

TRAVELLER

MARCHES ADVENTURE 2 : MISSION TO MITHRIL



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

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T R A V E L L E R INTRODUCTION

This adventure takes place on the world of Mithril, in Sword Worlds subsector of the Spinward Marches. It could be transplanted elsewhere without undue difficulty, with Mithril replaced by any cold, low-population frontier world. The mission requires the use of a starship to reach Mithril, but once there the Travellers will require only ground transportation.

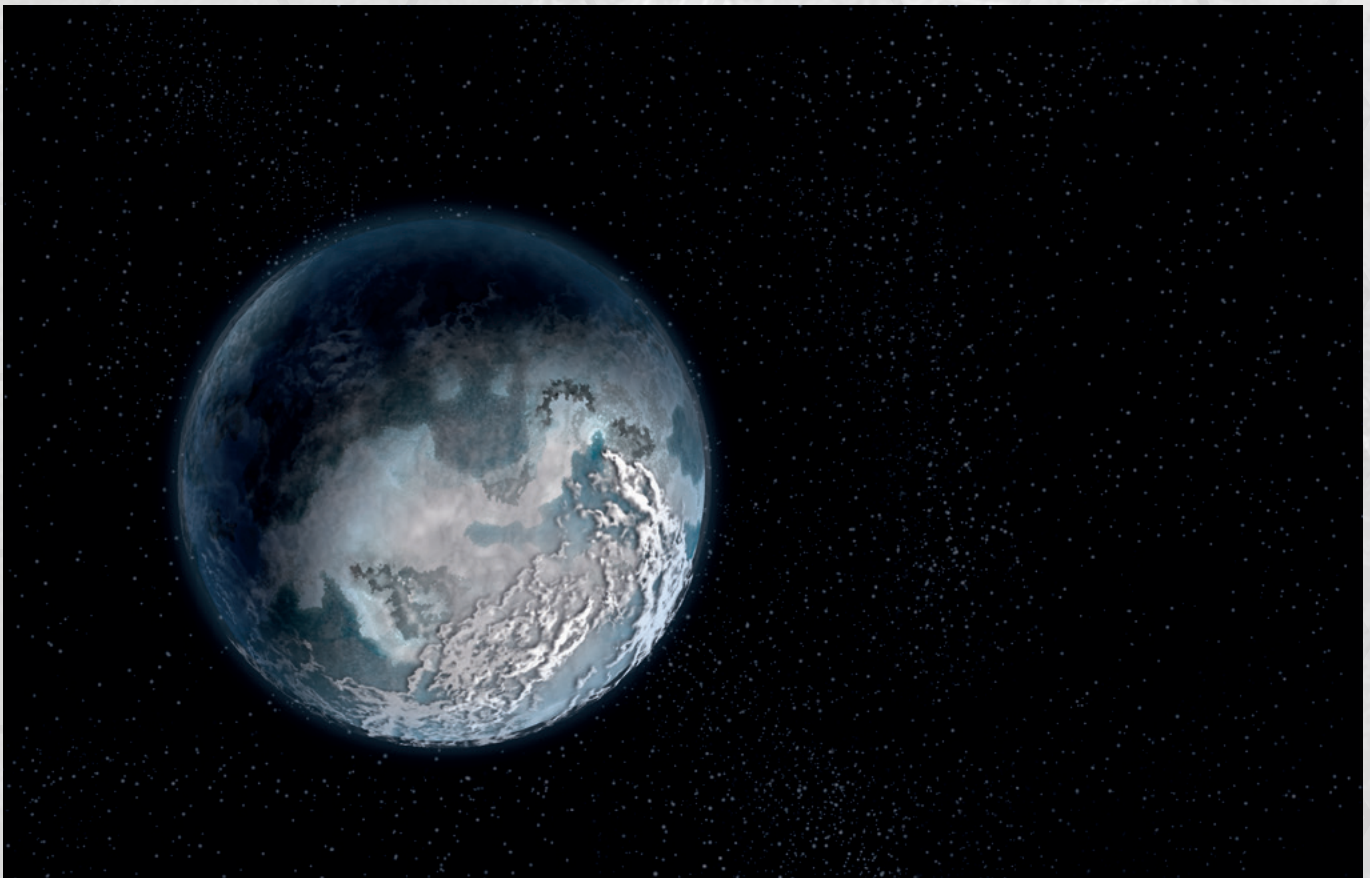
Mission to Mithril is in part homage to the Classic Traveller adventure, *Mission on Mithril*, and in some ways a sequel. No previous knowledge of that adventure is required. Almost any group of Travellers will be suitable for this adventure, though outdoors skills such as Recon and Survival will be highly useful, as will the ability to drive an ATV and fight.

In *Mission on Mithril*, the Travellers land at Mithril's rudimentary starport, only to find their vessel disabled. The base is strangely empty. As the Travellers explore, they discover there may be survivors of whatever

happened at the port. A distant distress beacon is detected, but reaching it requires an overland trek. Having located the survivors, the Travellers discover their problems are only just beginning...

SETTING UP & RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The Travellers require a reason to go to Mithril. More than likely, the Travellers will be making a routine stopover on the way to somewhere more interesting. The reason for the visit is not relevant to the adventure, so the referee has plenty of options if this adventure is being inserted into an ongoing campaign. If the referee desires, the Travellers might be given a cargo to deliver to somewhere that requires passing through Mithril. All that is necessary is for the Travellers to approach what passes for a starport on Mithril, at which point the events of the adventure will begin to unfold.



REFEREE'S INFORMATION

The following information is for the use of the referee. How much of it is made available to the Travellers, and in what manner, is for the referee to decide. Much of this data is commonly known or available through data terminals, info feeds to Travellers' comms, and so forth. However, the commonly available version may be incomplete, dumbed-down, or wildly inaccurate for all manner of reasons. The referee has the whole story; if the Travellers want accurate information they may have to search for it.

SWORD WORLDS SUBSECTOR

This subsector is dominated by the Sword Worlds Confederation, with only a handful of worlds not belonging to the Confederation. These are Imperial possessions, some separated from Imperial territory by Confederation systems. The generally anti-Imperial stance of the Confederation, along with its rather vigorous internal politics, creates an uneasy border region.

Four systems (Iron, Bronze, Mithril and Steel) are claimed by the Sword Worlds Confederation as 'reserve worlds' but are not members of the Confederation as they have no indigenous population. Largely undeveloped and unexplored, the reserve worlds have a token Sword Worlder presence and are occasionally patrolled by naval vessels. Attitudes to Imperial starships, which sometimes pass through from Lunion subsector to District 268 or Five Sisters, vary considerably depending on which factions are in power within the Sword Worlds. Polite hostility is not uncommon, and it is rare that Imperial visitors feel welcome on any Confederation world.

However, despite being on opposite sides in the occasional war, the Sword Worlds and Imperium are not enemies. Tension is normal, incidents not uncommon, but for the most part conflict is restricted to harassment of merchant vessels and a general policy of making outsiders feel unwelcome. As a result, there is little Imperial traffic into or through the Sword Worlds subsector, apart from a few shipping companies who have the right contacts on both sides of the border.

Some merchant factors (in both the Sword Worlds Confederation and Imperium) are actively on the lookout for crews willing to undertake trans-border work. In reality it is not risky, but many captains consider any possibility of harassment to be too much.

The Sword Worlds Confederation itself is a very loose organisation, with its member worlds frequently at odds (and sometimes even at war) with one another. Naval and military assets encountered, especially around the reserve worlds, tend to be in service to the Confederation as a whole rather than any of its member states, but even so they are on loan from one of those states and thus as embroiled in its politics as anyone else. It is not always possible to predict exactly what the attitude of a given ship captain or port director might be.

MITHRIL

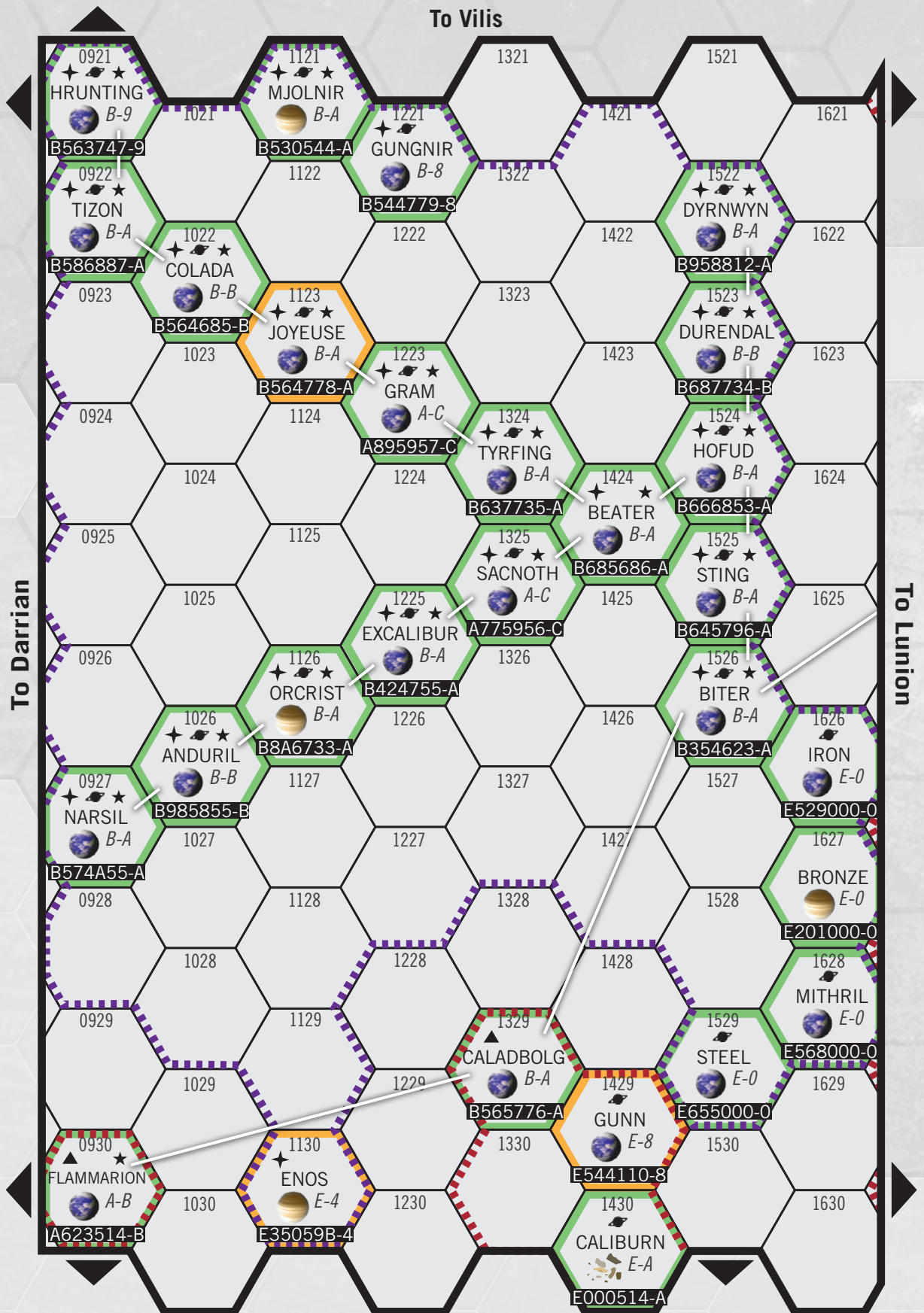
Mithril is a cold but habitable world orbiting an F4 V star along with six terrestrial (rocky) planets and one gas giant. No other bodies in the system are known to be inhabited, and Mithril itself has no official population though it does have a small Sword Worlds Confederation outpost maintained mainly to assert territorial rights.

Mithril's surface is largely covered with ice. Its extensive oceans are frozen at the poles, with large ice caps, and have other areas which are at most semi-liquid. Nearer the equator the water is a little above freezing, but icebergs are not uncommon in any region. Similarly, much of the land is also covered in deep snow or ice.

Travellers tend to evolve shorthand that conveys necessary information. Often vague, generally unscientific and sometimes quite insulting, many of these terms have nonetheless found their way into common speech and whilst planetologists may cringe at the terms, Travellers find them useful. The terrain of Mithril is generally subdivided into four unofficial types.

Arctic Zones: Some areas of Mithril are permanently under arctic conditions. Their seas support a variety of plant life, fish, crustaceans and the like, with a few land-dwelling species, but for the most part the extensive arctic zones of Mithril have very little life on land.

THE SWORD WORLDS SUBSECTOR



- Gas Giant
- Starport Class & Tech Level
- Scout Base
- Naval Base
- Military Base

To District 268

- Secure System
- Amber Zone
- Red Zone
- X-boat Route

- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)
- Asteroids
- Imperium Border
- Sword world Confed. Border

Ice Zones: Ice zones are subject to thick ice, covering land or sea. Occasionally, conditions warm up sufficiently that the ice breaks up creating crevasses, icebergs and other hazards, but ice zones are very rarely clear of ice – and never for long. Some ice zones are extensive; others, such as glaciers, are relatively small. Ice zones tend to have more life on land than arctic zones, due to the availability of food under the ice or in more hospitable nearby regions.

Snow Zones: Snow zones are warm enough that plants can grow, at least for short periods. Snowfall is frequent, and snow can lie deeply at times. The ground may be frozen much of the time, though there are sheltered areas that remain above freezing more or less permanently. Thick ice can be encountered in a snow zone, but it is not the primary terrain.

Rock Zone: Mountains, badlands and areas where there are significant amounts of bare rock are imaginatively known as rock zones. Temperature conditions can vary, which will determine whether there is much life present. Many rocky areas have a considerable amount of plant life, especially on the sheltered sides of mountains or in gaps between large boulders.

