

# A Weekend in the Country

by **Alex Clark**

There can rarely have been a live role-play event so beset by difficulties as this one, but despite having to delay the start to avoid the local junior school's charity walk, and having a group of seasonal field hands camped on one edge of the site, Dave Harvey put on a very enjoyable event. Although given the torrential rain that came down for most of Friday night, the delayed start may have been a blessing in disguise.

Sarah and myself arrived at about 3:00pm, Sarah having spent the morning preparing stuff for the barbecue. Tim Atkinson and Ros Day were already on site, and others arrived over the next hour or so.

The opening game of the weekend was *Open the Box...!*, by Ros Day and Jasper Hedger and was set in the Star Wars universe. The administration of a minor world on the edge of the Empire were trying to ingratiate themselves with the Emperor by sending him a special gift. Unfortunately, various malcontents and criminals wanted to steal the Emperor's present, which was in a very securely locked box.

I was part of a group of government representatives who had been given the job of delivering the box to the Imperial officials at the space-port (OK, space landing strip). The others were Dave Harvey, Craig Porch and Sue Davies (Fiat Lux!)

Knowing that there were bands of desperate criminals who wouldn't hesitate to shoot us and take the box, and given that none of us was carrying anything bigger than a pistol, we decided that our most prudent course would be to cache the box somewhere safe, then go to the space port, find some nice heavily armed Imperial soldiers for an escort, and then all go and get the box together.



We also reasoned that, as we didn't actually know what was in the box, or how to open it, we must be pretty low on the bureaucratic totem pole and therefore not at all inclined to get into a gunfight.

We managed to sneak around to the space-strip without encountering anyone, although it was a near thing. Unfortunately, the Imperial officials and troopers that we'd been hoping to find there had obviously decided to be fashionably late. Moving cautiously further round the site, we heard the sound of gunfire, so we did the sensible thing and hid.

As it turned out, one of the warring sides was the Imperial troopers we'd been looking for. Making ourselves known to them (from a safe distance) we were informed that they were retiring to bring up reinforcements, and that we should wait in cover to rendezvous with them.



After a short wait and an encounter with a pair of heavily armed rabbit hunters, a party of Stormtroopers made their entrance, complete with concealed combat orchestra playing the Stormtrooper March! With them was another trooper (Mick Penver) carrying what appeared to be the box containing the Emperor's present. They'd apparently captured it from a group of rebels, who must have found our cunning hiding place for it.

By this time it was getting towards time for the shuttle to land so we all moved towards the landing area. As there were still some 10 minutes to go the Stormtroopers deployed out in the open and the rest of us hid behind a tree. The Stormtroopers started coming under heavy fire, and it was all getting a bit busy until it started to chuck down rain (monsoon season on Merdonia, obviously) which may in fact have saved us. Most of us took (largely ineffectual) shelter under the large yew tree that was our finishing point until final whistle went.

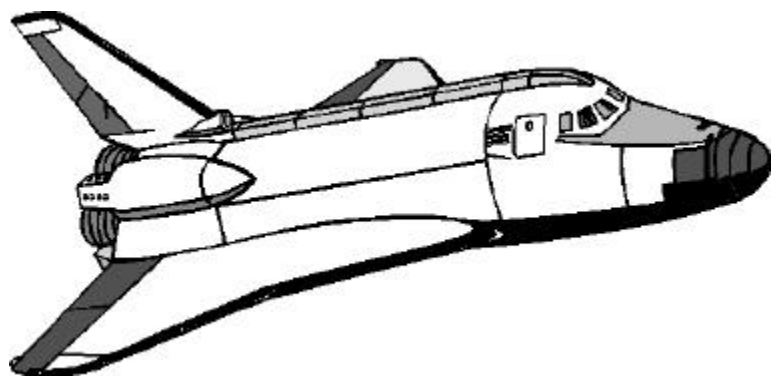
In the debrief, delivered by Ros, made up as a member of the Black Sun (a highly organised criminal organisation), we learned that our box had not been found after all - those naughty rebels had made up a duplicate box, which when opened by the slicer (Sarah Clark) turned out to contain a nasty little snake, and a box of Tribbles! So it would seem that the Emperor is in for a different kind of birthday surprise, as will be the administration of Merdonia. The real box, when recovered, had in it party poppers and sundry other party items, and a cake with the Imperial logo on the icing. The entire script had actually been an elaborate way to give Sarah, whose birthday it really was, a cake!



