

DAVE SEMARK

TRADE IN THE THIRD HORIZON

Buy low, sell high, and grease the wheels of the Third Horizon



A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRADE, including: The Impact of the Portal Wars; The Navigation Accord; The Doppelgänger Caravans; The Main Trade Routes & Staging Posts; Trading Commodities; Opening Up New Markets; Pirates, corsairs and privateers; How to bring trade into your Coriolis campaign; Scenario Hooks & Ideas

**FREE LEAGUE
WORKSHOP
CORIOLIS**



A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRADE

THE IMPACT OF THE PORTAL WARS

The Portal Wars began 120 years ago, the First and Second Horizons battling over the right to claim the rich flower of the Third Horizon for themselves. The wars raged for over 20 years before, in a last-ditch attempt to wrestle victory from the jaws of defeat, the citizens of the Third Horizon destroyed the Portals to the other Horizons. This prevented the imminent invasion and ended the war in a flash. But it also cut the Third Horizon off, into blessed isolation, for ever.

That 'blessed isolation' came at a price: it meant a terrible economic recession for the Firstcome societies of the Third Horizon at that time, 50 years before the arrival of the Zenith. The two decades of war had brought enough hardship, but now the supply of goods and the access to trade markets in the other Horizons, once taken for granted, were suddenly gone. The standard of living, and the quality of life of the average citizen, plunged: industries and trades in the Third Horizon collapsed overnight; poverty became endemic; hungry, scared people called out to their leaders and implored 'why do the Icons desert us?', 'why have you failed us so badly?'. The Long Night had fallen upon the Third Horizon.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Firstcome leaders were at a loss and fell back on the only thing that they knew: their faith in the Icons. Religious authority was ruthlessly enforced, law and order maintained through pogroms and witch hunts. In fear, societies contracted upon themselves and borders were closed. Trade dried up. The people hunkered down to weather the dark storm that the Portal Wars had brought to their door.

So it was for 50 years. These isolated, inward-looking and suspicious cultures survived, in a fashion, clinging to their religious theology like a thread-bare blanket in the freezing night. But, in time, that Long Night became bearable, as generations of people were born into a world

knowing nothing but the gloom of the darkness.

And then, almost over-night, it was over.

The arkship, Zenith, arrived in Dabaran, travelled across the Horizon and eventually settled at Kua. Here these Zenithians established the Coriolis station and new factions, bringing fresh blood to the Third Horizon. They had been through their own Long Night but had now seen the light of dawn on the Horizon. Zenith's arrival changed everything...

Coriolis quickly became the trade hub for the whole Horizon. The Zenithians, long imprisoned in the confines of their ship, were suddenly free to explore and exploit the new lands before them. These new factions were excited and eager, filled with spirit and the urge to explore. They were natural entrepreneurs, determined and adventurous, and they set about seeking political and commercial opportunities. They took the Horizon by storm.

The Firstcome were shell-shocked. Their reliance on deep-rooted theology, their inherent conservatism and desire to preserve the status quo, had served them well enough during the Long Night, when all they desired was survival. But now this reliance made them suspicious and cautious in the face of the Zenithian zephyr. They were slow to react. Before they knew it the Zenithians, driven by the power and energy of the Consortium, had their tendrils throughout the Third Horizon and trade started to flow. The Firstcome had handed the initiative to these newcomers, and have been scrabbling to catch up ever since...

The Consortium set about establishing themselves as the key commercial power within the 36 Systems. This cultural and commercial imperialism was driven through the domination of their competitors, establishing their pre-eminence by the tools of monopolising trade, aggressive expansion into new markets and, where necessary, colonisation. This pre-eminence, whilst it hasn't gone unopposed, has been greatly advanced through a series of key developments.

