



The Volturnus Connection

Building background for the Volturnus campaign

by **Stephen Bonario**

A referee starting a new STAR FRONTIERS® campaign with the Volturnus module series has many questions about the historical background of the Volturnus adventures which need to be answered. The answers provided in this article are unofficial, but are given to help the beginning referee tie up the loose ends and to help the campaign

grow beyond the initial series of adventures.

This article attempts to deal only with those questions that relate to motivations or rationales important to the series. The motives of the Eorna and the Sathar are well defined in the Volturnus modules. But why are the pirates on Volturnus? What real interests does the Truane's Star government have in the planet? What follows is a possible account of what happened to cause the

circumstances present when players begin SF-0, *Crash on volturnus*.

In Frontier Year 44 (for more information on the Frontier time system, see the Expanded Game Rules, p. 52, and SFKH-1, *Dramune Run*), there was a human merchant named Seccitte Zebulon, who regularly made shipments to the Truane's Star system. His ship accidentally misjumped when leaving that system, and Zebulon found himself in an uncharted and mysterious new star system.

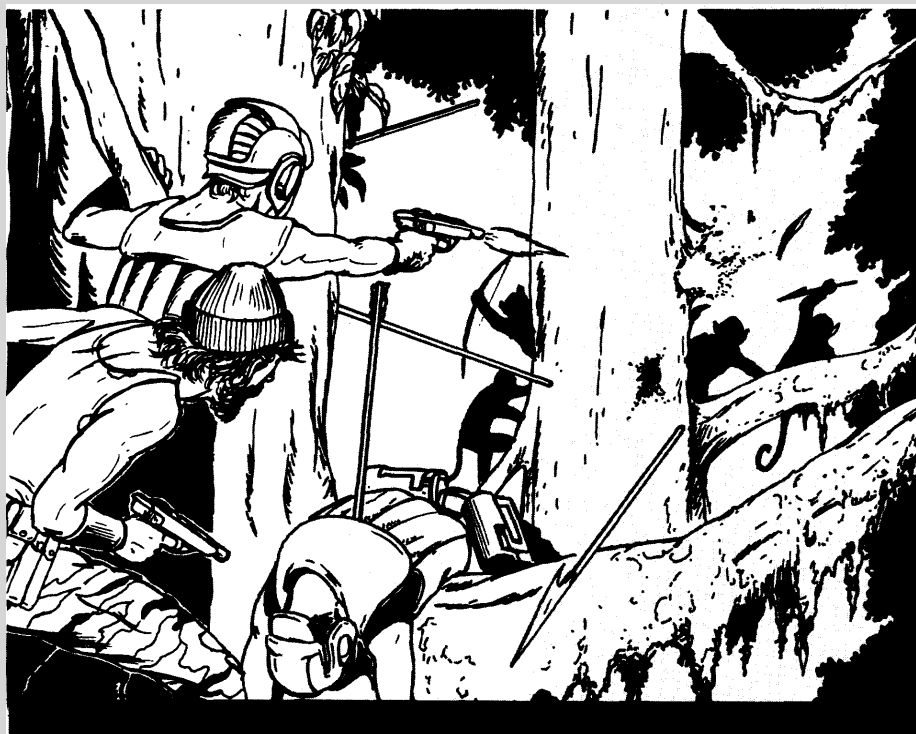
Upon return to Pale, Seccitte decided to sell the astrological information he and his crew acquired while charting their way back. He sold the location of the system to the government of Pale, which promptly paid Zebulon by giving him a private luxury island (where he lived very comfortably — under the government's watchful eye, so he could not resell the information elsewhere).

The Truane's Star system was divided at the time. Pale was the first local planet colonized because of its great mineral wealth. Pale is a cold planet with seasons defined only by the movement of polar ice over its equatorial oceans. New Pale is an Earth-like planet rich in vegetation and animal life. However, this planet is *far* more dangerous than Pale; huge, vicious dinosaurs roam its plains, jungles, and skies, very much like prehistoric Earth. New Pale was settled by humans to supply food to Pale.

The governments of these two neighboring worlds were independent of each other, yet cooperated well. Pale knew its existence depended on the continuation of food supply shipments from New Pale, the cheapest available external food source. New Pale relied on this demand for its food as its main source of income.

In F.Y. 45, Pale's government created a Planetary Research and Development division to open up the "Zebulon Star Route." Pale launched a deep-space probe to explore the system, now named Zebulon after its discoverer. The probe reported astrophysical data on the system and its only habitable planet (now called Volturnus). When it was discovered that great mineral wealth existed on Volturnus, Pale became eager to colonize the planet. Because Pale itself was an ore-rich world, it already had many mining companies in operation on it. The Research division began taking development bids, and the resulting competition was fierce.

The contract to develop Volturnus was



awarded to a healthy company called MINER (Mining for Industrial use of Natural Earth Resources). Plans and negotiations went on for a year, and MINER planned to begin settlement of Volturnus in early F.Y. 47.

Two calamities struck the project at this time, causing the whole thing to fall through. First, New Pale began to receive non-human colonists from Pale. A majority of humans on New Pale were HUSPs (a slang term for persons believing in a racist political philosophy called Human Superiority). The HUSPs preferred this racially isolated planet and didn't want it "contaminated." But Pale used military force to bully the weaker government into allowing other races to settle there. Pale saw this as a way to increase food production on New Pale and perhaps drive food costs down. Several months later, the HUSPs banded together and began terrorizing the new colonists, also attacking Pale's "colonial protection" forces. New Pale thus declared itself to be in a state of war with Pale.