The rain had blown over by this time and, although the skies frequently looked threatening, the weather stayed dry for the rest of the event.

After a chance to rest and dry out, Sarah served the barbecue, consisting of coated chicken, and peppered steaks. We'd just bought a new portable barbecue which did the job very well, which was a good thing considering that the fire pit where we'd done the cooking in the past was well waterlogged!

While the rest of us were eating, Paul Grosvenor and Craig Porch were setting out the props and such-like for their game, 'Many Happy Returns'. In this game, most of us were members of a UN team sent to locate the remains of a shuttle which had crashed on re-entry returning from Mars, carrying the results of a number of scientific experiments. Players were engineers, biologists, geologists or medical specialists, with a small contingent of UN military to take care of security aspects.



In a moment of madness, someone had decided to script me as military commander and 2ic of the whole mission, so I wasted no time in exploiting the cock-up potential of the situation.

As the scientists dispersed around the site to look for debris, I assembled my little band of merry men. This apparently consisted of two new guys whose names I can't remember (sorry, lads!) plus Tim Atkinson and Mick Penver. Unfortunately, I didn't think to check everyone's ID and Mick was actually a tabloid journalist and Tim was an eco-activist. At their suggestion I sent them out in pairs to patrol and set myself up at an observation point on top of one of the earth ramparts (i.e. well out of the way of the field HQ and the comms link represented by Dave Harvey).



The scientists soon came upon radioactive hotspots, which were the remains of the fuel cells, and also some coloured gunk. Tim was an early victim of both, as he was infected by the gunk, which was some kind of nerve toxin, then led through a radioactive area which did him severe damage, none of which was treatable by our medical team.

In a bad way and getting worse, Tim's behaviour was so erratic that I put him under guard. (I'd returned to the HQ area by this time) I also had a complaint that neither he nor Mick had been able to produce ID when requested, and a call via the Comms system brought the news that they were actually intruders. This was very embarrassing as I'd vouched for them to one of the scientists a short time before.

I placed them both under guard, but Tim was becoming unmanageable so I decided to stun him. As I brought my gun up he rushed me, and passed on the infection of the nerve agent to both myself and the mission commander (Sarah Clark).

I stunned him anyway, but in the confusion Mick Penver escaped into the darkness. The effect of the nerve agent was to knock off 1 HP every 20 minutes.

The only treatment we had available slowed the rate down to every half hour so we really needed to finish the job and get back to proper medical facilities. However, this sense of urgency was superseded by a message from HQ telling us we had 45 minutes to locate and destroy all the toxic biological material before they sterilised the area with an airstrike!



With such an aid to concentration, the areas of infection were quickly located. A means of destroying the material was to hand, in the form of the hottest of the hot spots, which was so active that it would vaporise anything coming close. The gunk was deposited into the hotspot with the aid of a pulley devised by one of my troopers (well done, that man!), and we mostly lived happily ever after.

Except Tim, who expired before we were extracted. And the UN was going to have a major PR job to do as Mick had managed to file a story about secret bioweapons research and cavalier disregard for the environment while I was off in splendid isolation on the rampart.

An interesting puzzle game in which I think the only shot fired in anger was when I stunned Tim.

With no dry firewood we couldn't have the usual session round the fire so we huddled round the barbecue instead, while Sarah cooked up some sausages. We watched satellites and meteorites until it got too cold and we turned in.

Sunday morning dawned bright and very warm. The game originally planned for the morning was Pete Merritt's 'Any Port in a Storm...?,' but unfortunately Pete had not been able to make the event. As an alternative, Dave gave us a 'border crossing' game.

We were mainly organised into mercenary groups of 4, and invited to contract for various jobs, including guarding the border which was defined by the inner rampart. Other contracts required smuggling something across the border, capturing a wanted criminal, or hunting down a terrorist gang.

Tim and Mick were far too effective for comfort as the terrorists, and 4 guards made for a rather leaky border. As each contract was time limited to half an hour, it made for a pretty lively game.



By now it was lunchtime, and the sky was looking very black again, so proceedings were brought to a close.

Thanks to everyone involved in organising the event, particularly Dave and Sarah.