improvise their way up the mountain.

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

Getting to the base of Mount Salbarii from the town is not too much of a challenge. The Travellers are on government business, so it is not too hard to arrange to be driven to the mountain in an offroad vehicle. Indeed, the first 500 metres of the ascent can be undertaken aboard a vehicle, albeit not quickly. After that, it is not really feasible to drive a wheeled vehicle any higher. An ATV could do it, but there is not one available. Nor is an air/raft which would make the trip very easy indeed.

However, the climb up Mount Salbarii is not as bad as the Travellers might have expected. The early stages are little more than a walk up a fairly steep slope, though there are boulders and outcrops to be detoured around. The thin air will begin to be a problem after a while, even for those who are acclimatised to some extent.

Travellers will tire and become irritable more quickly than expected. Altitude sickness may worry medically-minded Travellers without breathers but it will not be a problem just yet.

It is not possible to just go straight up towards the peak. Instead the Travellers will have to follow a snaking path around boulders and scree slopes, following ridges and working their way higher. On average with detours, steep bits, slow going in places and the odd easy section the Travellers will be able to ascend about 100 metres per hour. They would be well advised to rest or camp overnight on the way up rather than simply charging at the peak in one go, though it is doable for those who like an 'ironman' type challenge.

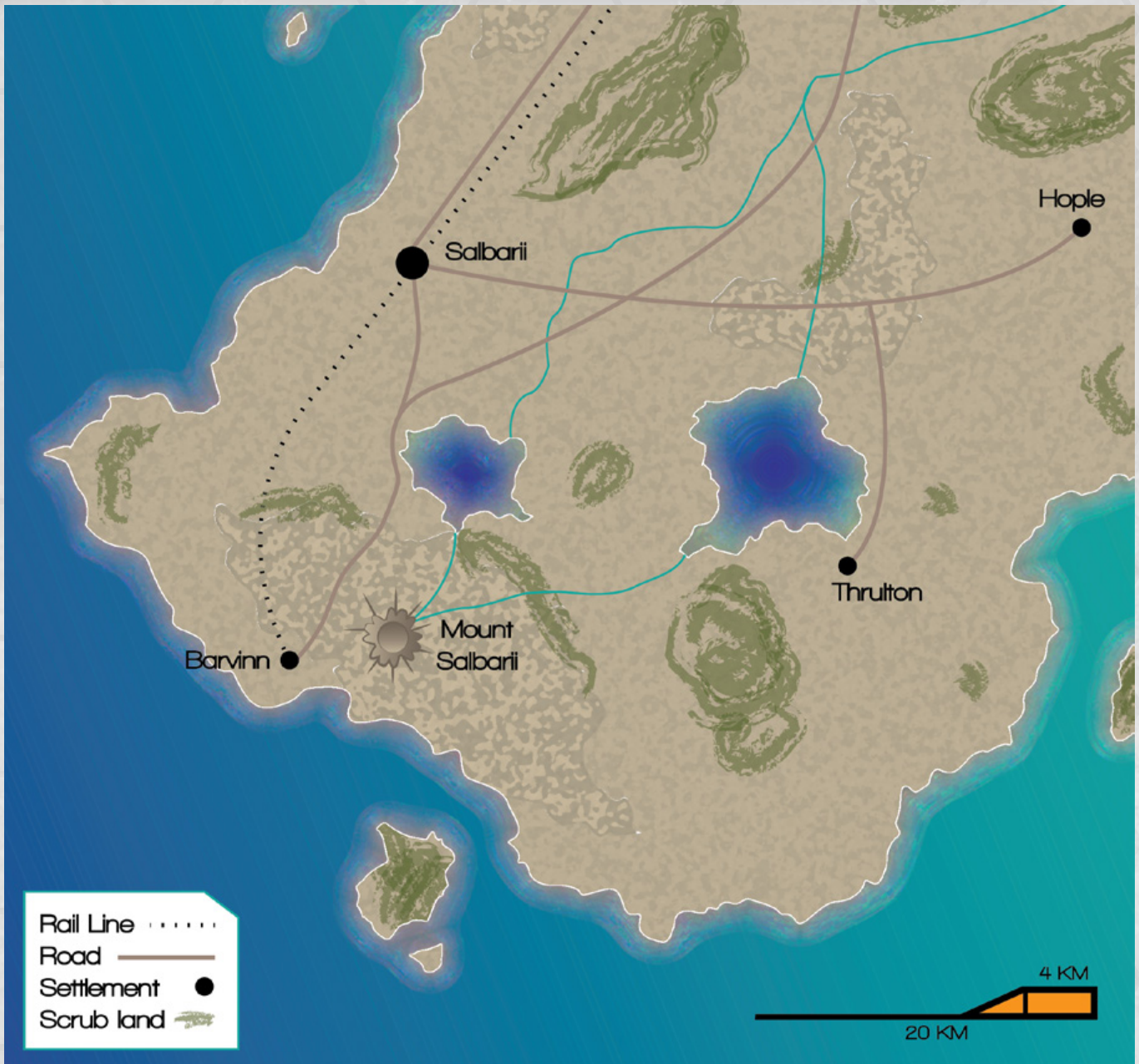
Up to about 800 metres, there are no significant problems, just a lot of very tiring uphill walking and the odd scramble up a steep or rocky section. After this, the Travellers may start to struggle a bit.

800-900 METRES

This segment of the climb is characterised by a lot of steep slopes and tumbled rocks, resulting in many frustrating detours. It takes 2 hours or so to ascend 100 metres vertically. Or rather it would but for an obstacle in the form of a volcanic outcrop that runs around much of the mountain. After some investigation the Travellers will realise that they have a choice of following a long looping ridge around the outcrop or climbing up a 10 metre more or less sheer rock face which, while hazardous, could cut hours off the journey and perhaps avoid other problems further on which are as yet out of sight.

The climb is not unduly difficult (Routine 6+) for a Traveller with Athletics skills. Once a rope is established at the top, less skilled Travellers should be able to scramble up. While resting at the top, the Travellers make an unpleasant discovery – the bones of two humanoids, probably humans, along with a forlorn collection of very decayed mountaineering gear. The bones show obvious signs of a fall. It seems that one of the climbers fell and injured himself very badly.

His companion was attempting a rescue when some sort of disaster befell and they died together on the



mountainside. The remains are half a century old and little of their gear is any use now, though some pitons and the like might be salvaged.

If the Travellers choose not to climb, it will take them 1D hours of frustrating walking to follow the ridge round to a point where they can get past the difficult area.

900–1100 METRES

The going is easier on this section, enabling the Travellers to make better time. However, this would be a mistake. They are on a thin-atmosphere world to start with and have ascended 1,000 metres from sea level

in a fairly short time. Ideally they need to rest a lot and take the climb slowly to avoid altitude sickness.

A good decision here can save a lot of problems later on. The referee might allow a Traveller with the Medic skill to make a check to realise that the ascent needs to be paced. If any Traveller points out that they are climbing a mountain in an already thin atmosphere, the referee might point out the risk of altitude sickness and ask if the team are deliberately going slowly to avoid it.

If the Travellers do not specify they are pacing themselves or taking a suitable rest, the referee is free to assume they are pushing on at what seems to a

layman to be a reasonable pace but which is in fact too fast for the conditions.

A party that slows down will make the usual 100 metres per hour in terms of altitude. A party that does not will manage 200 metres in an hour or so, but each Traveller without a breather or other supply of oxygen will have to make an Easy (4+) END check.

Those that fail the check now have mild altitude sickness. The result is that they will begin to tire faster than they expect and may begin to experience symptoms such as faint nausea, headache and a tendency not to react quickly to changing circumstances. This will not yet be a serious problem, though the Travellers will tend to snap at one another and find simple tasks like retying a bootlace both tricky and intensely annoying. This translates as a DM-2 on all checks, even when undertaking purely mental tasks.

1100–1200 METRES

This section is steep and rocky, with little vegetation. There is clear evidence that the mountain was a pretty active volcano in the distant past, with fields of hardened lava and obvious paths where it has flowed. The Travellers are slowed by the terrain but can take a fairly direct route, so can make 100 metres per hour vertically without undue strain.

1200–1350 METRES

This section of the mountain is really quite steep and has numerous hazards in the form of loose rocks, overhangs and sections where there is no alternative but to climb or scramble up a more or less sheer rock face. It will take 1D hours to traverse this section. This might actually be quicker than on the lower slopes since the Travellers are now able to go more or less straight up. No check is needed as the climb is not especially tricky. However, there is another problem.

