

# TRAVELLER

REFEREES BRIEFING 3 : GOING PORTSIDE



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

# TRAVELLER

## REFEREES BRIEFING 3 : GOING PORTSIDE

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T R A V E L L E R

# INTRODUCTION

Travellers pass through many starports in their wanderings, and after a while these places can begin to blur into one another. The endless procession of generic bars and hotels, the same shops and tired old décor can be soul-destroying. But it does not have to be

like that! *Referee's Briefing 3: Going Portside* presents a miscellany of things to do and places to visit that are both interesting and memorable. Not always for the most positive of reasons but then, you can't have everything....



# C H A P T E R - O N E

# PORTSIDE FEATURES

By convention, the main interplanetary or interstellar port on a world is known as its starport, and all other ports are referred to as spaceports. This can cause some friction where several ports vie for the status of starport, since being the recognised starport brings in increased trade and therefore income. In some systems, newly arrived starships may be bombarded by messages from ports, all claiming to be the legitimate main starport of the entire star system, perhaps offering inducements to use them instead of another. Starship operators can get some good deals this way, but must be careful – anything that seems too good to be true almost certainly is.

A starport is the public face of the world or government that owns it, and a source of both revenue and political credibility. Thus most operators try to keep their spaceports clean and orderly, though specialised installations such as high-bulk ore loading depots may not follow this rule. A port that is run-down and badly maintained is not only potentially hazardous to visit but can indicate the owning government or corporation is struggling financially. This can have the effect of further damaging the economy, so most operators pump money into their port long after other projects have been cancelled. There might be a sharp divide between the clean and efficient starport and conditions on the surface of the planet.

Whatever laws may apply on the planetary surface, ports – especially the orbital highport component – tend to be reluctant to allow visitors to carry powerful weapons. Some ban everything but handguns or hand weapons, some allow only hand weapons and some do not allow weapons at all in the port. This is partially in case of hull breaches or – more commonly – damage to pipes, wiring and other essential internal components, and partially so Travellers causing trouble in a bar do not outgun the security team sent to arrest them. There is also the factor that openly carrying weapons can create a ‘frontier’ feeling that most port operators would prefer to downplay. The message is: feel safe, spend money.

## TRANSPORT

All but the most primitive spaceports make provision for personnel and luggage movement within the port using moving walkways and small vehicles. Typically, the latter are small, open-sided or open-topped carts seating two, four or six. A typical example is the ‘Portsider’ range of electrically powered vehicles designated Portsider 2, 4 or 6. There is also the Portsider Mule, which carries cargo in its rear container, and the Longsider, which is a locomotive unit capable of towing several unpowered passenger or luggage carts. Longsiders are usually driven by port staff or run on an automated route, and rarely have more than four cars behind the prime mover unit. However, very large longsider trains do sometimes trundle through the port, often to the inconvenience of everyone nearby.

Grav vehicles are not common in enclosed starports, partly because wheels are much cheaper and partly to reduce the chance of a highly expensive accident. Those grav vehicles that are present will commonly be locked into flight paths between certain points. Some large ports use automated grav platforms rather than moving walkways, permitting rapid transit from one point to another above the heads of those shopping or dining below. A network of such platforms is sometimes used to move personnel in three dimensions, flitting from a ground-level point to a high transit level, permitting the occupants to transfer to a horizontal (or more or less horizontal) transit plane before stepping onto a final platform to go up or down to the desired level. For movement of small items, carrybots are typically used.



One common carrybot configuration resembles nothing so much as a large saucepan with four rapidly-swivelling wheels. A grav-powered version is used for faster deliveries in some ports. Most designs have a lockable top and can be used to deliver a customer's purchase from a shop or to take a weapon across the concourse to be released where it is legal. There have been claims of 'carrybot scams' in some ports, where bots have simply gone missing with someone's goods, but it is in the interests of port operators to ensure this does not happen.

Larger carrybots typically used tracked propulsion, or low-powered gravitic drives that allow them to float gracefully overhead. Many port visitors forget about the large amounts of heavy luggage and small cargo being moved about above them, leading to the occasional start as someone suddenly realises a half-ton of assorted goods and cargo is hovering over their head.

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## CARRYBOT

Most carrybots operate on wheels or tracks, sometimes at high speeds along designated lanes segregated from foot traffic. Some ports have bots zipping around at ground level, weaving in and out of people. This can look like chaos but most carrybots have a guidance system that allows them to not only avoid collisions but to predict a good path – albeit not a straight one – though foot traffic. Carrybot malfunctions or errors do sometimes trip people up, and getting kicked across the concourse is a common experience for one of these robots.

	Hits	Speed	TL	Cost
<b>Astro-Mech Droid</b>	10	12 m	8	Cr6000
<b>Skills</b>	Profession (Porter) 2			
<b>Attacks</b>	None			
<b>Traits</b>	Armour (+2) Small (-1)			
<b>Programming</b>	Basic (porter)			



## ADVERTISING AND MARKETING

Dozens, sometimes hundreds, of businesses compete for the attention of port visitors. As a general rule, success at generating business trumps good taste, and so advertising has tended to become ever more shrill and hysterical. This trend is controlled in some ports, where regulations dictate how loud and lurid advertising can be, but in many places the concourse is a riot of attention-grabbing colours and sounds, which can be hard on the senses.

People and robots are also used for marketing and advertising purposes. The least subtle methods include having a robot follow new arrivals around, offering them deals or blasting out music and slogans. The 'helpful official' gambit is often used as well, with someone who dresses almost but not quite like a port official or security officer offering guidance or official-sounding instructions that channel new arrivals towards certain businesses or purchases.

