

GRAX'S CLUB



a
DARK MATTER™
adventure



GRAX'S CLUB

WELCOME TO THE CLUB

Before you know it, you've been shuffled into a cramped office, misty with cigar smoke, being eyed over by the green man himself, Grax. He stares you down each in turn, a silent inquisition as he checks your applications so convincingly you'd barely notice he was holding them upside down. At last, he barks, "You're hired! Welcome to the team."

And with that, the timid halfling accountant shuffles you out of the room and proceeds to eject a battery of legalese about the nature of your contract at Grax's Guys for Cheap. Most of his words blend together, either due to his stammering, or the fact that he very probably is misusing them. One thing is clear: this mercenary company seemed a lot more organized from the outside.

WHAT'S GRAX'S CLUB?

In this lighthearted campaign for the *Dark Matter* campaign setting, you play second-rate mercenaries working for a third-rate mercenary company, *Grax's Guys for Cheap*. As part of your contract, you take whatever nonsense oddball jobs come across your desk, and your boss, none other than Grax himself, has more than enough to keep you busy.

Each chapter of this campaign functions as a slapstick one-shot, as you are recruited to some new, ridiculous job for yet another kooky client. You can play this adventure as one large adventure with four parts, or as a series of disconnect adventures, connected by common characters and the prologues in the Grax's Guys headquarters. You can play chapters out of order, skip chapters, or just dip into one as a one-shot.

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, you need the *Dark Matter* campaign setting by Mage Hand Press, as well as the System Reference Document (SRD) or the 5th Edition core rules.

Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players when their characters first arrive at a location or trigger a specific circumstance, as described in the text.

This adventure contains statistics for most of the creatures found within. When a creature's name appears in **bold** type, that's a visual cue for you to look up its statistics in the appendix of this book. Some monsters will include a note of where to look up its statistics, if those are found elsewhere. Named nonplayer characters (NPCs) also appear in **bold** type, as a visual cue to place them in the scene.

Lastly, ability checks, saving throws, attack rolls, and other game mechanics, such as rolling for initiative and voting as a group are listed in **bold** type, to remind you that dice will be rolled by you or the players.

If a phrase appears in *italics*, it refers to a proper name, the name of a spell, a magic item, or a section within this book. This book contains no additional spells, so all spells referenced can be found in the SRD or in *Dark Matter*.



BIPINBOP'S FACTORY OF FUN

AN ADVENTURE INTO A FANTASTICAL FACTORY
FOR 1ST TO 2ND-LEVEL CHARACTERS

WRITTEN BY MIKE HOLIK
MAGE HAND PRESS

GRAX'S CLUB

BIPINBOP'S FACTORY OF FUN

INTRODUCTION

With a *crash, clatter, clunk*, a rocket the size of a shoebox, constructed of scrap and bubblegum crash lands onto a rooftop. A tiny hatch swings open and a little robotic head peeks out, revealing bright round light bulbs for eyes that peer around curiously. On a single tire installed in lieu of legs, it clammers out and roves around the crashed rocket, then cautiously approaches a skylight looking down into the building below. Its light bulb eyes light up. In a great mechanical orchestra, factory machines whirl about and send sparks flying, boilers broil and send puffs of steam into the air, conveyor belts shuffle materials and packages to and fro, and a great pipe spouts a never ending supply of a carbonated, sugary liquid.

The robot holds two mechanical fingers to a place its mouth might be and emits a supersonic whistle. For an instant the scrapped rocket rattles, and then it bursts open with a procession of tiny robots of all shapes and sizes. Some waddle about on undersized legs, others clatter around on a half dozen of them, while others still wheel about or hover; each is a member of a mismatched bunch, like an animate junk drawer. The mob chatters at incomprehensible speeds and cheers at their good fortune. The wizmos have found a home!

BACKGROUND

This adventure features the following prominent elements of the *Dark Matter* universe.

GRAX'S GUYS FOR CHEAP

Grax's Guys for Cheap is the most affordable mercenary company in the 'verse, and boasts a wide net of job postings. Prospective clients can ask almost anything of Grax's Guys, from shipping Rosvalian star pigs across the galaxy, to asking as a short order cook in the restaurant those pigs are served at. While a typical Grax's crew will see plenty of bodyguard duties and security details, they'll take nearly any job, provided it's legal and the pay is acceptable, with

a half-up-front deposit. The tagline "You can trust Grax!" can be seen advertised in almost every port in the 'verse, and is practically a cliché at this point.

Moreover, the founder and owner, Grax Grraxe, will hire just about anyone to a crew, and makes a point to offer regular contracts to orcs, half-orcs, and other distrusted races. This means that a Grax's Crew is the easiest starting position for anyone breaking into the mercenary business, if not the most prestigious or lucrative.

In recent years, however, due to competition with the better-funded Scale and Fang Inc., Grax's Guys for Cheap has been on the decline. Plenty of crews still work with the company, but the jobs have gotten more dangerous and less profitable with each passing month, as the upscale, better-paying clients have gone elsewhere. For his part, Grax has doubled-down on getting contracts and improving the company image, one job at a time.

KRASH

Spacers everywhere drink Krash, a sugary canned soft drink manufactured on the human world of Holloway. With decades of successful advertising and a diverse line of products, from Krash-Zero to Tropi-Krash, the brand has become the most popular soft drink in the 'verse, much to the chagrin of Krash's biggest competitor, Orc-a-Cola. On many human worlds, Krash has become a generic term for soft drinks in general, and cans of the sugary drink can be found everywhere from the Solar Citadel to the outer reaches of the Frontier.

Every few weeks, the inventor of Krash and owner of Krash Co., Boxly Bipinbop, gives tours of his amazing factory to a select few. Names are selected by picking randomly out of a hat, but the Krash Co. board of directors usually slips in a few names of wealthy benefactors or prominent investors.

However, Boxly has gotten word that one of the people on his next tour is plotting to steal the secret Krash formula! In turn, he has hired a crew of Grax's Guys to follow along and keep an eye on the tour group to ensure that nothing sinister happens.

THE FIRM

At first blush, it can be hard to tell that any part of the Firm's dealings is illicit; after all, its contracts are watertight, its checks never bounce, and its lawyers are impeccable. Those in the know, however, understand that, for all its business accoutrement, the Firm is the largest organized crime syndicate in the 'verse.

To conduct its various illegal operations, which include hacking, weapons trafficking, and elaborate heists, the Firm hires short-term Contractors, individuals specially-recruited to match the details of a particular job. Contractors are abundant and varied, including everyone from expert hackers to common thugs, but all are expected to follow their contracts to the letter, regardless of what deeds they entail. Many Contractors even play the part of businessmen with aplomb. By their nature, Contractors are compartmentalized and ultimately expendable; no single Contractor knows details which might incriminate the Firm's Management, and if they become a problem, their contract can be terminated, usually via unprotected spacewalk.

OVERVIEW

Bipinbop's Factory of Fun is an adventure for 1st-level characters, and is the first in a series of adventures centered on Grax's Guys for Cheap. In it, the characters attend a tour of the secretive factory where the popular Krash soft drink is manufactured and discover that it is infested by havoc-causing wizmos, a type of tiny scrap robot. Soon, they are trying to save the members of the tour from accidental harm while attempting to stop the theft of the secret Krash recipe! It is presented in four parts.

Prologue: Orientation at Grax's HQ lets the players get familiar with their new home base as Grax's Guys, as well as the faces they're likely to see between adventures. They meet their boss and get a brief orientation from accountant Jimball Hundwig, and acquaint themselves with a few other danger-loving Grax's crew members. If playing this adventure as part of a larger Grax's Guys campaign, it's recommended you let the players explore Grax's headquarters and return between every individual adventure.

In *Part One: Old Mr. Bipinbop*, the characters arrive at the Krash factory and acquaint themselves

with the other members of the tour while visiting the gift shop and waiting for their host. The characters gradually notice that something is going wrong with the machines in the factory's theme part of a museum, and a mob of wizmos is likely to blame.

Part Two: The Tour takes the characters through the factory, as a series of accidents endanger different members of the tour group. As the group dwindles, the characters are caught by surprise when it turns out that one of the attendees was hired to steal the Krash secret recipe, and escapes while they battle the wizmos.

In *Part Three: Race to the Vault!*, the characters meet a criminal contractor at the safe containing the Krash secret recipe. Can they defeat them and keep the recipe from falling into the wrong hands?

KEY CHARACTERS

The following nonplayer characters feature prominently in this adventure.

GRAX GRRAXE (HE/HIM)

The party's employer and head of Grax's Guys for Cheap, Grax Grraxe, is a fat, well-humored orc with an eyepatch and a thick orcish accent. Around fifty years ago, Grax decided to leave the Warzone and all its general unpleasantness to found Grax's Guys, a low-to-mid-tier mercenary organization, which bills itself as being all-purpose. True to form, Grax branded it after himself, and his face can be seen on billboards, company mugs, and the occasional t-shirt.

However, over the last few years, GGFC has lost a lot of customers to their closest rival, Scale and Fang Inc. Nothing perturbs Grax so much as this rivalry, and in particular, that he's losing to the mercenary company owned by Garfreckt, an eternal dragon who Grax considers to be a bit of a jerk.

BOXLY BIPINBOP (HE/HIM)

The inconceivably wealthy entrepreneur, Boxly Bipinbop, founded Krash Co., the makers of the galaxy's most popular soft drink, when he was just thirteen years old. Now, in his waning years, he is content to be an eccentric billionaire and the face of his company, while his board of directors conducts the usual regimen of scheming and corporate backstabbing. A near-human greenskin with a mop of wildly unkempt white hair, Mr. Bipinbop projects

a larger-than-life persona, even as he hobbles about with his cane, and personally gives tours of his wondrous, magical factory.

