

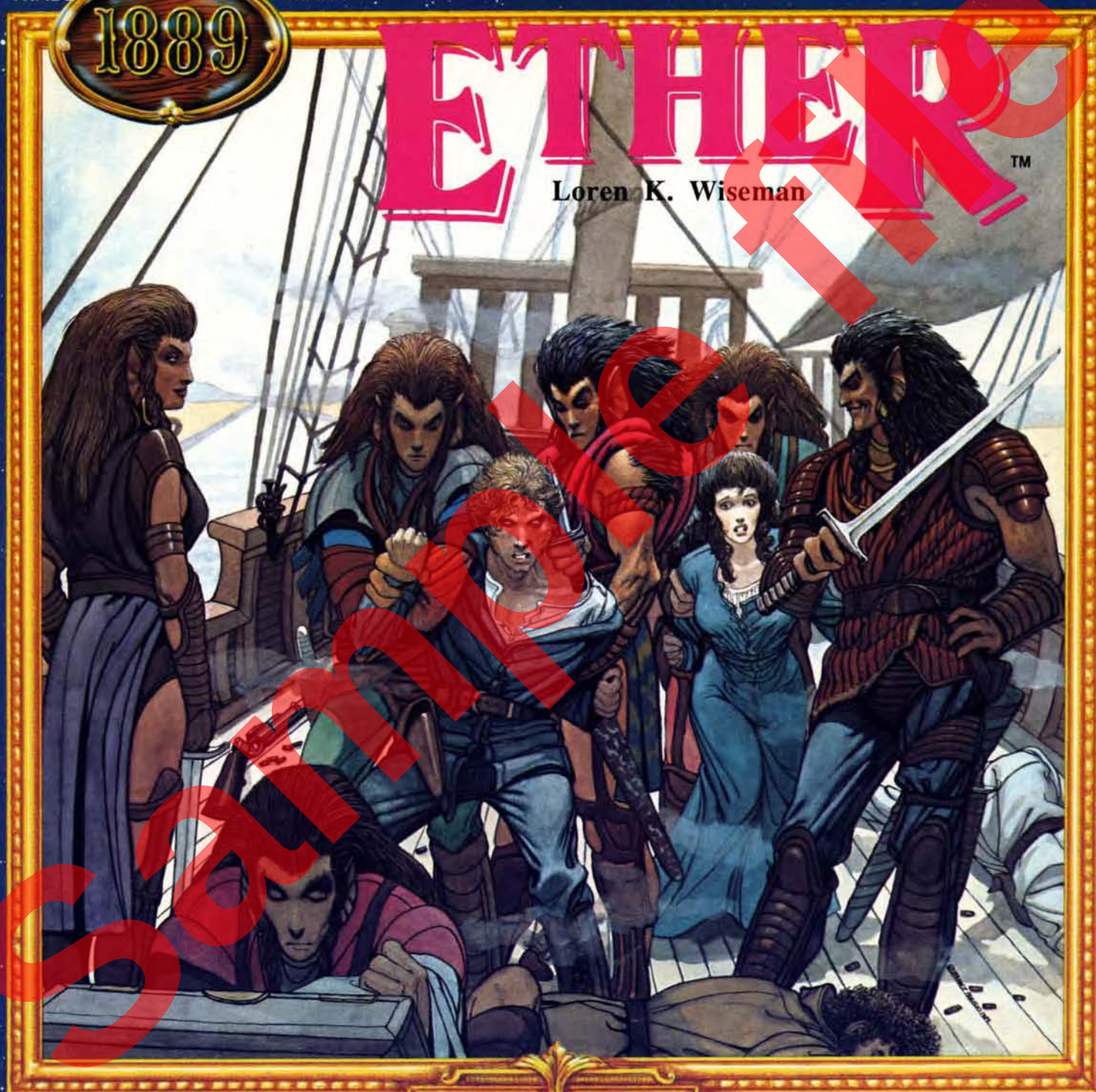
SPACE
TRADE MARK

1889

**MORE
TALES FROM THE**

ETHER™

Loren K. Wiseman

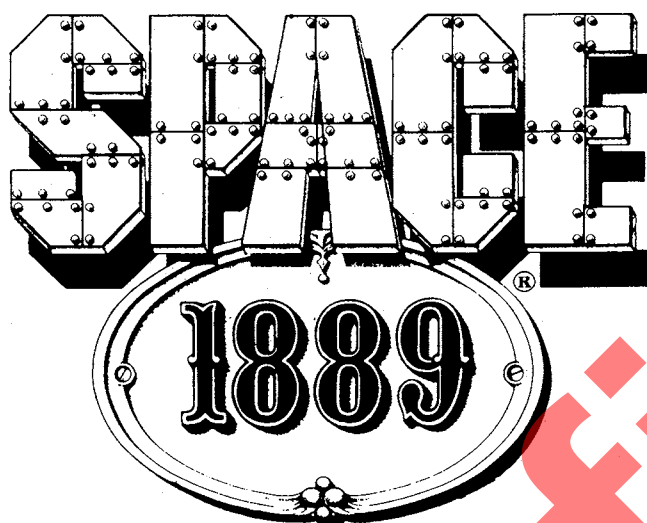


Canal Pirates...
Swamp Terrors...

GDW

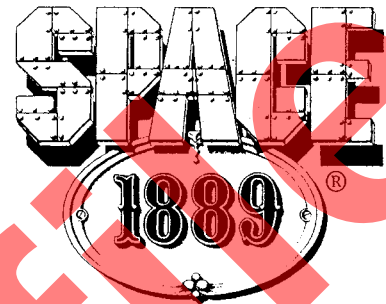
Lost Desert Tribes...
On 19th Century Mars.

Science-Fiction Role Playing in a More Civilized Time.



**MORE
TALES FROM THE
ETHER**





MORE TALES FROM THE ETHER

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Caught in the Mire

IN THIS ADVENTURE, most characters will already be in the service of H. M. government, far from the center of British colonialism on Mars. Those characters without backgrounds in government service may pick their own reasons for being involved with the Mercantile Lords of Thalia at a time when the lords are desperately seeking peace

with their neighboring canal city, Afirenz. For instance, a reporter might easily sell his story about an exotic Martian conflict to eager papers and readers back on Earth. Adventurers of many sorts can be found in the service of potentates all across the red planet—perhaps this is why the characters are present. In any case, one character should be the

representative of the British colonial office, helping to mediate a peace between these two warring cities.

BACKGROUND

THE ANCIENT TRADE routes through equatorial Mars are literally carved in stone, hewn out by fantastic powers that today can only be described as magical. The canals served not only to bring water to the thirsty lands and inhabitants of Mars, but also to tie them together in trade. For many cities, the coin and barge have proven mightier than the sword and bow.

Tradition holds that Thalia has been besieged and embattled dozens of times since the time of Seldon, hosting a large number of warlords,

Althar of Thalia (Veteran NPC)

RENOWNED AS the greatest warrior in the city, Althar has risen alongside Lord Braltar as his “right-hand man.” The two have enjoyed a close personal friendship since before the assassination of Lord Shesh, as each commanded merchant vessels along the canals. In this time of war, Althar has proven himself a capable warrior and general, using the city’s pathetic rabble army to hold off the enemy and even harry the walls of Afirenz.

Althar has been entrusted by the lord with the peace mission to Afirenz. He is the only warrior the lord trusts to carry out this mission, and to carry out the secret mission of locating and destroying the pirates’ swampy lair.

Althar is a private Martian who rarely lets his true feelings be seen



in public. He spends a great deal of time with his troops—inspecting their weapons, trading for better ones, and planning strategies with his officers. However, he is enough of a trader that he will certainly find his place again once generals are no longer needed in Thalia.

Motives: Ambitious, Eccentric.

Appearance: Althar is a tall, proud Martian with deep, penetrating eyes and stern, unwavering features. The warrior presents a very Lancelotian image, which makes people forever wonder where the chink is in his armor.

