

# SERENITY ROLE PLAYING GAME

A SPECIAL  
DELIVERY

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A TALE OF  
THRILLING HEROICS  
IN THREE ACTS

SERENITY  
ROLE PLAYING GAME

A SPECIAL DELIVERY

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## **HERE'S HOW IT IS**

Out in the Black, doing something for nothing is usually bad for business and can even be bad for breathing. This 'what's in it for me?' attitude ain't exactly what proper Core folk would call charitable, but with times being as hard as they are, them as what live on the Rim have to make do with the reality of living in an unforgiving 'Verse. If doing something for nothing is unusual, doing anything for somebody you don't know is unheard of. Yet that is the exact situation the Crew finds themselves in, the only question bigger than why they would do such a thing is will doing so cost them everything.

## **GM'S NOTES**

A Special Delivery is an adventure designed for Veteran level characters and consists of three acts of two scenes each. The first act involves a Dyin' Wish and How Tough Can This Be? Act two encounters a Ruttin' Complication and A Tale of Two Boats and concludes with act three's Bear Huntin' and Just Rewards. This adventure can be modified to provide a challenge for characters of greater or lesser experience levels by adjusting the number and type of NPCs and the difficulty levels of the tasks needed to complete the adventure.

## **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**

In the 'Verse, most of the time, news travels at the speed of the fastest ship. This fact harkens back to an era on Earth-That-Was so ancient that it recalls the time prior to the invention of the telegraph. This fact is also a source of constant frustration from

the highest levels of the Alliance government down to the most common of folk, as this fact reminds everyone that despite billions of credits invested in the effort, every attempt to develop a form of faster than light communications has failed. Since knowledge is power, fast, secure communications are just as crucial as they have ever been. Sending a Wave via the Cortex is fast, but access to nodes capable of the necessary power and encryption to ensure security is extremely limited, typically with only the Alliance or the biggest of corporations having the ability to rely on such methods.

Enter Ma Shang<sup>1</sup> Express. Not as fast as a Wave, but capable of safely delivering digital information anywhere in the 'Verse faster than any means other than a prohibitively expensive and exceedingly rare secure Wave, the high-speed couriers of Ma Shang Express are a common sight from the Core to the Rim and one thing a secure Wave can not do is deliver hard copy; in this niche market, Ma Shang has no rival. Just as the Express' purpose built, sleek, one-man couriers are renowned for their reliability and speed, so too are the Express Riders known for their steadfast dedication and utter dependability. Those that live on the Rim say that it is easier to be elected Prime Minister of the Alliance Parliament than it is to meet the demanding standards required to become a Ma Shang Express Rider. However, regardless of skill or grit, in the Black, sometimes good just isn't good

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<sup>1</sup> Literally "on horseback", but meaning Right away

enough. While on a Rim planet, the Crew witnesses a vicious attack on a fellow spacer and before they can reach him, he is mortally wounded. The unfortunate victim lives just long enough to make a desperate dying plea, a request that, on the surface, is a simple one, but one that carries even more baggage than the Crew could possibly expect...

## **ACT ONE**

### **SCENE ONE**

#### **A DYIN' WISH**

*"There are a damn few things ya can count on in this 'Verse. The Alliance don't care about folk, the sun rises in the East, and the Ma Shang Express. The company has been in business since before the U-War and they ain't never missed a drop. Ta get that sorta rep, ya best believe ya better gots good folk what work fer ya and Ma Shang only hires the best. Pays 'em good too, but ain't one spacer in a hundred gets that gig as they screen their folk as hard as a Member of Parliament heart. I know I tried and didn't even get close ta gettin' hired."*

– Pops McMurty itinerant spacer, long time Rim resident

The PCs have been on the planet Muir, one of the rare worlds on the Rim to actually have a booming economy, for the past several weeks. The miners of Muir are not only independent of the Corone Mining Consortium and the Miner's Guild; they managed to secure an exclusive contract with the massive Fed installation on Liann Jiun supplying raw materials to what is the

largest Alliance facility on the Rim. The Crew had things go smooth for a change and lucked into a fairly stable cargo run that, even though the pay has been weak tea, the work, while not clockwork regular, has been steady. The almost predictable work has allowed the Crew to develop a routine of sorts, working for a few days each week and then taking some down time on Muir in between cargo runs. The Crew has just returned from a cargo run and now has time to enjoy some relaxation for the next few days before they there is an opportunity to bid for another cargo job.

*GM Note:* Any PCs with Independent sympathies will be feeling decidedly conflicted by this work as despite the fact that having access to steady money is nice for a change, they are nonetheless working for the Feds and that is enough to unsettle a Browncoat's comfortableness.

Muir is a decent sort of place and since it is a boom planet at the moment, there are more than a few establishments that have sprung up with the express purpose of separating a Spacer from their hard earned coin. The space port town of Kipling is booming with business and there are several types of entertainment available from the legal such as restaurants or theaters, to the semi-legal like casinos and horse tracks, to the downright illegal, which includes drugs and whores. Times are good and if a person can think of it, it can probably be made available, but the price is of course subject to negotiation based on exactly what it is and exactly how legal it may or may not be.

This part of the adventure is primarily a role playing opportunity for the Crew. They can conduct whatever business they would like to look into regarding chasing rumors, other work, but most importantly, just enjoy a few days of fun. There are many forms of entertainment available on Muir and the GM is invited to use any, all, or none of the following as well as adding anything they need to build on their own campaign.

Most of the passive entertainments will not require any skill check unless the GM adds a complication. Kipling offers cricket, baseball, Corvue movies, several nice restaurants, and every spacer's favorite past time taverns. However, a couple other forms of entertainment will require skill tests and they include: horse races, casino gambling, boxing matches, and for a completely different change of pace, fishing.

Betting on horse races will require that the PCs learning about the entrants either by reading the locally produced racing form or by picking up what the word is via mixing with the crowds at the track. The information in the racing form requires an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Knowledge / Horses roll to determine which horse has the best record. If this roll fails, the PC will have a two-step penalty to their skill to place the bet, which is a HARD (11) test of Intelligence + Perception / Gambling with winnings or loses determined on the Track/Ring Table below.

Learning about the entrants by mingling with the crowd is a HARD (11) test of Alertness + Covert / Streetwise; surreptitiously observing the animals prior

to the race is an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + Animal Handling roll. If either of these rolls fail the PC will have a two-step penalty to their skill to place the bet, which is while placing a bet is a HARD (11) test of Intelligence + Perception / Gambling with winnings or loses determined on the Track/Ring Table below.

<b>Track/Ring Table</b>	
<b>Roll</b>	<b>Result</b>
Botch	Lose Entire Bet
Failure	Break Even
Success	Double Amount Bet
Extraordinary Success	Quadruple Amount Bet

Casino Gambling can be as complex as the GM wants to make the scene using Opposed Rolls, with NPCs, but the process can be simplified with a roll of Intelligence + Perception / Gambling checked on the Casino Table below.

<b>Casino Table</b>	
<b>Roll</b>	<b>Result</b>
Botch	Lose 2d6 X 10 Credits
Failure	Lose d4 X 10 Credits
Success	Win d4 X 10 Credits
Extraordinary Success	Win 2d6 X 10 Credits

Betting on boxing, when you boil it down isn't all that different from betting on horses and will use most of the rules as listed above except the roll to determine which boxer has the best record will use Intelligence + Knowledge / Boxing and surreptitiously observing the fighters prior

to the race is an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + Athletics roll. The results of the bet will use the Track/ Ring table above.

Finally, a nice relaxing time can be had renting fishing gear and finding a quiet spot out on one of the many lakes that dot the area. PCs are of course welcome to use their own gear if they happen to have it, but as this is unlikely, full tackle rigs can be rented for five Platinum per day, while a boat can be rented for ten Platinum per day. Actually catching fish is a HARD (11) Intelligence + Survival or a FORMIDABLE (15) Intelligence + Knowledge roll with a success catching d4 pounds of fish and an Extraordinary Success yield 2d6 pounds of fish.