THE PORTAL CRISIS AND THE FREE TRADE TREATY

40 years ago, barely 20 years after the Zenith's arrival, the Consortium was focusing all their efforts on establishing links over the big four trade routes: the Dabaran Circle, the Miran Chain, the Algol Route, and the Sadaal Route. These new space lanes were plagued by difficulties, from local authorities limiting the use of the portals in their systems, to pirates and the inherent dangers in the Dark Between The Stars.

After much fruitless debate in the Council about how to protect these emerging trade routes, the Legion lost patience and unilaterally announced that they would guard these trade lanes for the benefit of all. It seemed, on the face of it, all very altruistic. But in reality, the Legion had simply taken advantage of political indecision and the military vacuum that only their fleets could fill. In one fell swoop the Legion had positioned itself to protect the Consortium's interests across the whole Third Horizon.

This was the Portal Crisis, as these three days became known. Most Firstcome leaders, suckled on the terrible stories of the portal wars and weighed down by cultural war-weariness, were terrified that the Legion's move would lead to conflict, and conflict would lead to war. But a few were ready to resist the new-comers, by force of arms if necessary. As Legion fleets left port to take up their new duties the Council on Coriolis rushed to find a solution, and on the third night they signed the Free Trade Treaty. It was a desperate last minute attempt to prevent clashes between the Legion and local faction authorities who took issue with the Legion's self-appointed task. The Free Trade Treaty declared the independent status of every portal in the Third Horizon and gave the right to every citizen to use the portals as they saw fit. Without explicitly saying so the Treaty ratified the Legion's play, and the Consortium took another huge step towards commercial supremacy in the Third Horizon.

No Firstcome faction liked it. But most saw the benefits of taking advantage of the trade deals the Consortium was offering. Only the Order of the Pariah openly balked,

blockading the Zalos portals and resisting any travel through them that wasn't authorised by the Zalosian leadership. There was a tense and uneasy standoff with the Legion, and a few shots were fired. Eventually, and with great reluctance, Zalos fell into line with the Treaty and re-opened their portals, although they periodically find some political pretext to close them again, just to prove that they can. But many observers think this is a smoke screen: Zalos not only needs the trade that the Miran Chain can offer, and didn't really want to provoke a war with the Legion (who increasingly think the portals are not only under their protection but also under their governance), but also comes under significant pressure from the Church of the Icons in Mira, who's trade suffers when the Zalos link in the Miran Chain is broken.

THE NAVIGATION ACCORD

Trade progressed in reasonable order for a number of years, and as time passed the Firstcome factions learned and changed and started to claim a greater share of the commercial spoils on offer. The Consortium couldn't help but see this shift and resolved to re-assert their early dominance.

Then, just 5 years ago, the Council passed the Third Horizon Navigation Accord, a series of pro-Consortium regulations that left most observers staggered at the Consortium's audacity in proposing them, and skill in actually pulling them off. These regulations encourage trading systems that concentrate manufacturing in Consortium approved systems and isolates the producers of raw materials by limiting their markets and how they access them.

This Accord is a thinly veiled Consortium bully-boy tactic, with the following restrictions:

Only vessels licenced by the Consortium are allowed to transport certain goods, as stipulated by the Consortium (i.e., the lucrative ones). Any trader operating without a licence would suffer from customs tariffs, non-licenced penalty fees and / or arrest and confiscation of the cargo;

The Consortium will favour certain producers of raw materials, guaranteeing them a market for their produce at a set price;

The Legion is authorised to enforce these regulations; and,

The Accord recognises that the Legion does not have the ships to regulate all trade, and has allowed the Consortium to authorise "privateers" to help the Legion. A ship carrying an "Antiqam Altarkhis", or Letter of Marque, is legally authorised to enforce the Accord.

The upshot of the Accord was that, with one sweep of a pen, the Consortium hardened their control of the high value bulk hauler trade routes and can pick and choose who it operates with and on what terms. Those who sign on the Consortium's dotted line may get guarantees and protections, but these come at a price, a price that always favours the Consortium. Those who don't sign up have to take their chances with finding a market and coping with entirely legal Legion, or privateer, harassment.