This bedlam of advertising can get so out of hand that nobody buys anything, and the concourse is avoided by anyone who does not absolutely have to be there. To avoid this, most port operators try to regulate the activities of marketers, but those that most closely push the limits have an advantage over those that act more politely. As a result, unless draconian laws are passed and enforced there will always be an element of the noisy bazaar about a port concourse and business district.

Subtler methods to get Travellers to part with their credits are also used in many places. Data outlets are sponsored by local businesses, or heavily biased towards those who pay for the privilege. This can in some cases be dangerously misleading, as getting money out of people often trumps providing useful or truthful information. Likewise, entertainment is often sponsored and sometimes deliberately biased, with blatant product placement or less obvious but equally manipulative practices.

It is not just shops and service providers that participate in this bombardment of the senses. Political groups, religions, charities and even individuals might all sponsor noisy and aggressive marketing campaigns. Occasionally what amounts to an advertising war will break out, as two rival groups produce campaigns that put one another down or undermine their rival's advertising. This can at first be incomprehensible to a new arrival, as without context some of these response ads are meaningless. Soon, however, Travellers will be as weary of the back-and-forth campaigns as everyone else.

## THE STARTOWN

The 'Startown' is an interface between the starport and the rest of the planet. Sometimes the startown is actually within the confines of the port, but more commonly it lies just outside. If there is a difference in jurisdiction between the port and the rest of the planet, then usually the startown is subject to local laws enforced by the world's own police and security agencies. It is not uncommon to encounter special security forces, often composed of mercenaries or supplied by specialist companies, within the startown. Treatment of offworld offenders may be more lenient than on the rest of the world, but this is not a hard-and-fast rule.

Startowns are typically geared to relieving Travellers of their credits as fast as possible, and are often seedy or outright corrupt. They tend to be noisy, rough-and-ready places with a correspondingly high rate of crime, though this depends greatly upon the local government's attitude. Some startowns are positively sedate.

In many cases the only settlement on an entire planet is next to the starport, but this does not mean all of it qualifies as a startown. The same comments apply to worlds where the capital is co-located with the starport. In these cases it may be that the startown is a district with fairly obvious boundaries, outside of which a more normal situation exists. The 'startown' of a world with just one settlement might be a single street. Behaviour that would be tolerated there might be quite unacceptable on the far side of the boundary, just metres away.

In addition to the obvious bars, restaurants and places of entertainment, the startown typically contains other things Travellers might be willing to pay for. These include medical facilities capable of dealing with space-travel-related maladies and also less conventional services. Implants, body modifications and the like are not always legal on a given world, and even if they are, practitioners who deal in them tend to gravitate to the port area to take advantage of passing Travellers with large amounts of cash to spare.

Services in the startown include travel to other points on the planet. This is usually legal and above board, ranging from local rail or maglev services to vehicle hire. There will also be those in the startown who can get Travellers into places they should not be – or who say they can – for an appropriate fee. On some worlds that might include crossing the extrality line onto the planet proper, and there are many governments who like to keep offworld influences contained and/or their own

citizens out of the starport zone. Even if such measures are in place it is common to find locals in the startown who do not live there, as it is a place of excitement and adventure. Travellers might be amused by the antics of wide-eyed yokels who have come to the port for the first time... or they may get fleeced by someone pretending to be just such an innocent.

The startown is always a good place to pick up rumours and information, as well as to find work or recruit personnel. It is generally cheaper to live and operate there than in the port itself, and often the closer links with the planetside population can be beneficial. On many worlds there is an entire social class of people who make their living at the startown. From rich and powerful businesspersons to part-time labourers, these people form a group that is 'not quite the same as us' in the eyes of many planetsiders.

## THE FADE DOWN

'Fade-Down' is a sociological term for the gradual (or sometimes very rapid) reduction in offworld influences experienced as Travellers get further from the starport. Major worlds often have a culture almost indistinguishable from the 'interstellar standard' of the region where they are located, not least because they contribute extensively to it by way of trade, exports and entertainment. Less important worlds, which receive a smaller volume of traffic, tend to drift away from the interstellar cultural norms. This is far less pronounced close to the starport and startown, but on such worlds the number of Travellers who venture far from the port is very low.

Similarly, offworld goods are not uncommon close to the starport, but to get further away they have to pass through local distributors or private hands. This of course does happen – a remote farmhouse might still have the very latest offworld-made entertainment system – but as a rule the amount of offworld goods and technology 'fades-down' with distance from the port. This means it can be difficult to obtain spares in the outback for a grav vehicle that is in theory within the world's technological capabilities, and the locals often use less advanced equipment.

Thus as Travellers get farther from the port, they will usually experience a decline in the level of technological sophistication, a shifting of accent and dialect, and quite often a change in clothing and even architectural styles. The fade-down occurs at different rates on various worlds, and on some it is barely noticeable. On others, it is possible to cross the startown boundary line and step into what is, culturally at least, a different world.

# HOTELS, BARS AND RESTAURANTS

Meeting a client or patron in a bar is something of a cliché, but there are reasons why clichés become common. A bar or restaurant provides a public place which still has a measure of privacy – or at least difficulty in overhearing – and a business discussion could be passed off as a social outing. This is unlikely to fool anyone completely but it does make it difficult to prove a given patron hired a particular ship crew. Choosing a bar or restaurant at random also reduces the chances of encountering an informant for any opposition group. Thus the invitation to meet and discuss a potential job so often *does* take place in a bar or restaurant.

## ADVANTAGE HOTELS

The Advantage chain of starport hotels is common in Class A and B ports, and many busy spaceports too. As might be expected, the chain's advertising materials extol all the many benefits of staying in one of their facilities, which are priced a little above budget level, but not excessively so. Decent rooms, a clean bed and access to most of the facilities a Traveller could want on-site are common to many chains, but Advantage takes care to make things as easy as possible for the visitor.