Once the PCs have had their fun or the scene starts to drag, the GM, at a time of their choosing, will describe the following: While walking between venues or back to their ship, one or more of the Crew will spot a man under attack. He is in a desperate fight against three attackers, but before the PCs can take any action, they see the man get stabbed. What happens next depends largely on the actions by the Crew. If the PCs help, the attackers run as soon as they realize they have been spotted. If PCs do not help, man is able to draw weapon and fire a couple times scaring off attackers. The man spots the Crew and calls for help as he collapses. Again, if the PCs hesitate, he weakly pulls out and waves a coin purse in their direction. Assuming the PCs approach the man, they find he is bleeding profusely and is clearly mortally wounded. Through sheer force of will, he begins to speak. Read Aloud:

**"<Cough...cough> Damn *hun dan*<sup>2</sup>...<gasp> looks like this is how it ends." His eyes then focus on the nearest PC. "Okay, here's the deal...<cough>...Look, I know ya don't ken me from Adam, but I am beggin' ya for a favor." If the PCs fail to agree, he grimaces in something other than pain and adds. "Okay, okay, fair enough, but if'n ya helps I swear that Ma Shang will make it worth yer time." Hopefully, this last bit finally gets the PC's attention and the narrative will continue with the assumption that they do.**

**"*Ren ci de Fo zu*<sup>3</sup>, thank ya. I ain't got much time, but here's the deal. Somethin' most folk don't ken is that Ma Shang pays a reward for recovery of delayed packets. My coin purse is a down...<cough...cough...wheeze>down payment for getting the packet to Bernadette. Since I went and got my fool self kilt off the clock, the *jing chang mei yong de*<sup>4</sup> corporate bean counters won't pay the death benefit to my family unless the packet gets delivered. Ma Shang ships are rigged not to run without a...<cough>...code. Deal is I give ya the code that keeps ship runnin' for next four days and one of ya drives the ship to Bernadette so my f-f-family gets <cough...cough...wheeze> taken care of. We...we... got a d-deal?"**

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<sup>2</sup> Jerks

<sup>3</sup> Merciful Buddha

<sup>4</sup> Consistently useless

The man is beginning to fade and his eyes bore into that of the PC, silently beseeching them to agree. When the PC agrees, he manages a ghost of a smile before adding.

**“Th-th-thanks...one...last thing, course is locked...just...needs code...if’n course...changed...ship... shuts down. Shoulda stayed with Post, never forget t-twenty-f-f-fifty. C-c-code is...epsilon-omega-nine-three-Rubicon-four-seven...” He manages to choke out as the light leaves his eyes.**

Have the PCs make an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + Perception / Hearing test to detect the sounds of others approaching and it does not take a roll, to realize being found standing over a body would cause unwanted attention and that immediate retreat would be the best thing to do at the moment. If no one has claimed it by now, any PC with the Greedy or Filcher Traits will find it very difficult to ignore the dead man’s coin purse. Successfully grabbing it before being spotted by whoever is approaching is an AVERAGE (7) roll of Agility + Covert and if successful, the purse will be found to contain €78 and 35 Platinum. If this roll is failed, some revelers catch a glimpse of the PC and raise the hue and cry. The GM should shake their head and roll a few hidden dice to make the players nervous however, the PC will manage to escape identification and the GM should award a couple Plot Points for role playing their Trait. Since the dying man stated that the code he gave them was only good for four more

days, the Crew should head immediately for the port to find the courier’s ship. The Kipling space port is doing quite well during the current boom and the docking bays are busy. However, regardless of how busy the port may be, the distinctive *Zidan*<sup>5</sup>-Class high speed couriers used by the Ma Shang Express always stand out in a crowd. The Crew easily finds the sleek vessel, but when the Crew tries to board the ship, they quickly discover that the code the dying courier gave them doesn’t open the airlock. This revelation rattles the PCs for several moments as they realize, they are somehow going to have to override the ship’s security if they are going to keep their word and earn the reward.

Fortunately the bay where the ship is docked is secluded, giving the Crew enough privacy to work. As it is unlikely that PCs are currently carrying shipjacking tools, the airlock’s security is too good to override without the proper equipment. Defeating the security on the ship will require a set of electronic lockpicks or Ship-picks if the Crew has any, while actually getting the airlock open is a FORMIDABLE (15) test of Intelligence + Covert / Open Locks. If the Crew does not own either of these items, they will have to succeed in a HARD (11) roll of Intelligence + Influence or Covert / Streetwise to locate a set of electronic lockpicks which will cost €35.4. Locating a set of Ship-picks is a FORMIDABLE (15) test of the same skills at a cost of €177. These highly specialized tools provide a two-step bonus to Intelligence + Covert / Open Locks skill, but

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<sup>5</sup> Bullet

only when used on ships however, they are at a two-step penalty to skill to use on any other type of lock.

Before the Crew heads out to find the necessary equipment, the GM should have the PCs make an AVERAGE (7) Recall (Intelligence + Willpower) roll to remember that the courier was wearing his Ma Shang Express uniform when he was killed and that it will probably be less than an hour before someone in a position of authority comes to check on the ship. To represent this time constraint, finding someone with the equipment they need is a HARD (55) Complex Action of Intelligence + Covert / Streetwise with each roll taking five minutes and using the standard rules for any Botches. If the PCs fail in these tasks, the authorities arrive and arrest the PCs for murder and shipjacking. As this will end the adventure in the worst possible way, the use of Plot Points is greatly encouraged. Once the Crew has overridden the security on the courier's ship, they find that the interior is very cramped. There is a small cockpit, more than a little reminiscent of a Hummingbird-Class fighter with a Spartan cabin and miniscule cargo bay. None of the ship's controls function until the code is entered into the computer. The PCs will have to make a HARD (11) Recall (Intelligence + Willpower) roll to remember the code they were given. As soon as the correct code is entered, the ship quickly powers up and is the computer announces all systems functional. In addition, the computer intones: "Current course locked in for Bernadette. Current access code expires in three days and twenty-two hours."

A sweep of the ship's instrumentation show the fuel tanks are only two-thirds full, but the courier has extra large tanks to support her powerful engines. It is also clear that the Crew's own ship, even on Hard Burn can not hope to keep up with this ship. However, using Hard Burn, the PCs can arrive only two days after the courier arrives. In fact, if any PC can make an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Piloting roll, they will realize that if whoever flies the Zidan does not use her full speed, they will not reach Bernadette in the time remaining before their access code expires.

The GM should gently remind the Crew that the clock on how long they have before someone investigates on the death of the Express Rider is still ticking. The Crew should be given a few minutes to decide who is going to pilot the courier and if they are going to try and fit two into the tiny vessel as while clearly built for only one person, a second person could squeeze into the cabin, but it will be obviously extremely uncomfortable for anyone that tries to do this.

In addition the Crew is going to have to decide who is going to pilot their own ship, which will have to follow along behind the Zidan to pick up the others on Bernadette and get their reward. If the PCs check the Cortex, they find the dying man, David Weiss according to the ship's log, was telling the truth, Ma Shang Express has a standing reward of €2,000 for the delivery of delayed packets. As soon as the two ships are ready to lift, go to the next scene.

## **SCENE TWO**

### **HOW TOUGH CAN THIS BE?**



*"There's no shortage of folk in this here Verse of ours, some are bad, fewer are good, and most are somewhere 'tween the two. Keepin' food on the table means most of them folks will at some point or another will make a choice they ken right down in their bones just ain't on the up and up, but what's a body to do when times is as hard as they are? One thing, well, one of many things actually, but one of the things I ain't sussed out yet is why come, in nearly twenty years of runnin' the Black no less, there ain't never been an Express Rider what went bad?"*

– Gus Jacobsen, itinerant spacer as interviewed by the author Jiang Hu Long for his highly successful fictional series 'Verse Stories'

Once the courier is ready to depart, the PCs the GM should call for the Crew to roll an AVERAGE (7) test of Intelligence + Covert. If any of the PCs succeed, they will realize that having their own ship lift either before or after the courier would be more discrete than lifting at the same time as the courier. If by some chance all the PCs fail the above roll and none of the players think to disassociate their own vessel from the Ma Shang ship, when their ship attempts to depart, they will face a complication as described below.

If the courier lifts alone, the pilot of that ship will receive the following message from Kipling traffic controllers. Read Aloud: "Ma Shang 473 you are lifting without clearance, you are to return to Kipling Port immediately."

Should the players not realize that returning to the port is a bad idea, have the pilot attempt an AVERAGE (7) test of

Intelligence + Covert to figure out that it is probable that the Express Rider's body has been located.

Since the PCs are unlikely to stop traffic control sends another message: "Ma Shang 473, you are wanted for questioning by local authorities. You are ordered to return to Kipling Port. If you do not comply, the system patrol will be forced to fire on you."

The reality is, Muir only has a couple of small patrol boats and with even an EASY (3) Ship's Alertness + Piloting / Scanners or Technical Engineering / Scanners test, it is obvious that the patrol boats are neither in a position nor fast enough to stop them.

When it is clear the PCs will not stop, they receive one final signal from traffic control:

"That ship has now been tagged as stolen and anyone aboard is now wanted for the murder of Express Rider David Weiss.

Deadly force is now authorized."