THE SWORD WORLDER OUTPOST

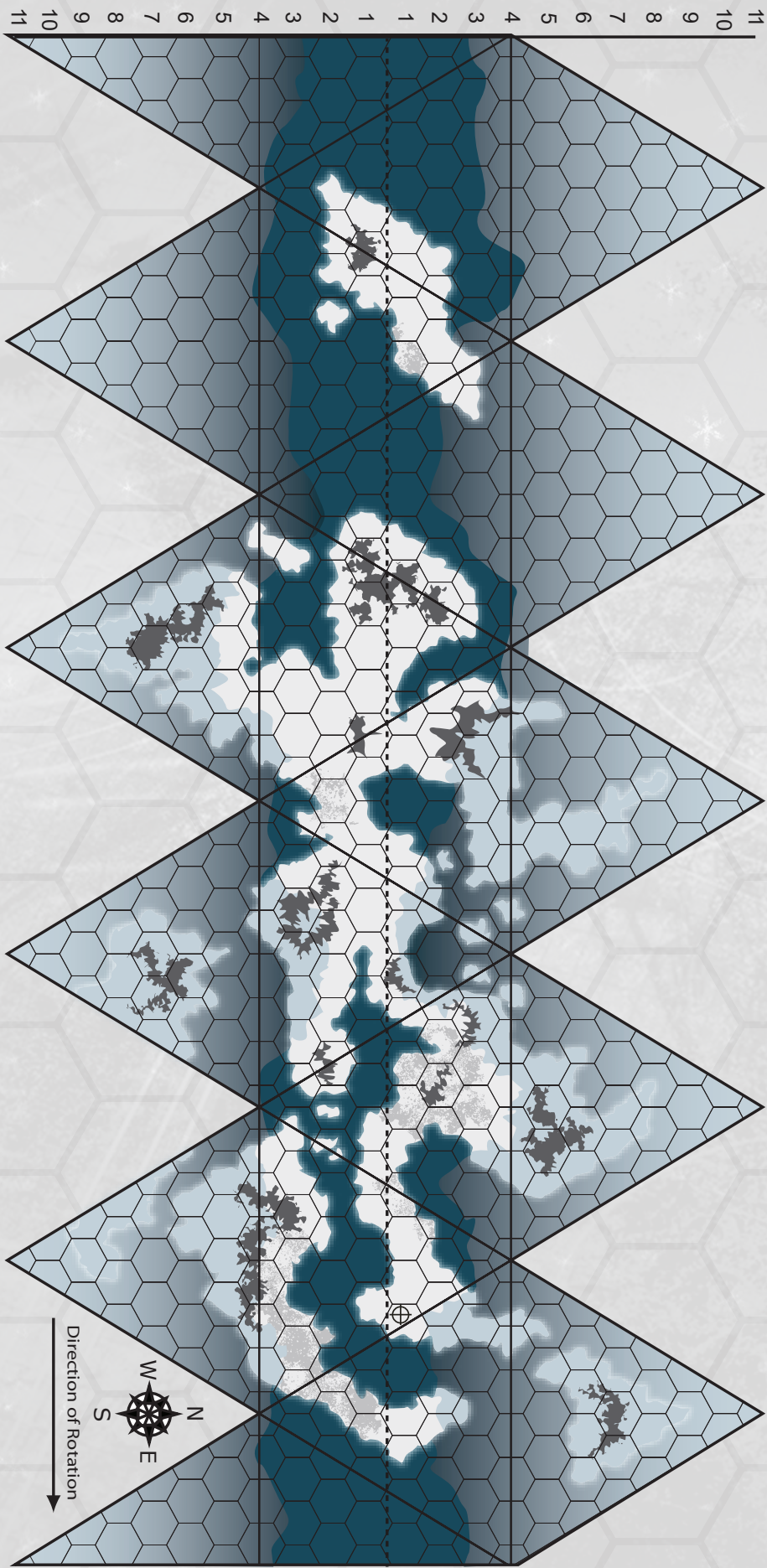
Mithril is officially designated as possessing a Class E starport – little more than a marked landing area. This is accurate, but the presence of the outpost provides visiting starships with minimal services if the staff are friendly to them. Sword Worlder vessels are usually welcome, as well as some independent trade ships that pass through from time to time. Imperial-registered ships are generally directed to the system's gas giant for refuelling, or granted grudging permission to land and take on water and ice, to be internally converted to fuel. These vessels are then pointedly ignored.

Some Imperial ships receive a warmer welcome at Mithril, usually due to previously-established good relations or possession of a transponder code that indicates a friendly vessel. There is little trade to be had at Mithril; at least, not in the volumes that keep a starship flying. However, the outpost staff will buy small luxuries and items, so there is sometimes a little money to be made.

Name	Location	Bases	Profile	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Gas Giants
Anduril	1026	M N	B985855-B	Ri		G
Beater	1424	M N	B685686-A	Ag, Ni, Ga, Ri		G
Biter	1526	M N	B354623-A	Ag, Ni		G
Bronze	1627		E201000-O	Ba, Ie, Va		
Caladbolg	1329	S	B565776-A	Ag, Ri		
Caliburn	1430		E000514-A	As, Ni, Va		
Colada	1022	M N	B564685-B	Ag, Ni, Ri		G
Durendal	1523	M N	B687734-B	Ag, Ga, Ri		G
Dyrnwyn	1522	M N	B958812-A			G
Enos	1130	M	E35059B-4	De, Ni, Po	A	
Excalibur	1225	M N	B424755-A			G
Flammarion	930	N WS	A623514-B	Po, Ni		
Gram	1223	M N	A895957-C	Hi, In		G
Gungnir	1221	M	B544779-8	Ag		G
Gunn	1429		E544110-8	Lo	A	G
Hofud	1524	M N	B666853-A	Ga, Ri		G
Hrunting	921	M N	B563747-9	Ri		G
Iron	1626		E529000-O	Ba		G
Joyeuse	1123	M N	B564778-A	Ag, Ri	A	G
Mithril	1628		E568000-O	Ba		G
Mjolnir	1121	M N	B530544-A	De, Ni, Po		G
Narsil	927	M N	B574A55-A	Hi, In		G
Orcrist	1126	M N	B8A6733-A			G
Sacnoth	1325	M N	A775956-C	Hi, In		G
Steel	1529		E655000-O	Ba, Ga		G
Sting	1525	M N	B645796-A	Ag		
Tizon	922	M N	B586887-A	Ri		G
Tyrfing	1324	M N	B637735-A	Ie		G

NAME: Mithril

UWP: E568000-0



- City
- Starport
- Mining
- Farming
- Industry
- Power Plant
- Military

Hex Scale

700 Km

World Gravity

0.45 G

Mean Equatorial Temp

-10° C

The outpost consists of an administration building, reactor shed, accommodation block and vehicle garage. It can house up to twelve people with ease, but normally has a staff of five. They are bored most of the time, with little more to do than to bulldoze snow off the landing area in the ATV and monitor automated equipment on the off-chance a vessel comes through. The staff have secondary duties connected with weather monitoring and collecting data on Mithril's soil, water, air and wildlife. This is mostly scientific make-work, creating a body of knowledge that might some day be useful to settlers or colony planners but is of little importance today.

The outpost is not a military base, though the personnel assigned there are armed and trained to handle their weapons. The installation is sovereign Sword Worlds Confederation territory (as is the whole planet) and an attack upon it would be an act of war. One reason for the refusal to accept many ships is that the outpost is simply not in a position to conduct much business with outsiders, especially badly behaved ones. It is simpler to shut the doors than enforce any sort of law and order, and less disruptive of routine.

Occasionally the outpost plays host to people not assigned there, usually a party of scientists or explorers engaged in work connected with the eventual colonisation of Mithril. It is very rare for two such groups to be on-planet at the same time, so the spare capacity of the accommodation block usually suffices. At present, the installation is hosting a family of four visitors. The parents are explorers and their children are assisting them. This party conducted a range of weather and soil experiments at the port during the first few weeks of their stay, and recently headed into a remote part of the planet to investigate points of interest.

THE INCIDENT

There is, or rather was, another guest at the port. This individual came on a ship out of the Imperium and quietly disembarked, remaining unofficially at the port to await a ship to any port deeper in the Confederation. He did not tell the port staff his business, and they did not ask as he was carrying the identification of a diplomatic courier. The fact that a courier was crossing the border quietly suggested skulduggery was afoot, but the port staff had seen this sort of thing before and were not concerned.

Perhaps they should have been. The courier was indeed what they suspected; an intelligence officer bringing back reports and observations from his time in the Imperium. There was nothing illegal about any this, not as such. Discreet observation of conditions along the border are part of the constant intelligence and counter-intelligence game played by the Imperium and its neighbours. Part of the game is not letting the

opposition know what has been reported and what has not, so information is often carried by personnel crossing the border 'on the quiet'.

The courier was carrying reports on the movement of Imperial commercial and naval assets among the worlds of the Lunion Shield; the strategically critical star systems just across the border. Knowing whether the Imperium is in a position to defend its assets in that region, and what assets are present, is vital to the Sword Worlders' strategic planning. The Imperials do the same thing to the Confederation, after all.

The Imperial authorities did not know about this courier and would not have cared much if they had. Disrupting information flow to the opposition is always worthwhile, but there was nothing going on worth taking risks over. However, not everyone thought so. Ironically, it was not the Imperial authorities that detected the information transfer, but a consortium of merchants engaged in shady trans-border shipping. Worried that their activities might be brought to light, they decided to intercept the courier.

The first attempt failed, but caused the courier to miss his pickup by a routine resupply ship coming through Mithril. Arriving after it left and forced to wait for the next ship, he was still present when an independent far trader – the *E-a-taka Wasab*, registered out of Tarsus in District 268. Despite being named in the language of the Bwaps, *E-a-taka Wasab* was crewed by humans. She was not known at the port, so was brusquely directed to stick a hose in the snow for fuel and subsequently ignored.

E-a-taka Wasab refuelled then blasted the front doors off the accommodation block with a low-powered shot from her laser turret. Armed personnel stormed the installation, catching the three Sword Worlders and courier who were present by surprise; the Sword Worlders put up a creditable fight but were quickly overwhelmed and shown no mercy. The wounded courier was taken aboard the ship along with his data and notes, and *E-a-taka Wasab* took off.

One of the Sword Worlders at the installation had a background in military electronics, and had been working on a personal project to alleviate the boredom of her posting. This was an electromagnetic pulse device designed specifically to disrupt gravitic lifters of the sort used by vehicles and starships. She managed to arm the device before she was killed, but its setup sequence was incomplete when *E-a-taka Wasab* left Mithril. The device is now armed and charged, with no-one to turn it off. It will be triggered by the first set of gravitic lifters that pass over the landing field; i.e. the next starship that touches down.

THE SURVIVORS

Two of the base personnel were out in the field at the time of the attack, assigned to assist the family of scientists currently on-planet. This mostly meant flying them around in the installation's air/raft or making supply runs back to the port. They were far enough away when the attack occurred that they were not detected, and upon hearing a distress call from the port, they attempted to rush back to help. This went awry in two ways.

The family were opposed to being abandoned in the field and argued vigorously against the idea, to the point where the father came to blows with one of the base personnel. In the resulting chaos, he made a serious piloting error and ran the air/raft into a rock outcrop on takeoff. Believing it still flyable, the two Sword Worlders raced homewards to help their comrades, only to come down hard in a region of rocky hills. They are still alive, though injured.

The family are also still alive, though they are stuck in the far outback of a world whose human population was more or less halved by gunshots at the port. They are resourceful people, and trying to survive as best they can, but there is a limit to how long they will manage in the harsh conditions of Mithril.

IMPERIAL ATTITUDES TO SWORD WORLDERS

The attitude of many Imperial citizens to the Sword Worlders is one of unintentional prejudice. This is fed by entertainment shows that keep re-using various rather inaccurate tropes when they portray the Sword Worlders. As a result, many Imperials expect Sword Worlders to behave like sexist cartoon Vikings, in some cases down to the horned helmets and mead-filled drinking horns.

In reality, the Sword Worlders are proud of and heavily influenced by the spiritual roots of their culture, which is based on the values of archaic North Europeans and particularly Icelandic culture. Resourcefulness, independence and personal integrity are highly valued, and there are stronger concepts of male and female roles than in most other starfaring societies (the Aslan are a notable and far more extreme example). Sword Worlder culture holds that males and females are disposed towards different strengths, and this natural order of things creates a strong partnership that should not be lightly ignored.

Put simply, to the average Sword Worlder it is obvious that men should undertake most tasks that take place outside the home, and that women should run the household. Since the men must live in that household, there are various opinions about who actually wields the power in Sword Worlder society. The typical Sword Worlder finds it questionable that men from other cultures do not take 'proper care' of their women, and try to force them into roles unnatural for them. The more egalitarian Imperials see this viewpoint as archaic, chauvinistic and rather silly.

Sword Worlders do not see themselves as sexist, and resent the label. They feel that each person has a natural role that plays to their strengths, as determined by gender, and that this is not sexist; it is merely common sense. Many Imperials think this means women are second-class citizens in Sword Worlder society, and are surprised to see strong women working alongside men in many fields.

The other common expectation is partially true. Sword Worlders do tend to have an accent even when speaking Anglic, and are prone to use traditional figures of speech which supposedly come from ancient Icelandic or Norse sayings. However, it is far more common for a Sword Worlder to refer to a starship as a starship than a 'mighty star-steed', though some play to that stereotype just for the fun of it.

Some stereotypes are true, at least to a degree. Sword Worlders are, on the whole, proud and independent. They enjoy competition and relish the respect of those they feel are worthy of their own. Complaining all the time, being incompetent or cowardly are seen as personality defects as well as weaknesses, but stupid recklessness is also poorly regarded. Sword Worlders are mistrustful of over-complexity in devices or plans, preferring straightforward solutions.

Ease of use is more important than advanced functionality, causing many Sword Worlders to dismiss fragile and complex devices as unreliable – and have little respect for those who rely upon them. This attitude can be summed up as 'grav vehicles beat walking, but the passenger who doesn't bring along their boots is a fool.'

Overall, most Imperials first discover the Sword Worlders are a lot more like them than they imagined, then over time realise that there are indeed some great differences between Sword World and Imperium culture. A common reaction to first encounters with Sword Worlders is 'I was surprised to find they're just like us... then I found out they're not. But not in the ways you'd expect.'