Another test for altitude sickness is necessary at this point. This is a Routine (6+) END check for anyone not already suffering and a Average (8+) END check for anyone who is suffering. Travellers who fail the test are now suffering from mild altitude sickness if they were not suffering before, and moderate symptoms if this is the second test they have failed.

Moderate altitude sickness may cause nausea or even vomiting, headache and dizziness but worst of all is the strange mental numbness. Sufferers will sometimes just fail to react to obvious things. For example, a Traveller might keep on plodding numbly forwards when everyone else stops for a rest – and might even walk straight off a



Recovering From Altitude Sickness

A Traveller's body will try to adjust to the conditions it experiences. As a result, simply resting up for a day or two, especially if the Travellers can descend a couple of hundred metres from their highest point of ascent, will allow a good recovery to be made. A Traveller's penalty due to altitude will go down by one for each day of rest at a constant altitude or slightly lower, i.e. each day the Traveller does not climb any higher. When it reaches zero, a full recovery has been made.

Artificial assistance is also possible. A few minutes of oxygen from a medical unit or vacc suit, or some time spent in the sealed environment of the starship, will dispel the penalty for an hour or two. It will, however, return after that until the Traveller has acclimatised to the conditions properly. A Traveller who can rest for a significant part of the day (say sleeping for 8 hours) in a suitable controlled environment will recover quicker even if he works outside the rest of the time. His negative DM will go down by 2 per day in this case. If the Travellers were to acclimatise for several weeks, they would eventually become more used to the conditions atop Mount Salbarii, though they would still tire quickly due to the thin air and consequent difficulty in getting enough oxygen. However, they would at that point be capable of functioning more or less normally. Until then, everything they do atop the mountain is harder and more tiring than they would normally expect.



ledge in extreme cases. Travellers with moderate altitude sickness suffer DM-4 to all checks until they recover.

And of course, this is not a good time to be uncoordinated or confused. The Travellers will need to make at least one Athletics check to scramble up this section. Anyone who fails will fall, skidding down a rocky slope and suffering 3D damage. Precautions like being roped together might mitigate this at the referee's discretion, though this might put other Travellers in danger. Anyone who fails must try again, with another chance to fall and injure himself.

1350–1400 METRES

This section is worse than the last one, but fortunately not that high. It will take another 1D hours to clamber slowly up the rocky face of the mountain, which at times is almost sheer. As the Travellers near their goal they must make a final END check to avoid altitude sickness.

This is Difficult (10+) for anyone already suffering any symptoms and Average (8+) for those who have not yet begun to suffer.

Travellers who have failed one check are now suffering from mild altitude sickness (DM-2 to all checks), those who have failed two checks are moderately afflicted (DM-4 to all checks) and those that have managed to fail all three will be a danger to themselves and everyone else. They stumble about like zombies, suffering from a terrible headache and vomiting occasionally. They respond very sluggishly to changing circumstances – even crises – and struggle with even basic tasks. These Travellers have severe altitude sickness and suffer DM-6 to all checks.

The climb itself requires another Athletics check to make without mishap. It may be that some Travellers are by now almost incapable of making the climb, in which case their friends will have to get inventive and find a way to help. Failing the Athletics check to make the climb results in another fall for 3D damage and the requirement to try again.

THE CRATER LIP

The highest point of the crater lip is about 1,500m above sea level. However, it is not necessary to go over the highest point. There are several areas where the lip is a good 100 metres lower than the highest point. Most groups of Travellers will want to enter by the easiest route they can find, rather than determinedly conquering the summit.

The view from the crater lip looking outwards is most impressive. South and west are coastal plains falling away to the open ocean. North and east, if anyone travels around the crater rim, the interior of Settlement Island can be seen. The interior of the crater is a good 1-2 kilometres across, with an outer zone sloping steeply down a good 200m (to a height of about 1,250-1,300m above sea level). There is a fair amount of vegetation in the crater including a scrubby bush-forest, and a small lake in a centre. The lake has an island, and on that island is parked the familiar arrowhead shape of a scout/courier. It looks to be intact, though it is surrounded by trash.

Descending into the crater is fairly hard work but not unduly hazardous unless a Traveller is suffering severe altitude sickness and cannot keep his balance. However, it will take time to climb down and even longer to get back up if the ship turns out not to be flyable.



C H A P T E R - S E V E N

IN THE CRATER

The crater can be considered to be made up of three concentric zones. The outer, or lip, zone is characterised by steep slopes, tumbled rocks and a general lack of life. The inner zone extends from the outer zone edge to the shores of the lake, and is an average of 6-800 metres wide. It has soil of a rather thin sort, covered in scrubby grass and in places a forest of waist-high bushes.

The lake lies more or less at the centre of the crater and is about 500 metres in diameter, being roughly circular. There is an island about 100 metres in diameter in the centre of the lake, with vegetation of the same sort as around the lake. The water is warmish and drinkable though it has an odd mineral taste, as might be expected.

Getting across the lake to the *Highndry* should not be a huge problem. The lake is deep but not especially wide. Prudent Travellers might decide to make some kind of float to get themselves and their cases of spares across to the ship rather than just plunging into the lake.

Travellers exploring the crater are likely to make two finds sooner or later. The first is that there are several lava tubes around the outside of the crater, mostly in the outer zone. The second is that they have company in the crater.

THE LAVA TUBES

Most of these are dead ends but a couple lead to caverns under the lake. These might be worth exploring from a mineral prospecting point of view. They are slightly warmer than rock would normally be, which may cause Travellers to worry.

If the lava tubes are followed far enough down, most of them end at a deep cavern formed by a huge lava bubble in the distant past. It is an eerie and yet majestic place, with smoothed off walls and a gently sloping floor. Several lava tubes end here, and there are a number of dead end tubes leading away from the cavern. There is also one that eventually comes out in an ancient lava flow about 800 metres up the northern side of the mountain. This may offer easier access in the future if anyone came back for some reason.

COMPANY

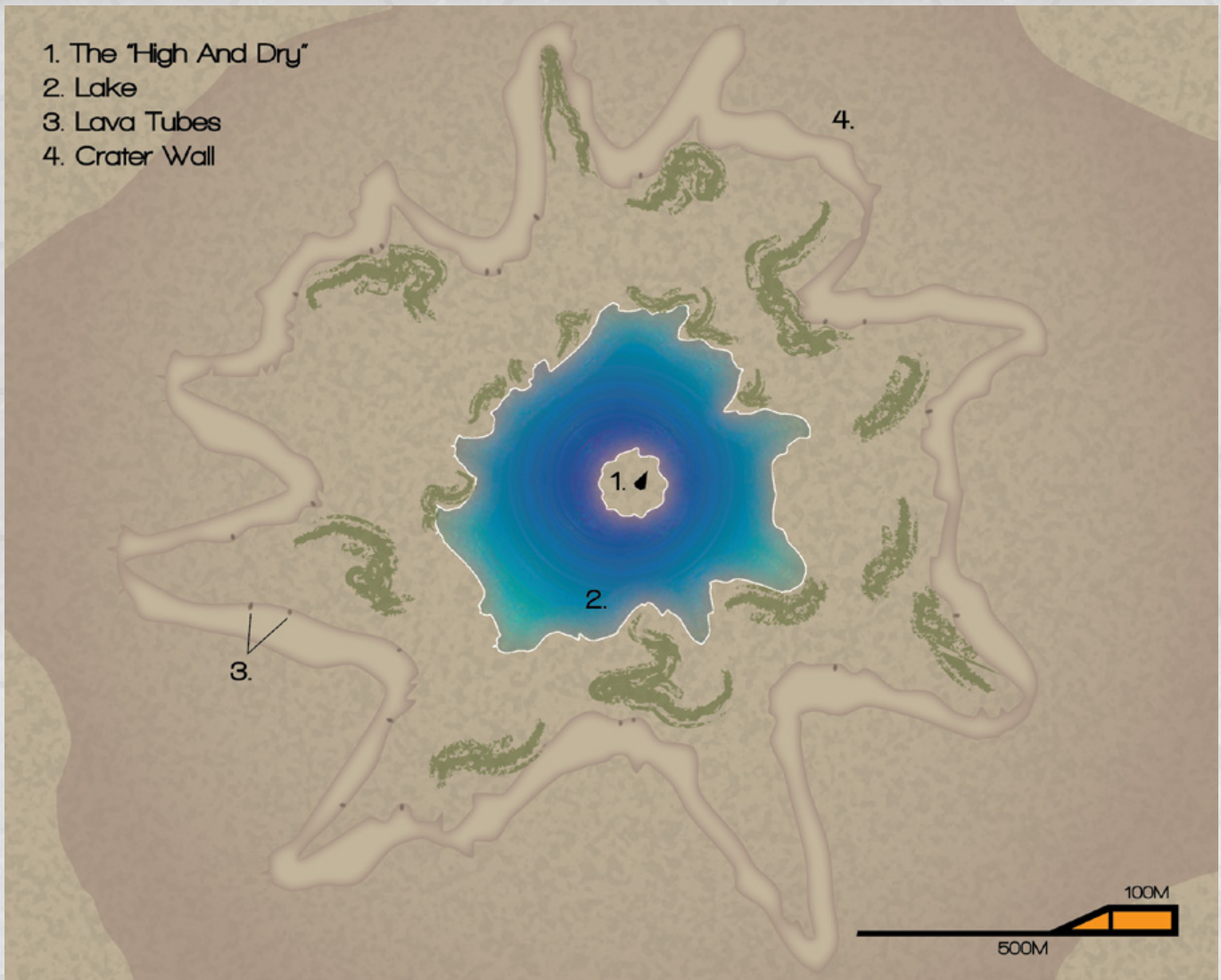
The crew of the *Highndry* had a guard animal, or possibly a pet. This beast was, or rather is, an omnivore the size of a large dog and similar in temperament. That is, were it not starving after living on what it could scrounge from the crater and the trash around the ship for several weeks, it would be friendly to those it considered part of its community or family. A reliable guard animal, companion and disposal unit for meal scraps under normal conditions, the beast is at present a threat to everyone around it.