Attributes Skills

Str: 3	Fisticuffs 2, Throwing 2, Close Combat 4 (edged weapon)
Agl: 4	Stealth 3, Marksmanship (bow 3, rifle 2)
End: 4	Wilderness Travel 3 (foraging), Fieldcraft 3
Int: 5	Observation 4
Chr: 3	Eloquence 2
Soc: 2	Riding 3 (gashant)

kings, and barbarian hordes in its troubled history. But none have been more successful than the 300-year-old reign of the Mercantile Lords. The lords are a hereditary line of rulers who have tempered their military adventures in favor of wide-ranging trade along the ever-present canals. Though in actuality the line has been broken several times by mysterious death or outright assassination, the learned among the populace realize that becoming a lord is more a function of ability and ruthlessness than of direct lineage.

The present lord is the first son of Lord Shesh. However, during Lord Shesh's 17-year reign, Thalia managed to keep its trade lines open and profitable, even in the face of increasing piratical activities on the

nearby canals. When Lord Shesh was discovered to have been poisoned in his sleep chamber, an investigation turned up evidence linking the crime to the ruling family of Afirenz. Public sentiment immediately pushed the new lord, Lord Braltar, into a war with Afirenz, a war neither city was prepared for.

Even though new evidence in the murder of Lord Shesh points in virtually every direction but Afirenz, the war has dragged on for three long years. Conflict has been characterized by meager offensives on either side of the large swamp area between the two cities. Neither army is willing to enter the swamps, certain they would be no match for the Hill Martian pirates hiding there. By treaty, the canal has been de-

clared neutral territory, but the ever-present pirates have still virtually stamped out travel between the two warring cities.

At the request of Lord Braltar, the British colonial office has agreed to mediate a peace between the two reluctant combatants and has sent a representative to bring the two together. In a gesture of goodwill, the lord will send his ceremonial barge (heavily guarded against pirates, of course) down the canal as a gift to the ruling family in Afirenz. Once it has arrived, Afirenz will send a galley with three daughters of the family as brides to the lord and his high-ranking officers. The colonial office then hopes to arrange for the two cities to cooperate in an eradication campaign against the pirates.

Orthir, Captain of the Ceremonial Barge (Veteran NPC)

THE BARGE very rarely leaves Thalia for other canal cities, so its captain could easily take up permanent residence on dry land. But Orthir will have none of that; he keeps his quarters on the barge as his permanent abode. He will exclaim that he has had a canal beneath his feet for most of his long life and cannot keep his footing otherwise.

Jovial and outgoing, Orthir also has a serious side—he is patriotic to his lord and the traditions of that office. The barge is an important symbol of the long line of merchant rulers in Thalia. It was once used to ferry the lords in search of new markets and to maintain friendships with other rulers. Secretly, Orthir aspires to the days when Thalian trading galleys plied canals in virtually every corner of Mars.



Orthir runs a tight ship and has been busy preparing for what could be the barge's most dangerous mission in years. He believes in the notion that only the ceremonial guard may ride on the barge—a fighting force more decorative than effective. Even Althar has argued this point with the aged captain, but he has held fast to his interpretation of tradition and honor.

Att.	Skills
Str: 3	Fisticuffs 2, Throwing 2, Close Combat 4 (edged weapon)
Agl: 4	Stealth 3, Marksmanship 2 (bow)
End: 4	Wilderness Travel 3 (mapping)
Int: 3	Observation 3, Gunnery 2 (muzzle-loading cannon)
Chr: 2	Eloquence 1
Soc: 3	Riding 2 (gashant)

Motives: Loyalty, Responsibility.

Appearance: Orthir is an elderly Canal Martian who prefers to be seen in public only in his dress uniform. The court tailors have had to let it out a few times over the years, as the captain has put on considerable weight.

REFEREE'S SYNOPSIS

ALTHAR IS A hero to the people of Thalia; as a warrior and a merchant captain, he has won the hearts and minds of Thalia's people. His closeness to the lord has permitted him to act outside normal procedure at times, with authority second only to his master. What the people do not realize is that Althar and the lord are actually hoping for an ambush so they can locate the base camp of the swamp pirates.

The human characters, for whatever reason, will accompany Althar and the barge on the journey along the canal to Afirenz. Its course runs through the heart of the pirate-infested swamp, as everyone knows, so escorting soldiers and boats will be plentiful. Althar has overseen the outfitting and deployment of the expedition.