C H A P T E R - T W O

OVERVIEW

Mission to Mithril has three main components; an investigation of the deserted starport, an arduous overland trek to the site of a distress beacon, and the return to the starport. The adventure is very much about the interaction of the Travellers with the world around them; they must undertake an overland journey, and this is one case where the journey is more important than arrival. Along the way, the Travellers must solve a variety of problems, few of which can be dealt with by bribery or gunplay. For much of the adventure, there is no-one outside the Travellers' group to interact with.

The referee has a chance to show the Travellers the wonders of an alien world – and some of its dangers. It could be possible to reduce the journey to a series of checks, but this would miss many of the opportunities for adventure along the way. The Travellers have a destination to reach and may be impatient to do so, but there is a world to be experienced. The obstacles are not delays to be shoved aside with the right check; they *are* the adventure.

Eventually the Travellers will reach the beacon and find out at least some of what happened at the starport. They will also discover that critical components they need to fix their starship are available but must be found by locating a crashed air/raft. This leads the Travellers to the second group of survivors, after which they will need to return to the starport. The journey back will be slightly different to the outward trip as it involves interactions with the survivors, which may not all be amicable.

Travellers being what they are, it is likely that the referee will be presented with all manner of unexpected incidents and self-inflicted setbacks. The main opposition to the Travellers is a harsh world where stupidity or bad luck can be fatal. On the other hand, these conditions have led to some unique local plants, creatures and phenomena which might spark the Travellers' interest, and it might be that finding out more about Mithril becomes a priority for the Travellers. The referee should not fall into the trap of letting the Travellers dash from one encounter or plot point to the next in the manner of a flow chart. Instead, the referee should show the Travellers the world they are on and let them experience it up close and personal.



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

CONDITIONS ON MITHRIL

Mithril is not a friendly or welcoming world, though it is nothing like as hostile as the typical airless rockball or toxic-atmosphere moon. To survive on Mithril, humans need heat and food, neither of which the world supplies in any great quantity, but they have air and water provided for them. There are far worse places to be marooned.

The equatorial area of Mithril, where the starport is located, is mostly a snow zone, with large areas of rock zones and some ice zones, mostly in the form of glaciers. There is also a fair amount of open sea, most of which is clear of pack ice. Large icebergs can still be encountered there, however.

Conditions in the equatorial area can be harsh, but nowhere near as bad as elsewhere. The temperature sometimes goes above freezing for several days at a time, which results in an explosion of plant growth. Animals usually emerge soon afterward, cramming what might normally be months' or years' worth of activity into a few short days.

Rainfall is rare in the equatorial area, though sleet is almost as common as snow. Hailstorms are not infrequent, and occasionally the region will be swept by tremendous storms characterised by huge hailstones and repeated lightning strikes. A Traveller equipped with good cold weather clothing can operate outdoors for an extended period with only mild discomfort, providing somewhere warm and dry is available, with plenty of food.

The plant and animal life of Mithril is at best unpleasant to eat, and can make some Travellers mildly unwell. There is little nutrition to be gained from plant life, even when processed into ration bars or porridge by a survival still. Animals and fish provide a little more sustenance if carefully prepared or processed, but overall a human cannot survive for long by hunting or foraging, even in an area with relatively abundant life.

WEATHER

Weather in the equatorial area is moderate compared to the arctic zones, where freezing windstorms can blow for weeks on end. Extremes of weather – storms at one end and warm conditions at the other – are uncommon, with most days cloudy and sleet or snow falling at intervals throughout the day. A weather category is used to indicate the prevailing conditions on any given day.

Warm: The temperature is well above freezing, around 4-8° C. Rarely, a hot spell takes the temperature above 10°, but this is short-lived and only occurs once every couple of years. During a warm period, there will be some melting of thinner ice, but these conditions rarely last long enough to affect thick pack ice. During a warm spell, the phenomenon of the Ephemeral Glade (see page 21) is likely to take place. Warm days are quite overcast, and may see some rain or sleet.

Cool: Cool conditions would be considered cold on most planets, but for Mithril any day above freezing is a good one. On a cool day, the temperature typically hovers around 0-4°. An Ephemeral Glade is possible in areas with thin snow cover and snowfall or hail is also likely but intermittent.

Cold: The average temperature in Mithril's equatorial zone is around -10°. A cold day sees temperatures around this average, ranging a few degrees either side. Snowfall or hail is common, and can last for several hours.

Very Cold: Very cold for Mithril means temperatures in the -20° to -40° range, averaging around -30° C. This is too cold for much snowfall unless a storm blows it into the area.

Extremely Cold: Extremely cold refers to temperatures of -50° and below. These conditions are uncommon in the equatorial area but near-constant in arctic regions. Snowfall is unlikely unless a storm moves it, but strong winds are common and can carry small ice particles which are deposited on any surface they strike.

STORMS AND PRECIPITATION

Storms can occur in any temperature conditions. To determine the possibility of a storm, the referee should roll 2D, adding DM+1 for every day since the last major storm. A result of 7+ indicates there is significant precipitation that day (rain in a warm period, sleet or hail if cool, snow or hail if colder conditions prevail). A result of 13+ indicates a serious storm.

A storm will last 2D hours and is characterised by strong gusty winds that blow snow into deep drifts, driving hail or snow, and heavy precipitation that reduces visibility to almost nothing. Driving in these conditions is inadvisable – an ATV can be blown sideways on ice and might even be tipped over by an extreme gust. Moving around outside on foot is also highly dangerous. There is a 1 in 6 chance that the storm will be accompanied by spectacular lightning.

To determine the weather conditions each day, the referee should throw 2D and consult the Weather Conditions table.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

2D	Result
2 or less	Extremely Cold
3-5	Very Cold
6-9	Cold
10-11	Cool
12+	Warm

Apply the following DMs:

Snow Zone:	Ignore all other DMs
Ice Zone:	-2
Arctic Zone:	-4
Storm Occurred Yesterday:	-4

It is possible for the temperature to suddenly rise by more than one category. This is accompanied by thawing and cracking of surface ice which can make conditions even more hazardous. A large change the other way makes a storm likely; roll 2D, on 8+ a storm occurs the next day.



MITHRIL DOWNPORT

Nothing seems out of the ordinary as the Travellers' ship approaches Mithril Downport. There is no message of welcome, just an automated beacon informing incoming vessels that they are permitted to land at the port but not granted clearance to enter the installation or travel on the planetary surface. Vessels can take on fuel by melting snow, and those who want anything else are advised to file a request with the port director's automated message system. If the Travellers do this, they get an automatic response but no action, for reasons that will soon become apparent.

Mithril is predominantly grey-white as far as the eye can see, and the Travellers may be moved to speculate that perhaps this is the origin of its name. The port is in a Snow Zone, so depending on the temperature there might be anything from a light dusting to a metre-deep pack of snow with huge drifts. The sky overhead is cloudy with the threat of yet more snow.

As the Travellers make their landing, some may note there are no signs of life at the port installation, though there is power; lights are on and a dish rotates endlessly on the roof. Looking more closely, the Travellers realise there is something odd about one of the four buildings. Its outer snow-screen, a light framework designed to stop snow drifting in front of its entrance, is in place making it difficult to see the actual doors, but it becomes clear the screen is damaged. Heat scoring suggests intense energy, such as a laser weapon.

Before the Travellers can act upon this information, the ship's instruments spike and it drops the last metre onto the landing field, hitting hard and shaking the Travellers up. Loose objects tumble to the floor, and for a moment the lights go dim. Any attempt to take off again fails; the ship's drive and lifters are simply not responding.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Travellers' ship has suffered damage, but it is mostly cosmetic. Lighter fittings may be dented, and anything not properly secured has at least been rearranged. The landing gear has taken a pounding but should have been able to withstand the shock. All the same, it needs inspection. Power and most significant functions are still online, though there are signs that an overload has occurred and fried a few circuits. The only system with critical damage is the drive.

Inspection of the drive reveals the control circuits are intact and working, but the gravitic lifters and drive are inoperable. The fault is presumably within the systems themselves, necessitating a crawl into the inspection spaces. There, an ominous smell of burning circuitry leads to the gravitic systems' governor circuits. All of them have been overloaded by a power surge generated by feedback in the gravitic lifters themselves. Something like this could happen in one system because of malfunction – though that is still very unlikely – but for every single governor to be overloaded at once there must be an outside cause.

A replay of sensor data from the landing indicates there was an electromagnetic pulse just as the ship touched down. It was on a narrow frequency and apparently designed specifically to interfere with gravitic systems. The pulse originated somewhere nearby, but it is not possible to pin down the precise location.

There are no footprints or signs of vehicles, starships or any other form of traffic to and from the port installation, but it has snowed recently which would cover any tracks. Nobody is moving in the port; the Travellers do not seem to be under attack.

The damage is not repairable with the equipment and spares the Travellers have to hand. They are stuck on the landing pad until they repair their ship or another vessel comes by. The latter might not be for weeks. The only course of action seems to be to investigate the downport.

INVESTIGATING THE DOWNPORT

The port installation consists of four buildings with a perimeter fence around them. It is not clear what the fence is designed to keep out; it is a simple wire barrier without barbs or heavy posts, and seems to have been erected mainly to delineate the installation. There is no gate, just a gap wide enough to drive a couple of ATVs through side by side. A road of sorts runs the short distance from the landing pad to the installation, and about 150m past before stopping abruptly. Whatever the road was intended to lead to was never built; today there is a large pit near the end of it, which is used to dispose of large objects that would otherwise clutter the

installation. The road is of the same crushed-and-fused stone as the landing pad, a common building material used by most advanced cultures throughout Charted Space.

The installation consists of four drab, blocky buildings with thick windows covered by storm shutters, all closed. Doors are equally thick and well insulated, and protected by an overhang of the roof with a light fabric snow screen extending to the ground.

At the time the Travellers land, there is a small fire burning within the reactor building and an alarm sounds for a few minutes as the fire suppression system is activated. The installation is silent and without mains power for about four minutes after the EMP device goes off, after which the reactor automatically comes back online. The Travellers might be too busy with their own problems to notice this.

The Vehicle Garage

This is a windowless brick-shaped structure with a large access door on the front and smaller personnel entrance at the side nearest the accommodation block. The doors are shut and it is in darkness, but the lights will come on automatically if someone enters. The building has a heating system, which is run at low level just to keep the vehicles from freezing up.

The garage has a cradle for an air/raft – the vehicle is not present – and an all-terrain vehicle is parked beside it. The ATV (see page 38) is functional and unlocked. The keys – actually a data storage device with a finger grip, giving the impression of a key – are in the driver's access slot. Clearly the installation staff preferred to be able to use the vehicle at a moment's notice rather than having it secure. The Travellers may wonder why, but there is no big secret here – the ATV was mainly used as a bulldozer to clear snow from the landing area.



Anyone with a background in starship engineering or grav vehicle operations will realise that an air/raft has similar governor circuitry to a starship, just less of it. Finding the missing air/raft will enable the Travellers to get their ship off the ground and back to a port where a full set of spares is available.

Racks at the back of the garage contain maintenance tools for the ATV, along with an assortment of manual tools such as snow shovels. Most are in their racks and have seen little use.

There are no signs of combat within the garage; the attackers merely made sure the building was empty.

The Reactor Shed

The reactor 'shed' is a very solid building with thick walls and no windows. It has a single entrance, a heavy door which is closed. Within is a compact fusion reactor adapted from a standard Sword Worlder design that normally powers small starships. The reactor's fuel reserves are contained in a series of large tanks under the landing pad, connected by underground pipes. These tanks also provide fuel to passing starships and contain enough processed fuel to run the reactor for years.

Additional fuel is normally obtained by way of smaller pipes running out from the landing pad to artificially constructed dips in the ground. These are not obvious when covered with snow, but will show up on thermal sensors as warm spots. Slight heating in these areas, caused by low-powered dispersed elements, causes melting snow to run down the dip and be collected in a small tank just underground. It is then pumped through the purifier (also under the landing area) and stored as liquid hydrogen ready for use. In periods of high demand, often additional snow could be bulldozed onto the collection points and heated more quickly to create a considerable volume of water which is then cracked into hydrogen and oxygen, but this has never been needed.

The reactor shed contains a small electronics workshop, which is in complete disarray. It looks like it has been ransacked, but investigation will reveal it has merely been used to store, dismantle and fiddle with every piece of scrap electronics the base staff could find. This took place over a lengthy period, and there are several parts of half-built devices lying around. It was here that the EMP device was constructed, and the presence of several heavy-duty coils, all of them misaligned or damaged in some way, will give a clue that someone was building some kind of electromagnetic device if a Difficult (10+) Electronics or Average (8+) Engineer check (INT) is made.

By the time the Travellers enter the reactor shed, it is likely that the power will be back on and the fire out. It was caused by the detonation of the EMP device which has crippled the Travellers' gravitic lifters. The remains of the device itself can be found in a corner of the electronics workshop. Its detonation was electromagnetic rather than explosive and has not caused a blast effect, but it did become hot enough to melt itself and cause the small fire. The EMP affected the reactor only a little, causing a short shutdown and automatic reset, but has destroyed nearby electronics. None of the civilian electronic devices under repair in the workshop are salvageable, but shielded electronics will be untouched.

The Administration Building

The administration building follows the same general design as the other structures; thick-walled and blocky. There is a small vestibule, intended to reduce heat loss and provide somewhere to leave outdoor clothing. Beyond the entryway, the building contains four offices, two of which look like they have rarely if ever been used, a communications suite, an administrative centre with far too many desks for such a small installation, and two secure storage areas.

The Vestibule is a small chamber with racks for coats and a couple of snow shovels. It would be unremarkable under most circumstances, but there is a lingering smell of solvent-based cleaning products and an odd reddish stain here and there. It appears that someone has cleaned up quite a lot of blood here, and there are a couple of bullets embedded in the row of parkas hanging down the wall. They are too flattened to identify.

The Offices are very small, with little more than a workstation and a few shelves. One was routinely used by the port warden and another by whoever was on duty when he was not. The other two have only been used occasionally. The port's records are intact and can be accessed from any of these terminals, but require an authorisation code. If the Travellers can hack the terminals with a Very Difficult (12+) Electronics (computers) check (2D x 10 minutes, INT), they will be able to view the (very sparse) shipping records for the past few months. The last visitor to the port was the far trader *E-a-taka Wasab*. Before that, subsidised merchant *Jinfrei* came through a couple of weeks previously, and three weeks earlier a Sword Worlder vessel designated only Supply Run 4-14 called at the port.