Bipinbop retains every ounce of enthusiastic inventiveness which helped him corner the soft drink market in his youth, and has supplemented his cutthroat business acumen with a dear and genuine affection for children. With no kids of his own, he hopes to ensure his company can be a haven of childish wonderment, instead of a mere corporate machine.

KERRIS (HE/HIM)

A budding, if precocious twelve-year-old inventor, Kerris is a human boy with freckled brown skin, curly dark hair, and an endearing gap in his front teeth. Kerris can be easily spotted by the bulging backpack of gadgets he wears at all times, as well as by the notebook in which he is eagerly taking notes. He hopes to apply everything he sees to his own machines when he gets home.

Kerris is accompanied by his father, Jim Lotide, but his enthusiasm and inventiveness is matched only by Boxly Bipinbop. Jim is a lethargic but caring father, who can't hope to keep up with Kerris's energy.

ROSE MATILDA (SHE/HER)

A prim, entitled elf of forty-five years old (a pre-teen in elf years) Rose Matilda thinks she is better than everyone else on the tour, with the exception, perhaps, of Mr. Bipinbop himself. Living on the elven home worlds has taught her, without a doubt, that wealth and elvenness set her apart from most other kids, and will inevitably make her more successful in the long run. Though she stands an inch taller than the other kids visiting the factory, Rose hasn't yet learned the important lessons of humility and altruism that the other kids have long since internalized.

Rose is accompanied by a group of bodyguards from Scale and Fang Inc., a more competent, better funded mercenary organization than Grax's Guys, a fact which Rose is all too ready to share with the party.

THE TREE-BLADES

The Tree-Blades are a skathári family visiting the Krash Factory on vacation. Each of the Tree-Blades is named with a litany of honorifics and antonyms, but have chosen to summarize their names for introductions.

Tukt (he/him). The smallest skathári, Tukt, is an insectoid boy with comically large eyes and diminutive wings, who impulsively touches or licks anything with his reach.

Bmarka and Drim'kt (she/her and he/him). Tukt's parents, Bmarka and Drim'kt, don't know much about magical technology, so are using this vacation as an opportunity to see a bit of the 'verse before settling down. When the parents see something new, they usually observe it for a moment, say "neat" in Skathári, snap a picture on their holo-sphere, and then collect Tukt from whatever trouble he has already embroiled himself in.

FERMATA (THEY/THEM)

A little purple amoeboid filled with little carbonated bubbles and quivering with energy, Fermata is a Krash-drinking champion. The amoeboid keeps a mental list of their favorite Krash drinks, and intends to sample each one of them before the tour is done. More than anything, Fermata is hoping to find some of the long-discontinued *Hyper-Krash*, an energy drink too awesome (and potentially carcinogenic) to be sold on the open market.

Fermata is accompanied by their parent, Mill, a timid amoeboid who is entirely too permissive of Fermata's obsessions. This year, it was Krash, last year it was drones, and next year it will likely be something just as expensive or dangerous.

JENNA AND JEN

At first blush, little Jenna is a human girl of no older than eight years old with enormous blonde pigtails, who responds to most questions with a broad um and ahs or occasionally a giggling oops. Her mother, Jen, is a pleasant, if airheaded suburban mother who possesses a uniquely blank stare for most situations.

Both of these people are imposters. Little Jenna is actually Grisham Buzzpop, a male halfling in his mid thirties, going deep undercover on a contract from the Firm in order to steal the secret Krash recipe. Jen is an android programmed to perfectly replicate the demeanor of an antiquated

housewife until triggered with a code word. While this is undoubtedly the most embarrassing contract Grisham has ever taken, he has firmed up his disguise with a special cocktail of illusion and glibness potions, so the party might be none the wiser. The two plan to sneak away from the tour at the first possible opportunity to perform their recipe heist.

THE SCALE CREW

A band of mercenaries from the rival Scale and Fang Inc., the Scale Crew is better-funded and more competent than any crew from Grax's Guys. They consist of the following:

Drak Garfreckt (he/him). A male dragonborn with red and black scales, Drak is the leader and fighter of his crew. He's cool under pressure, tough as nails, and smart enough to be a step ahead of any rival mercenary group. His last name is that of Garfreckt, the eternal dragon who founded and owns Scale and Fang Inc. Perhaps, he was adopted by the eternal dragon, or is distantly related to it. In any case, Drak has the assurance of someone who earned their position through expertise and hard work, and commands the respect of his crew in turn.

Trace (they/them). The heavily-upgraded vect of the Scale Crew, Trace, serves as their sniper and gadgeteer. Trace's expertise lies in drones, blasters, and explosives, but any mechanical device which can be broken or repaired falls under their domain. At a glance, it can be determined that Trace is cold, calculating, and prepared for anything.

Sierra O'Connell (she/her). The lovely Sierra O'Connell is a near-human green-skin who oozes charisma. Her smile not only lightens up a room, it makes even Drak and Trace seem less businesslike and dour by extension. On a typical day, she's dressed for adventure, with a fitting hat to complement her laser whip. Sierra even knows a few songs as well, so she serves as the Scale Crew's bard, as well as their rogue. Her biggest personal flaw is that she will, without fail, steal the wallet of anyone she spends time with. It's as much habit as it is misbehavior for her at this point.

Aela Vestele (they/them). The half-elf sorcerer Aela Vestele is easily the most refined of the Scale Crew, and is usually the most refined of any group in which they find themselves. Only when they cast a spell does the nature of their sorcery become revealed: small dimensional rifts open around them,

revealing a soup of alien tentacles and eyes. Despite this, Aela tries to be utterly composed at all times. Their father is Jermain'ion Vestele, one of the most successful capitalists in the Elven Empire, so it's anyone's guess how Aela ended up as a half-elf in a mercenary company, instead of as a full-blooded elf working behind a desk.

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PROLOGUE: ORIENTATION AT GRAX'S HQ

In this adventure, the characters play newly-hired members of Grax's Guys for Cheap, a second-rate mercenary company with third-rate employees. The ink on their contracts hasn't dried by the time the nervous halfling accountant, Jimball Hundwig, is showing them around Grax headquarters. The HQ will be the characters' home away from home while they're waiting to be assigned a job, and this tour acts as both an uninformative orientation and a way to set the bar very low for new employees. True to form, the headquarters isn't a dramatic skyscraper or an orbital space station, but a converted warehouse right next to the starport on the planet Fornax.

THE LOUNGE

The characters have been ushered into the Grax's lounge and sat on its remarkably uncomfortable couch for a brief orientation. Read or paraphrase the following to begin:

In the space of a few short minutes, you were interviewed by the orc himself, Grax, promptly hired, pressed to sign a few dozen questionable legal documents, and subjected to a battery of incomprehensible legalese by a stammering halfling accountant. Now you're sitting at the heart of the Grax's Guys for Cheap operation: a lounge in the center of a converted warehouse, with a couch, a weathered pool table, and a dartboard, upon which is a picture of Grax himself. The concrete floor and spartan adornments evoke an elementary school gymnasium, not a galaxy-wide mercenary organization.

At last, the halfling ends his legal screed and concludes, "Now for the tour. Where to begin?"

Before beginning the adventure, the characters are guided to the Crew Quarters, the Shooting Range, Storage, and Jimball's Office by Jimball Hundwig, the nervous halfling accountant. The characters can choose the order of these locations, as Jimball is

critically averse to standing up for himself under any circumstances. The characters begin in the lobby, where they can ask questions of Jimball or mingle with Grax's Crew 7, who are gathered around the pool table.

TALKING WITH JIMBALL

At any time, the characters can ask Jimball questions about their new job. Here are some important answers he might provide:

- You are paid 100 credits each as an operating budget before each job, and paid a varying amount after a successful job, based on your performance.
- BYOB: Bring your own blasters. No, the Krash vending machines aren't free either.
- No, you don't get to pick your jobs. When a client drops into your laps, you take whatever job they offer.
- Jimball isn't technically your boss, but he hands out the operating budgets, so he might as well be.
- Don't barge into Grax's Office unannounced.
- Vacation days and holiday bonuses are handed out in a way that makes them impossible to claim.

A **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation) check** convinces Jimball (who possesses practically no self-esteem) to go and cower in his office instead of doing the tour himself.

THE POOL TABLE

Grax's Crew 7, a four-person team consisting of a vect named PQ-11, an avia-ra named Osira, and two humans named Ollin and Tess, are perched at the four corners of the pool table, but none have pool cues. Read or paraphrase the following:

The four crew members each extend a closed fist to the table's center and stare daggers at one another. Wordlessly, they bob their hands three times and flash hand signals: three rocks and a scissors. The avia-ra darts for a phaser in the middle of the table and shoots the human showing scissors, who collapses in a heap. The remaining three give a sigh of relief and exchange credits.

Grax's Crew 7 seem to be playing a life-or-death game of rock-paper-scissors, and have one free spot if a character would like to join. In this game,

a player is eliminated if they solely lose the game of rock-paper-scissors and fail to secure the blaster in the center of the table before anyone else grabs it and shoots them. The phaser is set to its nonlethal setting, but the members of Grax's Crew 7 insist the opposite. Play rock-paper-scissors with four players, and roll initiative using a +2 bonus for each nonplayer character when someone loses. For each round a character survives (up to three), they win 50 credits. On a failure, the character is rendered unconscious until the adventure begins.

CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters at Grax HQ contain some impressively uncomfortable bunk beds and a large screen to watch holo-shows. It's a good place to retreat to if the lounge is too loud or crowded, but crew members otherwise avoid the quarters until late at night. Jimball assigns each character a bunk bed and a lock box. Let each player argue about whether they get a top or bottom bunk, even though this has no bearing on anything whatsoever. Once the players have come to a consensus, read or paraphrase the following:

Just as soon as you've settled on your bunk beds, a deafening crash shakes the room. The dust eventually settles, revealing an unexploded missile that has crashed through the ceiling and landed dead-center through one of the bunks. A clean cursive message in paint on the side reads, "To Grax, from Garfreckt".