When the barge is attacked, Althar is to make the best stand possible, and then escape the ambush with as many men and boats as he can. With these he is supposed to track the victorious pirates, find their camp, and await reinforcements.

The human characters will be captured by the pirates, but they will be turned loose since they are of no ransom value. In the swamp, hungry and exhausted, they will find Althar and his troops, and warn them that the pirates plan to move before reinforcements arrive. The war against the swamp pirates will have to be waged now, with the few materials and men at hand.

The Barge

THE CEREMONIAL barge has seldom been used in the last 10 years; but, under the direction of Orthir, it

has been kept in good condition. Offered now as a gift to help end a war, Orthir was, at first, somewhat torn between his wish to obey his lord and his love for his craft. Seeing his loyal servant so divided on the issue, Lord Braltar stepped in and personally ordered Orthir to remain captain of the vessel under its new owners. Orthir is now consumed with joy, since he can remain with his barge and still follow the orders of his lord to the letter.

The ceremonial barge is an enormous craft of wood, reeds, stone, and gold leaf. The craft was originally built to be a diplomatic vessel and to impress future trading partners—a task which it serves magnificently. The forward and flanking battlements ride high off the water, and the central tower rises higher still, fully 30 feet above the waterline. It has masts for sails, but travel by oar is considered more stately—the single rowing deck requires 100 strong backs to make headway against the current.

The barge has several elaborate features. The royal suites are reserved for the lord and his retinue, or his appointed representative on a particular journey. This suite is comprised of a dozen rooms, including bedrooms and reception rooms, plus a swimming pool and kitchens—stocked with the finest delicacies. The three other suites are reserved for guests, and although they are somewhat smaller, they provide luxurious accommodations for their fortunate occupants. The remainder of the barge is devoted to the operations of the ship, from crew quarters to a rowing deck and steerage room. The barge is ornately decorated with gold and jewels—treasures from

across Mars—for the enjoyment of its privileged passengers.

The Treasures Of the Barge

THOUGH OF NO particular religious significance, the ceremonial barge is central to the theme of mercantile canal trading and the lineage of the great lords. As such, it has become the repository of much of the wealth and glory of Thalia, the pride of its aristocracy, and a worthy gift to stop a long and troublesome war.

The suites are elaborately decorated with such fineries as marble statuary, washbasins, and pillars, and all the furnishings are emblazoned with gold, silver, and gems of all shapes and sizes. There are rogo wood tables crafted by the finest artisans of distant Yaonis, scented hangings from the witch people of the Duo Badlands, and even silk rugs and robes from China—gifts from British traders who have travelled between the worlds.

A small fortune is locked up in the barge—it's not enough to bankrupt Thalia once it is given away, but certainly enough to tempt thieves and pirates. Many Martians have lost their lives at the hands of the guards, their blood still not completely bleached out of the sandstone battlements.

Mission of Peace

THE FIRST THREE days out from Thalia have been virtually without incident. The grand barge was ceremoniously launched on its treacherous journey by the lord, who was officiating at a festival in honor of the event. Now it is majestically cruising through the swampland along the canal, as if challenging the

elements to impede its progress.

Althar has positioned boats in front of the barge and to its rear to protect against the dangerous Hill Martian pirates known to infest the swamps. From the cover of the dense foliage they can strike with their sleek, fast boats to seize any prize that ventures through their domain. Althar is convinced that the pirates will not attempt to take such a well protected barge, but he is, nonetheless, proceeding with caution.

The humans will be placed on the barge. Those attached to the British colonial office will be afforded accommodations in the luxury suites. Others will, no doubt, be put up in the lower decks with the crew. Every day Orthir will be seen tending the ship, working the crew to prepare the ship for its new owners. Underlying all their activities, however, are the tension and fear associated with travelling through the swamp, knowing that watchful eyes are following the

barge, coveting its riches.

The humans' activities during these first three days will be limited. Aside from observing the passing marshlands and their beautiful wildlife, they might make friends with some of the crew, become acquainted with Althar or Orthir, or ask questions about the journey. They will certainly get a good idea of the layout of the barge, so they may claim to be familiar with the escape routes once the pirate attack begins.

