

Smuggling 101

The busy captain who doesn't want to explain his cargo to Customs has several options. A ship's bulkheads can be remodeled to create hiding places, or other cargo can be used to conceal the illegal freight. Betan technology provides the extremely useful mass-detector jammers, which can be run off a ship's artificial-gravity system in order to foil weight checks. Rigorous sterilization can, to some extent, hide any evidence of illegal biological goods, but a really thorough check is likely to show anomalies. Bribes to customs officials vary in reliability, and to a large extent depend on the severity of the smuggling that the official *believes* is taking place, as well as the personality of the official. Blackmail is also a useful tool. Once a customs agent has accepted a bribe, he is as guilty as the smuggler, and even more vulnerable to exposure . . .

Cargoes

High technology doesn't make itself, and it requires almost equally high technology to manufacture – which means that there's always going to be an opportunity for someone to ship the latest Betan gadgets across the galaxy. These might be entire ground vehicles, or even bigger devices . . . or small gear such as weaponry, spying devices, or engineered creatures. This is an excellent business opportunity for single traders with a suitcase full of samples, trying to make a deal for later, larger shipments. High technology is also a good target for pirates, as are rare ores; it helps a great deal that both will usually survive the ventilation of the spacecraft they're carried on.

Not everything is worth shipping. Very few planets or stations depend on trade for the necessities, such as food, water, and oxygen; they have natural resources or protein vats. The fact that animal protein can be copied cheaply from recycled organics has largely destroyed the food trade, except in totally isolated organic-low areas (such as asteroid belts or military bases), or for the rich who enjoy rare cuisine just because it's rare. Gems were once precious trade goods, but they became near-worthless when it became possible to synthesize them. (This caused several bankruptcies on Barrayar for those who had unwisely invested in them.)

Trade Opportunities

One opportunity that never goes away is the arms trade. Armies, mercenaries, planetary governments, rebel forces, or space stations wanting to defend themselves . . . everyone wants to buy the latest in weapons technology. This can range from imploder lances for spaceships to nerve disruptors (and shields to protect against them) for personal use. Of course, some planetary governments legislate against the arms trade, or tax it heavily. Beta Colony disapproves of arms deals taking place on their planet,

though the Orb of Unearthly Delights (p. 35) hosts a lot of wheeling and dealing. Both Barrayar and Cetaganda object to weapons passing through their systems except for the government. Various Jackson's Whole Houses will gladly work with weapons dealers – in return for a share of the profits, a share of the weapons, or possibly the whole thing if the Deal changes.

Other trade opportunities include vegetation and seeds for space stations that want to improve their hydroponics, settlers engaged in terraforming, and individual gardeners. Live vegetation requires care, so the traders may need to hire horticulturalists – or take some rapid courses in basic gardening.

Finally, one way to earn some cash is to transport *people* . . . legally or illegally. If a world doesn't have regular passenger traffic, anyone who wants to get there will look first for a trading ship going that way. Some travelers will pay well . . . sometimes, suspiciously well. Others hope to work off their passage. Some are on the run from the law and can't risk regular passenger ships. It is up to each captain how much he wishes to charge such travelers, whether he will risk the law on their behalf, and whether he will keep his side of the bargain at all. Jackson's Whole is not the only world where a traveler can be trapped by confusing customs or regulations and reduced to near-slavery before he realizes his position . . .

Getting Through Customs

It's a rare world that has no restrictions or duties on imports. The wise freighter captain will attempt to make a smooth passage through Customs, whether that involves opening his holds and paying his fees, bribery, or being very efficient at hiding contraband. Some planets, such as Beta Colony, enforce rigid ethical standards in what they'll allow through their space. Others have empirical standards, such as Cetaganda or Barrayar; items that could prove dangerous to the Empire and its servants are illegal, whatever the written regulations may say. Some places have strict biological quarantine laws, such as Kline Station with its ecocops (p. 49), where a load of the latest technological weapons wouldn't be blinked at, but a single cockroach could cause your ship to be impounded for a full search and fumigation. Others have no laws at all, save that money talks.

(For those interested in a trading campaign, *GURPS Traveller: Far Trader* discusses the subject extensively.)

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