

vs. Pirates

GM's NOTES

Standard intro for GURPS and Discworld, and status of the book. Don't dish out the character sheets yet...

Okay, conceptual set-up here; the PCs are from the Agatean Empire, and had been selected by whatever arbitrary process was in use at the time to train as Imperial Ninja – presumed to involve recruiting and training promising-looking orphans or something. However, they were still fairly early in the course, somewhere up in the mountains, when the Dynastic Change happened (ref. *Interesting Times*), and the whole Imperial Ninja idea was put on hold. After a while, someone in the reformed administration apparently noticed that they were paying for a bunch of people to be sitting around not doing very much, but that these people had been detached from any family life or whatever, and possessed dangerous if incomplete combat and assassination skills. So that someone had the bright idea of retraining the PCs as useful, peaceful civil servants.

But the retraining process had barely got underway, really, when the Second Dynastic Change happened (ref. *The Last Hero*). That didn't make much difference at first, but the Second Change got a bit more complicated than the first, and someone decided that the New Administration *might* need some ninja after all. Just, hopefully, not full time. So the PCs' old status was reactivated, under the authority of the Department of Despicable Necessities. But they're really just a bureaucratic problem-solving team, honestly. Apart from anything else, they are no longer expected to succeed in a mission or die in the attempt; failure merely leads to a review of their leave request evaluations and adjustment to their personal pension disbursement schedules.

Now dish out the character sheets. Note that stuff in square brackets relates to points cost, not generally relevant in play; basics of stats, advantages & perks, disadvantages & quirks (mention self-control numbers), skills. Note also that height, weight, and gender have been left open for the player to decide (within sensible limits). Explain a few things...

- Is assumed for the purposes of this scenario that the PCs normally wander round in civilian clothes, but have proper ninja pyjamas in their luggage, along with all the weapons on their character sheets. Going armed in public is generally considered a bit gauche, please note, unless you have a plausible cover story or identity.
- The PCs have not been assigned genders, or for that matter very specific descriptions, although some things are implicit in what's on the character sheets. Players can scrawl what they like in those empty spaces, and keep the character sheets afterwards.
- Futatsu has a bit of a special ability... The rest of the team are probably aware that there's something unusual about him/her, about which he/she does not speak. Something to do with a weird family background, probably. Suffice to say that it takes ten seconds to activate, at the end of which time, well, see the second sheet handed to the player. Oh, and he also has the *Trickster* disadvantage; quote the definition to the players and point out that they'll be on a long sea voyage with this person.
- Hitotsu has the "Unfazeable" advantage (basically Immunity to Fear), Low Pain Threshold (doubles shock penalties – you're *supposed* to avoid being hit), and the Chauvinistic quirk (always *aware* of difference in class and race, though not strongly prejudiced).
- Yottsu is androgynously good-looking, has bright blue hair, and has the Selfish disadvantage (basically, very status-conscious and looking for personal social advantage).
- Mittsu has Unfazeable as above, and also Single-Minded (+3 to rolls for lengthy tasks on which it helps to really concentrate, but need a Will roll to pay attention to anything else, and -5 to rolls to even notice other

stuff) **and** Attentive (+1 when working on lengthy tasks, -3 to notice interruptions), for a total +4 to task, -8 to notice interruptions.

- Itsutsu has an Extra Attack (and Ambidexterity), which must be with a different body part (so can punch and kick, or use sword and numknuts, or fire two pistol crossbows simultaneously... Also Flexibility (gives skill bonuses, and can ignore up to -3 in penalties for working in close quarters), Dual Ready (can draw sword and numknuts simultaneously), Bad Sight (if loses glasses, gets -2 to melee attacks and doubles effective range for range penalty calculation), Easy to Read (gives others +4 to skill rolls to assess your intentions, spot lies, etc.), and Dull (sticks with tried-and-trusted methods).

Other stuff on those character sheets, just ask...