At this point, the courier's sophisticated threat analysis array detects that one of the patrol boats has opened fire! No roll is necessary to detect the two missiles closing in from behind them. The GM should allow the PC(s) aboard the courier to sweat for a few seconds before the threat analysis array recommends that if the courier goes to full speed, the missile has been fired from far enough away that it can not catch them.

How much suspicion falls on the PC's own ship if they departed separately from the courier is based on their actions. If the Crew chooses to take off before the courier, then they avoid suspicion completely. If they depart after the courier, then as long as they do not interfere in its escape, they

will also be able to escape without being flagged as accomplices.

If the Crew lifts at the same time as the courier, the traffic controllers send the following message. Read Aloud: "Ma Shang 473 and accompanying vessel, you are lifting without clearance and are ordered to return to Kipling Port immediately."

Again, if the PCs do not realize that returning to the port is a bad idea, the GM should call for an AVERAGE (7) test of Intelligence + Covert to figure out that it is probable that the Express Rider's body has been located.

As it is unlikely that the PCs stop, traffic control sends another message: "Ma Shang 473 and <PC's Ship's Name>, you are wanted for questioning by local authorities. You are ordered to return to Kipling Port. If you do not comply, the system patrol will be forced to fire on you."

An EASY (3) Ship's Alertness + Piloting / Scanners or Technical Engineering / Scanners test will quickly show that while the patrol boats are neither in a position nor fast enough to stop the courier, they are in a position to intercept the PC's ship. When it becomes clear that the fugitive vessels will not stop, they receive one final signal from traffic control: "Ma Shang 473 has now been tagged as stolen and anyone aboard as well as anyone aboard <PC's Ship's Name> is now wanted for the murder of Express Rider David Weiss. Deadly force is now authorized."

Onboard the courier, the ship's sophisticated threat analysis array detects that both of the patrol boats have opened fire! No roll is necessary to detect that two missiles each are closing in from behind on

both ships. The GM should allow the PC(s) aboard the courier to sweat for a few seconds before the threat analysis array recommends that if the courier goes to full speed, the missile has been fired from far enough away that it can not catch them. The situation onboard the PC's ship is decidedly more complex. Escaping the inbound missiles is based on what sort of gear is aboard the Crew's ship. If they happen to have jammer missiles it is a HARD (11) feat of Ship's Agility + Pilot / Appropriate Specialty with the jammers granting a two-step Skill bonus to avoid the missile attack. If they have decoys missiles, then it is an Opposed Roll pitting the Ship's Alertness + Heavy Weapons or Technical Engineering skill versus the Ship's Alertness + Heavy Weapons / Missiles of the patrol boat's gunner to avoid being hit. The missiles are 100 pound kinetic warheads doing d6W damage.

If the Crew does not happen to have such handy counter-measures, they will have to resort to some tricky flying to escape. As the PC's ship is still at low altitude, they can attempt to use ground clutter to cause the missiles to miss. The Pilot will have to succeed in an Opposed Roll of the PC's Ship's Agility + Piloting skill versus each Missile's d8 Alertness + d6 Heavy Weapons skill to force the missiles to hit ground obstacles. Fortunately for the Crew, they happen to be far enough away from Kipling that the missiles will not cause collateral damage to people or property when they strike the ground. The 100 pound missiles are armed with kinetic warheads doing d6W damage.

Escaping the patrol boat before it can fire again will depend on the speed of the PC's ship. If their ship has a cruise speed of 8 or better, all they have to do is accelerate to maximum speed to out run the slower patrol boats.

If their ship's cruise speed is less than 8, the Crew will have to resort to desperate measures and in this case, desperate measures means going to Hard Burn while still in atmo. Setting up this insane maneuver requires that the Mechanic succeed in a HARD (11) test of Intelligence + Mechanical Engineering to set up the Pulse Drive so quickly. Failing the roll delays the process long enough for the patrol boat to fire again forcing the Crew to avoid the missiles as above. While a Botch stalls the engine and forces the Pilot to have to make a HARD (11) Ship's Agility + Piloting roll to land safely. If the landing roll is failed, treat the difficulty as an attack doing Basic damage.

Once the Pulse Drive is ready, the second part of the escape requires the Pilot to make a HEROIC (19) test of Ship's Agility + Piloting to control the ship through the climb out. If this roll fails the ship cartwheels out of control, treat the difficulty as an attack causing Wound damage to the ship. In addition, the Pilot will have to make a FORMIDABLE (15) Ship's Agility + Piloting roll to land safely. If the landing roll is also failed, treat the difficulty as a second attack doing Basic damage.

As failing in these rolls will result in the patrol boat being able to catch their ship and force them to land by picking them apart with missile fire or by inducing them surrender to avoid that fate, the use of Plot

Points is strongly advised to prevent a premature end of the adventure.

Regardless of method, once the two ships are clear of Muir, the local patrol does not pursue.

Since it will be impossible for the Crew's ship to keep up with the courier, the two ships will have to proceed to Bernadette independently at each ship's best speed, which for a standard Firefly at Hard Burn will take six days compared to the courier's four. Just before going to the next scene, the GM should have any PC with Weiss' coin purse spot a small slip of paper at the bottom that they hadn't noticed earlier. If by chance none of the PCs took the coin purse, then while checking out the courier, a PC finds a note on a clip board next to the astrogation computer. In either case the note reads as followed:

**"You have something we don't want delivered. We need to talk."**

The GM should now award 3-5 Plot Points for escaping Muir and should go to Act Two.

## **ACT TWO**

### **SCENE ONE**

#### **A RUTTIN' COMPLICATION**

*"One of the many things most folk what lives on them purdy Core Worlds don't ken is how many hands are involved in, and what all those hands are stained with when it comes to them fancified goods they like so well. It don't matter if it's a lady's fine watch, a dandy's gaudy duds, or the meat what is on their tables, those goods passed through many hands to get there. The*

*'Verse is pretty much made up entirely of middlemen and all of them guard their little piddlin' grounds fiercer than a wolverine mamma guardin' her kits. Ya'll just make sure'n ya'll remembers that that little detail if'n ya think about tryin' to 'cut' out' the middle man."*

– Frankie 'Twice Pipe' Whitaker, Information Broker, Persephone

En route to Bernadette, the Crew is now aware that the death of the Ma Shang Express Rider David Weiss was apparently not just a simple random act of violence. Something in the cargo on the courier now in their possession has someone desperate enough to try and prevent Weiss from delivering. However, while cruising through the Black, there doesn't seem to be much they can do about this revelation and due to the differences in speed between the Crew's ship and the courier, they will only be able to communicate in real time for roughly twenty-four hours before comm lag will become significant enough to prevent the two ships from communicating. Whatever plans the PCs want to work out before they will have to do so in this time before they lose the ability to speak directly to each other. Thinking back over the attack on Weiss in their mind's eye in a sort of flashback scene as represented by an AVERAGE (7) Recall roll (Intelligence + Willpower), there are only a few small events to remember: The base roll remembers that there were three attackers and for each point over seven, that PC remembers one more detail.

The attackers operated as a team, using hand to hand fighting skills and not brawling.

Going by the styles of kicks used, the attackers were using Aikido.

The attack was clearly the work of professionals.

The knife used to kill Weiss was a fairly rare Earth-That-Was weapon known as a Balisong or a butterfly knife.

The first twelve hours out of Muir pass without problem allowing the PCs the maximum amount of time to confer about any plans they want to work out prior to reaching the point where the two ships get too far apart to talk in real time. The next part of the adventure is going to be a challenge for the GM to keep the action flowing between the two ships.

However, just over two days into the trip for the Zidan's automated scanner package sounds an alarm. When the pilot checks the display, unless they have the Steady Calm Trait, they will be gripped by dread by the sight of the Alliance Trebuchet-Class Patrol Cruiser IAV Agamemnon closing fast.

Unless the PC can succeed with an AVERAGE (7) Willpower + Discipline roll they will suffer a one-step penalty to their Piloting skill. Before the pilot can react, an urgent wave squawks through the ship's speakers.