RESISTANCE TO THE CONSORTIUM

"The harder you tighten your grip the more systems will slip through your fingers."

And so it seems for the Consortium.

Despite their apparent success over the last 50 years, and their monopoly over the major bulk trade routes and raw material suppliers, the enormous expansion of their commercial activities has left more and larger gaps for others to fill. The Third Horizon is swarming with small independent outfits, the so-called Free Traders, and no amount of regulation or enforcement is going to stop even a fraction of the trade carried by these captains.

But these free traders can't exert any influence by themselves. Many have joined the Free League, the union of traders and commercial workers, that carries a weight way beyond any individual within it. The Free League doesn't just represent Captains and pilots, they represent dock workers and cargo hands, and here is where their

power lies. Not even the Consortium can operate smoothly without these men and women and hence the Consortium needs to keep the peace with the Free League, albeit an uneasy and uncomfortable one for the commercial giant.

The Free League knows this only too well and exploits it to the full. The League knows it can't compete head on with the Consortium but uses its leverage to ensure that the Navigation Accord regulations might be relaxed, or softened, for Free Leagues unionists. Having a penalty fee missed here, or a blind-eye turned there, helps the Free Traders of the League to compete with the Consortium, filling the gaps left in the wake of the huge operations of the bulk haulers, and by the Navigation Accord itself. But, the traders of the League are also well-placed to take on trade routes that the bulk haulers don't bother with, on more distant and remote systems. Here the commercial opportunities for the Consortium might be weak tea, but for an enterprising Free Trader it might just be the jackpot that changes their fortunes forever.

Another competitor is the Zenithian Trade Alliance. Similar in approach to the Free League, this alliance sprung from traders who were discarded by the Consortium or didn't want to buy into the draconian terms of the Navigation Accords. Less a union, and more a loose affiliation of like-minded men and women, the ZTA is less inclined to be above board and squeaky-clean: as ruthlessly cynical and single-minded as the Consortium, the ZTA's membership has a reputation for being ready to bend and break the law to get what they want, and not against hiring their own "anti-privateer privateers". As such, the Free League (at least publicly) wants nothing to do with them.

THE DOPPELGÄNGER CARAVANS

Even though most may think the Consortium's dominance of the big trade lanes is unassailable, and cannot be challenged, there has been a recent development that has done just that. Following the shock-wave of the Navigation Accord, it took a few years before organised resistance arose. But 18 months ago, the first of the so-called "Doppelganger Caravans" left Mira bound for Dabaran. Inspired by an idea first mooted by the Order of the Pariah, the trader-baron Sima Akalay (from the planet Trigon in Mira) organised a fleet of ships, from bulk haulers to small traders and agile battle cruisers, to form a trade caravan. The caravan would be so big, so well prepared and so well armed that the Consortium's Legion lackeys would have to choose between letting them through unmolested or an all-out attack. But the Caravan would not only be well able to protect itself, it would also be made up of so many people from so many factions (both Firstcome and Zenithian) that to fire upon the caravan would be akin to starting war with The Third Horizon all at once. Akalay calculated that the Legion would not.

He was right. Since then a dozen more enterprising people from across the Horizon have organised similar ventures. Thus far the Consortium has had to grin and bear the humiliation, watching as the Navigation Accord is flouted with impunity. But this situation cannot persist, and something will have to give...

TRADE ACROSS THE HORIZON

The big trading networks across the Third Horizon link together like one huge circulatory system, with Coriolis at its heart. And the Consortium drives and controls these big trade routes.