For example, the hotel has a 'starfarer laundry service' which caters to the lazy Traveller or the one who does not have access to proper facilities aboard ship. For a reasonable fee, the hotel will clean and press a Traveller's entire wardrobe overnight. Other places offer laundry services, of course, but the Advantage chain makes a point of keeping things as simple and easy for visitors as possible.



**ADVANTAGE**  
Hotels

Advantage hotels also have at least some form of conference and meeting chambers, along with sport and recreation facilities. These vary considerably from one hotel to another, but it is widely known that the local Advantage is a good place to host a low-cost meeting or conference, and is often used by interstellar traders as well as local political, social and even sporting groups of this purpose. Thus Travellers checking in to an Advantage hotel might find it filled with members of the world's Badminton Regulatory Committee having their annual general meeting, or something similar.



## ASTROBURGERS

The Astroburgers chain started out as a joke, albeit a rather expensive one. The founders, living off a legacy and essentially just looking for something to do with their time, created the tackiest advertising campaign they could think of, and an equally downmarket burger chain to go with it. In an equally crass piece of exploitation, they invented themed burgers for practically every possible occasion, event or cause.

Astroburgers have burgers celebrating not merely the navy, for example, but elements within it. Thus there is a burger commemorating the cruiser service, one for the patrol forces, one for the battleship crews, and so forth. The crews of tankers and logistics vessels are commemorated by one of the largest fast food items in known space – which is itself a piece of unobvious marketable-concept creation on the part of Astroburgers.

Astroburgers was, unaccountably, a huge success in the marketplace, and now has tens of thousands of outlets. Its management are prone to extravagant and ever-more-silly publicity stunts, which are themselves now a trademark. One of the most questionable to date is the commission of an antipiracy patrol at the burger chain's expense. The words 'This space battle was brought to you by Astroburgers' are currently enshrined as the most appallingly crass piece of advertising in history... though there are many who secretly wonder how Astroburgers is going to top that one.

As might be expected from such an immense restaurant chain, Astroburgers also has holdings in the supply industry. Its investment programme is surprisingly ethical, pumping hard cash into weak agricultural economies and providing a steady buyer for their produce. The embarrassment of having a giant Astroburgers logo at the gateway to a ranch is perhaps offset for many small-time farmers by being able to keep their land and make a decent living.

## BREWHOUSE TAVERN

### BREWHOUSE TAVERN

The Brewhouse Tavern is an outlet for its own micro-brewery and other locally sourced produce. In theory at least, everything on sale has been grown, fermented, distilled or otherwise made ready for consumption within a few hundred metres of the bar. This is not always the case; some items have to be imported. However, for the most part the local Brewhouse Tavern is exactly that – local.

The clientele tends to be a broad cross-section of local society plus visitors from other stars. Some of those frequenting the Brewhouse are rather tiresome about the virtues of locally-sourced food and drink, and can be rather pretentious for what is in fact a fairly ordinary establishment. Most of the clientele are more agreeable, however, and there is a possibility for a real meeting of cultures.

One peculiarity of the Brewhouse is the 'Brewhouse Pickles' phenomenon. When this started is a matter for conjecture but it has grown into a near-obsession and something of a unique selling point for the bar. The Brewhouse's regular patrons will pickle almost anything and, after it has stood behind the bar for long enough to attract sufficient comment, they will offer it around. A number of real delicacies have been created in this manner, along with some true abominations. 'Sampling the pickles' is something of an initiation rite among regulars, and provides a certain amount of entertainment as well.

## GenEric!

BAR & STEAKHOUSE

### GENERIC!

The GenEric! chain of bars and steakhouses actually makes a virtue out of its sameness. Clients know in advance exactly what to expect, from the colour of the carpets down to the spelling mistakes on the menu. GenEric! has franchises in numerous starports and is known for its middle-of-the-road selection of bar meals and extremely cheap cocktails.

GenEric! has its own line of wines, beers and spirits, which come in plain grey-labelled bottles or other containers. Those claiming a refined palate will condemn the blandness of these generic products, but they are carefully blended to hit the middle of their chosen demographic. As a result, they sell well at a fairly low price, and are sold by the shipping container to outlets far beyond the range of the GenEric! bar and steakhouse chain.

GenEric! also has a strong employee-training programme and offers a college-assistance package to employees who meet their targets reliably. There are thus numerous spacer crewmembers, portside officials and even the odd naval officer who got where they are serving generic beer and burgers in a GenEric! establishment. Whilst this career path is sniffed at by some, it is for many the only route to a better-paid job.



## LANDING DECK

The Landing Deck is a fairly typical spacer bar, catering to passing trade as well as the local merchant and commercial spacer crews. Like many such themed bars it has rather more style than substance, serving much the same drinks and, if anything, inferior food to other establishments. Nevertheless, it has an ambience that many spacers find welcoming. The décor and general style are close to what is encountered aboard most starships – close enough to be comfortably familiar – but different enough to be a welcome change. In short, the Landing Deck is (as its name implies) sort of a transition point between spacefaring and shoreside culture.

The Landing Deck does make an effort to play to the interstellar nature of its name, regularly hosting guest beers and foods from far-off places. Some of these are actually local produce given an ‘exotic’ twist, but not everyone realises that. Some clients are genuinely convinced their dinner has been sourced from some distant culture and the key ingredients shipped halfway across the sector. This may actually happen from time to time, but mostly such meals are the product of a few minutes’ datanet research and a certain amount of creativity on the part of the chef.

# PLANETFALL

*BAR & GRILL*

## PLANETFALL BAR & GRILL

According to some spacers at least, there is a Planetfall Bar & Grill in every starport in known space. This cannot possibly be true, but the name is certainly one of the most commonly encountered. Some Planetfalls are part of a chain using that name, others use it by coincidence or to cash in on the success of the larger group, which lacks the resources to pursue a cease-and-desist legal challenge over interstellar distances.