The animal belongs to a species named Tensher's Wolf after its general appearance and the scientist who named it. Tensher's Wolf is not native to the Spinward Marches but is often imported as a guard animal. It is covered in sandy-brown fur which blends fairly well with the undergrowth and is adept at hiding from its prey. Tensher's Wolf prefers to attack by surprise. Normally it will not attack humans but this example is desperate and starving, and on top of that may consider the Travellers to be intruders into its territory especially if they go near the scout/courier. If it chooses to attack someone it will try to pick an isolated Traveller if possible.

TENSHER'S WOLF

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Tensher's Wolf	36	12 m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Melee (unarmed) 3, Recon 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3	
ATTACKS	Bite (3D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+2), Camouflaged	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Pouncer	

1. The "High And Dry"
2. Lake
3. Lava Tubes
4. Crater Wall



The behaviour of this creature depends entirely upon the Travellers. If they are not aware of it or do not actively attempt to feed and befriend it, it will try to kill and eat them unless it can steal something to eat from them instead. An encounter where the creature steals food from the Travellers' camp might cause them to realise that it does not fear people and might in fact be an abandoned pet. If the Travellers leave suitable food for the creature and allow it to satisfy its desperate hunger, it can be approached. If treated like a member of the family, it will revert to being one and eventually become a loyal guard animal/pet. If the Travellers do not befriend the creature they will have to kill it before it kills and eats one of them.

THE HIGHNDRY

Once the Travellers reach the island, they can see that the *Highndry's* hatches are all closed but just about everything inside it has been dumped outside in a huge mess made worse by some kind of animal raking through it looking for food. It would appear (correctly) that

the crew attempted a repair then stripped everything of value that they could carry from the ship, dumped the rest and took off in the ship's air/raft. Among the wreckage is a forlorn metal food bowl licked clean long ago. The name 'Kimbley' has been hand-stamped into the metal of the bowl. Someone once cared for the poor starving beast now haunting the island, but not enough to take it with them when they left.

Among the stuff that has been turfed out of the *Highndry* are ration packets, all of which have been ripped open and the contents (plus a fair amount of the packaging) devoured. Most of the rest of the stuff has been destroyed by the animal.

Gaining entry to the *Highndry* is not very difficult. Its reactor is powered down and the batteries are all but drained but there is sufficient power left to accept an entry code for the airlocks, although the doors will have to be manually opened. Inside, the ship is a terrible mess. The crew never took proper care of the ship when

it was their home, and in the process of leaving they were not gentle.

On top of that, virtually every access panel is open, the covers are off everything that has a cover and there are components strewn all over the deck. Putting it all back together will be a big job. Fortunately, some of the components can be bypassed or replaced with the gear the Travellers brought with them up the mountain. The resulting lash-up will not be pretty or safe for people walking past but it should suffice to get the *Highndry* to a dockyard where a proper repair can be conducted.

The first stage will be fixing up the power, life support and flight systems and running some simulations with the ship's software. This is a job that really should not be rushed; a problem with the ship's control electronics at the wrong time would be disastrous.

And so, having climbed to the top of the world, the Travellers can finally begin the job they came to Walston to do.

REPAIRS, SURVEYS AND TREMORS

Repairing the *Highndry* is a relatively straightforward task for Travellers who have the right equipment, i.e. the spares they have been given. The repair mostly takes the form of removing a large number of demountable circuit blocks and either bypassing or replacing them depending on how essential they are. The portable download/diagnostic unit can then ascertain whether a given system is useable or needs further work.

There are four main systems needing repair:

- Flight controls and navigational systems (bridge)
- General shipboard electronics (dispersed throughout the ship)
- Power systems electronics (engineering)
- Drive systems electronics (engineering)

Each of these jobs takes 1D+2 man-hours to complete. Most of the work can be done by an unskilled person who has been shown how as it simply requires identifying a circuit block by its code number and a simple remove-and-replace procedure. However, the referee should ask for an Electronics check at the end of each job.

The Travellers should not be told the difficulty level, creating a degree of uncertainty about whether the job has been done properly. In fact, between the diagnostic unit and a suitably skilled person offering guidance to those doing the actual work, there is no real chance of a disaster.

In addition, the ship's computers need to be accessed and purged, then the temporary control software uploaded. This can be accomplished by anyone with the Electronics (computer) skill, and again a check should be made.

In the event of a really terrible check, the Travellers may want to redo the task, which takes another 1D+2 man-hours.

However, provided due care was taken there will be no serious problems with the ship's systems when the time comes to fire them up. Nothing ever works properly first time however, so a prudent crew will undertake a series of ground tests and a low altitude shakedown flight before blasting off into the unknown. It is all but inevitable that some sort of problem will appear and have to be fixed. In the meantime there are two other jobs that need doing.

The first is making the *Highndry* habitable. The general electronics systems dispersed throughout the vessel deal with things like life support, recycling and lighting, but there is also a fair amount of filth and mess that must be cleared out before the ship is really fit to live in. A number of quite important components such as air filters are missing and must be located – the crew dismantled everything they might be able to take with them, selected the most portable and valuable, and left the rest scattered throughout the ship and on the ground outside. Locating and replacing important parts will take several people a couple of days, and cleaning up properly will take longer even than that.

There is also the matter of the seismic survey to be carried out.

THE SURVEY

The Travellers do not, strictly speaking, have to keep their promise to Minister Greener. The people of Walston could not stop the scout ship from simply taking off with the work undone. However, if the travellers wish to pick up any belongings they did not bring up the mountain with them, or to take on supplies for their voyage, the locals will want to know how the survey is going and may decide to be difficult if they think they are being taken for a ride.

The survey itself can mostly be done on the ground, and may be quite entertaining as it involves emplacing a series of seismic charges and detonating them. The charges are aboard the ship, strewn around in a frighteningly haphazard manner, and the sensor equipment for the survey is separate from the flight and power systems. The previous crew had little call to use it or mess with it, so it remains intact and functional unlike most of the things they got their hands on.

To do a really thorough job, the Travellers should emplace ground sensor units all over the crater and in some of the lava tubes. Charges should be set off in

some of the tubes as well. The effects of the charge detonations will be used by the scout ship's computer to create a three dimensional model of the volcano. When matched up with readings taken by more sophisticated sensors like the vessel's high-penetration densitometer, this will allow the computer to predict if and when an eruption is likely. Other indicators include measurements of the lake temperature and samples of the gas mix around the crater area.

The survey will take about 10 man-hours to do cursorily and twice as long to carry out properly. Ideally Travellers with Electronics (sensors) or Science (planetology) will be available to carry out the data analysis and someone with Explosives skill to emplace the charges, but the system is reasonably idiot-proof and need not be too precise that a typical group of Travellers cannot muddle through somehow. After a few hours of blowing up small areas of rock and vaporising the occasional bush, the Travellers will get a fright.