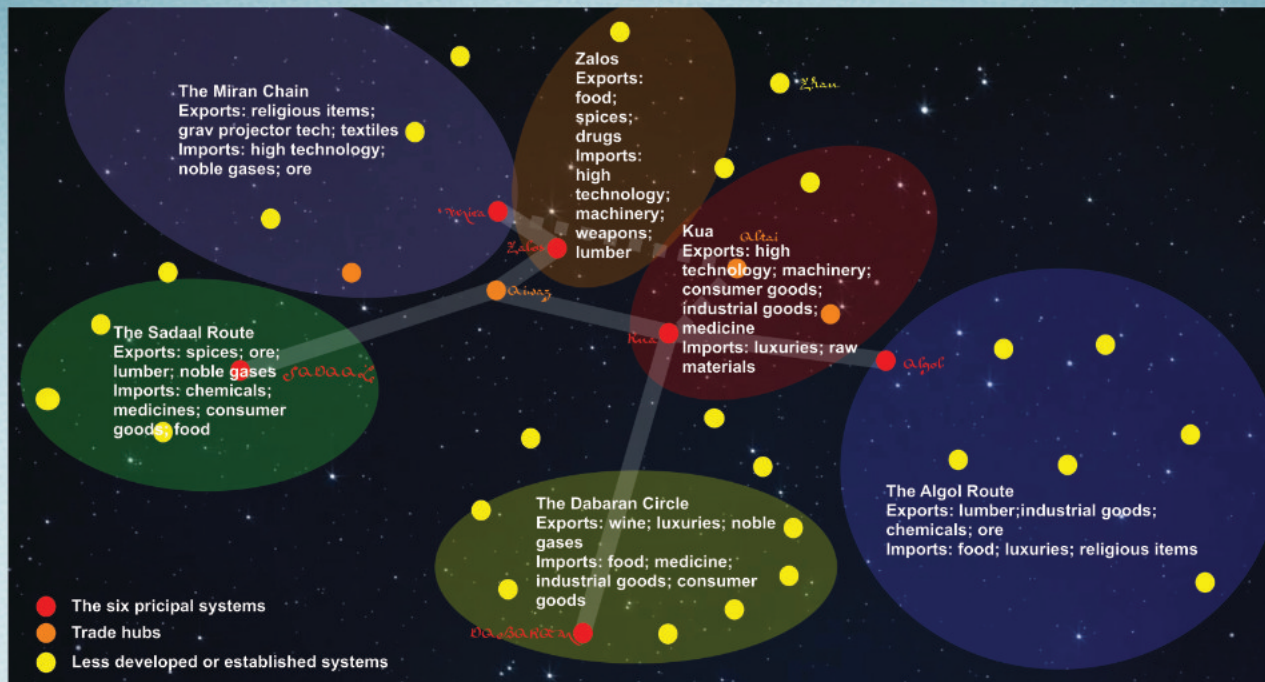
THE MAIN TRADE ROUTES & STAGING POSTS

At the level at which the Consortium operates there is a huge variety of controlled goods and products that are shifted across space in huge freighters and in enormous volumes. The profits to be made, by those with a stake in this trade are staggering. But this trade is largely limited to the core of the Third Horizon, the big six systems (Kua, Zalos, Mira, Dabaran, Algol & Sadaal), the key staging post systems (of which Aiwaz is the principal example), and the main Bulk Hauler Routes these systems service:

- The Miran Chain;
- The Dabaran Circle;
- The Algol Route;
- The Sadaal Route;
- And the Mira-Dabaran Gold Road.

The one trading route that can beat all of the others, if you're a clever and wily trader, is the "Mira-Dabaran Gold Road". Captains along this route buy up in Mira, sell off for a profit in Zalos and buy up everything the locals need in Kua, before picking up a full cargo on Coriolis for Dabaran, and doing exactly the same on the way back.

Some systems get the benefit of trade just by virtue of their location along one of the established bulk hauler routes. A system like Aiwaz, that doesn't really produce anything, does exceptionally well from trade along the Miran Chain and the Sadaal Route (being located on both) as well as trade on the Mira-Dabaran Gold Road. The Aiwaz authorities know a good thing when they see it and have explicitly tried to maximise this advantage by establishing the first planet in the Aiwaz system, Trini, as a specialised "trade hub". Traders and hauler captains, on the lookout for business and cargo, will frequently head



for Trini in the first instance, as an easy and quick way to pick up some good leads.