**"Ma Shang 473, you have been flagged as stolen. You are ordered to shut your engines down and release your controls for docking."**

As the PC(s) mull over how to respond, the Agamemnon begins launching ASREVs as a

show of force and to widen their interception area. Knowing that being found in possession of stolen property as well as being suspects in a murder, surrendering to the Feds is an extremely, and possibly, even fatal idea. Once again the Zidan's threat analysis array provides assistance. The display shows the Alliance ships as they deploy and the text on the screen prompts the pilot "Plot evasion course Y/N?" If the pilot chooses yes, the yellow icons representing a neutral object flash to red and the courier begins to vibrate with barely restrained power. The computer intones: "Hostile vessels detected. Counter-measures suite activated. Escape vector plotted. Initiate on your mark." The Pilot is then given a set of course changes via a previously unnoticed Heads-Up Display (HUD) As the Pilot accelerates on the first of the vectors indicated by the HUD, they can see that the Feds have deployed four ASREVs and despite the courier's obvious speed and maneuverability, evading the Alliance cordon is not going to be a simple task. Escaping the Alliance net is a FORMIDABLE (95) Complex Action of Ship's Agility + Ship's Piloting Skill + Piloting with each roll taking one combat turn. The Pilot must escape within fifteen turns or the Agamemnon will have launched enough additional ASREVs to make escape impossible. If a second Botch is rolled during the escape attempt, one of the Feds has gotten a solid enough of a lock to fire a missile at the courier. This is an Opposed Roll of Ship's Alertness + Piloting or Technical Engineering versus the Ship's Alertness + Heavy Weapons / Missiles of

the ASREV's gunner with the PC getting a two-step bonus to skill due the ship's threat analysis array automatically firing one jammer and one decoy missile as counter-measures. The missile is a 200 pound kinetic warhead doing d8W damage should the courier be hit.

On the assumption that the PC(s) as successful in their slipping though the Alliance cordon, the Zidan immediately recommends going to Hard Burn and once the courier leaps to full speed, none of the Alliance ships can even hope to catch the fleeing PC(s).

Once safely away, any PC(s) on the courier should roll an EASY (3) Intelligence + Knowledge or Covert test to think to send a wave to warn their own ship forty-eight hours behind the courier of the Agamemnon, which if sent will give their Crew plenty of time to vector around the Feds, but the new course will cause the PC's ship to fall a further twelve hours behind the courier.

If the warning is not sent, the results for the PC's ship will largely depend on whether they were tagged as an accomplice to the theft of the courier or not. If the PCs escaped Muir without being associated with any crime, their ship is stopped by the Agamemnon and inspected, but unless the Crew does something to cause the Alliance officers to suspect them, they are free to go with only a hour delay. However, if the PC's ship was tagged by the authorities at Muir, escaping the alerted and angry Feds in a ship without the sophisticated gear of a Zidan-Class courier is going to be a much more difficult task.

The Crew's evasion options will be determined by how close they are to the Agamemnon when they detect the Alliance ship. Whoever is on the bridge must roll against Ship's Alertness + Piloting or Technical Engineering and compare the results on the table below for how close PC's get to the Feds before they detect them:

Roll	Result
Botch	Medium Range
Failure	Long Range
Success	Out of range, but detected by Feds
Extraordinary Success	Out of range and not detected by Feds

If the Agamemnon is detected while out of weapons range, even if they were in turn detected, the PCs can simply reverse course, go to Hard Burn, and re-plot a new course around the Feds. Plotting the new course requires a HARD (11) Intelligence + Piloting / Astrogation roll, but will cause the PC's ship to fall an additional twelve hours behind the courier.

Not detecting the Patrol Cruiser until their ship is in weapons range will make things a bit more interesting than the Crew probably likes as the PC's to have to evade weapons fire before they can escape. If the PCs blunder into range of the Feds, they will receive a single warning: "<Ship's name>, you are ordered to shut your engines down and release your controls for docking." If the Crew does not comply immediately, no roll is necessary for the ship's scanners to detect targeting arrays locking on to them.

Escaping the Alliance attack will use many of the same rules as the escape from Muir. Again, if they have jammer missiles it is a HARD (11) feat of Ship's Agility + Pilot / Appropriate Specialty with the jammers granting a two-step Skill bonus to avoid the missile attack. If the Crew has decoy missiles, then it is an Opposed Roll pitting the Ship's Alertness + Heavy Weapons or Technical Engineering skill versus the Ship's Alertness + Heavy Weapons / Missiles of the patrol boat's gunner to avoid being hit. However, the first salvo is 200 lb kinetic warheads doing d8W damage while the second salvo is 100 lb kinetic warheads doing d6W.

If the Crew does not have any counter-measures, their only hope is if their Pilot can out fly the missiles long enough to escape. The Pilot will have to succeed in an Opposed Roll of the PC's Ship's Agility + Piloting skill versus each Missile's d8 Alertness + d6 Heavy Weapons skill to avoid the missile until it runs out of fuel and self-destructs. The 200 pound missiles are armed with kinetic warheads doing d8W damage if they should hit, the 100 pound missiles do d6W.

The Agamemnon is slower than the PC's ship and can only watch impotently while the PC's flee as the Feds can not launch ASREVs quickly enough to prevent their escape. The Patrol Cruiser fires two missiles for each range band that the PCs enter, thus if the PCs detect the Fed ship at Long Range, the Agamemnon will fire two missiles at that range, and if the PCs Botched their scanners roll and blundered into Medium Range, the Feds will fire two

missiles at that range and then two more as the PCs move to Long Range.

Once out of weapons range, the Crew will need to re-plot a new course around the Feds, which is a HARD (11) Intelligence + Piloting / Astrogation test and will cause the PC's ship to fall an additional twelve hours behind the courier.

Once both ships are past the Agamemnon, go to the next scene.

## **SCENE TWO**

### **A TALE OF TWO BOATS**

*"Is it possible that any entity could claim to own the title of most dependable company in the 'Verse? If so, then that title would, without reservation, go to Ma Shang Express, a company that has become synonymous with dependability. After nearly twenty years in business it is Ma Shang's proud reputation to never have lost a packet entrusted to their care. An amazing feat under any circumstance, but even more stunning is that Ma Shang managed to keep this reputation going even during the titanic upheaval that was the Unification War. Yes, there are many terms used to sing Ma Shang's praises, but the one that means the most to the employees is dependability."*

– Ma Shang Cortex advertisement

Despite remaining on pins and needles due to the encounter with the Alliance Patrol Cruiser the rest of the trip passes uneventfully for the PC(s) on the courier. Knowing that the ship is tagged as stolen makes it obvious that an open approach into the restricted landing zone that surrounds Bernadette is out of the

question. However, an AVERAGE (7) Recall (Intelligence + Willpower) test or an EASY (3) Cortex search using Intelligence + Technical Engineering will know that Bernadette is home to hundreds of religious sites and that thousands of pilgrims visit the beautiful Core World daily.

Devising an alternative entry to the planet will require a HARD (11) Intelligence + Covert or Technical Engineering roll. On a success, the PC(s) will think to use one of the many pilgrimage ships as cover. This will require the use of a jammer missile to mask the courier's approach to one of the large converted freighters used by the pilgrims. Thanks to the courier's advanced scanner and stealth systems, it only takes a HARD (11) Ship's Alertness + Ship's Perception Skill + Piloting or Technical Engineering to program and fire the missile in such a way that it creates a blind spot in the freighter's scanners long enough for the courier to slip into the larger ship's wake. The Pilot will then have to succeed in a HARD (11) Ship's Agility + Ship's Covert Skill + Piloting in order to ride down behind the freighter undetected.

If the Pilot fails either of these rolls, the courier is noticed by the Bernadette traffic controllers and the very responsive system patrol is sent to investigate. The Pilot has one last chance to avoid detection by firing a decoy missile, but due to the patrol being on the alert for tricks, this task is a FORMIDABLE (15) Ship's Alertness + Ship's Covert Skill + Piloting or Technical Engineering test. If successful, the patrol ASREV is lured away long enough for the courier to land. If the roll fails, the Zidan's scanners warn the Pilot that the patrol

ASREV has locked onto them just as they receive a warning to surrender immediately. A quick check of the courier's scanner display shows that not only are additional ASREVs approaching, ground batteries on the planet are also tracking them making escape for even the nimble courier impossible.

If the PC(s) is foolish enough to try to escape, the GM should run the fight as normal, but regardless of actions by the characters, they will be quickly hemmed in while sustaining crippling damage and will have to land under Alliance over watch. After landing, but before the PC(s) can flee, they will be surrounded and immediately arrested.

Should the PC(s) successfully slip past the system patrols, the Cortex analog to GPS steers the courier to the Ma Shang private landing field. On landing, rather than the friendly greeting the PC(s) were hoping for, they are met by security forces and immediately arrested.

How well the PC(s) are treated depends on whether they were arrested by Federal Marshals or by Ma Shang personnel and if the courier had to be shot down. If the PC(s) surrendered peacefully, they will be thrown in a holding cell while the Feds check out their story. The Marshals are all for charging them with the murder of David Weiss and the theft of the courier.

However, the fact that they had the ship's access code supports their story that they are not criminals as Weiss' body did not show signs of torture. It is a fact unknown outside of the company that Ma Shang Express Riders are trained to resist interrogation and would not reveal the code

against their will any other way. It takes the better part of three days before the PC(s) are released, due largely to the work of the Ma Shang Express advocate Richard Harlow interceding on the PC(s) behalf and supporting their innocence.