Appended notes indicate *Jinfrei* makes a semi-regular run from Zaibon to Caladbolg by way of the reserve worlds and is a friendly vessel – i.e. her crew interact with the port staff. On this trip, one of her passengers disembarked and remained at the downport. There is no indication as to this person's identity.

Similarly, Supply Run 4-14 has an appended note that supplies were delivered and four personnel remained at the port. These were Eric and Myntelle Bothildr, noted to be explorer-scientists, and their children Egino and Runa.

The Admin Centre is the largest space in the building, and clearly intended to house a full port staff. A double row of desks has been pushed together down the middle of the chamber, and is strewn with outdoor clothing plus several sets of what appear to be home-made skis formed out of resilient plastic. From the cracks, the experiment does not seem to have been a success. There is another stain, much like the one in the vestibule, in the doorway to the communications centre, and the walls are pockmarked by a considerable number of bullet holes.

The Communications Centre is a small room jammed full of electronics. Most of the downport's systems are still functional, though the data storage cores of the comms system have been removed.

The Secure Storage Chambers were used to house an armoury and a home-made still. There are racks for a dozen longarms and the same number of pistols, but no sign of any weapons or ammunition. Some webbing, cleaning equipment and so forth remain, suggesting the armoury was looted. Likewise, only a couple of bottles of home-made hooch remain.

The Accommodation Block

The door to the accommodation block has received a hit from a laser weapon, and it is obvious this has been deliberately concealed by lowering the snow screen. The accommodation block has a small entrance vestibule leading into a main chamber which is used for dining, meetings and recreation, along with twelve individual accommodation chambers, a kitchen and its associated storage area, and two configurable areas in use as a lounge and gym.

The Main Chamber, like that in the administration block, was the scene of a brief but vicious gunfight. Numerous bulletholes in the furniture and chips out of the walls indicate well over a hundred rounds fired. Most casings have been cleared up, but a few were missed. They come from Sword Worlder smallarms and generic weapons common along the frontier, as well as within the Imperium. The central dining table was overturned as a barricade and is riddled with bullets. A large stain has been cleaned up behind the table.

The Kitchen and storage area are well equipped with gadgets and can turn out meals for well over twenty people at once. Large stocks of food remain, with perishable items in cold storage. The kitchens have not been unduly disturbed except for the cleaning products, which have been ransacked.

The Configurable Chambers are currently set up as a lounge and a gym. They are untidy but otherwise not disturbed.

The Accommodation Rooms are small and basic. Indeed, they are slightly inferior to those aboard a second-rate commercial starship. A couple have been used as 'junk rooms' where various items have been dumped – notably a large number of holed, torn and otherwise damaged pieces of outdoor clothing. Another contains various basic medical supplies, most of which is in cases that have at some time been opened to deal with a minor emergency.

It is obvious that six of the chambers were in recent use. Five of these have clothing and personal items belonging to a mixed male/female crew, in varying degrees of tidiness. They have been cursorily searched and notably lack items like jewellery, personal electronics and any form of cash.

The other room will remind the Travellers of a starship cabin used by someone who dislikes to pack and unpack. A few items have been placed on shelves or hangars, but it appears occupant lived out of his bags. These are missing, as is the occupant, though there is a blood trail leading to this chamber from the central one. It has been thoroughly doused in some solvent-based cleaner.

The Pit

At the end of the road is the downport's refuse pit. It has been used for many years to dispose of large items that would otherwise create obstacles. The original snow-clearance vehicle, having finally given up the ghost, was dumped in here along with various broken tables and fittings. There are signs that something has burned in the pit, though anyone climbing in will run the risk of being cut or even impaled by twisted metal. There are three burned bodies, along with clothing and personal identification, in the pit. They were doused pretty thoroughly before being burned, and identification is impossible.

EVENTS AT THE DOWNPORT

The Travellers may be able to piece together what happened here. After refuelling their ship (in case a quick getaway was needed), the attackers disembarked and moved towards the administration building. Two of the base staff were outside and, in accordance with standing orders, they were armed whilst foreigners were present. These two were fired upon, resulting in a running fight across the installation. One made it to the accommodation complex where he joined the base's other visitor – the intelligence officer – inside. They sealed the door, only to see it shot away by the ship's laser. They made a last stand in which the staff member was killed. The intelligence officer attempted to retreat into the living chambers but collapsed from his wounds and was captured.

The other Sword Worlder was separated from her colleague and entered the reactor shed. There, she attempted to arm her experimental EMP device in the hope it would cripple the attacker's ship, after which she slipped back out and began trying to get around the attackers and into the admin building. She was eventually killed somewhere between the reactor shed and her destination in an exchange of gunfire that killed or wounded at least one of the attackers. It would be hard to find the location in the snow, but a thaw would reveal numerous cartridge cases and discarded magazines.

Meanwhile, the installation commander attempted to defend the entrance to the administration building, wounding some of the attackers, and fell back to the central chamber. He finally attempted to destroy the communications logs and code data in the comms room, but was killed before he could reach the data cores.

The attackers burned the bodies of the three staff and attempted to clean up or at least degrade blood spills in the hope it would not be obvious who was dead and who had been captured. Their goal was the intelligence officer, and they have him along with the installation's (not very valuable) comms data. Subsequent events concerning this individual are beyond the scope of this adventure, but the incident may well increase tensions along the Imperium/Sword Worlds border.

THE CURIOUS SILENCE IS BROKEN

The Travellers may be expecting some deadly alien threat to have overwhelmed Mithril Starport, and might engage in a 'bug hunt' looking for a lurking monster. There is none to be found, though there are clues as to what happened here. The fact that sometimes there is no monster waiting to leap out at the Travellers will keep them guessing next time they encounter a deserted outpost or drifting alien wreck...

However, the referee should not allow the Travellers to wander around the downport for too long. They may become bored and aimless, especially since they are stuck there. Instead, the referee should allow the Travellers time to collect any clues, then introduce the next element of the story. This comes when the port's automated systems, or those of the Travellers' ship, pick up a weak and distant signal.

The signal is nothing more than a repeater beacon, of a sort used by distressed colonists and starfarers. It conveys no information except a location and appeal for assistance. There is no reply to any attempt to contact the operators of the beacon.

If the Travellers ignore the beacon, sooner or later a ship will come through the starport and they will be able to get assistance. Of course, if this is a Sword Worlder ship (which is likely) they will have to explain where the port crew are, and why they ignored a distress beacon. That might lead to further complications.

The best solution might be to respond to the beacon. The Travellers' ship will not fly and there is no answer on the radio, so the only option is to take the port's ATV (or any ground vehicle the Travellers' have on board their ships – remember, any grav vehicles they have will also be inoperable) and drive to the signal site. The ATV's communications equipment is powerful enough to reach the starport if any ships come in whilst the Travellers are en route; they are in no danger of missing the chance to get help by investigating the beacon.

CHAPTER - FIVE

OVERLAND

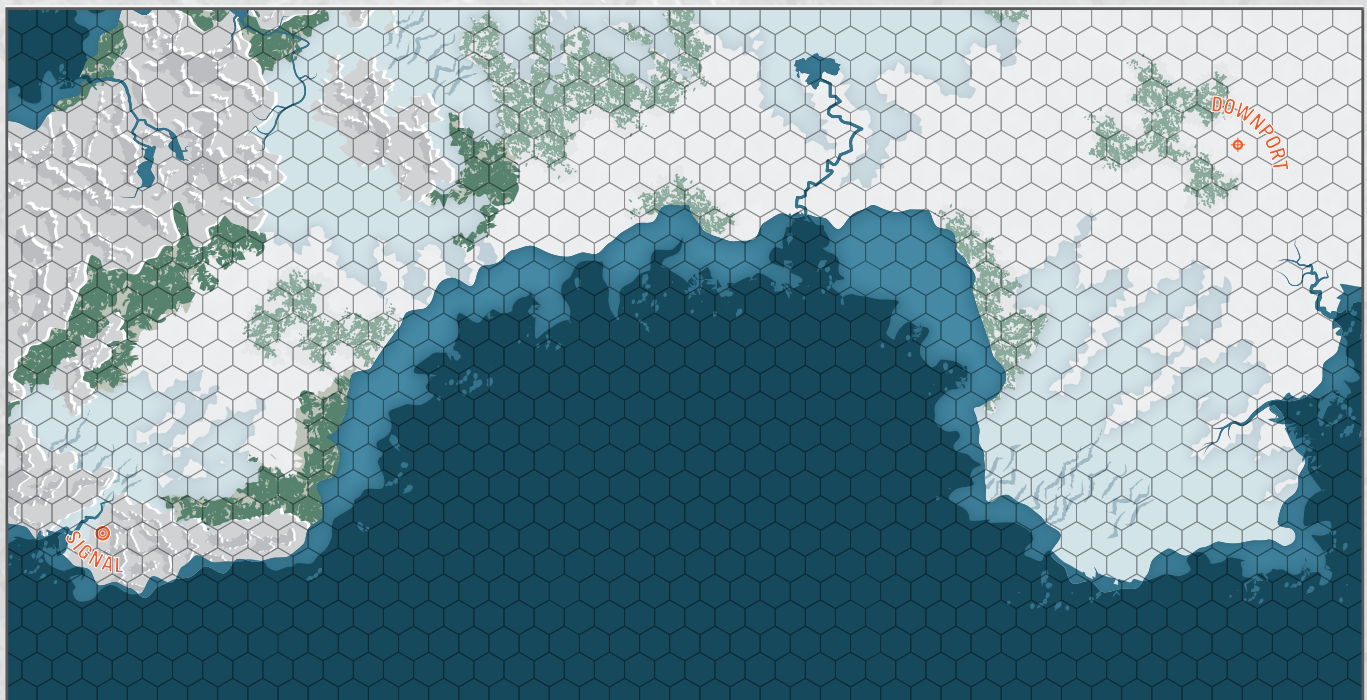
The distress call is emanating from a point around 2,000 km to the west of the starport. That is no great distance in an air/raft, and a short hop for a starship, but for a band of Travellers in an ATV it is quite a trek. Still, it should be possible to reach and investigate the signal, and get back to the starport in less than three weeks. There is little chance of a ship coming through in that time, and if one does the ATV's communications suite will enable contact to be made from anywhere on the planet.

Mithril has a 20-hour day, creating roughly ten hours of daylight and ten of darkness. Driving an ATV at night is entirely possible, though more hazardous than travelling by day, but trying to drive around the clock would quickly exhaust the Travellers. It is not possible to get much sleep in a bunk aboard a vehicle crossing rough terrain.

The Travellers would therefore be best advised to adopt a routine of travelling for most of the day, with the occasional stop to investigate a point of interest, check out some obstacle ahead, or perhaps just to take a break.

The ATV is capable of quite high speed on open ground, but when driving on unknown terrain this is inadvisable. On reasonably open terrain, the Travellers' ATV can cover about 250 km per day (assuming ten hours of driving) on average, though at any given time the vehicle might be moving much faster or slower than its average speed of 25 kph.

The Travellers' rate of progress will depend on a number of factors, including terrain, obstacles, weather and a willingness to take risks. The nominal speed of 250 km per day assumes the Travellers are cautious and gives



- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| Snow Plains | Ice | Seacoast or Lake |
| Plains | Broken Ice | Open Water |
| Mithril Taiga | Broken Terrain | = 50Km |

them a good chance to spot anything of interest along the way. Groups who insist on travelling faster may run right into a problem before they have a chance to spot it, or could drive straight past something of importance. The rate of travel affects the chance of a mishap along the way (see page 20).

Each day, or each significant segment of a day if the Travellers enter different terrain or some other change in circumstances occurs, the Travellers should indicate how fast they intend to travel.

Normal Travel: The nominal speed of the ATV is, as already noted, an average of 25 kph. At this speed, the primary focus is on covering ground rather than exploring. The Travellers are unlikely to notice anything but the most obvious features. Chances of an event, incident or mishap are normal.

Travelling Fast: Maintaining a high average speed and approaching obstacles with little reconnaissance or forethought is risky but allows the ATV to proceed 20% faster; i.e. an average speed of 30 kph. Chances of a mishap are higher.

Reckless Driving: If the Travellers are in a real hurry they can take risks and charge through obstacles that others would normally go around. Driving recklessly is 100% faster than normal travel (50 kph on average) but incurs significant risks.

Proceeding Cautiously: Moving more slowly reduces the chance of a mishap and increases the chances of spotting something interesting along the way. Speed is reduced by 20% to 20 kph on average.

Exploring: Moving very slowly and weaving about to investigate anything interesting from the ATV, sometimes dismounting to take a closer look, reduces movement speed by about 40%, i.e. the Travellers proceed at an average of 15 kph. Exploring does not just mean looking for points of interest, it also results in being very cautious about obstacles and hazards. This greatly reduces the chance of a mishap.

Driving at Night: Other than making it hard to get any sleep in the ATV's bunks, driving at night also increases the chance of a mishap. Speed is reduced by about 20% if a full set of instruments, including radar and thermal imaging is available (the ATV's sensors include these instruments). If using lights alone, speed is reduced by 50%.

TERRAIN

Terrain also plays an important part in determining movement speed and the possibility of a mishap.

Ice: Ice is the predominant terrain in arctic and ice zones, and can sometimes be encountered in a snow zone. Solid ice that has not been thawed and refrozen is stable and relatively smooth, allowing progress up to 50% faster than normal without increasing the chances of a mishap.

Broken Ice: Broken ice may have rock projecting through it or littering its surface, and may also be very uneven due to thawing and refreezing. Crevasses and similar hazards are not uncommon. Broken ice can be traversed at normal speed, but the chances of a mishap are greater.

Plains: The flat lands of a snow zone may be covered in shallow snow which will not impede the ATV's progress. Snow cover will conceal dips and watercourses, which can result in sudden lurches or even a plunge into a shallow lake through thin ice. Plains may also have a fair amount of vegetation, though this is low and hardy, and does little more than to conceal the nature of the terrain. Plains can be navigated at normal speed.