Other systems, most notably Altai, are also in a similar position, but Altai hasn't yet really taken advantage of the opportunities this presents.

TRADING COMMODITIES

The big Six systems, and their staging post systems, have bulk trade in:

- High Technology
- Machinery & Industrial Goods
- Lumber & Ore
- Chemicals & Noble Gases
- Weaponry & graviton Projectors
- Consumer Goods & Religious Items
- Food & Spices

Not every system needs inter-stellar trade, although all would probably benefit from it. The Zalosian blockade of their portals was detrimental to both Zalos (they are still

fighting the costly civil war over Zalos B and need foreign currency to boost their economy) and Mira (who's trade suffers badly if the Miran Chain is broken and all trade has to go the long way around, through both the Quadrant of the Pillar and the dangers of Odacon).

But many other systems are well off the beaten track and have never seen the sight of a bulk freighter emerging from a portal. These distant systems, like Menkar, Nagar, Erequ and Eanu, have their own local economies that allow the local system to get by. But some must be ripe for the smaller Free Traders, offering something that's worth the time, cost and risk of flying all that way.

Some examples:

AWADHI: the medical labs and research facilities in Awadhi are driving forward leading-edge science developing artificial blood plasma and gene-modified medical therapies, expensive tech that's wanted by the rich and powerful, all over the Horizon;

ANASPORA: the dry desert planets of Anaspora are infested with insects of all varieties and species, and the locals have learned to live with, and exploit, them as a resource. Insect-derived commodities, such as honey, hardened wax, locust protein-paste and other food-stuffs, deadly venom (used in primitive herbal remedies, and illegally as poison) and anti-venoms are becoming an increasingly high-profile demand around the Horizon;

MELIK: you would be surprised how scarce pure water is across the Third Horizon. But the ice planets of Melik, and the ice belts that orbit these planets, are a source of the purest water found anywhere. Yes, most systems have their local sources of water, but none have water of the purity that's found in Melik, hence the demand for this to be transported to high class societies and communities all around the Horizon;

DAYBUL: if Melik is the source of choice for water, then Daybul is the source of choice for salt. The simplest of resources in the Horizon is providing an increasingly powerful export commodity for Daybul, one that doesn't yet come under the Navigation Accord, but the Consortium's beady eye is starting to look this way.

CAPH: the scientists of Caph have leaned on their research colleagues in Kua and have developed more efficient and powerful stasis tech. So far many don't see the need for stasis tech that is more reliable and uses less energy going through the portals, but as portal travel increases ship-builders look to anything that increases efficiency in their vessels, and this tech is emerging as a commodity for the future;

ERRAI: despite the Navigation Accord that tries to concentrate manufacturing into Consortium-endorsed facilities, the crafts-folk of Errai are producing exotic

furniture and furnishings that are grabbing the fashion world of the Third Horizon;

EANU: the beautiful jungles and plains of the Eanu system have given rise to a huge variety of evolved creatures, from tiny marmosets and lap dogs, to beastly wolverines and bears. The market for these natural and exotic creatures, as pets, as status symbols, as machismo-enhancers, is huge, and the traders of Eanu are rapidly breeding these creatures to meet that demand;

RIGEL: the factories of Rigel make some damn fine vehicles, gravbikes, scooters and hoppers. Indeed, the Dabaran Latifs source their gravbikes from Rigel, and their skill is widely acknowledged. The Consortium haven't been allowed to get their grubby hands on this emerging trade, and the Rigel industrialists are doing their utmost to get their factories working to meet this demand;

And then there are Services: from the actors of the Theatre Schools of Kua; to the massage and relaxation houses of Sivas; the schools of exorcism and Icon ritualism in Zalos, Mira, the Monolith and all the little chapter houses scattered across the Third Horizon; the tough independent mercenary units residing in Nagar, Nharmada and Uharu are just waiting for coin to roll in so their brigades can roll out; and the specialised services like the freezing cold operators from Mazuna in Zib, and the underwater covert ops teams of Ghodar.