The Planetfall is the sort of place Travellers tend to head for when they reach a starport. Most Planetfalls have inexpensive rooms for hire and a relaxed atmosphere that caters to starfarers both in terms of décor and products sold. Many of the staff are experienced Travellers themselves, or have been around spacers long enough to understand their particular mindset and problems.

The Planetfall Bar & Grill is very much a beer-and-steak sort of place, catering to those seeking a low-cost good time without much in the way of sophistication. There is often live music of varying quality, but typically the entertainment takes the form of swapping jokes and tall tales with like-minded people. Many spacers love the Planetfall precisely because the food is not all that good and the beer is as respectable as you would expect at the price. It is a place without pretensions, where everyone is welcome until they get themselves thrown out.



**Star Bowl Hotel**

## STAR BOWL HOTEL

There are several Star Bowl Hotels across known space, most of which claim to be the original. All are located on an orbital highport or airless world, and feature large sections ‘out among the stars’ with a ceiling, walls and sometimes floor made from transparent materials. Dining rooms and conference chambers are commonly constructed in this manner, but some hotels offer bedrooms with this feature. It is, of course, not to everyone’s taste to step out of bed onto nothingness, but there are plenty of people who will pay well for the novelty.

The Star Bowl is a very upmarket hotel, with liveried staff and all manner of facilities within the hotel itself. Most have a shuttle port of their own, and offer direct transit anywhere in the system for a suitable fee.

At least one Star Bowl Hotel is essentially an orbital spaceport in its own right. Located over a rockball planet as a convenient gravity well, the hotel has its own conference and business suites, and hosts high-end negotiations on a frequent basis. Its casinos and entertainment facilities are considered worth the huge fees, and also the journey required, to visit such a palace-for-hire. This particular Star Bowl is a place where nothing is made or manufactured except fortunes and the ruin of others.

## STARFARERS' HOSPITABLE INSTITUTION

### STARFARERS' HOSPITABLE INSTITUTION

Often just referred to as The Institution, or the 'SI', the Starfarer's Hospitable Institution was founded to provide shelter to down-on-their-luck Travellers and assist in recruiting of crews and work teams to mutual benefit. It still serves this purpose, but has evolved over the years into a sort of social club for spacers off all kinds.

Entry to an SI facility requires proof of status as a 'spacer', i.e. someone who works aboard starships, spacecraft or space stations, or to be the quest of a spacer. Proof is easy enough; anyone whose qualifications suit them for a shipboard job, or whose work history includes time served aboard a vessel or station qualifies. Even a week spent mopping decks on a working passage is good enough.

The SI acts as a hiring-hall for spacer crews and similarly qualified people, and maintains an unspoken but very real hierarchy of who is skilled, who is reliable, and who is both. Flakes, gold-brickers and those suspected of having unsavoury affiliations are at the bottom of the hierarchy, and will find little work coming their way, but a qualified spacer with a good reputation can usually find a job – of some kind – at the SI. Jobs are also subject to an appraisal, mainly based on word of mouth and recommendations from fellow members.

For most SI visitors, the typical installation (they are sometimes even referred to as that, though 'bar' is more common) takes the form of a bar that serves basic but generally good quality meals at a reasonable price. There is also a hostel associated with each installation, where rooms can be rented quite cheaply. It is possible to live very inexpensively at the SI for an extended period, and for those genuinely down on their luck the SI has an additional option. Anyone qualified to gain entry can ask for help and will not be turned away. They will be given a place to sleep (usually a hostel room but other arrangements have been made in the past) and a couple

of meals a day. These are usually whatever the kitchen has too much of, but otherwise the same as that being served to paying customers. In return, the out-of-luck spacer is expected to help out at the installation and not abuse the setup.

The Starfarers' Hospitable Institution has a good reputation for looking after its own, but is resented by some as an elitist club catering to pretentious free trader crews. This is rather unfair, but that has never stood in the way of a good grudge. It is not just non-starfarers who dislike the SI. Those that think of themselves as high-end spacers – crews of major merchant lines and naval personnel for the most part – tend to sniff at the SI as a place where the lower orders gather, and take their business elsewhere.



### THE TORPEDO BAY

The Torpedo Bay ostensibly caters to naval personnel, crews of armed space vessels and the like, though in reality it is simply a themed starport bar. The speciality drink is 'torpedo juice', a reference to an ancient maritime practice of mixing alcohol from a torpedo's propulsion system with pineapple juice to create a potent but unpalatable beverage. The version served in The Torpedo Bay is less likely to cause serious health issues but is still extremely strong and not for the faint-hearted.

The bar itself is festooned with naval paraphernalia, all of which claims to be genuine. Some visitors find the manikins in naval uniform creepy, others tacky. Likewise, the décor is not to everyone's taste and the regular screenings of naval-themed movies have attracted adverse comment at times. Overall, though, The Torpedo Bay is a successful concept for a bar which has been widely copied in many ports. So long as patrons are willing to pay over the odds for a tall glass of Torpedo Juice or a Detonator cocktail, the 'Bay will remain open for business.

# RETAILERS, MERCHANTS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

Commerce, it is said, is the lifeblood of civilisation. There are few worlds entirely self-sufficient, though many could be if necessary. However, interstellar trade enables the movement of raw materials and finished goods from places where they are cheap to markets willing to pay more. A world linked into the interstellar trade network has huge advantages over one that is not. Its industries can obtain components more cheaply than making them locally and can source materials otherwise unavailable. Similarly, high-technology items are available in places where they cannot be made, again courtesy of interstellar trade. However, in both cases the market is subject to influences. Interruption in commercial shipping or a diversion of trade elsewhere can send prices soaring upwards. And of course, some items are officially unavailable for various reasons. A supplier who can get them despite laws, prohibitions or scarcity can charge any price he chooses.