THE BRIEFING AND VOYAGE (IN THE PAST)

A few weeks ago... The PCs had just finished an audit of taxation department procurement procedures in the W'ung district when they found themselves rerouted to Bes Pelargic. There, they met a senior (and rather old-fashioned and stiff-necked) official of the Department of Despicable Necessities, who explained their mission. This can be considered a flashback scene.

In recent years, for reasons which no *loyal* Agatean bureaucrat can understand, a significant number of subjects of the Empire have been seeking to travel to other lands, presumably to observe the Angry Ghosts who are surely well-known to live there, or something. In order that they may do so in comfort, various merchants of the Empire have recently constructed large, comfortable sailing craft to transport them over the oceans to, well, wherever they want to go. The latest and largest of all of these, the *Fourteenth Acknowledged Imperial Concubine*, has recently been completed and set out on its maiden voyage, to the Brown Islands, a few weeks ago.

However, the government has recently received a worrying albatross post message from **Lacquered Tablet**, its official, umm, governor in Port Duck, *de facto* capital of the Brown Islands. It appears that there are said to be many rumours swirling about the underworld of the Brown Islands that the local pirates are planning a great assault on and robbery of this huge prize. This sounds a little unlikely – most of those pirates have learned better than to harm Agatean citizens, the lessons being delivered with a great deal of force – but it's possible that some foolish foreign criminals might be prone to temptation. The government has approached the owner of the *Fourteenth Acknowledged Imperial Concubine*, **Five Earth Kettle**, but he dismisses the story, insisting that he does not want his customers disturbed by such nonsense. Lacquered Tablet's chief of legal enforcement affairs, Prop Lee, is said to be most concerned, though, and he is a most trustworthy agent...

So the government has decided that a cautious response is indicated. Fortunately, the Imperial Navy has a new sloop, the *Vigorous Declaration of Intent*, with the speed to catch the *Fourteenth Acknowledged Imperial Concubine* before it reaches the Brown Islands. Or at least not very long after. (Unfortunately, it's a light vessel that might not be able to take on too many determined pirates at once, but no need for their superiors to worry the PCs with that fact.) And the PCs are being sent with the ship to assist.

Their orders are to act as the government's emissaries. When the *Declaration* catches up with the *Concubine*, it will claim to be on a regular patrol, and come up alongside to swap post and courtesies. However, the PCs will be the ones who go over, will brief the captain, **Ten Pine Bowl**, on the possible threat (they'll carry a letter of accreditation from Five Earth Kettle), and will then find some way to stay aboard secretly. They will also have a couple of signal rockets with them. The *Declaration* will then shadow the *Concubine* just beyond visible distance (its itinerary is fortunately well established); if pirates should attack, the PCs are to fire off a rocket to signal the naval captain, then do everything necessary to delay the pirates and protect the Agatean subjects on the ship until the Navy can come up and save the day.

Simple, really. And the PCs may just be getting a free cruise with no actual danger.

WHAT'S GOING ON

It's an insurance scam. The *Fourteenth Acknowledged Imperial Concubine* was built a little too hastily, by the lowest bidder, and it became pretty obvious to Five Earth Kettle that it'll need a lot of maintenance and work after even one voyage – even before his loans fall due. So he insured it up to the eyeballs, bought off any government and insurance company inspectors, took Ten Pine Bowl and a few of the crew into his confidence (with large payments), and then arranged for his agents in the Brown Islands to arrange a “surprise” pirate attack. The local

pirates do mostly know better than to provoke the Empire, but they've been told that this is a pre-arranged scene, intended as a surprise extra feature for the passengers, and hence that it's a secret. But, well, tell a bunch of drunken pirates to keep a secret, and they'll tell too many people that they're keeping a secret...

So the plan is that the pirates will "attack" at a scheduled time, and then, just as they're throwing grappling hooks up on deck, a couple of the crew who are in on the plot will blow a bunch of demolition charges that will take out the ship's hull just below the waterline. Then, well, panicked evacuation, Ten Pine Bowl and crew who are in the plot with him get away in a fast pinnace, insurance claim. Hopefully, the casualties among the passengers won't be too numerous; some will have to survive to act as witnesses.