THE TREMOR

Although the Travellers do not know it, their actions have nothing to do with the slight tremor that shakes the mountain in the middle of the survey. It is not especially violent but goes on for a surprisingly long time, bouncing things around in the scout ship and making it difficult to stand in the open.

After what seems like far too long, the ground stops trembling. At first it seems like nothing is different, then two things will be noticed. One is a slight plume of dust or gas escaping from the south-western side of the mountain. The second is a disturbance in the surface of the lake. As the Travellers watch, huge bubbles rise to the surface of the lake, which then subsides.

Astute Travellers may notice that the lake level is dropping. Not quickly, just a centimetre or two each minute, but the lake is slowly draining away. A small fissure has opened in the lake bed and it is draining into the lava tubes – which may be a problem for anyone in there at the time. It will take hours for the lake to empty, as it is 30 metres deep in places. All that will be left are a few forlorn pools. By this time the fissure will have ceased to vent gas and the mountain will once again be quiet. However, these events may give the Travellers cause for grave concern.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Highndry's* computers (and any Travellers with relevant skills) will come up with a prediction after a few hours. There are many variables, and nothing is certain but it seems likely that the mountain is indeed becoming active.

It would appear that the lava plug deep in the volcano's innards has been breached and magma is seeking a way to the surface.

It is highly likely that there will be an eruption of some kind within a few months. However, the scale is not expected to be very large. Chances are good that there will be very little lava actually reaching the surface, and what does escape will cool long before it reaches the base of the mountain. Gas and ash clouds are more of a problem, but again it is likely that the eruption will take the form of a steady release of pressure, with a plume of ash-laden gas escaping from the top of the mountain to be blown downwind (which means to the west, across the island and out to sea). This will look alarming but should not seriously threaten even the nearest town. It will be alarming but not excessively dangerous.

The computer model is fairly certain that there is no significant hazard to any settlement on the island, not even the handful of outlying farms that dot the fertile land below the volcano. However, it does suggest that further monitoring is advisable as the entire prediction is based upon one incomplete map of the mountain's structure.

TEST FLIGHT

At last the *Highndry* is ready for a test flight. The Travellers may be suspicious that the ship's systems are not in perfect working order. This is a reasonable conclusion as no-one ever gets a complete overhaul of this kind right first time.

A prudent crew would use the training-mode simulators on the ship's controls to make a dry run before take-off, and run low then full-power tests on the ground. A sensible approach of this sort will take a few hours but will iron out the worst of the faults before take-off.

However, a nervous crew may want to get off the mountain right away, in which case the *Highndry* can be prepped for flight in a few minutes. However, it will function somewhat erratically. Un-calibrated controls, sudden faults in various electronic systems and the occasional burst of sparks from something will conspire to make the crew's task very difficult. If proper tests are not carried out before flight, DM-2 applies to all Pilot and Engineer checks until the crew can find a couple of hours to fix the worst of the faults.

Once the faults are fixed, the *Highndry* can be operated without penalty, though it does not quite 'fly right'. It is sometimes slow on the helm, sometimes erratic. Autostabilisation is wayward at best, and power systems are not 100% reliable. All of this makes operating the *Highndry* a nerve-wracking and tiring business.

However, the Travellers are going to need to fly, and soon.

C H A P T E R - E I G H T

ERUPTION!

Just as the Travellers are preparing for their test flight, several things happen in fairly rapid succession. Most are alarming and the rest are downright scary. The first sign of a problem is a gentle pinging from the sensor data processing suite. This may not even be noted unless someone is monitoring it or is in the same room. The suite wants to inform the crew that it has revised the eruption prediction based on new data. To the computer, this is a dispassionate exercise and of no real urgency.

To anyone looking at the data from the point of view of, say, being sat on top of the volcano, the new data is a little more urgent.

The computer displays tables of temperatures and gas mixes and such, plus a helpful three dimensional model of the mountain which shows a huge lava plume smashing through the plug and filling the tubes. If asked for a prediction, the machine shows the top blowing right off the mountain in about six minutes' time. The Travellers just have time to realise that they cannot possibly get clear when the machine pings again to indicate revised data. Now it shows a much reduced lava plume simply pouring out into the crater and down the sides of the mountain, accompanied by a cloud of hot gas and ash. The first wisps of smoke can be seen coiling up from the lava tubes and the lakebed fissure. What water remains is beginning to boil. An eruption is obviously imminent, and the ground begins to shake to confirm this.

On-the-ball Travellers may have time to wonder what has changed, since the lava plume is now much smaller than the one depicted a moment ago. They will find out in due course.

In the meantime, there is still lava rising up the inside of the mountain and seeking a way out into the crater. The Travellers have a few minutes to take off.

As the last pre-flight checks are being made and the power plant brought up to full power, a plume of smoke can be seen rising from the south-western side of the mountain, well outside the crater. The ground shudders and the ship's radar begins warning of incoming missiles. These are in fact chunks of rock flung up into

the air by the eruption going on well down the flank of the mountain.

The lava plume has found a way out, through a path that was too far down the mountain to appear on the survey.

While this means that the Travellers will not be incinerated in the crater and that there will be no catastrophic release of pressure resulting in the top being blasted off Mount Salbarii, it does have other implications.

By now the air in the crater is becoming too hot and too laden with volcanic gases to breathe. As the ship lifts off, lava begins to boil out of the lakebed fissures. If the Tensher's Wolf previously encountered is still around and has not been adopted by the Travellers, it will run for the ship seeking the safety of its home. If it has already been befriended, letting it aboard will not be a problem. On the other hand, if the Travellers have just allowed a terror-stricken carnivore into the ship, where it finds strangers instead of its human masters... problems are likely, to say the least.

As the scout ship lifts clear of the hell zone that has become of the crater, bushes begin to catch fire and the air is filled with dust and ash. The radio is active, with two transmissions on similar bands.

TRANSMISSION ONE

The first transmission is coming in from the capital at Central Lake by way of the starport orbital beacon. Minister Greener wants to know what is happening. He has some garbled reports of smoke from the mountain and a tremor.

He would like to know how serious the situation is and what the long-term implications are.

Greener has little information and does not know how bad things are. However, as he receives reports of ash clouds in the sky, he begins to realise that things are serious indeed. At this point he becomes increasingly desperate for information. At this point, the travellers have little to give him other than their own first-hand account of the eruption.

TRANSMISSION TWO

At more or less the same time, the town mayor's office at Salbarii tries to contact the travellers. The tremors have been felt in the town, about 20km to the north of the mountain, and dark clouds can be seen issuing from the mountain. The mayor and his tiny staff have issued a general alert and, like Greener, need information.

DECISIONS

The Travellers could cut and run at this point, but for a minor problem. Their fuel tanks could be filled easily enough by taking on seawater and cracking it for hydrogen. However, a number of red lights appear on the jump drive control panel. The drive is inoperable until a proper repair is undertaken, which will necessitate removing a number of bulky components to get at the critical systems. This really needs the sort of tools and hoists found at a starport. If the Travellers ask, Greener or any other government official on Walston will be

happy to offer them use of the equipment they need if they will help with the present crisis.

For the time being, what the Walston authorities need is information. The world's handful of grav vehicles are en route to Mount Salbarii, and a special train full of security personnel, fire and rescue workers, and the like, is being assembled. But for now the only people able to make any real difference are the Travellers. Greener wants them to make a flyby of the whole mountain and the surrounding region, and report what they can see. A direct video feed via the starport beacon would be ideal. Once he knows what is happening, Greener will be able to decide what to do – or better, put a full picture in front of the dictator and let him formulate a response.

The Travellers have a choice here. If they choose to run they will not be welcome on Walston and can expect no help with the ship, though they should be able to fix up the drives themselves eventually. In the meantime, people may be in danger and they have the means to help.