Snow Plains: Snow plains are simply plains covered in deep snow, necessitating the ATV using its dozer blade and pushing through. Snow plains slow the ATV by 50% and may conceal hazards that require backtracking or present themselves too late to be avoided.

Broken Terrain: Rock zones may be characterised by tumbled boulders and sharp-edged outcroppings. Sudden dips and small cliffs are not uncommon. Speed is reduced by 25% and hazards are more likely.

Mountains: Minor hills are not much of an obstacle for the ATV, and can be considered the equivalent of plains for most purposes so long as the Travellers take easier routes through valleys and over saddles rather than trying to drive over peaks. A tougher route through hills can be treated as broken terrain. Mountains, however, tend to be tough going for an ATV. Speed is reduced by 90% unless an easy route through a valley can be found, in which case the reduction is 50%. Even using a known pass can be tricky; the ATV will need to struggle over obstacles and occasionally backtrack. Mishaps and incidents are quite likely.

Mithril Taiga: Some areas of Mithril, notably sheltered areas in the lee of hills or mountains, have an equivalent to Terra's taiga forests. On Mithril this takes the form of low, scrubby and thorny bushes which are almost impenetrable to an ATV and difficult to find a path through even on foot. The taiga regions have more animal life, but have been little explored. Taiga will snarl up an ATV within a few metres, requiring hours of work to free it. Travellers on foot can make slow progress or cut a path into the vegetation to create shelter, but anyone trying to get anywhere needs to go around this obstacle.

Seacoast or Lake: Shores and shallow water can be navigated easily enough, and are treated as plains or snow plains depending upon conditions. The ATV can drive through lakes and calm rivers without hazard or drive over frozen ones. Thin ice, i.e. which is forming or melting, is more of a hazard as the vehicle might break through and become stuck.

Open Water: Attempting to navigate the open sea in a ground vehicle is hazardous. If the water is calm, the ATV can make headway at about 2.5 kph, i.e. around a tenth of normal offroad land speed. Strong winds or currents will take the ATV wherever they will, typically in a westwards and towards-the-equator direction. A storm will be a horrible experience for everyone aboard and will almost certainly injure or even kill the occupants if the ATV is rolled over, but the vehicle itself will stay afloat and ultimately survive to be washed up somewhere.

Other Factors

Offroad driving in rough terrain is physically and mentally tiring, and even driving on a flat ice plain causes fatigue – largely due to monotony. Drivers should be changed every two hours, and not drive more than a quarter of any given day/night cycle. Players who roleplay this rather than just dismounting to investigate something of interest when it arises are entitled to some slight leniency on the part of the referee if they hit a major problem as they will be less tired and stressed than those who insisted on the 'iron man' approach to overland travel.

MISHAPS & INCIDENTS

Each day the Travellers are driving or are otherwise outside the downport, the referee should determine if an incident or mishap occurs. This is a straight check on 2D, with a base chance of an incident determined by the local terrain, as shown on the Mishap table.

The question may arise as to who is driving at the time an incident potentially occurs. This can be determined randomly by asking the Travellers to indicate who is driving in each hour of the day and rolling 2D-2. This gives a result of 0-10. A number indicates the hour and can be matched to a driver, whilst a 0 permits the Travellers to choose who was driving. Alternatively, if an Average (8+) Recon or Navigation skill is made the Travellers may decide who was driving when the incident occurred – forward planning allows them to put the best driver in the hot seat when things look like getting tricky.

Note that many incidents occur in such a way as to permit the Travellers to plan their approach. It is not mandatory for the person driving the ATV when a hazard was spotted to be the one who negotiates it.



MISHAPS

Terrain Type	Chance of Incident
Ice	Difficult (10+)
Broken Ice	Average (8+)
Plains	Very Difficult (12+)
Snow Plains	Difficult (10+)
Broken Terrain	Routine (6+)
Mountains	Easy (4+)
Seacoast or Lake	Difficult (10+)
Open Water	Average (8+)

Apply the following DMs:

- Driver's Drive (wheel) -skill level
- Highest Recon or Navigation skill -skill level
- For every hour past two a driver remains at the controls +1
- For every hour past five in the last twenty the driver remains at the controls +1
- Heavy snow falling +2
- Driving at night +2
- Travelling fast +2
- Driving recklessly +5

If an incident occurs, the referee should roll 1D for the nature of the hazard and consult the Incident table.

INCIDENT

1D	Incident
1	Hidden Obstacle
2	ATV Malfunction
3	Terrain Feature
4	Blocked Passage
5	Ground Subsidence
6	Navigational Error

Hidden Obstacle: The ATV encounters a previously undetected obstacle. A Difficult (10+) Recon check will allow the driver to halt before it is too late; otherwise the vehicle will not be able to avoid the hazard. Backtracking will take 2D hours. The nature of the obstacle depends upon terrain; a deep gulley or crevasse is likely anywhere, or perhaps an area of thin ice causes the ATV to plunge through and become stuck.

ATV Malfunction: The ATV starts making some alarming noises or suffering intermittent power loss. The referee should roll 2D to determine the severity of the problem. The resulting number is the amount of cumulative Effect that required on Average (8+) Mechanic checks (INT) to fix the problem, e.g. a result of 9 will require multiple skill checks to eventually fix the malfunction. A check can be attempted for every hour of work, which necessitates operating outside the vehicle. If the

Travellers choose to ignore the warning signs, the referee should roll 1D-2 for each hour of driving and add the result to the existing severity. When the total reaches 12, the ATV is no longer drivable. It can be repaired in the field requiring a Very Difficult (12+) Mechanic check (INT), and each attempt requires an entire day of work. If the Travellers lack the requisite skills, they may be able to improvise a solution using their starship engineering or scientific skills, hack the vehicle's onboard computer to compensate, or otherwise cleverly bypass the problem. Any such solution is temporary.

Terrain Feature: The Travellers encounter something unusual but not necessarily hazardous. Warm-water geysers are possible in any terrain, and create a local warm spot that will have vegetation and some animal life. Other possibilities are wind-carved rocks that look almost artificial, curious snow dunes and patches of impenetrable taiga 'forest' which might conceal something of interest if the Travellers want to spend all day hacking away to investigate.

Blocked Passage: The Travellers' progress is blocked by some obstacle, which might be a crevasse, thick boulder field, or blind canyon. They will have to backtrack a while and find a way around – this takes 2D hours minus the Effect of an Average (8+) Navigation check (INT).

Ground Subsidence: A recent thaw has weakened the ice or created loose, possibly muddy, conditions. Crossing this area requires a Difficult (10+) Drive (wheel) check (DEX); failure indicates the ATV has become stuck. Extricateing it is a long process; the referee should roll 2D for the severity of the situation. Getting out requires a cumulative Effect on Average (8+) Drive (wheel) checks equal to the severity value. A check can be made every hour, with DM+1 for every Traveller who has found a means of helping. Once free, the ATV is still in the middle of the hazardous area and requires another Drive (wheel) check to get out.

Navigational Error: Having become quite lost, the Travellers emerge from the hex they are currently in, in a random location. Roll 1D, counting round map hex sides from the top (north) side for their heading. This may take them into new hazards.

EVENTS

Where incidents and mishaps can occur because of the Travellers' own actions – or they may get lucky and avoid them – events are semi-scripted. That is, they are applied whenever the referee feels appropriate. Not all of the events listed below need occur in the course of the journey; the referee can choose which seem the most appropriate.

Some events are best applied when the Travellers are stopped for some reason; whether they are camped for the night, halted to investigate something or dealing with a mishap. Others can be hinted at, perhaps by an odd sensor return or a shape glimpsed through the snowfall.

Events can be spaced along both the outward and homeward legs of the journey, with different events used for changes of pace. The referee should not forget that the Travellers are operating in extremely cold conditions, often with poor visibility. This can complicate the simplest of tasks and make a mundane event quite deadly.

The ATV Wreck

A strong sensor return leads the Travellers to a wrecked ATV. It is a tracked vehicle, unlike the wheeled one they are driving. It may be washed up on a shore or disabled in a gully. The vehicle has been stripped of everything the crew could carry, suggesting there were survivors. However, the wreck is very old (decades at least) and few components remain in a salvageable state.

The Crater

The Travellers come across a large crater, presumably the result of a large meteorite impact in the distant past. The crater rim is around 30-40 m high in some places, and too steep for the ATV to negotiate. The crater is around 1 km across and 150 m deep at its lowest point. The crater sides shelter the interior to some extent, resulting in a small lake of semi-liquid water surrounded by tumbled rocks and ice. The sides are overgrown with Mithril's equivalent of taiga forest and home to various small creatures.

The Ruin

A strangely regular rock surface nearby turns out – if investigated – to be a wall. It was originally part of an octagonal building with two storeys above ground and one below, with a minimal lighting system powered by solar cells on the roof, and not much else in the way of amenities. The top floor has completely collapsed into rubble and there is little left above waist height of the middle storey. The underground segment is intact (if rubble is cleared to access it), and contains water storage tanks and some decayed shipping crates that once held emergency rations and other supplies. The Travellers may recall hearing rumours of a chain of 'octagon shelters' built to assist stranded starfarers, but why one was built in Sword Worlder territory is a mystery.

The Magnetic Anomaly

The ATV's sensors record unusually strong magnetic interference. Investigation reveals a reasonable deposit of ferrous metal ore close to the surface. If the Travellers choose to map the deposit and take core samples (a process that will take a couple of hours in clear weather, longer in heavy snowfall), they can sell the data for Cr10000 to the Sword Worlder authorities. There are no plans to exploit Mithril's resources as yet – indeed, it is prohibited – but an accurate map of prime resource sites will be useful when the order is given to open up Mithril.

The Chasm

A fissure in the bedrock has created a deep chasm. Warmer conditions inside keep ice from forming over the top, at least most of the time, and result in a constant trickle of meltwater down the sides. In some places this produces small waterfalls that have carved the chasm sides into fantastic shapes. The chasm is around 50 metres deep, with some deeper areas filled with water. Plant life not seen elsewhere grows in this sheltered environment, feeding a variety of animals. The chasm offers good shelter from a storm, though it would not be possible to get the ATV into it (not in a manner that would facilitate getting it out again, anyway). Travellers who explore the chasm will eventually discover there are caves, some underwater, running off to the sides. In one of these caves is a large pile of bones. They are ancient, and there are dozens or perhaps hundreds of sets. Closer examination suggests they might be Aslan but also a primitive culture, and dating the bones would place them here long before Aslan ever reached this region of space.

The Ephemeral Glade

An ephemeral glade occurs when the temperature rises above freezing for a day or two in areas where this is rare. Warmer regions have vegetation all the time, but in colder areas life must make the most of the few chances that occur. An ephemeral glade centres on a pool of meltwater, around which plants spring up at an incredible rate. It is possible to watch the plants grow, with some bamboo-like species reaching a height of two or three metres in just a few hours. Creeping plants climb the taller varieties, and a carpet of moss-like growth covers the ground. Within an hour or two, small creatures can be seen clambering over the plants and devouring them. Thus begins an orgy of feeding, mating and egg-laying which goes on until the temperature drops enough to start freezing the pond. Once that happens, the vegetation rapidly dies. Creatures continue to feed on dying plant matter for a while, but it quickly dissolves into brown sludge. Within hours of a temperature drop the glade is gone, and the creatures return to hibernation.

ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

Animal life is sparse on Mithril. Most of what exists is primitive and small, variations of thick-skinned reptiloids with the ability to burrow into snow. There are few large predators on Mithril; most creatures are either herbivores or opportunistic scavengers. The referee should use the following creatures – with the possible exception of snow-worms – at any time it seems appropriate. An animal encounter can make one of the events noted above a lot more complicated.

CALAMANDER

The calamander is a reptiloid scavenger, with individuals falling into three distinct types; male, female, and protector. It lives in ice or snow terrain, burrowing out extensive tunnels through which individuals can move surprisingly quickly.

The large female is attended by several drone males who feed her and take care of the warren; it is these males that are the most likely initial encounter with a calamander colony. Males are about the size of a badger, are amphibious and tend to flee or hide when threatened, except when the warren is threatened. If unable to hide, males give off a curious squealing sound which attracts other calamanders.

The third type of calamander is a protector, which normally remains close to the warren. Protectors will come to the aid of a squealing male and are vicious, though they can be driven off if the warren is not under threat. If it is, protectors will defend the female to the death. The protector is significantly larger than the male, though not as big as the female. Most tunnels in a warren are not large enough to accommodate a female; a mature female rarely leaves her burrow.

Calamanders are attracted to shiny objects, and will steal important components if they are left lying around. Their tunnels are large enough for a human to crawl into, though encountering a protector is hazardous to say the least.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Calamander Female	12	2 m
SKILLS	Melee 0	
ATTACKS	Bite (1D)	
TRAITS	Slow Metabolism (-2)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Intermittent	

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Calamander Male	8	8 m
SKILLS	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (1D)	
TRAITS	Amphibious	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Intermittent	

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Calamander Protector	14	2 m
SKILLS	Melee (natural) 2, Recon 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (1D)	
TRAITS	Amphibious, Armour (+2)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Intermittent	



CRYSTALLICE

Crystallice are small but nasty creatures resembling ice crystals. They are extremely hard to see even for those who know what to look for, and will attach themselves to clothing or skin when something warm passes by. Over the next few hours the Crystallice will crawl to bare skin and begin to feed. They inflict a bite that causes no real damage but is intensely painful, and take a small quantity of blood over the course of an hour or two. After this, the crystallice – now a reddish colour – drop off and digest their meal. Few can stand the pain of the bite for this long, but other than waiting for them to drop off the only solution is to pick the Crystallice off – which is in itself a painful exercise.



RAUCUSS

The raucuss probably has a proper scientific name, but the Sword Worlders assigned to the starport do not know it, and nicknamed the creature for the raucous noise it makes. The raucuss is a flying scavenger, which will devour anything organic and try to eat almost anything else. Often encountered in small groups, raucuss will mob other creatures to drive them away from food, and are prone to landing on buildings or vehicles (including air-rafts in flight, which can be comical) and pecking at seals or ripping antennae out of fittings. Raucuss are noisily defiant, and more likely to hop out of reach and scream at Travellers than flee.



ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Raucuss	5	8 m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity), Melee (natural) 1, Recon 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (1D)	
TRAITS	Flyer (very slow), Small (-2)	
BEHAVIOUR	Scavenger, Intermittent	

SNOW-WORM

The snow-worms of Mithril are rarely sighted, and thought by many to be myth. They move endlessly under snow plains and can tunnel through solid ice given enough time. Snow-worms are filter feeders, extracting small particles of food from snow or ice forced through their bodies, though a snow-worm will eat larger organic matter, including the remains of an ephemeral glade or some hapless creature trapped in the snow. The worms are essentially mindless, existing only to feed, but will rear up out of the snow and lash at any source of damage with either end of their long bodies. They may also attempt to eat downed Travellers. Most snow-worms are about a metre in diameter and around 25 m long, but giant specimens have been (unreliably) reported.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Snow-worm	75	3 m
SKILLS	Melee 0	
ATTACKS	Crush (5D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+6), Slow Metabolism (-2), Large (+4)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Filter	

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Giant Snow-worm	160	3 m
SKILLS	Melee 0	
ATTACKS	Crush (8D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+12), Slow Metabolism (-3), Large (+6)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Filter	



C H A P T E R - S I X

THE EXPEDITION

Once the Travellers get within 250 km of the beacon location, they will be able to contact the Bothildr family. They are quite excited to be speaking to anyone, which may make it a little difficult at first to get any useful information. The family will ask what happened at the port – all they heard was a garbled distress signal – and if the Travellers have seen Egil and Katrin. The Travellers will not know who that is at first.

It will not be hard to follow the beacon to the expedition camp. It lies in a sheltered area, on the fringes of a range of broken hills. Steep rockfaces are common in the area, which has been fractured by ancient upheavals to create multiple faults in the bedrock. Scrubby Mithril taiga is common, providing additional shelter but also making travel difficult.

The expedition camp consists of two semi-rigid field shelter modules (see page 36), one configured as living quarters and one as a working area. These are surrounded by a windbreak constructed of scrubby bushes cut and wired together. A framework supporting an angled roof of the same vegetation provides overhead cover.

There are a few items outside; mostly equipment left carelessly on a folding table or dumped in a pile where no-one is likely to trip over it. The working area contains only a couple of portable computer terminals and a network interface. There is no long-range communications antenna since the expedition were using the one onboard the air/raft before it left. The living quarters are equally sparsely appointed, with a few personal items

The Bothildr family have no reason to be suspicious – indeed, they have many reasons to be glad to see a vehicle approach – but they do have a healthy caution due to working in the wilds. Eric stands in the open, waving to the ATV, with his shotgun nearby in case it is needed. Myntelle positions herself out of sight where she can use her rifle if necessary. The kids, too, disappear among the nearby vegetation.

If the Travellers seem non-threatening, the family welcomes them with greetings and anxious questions. Although they are gravely concerned, the family are also bound by a long habit of frontier hospitality. Anyone who stays still long enough will be offered a bowl of stew and

hot drink. Eric also slyly produces a flask of something stronger and quite unpleasant. The offering of food and drink is not merely a social ritual; it is a chance to take the measure of the newcomers.

The Travellers will notice the stew is thin and tastes odd. It is made from rations that will only last so long, and has been supplemented with local ingredients – calamander meat and berry-like objects picked from a bush. Although these have little food value, they add bulk to an otherwise meagre meal. The Bothildrs will think much more highly of the Travellers if they reciprocate the offer of food from their more plentiful supplies, but only if they do so in a sensitive manner. The family are proud, like most Sword Worlders, and will not take kindly to being patronised or offered what looks like charity – even if it actually is charity.

The Bothildr adults are quite happy to talk about events like an attack on the starport in front of the children; they are going to need to deal with what has happened sooner or later, after all; this may surprise Travellers who are careful what they say around the kids. Eric wants to get his family back to the starport and offworld as soon as possible, and will ask the Travellers to take them.

The Travellers, for their part, know the family came out here in an air/raft but it is clearly not present. Eric can fill in some of the details – including the part where he and Egil had a short and not very fair fight over the vehicle. The two port staff wanted to race back immediately as soon as the distress call from the port was heard. The last Eric saw of them was a hurried takeoff that clipped a nearby rock stack. The air/raft disappeared into the distance, flying unsteadily. It did not answer any communications from the family, and soon after it took off its distress beacon was activated. Since the air/raft was not present at the port, Eric believes it might have come down in the snow plains.

Eric and his kin have been stuck here since, eating reduced rations and trying to continue their work as best they can in the hope that ‘something... you maybe... would turn up.’ He makes little of the fact that his family would eventually starve or die of exposure if help did not arrive – it either would appear or it would not; there was no point in fretting over what Eric could not control.

Eric proposes breaking camp and heading back to the port as soon as possible, but suggests setting off at first light rather than halfway through a day. He also wants to look for the downed air/raft; he did not like the port staff members much but they may be stranded and he feels he should try to help them.

In the interim, Eric asks his kids to show the Travellers around the site and explain what they have found. If anyone is interested, the Bothildr kids offer a highly erudite explanation of what they have been working on as they lead a quick tour of the area. This is a little tricky in places as the local vegetation can be thick and surprisingly resilient.

THE EXPEDITION'S FINDINGS

Some years ago, a starship came through the port with a crippled jump drive. As luck would have it, a suitable spare part was in storage and, in return for it, the crew undertook a rather amateurish (in the opinion of Runa, anyway) survey of some points of interest. They found strange rock carvings in one location ('and managed to miss all the others!') and a radioactive waste site dating back hundreds or maybe thousands of years. The port warden duly noted the findings and sent them off to be forgotten about in his report.

Eric and Myntelle Bothildr came across the report some years ago ('while they were killing time at the university so us kids could grow up a bit') and decided to come to Mithril to investigate. An aerial survey indicated rock carvings at several spots, all of them widely spaced, but virtually no evidence of an advanced settlement. That suited the Bothildrs; they were mostly interested in primitive cultures.

The initial hypothesis was that Mithril was once warmer, had an indigenous intelligent species which never reached the technological stage, and that the radioactive waste came from some other source. This idea was blown out of the water ('Dad says his idea *evolved*, though!) by proof that Mithril has not had a warmer phase in hundreds of thousands of years.

The rock carvings are primitive but impressive. They seem to depict giant Aslan-like figures, but also smaller ones that also appear to be Aslan. There is at least one better set of carvings somewhere on Mithril, but the survey neglected to indicate where and the Bothildr family have not located it. What they have found, however, is a crude cave-village settlement not far into the hills. It was surrounded by refuse that had been buried over many years, suggesting primitive people lived there for some time. Conditions in the hills are tough, but not as bad as out on the snow plains. Presuming plant and animal life could support these people, a settlement could have been sustained.

What the Bothildr family are sure of is that these people were Aslan – genetically, if not culturally. They have measured the bones and teeth found at the site, including some in a burial cave, and have concluded without any doubt that primitive Aslan at one time lived on Mithril. The question of how they got here, considering Mithril is far from the Hierate and the bones date from long before Aslan moved into this region of space, is a good one. Eric believes the reported radioactive waste dump suggests these Aslan had high technology at their disposal. Perhaps they arrived by starship – an extremely long-range colony ship perhaps? If so, their colony presumably could not sustain its technological base and eventually failed. Later generations lived a primitive life until they died out.

Eric believes the fate of these Aslan was not a miserable one. Their new world was harsh and unforgiving, but Aslan are tough and relish challenge. They were lords of this world in their time, and perhaps they were content.

He also harbours a theory that some remnants of ancient Aslan technology could be still on Mithril. Despite his primary interest in primitive peoples, he would be fascinated to find out more about these ancient interstellar voyagers. Why come so far from the Hierate? Why settle on Mithril? Did they build colonies elsewhere? And if they got this far, where else did the ancient Aslan voyage to? Are there more of them out there somewhere?

These questions will have to wait, however. There is pressing business; notably to find the downed air/raft and get back to the starport.

CHAPTER - SEVEN

SEARCHING



Eric roughly knows the direction taken by the air/raft. For some reason – he does not know why – it was not headed directly back towards the starport. Eric's best guess is that the navigation system was damaged in the collision, which might also explain the lack of communication once the vehicle was out of sight. Myntelle remembers seeing a storm front on the horizon, and suggests the port staffers were trying to go around it. Either way, the air/raft will not have come down on a direct line back to the port.

The air/raft's location should be chosen by the referee, somewhere off the Travellers' route to the expedition site by about 200 km. Its guidance and main communications systems are indeed damaged, but the short-range emergency beacon works. Once the Travellers get within 100 km they will pick up the signal and can begin a more detailed search.

During this time it should be noted that the ATV may be getting a bit full. Once the two air/raft survivors are located, the situation will get worse. One solution, in clearer weather at least, is for some to ride outside the vehicle on its outer gantry. This is a little precarious – the kids will love it though – and can get very cold if it is windy. However, with suitable clothing a perch outside the vehicle at least reduces crowding inside.

There are two minor incidents, both related, during the search.

A SUDDEN LURCH

Even in clear conditions, patches of deep snow, sometimes with layers of ice buried within, are not uncommon. Some patches go on for tens of kilometres and, apart from being monotonous to the eye, they are generally a good thing – snow and ice are often more even than bare ground, and allow a higher cruising speed.

Whilst crossing such a patch of snow, the ATV suddenly lurches forward and down, coming to a violent halt with the driving cab buried in the snow. Everyone outside will be flung off, though they will land in snow for only 1D damage. Those inside will be flung into hard surfaces or

each other, suffering 2D damage and possibly causing tempers to flare, though anyone who makes an Average (8+) Athletics (dexterity) check can reduce the damage by 1D. Those strapped into seats suffer no damage.

It is not possible to open the cab doors due to packed snow around the vehicle's front end. Rear or roof access points are free, enabling the Travellers to get outside and take stock of the situation. Investigation shows that the ATV has broken through a thin layer of frozen snow and plunged its front wheels into a cavity beneath. This is strangely tunnel-like, extending away in both directions before ending in other collapsed sections. The cavity is almost two metres in diameter and lined with packed, frozen snow. It will remind Travellers of a pipe or burrow.

Getting the ATV free is mostly a matter of hard work. Digging the cab out and shoving something under the wheels to improve grip will enable it to be driven clear. It will take time, however, and the work may be complicated by bad weather or other problems; this is an excellent opportunity for an interaction with Mithril's wildlife. Calamanders will try to steal small tools, the raucuss will try to eat them, and crystallice may be found on Travellers' skin after the vehicle is freed.

Something Moving in the Snow!

While the Travellers are digging out their ATV, someone spots movement in the snow, or just under it. After a few minutes, more movement is spotted some distance away. Staring at a large expanse of snow is likely to play tricks on the eyes, and Travellers who are watching for movement cannot work properly. The referee should play a couple more incidents of this sort out, with people pointing and shouting, sometimes looking in completely different directions.

After a few repetitions, Travellers who make an Average (8+) Recon check will spot that the last movement is snow falling into a cavity remarkably like the one the ATV plunged into. No known natural phenomenon could cause such regular cavities through the snow, but there is no creature around that could have done it, either.

Once the ATV is freed, the Travellers can press on. Eventually the air/raft distress beacon is detected, and as the ATV closes in voice contact can be made with the survivors. They are both alive, but not in a good situation. The air/raft is unflyable but Egil managed to get it down in the mouth of an ice cave. While power remains, the survivors have light and heat, but their food ran out days ago and what vegetable matter Katrin managed to drag together does not seem to make good ration bars even when processed through the emergency field utility module (see page 36) carried as part of the air/raft's survival stores.

Egil is injured and cannot move around much, so the survivors could not leave the cave and meet the Travellers even if there were not 'something' lurking outside. They do not know what it is, only that they have seen glimpses of something moving under the snow; something serpent-like. The survivors have not been attacked but fear they will be if they encounter whatever is under the snow.

GETTING TO THE SURVIVORS

The cavities encountered by the Travellers were made by a particularly large example of a snow-worm, one of Mithril's largest creatures. They are attracted to warmth and will eat anything they can filter out of the snow. However, the worm outside the ice cave is big enough to swallow a person whole.

The worm will detect the approaching ATV and move towards it under the snow, rearing up underneath with enough force to tip the vehicle on its side. It will then lash at the ATV with its body, potentially causing serious damage.

The worm is tough and persistent, and will have to be dealt with somehow. It could be riddled with bullets, but rather than fighting or killing the worm, the Travellers might treat it as a problem to be solved. It can be driven off by powerful vibrations through the ground and snow (small explosions or an extremely loud sound system would do the trick) or by something it does not like the taste of in the snow. Since the worm cannot move without ingesting snow, anything toxic or irritant will cause it to retreat rapidly. Fuel oil or solvent-based chemicals, or almost any acritical liquid, will cause it to retreat. Clever travellers might be able to create a barrier this way. Electricity will also work; zapping the worm with a live cable from the ATV's powerplant will cause it to retreat, though doing this without harming themselves might be a challenge for the Travellers.

Once the worm is dealt with, the ATV can be righted (digging away snow on one side and pushing the other will work) and finally the survivors can be rescued.

EGIL AND KATRIN

Egil and Katrin are not in a good state. They are extremely hungry and have been living in a crippled air/raft for many days. The air/raft is of a 'ragtop' design, with a flexible cover over the six-person crew compartment. This enabled the survivors to keep the internal temperature above freezing, but waste heat has melted part of the ice cave, creating a puddle of meltwater around the air/raft which has then frozen again. Not only is this dangerously slippery, the vehicle is frozen to the ground in several centimetres of ice.

If the Travellers want to remove the gravitic lifter governor circuits, they will have to thaw out the ice and gain access. This may require some ingenuity, and extracting the circuitry will be a cold job since the Travellers have to stand on half-melted ice with icewater running over their boots. There are no major technical problems however.

Egil needs medical attention, and has either fractured or badly bruised ribs. It hurts him to breathe, let alone move and, on top of hunger, cold and the knowledge that the crash was his own stupid fault, this does not make him a pleasant companion. He and Katrin are suspicious of the Travellers, since they know something bad has happened to their comrades at the port. However, food and blankets will go a long way towards overcoming their reservations.