## CLEVER SAYENNE

Many starports have an equivalent of Clever Sayenne, a semi-mythical figure said to be a member of an otherwise unknown or unidentifiable alien race. Clever Sayenne knows everyone and everything, and can get anything for a price – or so the story goes. There are more than a few beings who claim to be the original Clever Sayenne, or to work for him... her... it... them... whatever term seems appropriate.

According to rumour, Clever Sayenne will sometimes give out information or even perform services for free... though perhaps not entirely so. Sayenne is said to have a web of people who owe a favour or two, which is useful for protection as well as ensuring others pay what is owed. There are also claims that Clever Sayenne is working for one or another of the region's intelligence services. This is more than likely true, though probably on his own terms and not out of any sort of loyalty.

Clever Sayenne is thus a useful source of information and items that cannot be found elsewhere, but any dealings are risky. Sayenne will happily sell to others information on what a given client has been asking for or what items he has bought. He will not betray a client just for the sake of it, but owes no loyalty that has not

been paid for and will sell any information he has. It is possible to bribe him to keep quiet about something, but this is not a guarantee of silence – it is simply a means of raising the price he charges to anyone else asking about the same subject.

Clever Sayenne is not by any means a popular figure but he is useful. Even the authorities will pay him for information or items, and are one of the groups who pay a regular fee to be informed when Sayenne gets his hands on certain items such as suspected Ancients artefacts. Although legal means could be used to seize such items, in the long term it is more reliable to pay Sayenne to tell the authorities when something has been found, and then to buy it from him at a ridiculous price. Whilst expensive, this method is more reliable than hoping to hear about items for sale and then trying to pounce on the seller before they move on.



Interstella Ordnance

## INTERSTELLAR ORDNANCE

Interstellar Ordnance (IO) is an arms manufacturer with a long pedigree. It is claimed that the firm was founded on Terra not long before the invention of the jump drive, but there are no records of its existence. However, IO has certainly been around a long time. The firm mainly deals in high-volume sales to governmental and corporate clients, law enforcement agencies and the like, but has always had a 'weaponry for the everyman' ethos as well. Thus IO maintains retail outlets at numerous highports – but never on-planet, for no better reason than the 'interstellar' connotations.

IO only supplies heavy weapons and military hardware such as naval missiles or combat armour to major organisations and governments, but is quite happy to sell smaller weapons to personal defence and security clients. Sales policy is generally responsible – clients are expected to show evidence of qualification with a weapon type or demonstrate competence on the shop's small firing range.

Most of the weaponry on offer is solid, dependable, no-frills but relatively expensive for the type. Interstellar Ordnance believes their brand name and reputation for reliability are worth a few extra credits – actually, quite a few extra credits. IO offers accreditation and qualification services, and training for those who have little weapons handling experience. They also have a mercenary registration programme, assisting mercenary units and security forces in filling their ranks. This is a fairly small-scale operation in most areas, though the regional Interstellar Ordnance headquarters do have the capability to locate whole mercenary formations of up to battalion size for a client.

## KINSLEY MERCHANT FACTORS

The Kinsley Group is an association of traders who deal mostly in buying and selling cargoes as they move along the interstellar trade lanes. Quite often the cargo is not even unloaded; a merchant buys ownership of it as the ship emerges from jump and it may change hands several times before arriving in port. The final owner might decide to ship the cargo on, or sell it to someone else who thinks it will make a good profit at the destination. This sort of trading is complex and often quite incomprehensible to outsiders.

The Kinsley Group does also deal in physical items rather than the legal ownership of something the buyer will never see. Cargoes are bought and sold, and often broken up for sale to a number of smaller clients. A merchant factor will normally have a fairly quick turnover in goods and will rarely buy something that will stand in a warehouse for a long time, but everyone makes mistakes. Thus it may be possible to pick up a speculative cargo very cheaply if the factor wants to clear some space, or to get rid of a bad buy for whatever he can get.

Similarly, a merchant factor might charter a ship to deliver a particular cargo somewhere he thinks it will sell well, or he might offer a merchant crew a part-share in the cargo in return for delivery. This sort of deal falls outside the usual activities of the merchant factors and generates a smaller income than their normal mode of operation, so the factors tend to have little time to spend on it. Negotiations tend to be brisk and low-expectation; the unwanted cargo is losing money by standing around taking up space, so getting rid of it at any price might be a bonus. However, a degree of professional pride will prevent factors from selling at too low a price.

Merchant factors often have odd jobs that need doing by those with a starship or spacecraft. The Kinsley group will often sponsor a ship to go to a particular star system with messages or market updates for other members, or to carry a mixed cargo of samples to try out the market somewhere. Its personnel also move around quite a lot; a senior broker or factor will have a well-established office but junior personnel might be sent to open a subsidiary or to carry out negotiations elsewhere. Charters to carry a junior broker and his trade samples are not uncommon.





## LITTLE SARIV'S INTERSTELLAR TRADING EMPORIUM

Little Sariv's establishment is literally an interstellar one – it is a very old merchant starship converted to sell goods directly wherever it lands. To the dismay of many port officials, Little Sariv (who is actually rather large) and her crew drop the cargo hatches, open the doors and invite all comers to browse their wares the moment they touch down. A part of the cargo bay is given over to storage, with a small 'back room' area where deals are made and 'the good stuff' is kept under the counter for customers with an appropriately large wad of credits.

The emporium is just about spaceworthy, despite being festooned with coloured external lights, electronic billboards and a number of custom features that seem to have been very loosely attached to the hull. Her crew are well armed and tolerate no nonsense – in the form of time-wasters as well as thieves – but anyone with credits to spend is welcomed like an old friend by Little Sariv. Many are fooled by her loud and shrill demeanour, her outrageous flirting and obviously made-up stories of where she got her goods. Behind the façade is a shrewd trader who can turn a profit almost anywhere.