FIGHTING MOUNT SALBARI, PART ONE

Assuming the Travellers decide to help, they will need to fly close to the mountain. There is a lot of thick haze cause by smoke and ash coming from the mountain, and the odd rock flung into the air (the ship's sensors insist on wailing a missile alert for these), making the flight tricky. All Pilot checks are Difficult (10+) while operating in this environment. The ship's radar and other sensors make it possible to map the ground easily enough through the haze even though visual range is very short. A circuit of the mountain reveals the following facts:

- There is a small amount of lava in the crater itself, and some leaking from outlets on the higher slopes. This is not a significant hazard beyond the immediate area.
- There is a major eruption much lower down, where part of the mountainside has collapsed. A veritable river of lava is pouring out. This is on the south-western side of the volcano.
- The land slopes generally down to the sea from the erupting side of the volcano, offering the lava flow a direct path to the sea.
- The town of Salbarii, 20km north, is not in any real danger at present or in the foreseeable future.
- There are some small settlements, mainly just farms and a couple of hamlets, in the path of the lava flow. Within hours at most these will be swamped. The only settlement of any size in the danger zone has a population of about 60 people and is on the coast. It is not know for certain if it is endangered but this seems likely.

RESPONSES

At first, there is little response from the people of Walston. True to their collective character, most people simply wait for someone else to take charge. There are a couple of notable exceptions, however. The fishing submarine *Ocean's Bounty* has surfaced and is transmitting her intent to run into the coastal hamlet of Barvinn where she will take off as many people as she can. The mayor's office at Salbarii is broadcasting instructions for all inhabitants of threatened settlements

to make for Salbarii where they will be looked after unless the town is in danger, in which case they will be evacuated by rail.

After a while Dictator Masterton comes on the air in person. From the poor quality of the transmission it seems that he is aboard a fast-moving vehicle. His instructions to the people repeat those of the mayor of Salbarii – head for the town where a rescue plan is being put in place. Those that cannot get to Salbarii should make a run for Barvinn on the coast and await rescue. Masterton asks to speak to the Travellers (assuming they have offered to help). He is indeed aboard a grav car heading for Salbarii, one of just three owned and operated by the government. He quickly outlines the situation.

There is a road – more of a dirt track really – up to Salbarii but it runs close to the mountain and may already be cut. There is also a single track rail link down the coast to Barvinn which will stay open for a while. A train has already been sent to pick up the town's population. However, it is likely that some people will arrive after the train has departed. The sub can take a handful off; the remainder will have to wait for a second run by the same train – Walston has a very limited transport system.

Masterton is going to set up a command post at Salbarii and send his grav vehicles to pick up anyone who is stranded. He hopes the travellers can help by getting an estimate of the lava flow rate. If so, this will indicate how long the town of Barvinn has before it is endangered. Ideally the Travellers will also be able to say whether the road is still open and report on conditions in general. Their radar terrain mapping system could help predict the best routes out for endangered personnel.

This comes down to three main tasks:

- Map the terrain and model the lava flow path
- Establish a flow rate for the lava river headed in the general direction of Barvinn
- Monitor the conditions at the mountain and report any changes

MAPPING THE TERRAIN

This requires a couple of overflights and a successful Electronics (sensors) check. The map shows what is already suspected – Barvinn will be consumed by lava, and the overland route will be cut before anyone can use it. The railroad will stay open almost to the end, however.

ESTABLISHING THE FLOW RATE

The lava is following ground contours and flowing much like a river as a result. Hovering directly above a flow is not a good idea, but it is not very difficult to fly slowly parallel to a flow and try to estimate a rate of advance. This will require ignoring distractions like the spectacular combustion of nearby vegetation and a successful Electronics (sensors) or Science (planetology) check. The Recon skill might also be used to create a quick and dirty estimate.

Combining this estimate with the terrain map should enable the Travellers to estimate how long Barvinn has before the lava reaches it. The figure of roughly one to two hours seems reasonable at this point.

MONITORING THE MOUNTAIN

There is still some doubt as to whether Salbarii is in imminent danger or will need to be evacuated in the longer term. It may be that the town is perfectly safe. Which of these is true will have important implications for the handling of this disaster so again the dictator needs information to make a decision.

Ideally, the Travellers should return to the mountain (a part without lava spurting out of it would be good) and emplace some sensors in short holes drilled in the rock. This will allow an estimate of both temperature and stresses in the mountainside, which will allow an estimate of how long the eruption will go on for and if any more unpleasant surprises can be expected.

Landing on the mountainside is tricky, but not especially dangerous so long as the Travellers stay away from the

immediate vicinity of lava flows. The air is hard to breathe but a filter mask or air supply will suffice to deal with this problem. It is also, not surprisingly, hot.

Emplacing sensors takes half an hour or more, with a couple of hops from one point to another aboard the scout ship. Its air/raft would have been most useful for this job, but the ship itself can manage with a decent pilot. Fairly soon, the data begins to come in and there is good news.

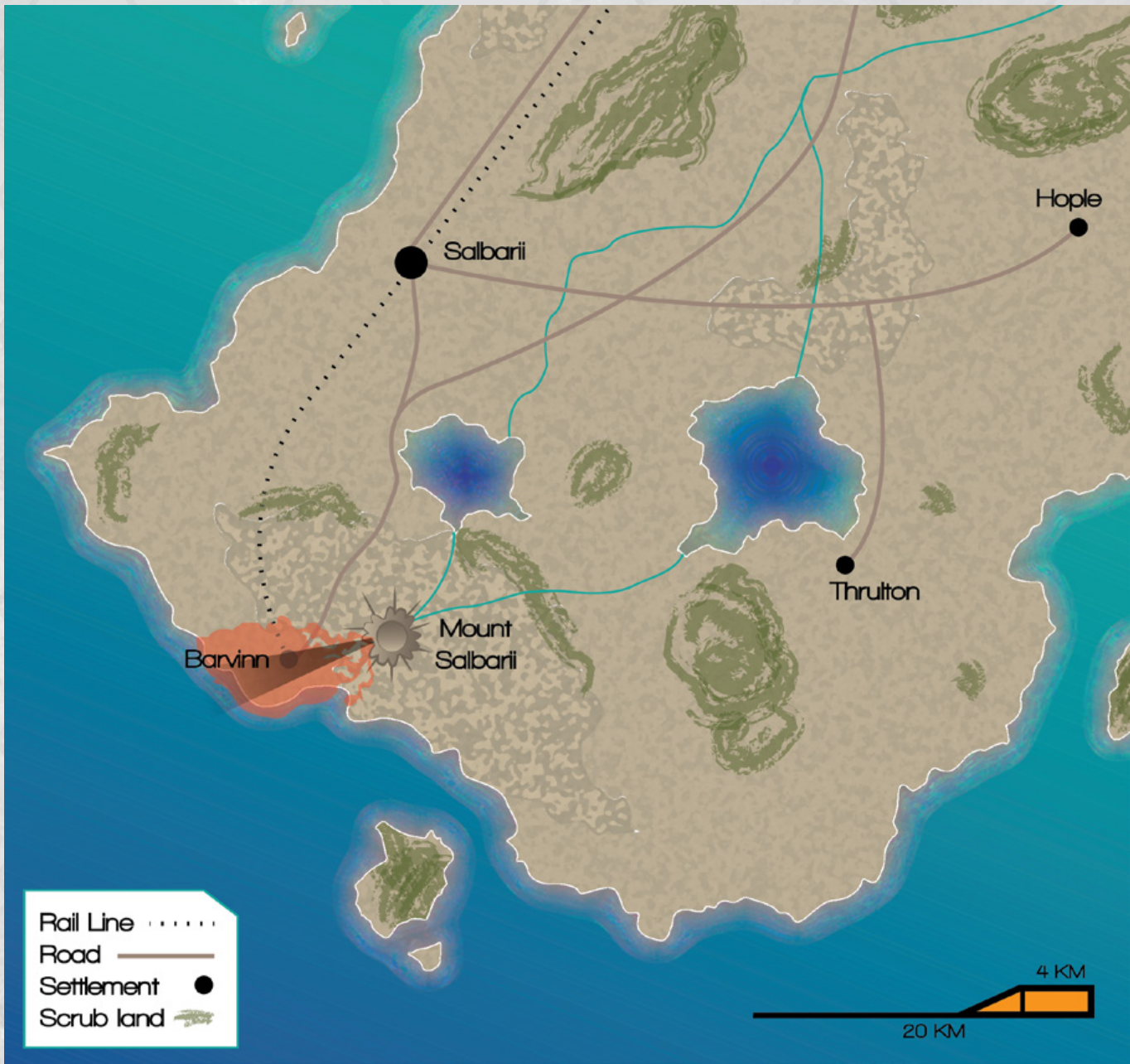
The lava flow is slowing and the temperature of nearby rock is dropping ever so slightly. It would seem likely that the eruption will be quite limited after all. Paranoid Travellers might choose to recheck these findings, use different instruments and generally do a more thorough job. If so, they will realise that there is more to their findings than initially meets the eye. If not, the computer model will present the data listed below in a few minutes anyway.