However, if the PC(s) had to be shot down, the situation goes much worse for them as the Ma Shang Express advocate does not come to the PC(s) defense beyond verifying that an Express Rider would not reveal the code against their will except by torture. The PC(s) are still being held when the rest of the Crew arrives on their ship. If the other PCs try to bail their friend(s) out, they find that charges against them for their part in the courier's theft (if any) have been dropped, but the fines against the PC(s) being held amount to €500 for reckless endangerment and resisting arrest.

*GM Note:* It is important to the plot and timing of the rest of the adventure that regardless of PC actions, any character aboard the courier will be held in jail until the PC's own ship arrives on Bernadette to bail them out.

While the courier is arriving on Bernadette, the PCs on their own ship are facing a challenge of their own. Whether from having to use continuous Hard Burn, a near miss by a missile, or they just weren't topped off enough for the trip to begin with, the PC's ship has to stop to refuel.

The *Xinglong*<sup>6</sup> Skyplex was placed in the middle of the corridor between the Arden

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<sup>6</sup> Star Dragon



Quadrant and the Border Planets specifically to support smaller ships unable to make the long haul without refueling. There are many such skyplexes offering repairs and various forms of entertainment in addition to fueling services. When the Pilot notices that their fuel situation has become a problem, the skyplex is only four hours away and directly ahead on their current flight path.

If the GM had to force the need to refuel by causing damage to the ship, the damage is trivial and can be repaired with an EASY (3) Intelligence + Mechanical Engineering with available tools and no additional parts. If the ship was undamaged, the refueling is unusually delayed by a skyplex pump failure after the hoses are connected to their ship. In either of the above situations the delay only takes a half hour.

While the ship is refueling, have any PC outside the ship roll against Alertness + Perception against a HARD (11) difficulty. Anyone that succeeds with the roll notices that there are several suspicious looking toughs hanging around the docking area that are trying to remain unnoticed, which gives the Crew normal Initiative when the toughs attack. If none of the PCs make the roll, to spot the immanent trouble, then the PCs are surprised, giving the toughs a 'free' turn when they make their move.

Unknown to the PCs, the persons responsible for sending the note to Weiss, despite whether the authorities on Muir figured out who the PCs were or not, were able to do so and are going to try a desperate back up plan to try and kidnap one of the Crew while they are on the

skyplex to prevent the delivery of the courier's cargo

There are a total of six thugs with stats equal to Bully Boys (Pg 185 of the Serenity Rulebook) outside the ship armed with clubs, but do have holstered pistols. The tough's initial move is an attempt to grab an isolated member of the Crew. Have each person outside the ship roll d6, any character with Things Go Smooth or Nose for Trouble roll d8, while anyone with Things Don't Go Smooth rolls a d4 with the PC that rolls the lowest being the target. That PC gets an Opposed Roll of Alertness + Perception / Hearing versus the thugs Agility + Covert .to detect the attack before it occurs, otherwise the thugs get a free turn. If the thugs gain surprise, they will attempt an All-Out Attack with a Called Shot to the head in an effort to knock the PC out. If the PC is so subdued, the thugs will throw the character over their shoulder and make a run for it. In addition, if the grab is successful, the remaining four thugs open fire with their pistols to provide covering fire for the retreating pair carrying the unconscious character.

The thugs fight until half of their number is dead or disabled, whereupon they scatter dumping a captured PC. The thugs will also dump a captured PC and flee if one of the two thugs carrying the character is killed or disabled. Finally, if the thugs haven't escaped by the time skyplex security arrives on turn fifteen, they will also dump a captured PC and flee.

If the fight lasts long enough for security to arrive to break it up and even if security arrives after the fight is over, the PCs are detained while the guards sort the situation

out. The detention quickly proves to be short lived as several witnesses step forward to back up the character's story of self-defense.

In addition, if the PCs had time before the guards arrived to search any disabled thugs or by hearing the guards speaking among themselves after they do the search, the Crew learns that one of them carried a Balisong knife. Since this highly unusual weapon was what was used to kill Weiss, it is obvious that the two attacks are not only related, they were done by the same people. However, the thug(s) are whisked away before the PCs can follow up on this important clue.

As soon as the Crew is cleared of any wrong doing and the fueling is completed, the PCs are allowed to depart.

The rest of the trip passes without incident, but on arriving the Crew has to figure out a way to get through the system patrol of Bernadette's restricted landing zone. An AVERAGE (7) Recall (Intelligence + Willpower) test or an EASY (3) Cortex search using Intelligence + Technical Engineering will know about Bernadette's religious sites. When their ship is challenged by the traffic controllers, a HARD (11) Intelligence + Influence / Persuasion or an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Performance / Acting will bluff the controllers with a story about making a pilgrimage. If the roll fails, the PCs will be ordered to hold position while a system patrol boat docks and inspects their ship. Unless the PCs deliberately provoke the Alliance officers that do the inspection, they will be allowed to proceed with a €50 fine

for approaching the system without proper documentation.

Even if the PCs were known to be involved with the theft of the courier, they are cleared by the Feds and allowed to land, this alone should have the players wondering what is going on, but when the Crew goes to leave their ship, they are met by representatives of Ma Shang. How this meeting goes is based entirely on the earlier actions of the Crew on the courier. If the ship landed undamaged, the Ma Shang representative Mr. Harlow is very polite and informs the PCs that the unfortunate misunderstanding regarding the late David Weiss and his ship has been resolved. Mr. Harlow escorts the Crew to where the PC(s) are being held and thanks everyone for their service.

If the courier was badly damaged, the Mr. Harlow is much more formal. He explains that all the charges regarding the death of David Weiss and the theft of the courier have been dropped. He escorts the Crew to where the PC(s) are being held, but leave it to the Crew to bail out their friends.

Regardless of the courier's status when the PCs are all reunited, when they ask about the reward from Ma Shang, they are told that a packet is missing. Since the Crew failed to deliver the entire contents, and thus violated Ma Shang's record of never having lost a packet, there will be no reward.

The GM should now aware 4-6 Plot Points and go to Act Three.

## **ACT THREE**

### **SCENE ONE**

## **BEAR HUNTIN'**

*"Ya'll ever hear of Occam's Razor? I know I may have had a humble beginnin' and all, but I have read a book or two in my day and the long and the short of the old Earth-That-Was tale is some high thinkin' monk came up with the idea that to figure anything out, start with the easiest answer before goin' and puttin' in too much time makin' things complicated. Thinkin' is a good thing most of the time and far too few folk use it enough, but there are times when too much thinkin' makes an easy problem more difficult than it has to be. In other words, based on the way I heard from this old country sawbones was "When ya hears hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras". So next time ya'll got a problem, before ya'll go and get wrapped around the axle and all, ya'll try and remember old Occam's Razor."*

– Pops McMurty itinerant spacer, long time Rim resident

The first challenge the Crew faces in learning what happened is figuring out how a packet could have come up missing in the first place. There was precious little time from the attack on Weiss to their escape from Muir, leaving very few opportunities for the packet to be stolen.

It was unlikely, but not impossible, that Weiss had the packet on him when he was attacked and unless a PC specifically mentioned searching his body at the time of the attack, the Crew has no way to verify that theory. Besides, if that were true, that wouldn't explain the attack at the Xinglong Skyplex. Even if the PCs did search Weiss' body, they didn't find anything beyond his

coin purse, an IDent card, and a small pistol he never had the opportunity to draw.

Since the Crew knows that the ship was sealed when they got to it at the Kipling space port, the missing packet could not have been taken before they left. As the ship was in their control during the entire trip to Bernadette, the only time when the cargo was out of their direct control was after they landed (or crashed) at their destination.

The most logical step to investigate the missing packet is to discover who had access to the ship after it landed and finding out what is missing wouldn't hurt. If any PC looked through the cargo of the courier during the trip, they found that the ship's tracking system registered that it carried 350 pounds of assorted packets. Unless the PC specifically mentioned scanning the contents, they would have little information about the cargo beyond who sent a packet, to whom, and the weight of the packet.

Even if the courier was delivered undamaged and the Crew is thus on good terms with the people at Ma Shang, they will be flatly told that seeing the ship is not an option. Either an AVERAGE (7) Perception + Covert roll will detect or an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Knowledge roll will know that the security at the Ma Shang facility is absolutely ironclad and sneaking into the facility would be an IMPOSSIBLE (31) task, if not outright suicidal. If the courier was shot down, Federal Marshals sealed off the crash site immediately and the ship was guarded by

the Alliance officers until a Ma Shang salvage crew arrived to take possession of the wrecked ship.