The inside of the emporium is a riot of... stuff... for sale. Little Sariv sells whatever she can get her hands on, from cuddly toys to plasma guns – and they are likely to be next to one another on the shelf. There is a system, she claims, to where any given thing should be found but no requested item is ever where she first says it is. However, there will usually be something nearby that the client did not know they wanted but simply cannot leave without.

Some of the items sold aboard Little Sariv's ship are extremely valuable, but most are very mundane or sometimes a bit weird. It is not clear how Little Sariv turns a profit on trinkets and teddy bears – even if customers do tend to buy three other items for every one they actually intended to. It is rumoured, though never proven, that the emporium also sells information on a variety of subjects. Little Sariv does not comment on such matters – actually, she makes a lot of comments on a great variety of other matters if asked about information brokering, and ends up not really saying anything at all. There are also claims that Little Sariv is an assassin. Probably not personally, but they say that for the right price she can arrange for someone to become dead. Of course, they also say she is an honest trader....

## PLANETSIDE TRANSPORT

Planetside Transport is a franchise which has been widely copied. Some fakes have been closed down but legal action over interstellar distances is a difficult prospect. Planetside (and those that copy the name) rents out vehicles to those wanting to travel around the world away from the starport, but perhaps more importantly it also provides an advisory service. Some worlds have complex laws regarding travel or transit between areas – including in and out of the startown – and unwary Travellers can fall foul of local legislation. Planetside Transport can smooth out many of the difficulties that might be encountered; including a few that might have been blown out of proportion.

Planetside provides not only a means of transportation but also the appropriate documentation and any local conversion training or accreditation that may be required. Some worlds impose licensing or other requirements upon visitors, which may necessitate taking a local driving test or at least showing familiarity with traffic and vehicle management laws. For those who need more help, or who are less than keen on jumping through hoops for the sake of a single trip shoreside, Planetside Transport will provide drivers or guides for a fee. On a few very wild frontier worlds these guides are not merely navigators but may also ride shotgun, so to speak.

## UNIFIED SECURITY & ESCORT SERVICES

USES (pronounced 'Yoo-Sess') offers an integrated security service for people, items and starships. Its personnel are mostly long-service mercenaries trained in bodyguard and security operations rather than military operations. There are also starship crews and various specialists (mainly cyberprotection and communications specialists) on the books. USES promises to keep the client or object safe from any and all threats, but does not guarantee that the client will like how that is accomplished.

Some bodyguard services will indulge the whims of the client, who might make their job very difficult by refusing to accept advice or even wilfully messing the close protection team about. USES does not tolerate such conduct; if the client wants something or someone to be safe, the USES will make that happen whether they like it or not. The firm has a policy of issuing an ultimatum to difficult clients, to the effect that they must comply with the firm's instructions or the contract will be immediately terminated – with USES keeping the entire fee. The firm's employees have indeed holstered their weapons and walked away from a client in danger; few now doubt the sincerity of the ultimatum.

The upshot of this hard-nosed attitude is that USES is highly successful at keeping its clients alive despite extreme threats, and is equally good at securing an item or ship. Detachments are often hired by starports seeking to enhance security for a time or ships carrying highly valuable cargoes. USES' success rate is very good and most criminals know to seek easier pickings elsewhere. On the down side, a USES detachment is expensive and serves as an indicator that something or someone of very high value is in the area.

## VARELLI TRAINING SERVICES

Varelli Training Services (VTS) specialises in providing training and distance-learning packages to those without the capability to obtain them through conventional means. Much of what is available is academic, and follows a standardised format blatantly copied from one of the major university programmes. Although there are tests and examinations built into these packages they do not provide any recognised qualifications or accreditation, but are generally of good enough quality to enable a client to pass the relevant exams once the course is completed.

Not all of the VTS materials are quite so high-quality, however. A variety of teach-yourself programmes using holographic and visual instruction allow the user to learn (using the term rather loosely) anything from offroad driving to martial arts. Some of these programmes are fairly coherent – though that is not a guarantee of quality – whilst others seem to have been cobbled together out of bits and pieces found on the local datanet. The gaps (and there are many) in these programmes are gradually filled in with additional material, much of it filmed by VTS clients in return for a discount on some other learning package. Thus Travellers wishing to learn rock-climbing might obtain a self-instruction course from VTS in for a reduced price or even free, in return for filming a how-to segment on plasma gun maintenance or the care and feeding of exotic livestock.

In theory, VTS is building a storehouse of knowledge presented by those who have carried out the task first-hand. In practice the material is a morass of badly presented, misleading and sometimes downright dangerous information interspersed with the occasional political rant or personal attack on someone who has offended the 'expert'. Regular users of VTS materials will become familiar with the 'assertion wars' between various experts who spend more time frothing about why someone else is wrong than presenting useful material.

There is valuable information to be had from VTS though, along with a certain amount of entertainment. All materials need to be treated with caution however, especially the Everyone's Guide to Everything series. This supposedly compiles general knowledge that all Travellers should know. In practice, it combines incredibly detailed examinations of minutiae with sweeping-to-the-point-of-being-misleading generalisations about important topics. It is fun, but not to be relied upon.

# C H A P T E R - F O U R

# RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND PLACES TO VISIT

Many planets have unique attractions of one sort or another. These might be a reason for going there, or there could be something interesting to look at whilst Travellers are in port. People who have little to look at but the same six bulkheads for weeks at a time might be impressed by something really quite mundane, but there are everyday wonders waiting just beyond the starport gates. Those willing to travel farther afield might encounter something truly magnificent.

## AVUNA ICEFIELDS

The Avuna region is composed largely of blue-white ice, which is unusually clear. Some areas are green or reddish rather than blue-white, creating a glittering patchwork of reflected light that changes throughout the day with the angle of the sun. The ice has been sculpted into wild shapes by the action of wind and thawing, making a walk through the icefield a breath-taking experience.