Of course, the PCs showing up will be a worry for Ten Pine Bowl, especially if he finds out that they are ninja; if he *doesn't* at first, he may arrange an accident or two for them. He's got just under two days (the *Declaration* will catch up with the *Concubine* late in the afternoon, the next day will be quiet, and the pirates are due midmorning the day after that), and that's as long as he has to act innocent. It's just a shame about the incriminating documents in his desk and the preplaced explosives in the hold.

THE MEETING AND AFTER

When the ships meet, Ten Pine Bowl won't be too worried at first, although he won't be 100% pleased either. He'll emphasise the unlikelihood of local pirates attacking an Agatean vessel, and point out that he has a crew of several dozen, many of them quite tough, and actually a fair number of crossbows and spears in the weapons locker in case of emergencies. If the PCs mention that the *Declaration* will be staying close to hand, he'll be a little worried, but the plan should all go off before the naval ship can get there.

If the PCs declare that they'll be staying on his ship, he'll hum and hah, say that all the cabins are and crew bunks occupied (the idea of this new ship was very popular), and eventually say that room can be made on the Secondary Reserve Stores Deck. What he won't mention, but the PCs will discover, is that the Secondary Reserve Stores Deck is basically the barn for the ship's pig/chicken/duck farm, sorry, Fresh Supplies Support Activities Deck. They'll be sleeping on straw.

On the other hand, they will get a view outside the ship; most of the passenger cabins face inwards, so passengers don't have to be disturbed by the sight of foreign places too much. Well, the ship does have a big central atrium, containing a compact Agatean-style market selling souvenirs of the Brown Islands (all stamped "Made in Bes Pelargic").

Clues:

1. An aged retired sailor, **Six Netted Flatfish**, is travelling on the ship as a passenger. He's also wandering around the place, telling anyone who'll listen (meaning none of the NPCs) that the ship is atrociously badly built. Play him as very cranky but well informed.
2. One of the crewmen who's in on the plot, **Twenty-One Porcelain Ornaments**, has to go below decks a couple of times to finish setting the demolition charges. His route goes through the Secondary Reserve Stores deck. He reeks of blasting clay to anyone with Discriminatory Smell. For that matter, someone with that advantage may catch a hint of the same odour anywhere on that deck.
3. Ten Pine Bowl and Five Earth Kettle haven't spent any more on supplies than their secret plans say that they need. So the galleys are demanding more and more livestock from the Fresh Supplies Support Activities Deck. The PCs will be around to hear an argument between a cook and a chicken-keeper, as the former demands more supplies from the latter (and some ducks and chickens stand around looking *very worried*). The cooks will say how tight supplies are, if asked, and say that they hope that the oft-promised restock in the next port will be as extensive as promised.
4. All this may lead to someone raiding the ship's purser's accounts. (The purser, **Two Blue Arrow**, is in on the scheme.) Security there is pretty nominal, but it will take an Accounting skill roll at -2 to extract the truth. The whole organisation of this voyage is subtly but definitely predicated on the idea that it all ends on the day of the planned attack.

THE ATTACK

When stuff goes down, the pirates ham things up; Ten Pine Bowl attempts to make reassuring noises at everyone, while Two Blue Arrow hangs around him; and Twenty-One Porcelain Ornaments gets sent below to blow the charges. If this isn't prevented, the charges go, and the conspirators all head for a fast sloop on the stern davits while vaguely and unenthusiastically telling everyone to evacuate. The pirates are likely to be puzzled but helpful through all this.

If the charges don't blow, the pirates come up on deck, puzzled by the way that everyone looks so worried and no arrangements have been made to receive them. Once it's clear that the plot has gone south, the conspirators will head for their getaway sloop at a fast sidle. PC actions will of course complicate matters.

AFTERMATH

It may be necessary or desirable (if there's time) to pursue the conspirators or subtler clues to Port Duck, where Lacquered Tablet will instruct Prop Lee to assist them. Preventing him from crossbow-bolting everyone may be the tricky bit...