Jimball is thankful that this one was a dud, but otherwise treats the missile as a banality of office work. If pressed, he simply remarks, "Scale and Fang Inc. Things are a little strained right now." A **DC 12 Intelligence (Technology) check** reveals the bomb to be a state of the art warhead, capable of leveling the building, which has simply failed to detonate. No amount of effort can repurpose the bomb or cause it to go off.

THE SHOOTING RANGE

Undeniably the best part of the Grax's headquarters is the shooting range and armory. To introduce this location, read or paraphrase the following:

The air at the shooting range carries the distinct odor of plasma, a sort of ozone smell which follows blaster shots. This long, otherwise featureless wing of the warehouse is sectioned off strictly to let Grax's Guys and Gals take shots at the numerous targets painted on a big chunk of discarded starship hull set up on the far side. The entire chunk of metal is massively pockmarked, but few things are more cathartic than putting a few more divots in its side.

The shooting range's companion is the armory, which contains every weapon known to man, and a few known only to orcs. The armory is overseen by Gracks, a half-orc with no relation to Grax. No weapons are strictly off-limits, but a **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check** is necessary to convince Gracks to let a character use a weapon with the Explosive or Overheat properties. There are practice dummies nearby as well, for characters which would like to spar with a melee weapon.

PRACTICING AT THE SHOOTING RANGE

If a character spends an hour practicing with a weapon at the firing range, they gain a practice die, a d6, which they can add to an attack roll using that weapon sometime in the next 10 days. A character can only have one practice die at a time.

THE ARMORY

At the Grax HQ armory, characters can purchase weapons, armor, and gear, as per the tables in the Dark Matter Equipment chapter.

CHARLES RATTINGTON JR.

As the characters explore the shooting range, they are accosted by someone through a side door in the warehouse. Read or paraphrase the following:

An insistent "Pssst!" wrenches your attention to an open side door next to the armory, leading outside. Once the figure silhouetted there grabs your attention, it darts out of view, perhaps hoping you will follow.

A character who investigates finds a hunched, hooded figure beckoning them away from the Grax HQ warehouse, and into a small shack erected next to some nearby dumpsters. The figure insistently

beckons the character to follow. Once at the hut, the character removes his hood to reveal the long-nosed face of a ratlike Near-Human who introduces himself with a posh, erudite accent as “Charles Rattington Jr. the third. Charmed, I’m sure.”

Rattington runs a small shop here that specializes in unconventional weapons and equipment. If the characters wish to purchase traditional, exotic, or illegal gear, they can do so here. This shop contains all equipment from the SRD and additional gear at the GM’s discretion.

STORAGE

A great deal of Grax HQ is used for storage. This is, by far, the best place to find peace and quiet in Grax’s HQ, but it’s also a place where characters might find some truly strange stuff. To introduce this location, read or paraphrase the following:

If the rest of Grax’s HQ is a converted warehouse, this is the section that’s an unconverted warehouse. Countless unlabeled crates are stacked haphazardly in this room, creating a combination of a fire hazard and an avalanche risk. Most crates seem to be filled with Grax-branded merchandise nobody wants to buy. That being said, if someone wants a Grax mug, this is the mother lode.

If a character wants to go digging through the storage, roll on the following table to determine what they find:

d8 Item

- 1 An entire blaster made out of vent tape. It even fires, though it can barely cook an egg.
- 2 A poster for the starball team, the Alluvian Astromos, signed by coach Hankerton
- 3 An unlabeled red button. Pushing it does nothing obvious, but feels ominous
- 4 A portrait of Grax’s distant ancestor, Mighty Sir Graaxe of Gracks, in full plate mail
- 5 A dozen packets of “Instant Cat, just add water!”

- 6 A datapad loaded with an AI that insults whoever reads it
- 7 A pamphlet of AI-proof logic puzzles, for fun and profit!
- 8 A box of Grax-branded tombstones, engraved with slogans like “It was Grax while it lasted!” and “Better Grax than dead!”

JIMBALL’S OFFICE

Next to Grax’s office is that of Jimball Hundwig, the accountant. When the characters visit Jimball, read or paraphrase the following:

For all that has been made of a halfling’s signature merriment and good cheer, you’ve never seen one so stressed out as Grax’s accountant, Jimball Hundwig. The stammering halfling, coated in perpetual flop sweat, is almost always in their comically small office, fretting over papers. Today is no different.

Before any job for Grax, the party can visit Jimball to receive an operating budget of 100 credits each. This is ostensibly to be used for equipment and provisions, but just as many of Grax’s Guys and Gals spend it frivolously or gamble it over dart matches. It’s one of the perks of working for someone with such poor oversight. In the corner of the room is an apparently empty birdcage containing January.

JANUARY THE THWIRREL

Each character should make a **DC 12 Wisdom saving throw**. Those who fail see an empty birdcage, filled with bedding, a water bottle, and a small food bowl. On a success, a character sees a purple and blue rodent with four long ears, that regards them curiously. A **DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check** identifies the pet as a thwirrel, a psionic rodent that infests many starports by removing itself from the perceptions of others.

However, a character with an **Intelligence score of 14 or higher** also hears a squeaky voice in their heads when they regard the thwirrel. She introduces herself as January, Jimball’s pet. Thwirrels are not usually telepathic, as January is, nor are they particularly intelligent. A short telepathic conversation reveals that January is smarter than

most AIs, but picky about who she talks to. Only particularly smart people have released that January is anything more than a pet; Jimball is still in the dark on this. If a character wishes to chat with January, it's best to feign a conversation with Jimball, who is only half-listening anyway.

GRAX'S OFFICE

When the players are ready to begin the adventure, they're summoned to Grax's office. Read or paraphrase the following:

The odor in Grax's office is always a fine artisan blend of cigars and the aroma of his self-branded cologne, which, for lack of a better word, smells of green. The burly, smiling orc waves you in and pushes aside a pile of papers to make room on his desk for a couple of drinks. By the time you sit in the comfortable armchair across from him, he's clattered two tumbler glasses down on the desk and filled them to the brim with a milky white liquid, pungent with alcohol.

"I've gotta job for ya!" Grax chortles, "Yer gonna love it."

The details of the job will be delivered via flashback in *Part One: Old Mr. Bipinbop*. Once the party receives this job, skip ahead to their arrival on Holloway in Part One.

PART ONE: OLD MR. BIPINBOP

With their “orientation” at Grax HQ complete, the characters are sent on their first proper mission, to the Krash factory on Holloway.

THE GREY FACTORY

The adventure begins at the gates of the Krash Co. factory on planet Holloway, at a small spaceport courtyard, where the party is to accompany a tour. To introduce the scene, read or paraphrase the following:

A wrought iron fence stands between you and a long concrete driveway leading to an imposing, windowless, rectangular building. The only splash of color on the entire structure is a large sign reading “Krash Co.” fixed in the right corner. At regular intervals, transport ships dock and depart from the building, evidently weighed down with tons of soft drink.

The characters arrive at the same time as two other groups, the young human **Kerris**, accompanied by his father, Jim Lotide, and a trio of skathári, the **Tree-Blades** family. A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that Kerris is bit dejected at the industrial, monochromatic factory, whereas the Tree-Blades are just happy to be here for the tour. The Tree-Blades parents snap a holo-sphere picture of the party, whereas the little Tukt Tree-Blade attempts to chew on the ankle of any character that is a nautilid, vect, or wrothian (a character with a **passive Perception of 8 or lower** fails to notice this).

When the characters approach the fence, an ear splitting buzzer sounds and the gates creak open, allowing entrance. Read or paraphrase the following details about the job when the characters set off down the concrete path:

Grax wasted no time putting you on an easy job, “babysittin’” as he called it, for your first assignment. You’ve been hired by the owner of Krash Co. himself, Mr. Boxly Bipinbop, to accompany a tour and prevent any “funny business” in the form of

industrial espionage. Apparently, Boxly has gotten word that a corporate spy might be attending this particular tour, in an attempt to steal the top-secret Krash recipe. “An’ all you gotta do is follow ‘em around,” Grax concluded. “Easy, right?”

At the end of the path, the characters come to a trio of plainly-marked double doors on the wall of the otherwise featureless concrete building. These are marked “Gift Shop”, “Shuttle Dock”, and “Viewing Area”.

GIFT SHOP

Though a little dusty, this store has all the necessities of an overpriced novelty gift shop: t-shirts, branded stuffed animals, elaborate plastic cups, big dumb hats, and of course, refrigerators of Krash. An automaton will happily check anyone out that wishes to buy something. 10 credits will purchase a character an armful of Krash-themed merchandise and a 6-pack of Krash. (Sadly, they’re all out of Tropi-Krash.)

Two amoeboids browse the isles of low-effort merchandise: the little purple **Fermata**, who is filled with little carbonated bubbles, and the larger greenish **Mill**, who is following her around. Nearby, the blonde, pigtailed human girl **Jenna**, is sifting through the pile of stuffed animals in search of an elephant, while her mother, **Jen**, idly insists that there is no elephant to be found. These individuals, too, are waiting to go on the tour. A **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds Jenna the only elephant in the pile of stuffed animals, which her mother sighs and purchases as a souvenir.

NO CHILDREN WERE HARMED IN THE MAKING OF THIS ADVENTURE

Dark Matter is a universe of adventure and, indeed, danger. However, while this adventure borrows no small amount of inspiration from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* and features a cast of children, we do not recommend or encourage any harm toward these younger characters. They may find themselves in perilous situations and face ironic consequences for their actions, but should always come out okay.