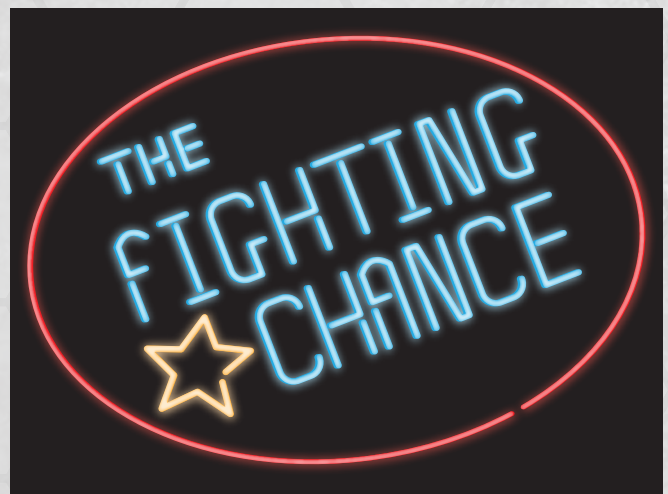
The Avuna Icefields are run as a resort, with access monitored and controlled by the world government. Large sections of the icefields are completely unspoiled and carefully monitored to avoid damage from too many visitors. Others are a little more commercialised, with lodges for visitors and a range of activities from ice-kiting to climbing in the nearby mountains. Activities tend to be rather robust, as might be expected from an extreme-environment resort, but in the lodges and the supporting amenities life is civilised enough for most tastes.

The resort is famous for its 'storm parties' where everyone has to get indoors whilst an ice storm rages outside. Winds are sufficiently strong that grav vehicles and even starships might be endangered, and anyone venturing outside risks being flayed by ice particles borne on powerful gusts. There are those who say it is tempting fate to try to live in such a place, and utter stupidity to treat it as a vacation destination. However, safety records are good and there is no shortage of visitors.

## THE FIGHTING CHANCE

The Fighting Chance is a venue for various forms of combat, as the name suggests. The original Fighting Chance was simply a bar with an arena in the corner where no-hold-barred bare-knuckle fights took place. That was long ago, however, and now the venue is a large complex with several such arenas as well as specialist combat areas.

The stock-in-trade of the Fighting Chance is, not surprisingly perhaps, violence. Unarmed combat between individuals is the commonest form of entertainment on offer, but the Fighting Chance caters to a variety of tastes. Gang fights were popular for a time, though currently they are out of fashion. The 'blood arenas' cater to armed combat, ranging from knives to exotic alien weapons or a miscellany of unlikely objects that fighters can grab and pummel one another with. For those with a more refined taste, formal sword and even pistol duels are held when there sufficiently skilled participants are present. Most arenas are – supposedly at least – designated non-lethal, but accidents do happen and fighters can be permanently injured or killed.



The Fighting Chance puts on a good show, and is actually quite classy despite its subject matter. Fighters are well taken care of and crowds are encouraged to be respectful. Despite this, the place has a rather poor reputation locally and there are always a few protestors hanging around making a nuisance of themselves. Those wanting to take part in a fight must go through a quite lengthy process including an assessment of their skill level and health as well as their suitability as fighters. Participants are turned away for psychological reasons as well as physical ones, with the result that almost everyone who steps into a Fighting Chance arena knows what they are doing and has a good reason to be there. That reason is usually to make money or to seek fame, but every fighter has their own story.

## THE FORESTS OF MYOKAI

The Forests are a take on the idea of having multiple ornamental gardens, each with its own theme, on the same site. The concept has been taken to an extreme, with artificial environment modification used to create large expanses of forest each with a unique environment. These range from cactus-like growth in semi-desert conditions through temperate and rain forest to arctic taiga, along with exotic types such as fungal and giant fern reservations. Some of these areas are dangerous to enter, and require sealed vehicles or suits.

Most of the reservations are kept as clear of cross-contamination as possible, but a few are deliberately mixed. Life here is a war between different invasive species, with the outcome under study by environmentalists and biologists from several universities. The operators of the forest complex are constantly on the lookout for specimens of plants and animals, and routinely commission collection expeditions ranging across the sector. Some of these can be quite hazardous; there are some very aggressive species within the forests of Myokai. These are normally kept to controlled sections of any given environment, but creatures can and do get out on occasion. Where possible, they are recaptured and quietly returned to their enclosures but these incidents are inevitable. Rather than reduce visitor numbers this seems to have increased them; many people seem to like the feeling of threat so long as they can also see the measures taken to keep them safe. As with other wild or hazardous environment attractions, there are those who think that the Myokai forests are a disaster waiting to happen. Others cite the possibility that an escape could lead to the destruction or at least wholesale forcible modification of the world's own ecosystem. In the meantime, visitors still come in their thousands.

## GLENRIOCH

Glenrioch is one of the most famous – notorious perhaps – golf courses in the known universe. It is entirely artificial, being constructed in a hollowed-out asteroid. The main course is a fairly conventional 18-hole setup and generally quite well regarded, but there are additional sections which attract comment – some of it very negative – from the golfing community. These areas have adjustable gravity, which can be increased or reduced, or even augmented with a sideways pull. Golfers can choose whether they want fixed gravity on each hole or a predictable fluctuation, and there is a form of extreme challenge match where players can win the right to alter the gravity on the next hole to their preference.

Naturally, Glenrioch is roundly condemned by purists, but there are still plenty of players willing to take on its unique challenges. The asteroid has its own small spaceport and accommodation, and the operators are savvy enough to provide plenty for non-golfers to do. Indeed, the retail centre is one of the best for many parsecs. Glenrioch is visited by many who have no interest in golf, including passengers from liners making a stopover for a few days as part of a stunningly expensive vacation package. Humbler folk often come by way of the freightliners and merchant ships that resupply the resort.