THE BAD NEWS

The lava flow rate has dropped because a plug has built up in the mountain somewhere. Now, sometimes this is a good thing as it can block the route to the surface and thus cause the eruption to end. However, in cases like this where there is a lot of pressure underneath, a plug of this sort tends to be short-lived. When it breaks, it will be like a dam bursting; the lava flow will massively increase and a chunk of the mountain may be quite literally blasted off.

According to the sensors and the computer model, Mount Salbarii is under rapidly increasing stress. Within just a few minutes the plug is going to fail and a massive eruption will take place. Worse, a huge cloud of super-hot ash and gas will be ejected from the mountain and will hurtle out across the coastal plain. The town of Barvinn will be destroyed and anyone in it will die.

The only good news is that the town of Salbarii will probably not be too badly affected, though a lot of ash is going to fall on it. In the long term the town may end up being abandoned but this would mean moving a significant chunk of the planetary population to new homes, representing a rather large project for the world government. It will not be even considered unless it seems inevitable.



C H A P T E R - T E N

FIGHTING MOUNT SALBARI, PART TWO

The Travellers would be well advised to get off the slopes of Mount Salbarii. It is not possible to predict the exact effects of the lava plug failing, other than the general statement that it can be filed under 'really bad'. Anyone between the mountain and the sea will be killed for certain, and the effects on the scout ship are likely to be severe to fatal. A withdrawal seems prudent.

EVACUATION ORDERS

Within moments of reporting the situation to Dictator Masterton, orders begin to come in from the temporary command post at Salbarii. The gist of it comes down to an order to cut and run right now. There is a train – really just a locomotive and a couple of cargo cars – running into Barvinn. It will take everyone who is at the station aboard and make for Salbarii at best speed. There is nothing to do but hope it gets clear in time.

However, there are people still trying to get to the station, who will not be there by the time the train leaves. The submarine *Ocean's Bounty* is in port at Barvinn, and will take aboard anyone who can be crammed in before heading out to sea and submerging. It should be safe, though nobody really knows how bad things are about to get. However, there are two groups that cannot reach safety in time. One is from an agricultural settlement, a farming hamlet well to the south. Ironically they might have been safe if they had stayed put or headed south, but then maybe not. In any case, they are now well within the threat zone and cannot be reached by anyone but the scout ship.

Masterton asks the Travellers to attempt a rescue of this group. Asks, not orders. He acknowledges that the Travellers have taken risks already and have saved many lives. If they take their ship straight up they should be able to get above the threat zone and be safe enough. But there are eleven people, humans and Vargr, some of them just children, jammed into a couple of ground vehicles struggling up a dirt road towards a promise of safety that the dictator himself has just withdrawn.

And so, the Travellers are requested to help. They could fly to the refugees, pick them up and then take their ship out to sea and submerge it. The *Highndry* would not make a great submarine – keeping water out is different to keeping air in – but it could happily function a few metres down, which would surely be enough to protect it from the eruption. But what of the other group Masterton mentioned? He regretfully says they are beyond help. In such a small population, he is acquainted with many of the planet's residents and this pair are particularly stubborn. Indeed, their daughter, who is on the dictatorial staff, is just as bad. Point is, Masterton knows these people. He can tell the Travellers who they are and what they do. He can offer a pretty accurate prediction of their reaction to news of the eruption and their stubborn refusal to be worried or to run for it until it was too late.

What he cannot do is save them.

Masterton has to make a decision – eleven people or two, and the two probably cannot be saved anyway, not even with the *Highndry*. So he asks the Travellers to abandon them and pick up the larger group who are nearer the coast. The two have just lost the numbers game; it is really that simple.

But someone else has different ideas.

DECISIONS

The Travellers can see an ever-increasing flow of black smoke or ash-filled gas pouring from the mountainside. Their sensors show massive stress in the rock before going offline. It is time to run, and decisions need to be made.

The relevant facts are:

- The Travellers could almost certainly get clear if they just decide to save themselves
- Going after the large group is risky but there is a good chance they could do it and still beat the cloud
- If the Travellers try to rescue the other group, they will be caught in the eruption for sure.

Before the Travellers can make up their minds, radar picks up an object coming in from the north, moving at well over 300kph. Its transponder indicates that it is a grav car with call sign Walston One – the Dictator’s own personal transport.

The limo is flying dangerously fast and somewhat erratically, right through the ash plume pouring from the mountain. It is probably flying more or less blind – grav cars do not have particularly great sensors as they rarely need to navigate under such conditions. The limo is broadcasting.

A breathless, growly voice – obviously a Vargr – is broadcasting on the emergency channel.

“Scout ship, get the big group. I’m going after mum and dad. I can get there before you can. Good luck.”

Masterton can confirm that his chauffeur was out picking up some refugees and has taken it into her head to try a rescue. Her chances are not good, to be realistic, but it is the sort of idiotic, stubborn, half-crazy stunt you would expect... anyway, he says, it solves the dilemma. If the Travellers can pick up the refugees at Barvinn, there is a half-decent chance of saving everyone.

The Travellers still have to choose between definite safety and some risk in return for the chance to save lives. If they so choose, they can climb above the disaster zone or race out to sea and witness the final eruption from a safe distance.

If, on the other hand they head for Barvinn they may find they get a closer view.

LAST TRAIN OUT OF BARVINN

Assuming the Travellers decide to undertake the rescue at Barvinn, they arrive to a pitiful scene. The settlement is very small, just three dwelling complexes and a rail platform where trains down the single line terminate. There is also a concrete dock with a semi-underground warehouse and a small crane for unloading boats and submersibles. The area between the dock and the station is flat and concreted over to make transfer of cargoes (mainly fish) from dock to railroad car as easy as possible.

There are two civilian ground vehicles, typical 4x4 pickups as used on the local farms, parked on the concreted area. Several people are rushing around in a state of shock and panic. Some are pointing at a train which is disappearing northwards, some at a fishing submarine which is just visible out in the bay. Others are

trying to break into a dwelling complex while still others are calling the rest back to the cars. These people are clearly desperate and have no idea what to do for the best.

When the *Highndry* appears, people begin to run towards it, waving, which of course will interfere with landing. The two cars on the concreted area are an additional obstacle, and landing without crushing them will be tricky (a Pilot check to avoid flattening a truck with the ship’s landing gear would be appropriate). Just avoiding killing any of the people will be challenge enough.

Of course, while some of the refugees want to rush straight aboard the *Highndry*, others would prefer to indignantly pour out a tale of abandonment and broken promises to anyone who will listen. People under great stress are not always entirely rational.

Rounding up the refugees may prove tricky. Some want to grab things from the vehicles, others are sure that one of their children, relatives or dependents are missing. The Travellers may have to use leadership or persuasive skills, or else drag people bodily into the ship and keep them there. All this will take just a few minutes but it will seem like much longer.

As the Travellers are struggling to round up the refugees, bundling them aboard or making the decision to abandon them, the mountain finally goes. A vast cloud of superheated gas, ash and rock fragments is blasted clear, rolling out from Mount Salbarii at high speed. Chunks of rock and even quite large boulders are flung into the air. It is really quite spectacular. Presumably there is a massive lava flow behind and beneath the cloud but it cannot be seen at this point.

The gas and rock-fragment cloud (correctly termed a pyroclastic flow) is moving at about 75kph and is about four to five minutes away. It is quite high, making a climb over the top a difficult proposition in the limited time the scout ship has before its arrival. Running ahead of the flow, out to sea, then submerging, is a better prospect.

If the Travellers pick either option, they will encounter only fairly mild effects. The scout will be buffeted about by a high wind pushed ahead of the cloud, and the pilot will struggle to maintain control, but there is no serious danger to the ship. If the Travellers take to the water they will discover that the flow can travel a long way over water, and will turn the surface layer to steam but does not heat the water more than about 5 metres down to any great degree. It does deposit lumps of rock which sink and bang against the hull, creating a sensation similar to being depth-charged.

The *Highndry* will survive either of these options with a few new dents and scorch marks to go with the many it already has. However, the valiant Vargr chauffeur and her parents will not. If the Travellers choose not to go to her aid (see below), the limo is forced down on the shore and overwhelmed by the pyroclastic flow. There is no chance for anyone to survive such an event.