Fermata convinces their parent to buy a 12-pack of Krash, and challenges a character to a Krash drinking contest! An interested character can make a **DC 17 Constitution check** to drink more Krash in a minute than Fermata. On a failure, the character is poisoned for one hour.

VIEWING AREA

Through these doors is a perfectly square room, 10 feet on each side, with a round 2-foot diameter window set into the opposite wall. Besides the window and a few faded Krash posters, the room is suspiciously unadorned. Read or paraphrase the following if a character peers through the window:

A maze of conveyor belts and mechanized arms sprawl out before you, producing a metallic cacophony reduced to a low din through the wall. Weaving through the factory's dense, automated layout is a steady stream of cans branded with every type of Krash logo being packaged into boxes, stacked into pallets, and being loaded onto trucks. It is difficult to discern any one machine's purpose from this perspective, as each is bafflingly complex and they all work together in a synchronized ballet.

A **DC 14 Intelligence (Technology) check** reveals that no machine visible here is producing the Krash soft drink or filling the cans and bottles. Every machine here is busily branding, packaging, and shipping the final product. A **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check** spots a little robotic creature, perhaps an inch tall, riding one of the bottles down a conveyor belt. Only one character sees this little robot, and only for a fleeting moment.

SHUTTLE DOCK

These doors connect to a short right-angle hallway leading out to a platform on the side of the building. With some benches and a docking port sized for a spacebus, this seems to be a shuttle stop for some other location, though there are no other buildings around the factory for miles.

Before the characters have fully arrived at the platform, they can hear the squeaky voice of **Rose Matilda**, an elven girl with straight black hair and

severe bangs, whining about being bored and the shuttle taking too long. The four individuals escorting her—a gruff dragonborn, a well-polished vect, human green-skin, and a dainty half-elf—alternate in their efforts to placate her, but their efforts appear half-hearted. A **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check or Intelligence (History) check** identifies these heavily-armed escorts as a crew from Scale and Fang Inc., a competing mercenary organization that is much better funded, and if we're honest, a bit more stylish. The **Scale Crew** is a recurring group of rival mercenaries, so feel free to introduce them in greater detail, using information from the Key Characters section of this adventure.

When the party approaches, the gruff dragonborn with red and black scales, **Drak Garfreckt**, recognizes them as Grax's Guys and sarcastically asks, "Who invited the B team?" Rose Matilda catches on and starts referring to the party as "that gross Grax team" for the remainder of the adventure. Drak continues being antagonistic, picking on each character in turn, insulting appearances and skills until someone retaliates with some threats. A **DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation) check** gets Drak to back down. Following this, a **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that, while Drak is being antagonistic, he was also sizing the party up as a potential threat. It looks like he's determined the characters are mostly harmless.

The other mercenaries, meanwhile, are much more forthright with the crew. The human green-skin **Sierra O'Connell** is quite friendly, and explains that they've been hired to protect the young Rose Matilda on the factory tour. Admittedly, it's more like babysitting, but that won't stop them from doing their job. If a character with a **passive Perception of 13 or lower** turns their back on Sierra, she steals 10 credits out of their pockets.

MR. BIPINBOP'S ARRIVAL

By the time the characters have had a chance to meet most of the tour group, a small space bus descends to the shuttle dock. The tour group gathers as an old human green-skin man with a mop of messy white hair hobbles out with a cane. Read or paraphrase the following:

“Why hello everyone! My name is Mister Boxly Bipinbop—that’s ‘Bip’-‘in’-‘bop’—and I am the owner of this fine company here.” He stamps his cane on the platform for effect. “I believe you are all here for a tour?”

Mr. Boxly Bipinbop gestures for everyone to join him on the spacebus. If anyone should ask why they’re leaving the factory to begin the tour, Mr. Bipinbop scoffs, “Why *this* isn’t the factory! This is just where we manufacture boxes and stickers and whatnot.”

In unorthodox fashion, Mr. Bipinbop quizzes the tour group as the bus begins a long, spiral ascent. He awards each correct answer with a **gold star** sticker. Make sure the players keep track of their gold stars: much like real stickers, they don’t do anything but they’re nice to have. He asks the following questions:

- How long have we been making and selling Krash from our little factory here on Holloway? A **DC 14 Intelligence (History) check** knows this to be 59 years.
- How many flavors of Krash are there in total? Most characters will assume this is three, but will only those which make a **DC 12 Intelligence (History) check** will recall a fourth flavor, *Hyper-Krash*, an energy drink discontinued for being too awesome (and for containing possibly carcinogenic magical additives).
- Krash was first sold in the Human Hegemony, but which galactic faction was last to sell the drink? A **DC 13 Intelligence (History or Religion) check** knows this to be the Avia-Ra, as religious officials branded the drink a “sugary heresy” for about six months.
- Who has the record for most Krash ever drank? A **DC 17 Intelligence (History) check** recalls that Decimus, a nautilid, filled their aqua-suit with the drink and consumed a record amount about three years ago. Fermata quips that they’ll steal the record before too long.
- And what’s the Krash secret ingredient? A **DC 10 Intelligence (History) check or Wisdom (Insight) check** understands this to be a trick question: the recipe is top-secret and its secret ingredient is a mystery.

The spacebus levels out and finally reaches the Krash Factory. As the clouds part, read or paraphrase the following:

You approach a colossal building, precariously perched on a large asteroid, just within Holloway’s atmosphere. Bright reds and greens adorn the outside of the building, and stupendous golden gearwheels protrude from the structure’s walls. Even the smokestacks produce discrete puffs of purple and pink smoke. “Krash” is emblazoned in flashing neon lights above a grand entryway.

“This is my factory!” announces Mr. Bipinbop.

The characters drink in the sights as the bus pulls to a stop. Mr. Bipinbop moves swiftly into the small museum at the factory’s entrance.

THE MUSEUM

The bus pulls to a stop outside the factory and the characters enter through a magnificent golden archway. A **DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices the motto “Fortes Fortuna Ridiculam” engraved on the golden arch, and a **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** translates this as “Fortune Favors the Fun”. Mr. Bipinbop awards a **gold star** to anyone who recognizes the motto. Read or paraphrase the following:

The factory’s golden doors open into a sprawling museum area, with flashing lights, colorful attractions, and dazzling screens. Without hesitation, the kids of the tour group scatter in all directions to drink in the sights. Mr. Bipinbop bellows a hearty chuckle, heartier than you thought such a scrawny man could produce. “What do you say we let them play for a few minutes? It’s good to let kids be kids.”

The characters are free to mill about the museum, or attend any of the following attractions: the Krash Original™ Roller Coaster, the Tropi-Krash™ Beach Vacation Experience, or the Krash Zero™ Gravity Siegelball Arena.

The museum is filled with displays of outdated soft drink mixing and bottling equipment, as well as large, printed photographs of a young Mr. Bipinbop, with equally wild brown hair and an identical youthful glimmer in his eyes. If a character

opts to stay in this area, learning about the history of Krash, instead of visiting the other attractions, Mr. Bipinbop will award them a **gold star** “for scholarship.” The character also gains advantage on all Intelligence (History) checks they make regarding the history of Krash for the remainder of the adventure.

When the characters (and the kids of the tour) have seen enough of this area, proceed to *Part Two: The Tour*.

KRASH ORIGINAL™ ROLLER COASTER

Sure enough, there’s a full-sized roller coaster installed in this factory, operated by a disinterested space kobold attendant. **Tukt Tree-Blade** and **Fermata** have done nothing but ride the coaster again and again since setting eyes on it. On its journey, the coaster weaves through the factory’s uppermost levels, emerges into space a couple of times, and goes on a loop-de-loop near the Krash waterfall. Every time a character goes on the coaster, **roll a d20**. A **roll of 5 or lower** causes that many credits to fall out of a character’s pockets. A character that does on the coaster more than once must make a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** or be disoriented (as poisoned) for 1 hour. However, the first character to go on the coaster might notice a tiny robot crawling into an unoccupied seat with a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check**. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** identifies it to be a **wizmo**. It is not there when the ride ends.

TROPI-KRASH™ BEACH VACATION EXPERIENCE

In this attraction, guests must dash through a novelty obstacle course covered in golden sand to win a prize. The obstacle course is dotted with beach chairs to be leaped over and little foam crabs, stylized to look like orcs (a none-too-subtle dig at the competitor brand, Orc-a-Cola). Guests must also outrun a bright but harmless laser beam, representing the sun’s rays, which buzzes loudly and disqualifies anyone it catches. **Kerris** tries the obstacle course over and over, to no avail.

A character can try their luck at the obstacle course with a **DC 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to avoid the orc-a-cola crabs, a **DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check** to leap the beach chairs, and a **DC 10 Intelligence check** to plot a path around the sun laser. However, the first character to run the course can notice a tiny robot scampering on

the laser projecting the “sun’s” rays with a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check**. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** identifies it to be a **wizmo**. Its tampering causes the laser to spark and intensify, dealing 1 radiant damage to any creature that fails the Intelligence check to avoid its path. **Kerris** leaves this attraction when he notices the dangerous laser beam. If a character beats the obstacle course, they win a **gold star** and a can of Tropi-Krash (like regular Krash, but fruitier and dyed red).

KRASH ZERO™ GRAVITY SIEGEBALL ARENA

A pair of double doors opens into a foam-padded 60-foot tall, 20-foot diameter cylindrical room, devoid of gravity. As the characters enter, a large foam ball bounces nearby, as **Jenna** and **Rose** linger high above with foam bats, ready to challenge them to a game of zero-gravity Siegeball. The objective of this game is to knock a large ball with bats into the opposing team’s tower, breaking its foam blocks apart. In an arena of this size, four players play two-on-two.