OPENING UP NEW MARKETS

Of the major routes the one to Sadaal is the most recently opened up, with still an abundance of planets and opportunities to be exploited. However, the Consortium thinks they have their operations here well underway and have been turning their attention to other new markets.

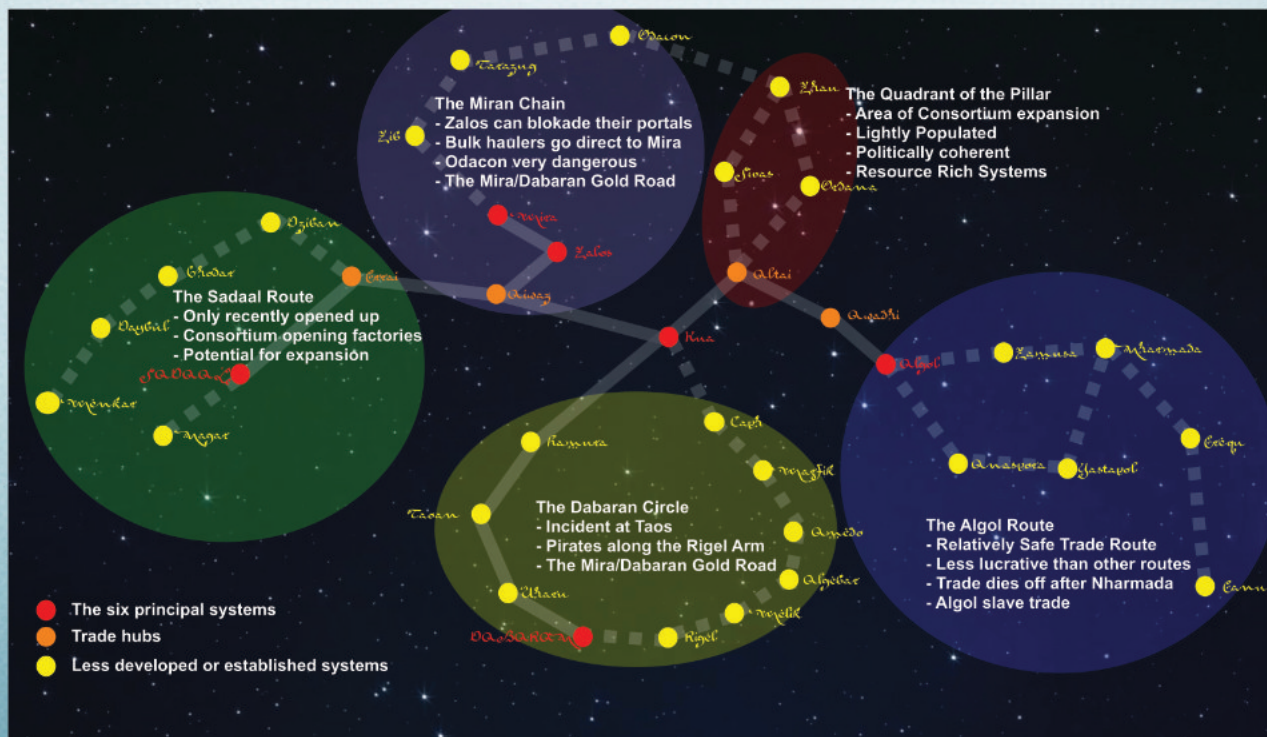
First and foremost is the Quadrant of the Pillar. As part of the Miran Chain these systems (Altai, Sivas, Ordana and Zhau) have been largely overlooked, with Mira and Zalos the key trade destinations in this part of the Horizon. These four systems have a lot going for them: they are largely untouched with huge reserves of raw materials and trade opportunities; the leaders of the Firstcome communities here nurtured their political ties through the Long Night, and have kept up their long-standing cohesion; there are rumours that the people here have been hiding a huge Portal Builder legacy in these systems. But now, finally, and perhaps inevitably, the Consortium has taken a strong interest in expanding into these territories.