DISTRESS CALL

As the *Highndry* is lifting off from Barvinn, the Travellers pick up a distress call from the dictator's limo. The Vargr's voice is even more breathless and there is a roaring sound that suggests that the windshield or another window has been shattered. There is also a hideous whining sound in the background which sounds like tortured lift units – anyone who has worked with gravitic units can tell the limo is in serious trouble even without the distress call.

The content of the call is plaintive and desperate.

"Mayday... Mayday, this is Walston One. The car is damaged, drives are failing... windows are cracked and I can't see properly... I think I'm heading for the sea but we're losing speed and altitude. I don't think we're going to make it. Is there anyone? Please?"

The voice gets weaker and then cuts off entirely.

Radar shows the limo limping towards the coast, losing height fast. It is perhaps a minute or two ahead of the pyroclastic cloud emerging from the mountain and actually outpacing it for now, but within moments it is going to be grounded. The limo's projected crash site is less than two minutes' flight time away, but the cloud is going to be only a minute or two behind that.

If the Travellers ignore the distress call, a Vargr chauffeur they have never met and whose name they do not even know, and her parents, will burn to death and be entombed in ash, but they and their shipload of refugees will survive.

If they go to the rescue, the pyroclastic cloud will engulf all of them for sure and there is no way of telling what will happen.

INTO THE CLOUD

If the *Highndry* heads for the projected crash site, the limo drops off radar but can be tracked by its transponder beacon. The sky is black with dust and falling ash, and it is very hard to see without electronic assistance. It takes a few moments to locate the downed

limo, which is in a terrible state. Much of the damage was done before the crash, it would appear. Someone is firing flares from the emergency kit, but the radio seems to be out.

As soon as the three Vargr spot the *Highndry* (which is not easy, given the circumstances) they begin stumbling towards it supporting one another. The chauffeur's comments about not being able to see properly are given a different context when any Traveller spots her face. She has been hit in the face by fragments of the windshield when it shattered and is blinded by blood coming from a great many small cuts. It looks worse than it is, but she is still largely blind and thus a danger to all if she keeps launching flares at random.

The falling ash is now moving almost horizontally. Even in the thin air of Walston there is a considerable wind picking up, driven before a 75kph cloud of superheated steam and volcanic debris. The cloud will bury the *Highndry* easily if it is caught on the ground, and the heat will overload its systems and broil the occupants alive. The only chance is to run for it. But there is less than one minute to impact and no chance to outrun the cloud.

There are basically three options. The first is to climb as high as possible and try to get above the cloud. This will at least avoid the worst of the debris, but there is no chance to get high enough to avoid being engulfed. The second option is to run for the sea and try to submerge. The cloud will catch the *Highndry* before it can enter the water, however.

The third option is the best, but not by much. If the *Highndry* hits the cloud head-on its aerodynamics *might* lessen the impact and at least it will have its strongest axis pointing at the threat.

At the very least, everyone should strap in or grab something.

The *Highndry's* bunks and cabin seats are all fitted with straps and crash frames, so eight people can be secured in the cabins as well as those on bridge chairs and emergency crash seats in engineering. The rest will simply have to cling on to something and hope for the best.

Whatever the Travellers choose to do, they will be hit by the pyroclastic cloud and will have to deal with its effects. The base of the cloud is a layer of superheated steam. If the scout ship is above that (just a few meters) then the temperatures are not sufficient to damage the vessel. However, the shockwave hitting the *Highndry* will have severe effects.

Physical Damage to the vessel itself will be fairly minor, but objects and people inside will be thrown around by the impact. Base damage for everyone inside is 3D at the initial impact, reduced by 1D if the ship is headed directly into the cloud and by another 1D if the Traveller is properly strapped into a crash frame or seat. Those simply clinging to something must make a Very Difficult (12+) DEX check to gain this reduction. Those who fail take full damage and in addition are dislodged from their hold on whatever it was, causing them to bounce around inside the ship during the next few moments.

As already noted, physical damage from the impact is not massive but the *Highndry* is flung upwards and out, away from the volcano and towards the open sea. Worse, the power plant and drive system are overloaded and cut out for a moment. This causes all the interior lights to go off, then come back on dimly as the emergency batteries cut in. Unfortunately these are not sufficient to power the lifters or the main drive, which is a shame because the *Highndry* is travelling in a ballistic arc without power, and both tumbling and spinning to boot. Any moment the ship will reach the top of its arc and begin to fall. It is unlikely that anyone will survive the crash when it hits the ocean.

SAVE THE SHIP!

The Travellers are inside an unpowered, tumbling, spinning death-trap that used to be a space vessel. They have been flung out of the pyroclastic cloud but will soon fall back through it into the ocean. People and objects are flying about inside the ship.

The Travellers will need to act fast to save the *Highndry*. Note that a scout/courier cannot glide; it has no control surfaces and while streamlined for passage through atmosphere it is not aerodynamic in terms of generating lift. With even just a little power it can be pointed in the right direction and made to fall controllably, but it needs a powered drive to fly. And that is the very thing it lacks.

There are two things that need to be done to make the scout ship controllable. The first is to reboot the control systems, which can be done from the bridge or engineering section. The second is to manually override the safety cut outs on the power plant and get power to the engines. The sooner both of these things are done, the sooner the pilot can begin trying to regain control of the ship.

There are three segments to the fall, Going Up, Going Down, and Seconds to Impact. During each segment the pilot may attempt a Pilot check if he has both controls and power. The more successful checks he makes,

the less severe the effects suffered by the *Highndry* will be. If other crewmembers make their checks to supply power and control in a given round, the pilot can immediately attempt to gain control of the ship.

To reboot the control systems: an Average (8+) Electronics (computer) check or a Difficult (10+) Pilot check is needed.

This can be done from engineering or any bridge console.

If the pilot completes this task he may still attempt his Pilot check to save the ship.

To get the power plant out of emergency shutdown mode: An Average (8+) Engineer (power) check is needed. This must be done from engineering, and requires physical access to the power systems, i.e. the Traveller will have to leave his seat and more or less cling to the power plant as he works.

Both of these tasks must be completed before the pilot can attempt to stabilise the ship. The pilot can make his check to regain control in the same round that the other two tasks are completed. This may mean waiting for another task to be completed; it is equally possible that the crew will get everything working in the first few seconds after the ship begins to tumble.

First Successful Pilot Check: The ship is stabilised and is at least falling predictably.

Second Successful Pilot Check: The ship is under power and begins to respond to the helm.

Third Successful Pilot Check: The ship is under full control and can avoid crashing.

Note that it is not necessary to roll damage and checks for every one of the refugees during these scenes. They make a lot of noise, pass out, vomit, shout for help, scream in terror or pain, and occasionally do something stupid like trying to get out of a crash frame in order to run around in a panic. The referee should use them as scenery to add to the drama and possibly tragedy of the situation.

GOING UP

The *Highndry* is nearing the apex of its crazy tumble through the sky. It is spinning wildly during this segment and all attempts at checks are made at DM-2 unless the Traveller is secured in some way.

Anyone who is not strapped into a crash frame or a seat is liable to be flung about and hurt. Travellers simply clinging on to something and trying to avoid being hurt may make an Average (8+) Athletics (dexterity) check to remain stable and not allow themselves to be bashed against the fittings.

Failure results in 2D damage. A Traveller clinging to something can grab someone else, requiring an Athletics (strength) check, and save them from damage. These rolls are not penalised for the tumbling of the ship since the Traveller is secured to something, even if it is merely by his fingernails.

A Traveller who is held by another in this manner will not be hurt and can attempt to use his skills without penalty for the ship's movement. Teamwork of this sort represents the best chance for success. Other Travellers may find themselves trying to catch refugee children who have come loose from their seat straps, or struggling to hold an unconscious friend against a bulkhead and prevent further injury.

GOING DOWN

The *Highndry* begins to fall and to stabilise somewhat. This is nothing to do with being under control; the vessel will tend to stop tumbling on its long axis due to its shape. It goes into a flat spin indeed, which is not much of an improvement in the grand scheme of things. Anyone not strapped in or otherwise secured makes checks at DM-1 and suffers 1D damage from being bounced around.

SECONDS TO IMPACT

Literally seconds before impact, the ship's automatic systems will bring the controls back online and remove all the safety cut outs from the power plant. The ship's avionics have detected that a collision is imminent and disregarded all other considerations in order to allow the crew a chance to save the *Highndry*. Damage to the drives or even an explosion is no worse a fate than hitting a planet at speed.