At this point the Crew, and the players if the GM has played their part right, should be feeling extremely frustrated by a lack of leads to pursue. The only other clue the PCs have remaining is that one of the thugs used a Balisong knife.

Finding out more information on this unusual weapon will take delving into Bernadette's darker side. This will require a PC with the Friends in Low Places trait and two Plot Points to find out who makes the flashy and difficult to use weapons. If none of the PCs have the above trait, then it takes a HARD (11) Intelligence + Covert / Streetwise or a FORMIDABLE (15) Willpower + Influence / Persuasion roll to find a street urchin that knows someone that makes Balisongs.

In either case, the PCs find themselves in one of New Paris' back alleys far from the glittering towers that you would think to find on a Core World. Any PC that succeeds with an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Covert / Streetwise or a HARD (11) Intelligence + Knowledge has heard of the darkest side of Bernadette, namely that slavers are known to prowl back alleys, such as the one they are in, and snatch up unwary tourists.

The GM should on occasion have the PCs attempt Opposed Rolls of Alertness + Perception versus some unknown adversary as they work their way just outside of the New Paris Blackout Zone. These rolls are just to increase player paranoia and do not require any encounter with slavers unless the GM chooses to add that complication to the plot. The slavers are professionals and

will not attempt to grab anyone that is armed, wary, or move about in groups of three or more. For the rest of this narrative, only lone characters that Botch an Opposed Roll will have any chance of being set upon by Slavers. If this occurs, the PC will be confronted by three "Bully Boys" that will brawl to subdue, unless the PC uses a firearm, which will cause the would-be kidnapers to scatter.

When the Crew reaches the location of the Balisong maker, they find a shabby and run down shop with an equally shabby and run down sign in the window that simply says: Cutlery. As the PCs enter the store a bell attached to the door jingles and reveals a cluttered and dingy shop filled with knives of all sorts. The wares vary from standard dinnerware, mostly cheap, but functional all the way up to some surprisingly finely crafted Samurai swords. A wheezing cough from a back room announces the arrival of a small wizened man that is presumably the shop owner.

**"Ni hao<sup>7</sup> and welcome to my humble establishment. I am Cai Jingde. How may I serve you this fine day?" The man asks; his eyes clear and sharp despite his apparent impressive age.**

The PCs are welcome to try what ever tack they think will work to obtain information from the shopkeeper, but the following options will all provide answers to one degree or another. A HARD (11) test of Willpower + Influence / Persuasion will surprise the man and while he says he is

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<sup>7</sup> Hello

unfamiliar with the weapon, his expression clearly shows that he is not only lying, but terrified. An immediate follow up HARD (11) roll against Willpower + Influence / Conversation will get the man to admit the knife is his work. If the PC should fail either of these rolls the old man will adamantly deny knowing about the knife. Threatening the shopkeeper with a HARD (11) Willpower + Discipline / Intimidation roll will also get the man to admit he made the weapon, as will an appeal to the man's vanity with a HARD (11) test of Intelligence + Perception / Empathy. In each of the above examples, if the PCs were able to grab the Balisong from the thug that attacked them on the skyplex, showing it to the man will reduce the difficulty of any roll to get him to talk by two-steps.

Regardless of which method is used to get him to talk the Cai reveals that the knife was a specially ordered item. The *tian sha de e mo*<sup>8</sup> that placed the order saw it in some Corvue broadcast and wanted one of his own. If the PCs mention that the owner is either dead or on his way to prison, the old man visibly relaxes and becomes much more talkative. If a player thinks of this on their own, this is worth a Plot Point. If none of the PCs think to mention that the thug is no longer a threat to the shopkeeper, they can roll against an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Perception / Empathy. The old man explains that many of his 'clients' work on the wrong side of the law, so he doesn't ask many questions about them, but this one thug, one Dennis Preston by name had a big mouth and told

him more than he wanted to know. Preston was proud to claim that he'd just become a made man in the Bernadette mob and the knife was a present to himself for a job well done. Preston would come by from time to time usually letting his 'associates' know about the old man's work phenomenal work. Cai hasn't seen Preston for about three weeks and doesn't know where he worked or lived.

The shopkeeper didn't give the Crew a lot to work with, however he did give them a name to try and track down, but he also left them with a very big question to answer and that is why would the Syndicate be interested in trying to stop a packet from Muir from reaching Bernadette? Figuring out their next step will require the Crew to investigate the two clearly separate clues using two separate paths.

Discovering a link between Bernadette and Muir, as with most not obviously illegal things in the 'Verse, will involve an extensive Cortex search. This is a FORMIDABLE (75) Complex Action of Intelligence + Technical Engineering / Hacking with each roll taking a half hour. The effects of the first Botch is as per the standard rules, however if a second Botch is rolled, the task doesn't become impossible, but all progress is lost and the PC has to start over.

When the threshold is reached, the following information is discovered: Most of the first part of what is public information is already known to the Crew namely that Muir is home to miners that are independent of both the Corone Mining Consortium and the Miners' Guild. The planet is currently experiencing a boom

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<sup>8</sup> goddamn monster

thanks to an exclusive contract with the Alliance base on Liann Jiun. The part that is of interest to the Crew is that the Alliance Corps of Engineers has just signed an extremely lucrative contract with the Muir Miners' League that not only extends Muir's exclusivity, it gives the League the right to set rates directly with the Corps of Engineers commander.

It is this last contractual detail that is critical to the Crew. If the miners can set rates without going through the Muir Miners' League home office, which happens to be located right here in New Paris, any current 'trade understanding' the League might have with the Bernadette Syndicate would be neatly circumvented and would cut the Mob right out of the profits! This is more than enough reason for a mobster from Bernadette to be putting the squeeze on a Ma Shang Express Rider.

One other detail that is important to the investigation is per Alliance law, that while an electronic contract can show an intent to deal, only a signed hard copy is binding. This is what had to be on the courier and what the Mob was trying to get Weiss to not deliver. This discovery answers the questions of who sent the note to Weiss, why the Bernadette Syndicate is involved, and more importantly, what packet is missing from the courier. Unfortunately, the Cortex search doesn't answer how the packet was stolen and, most importantly of all, who has it now.

Armed with the name of Dennis Preston, the Crew will have to continue their search of New Paris' seamier side to find out where that bit of information leads them.

However, an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence +

Knowledge or an EASY (3) Intelligence + Covert / Streetwise roll will know instinctively that attempting to look into any Syndicate dealings is going to be fraught with peril. The actual investigation will either entail the use of Friends in Low Places and five Plot Points, a HEROIC (19) test of Intelligence + Covert / Streetwise, or a INCREDIBLE (23) Intelligence + Perception / Investigation to find anyone willing to even admit they knowing a Dennis Preston. If the PCs succeed in the skill tests or use the Plot Points, they will get directions to an abandoned warehouse inside the city's Blackout Zone.

If either of the skill checks are attempted and failed, the Crew will be confronted by a surly looking group of toughs that want to know why the PCs are 'making such a fuss' in the neighborhood. There will be twice as many toughs as PCs with half armed with knives and the other half with pistols, in addition, all of them will have weapons equal to clubs in one form or another (cricket bats, chains, pool cues, etc). The toughs are equal to Unification Vets (Pg 180) and will fight until half of them are dead or incapacitated. If the PCs should lose this fight, they will wake up in a cell like room in what appears to be a large abandoned warehouse with a serious problem on their hands.

Assuming the PCs succeeded in their quest to find information on Preston, they will first have to slip into the Blackout Zone before they can check out the warehouse. Entering a Blackout Zone takes an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Covert / Streetwise roll to locate an entrance and a FORMIDABLE (15) Agility + Covert / Stealth

roll to enter unseen without a distraction. It only takes an EASY (3) roll of the same skill or an AVERAGE Intelligence + Knowledge roll to know that Blackout Zones are frequented by normally law abiding citizens, typically to buy illegal drugs and are often targeted by Federal Marshals. A raid by Feds on these thrill seeking citizens can provide the perfect distraction.

An AVERAGE (7) Alertness + Perception / Deduction roll will spot just such a group of locals. Once they are noticed, it will require a HARD (11) Agility + Planetary Vehicles roll to slip inside the 'Zone before the Feds can react while they are occupied with the locals. Entering the 'Zone on foot is only an AVERAGE (7) difficulty of Agility + Covert / Stealth. As failure at this point would be a disaster for everyone, the GM should make every attempt to talk the players into using Plot Points to succeed in this task.

Once inside the 'Zone, reaching the warehouse is a trivial task as residents in such areas do not ask any questions and keep to themselves whenever possible. Entering the warehouse will be a bit more challenging. Getting to a side door undetected is an AVERAGE (7) test of Agility + Covert / Stealth. Unlocking the door will require mechanical lockpicks and a HARD (11) Agility + Covert / Open Locks roll. Movement inside the warehouse is a second AVERAGE (7) test of Agility + Covert / Stealth. Success with all the skill checks allows a PC to reach what looks like a room that has been crudely converted into a dorm. A failure alerts the warehouse and results in a confrontation with the toughs as described above.