## THE JARMAINE MEMORIAL POINT TO POINT

The Jarmaine Memorial Point-to-Point is a race with no particular route requirement. There are several checkpoints that participants have to pass through, but they need not do so in any particular order. This permits the racers to select a route that suits their vehicle. The race is as much a social event as a sporting contest, making it a good place to meet new people, make contacts and generally have fun. There are those who take it very seriously, however.

The race takes place over a variety of terrain, with checkpoints several hundred kilometres apart. Participants may use almost any ground vehicle, but must use the same vehicle for the entire contest. Some favour speed, some offroad performance, others manoeuvrability. There is no one way to win the race, but vehicles that are too extreme in one category tend to encounter obstacles they cannot cross or get left behind by those with a wider range of capabilities. A significant segment of racers are not interested in winning so much as gaining notoriety for their fanciful vehicles or behaviour at parties. Many of these fame-seekers go on to become minor celebrities and gain sponsorship deals, whilst the winners may be forgotten by all but die-hard fans.

The Jarmaine Memorial is a huge spectacle, with dozens or sometimes hundreds of vehicles taking part. The workshops of serious teams or those testing out new vehicle concepts – or entering as a publicity stunt to sell their new model – are secretive places where everyone is fearful of espionage. Other teams host what is more or less a party on the move and could not care less if their secrets are revealed so long as it gains them publicity.

## THE MUSEUM OF CREATION

The Museum of Creation is a rather odd place. It is dedicated to all aspects of creation, from the cosmic to the artistic and biological. The showcase exhibit covers several ways the universe might have come into being, ranging from divine creation to physics as well as some additional hypotheses – not all of which are intended to be taken seriously. The exhibit traces the early development of the universe to the present day, presenting several astrophysical phenomena that challenge existing theories, and finally presenting a complex and at times rather baffling argument that all creation theories are ultimately the same story with different names for the ‘characters’. The idea that gods are the personification of physical laws and religious books tell the same story as science texts, just in different words, has prompted a certain amount of controversy but has simply increased visitor numbers.

Beyond the showcase exhibit the museum suddenly changes theme, and begins extolling the act of creation in technology, art, literature and biology. A fair amount of the museum is dedicated to the reproductive habits of various creatures, some of which are rather unusual, and there are entire galleries dedicated to great artists, inventors and the like. The focus is not so much on what they created as their influences and personality, and the universal search for the ‘spark of creation’ that inspired them.

The final exhibits attempt to pull together everything in the museum into a coherent whole, somehow linking the beginnings of the universe with the start of a life and the creation of a new device, piece of art or an idea. This section is distinctly strange and very metaphysical, but it does get people talking in the hugely expensive restaurant they pass through on the way out.



## THE RINGS OF WENNELIA

The gas giant Wennellia orbits in-system of the mainworld, quite close to its primary. It has a spectacular ring system, which is particularly impressive when viewed in the light of the nearby star. Trips to visit the rings are organised from the mainworld's Highport, for the most part using adapted merchant vessels whose cargo hold has been turned into a recreation facility.

The sightseeing trips are popular enough that some operators have begun offering extras including a chance to go outside – which requires a quick course in vacc suit operations for most people – and see the rings close up whilst standing on a platform extending from the ship's cargo bay. Allowing untrained people to do this has been criticised on safety grounds, but the tour operators tend to hire experienced personnel to supervise them. Indeed, many out-of-work Travellers have ended up shepherding tourists through the rings of Wennellia.

The passage through the rings takes place over a single day, with the round trip taking two more each side of the time spent on-station. Guests are kept entertained during this period by the crew or interactions with one another. Since the sightseeing cruises are highly expensive they tend to attract wealthy clients, who are in turn targeted by scam artists, gold-diggers and individuals who have a venture that needs funding. It has been suggested that at some point the entire complement of a cruise will be made up of people there to scam or otherwise get money from others, and the results might be more entertaining than any vid show.

## THE RUINS AT EVCLEI

The ruined city at Evclei was built by humans, though in great antiquity. Today, a small settlement frequented mainly by archaeologists and sightseers lies beside the once-great city, which is largely buried in the undergrowth. Segments have been unearthed, and some parts have been turned into a sort of 'living museum' of both archaeology and what is now known about the people of the city. However, there are digs ongoing at several points and not all of them are accessible.

One reason for this is that the human city at Evclei is thought to have been built on a much older site. It is not clear who the original builders were; some claim it was early humans, some that it was an ancient alien civilisation. Many of the artefacts brought out of the site are incomprehensible, supporting the theory of an alien intelligence. However, there are those who insist they are just 'ceremonial objects from a weird culture' and while interesting are nothing to get excited about.

As a result of a vid programme some years ago, there is a persistent rumour that the site is haunted or that some remnant of the original builders remains. Parties ranging from ghost-hunter teams engaged in an illegal search for artefacts can also be encountered in the site. Many of the ghost-hunters (and those pretending to be ghost-hunters) congregate on the fringes of the modern settlement where their arguments about who has seen what provide a source of entertainment for sceptics.

Despite the general rejection of the Ghosts of Evclei theory, there is a rather odd ambience to the ruins which some visitors find disturbing. The surviving buildings are a little too close together and the angles are just wrong. Not geometry-defyingly wrong, but not the way visitors expect them to be. It is possible that the builders were incompetent or prone to whimsical deviations from the norm, but no adequate explanation has ever been found for the strangely crooked walls of Evclei. Thus reputable scientists work here while amateur ghost-hunters film themselves running while screaming from shadows and oddly shaped walls. The contrast itself is quite interesting to observe, even for those with no interest in ancient cities.