However, the *Highndry* is still in a flat spin. Auto-stabilisation systems make a single, two-second attempt to right the ship and correct the spin and then shut down in a cacophony of overload alarms and wisps of smoke from the control systems. The pilot gets one attempt (with no penalties for the spin) to get the ship at least partially under control.

If power and control systems were already back online, the pilot simply tries an Average (8+) Pilot check to

get the ship properly under control. Anyone bouncing around unrestrained in this segment suffers 1D damage.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

What happens next depends upon how many Pilot checks rolls were made. Three attempts were possible, assuming that control and power were restored in the first segment.

If the pilot made all three, the *Highndry* pulls out of the spin and lifts her nose, accelerating out of the dive over the sea and climbing unsteadily to a safe altitude. There is a fair amount of minor damage to internal components, people have been violently sick, and the ship is a bit the worse for wear but the ordeal is over.

If less than three Pilot skill rolls were made, things do not go so well.

TWO SUCCESSFUL CHECKS

The *Highndry's* spin is stabilised and she is answering the helm, but it is a little too late. She hits the surface of the ocean at the bottom of a shallow but high-speed dive, skipping on the surface before pulling up and climbing into the air in a triumphant spray of steam and minor debris. Everyone aboard takes 2D damage if loose, 1D if held or clinging to something and no damage if strapped into a crash frame or seat.

ONE SUCCESSFUL CHECK

The *Highndry* is sort of under control, mostly, when she hits the water surface in a steep dive. She arrows deep into the bay and embeds her nose in the silt at the bottom, coming to rest stuck in the seabed a dozen metres down. Her hot hull boils water around her and hull plate groans under the stress of rapid cooling. Alarms are ringing and there is water getting in somewhere. Then the lights go out.

The initial impact causes 3D damage to anyone bouncing around loose, 2D to those secured by others or clinging to something and 1D to anyone strapped into a proper seat or crash frame. It is up to the referee to decide how much to make of being stuck in the seabed. The simple option is for the crew to be able to restore power in a few minutes and to allow the ship to pull herself free. More sadistic referees (our favourite kind) can create a whole mini-disaster movie out of this situation.

Really evil referees might like to note that the *Highndry* is nose down and leaking slightly. The ship's bridge and avionics are at the front. The effects of seawater on the ship's electronics are up to the referee (it probably will not be good), but it could be interesting trying to operate the controls in a vacc suit while underwater in a flooded bridge. There is an emergency helm station in engineering, which solves this problem in less dramatic fashion.

Sooner or later, it should be possible to get the *Highndry* free using her lifters and to return to the surface. Getting the water out might be an interesting challenge.

NO SUCCESSFUL CHECKS

If the crew were not successful in self-rescuing, all is not (quite) lost. As noted above the ship's automatics make a valiant if unsuccessful attempt to restore control.

The result is a massive belly-flop onto the ocean surface, causing 6D damage to everyone aboard. This is reduced to 4D of anyone who is properly braced or held, and 2D for anyone in a proper crash frame or seat. The *Highndry*

is badly damaged by the impact and plunges beneath the water.

The *Highndry* bobs back to the surface in a huge cloud of steam, then begins to take on water from buckled hull plates. The drive is smashed up and power is offline. There is nothing that can be done to stop the *Highndry* from sinking. It might be salvageable from the seabed at some point in the future but for now the priority is to abandon ship and take to the life rafts.

Fortunately, there are some. All shipboard survival kits carry one. A raft can squeeze six people in, and there are two of them. Any extra personnel can cling on and hope a rescue boat arrives before the local wildlife does. Animal attacks while in the water are at the referee's discretion. There are a couple of creatures that might try to attack a weakened human in the water, but this needs to be finely judged – it may be that the Travellers have suffered enough already. For those who need one more challenge, the problem of fighting off a sea creature with only what they can grab from the survival kit might be interesting.

The most likely assailant is an opportunistic Alderson. The Brakarr, a far more dangerous creature, is not commonly encountered in shallow water.



AFTERMATH: AS THE DUST SETTLES

The Travellers will eventually make their way to the shore somehow, or be rescued. When they do so, they will gradually find out the full extent of the situation. The referee must determine how many people were killed or injured, but it is entirely possible that (assuming everyone aboard the scout ship survived) there were no fatal casualties. Even if there were deaths, it is obvious to everyone that the Travellers are the heroes of the day. Whether by direct action or by bringing a warning in time they have saved dozens of lives among the small population of Walston.

Although the town of Salbarii may have to be abandoned in the long term, at present it looks like this may not be necessary. The volcano is 20km away and the centre of the eruption zone is pointed away from the town. Lava is likely to flow south and west, down to the sea rather than northwards to Salbarii. Ash and dust is blowing across the island but the prevailing wind is taking it mainly out into the ocean. The eruption itself is winding down now that the pressure has been released, but it seems likely that the mountain will remain active and if so, living so close is not really desirable.

However, in the short term there is an atmosphere of celebration among the people of Walston. They have survived a disaster in better shape than might have been expected and have a few new heroes to adulate. The Travellers will find themselves invited to a number of parties all over Settlement Island and a reception at the dictator's palace. In the meantime the resources of Walston's tiny starport will be brought to bear on making the scout ship flyable, assuming it survived at all. Things quickly wind down however, and the party atmosphere fades to be replaced with the more usual comfortable ordinariness of life on Walston. Note that with such a small population and limited resources, everything Walston has is going to be absorbed by dealing with the new problems faced by the town of Salbarii. There simply is not the cash available to shower the Travellers with gifts. The locals will make sure that the scout ship is well stocked with home-baked goods and the

Travellers will probably acquire any number of home-knitted sweaters, but there will be no big buckets of cash for them.

If the Travellers return to Walston in the future, they may become involved in further events spurred by the newly active volcano or an attempt to relocate people from the town of Salbarii. People from the Salbarii end of the island will always have great respect and friendship for the Travellers, though those from further away will probably wonder what all the fuss is about. They may even view the Travellers with suspicion, as if it were their fault the humdrum complacency of life on Walston was shattered by an exploding mountain.

DEPARTING WALSTON

Sooner or later the time comes to depart Walston. If the *Highndry* is flyable, it has to be delivered to Flammarion. If not, the Travellers will have to report its loss to the owners and the insurers. They may have to face some searching questions about the risks they took but given the state of the ship thanks to the previous crew they have a ready scapegoat to deflect any serious criticism of their actions – they can simply blame a breakdown caused by lack of maintenance.

Either way, it is time to go. There may even be a crowd of well-wishers to see the Travellers off when they depart. The *Highndry* climbs to orbit, leaving behind Settlement Island and the vast plume of ash trailing from the volcano towards the mainland. The world of Walston shrinks in the distance, and finally it is time to Jump.

The Travellers have vouchers for refuelling and life support resupply at Bowman, so that is their likely destination. In the meantime they will have a week in jump to reflect on their adventures, gorge on baked goods and try to decide whose sweater is the most garish... as heroes do.

EPILOGUE: FLAMMARION

The referee can make as much or as little as he likes of the trip to Flammarion. A jump-2 ship such as the *Highndry* can make the trip in two jumps via 567-908 or three if it goes by way of Bowman and Asteltine. The longer route is actually cheaper as the Scout Service has provided vouchers for refuelling and resupply, but at this point the Travellers can pretty much do as they please.

Upon finally returning to Flammarion Highport, the Travellers will be given accommodation in a nice hotel for a couple of weeks while the *Highndry* is overhauled.

As a referee, you could simply hand it over to the Travellers, but if you intend to play Project Steel next, the maintenance crew will discover there is a dangerous fault in the jump drive which will require parts. The bad news is that these parts will take some weeks to ship to Flammarion. The good news is that the Scout Service has an interesting opportunity for the Travellers...

ENHANCE YOUR TRAVELLER EXPERIENCE



We think a scifi game should have a scifi interface. Bring a higher tech experience to your tabletop with RPGSUITE's line of software for Mongoose Traveller. Create a fearsome crew with the Traveller Character Generator and design a custom spaceship with Starship Architect. Import your creations into the Digital Character Sheet, where gameplay is made smooth, straight forward and engaging.



Companion software for Mongoose Traveller makes tabletop gaming and technology a natural combination.

visit rpgsuite.com



RPGSUITE.COM

TECH FOR THE TABLE TOP