How the encounter in the warehouse goes depends on whether the Crew managed to successfully catch the thugs while they were sleeping or subdued them after a fight versus being captured by them after losing a fight.

If the PCs have the toughs at their mercy, an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Perception / Deduction roll promptly figures out that all the group's leadership must have been the ones that attacked the Crew on the Xinglong Skyplex as these men are clearly not the Syndicate's best. It only takes an AVERAGE (7) Willpower + Discipline / Interrogation or a HARD (11) Willpower + Influence / Persuasion test with a two-step bonus to skill due to having the not so toughs now at barrel's end to learn that the pathetic would-be mobsters do not have and have never had the missing packet. If a disaster occurred earlier in the scene and the Crew finds themselves prisoners of the toughs, their situation is grim, but not hopeless. The PCs have had everything they were carrying on them at the time of capture taken from them, but they are neither bound nor shackled to the walls of their make-shift prison. The 'cell' is as run down as the rest of the warehouse and an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + Perception roll easily finds a section of the wall that is in particularly bad condition. Forcing an opening is an AVERAGE (35) Complex Task of Strength + Athletics with each roll taking five minutes. The Crew has no way of knowing, but if they fail to break through in thirty minutes, a tough will discover them and will call for assistance in the form of a half a dozen of his heavily armed friends. The section of weak wall is small enough

that only one person can work at a time. The first Botch is as per the standard rules, while a second Botch makes too much noise and alerts their captors and brings two toughs to investigate.

On escaping the cell, the PCs have the option of fleeing or trying to turn the tables on the thugs. Escaping will only require an AVERAGE (7) Agility + Covert / Stealth roll and will allow the Crew to return to their ship. They may try to return to the warehouse, but all difficulties for Covert skills will have a two-step penalty due to the toughs being on their guard.

Turning the tables on the thugs turns out to be surprisingly easy. An AVERAGE (7) test of Agility + Covert / Stealth combined with an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + Perception test will locate their equipment, less any money, in a side room allowing the PCs to rearm and try to defeat the toughs again. A HARD (11) Agility + Covert / Stealth roll catches the toughs arguing over a game of tall card that is almost certainly being played using the Crew's own money. If the thugs are defeated, they can be interrogated as above.

After the interrogation is complete, the Crew can recover any stolen money taken by the toughs. A search of the warehouse finds a stash of obvious stolen goods, mostly simple merchandise too bulky for easy transport, but in what has to have been Preston's office, there is a sourcebox with a Blue Sun logo that stands out among the otherwise low tech items that could bear a closer inspection later. Once the search is complete, go to the final scene.

## **SCENE TWO**

## **JUST REWARDS**

*"A reputation is a nebulous thing as it is typically not based on facts, but on an opinion. The way the leader changes this opinion to fact is with the correct application of pain and fear. The proper application of pain serves to grab the follower's attention, while the proper application of fear serves to remind the follower of their place."*

– The annotated collected works of Xian Yu  
Volume Six, Chapter Nineteen, Celestial Publishing, Tenth Printing, Londinum, 2515

On departing the warehouse, the Crew has got to be feeling incredibly lost as to how to proceed. Ma Shang doesn't have the packet, neither do the mobsters, nor do the Feds and, as far as the PCs know, that eliminates everyone involved with the missing packet. The only thing the Crew is fairly positive about is that David Weiss was the last person to see the missing packet. Since the PCs don't know much about the man, perhaps the most logical step is to find out what else they can learn about him.

The best source of information on Weiss has got to be his family, but the Crew doesn't even know his wife's name. The only place to find out that particular piece of information is Weiss' former employer, Ma Shang Express. Things go smooth for the Crew for a change when the attempt to leave the New Paris Blackout Zone as a major altercation is occurring between the Feds and dozens of 'Zone Rats giving the PCs a free shot to slip out of the 'Zone unnoticed. Once clear of the Blackout Zone,



it is just a short trip via public transit to the Ma Shang facility.

Exiting the light rail car in front of the Ma Shang office, the Crew can not help but be impressed by the sprawling complex.

Entering the building and approaching the reception desk the PCs are warmly greeted by a professional looking woman that could easily be the poster child for the Receptionist's Guild if there were such a thing.

**"Welcome to Ma Shang Express, dependability is our watchword. How may I assist you?" She says with a smile that, if it isn't genuine, it does a phenomenal job of looking genuine as any of the Crew has ever seen.**

There are many ways to approach getting the information they need from the woman, whose nameplate states is Rebecca Choi, but an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + Perception / Empathy or Deduction roll will realize that sympathy for the dead man's family will probably have the best chance of success. Ms Choi however, is every bit as professional as she appears and getting her to reveal any useful information is not an easy task. In fact, getting any information on Weiss' family is a FORMIDABLE (15) Intelligence + Influence / Conversation or a HARD (11) Willpower + Performance test playing on wanting to speak to his widow about his last moments and his dying words of love for her are enough to get Choi to tell the Crew that Weiss' wife April lives in Wadsworthshire on Santo. Moved by the PC's story, Choi uncharacteristically lets slip that Weiss was a native of Muir and how

fitting it was for him to 'meet is maker' there.

Thanking Ms Choi, the Crew departs with a startling piece of news. If Weiss was a native of Muir, he'd know all too well what the Syndicate's reaction to the new contract between the Alliance Corps of Engineers and the Muir Miner's League. It is now clear that knowing what this reaction would be, Weiss took extraordinary steps to make sure the contract got to the League, but unfortunately, he died before explaining exactly what those steps were.

The last clue the Crew has to work with at this point is the fact that the home office of the Muir Miner's League is also here in New Paris and their office is within walking distance. As the PCs reach the grand office of the League, they see the front of the building is emblazoned with the letters MML that must be at thirty feet high. The GM should now call for a HARD (11) Recall Roll (Intelligence + Willpower) to remember the part of Weiss' dying words that made no sense at the time "Shoulda stayed with Post, never forget t-twenty-f-f-fifty." It takes an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Scientific Expertise or a HARD (11) Intelligence + Knowledge to remember that in the old Earth-That-Was Roman numerals MML equals 2050 or twenty fifty. If Weiss did once work for the Federal Postal Service, it is logical that he might have decided to trust them to get the contract to Bernadette and it also stands to reason that the number 2050 might be a post office box. The League's office is right in the center of town and Cortex access points are on every corner. Rushing over to the closest terminal shows that the nearest

Postal Service Office is only three blocks away!

The Crew race to the post office and are met by the franchise owner who smiles and asks how he can help them. Tense with the possibility that their quest is at an end, any PC's voice, that doesn't have Steady Calm, cracks as they ask for the contents of box 2050.

The man nods, steps to the back of the small office, and returns with a bundle, roughly the size of a large notebook. Read Aloud:

**"I wondered if anyone would pick this up. Not often you see 'Dead Man's Post' on one of the Core Worlds. Whoever sent this was well up on their Postal Service rules, but was probably a former worker as there are not many people have ever heard of adding nine-nine-nine-eight to a package's VIP code."**

When the man sees the blank stares on the Crew's faces he half smiles and continues.

**"Going by the looks on your mugs, it is clear you didn't send this, so I'll explain. I'm sure you know about VIP codes, 'Verse Interplanetary Postal codes tag exactly where an individual piece of post has to go. This is the standard nine digit code for any post going anywhere in the 'Verse. You probably even know about the 'Plus Four' codes that really narrow down where post has to go. However, what most people don't know is that ten of these plus four codes were tagged for**

**'special' circumstances. There is no need to go into what the others mean, but 'nine-nine-nine-eight' means 'Sender Deceased, release to representative' and since you asked for the package, to prove you are the representative, all you have to provide me is the name of the sender and point of origin."**

After all they have been through, the Crew is somewhat taken aback, but all they have to do is say David Weiss, Kipling, Muir and the package is theirs.

When the Crew has the package in their possession, it is only a short walk back to the Ma Shang office. Ms Choi is still on duty at the reception desk and when she asks how she may help them, they should ask for Richard Harlow the advocate that assisted the PC(s) that flew the courier to Bernadette, even if the ship was shot down during the landing, he is the only upper level name that they know with Ma Shang that would understand what the Crew has in their possession..

Harlow will initially either be intrigued by the Crew showing up at his office if the courier was undamaged or very annoyed if it was, but the corporate policy on customer service means he has to come to the reception area regardless of his opinion of the Crew. However, when the PCs present the bundle to Harlow, his curiosity is peaked and he has Choi open the package and inside is a Ma Shang Express priority envelop that is the missing packet!