The result of this was Pale's transference of money from "unnecessary" projects to the direct defense of its critical food supply source. Money from the Planetary Research division was diverted to this cause because it was felt profits from Volturnus operations would not be realized fast enough to help the war effort. Pale also believed that, if it could gain full control of New Pale, it could become a much more powerful stellar government.

The other calamity that struck was the kidnapping of the head of MINER, a Vrusk, who was later reported killed when the demanded ransom was not paid. His body was never recovered, and his will called for the liquidation of MINER, with all monies then deposited into a private bank account. It was widely believed that a rival company was responsible for his death.

This was a turning point for Volturnus. It gave the Eorna another twenty years to fulfill their Great Mission, but it also brought the Star Devil to

Volturnus. The former head of MINER secretly retained all the classified information on Volturnus and the Zebulon star system. He had rigged his kidnapping and death, then assumed a new identity as the Star Devil. His initial intent was to set up an illegal mining operation on Volturnus before the government of Pale could do so. To help realize his plans, he drew on the private bank account his will had set up. But as time went on, he instead became involved in pirating operations. He didn't know then how much his "business" would affect Volturnus's future.

The war on New Pale consisted of a series of HUSP-led terrorist attacks on food service shipments to Pale. Pale was forced to continue to spend money on ensuring its food supply remained secure. This became difficult in the early 50s because Pale had an overabundance of resources that were also low in demand. It suffered an economic depression, and many Pale-based mining companies went out of business. One mid-sized corporation, based in Point True, Pale's capitol, began to acquire these small companies hoping to gain a planet-wide monopoly. The corporation was Streel; by F.Y. 53, Streel completely controlled all mining operations on Pale.

Aware of this, the Star Devil approached the Pan-Galactic Corporation and worked out an agreement with it. The Star Devil, using bases in the Gruna Goru, Prenglar, and Dixon's Star systems, ran weapons shipments from Wartech Corporation to the HUSPs on



New Pale. Pan-Galactic financed the cost of the weapons, while the Star Devil furnished the ships. Gun-running proved profitable for both PGC and the Star Devil, allowing the latter to become a potent force. The Star Devil was able to develop Volturnus before Trauna's Star could do it, while keeping Strel busy investing money in the war effort instead of in business projects like PGC did. This activity went on from F.Y. 54 to F.Y. 63. The Star Devil expanded his pirate bases to the Araks, Athor, and Scree Fron star systems. In F.Y. 63, he began putting his Volturnus mining plans into operation. This particular year also saw the end of the Pale-New Pale war.

Strel struggled through those nine years of war, yet continued to grow into a larger corporation despite it. In F.Y. 63, in cooperation with the Pale Militia, Strel made an effort to end the war by pouring millions into the militia's coffers. Confronted by an army of far superior quantity and quality, the HUSPs were soon crushed out of existence, despite the best efforts of PGC and the Star Devil to save them. New Pale became a stabilized planet. Its new gov-

ernment then joined Pale's, and the two began united rulership of the Truane's Star system.

By F.Y. 64, Strel became aware of the long-deserted Zebulon colonization attempt. It urged the new government to develop the system claimed twenty years ago. Strel even helped finance a new Planetary Research division. The division sent an exploratory team three and a half months (140 days) into F.Y. 64. Nine months (360 days) later, a second team was assembled — the player characters.

This is where your campaign is set to begin. Using the previous information, you can provide information about the past to characters who manage to gain access to the pirates' computers. You can now use the Star Devil's many bases as expansion for further adventures. It is almost inevitable that a party will want to get even with the pirates, who may have been responsible for the deaths of party members or who may have escaped Volturnus with prisoners who are player characters. What happens next will be up to the referee and players. Using the rationale provided here

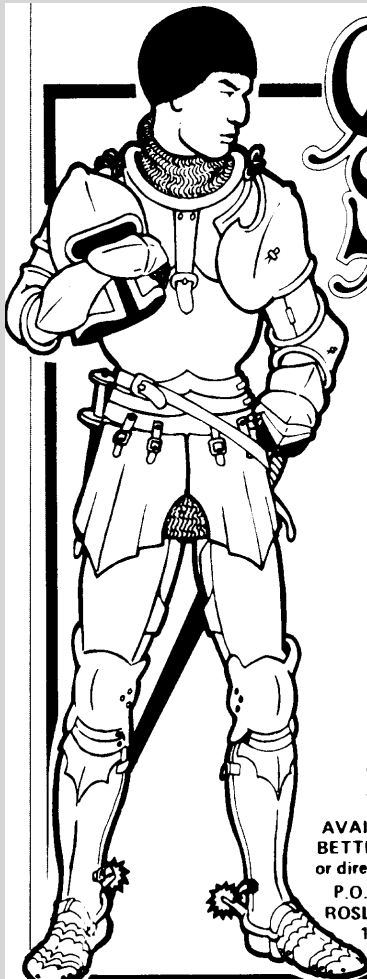
will flesh out the campaign and make it more logical and consistent.

It is also suggested that gamers use the following additional information:

1. The captain of the *Serena Dawn* was working with the pirates, but his reward for delivering the second team to them was his death and the destruction of his ship and crew. The player characters, of course, escaped.

2. PGC has been buying the Star Devil's ore mined on Volturnus. PGC knows of this operation and deals with it despite its illegality. Should characters discover this information, they could sell it to Strel for a handsome price. However, it is quite likely PGC will learn of the sale and send out a few agents to deal with the characters. . . .

I hope this article has demonstrated the need for rationale in any kind of campaign to new and old referees alike. By having a consistent set of motives for the major influences in a scenario, the referee can draw on them and "wing it" with ease when necessary, yet remain true to the pre-planned course of events. Players are an unpredictable lot, and answering their questions becomes easier when you know the answers.



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