Egil and Katrin do not know much more than the Travellers, except that the visitor at the downport was some kind of intelligence officer or maybe a courier. He was supposed to have met the ship the Bothildr family came in on, and was annoyed at being delayed by something in Imperial space. Other than that, the intelligence officer was tight-lipped and surly, and did not make good company. Katrin can add that she volunteered for this assignment mainly to get away from him, as he did not seem to understand the concept of 'no'.

Finally, with the parts they need and an ATV full of rescuees, the Travellers can head back to the starport. The journey will take a few more days, during which additional adventures could occur. The referee should use any events not yet encountered, perhaps complicated by the overcrowded vehicle. The journey back might become a nightmare of people riding outside in a huff, others yelling at one another in the passenger compartment while their comrades try to sleep, and so forth. It should be a memorable trip....

There is one last complication awaiting the Travellers.

RETURN

at the starport. Soon after reaching Imperial space with their prize (the wounded intelligence officer), the crew of the far trader *E-a-taka Wasab* were curtly told to go back and finish the job. There were to be no witnesses, but more importantly they had failed to find critical data the intelligence officer had stashed at the downport. Without it, their employers were going to be displeased. So, loading up some additional muscle *E-a-taka Wasab* set off back towards Mithril downport, arriving a few hours ahead of the Travellers.

The far trader crew spotted a starship on the landing pad, but it was silent and locked down. They landed a force at the port and did a quick reconnaissance, after which their starship took off again and began flying an orbital search pattern. Believing they had plenty of time, the attackers began a methodical search of the port buildings, intending to crack open the starship on the pad at their leisure. They did not know that the Travellers' ATV was approaching the port....

A SHIP IN ORBIT?

The ATV's communications suite starts receiving a feed from the port, which indicates a ship is in orbit. Its behaviour is strange; it makes no attempt to communicate but begins an approach to land. The ship behaves as if its crew are not expecting an answer from the port, which implies they know it is out of action. The ship touches down, spends about an hour on the landing pad, then takes off again. It begins flying what looks like an orbital search pattern.

What the Travellers make of this, and how they respond, will dictate the course of this part of the adventure. Smart Travellers will be able to access the communications logs, which show radio traffic between the downport's antenna and the ship in orbit. This traffic is encrypted and cannot be read – the port's system is boosting the signal but not interpreting it, so unless the Travellers can unscramble the comms' encryption (they may have the skills, but not the time, as it would take many hours to even attempt breaking the encryption) they will not be able to tell what is being said. However, knowing that something is being said at all might still be useful.

It would be possible to hack the downport's security cameras from the ATV with a Difficult (10+) Electronics (comms) check (1D hours, INT), and doing so will enable the Travellers to determine what is going on there. Essentially, a group of well-armed personnel, probably low-end mercenaries, seem to be tearing the place apart looking for something. The Travellers' ship seems intact for now.

How many mercenaries are at the port is up to the referee, and a count made using the cameras might not be accurate. The opposition faced by the Travellers should be significant but not overwhelming. The mercenaries arrived aboard a far trader, but it is possible some of them were crammed into bunks in the cargo hold rather than using standard staterooms aboard the ship. If so, there could be quite a lot of them.

The far trader *E-a-taka Wasab* missed the Travellers' ATV in its first sweep, largely because it overflowed during the initial climb to orbit when the crew had not begun their search. It has now disappeared over the horizon and will not be back for some time (the crew are investigating something of interest spotted in a far distant location; the radioactive waste dump reported by the original survey perhaps?). Thus, the Travellers have some time to act. Their ship is a sitting duck if *E-a-taka Wasab* returns, however, so they act with some haste.

ENDGAME

The Travellers need to reach their ship and rig a repair on the gravitic lifters. That will take D3+3 hours. It is unlikely they will remain unobserved for that time, but a stealthy group might manage it – especially if the weather is bad. An alternative approach would be to charge into the downport and fight it out with the mercenaries. This is not necessarily a great plan, since the Travellers' resources are limited and they have children aboard their vehicle.

Between these extremes is a smarter approach in which the Travellers sneak into the installation and eliminate some of the mercenaries quietly while others try to reach their ship. The vessel does not need to be able to fly to fight; its weapons turrets will function even if the lifters

are offline. Someone with a good Gunner skill could ambush *E-a-taka Wasab* or at least hold it off with the threat of weapons fire. That would require bringing up the power plant to full capacity, a process that normally takes about 30 minutes from standby. A good engineer could do it faster, of course, with a Difficult (10+) Engineer (power) check (5D minutes, INT)

The mercenaries will respond violently as soon as they spot anyone in the downport. If the Travellers conduct reconnaissance first, they may be able to stage ambushes and rig the odds in their favour. If they just blunder in blindly they will have to react to whatever happens.

The mercenaries, for their part, are complacent but not stupid. They have a couple of personnel on guard to patrol the installation, and at least one sniper armed with a laser rifle on the top of one of the buildings. The effectiveness of any sniper will be limited in bad weather, which might be used to the Travellers' advantage.

The referee can play fast and loose with timing if necessary, perhaps allowing the repair to be completed just in time for an escape if everything else has gone badly wrong. A mad dash to the ship and a hurried takeoff, pursued by *E-a-taka Wasab* and weapons fire from the ground would make a suitably dramatic ending to the adventure, but the endgame can play out in many other ways. A clever band of Travellers might simply slip away without the mercenaries even realising they are there at all.

AFTERMATH

Once the Travellers have escaped from Mithril or eliminated the threat from the mercenaries, there are a few choices to be made. The Bothildr family want to continue their research, but Mithril seems very dangerous at present. They will ask to be taken somewhere they can get a ship home and re-outfit for another expedition, and would prefer to go somewhere in Sword World space. The survivors of the port staff also need to get somewhere they can report what has happened. None of them have money to pay for passage, of course, but they should be able to arrange payment if the Travellers can convey them to Biter or Sting.

It is possible that the Travellers might return to Mithril with or without the Bothildr family, and investigate the mysterious primitive Aslan further. They may also stumble upon what the mercenaries were searching for;

a set of data storage devices concealed among the pipes leading from the reactor chamber to the underground fuel tanks. Hidden inside a maintenance cover, these devices contain multiple copies of the intelligence officer's findings. They are encrypted but can be broken sooner or later, and make for interesting reading.

The intelligence officer compiled a detailed listing of ships moving among the worlds of the Lunion Shield, highlighting several that might be involved in intelligence-gathering and others that could possibly become assets for the Sword Worlds Confederation (are the Travellers on this list, perhaps?). His findings indicate some discrepancies in the movement of certain Imperial merchant vessels, which may not be making the stops their logs claim.

What the Travellers do with this data is up to them. The Sword Worlds Confederation and Imperium would both be willing to pay a finders' fee of up to Cr25000 for the data, with no questions asked. It might even be possible to sell it to both sides. Each will issue dire warnings against doing so, but you should fully expect your Travellers to try it anyway. Indeed, they might be approached to sell a 'doctored' version of the data to the other side, and might end up being able to sell two versions of the same information, twice, to both parties.

As to the attack on the downport and abduction of a Sword Worlder intelligence officer... he will likely never be found (perhaps that was the point; what if this was all an elaborate ploy to plant false data and extract an operative?). Paranoia on both sides creates ripples in their intelligence communities but there is no indication this was an incident of aggression. Nobody can prove anything.

The result, in the short term, is a slight escalation of tensions and some sabre-rattling speeches by hawkish political and military figures on both sides of the border. There are those who fear the region is heading for war, and attention-grabbing headlines appear on the datanets. For now, the only real consequence of the Travellers' Mission to Mithril is seeing their ship named in an article called '12 Reasons Mithril Will Be The Flashpoint of the Next War (View Now)'. There will, however, be days when the Travellers wonder if the screaming headlines were correct. Tensions remain high along the border, and there are many on both sides who seem to want a new war.

CHARACTERS AND OPPOSITION

THE EXPLORERS

Eric and Myntelle Bothildr have worked together for many years, returning to the field when their children were old enough to be safe in a frontier camp. The kids are well-educated, especially on matters of history, geology and wilderness survival, but not used to being around large numbers of people.

Eric Bothildr Sword Worlder Scientist

SPECIES			GENDER		AGE	
Human			Male		38	
TRAITS			-			
STR	8	INT	8	SKILLS		
DEX	7	EDU	10	Admin 1, Advocate 1, Carouse 1,		
END	9	SOC	8	Diplomat 1, Flyer (grav) 1, Gun		
				Combat (slug) 1, Investigate 1,		
				Leadership 1, Persuade 2, Recon		
				1, Science (archaeology) 3, Science		
				(linguistics) 2		
EQUIPMENT			Shotgun (4D)			

Eric is primarily an archaeologist, with an interest in primitive cultures. This is what brought the family to Mithril; old rumours of evidence on-planet of habitation in the distant past. Eric is not an 'Ancients hunter'; he believes the quest for answers about the mysterious Ancients is less interesting than finding out how primitive people lived and what they believed. He is a practical and pragmatic man; whilst protective of his wife and children, he trusts them to take care of themselves.



Myntelle Bothildr Sword Worlder Scientist

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		39
TRAITS		-		
STR	7	INT	11	SKILLS
DEX	8	EDU	10	
END	8	SOC	8	
				Admin 1, Electronics (sensors) 1, Flyer (grav) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Medic 2, Science (biology) 2, Science (cosmology) 1, Science (planetology) 3, Survival 1
EQUIPMENT		Carbine (3D)		

Myntelle Bothildr is a planetary scientist, with some experience of biological sciences. Often, Eric will identify evidence that a primitive people engaged in a practice, and Myntelle will figure out why from the local conditions. They are in many ways an ideal Sword Worlder couple, with skills that complement one another and create a partnership stronger than individuals. Myntelle is well aware of this, and might offend a female Traveller who she sees as 'trying to be just another man when you could be a remarkable woman'.



Egino Bothildr Sword Worlder Scientist-to-be

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		11
TRAITS		-		
STR	4	INT	8	SKILLS
DEX	6	EDU	10	
END	5	SOC	8	
				Electronics 0, Gun Combat 0, Science (history) 1, Survival 1
EQUIPMENT		Revolver (3D-3)		

Egino Bothildr, at 11 years old, is the youngest of the children, and on his first field expedition. He was enjoying the experience until one of the port staff dashed off with the air/raft. Egino saw his father try to prevent this and get a bloody nose, so is likely to be nervous around people he does not know. His mother has dealt with this in pragmatic fashion by giving Egino the spare gun; a small-calibre revolver normally stashed in the expedition supplies. Egino has orders not to show it to anyone, but may pull it out if scared enough. He is trying to be a tough Sword Worlder man, but he is ultimately a frightened kid.



Runa Bothildr

Sword Worlder Scientist-to-be

SPECIES			GENDER		AGE	
Human			Female		14	
TRAITS			-			
STR	6	INT	11	SKILLS		
DEX	9	EDU	8	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Melee 0,		
END	6	SOC	8	Science (archaeology) 1, Survival 1		
EQUIPMENT			-			

Runa Bothildr is 14, and also on her first field expedition, though she did some practice runs with her father whilst Egino was too young to be taken on an expedition. Runa hated the university where her parents were working, and enjoys the wide-open spaces of Mithril. Like the others, she is concerned about recent events but confident her parents will figure something out. In the meantime, she has been exploring the site more thoroughly than the others, and was the one who discovered the village.



THE PORT STAFF

Katrin Gyrowetz and Egil Tedorsson have both served on Mithril for a couple of years. They are a sort-of couple, though do not really like each other all that much and together more due to a lack of anyone more suitable. This caused some friction with Myntelle Bothildr, who can be a little smug about her perfectly balanced family, and who made the mistake of giving relationship advice to Katrin.

Katrin Gyrowetz

Sword Worlder Technician

SPECIES			GENDER		AGE	
Human			Female		25	
TRAITS			-			
STR	6	INT	8	SKILLS		
DEX	9	EDU	8	Electronics (comms) 2, Gun		
END	8	SOC	6	Combat 0, Jack-of-All-Trades 1		
EQUIPMENT			Autopistol (3D-3)			

Katrin is a technician, whose primary task at the port was to look after the communications equipment and deal with minor maintenance issues. She was thoroughly bored during the field expedition and became argumentative at every opportunity, but on the whole is dealing with the situation better than Egil.



Egil Tedorsson Sword Worlder Field Operative

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		28
TRAITS		-		
STR	10	INT	6	SKILLS
DEX	6	EDU	5	Drive (wheel) 2, Flyer (grav) 1,
END	9	SOC	5	Gun Combat (slug) 1, Mechanic 1, Survival 1
EQUIPMENT		Autopistol (3D-3), Autorifle (3D, Auto 2)		

Egil Tedorsson is a field operative, which basically means he is assigned to Mithril Downport to do heavy work and provide security, normally bulldozing snow off the landing field or driving parties across the plains on one of the intermittent sample-collecting missions. He is not technically minded and at something of a loss when there is no obvious path forward. He is currently frustrated to the point of barely-repressed fury, not least because it was him who damaged the air/raft and he has no idea how to fix it. He is naturally transferring this to Katrin, further damaging their already poor relationship.



In addition, Egil is injured and in quite a lot of pain. He may have broken ribs from the second air/raft crash, and cannot move around quickly.

THE ATTACKERS

The crew who originally attacked the downport were sent back to finish the job. They are a typical low-end starmerc group, of the sort who do not bother with niceties like licenses or bonding authorities. They are ruthless but not especially skilled, and are not expecting any resistance. Given how easily they overran the place last time (those who were wounded are more a source of derision than a warning to others), the mercenaries are overconfident and trying to cover several bases at once. They tend to shoot first and not bother with questions at all, and since they have been told to eliminate everyone they encounter, they are not inclined to be merciful. Indeed, some enjoy the idea of killing everyone on an entire planet.