Each player makes a **Strength (Athletics) check** to compete. Compare the lowest score on either team to determine a winner. Best two-out-of-three wins a **gold star** and a can of *Krash Zero* (like regular Krash, but with fake, potentially unhealthy sugar). After the first game, however, a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices a tiny robot poking out of the arena’s walls, before poking its head back into the foam padding. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** identifies it to be a **wizmo**. Though **Jen** and **Rose** land first, the anti-gravity unexpectedly shuts down before the two player characters can land. Each character must make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall on a failure.

PART TWO: THE TOUR

This chapter brings the characters through a loosely-guided tour of the Krash Factory, which spirals dangerously out of control due to some meddling wizmos.

ASTEROID PROCESSING

Once the kids have swarmed the rides and been collected by their parents, the tour group convenes on the east edge of the museum area for the guided tour, hosted by Mr. Bipinbop. The group proceeds to a markedly more industrial section of the factory, with metal walkways and safety warnings everywhere. Read or paraphrase the following:

Mr. Bipinbop walks and talks quickly, never stuttering or losing a step.

“Every can of Krash begins right here, where we mine naturally-occurring sugar asteroids.” Just as he says this, a team of space kobolds fire harpoons into a passing pink and white asteroid, pulling it down through a hole in the factory ceiling.”

This huge rectangular room has two large shutters on the ceiling. As the kobolds harpoon passing sugar-asteroids, they're lowered down through one shutter and, at the bottom, mined of their tastiest ore. The remnants are transported by an enormous conveyor belt to the other side of the room, where a reverse-gravity pad launches the remaining rocks into space. A long metal catwalk stretches across the room in the narrow region in which it is safe from upward or downward flying asteroids.

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices a wizmo swinging from the roof to a sugar asteroid on a loose wire. At this, Mr. Bipinbop murmurs, “Well isn't that unusual?”

The tour group must cross a 5-foot wide, 120-foot long metal catwalk to continue. Having done this a hundred times before, Mr. Bipinbop marches onward, lecturing about the collection process, and why the company chose to use sugar asteroids. The tour group's marching order is as follows (parents accompany their children): Mr. Bipinbop, Rose Matilda, the Scale Crew, Kerris, Fermata, the Tree-

Blades, and Jenna. The party can cross the bridge at any point during the order.

An **DC 13 Intelligence (Technology) check** notices the anti-gravity pad stutter while the tour group is passing by and a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** spots a wizmo fiddling with the wires. When the Tree-Blades reach the center of the catwalk, read or paraphrase the following:

The anti-gravity pad flickers an eerie blue, and you can feel yourself being pulled closer to it. Worse yet, a sugar asteroid being lowered down into the building is pulled away from kobold harpoons and into the catwalk! The metal walkway snaps at the center! Just as quickly as it started, the anti-gravity pad returns to normal, and everyone on the walkway comes crashing down onto the asteroid. Meanwhile, a space kobold despondently places a large zero atop a sign now reading “0 Work Days Without an Accident”.

The three members of the **Tree-Blade** family, plus **Jenna and Jen** are knocked tumbling onto the pillow-soft surface of the 20-foot diameter sugar asteroid, landing in a big pink-and-white poof. If the party crossed after these characters, they are knocked down to the asteroid as well. If they crossed before these characters, they are safely on the other side and must descend a 60-foot utility ladder to reach the factory floor below. The deflected sugar asteroid moves steadily along the conveyor belt and will reach the anti-gravity pad in three turns! **Roll initiative.**

A character that can fly or glide to the sugar asteroid can land softly on the asteroid, but a character that leaps down after the others finds themselves sunk to the waist in the soft asteroid's surface. Digging out any of the characters requires an action. Little Tukt Tree-Blade, however, has dug himself deeper by eating the sugar ore, and takes two actions to dig out! A character that attempts an Intelligence (Technology) check to shut off the anti-gravity pad discovers that the wizmos have not only rewired it, but have gummed up the internals with literal chewing gum. It simply can't be fixed in time.

Whether or not the characters rescue them in time, Jen digs herself and Jenna out at the last possible moment and leaps from the asteroid, landing

LITTLE METAL FRIEND

As the characters proceed through the tour, one of the wizmos infesting the factory takes a liking to one of the characters and decides to become friends. Preferentially, the wizmos will choose a vect or a character with the highest Charisma score. You can also use this event if any player takes a liking to the wizmos and decides to become friends. Read or paraphrase the following:

In an instant, a little robot scurries up your leg and perches on your shoulder. When you crane your neck, you look face-to-face with the robot, which has big round light bulbs for eyes. It waves, chitters at an incomprehensible speed, and offers you a piece of gum, partially opened.

If the character accepts the wizmo's offer, they can indefinitely adopt the wizmo as a pet, following the rules for the *find familiar* spell. However, if they rebuff the wizmo's offer of friendship, the wizmo will sadly slink away into a hole in the factory wall, never to be seen again.

somewhat gracefully. If the Tree-Blades aren't rescued in time, they might be launched into orbit! If this is the case, Mr. Bipinbop reassures the tour group that there's atmosphere up there and a very large catcher's mitt. The Tree-Blades will be fine, and everyone else should continue the tour while the skathári family is being rescued. If the characters do rescue the Tree-Blades, they nonetheless retire from the tour, deciding that this vacation wasn't at all worth it. A player character that launched into orbit rejoins the game when the party reaches *The Krash River*. Each character that rescued someone gets a **gold star**. The tour proceeds to *Krash Brewing*.

KRASH BREWING

Undeterred by the loss of a family, Mr. Bipinbop marches the tour to the center of Krash Brewing operations, a great room filled with curly pipes, funny-shaped boilers, and, for some reason, an enormous spoon in the largest vat, manually stirred by a team of space kobolds. Read or paraphrase the following:

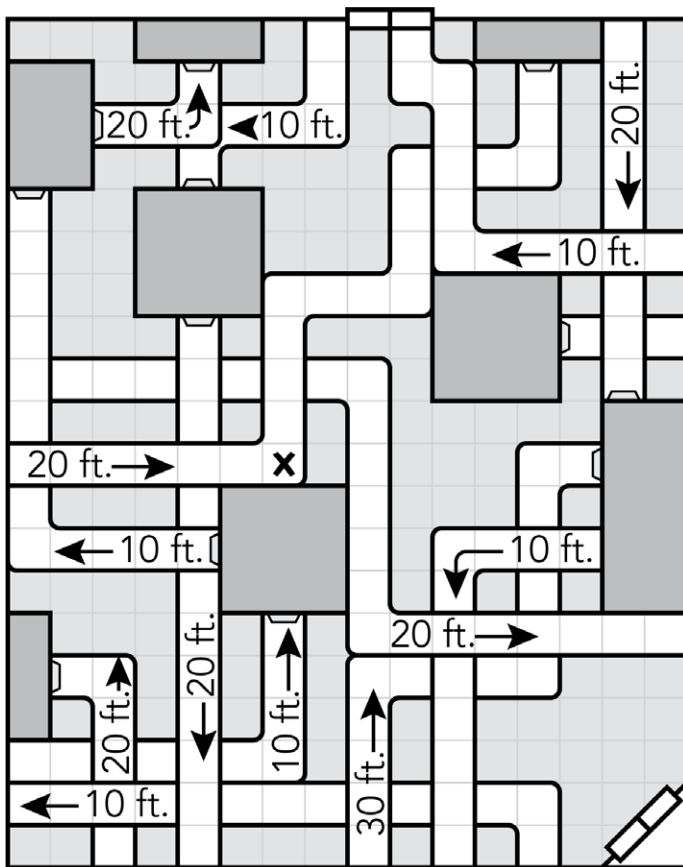
"Once we have all the ingredients," explains Mr. Bipinbop "It's time to start brewing! The Krash formula is top secret, of course." The spritely old man leads the group through a maze of pipes and boilers, arriving at the conclusion of his speech the moment he reaches the far side. Puzzled, he then adds, "Now where did that little amoeboid go?"

Sure enough **Fermata** has slipped away from the tour group, squeezing her jelly body between some pipes when no one was looking. This area of the factory is sprawling, interconnected, and infested with wizmos, and the characters should find Fermata before the little amoeboid gets hurt. Worse still, if Fermata is secretly the Firm Contractor, they might be attempting to steal the Krash secret recipe!

A **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check** picks up Fermata's trail, a bit of purple residue leading through the maze of pipes and boilers. A failure leads someone to a dead end or into a wizmo playing on the pipes like a jungle gym. The wizmo might toss a banana peel underneath the character's feet, replace their blaster with a bottle of Krash, tie their shoelaces together, or wrap the character up in a tangle of wires before escaping further into the factory. On the far side of the largest vat, the maze of pipes becomes a web on conveyor belts, on which Fermata is riding.

Fermata is trying to reach the Hyper-Krash™ Hyper Cooler across the conveyor belts, where some of the last bottles of the discontinued energy drink *Hyper-Krash* are stored. However, the conveyor belts lead to the bottling machines, and a team of wizmos have randomly sped up or slowed down each belt! Though Fermata doesn't recognize it, they are in grave danger of falling into a bottling machine.

Roll initiative. Fermata begins on a long, zig-zagging conveyor belt which moves at 20 feet each round, depositing the amoeboid into a bottling



machine at the end of her fourth turn. Her position is marked with an X on the map. A creature moves a number of feet in a direction marked by their belt at the end of their turn. If a character falls into a bottling machine, they take 1d8 bludgeoning damage, or 1d6 bludgeoning damage if they fall to the factory floor below. If the characters rescue Fermata, they are each awarded a **gold star** and Fermata's parent, Mil, escorts her back to their hovercar. Otherwise, Fermata is squeezed into a large Krash bottle! A remarkably pliable amoeboid, Fermata is unharmed, but will need to be slowly removed by a team of kobolds.

Additionally, a **DC 14 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check or Intelligence (Data) check** steals a single can of *Hyper-Krash* from the hyper cooler.

Two families down, the tour group proceeds to *The Krash River*.