The corporate advocate blinks in complete shock then beams at the PCs before telling Choi to let Senior Vice President Fredrick

DeAngelo know that he has several visitors on the way to his office. Harlow then escorts the Crew directly to the director of the Ma Shang facility.

On reaching the office, Harlow shows DeAngelo the packet and explains that it was the Crew that found it and restored Ma Shang's perfect record. He then defers to the PCs to have them tell the story of the packet's recovery. The PCs are welcome to tell as much of the story as they like, but if they chose to omit some of the grittier details, DeAngelo doesn't press them.

DeAngelo then directly contacts the home office on Londinum and reports that the company's reputation has been restored and that he is personally about to deliver the packet to the Muir Miners' League. DeAngelo then hangs up and orders Harlow and the Crew to accompany him in his hover-limousine for the trip to the League. The limousine can carry up to six, if there are more than this, a second limousine arrives to carry any additional PCs.

The missing packet is delivered to the president of the Muir Miners' League and on return to the Ma Shang office, DeAngelo makes an announcement via Cortex with great fanfare that thanks to some concerned citizens, Ma Shang's record of never losing a packet has been restored. Unless the Crew specifically states they refuse to be mentioned and win an Opposed Roll against DeAngelo's Willpower + Influence / Persuasion using one single PC's Willpower + Discipline / Mental Resistance. If the PCs win this roll, DeAngelo will state 'heroes that choose to remain anonymous' were instrumental in the recovery of the missing packet. If the

PCs lose the Opposed Roll, DeAngelo will proclaim heroes of the first order and on a more practical note, DeAngelo announces that Ma Shang will be doubling the amount of the standard reward for the delivery of delayed packets and presents the Crew with the customary giant check in the amount of €4,000 for extraordinary service. When the announcement is over, DeAngelo thanks them again and the Crew returns to their ship quite a bit richer for their efforts. The GM should now award each PC 5-8 Plot Points and 4-6 Advancement Points for completing the adventure successfully. However, as a final note, when the Crew returns to their ship, if they were mentioned by name in the Ma Shang announcement, they find a note pinned to the entry hatch with a magnet. "What goes around comes around." The note is unsigned, but it is a safe assumption that the PCs have picked up a "Deadly Enemy: Bernadette Syndicate" for their troubles. Even if the Crew refused to be mentioned in the announcement, as their ship departs Bernadette, they get an unsigned wave with the same message as the note and have still picked up the same Complication. They do however have cash in their pockets and whatever the sourcebox contains for their troubles.

**THE END**

## **NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS**

**Patrol Boat and Alliance gunners:** Use Alliance Grunt from page 179 changing Guns d6 / Assault Rifle d8 to Heavy Weapons d6 / Missiles d8

**Xinglong Thugs:** Use Bully Boys from page 185

**Bernadette Thugs:** Use Unification Vet and Proud of it from page 180

**Fredrick DeAngelo:** Use Town Leader from page 187 changing Influence d6 / Leadership d10 to Influence d6 / Persuasion d10

## **SHIPS**

### **Ma Shang Express Zidan-Class Courier**

**Dimensions** (LxBxH): 6 x 4 x 4 feet

**Tonnage:** 96 tons.

**Speed Class:** 12 cruise/14 hard-burn

**Crew Quarters:** One cramped single cabin (4tons)

**Fuel Capacity:** 2 tons (800 hours)

**Cargo Capacity:** 500 pounds

**Passenger Capacity:** None

**Gear:** One Escape Pod, Armor 2W, 2S, 10-pound aft-firing short range missile launcher with 6 jammer and 6 decoy missiles carried

**Price:** €26,256 (Base cost of €11,520 doubled due to complexity of engines, plus gear, which includes €1,200 for missile load)

Agility d10, Strength d2, Vitality d8, Alertness d6, Intelligence d6, Willpower d8;

Initiative: d10 + d6, Life Points: 16

**Traits:** Allure (Minor Asset), Gas Guzzler (Minor Complication), Lightweight (Minor Complication), Memorable (Minor Complication)

**Skills:** Covert d4, Perception d4, Piloting d4

**Complexity:** Average

**Maintenance Cost:** €192 a year (€16 per month)

**Description:** Zidan-Class couriers are fast with long endurance, but can only carry five hundred pounds of cargo. The engine technology of these ships is a closely guarded secret, but is known to be extremely powerful, capable of a velocity most other high-

speed designs need to use Hard Burn to match. Zidans can thus maintain a higher speed at lower fuel costs even though the engines themselves are not fuel efficient.

The embedded pass code system is a security feature to prevent theft of the ship. Each courier gets codes during pick up that will allow ship to run for one week with a new code required to be entered weekly. Codes are hardwired into the ship's computer and can not be bypassed. If code is not entered, the engine shuts down and can not be restarted. In addition, once a destination is locked into the astrogation computer, it can not be changed without also causing the engine to shut down.

## **In-System Patrol Boat**

**Dimensions** (LxBxH): 83 x 48 x 20 feet

**Tonnage:** 40 tons.

**Speed Class:** 5 cruise/7 hard-burn

**Crew:** Command Pilot, Weapons Officer, six Marshals.

**Crew Quarters:** 8-seat cockpit, with 2 cramped bunks located behind.

**Fuel Capacity:** 1 ton (500 hours)

**Cargo Capacity:** 8 tons of external weapons possible, typically only half that is carried.

**Armament:** One 1-pound autocannon with 200 rounds and up to 16,000 pounds of missiles.

**Price:** €3,400 plus ammunition.

Agility d10, Strength d2, Vitality d6, Alertness d6, Intelligence d4, Willpower d4;

Initiative d10+d6 Life Points 6

**Traits:** Everybody Has One (Minor Complication)

**Skills:** Piloting d6; Perception d6.

**Complexity:** average.

**Maintenance Cost:** €80 per year

**Description:** Yet another variation of the ubiquitous ASREV, the primary difference between the ISPB boat and their better known cousin is in addition to better sensors and flight controls there is room for eight. The ISPB sacrifices the ASREV's internal bomb bay in order to increase the size of the crew, but manages to be even more cramped than the ASREV.

Designed primarily for short ranged law enforcement, the ISPB maintains the capability to carry the full eight ton missile load of the ASREV. However, very few planets bother with arming the ship with the full load as the ISPB is meant to ensure cooperation of unarmed freighters or to drive off the occasional pirate, not to engage in heavy combat.

## Alliance Longbow Patrol Cruiser

**Dimensions** (LxBxH): 2200x700x900

**Tonnage:** 640,000 tons

**Speed Class:** 3 cruise/5 hard-burn

**Crew:** 24,000 / 400 Skeleton

**Crew Quarters:** 24,000

**Fuel Capacity:** 24,000 tons (800 hours)

**Cargo Capacity:** 24,000 tons

**Passengers:** 3200

Agility d8, Strength d8, Vitality d6, Alertness d6, Intelligence d8, Willpower d10;

Initiative d8+d6, Life Points 16

**Traits:** Fuel Efficient (Minor Asset), Memorable (Minor Complication)

**Skills:** Athletics d4, Heavy Weapons d4, Perception d4, Pilot d4

**Complexity:** Very High

**Price:** €48,160,000

**Maintenance Cost:** €3,072,000 Credits per year

**Armaments:** Two 200lb Cannon (d8 Spaceship-scale), range x1.5 (Newtech), with 200 rounds per gun, Twelve Interceptor 1 lb Autocannon (d6 Vehicle-scale), with 1,000 rounds per gun, Missile load: 208 long-range 100-lb missiles (d6 Spaceship-scale), 160 medium-range 200-lb missiles (d8 Spaceship-scale damage), 1,280 short range 10-lb missiles (jammers and decoys)

**Armor:** W4 (Newtech, half normal weight)

**Craft:** The Longbow normally carries a mix of Warhammer interceptors and Foxbats bomber-transport carrying eighteen Warhammers on each side of the ship or six Foxbats per side. The usual mix is 18/6, although, if the vessel is going into dangerous territory, it may carry thirty-six interceptors. It also carries eight standard shuttles in its internal hangars. If assigned to a commerce patrol mission, the Longbow can house ships as large as ASREVs in these spaces. It is in this role that the Agamemnon is acting when it is encountered during and there are thirty of them embarked.

**Description:** When the Alliance wishes to maintain a serious presence in an area without dedicating a full-blown Alliance Cruiser, it will send a Longbow Patrol Cruiser and several supporting vessels. The ship has the speed and maneuverability of a much smaller vessel, as well as the armaments and fighter screen to fulfill many roles.