THREATS TO TRADE

PIRATES, CORSAIRS AND PRIVATEERS

There's always lots of scope for some piracy in the Third Horizon, although the Consortium's bulk haulers and the Doppelganger Caravans are usually well enough armed to deter attention from all but the biggest pirate outfits. The lonelier trade routes in the lesser systems are often plagued by these vermin, and the long-way around the Miran Chain, forced upon traders when the Order of the Pariah chooses to close the Zalos portals, is particularly bad thanks to the corsair infestations in Altai and Odacon. The pirates in the Rigel Arm of the Dabaran Circle are enjoying a re-surge in activity too.

Since the Navigation Accord, there has been a surge in privateer, or "Antiqam Altarkhis" activity as well, most notably in the space lanes of the big hauler routes. There is an irony, not lost on Traders across the Horizon, in the fact that privateers who expand their operations outside the main trade routes have found themselves falling victim to the very pirates and corsairs that prey on the



traders upon whom they hope to prey. But not too many Free League or Zenithian Trade Alliance tears are shed on their behalf.

FACTIONAL STRIFE (UNREST AND CONFLICT)

It's always been the way, that when the mighty clash the little people suffer. Every time Zalos shut their portals small traders say a prayer to the Icons and hope for the best as they speed through the Quadrant of the Pillar and Odacon. Similarly, the unrest in the Taoan system doubles the distance, and the number of risky portal jumps, from Kua to Dabaran. Not only that, but the pirate operations in these systems, reluctant to challenge the battle-ready military fleets that inevitably gather, are also facing thinner and thinner pickings, as war dries up the trade and haulers go elsewhere. They are displaced to nearby systems, and suddenly there are pirate problems where once there had been none.

Beyond that, antagonists in these conflicts tend to let their ethical standards slip in the face of warfare, and the local populations suffer. Requisitioning and the appropriation of cargo and ships is all too common for the war effort

CORRUPTION & ORGANISED CRIME

Protection rackets, corrupt customs officials, exorbitant levies and tariffs are a constant threat to the livelihoods of small Free Trader outfits. The bigger operations tend to have criminal backing, or the financial wherewithal or weight of arms to face down these problems. But the sole trader doesn't have these advantages. No wonder smuggling has become endemic across the Third Horizon, as corruption encourages other criminal activities.

But for many these rackets are seen as another form of tax, to be paid with a shrug of resignation and no opposition. In the end the costs are passed on to their customers anyway, so all this does is make trade more expensive for those who are least able to pay.

THE DARK BETWEEN THE STARS

We mustn't forget the fact that flying in deep space is, in itself, dangerous, even without pirates, unrest and corruption to worry about. From having to make an ever-increasing number of portal jumps to get to the same destination, to flying under the radar to escape notice – with all the risks that this isolation brings – Free Traders are always the ones to suffer the most from trade disruptions.

But Free Traders are hardy folk. Most know no other way of life, and are happy to take on everything the Third Horizon can throw at them, so long as they enjoy the freedom to run their lives as they see fit, and are able to earn enough Birr to keep flying. Some say that's not much to aspire to, but most Captains would say that it's enough...

HOW TO BRING TRADE INTO YOUR CORIOLIS CAMPAIGN

FREE TRADERS AS A CREW

There is real gaming value in delving into the trader background of the PCs and the crew as a whole. A PC Trader crew should have more to them at the outset than just a ship, a title ("we are Traders!"), and a so-called trading mission. To help flesh out this back-story they could be expert or specialist traders in something, such as:

- they may be renowned for a specific trade route (perhaps they are the only traders who can get in and out of Taoan with a full cargo hold);
- perhaps they are antiques experts, dealing in forgeries as the only way to make ends meet;
- gun runners for hire;
- florists seeking new species and varieties;
- or spice and drug traders...