THE KRASH RIVER

More annoyed than concerned about the dwindling size of the tour group, Mr. Bipinbop leads the group out of the claustrophobic factory and into a grand atrium, through which flows an entire river of Krash. Characters that were launched into space at the

Asteroid Processing section rejoin the group, having evidently taken an elevator down from space. Please read or paraphrase the following:

"And now we come to the penultimate step of Krash production: the super carbonation!" shouts Mr. Bipinbop over the sounds of rushing soft drink. "For a better look, we'll take the boats!" Sure enough, a trio of ferries wait on the banks of the sugary river.

The party boards one ferry, Rose and the Scale Crew take another, and the last ferry seats Mr. Bipinbop, Kerris, Jenna, and Jen. Mr. Bipinbop explains that the river is good for cooling the freshly-brewed Krash, but it's the Krash Karbonation Waterfall that finishes the brewing process. Wagging his finger at each person in turn, Mr. Bipinbop warns that the river must remain uncontaminated, so no one is allowed to touch the river.

Each ferry is powered by two pedaling creatures and each is equipped with a pair of swivel-mounted Krash water cannons which can project a stream of Krash drawn up from the river. Each character should take a seat at either a water cannon or at the pedals. A **DC 11 Intelligence (Nature) check or Wisdom (Survival) check** notices that the Krash river is flowing swiftly, and hears the muted drone of a waterfall downriver. A **DC 14 Intelligence (Technology) check** tightens a water cannon's nozzle, doubling its short or long ranges.

As the ferries set off down the river, a character with a **passive Perception score of 12 or higher** notices little Jenna fidgeting with her pigtailed. She then produces a small vial of purplish liquid, drinks it, and returns to her beaming, childlike self. Once the characters are underway, the three boats set out in single-file. Read or paraphrase the following:

Alongside your ferry, a tiny snorkel-equipped wizmo pokes its head out of the water. It draws a miniature Krash water cannon, takes aim, and fires at the little elf Rose Matilda on the adjacent ferry! She is instantly soaked in a steam of sugary liquid and the wizmo vanishes back into the river with a giggle. Her face now cherry red with anger and embarrassment, Rose points squarely at your ship and cries "Fire!"

Roll initiative. The Scale Crew, eager for something to do, obliges Rose's order and begins pedaling ahead and firing at the party.

A character seated at the pedals can use their movement to move the entire ferry forward or backward as if they were moving normally on difficult terrain. Because of the river's speed, the ferry can't rotate. Additionally, a character sitting at one of the Krash water cannons can fire it. The cannon is a simple blaster with a range of 60/180 feet, projecting a stream of Krash at a single target. On a hit, a target is pushed 10 feet away from the attacker, potentially knocking the target off the ferry.

On the Scale Crew's turns, Drak and Trace use their actions to Dash and pedal their ferry forward, progressing 30 feet on each of their turns. When the characters are in range, Aela and Sierra use their actions to fire the Krash water cannons at characters in the party, each making one attack with a **+5 bonus**. For this combat, all Scale Crew members have **AC 14**. If a Scale Crew member is hit, they are knocked flying off the boat and into the river.

A character that is hit can make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** to avoid falling off the boat. If knocked in, they can be rescued with an action.

At the end of the first round of combat, note to the players that the river is growing swifter by the moment and that Mr. Bipinbop has docked his boat. At the end of the second round, let them know that the drone of the waterfall is becoming very, very loud. At the end of the third round, let them know that the edge of the waterfall is approaching rapidly! If both characters pedaling use their actions to Dash and pedal backwards, the ferry escapes the pull of the river and reaches land, ending combat.

At the end of the fourth round of combat, the Scale Crew's ferry and all characters in the river go tumbling over the falls, a 100-foot drop into a massive sea of carbonated foam. A character that goes over the falls will be reintroduced in *Part Three: Race to the Vault!* If the characters don't escape the waterfall's pull, their ferry goes tumbling over as well! If this happens, read or paraphrase the following:

As the roar of the falls becomes deafening, the whole ferry pitches forward, offering a glance over the dizzying heights a moment before the whole boat falls. But before everyone experiences a screaming plunge into the frothing, sugary mists below, the

fall is interrupted in a lurch. A harpoon embedded in the rear of the boat, pulled by two dozen space kobolds, pulls the ferry back over the edge and to the shore.

When the characters reach the river's edge and disembark the ferry, proceed to *Finishing the Tour*.

FINISHING THE TOUR

Exhausted from peddling and sticky from the confrontation, the characters make it to the river's edge and dock their ferry. The winding tour has brought them back to the museum area near the entrance, where a smiling animatronic statue waves at those departing the tour. Read or paraphrase the following:

Mr. Bipinbop curses and swings his cane at the wizmos scurrying along the ground. "Millions of gallons contaminated! Tour ruined! Get over here you little—"

Before the old man can smash the tiny robotic troublemakers, a dozen of them climb into a statue shaped like a can of Krash, with animatronic arms and legs. The statue ceases its programmed waving and begins to shudder and spark.

Roll initiative. An **animatronic statue** clambers to life, manipulated by wizmos pulling its wires from within. The museum area is 30 feet wide and 60 feet long, and is filled with displays of antique soda-making devices. A **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds an electric carbonizer in one of the displays. This device can be thrown at the statue as an improvised weapon to deal 4d6 lightning damage, destroying the device. A character within 5 feet of the statue can use its action to attempt to disable it with a **DC 13 Intelligence (Technology) check**. On a success, the statue has disadvantage on attacks until the end of its next turn.

The rest of the remaining tour group hides behind the various display cabinets while Mr. Bipinbop fruitlessly swings at the statue with his cane. On its first turn, the statue casually knocks Mr. Bipinbop across the room, rendering him unconscious.

When the statue is destroyed, the wizmos flee. Kerris is enraptured by the party's heroics and

swiftly decides that the characters are extremely cool, professional heroes. Though Kerris's father decides that it's time to leave this incredibly dangerous factory, Kerris insists on asking the party tons of questions about Grax's Guys for Cheap. A **DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check** or any amount of healing magic restores Mr. Bipinbop to consciousness.

If the players haven't noticed that Jen and Jenna are missing after this battle, a **DC 10 Wisdom check** or a conscious Mr. Bipinbop notices their absence. Furthermore, it seems they have taken Mr. Bipinbop's cane! When Mr. Bipinbop realizes this, read or paraphrase the following:

"My cane! They've got my cane! It opens every door in the factory. Those two must be heading for the vault! Go, you fools, get after them!"

Mr. Bipinbop gives the characters a keycard to unlock unauthorized sections of the factory. Proceed to *Part Three: Race to the Vault!*

PART THREE: RACE TO THE VAULT!

Advance all characters to 2nd level. Characters regain hit points equal to the amount their hit point maximum increases.

On the heels of two tour group members who have infiltrated the factory, the characters swipe a keycard on a locked door and gain access to the factory's restricted zones. Read or paraphrase the following:

The security door opens into a drab metal stairwell, adorned with a single element of color: two blonde pigtails on a wig, discarded at the foot of the stairs. Other costume elements, such as Jen's ruby red high heels, Jenna's floral dress, and an entire silicone face, have been abandoned on the first two flights of stairs.

A **DC 12 Intelligence (Nature or Technology) check** identifies the silicone face to be one belonging to an android. Furthermore, a **DC 14 Charisma (Performance) check or Intelligence (Arcana) check** deduces that this wig and the dress must have been accompanied by small illusions or enchantment magic to help Jen and Jenna pass off as a mother and child.

A **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check** finds a medical station in the stairwell containing four *potions of healing*.

This stairwell leads to two secure regions of the factory, the Boiler Room and the Kobold Quarters, both of which connect to the vault containing the secret recipe. With a **DC 14 (Survival) check**, a character can determine that the boiler room will be a faster, albeit more dangerous route to the vault, but the players can choose either path through the factory.

BOILER ROOM

Entering through a pair of heavy double doors, the characters enter a room dominated by enormous boilers producing hot water and other ingredients for Krash. Read or paraphrase the following:

STICKY BUT UNHARMED!

If any characters went over the Krash waterfall in Part 2, they stumble back to the rest of the group when this chapter begins. Their experiences of being fished out of the lake of Krash below has given them newfound empathy for seafood, but has otherwise left them uninjured.

A wave of humidity and heat strikes you the instant the doors open, fogging up goggles and helmets completely. Beyond the initial temperature shift, this space is dimly lit by red hazard lights and choked with steam, making it impossible to see far.

This 200-foot long, 40-foot wide area is filled with large boilers and extraordinary hot pipes. Due to the steam and low lighting, visibility is limited to 15 feet.

Additionally, unbeknownst to the characters, a series of laser trip mines have been set in this room by the passing Grisham Buzzpop (who previously wore the disguise of Jenna). Setting off a mine bursts one of the boilers, spraying boiling water everywhere and threatening to fill the room with a scalding tide. If this happens, proceed to *Boiling Flood*.

The character in front of the party notices the dim red laser of a mine if they have a **passive Perception of 10 or higher**, otherwise they set it off. A **DC 12 Intelligence (History) check** recognizes that the trip mine is emblazoned with the symbol of the Firm, a galaxy-wide crime syndicate that hires disposable Contractors to embark on criminal enterprises. Characters who know Thieves' Cant or who have had dealings with the Firm in the past recognize the symbol immediately. Navigating the rest of this room requires the lead character to detect three additional mines with a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check**. Each character following must make a **DC 5 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to physically avoid each mine. A failed check triggers a mine!

SCALDING TIDE

A character passed in front of the dim red laser of a trip mine for a split second, setting it off! Read or paraphrase the following:

A stomach-lurching beep sounds from the mine a split second before a deafening boom and the sound of shearing metal. While the bomb wasn't positioned close enough to cause direct harm, it ruptured the boiler on which it was attached, sending out a sheet of boiling water and beginning a flood.