Mercenary Gunman

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		-		-
TRAITS		-		
STR	8	INT	6	SKILLS
DEX	7	EDU	4	Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee
END	8	SOC	3	Combat (unarmed) 1, Recon 1, Streetwise 1
EQUIPMENT		Autopistol (3D-3), Autorifle (3D, Auto 2) Flak Jacket (+5)		

Mercenary Sniper

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		-		-
TRAITS		-		
STR	8	INT	6	SKILLS
DEX	7	EDU	4	Gun Combat (energy) 2,
END	8	SOC	3	Melee Combat (unarmed) 1, Recon 2, Streetwise 1
EQUIPMENT		Autopistol (3D-3), Laser Sniper Rifle (5D+3, Scope, Zero-G) Flak Jacket (+5)		

EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONRY

02/61643

ROUGH TERRAIN EQUIPMENT PACKAGE

A standard four-person equipment package, this item is stowed in a locker aboard the ATV. It contains four sets of individual equipment and some shared items.

FOUR PERSONAL KITS:

- Boots, 1 Pair (all sized for people with quite big feet)
- Knee pads and tough 'field' gloves
- Personal harness with attachment points for tethers and climbing rope
- Padded 'field' cap with rigid plastic skullcap insert
- Light working jacket, sleeveless
- Overcoat, waterproof
- Face mask with light-reactive lenses
- Pack of 6 disposable detection badges; these change colour in the presence of harmful radiation or some chemical threats
- Poncho/blanket

COMMUNAL EQUIPMENT:

- Climbing rope and pitons
- 'Cold Light' lighting kit – spikes, brackets and holders for the included chemical glow units
- Field tent, very cramped with 4 people, and groundsheet



02/64979

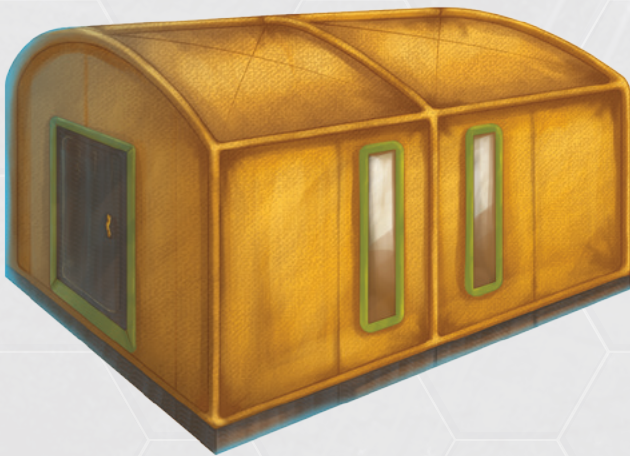
FIELD SHELTER MODULE

Favoured by explorers and field teams, the FSM system is designed to create a warm and weatherproof shelter without being difficult to transport. Each module is the same size; a 4m x 8m x 3m block built out of an inflatable frame/wall filling sandwiched between two layers of extremely tough fabric. The roof is the same, with the floor using a thicker inflatable layer over which a thin flooring layer is laid. Translucent panels allow some natural light into the shelter, which is supported at the corners and edges by semi-rigid pipes that become solid when pumped full of high-pressure air.

The shelter gives good insulation and is reasonably resilient, but cannot survive strong winds or snow piling on the roof; a windbreak or overhead cover is essential in these conditions. Each module has its own pump unit, which can run on its own batteries or an external power source. The pump can also be configured to act as a heating, ventilation and compressor/filter unit, taking in external air and making it safe to breathe before pumping it inside. A detachable secondary outer door creates an airlock if one is needed.

An FSM can theoretically be used on a vacuum or trace atmosphere world, but is not designed for these conditions and may fail unexpectedly. It is safe in very thin or tainted atmospheres, and remains tolerable even in extremely cold conditions.

Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Field Shelter Module	7	30	Cr8000



02/63321

FIELD UTILITY MODULE

The FUM is a ubiquitous and almost universally hated piece of survival equipment, with a range of applications. At its core is a small but powerful mashing and grinding unit that can pulp almost any organic matter, which can be processed into drinking water and a compressed 'food bar' or porridge-like substance. The nutritional value of the product depends on the raw materials; on Mithril there is little that can provide sustenance to humans, so the output of an FUM will be both disgusting and of poor quality. There are those, calling themselves FUM-chefs, who claim to be able to feed the right ingredients into an FUM and produce something edible, but this usually means just adding a vast quantity of hot sauce to the mix and hoping for the best.

The FUM runs off an external power source such as an ATV or air/raft, and has internal batteries which will keep it in operation for at least two weeks. The FUM can supply heat to a tent or shelter, and has a hotplate for more conventional cooking, and has detachable flashlights.

Most ATVs have a larger version of the FUM as part of the galley, but it is rarely used except on very long expeditions. A standard FUM is carried as part of the emergency kit in some ATVa and most air/rafts intended for use outside major cities. In theory, an FUM can keep survivors warm and fed, supplying them with drinking water, until they are rescued. More commonly, it is used as a mobile power source by teams in the field.

Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Field Utility Module	9	4	Cr8000



SWORD WORLDS ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE



The ATV found at Mithril Starport is a Sword Worlds-built vehicle, slightly different to the version encountered in the Imperium. Notably, it is vastly more expensive but has effectively unlimited range. It is also less well protected due to the need to shoehorn a fusion plant into a relatively small space.

The hull is significantly larger than the standard Imperial ATV and the vehicle runs on six very large wheels rather than eight, with tyres filled with a lightweight gel which seals punctures and provides the vehicle with buoyancy in water. The vehicle's interior consists of a driving compartment, main compartment subdivided into two configurable areas separated by the tiny galley on one side and fresher on the other, and rear section which is accessed by way of an airlock. There are side doors just behind the driving compartment, and roof hatches in the driving and main sections of the vehicle, but the only way to use these as an airlock is to close the airtight partition between the main and driving compartments. This is little more than a plastic curtain, but sufficient to allow atmosphere to be retained in either compartment whilst the other is evacuated or exposed to outside conditions.

Airlocks are not necessary on Mithril, as the atmosphere is breathable, but the ATV is designed to function on airless worlds. It has a small but efficient life-support plant under the main compartment floor, alongside its fusion power plant. So long as the vehicle has power, it can recycle air and water, processing a range of biological matter, gases, and liquids. Plant and animal matter can also be processed into an edible paste served like porridge or formed into dried blocks and carried as emergency rations. How nutritious and bad-tasting these rations are depends on what is available, but in theory an ATV of this type can keep its crew alive for months or even years.

The control cab has seats for a driver and an additional crewmember, who can move the secondary seat around to face a configurable instrument console. The ATV is equipped with powerful driving lights and remotely controlled spotlights plus radar, thermal and low-light instruments. It is also equipped with magnetic sensors and a seismic activity detector as standard.

The two configurable spaces are currently set up with two bunks which can be collapsed when not in use, creating additional working or living space. One configurable area

has a dining/meeting table on the other side, whilst the forward compartment has workstations for two crew. This is a common configuration for ATVs used for exploration.

The ATV has a narrow gantry running around the outside from the cab doors to rear airlock, with retractable ladders to reach the ground. This platform is intended for use as an elevated working station, with another pair of ladders giving access to the flat roof of the vehicle. Like many similar vehicles, the ATV has a small retractable dozer blade on the front, which on Mithril is mainly used to clear snow, and a winch for towing or self-recovery if the vehicle becomes ditched.

There is a small turret on the roof containing various antennae and instruments including a powerful multimode camera, and can support a light weapon. A locker next to the rear airlock contains a shotgun and rifle, with 100 rounds of ammunition for each. They do not appear to have ever been removed from their brackets.

The ATV is outfitted with a range of common tools, including shovels, saws and various power tools which can be charged or run directly off the ATV's power plant, along with an awning that can be used to protect a work crew from the sun (unnecessary on Mithril!) or increase living space by acting as a tent.

Typical working crew is four; two in the cab and two riding in the rear area or sleeping as best they can in the bunks. Collapsing the bunks makes it possible to accommodate a more people in the rear area in cramped semi-comfort and up to six or possibly more if they are jammed in like sardines. Many crews resort to space-gaining tricks like opening the airlock or moving items into it for storage, or rigging seats or hammocks over the cargo, making a trip more tolerable for a larger crew.



SWORD WORLDS ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE

TL	10
SKILL	DRIVE (WHEEL)
AGILITY	-1
SPEED (CRUISE)	MEDIUM (SLOW)
RANGE (CRUISE)	100 years
CREW	2
PASSENGERS	2
CARGO	0.5 TONS
HULL	90
SHIPPING	15 TONS
COST	MCR2.3

ARMOUR

FRONT	3
REAR	3
SIDES	3

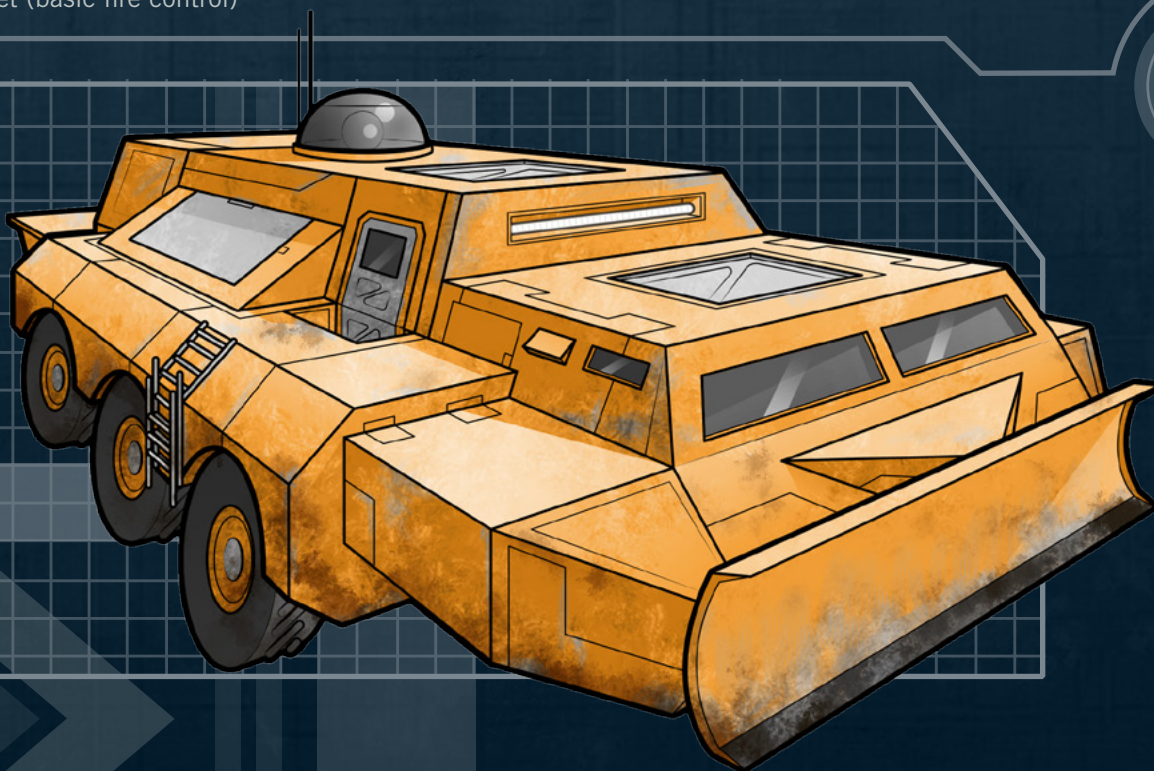


EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS

Airlock, Aquatic Drive, Autopilot (improved), Bunks x 2, Communications System (improved), Computer/1, Digger Blade, Fire Extinguishers, Fresher, Fusion Plant (advanced), Life Support (short term), Mini-Galley, Sensor System (improved), Vacuum Protection

Small Turret (basic fire control)

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



FINAL NOTE: ASLAN ON MITHRIL

Classic Traveller *Double Adventure 2: Mission on Mithril/Across the Bright Face* presented a tantalising hint that Aslan had at some time in the distant past been present on Mithril. This was an anomaly, which was never really explained in later materials.

The conclusions drawn by the Bothildr family are essentially correct; the primitive people of Mithril are indeed Aslan, and they originated offworld. The Aslan discovered the jump drive in -1999, but it is not clear exactly when they came to Mithril. If they arrived before the invention of the jump drive, they must have used a 'sleeper' ship of some kind. If so, it is quite possible that Mithril was not their intended destination, but that some or all of the colonists were placed there for some reason.

There is an implicit implication that, at some point, there was a technological society on Mithril. This is correct; a segment of the colony mission's population was deposited on Mithril with sufficient materials and equipment to build a small city. This may have been intended as a waypost, or they might have been exiled for some reason.

The colony on Mithril failed, and by the time the Sword Worlds were colonised around -400 there were no Aslan living there. They lingered for some centuries after the collapse of their technological society, eking out an existence as hunter/gatherers and creating increasingly crude monuments to their former greatness. The earliest Aslan carvings on Mithril were made with energy weapons or instruments developed from them; the last were chipped out with stone tools. Yet all seem to depict the same thing – giant, 'godlike' Aslan and smaller 'mortal' Aslan. The message was clearly important but is lost to history unless someone like the Bothildr family can decipher the carvings.

In the meantime, the presence of Aslan on Mithril raises new questions;

- Why did they come so far?
- Why did they leave the Hierate at all?
- Are there remains of their technological enclave somewhere on Mithril?
- Did some other part of the expedition keep going past Mithril, and where might they have ended up?

It is possible that these early Aslan voyagers encountered the Darrian civilisation, which had reached TL3 by -1500 and (with the assistance of Terran settlers) could build jump-capable ships by -1395. The Darrians lost a lot of their records in the Maghiz, a self-inflicted nova event that destroyed their interstellar civilisation in -925, so it is entirely possible they did encounter the early Aslan colony mission, but have since lost that knowledge.

Inquisitive Travellers might want to find out more about the lost Aslan of Mithril, and there are those who would pay well for good information. Several universities would be interested, and some Imperial agencies might try to use the previous settlement of Mithril to undermine Sword World control. The Aslan Hierate might also be very interested in knowing what happened to their lost brethren, and could make use of the discovery that they once had a foothold in what is now human space.

These implications are beyond the scope of this adventure. Subsequent events are, as always, at the discretion of the referee and their Travellers.