But whatever the background is, it would give them the genuine basis for a Trading campaign, a proper and colourful back story and context,, even if your campaign itself includes adventures that are not so trading connected. Having a trading basis gives a campaign a strong anchor around which the players' adventures revolve.

WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO TRADE?

When it comes down to it and they need some money a Trading crew will trade (smuggle?) just about anything. Page 48 of the Atlas Compendium provides an excellent summary of a wide range of potential trading goods, and gives a d66 table of Free Trader cargo options, from ore, noble gases and ice, to exos, drones and body armour.

GMs can offer their players a range of perhaps 6-8 missions to choose from, and role play them "looking for work" on the basis of those missions. Free Trader Mission Generator Tables can be found on pages 48-49 of the Atlas Compendium.

SCENARIO HOOKS & IDEAS – TRADE

First and foremost, a campaign may involve a simple but extended journey for a crew following either an overarching mission or simply a trading expedition, where they trade their way from system to system, having adventures along the way;

Or, they may be experts in trading a specific type of animal, or semi-intelligences, or portal artefacts, and they get a huge order from an unknown buyer. It's a tough order to fulfil, but the pay-off is huge...

Or they learn that a competitor has been given task, noted above, and if they let the competitor do it their position and reputation as traders will be dust. They have to complete the order and sell it to the buyer before their competitor does;

The PC Crew could be pirates, or holders of the "Antiqam Altarkhis" letter of marque. This could be down to circumstances, or they could be working with / for the Syndicate or the Consortium;

There's a range of political scenarios to be played out around the Council, seeking to reinforce / repeal / change the Navigation Accord. Maybe there are omens from the Icons that this situation is displeasing to them;

The Doppelganger Caravans are a direct and visible threat to the Consortium's authority. Perhaps someone is needed to disrupt the next Caravan or subvert the Captain of the convoy. Or maybe a plot against the next Caravan is brewing, and someone needs to root out the plot and help the Caravan go about its business;

Some extreme Firstcome faction hates the dominance of these Zenithian heretics, and undertakes to destroy every portal, and return the Third Horizon to the religious certainties of the Long Night... Perhaps they see Kua and the Coriolis station as the fount of all that is wrong with the Third Horizon, and the capture or destruction of the Kua system is the way to right all these wrongs;

A bulk hauler or a Doppelganger Caravan didn't arrive at its destination as expected. Maybe it was found but empty and haunted. What happened to it? Maybe someone wants the PCs to go and find out...

Does some other faction take up the Zalosian example and shut down access to their portals? Why would they do this? What is behind the move? Can someone infiltrate the system and investigate?

A friend has been ruined by some small-time – but influential – trade official. The PCs are asked to take revenge and uncover the conspiracy plaguing the system or planet;

The Consortium are trying to expand into the Quadrant of the Pillar. Maybe the pirates in Altai are freedom fighters resisting the corporate advance of the Consortium's commercial imperialism. Maybe the PCs support the pirates, or are sent to help clear them out and smooth the way for the Consortium's trade to move in;

In the Ghodar system the PCs have connections who have uncovered a rich seam of some natural mineral resource. But the Consortium's agents have moved in, backed by some Legion thugs, to make the locals an offer they cannot refuse, and try to impose the Navigation Accord. Maybe someone has the strength to resist this...;

A collector of antiquities, a trading partner of the PC crew, offers the players a special commission to go find something unique. But they are not the only ones after it...

The PCs' patron has heard tales of new raw material deposits being opened up in Sivas / Ordana / Erequ / Algebar / Nagar, and sends his trading contacts (the PCs) to go and open up negotiations to secure the trade. But the Consortium, the Free League and the Zenithian Trade Alliance all want a piece of it too.

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