The room begins to slowly flood with boiling water! **Roll initiative.** Characters must balance on pipes and hop on boilers to escape the room's slowly increasing tide of boiling water. The exit is 90 feet from the characters if they set off the first or second mines, or 45 feet if they set off the third or fourth mines. Characters can move along the pipes safely at half speed, or can choose to make a **DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to move at normal speed. A failure on this check subjects them to a splash of boiling water for 1d6 fire damage. At the end of each character's turn, they must make a **DC 6 Dexterity saving throw** or take 1d6 fire damage from the rising water. This DC increases by 4 at the beginning of each round.

Keep track of how many rounds it takes for characters to escape the boiler room; this affects the order in which characters reach *The Vault*.

KOBOLD QUARTERS

The doors leading to the kobolds' quarters are appropriately kobold-sized, requiring characters of Medium size to stoop or crawl to proceed forward. Read or paraphrase the following:

Kobolds on break shuffle to and fro through miniature hallways, exchanging conversations and going about their routines, only to meet you with a mixture of confused and anxious expressions, as if a set of oxen were just unleashed indoors. Indeed, this floor seems to be divided into two subfloors, with a horizontal partition posing an obstacle for larger entrants.

This entire floor, with an 8-foot tall ceiling, houses two 4-foot tall subfloors for the factory's space kobold employees. Inside, the space kobold cafeteria, the various common rooms and personal rooms, and offices for kobold management are laid out in a labyrinthine network, evidently more intuitively navigated by space kobolds, who hail from anthill-like asteroid warrens. To make matters worse, all the signage on this floor is in Draconic, so creatures that can't speak it are sure to get lost. Kobolds scatter in all directions as Medium-sized characters enter the space to avoid being trampled.

Characters start out in the cafeteria, by far the most spacious area in the complex. From this starting location, hallways are only wide enough for a single character to proceed at a time. However, there is more than one way to proceed through the complex, so multiple characters can try their luck at navigating at once. Three successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) checks** navigate a character to find the floor's exit on the far side. Each successive check takes one round, or two rounds for a character that is Medium sized. A character which speaks Draconic can navigate with ease, requiring no checks. However, a character that wishes to follow another's route must do so on the following round, requiring a very slow game of follow-the-leader for everyone to follow one character.

If a character of Medium size fails a Survival check, they can attempt to simply break through the walls or ceiling of the kobold quarters with a **DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check**. A successful check reverses the failed Survival check, but also provokes a small mob of angry space kobolds who begin throwing rocks, food, and kobold-sized cans of Krash at the character until they leave the kobold quarters, dealing 1d4 bludgeoning damage to the character at the start of each of their turns.

Keep track of how many rounds it takes for characters to escape the kobold quarters; this affects the order in which characters reach *The Vault*.

THE VAULT

Finally, the characters reach the hallway leading to the enormous steel vault, inside of which is the secret Krash recipe. A **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** overhears the following conversation between a gruff sounding halfling man and a robotic voice:

HALFLING: "The jobs don't get any easier, do they?"

ROBOTIC VOICE: "Unconfirmed, difficulty requires further analysis."

HALFLING: "I take it they didn't program you with smalltalk. Anyway, codeword: 'Nutcracker'. Let's get that safe open."

Any further conversation is drowned out by the loud whoosh of a blowtorch.

The room containing the vault is 40 feet wide and 40 feet long, and is connected to the 50-foot long, 10-foot wide hallway by a pair of double doors. Inside, **Grisham Buzzpop**, the Firm contractor that was previously posing as Jenna, has deployed a trio of small **laser turrets** (AC 10, HP 5), one mounted on each wall facing the door. Grisham has also piled up the only furniture in the room into a small barricade, behind which he is waiting with blasters drawn. In front of the vault, the android formerly posing as Jen has folded back both of its hands at the wrists to expose blowtorches, which are slowly eroding a path into the vault. The **android** takes no cover and doesn't seem concerned about its own well-being while performing its task.

Roll initiative. If the characters don't arrive all at once, because some took longer to navigate the Kobold Quarters or escape the Boiler Room, the first half of the party arrives on the first round of combat, and the remaining members arrive on their turns during the second round.

Each round on initiative count 10, the three turrets fire at the character nearest to them, using a **+2 attack bonus** and dealing 2d4 radiant damage on a hit. The android ignores all interruptions and damage as it robotically attempts to melt its way into the vault.

When Grisham drops to 0 HP, read or paraphrase the following:

The halfling turns his gaze to the android and gasps out the words "Protocol: Oversight..." before succumbing. Suddenly, the android staggers into the center of the room, loudly and robotically repeating "Oversight, Oversight, Oversight". It places its palms on either side of its head, and, in a flurry of sparks and incredible force, crushes its own skull, before collapsing in a heap.

A **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check** discovers identification for Grisham Buzzpop on the halfling contractor's body, as well as a page from a contract from the Firm, detailing where to rendezvous with the android and how to best disguise for the mission. He's also carrying 80 credits, a disguise kit, and a flashlight.

The android is carrying documents identifying it as Jen Marigold, but a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals these are impressive forgeries. Inside its body, the android has been modified dozens of times with black market Firm technology, most of which is inoperable now. A set of *finger picks* (see *Dark Matter*, chapter 5, Construct Grafts) can be salvaged from its left arm. Furthermore, a **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check** recovers memories from the android's black box. Usually, this would be a photographic record of everything the android has seen or heard, but it instead contains a recording of a smooth voice repeating the word "Oversight" indefinitely.

OPENING THE VAULT

Despite the heist failing to crack open the safe, the characters can still get inside and take a peek at the secret Krash recipe. Doing so involves entering the phrase "Fortune Favors the Fun" on a keypad near the vault door, causing it to swing open easily. Only reveal this possibility if a character successfully translated this phrase earlier in the adventure, and do not provide any hints whatsoever—this is strictly a reward for extra canny players.

Inside the vault is a practically empty space containing a notebook on a desk. It contains, in sloppy handwriting, the secret ingredient that makes Krash so addictive: brain juice! This rare substance is drained by space vampires and fills the brains-in-jars manufactured by wrothians. Evidently, the companies hires both of these types of monsters to provide a steady supply of juice. If confronted

with this information, Mr. Bipinbop insists, off the record, that it's the only way to get the taste just right. He contracts Grax after the mission to wire each character 500 credits in hush money, on the condition that they sign a magically-binding nondisclosure agreement.

RETURNING TO HQ

When the characters return to Mr. Bipinbop at the entrance to the factory, they also find that young Kerris is waiting there as well, eager to ask dozens of questions about the party's exploits.

By way of thanks, Mr. Bipinbop opens up two of the Krash museum's displays and offers the party a *transmat deck* and a *jetpack*, both antique and Krash-branded, but perfectly functional. Furthermore, he insinuates that he has another surprise for them, which should show up at Grax headquarters in a few weeks.

When the characters return to Grax's HQ, read or paraphrase the following:

After a shuttle back to the surface of Holloway and a taxi ride through the maws, you land back at the Fornax spaceport. To your surprise, you see the smiling, eyepatch-wearing Grax, waiting for you.

"Old Mr. Bipinbop already called and told me everything about your little tour. A smashed up museum, a contaminated river, irreparable damage to the safe. Thankfully, the old man told me I should keep you kids around." Even though the orc only has one eye, you could swear he winks.

"I know it's not much, but you'll need a ship." He strides to a rusty, dinged-up freelancer, slaps it on the side, and announces, "Welcome to the team! "

For as long as the characters work for Grax, the *Gittin'* is their very own ship. They can use it between *Grax's Club* adventures of escapades of all kinds, as long as it still flies when they bring it back.

For excellent work, the characters each earn 150 credits, or 200 for the character with the most gold stars at the end of the adventure.



CONSPIRACY IN THE STARS!

AN NOIR THRILLER ADVENTURE
FOR 3RD TO 4TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

WRITTEN BY MIKE HOLIK, DONATHIN FRYE, CHARLIE SMITH,
SIMON GOUDREULT, MAKENZIE DE ARMAS

GRAX'S CLUB

CONSPIRACY IN THE STARS!

INTRODUCTION

In the uppermost chamber of a tower, a small library fills with a half-dozen overlapping arguments. The broad, circular table hosts individuals in fine, fitted suits, and others in gilded robes; very few reveal their faces to their compatriots, preferring the anonymity of masks or hoods. A disembodied voice sounds from a datapad, interrupting the din of argument, “If you would be so kind, I have a solution that should be to everyone’s tastes.”

The conference yields as the datapad projects images of a young woman wearing a ruby red dress, cut high enough to reveal the blaster strapped to her thigh. “One Miss Carmen Cane, Head of the New Terran Organization—a nasty group, to be sure, but one in which we have a common investment. The professor’s invention could surely shift the state of the game out of our favor, but if Miss Carmen Cane were to acquire the professor...”

The voice’s sinister implications needn’t be stated; the grumbling around the table shifts to that of approval. One by one, the figures flicker out of existence, their holograms disconnecting from the meeting. At last, only a smooth-voiced man in a tailored suit is left with the datapad. “It’s a risky play, Oversight. The Tower doesn’t like to lose.”

The datapad lights up as it replies, “And they won’t. Plus, they’re wizards; I’m sure they enjoy a good conspiracy.”

BACKGROUND

No obstacle is more perilous to civilization’s travel and expansion through the stars than Dead Magic Zones. In these regions of space, the ‘verse has thinned. No magic functions, including that which powers most ships and Dark Matter engines. In Dead Magic Zones, navigation systems fail, life support fizzles out, and engines die.

What makes Dead Magic Zones even more dangerous is that their boundaries are always changing in chaotic, unpredictable patterns. A zone

can encompass an entire world while releasing others as it moves and shifts over thousands of years.

Worlds deep within Dead Magic Zones remain largely unexplored by the greater civilizations of the ‘verse, and are hence often referred to as “lost worlds.” These worlds represent an elusive, teasing promise to innumerable cultures: if more habitable planets, free of corporate and government interference, were to be accessed by the ‘verse at large, many ongoing interstellar conflicts might finally find peaceful solutions.

Until recently, exploring the Dead Magic Zones has been impossible. However, a gnomish inventor named Professor Orryn Talfough-Gogglefogger has developed a prototype device called a Talfough Matrix, capable of altering a ship’s Dark Matter engine to jump without magic. Professor Orryn has tested his prototype on his own ship, the Caliber, and has proven that it works. Now he plans to meet with cultural and business leaders from around the ‘verse about investment, so that he can mass-produce Talfough Matrices and develop even smaller matrices that would fit on suits or clothing, allowing arcanists access to their magic on lost worlds without the need of a Dark Matter engine or ship.

OVERVIEW

Conspiracy in the Stars! is an adventure for 3rd level characters, and is the second in a series of adventures centered on Grax’s Guys for Cheap. In it, the characters must unravel a noir conspiracy to kidnap the brilliant Professor Orryn and steal his newest adventure. It is presented in three parts.

In *Part 1: The Usual Suspects*, the party meets a cast of suspicious individuals gathered to hear a presentation from Professor Orryn, a brilliant inventor who claims to have unlocked the secrets of traversing Dead Magic Zones. With each character they meet, they learn a little bit more about the intricacies of interstellar politics, and acquire new suspects for who might be behind a plot to eliminate the good professor. This does little to dissuade a would-be assassin who destroys the entire bar!

By *Part 2: The Usual Suspects*, the characters are left to explore the wider city of Port Nomad and investigate the attempt on Professor Orryn's life. The more they learn, the more the evidence suggests that Ser Helio-Horus, the sepulcher knight charged with keeping Port Nomad safe, is corrupt and may be part of an unknown plot against the professor. This comes to head with a shootout and a chase through the streets of Port Nomad!

In *Part 3: All Aboard the Caliber!*, the characters gain access to Professor Orryn's highly advanced gnomish space vessel the Caliber and pursue the kidnapped professor. They battle through an asteroid field and face off against the sinister Carmen Cane in an attempt to save the professor from certain doom.

KEY CHARACTERS

The following nonplayer characters feature prominently in this adventure.

GRAX GRRAXE (HE/HIM)

The party's employer and head of Grax's Guys for Cheap, Grax Grraxe, is a fat, well-humored orc with an eyepatch and a thick orcish accent. Around fifty years ago, Grax decided to leave the Warzone and all its general unpleasantness to found Grax's Guys, a low-to-mid-tier mercenary organization, which bills itself as being all-purpose. True to form, Grax branded it after himself, and his face can be seen on billboards, company mugs, and the occasional t-shirt.

However, over the last few years, GGFC has lost a lot of customers to their closest rival, Scale and Fang Inc. Nothing perturbs Grax so much as this rivalry, and in particular, that he's losing to the mercenary company owned by Garfreckt, an eternal dragon who Grax considers to be a bit of a jerk.

BOSS AHN-NOVA (HE/HIM)

Boss Ahn-Nova is an owl-headed Avia-Ra who was kidnapped by mercenaries and taken away from his family as a child. Though the ransom was eventually paid and he was freed, Ahn-Nova resolved from that moment on to never be helpless again. After spending many years as a smuggler and occasional hitman, Ahn-Nova moved to Port Nomad and has been working since to build his own small criminal empire in the seedy spaceport. He has the sort of reputation that one would expect from a backwater

crime lord: he never lets go of a debt, lacks any sort of moral compass, and is more than willing to help anyone with any problem that they have—for a price.

Currently, Boss Ahn-Nova and the spaceport's Chief of Security, Ser Helio-Horus, are known enemies. Because of their feud, Boss Ahn-Nova will not attend the presentation at Starswill Bar. However, both of the bartenders working that night are his employees, and he expects a full report.

CAPTAIN LYSANDRA (SHE/THEY)

Captain Lysandra is a commander in the Nautilid Flotilla who has come to Port Nomad to listen to Professor Orryn's presentation about a new gnomish technology that will allow limited use of magic for ships and individuals in Dead Magic Zones. They hold no small amount of hope that this technology could finally be the answer to the nautilids' endless search for a new homeworld with naturally occurring Poseidon Solution.

A year ago, Lysandra's ship was blown up in what was reported as an "accidental drive malfunction". She believes it was no accident, and suspects the Firm was behind the sabotage. The incident has motivated Lysandra further, and made them a little reckless and desperate, as their goal to find a new homeworld for their people continues to be hampered by outside forces beyond their control.

CARMEN CANE (SHE/HER)

Carmen Cane is the definition of the human femme fatale. She oozes charisma, confidence, and immense intelligence. A short conversation with her immediately identifies her as a brilliant young brain surgeon. Because of her beauty and wit, she often finds herself rubbing elbows, sharing drinks, and exchanging glances with powerful men and women.

The truth, however, is far more nefarious. Carmen is a deadly secret agent and a powerful wizard. She is also the leader of the New Terran Organization: a violent, dogmatic, and virulently spreading terrorist organization that believes that humankind is the most superior race, and that they should claim the stars as their right. So while Carmen's bright smile and inviting demeanor may charm those who do not know her secrets, when dealing with her followers or enemies, she reveals herself as an unabashed sociopath, the mastermind of some of the most ruthless acts of interspecies violence in the 'verse's recent history.

Of course, even that isn't the full truth.

The New Terran Organization, unbeknownst to its xenophobic and simple-minded followers, is a front organization funded by the criminal syndicate, the Firm, and is acting at the behest of a secretive cabal of wizards known as the Tower. Not even Carmen fully understands what the Firm and the Tower are after, or why the Professor is necessary in the grand scheme of things.

CIRDAN BLACKFORGE (HE/HIM)

Cirdan Blackforge is an old, once-famous dwarvish shipwright, now down on his luck and nearing the end of his career. He is representing the Blackforge Clan at Professor Orryn's presentation, but has grave misgivings about the possible impact the new technology might have on the 'verse's complicated economy. He believes dwarves like him would be hit the hardest by any major change to the status quo.

Despite his resistance to change, Cirdan does his best to keep an open mind and is always interested in meeting new people.

DARKSTAR KILLAGOB (HE/HIM)

Darkstar Killagob is an ex-hitman and current information broker for the Firm, which makes him one of the most dangerous halflings in the 'verse. The Firm stands to gain a lot from investing in technology that could unlock Dead Magic Zones to exploration, colonization, resource mining, and more. Darkstar, a stone-cold killer, will do whatever it takes to determine whether or not the gnomish technology is the real deal, and make sure that his organization reaps the lion's share of the benefits.

Darkstar is extremely confident and believes that he is smarter and more skillful than pretty much everyone he meets. Despite this, he doesn't feel the need to prove it, and will only act when he feels it's absolutely necessary; his small gestures and quiet words hold a lot of weight.

EMBER (THEY/THEM)

Ember is an amoeboid scientist who just happened to be in Port Nomad during Professor Orryn's arrival and subsequent presentation. Ember is a very progressively minded sociologist with a focus on the effects of interstellar war. They have a particular interest in orcish sociology and believe the new technology could do a lot to disperse current ongoing wars that are unlikely to ever end without a major

systematic change.

Curious and patient, they are observing the 'verse with an attempt to consider all of its many variables, and they are very interested in how others act. They value neutrality, avoid becoming directly involved in conflicts, and try to use their influence passively. However, they are quite powerful when they unleash their magic.

HIGH ORACLE THESSALIA (SHE/HER)

High Oracle Thessalia of Great House Mere'gaal is present representing both the interests of the Elvish Empire and Astrogations Incorporated. The latter has tasked her with learning more about Professor Orryn's prototype and then use her divination magics and great wisdom to give the starfaring guild an informed suggestion on how much they should invest in the new technology.

Thessalia knows things about other people that she should have no way of knowing, and will occasionally leave hints and suggestions to this end, often for her own amusement. She will never start a fight, but she will be there to help others in need. When tides turn against her people, or those she wishes to win over as allies, she will use all of her power to aid them in any way she can.

KENNIE FLOPWIG (HE/HIM)

Kennie Flopwig is Kiri's twin brother and the Chief Data Executive of the Galactic Bank. He lacks Kiri's gumption and charisma, but he is a genius with crunching numbers. He is also clumsier, both physically and socially, and Kiri often has to re-word his blunderous statements. Being around Darkstar Killagob makes Kennie even sweatier and more anxious than he usually is; he legitimately fears that if he says something overly annoying or awkward, Darkstar might kill him.

KIRI FLOPWIG (SHE/HER)

Kiri Flopwig is the Vice President of the Galactic Bank. She's an energetic, take-no-prisoner shark, made bolder by her halfling genetics. Still, everyone has a boss—and the Galactic Bank is beholden to the Firm. Kiri is at Professor Orryn's presentation as a potential investor, but the ultimate decision will be made by the Firm's information broker, Darkstar Killagob. While she understands the hierarchy, she secretly resents the Firm and Darkstar for treating her and her company with so little confidence.

NEUTRON (THEY/THEM)

Neutron is an amoeboid doctor working at the clinic in Port Nomad, who harbors grand aspirations of being a holo-screenwriter. Neutron takes to their work as a doctor naturally, but longs for the types of adventures found in holo-plays: daring tales of intrepid heroes and narrow escapes from defeat. In their free time, Neutron has been chipping away at a holo-screenplay of their very own, but sadly, they are devoid of any talent in writing and will plague anyone who will listen with clichéd story and character ideas.

Though Neutron is not present for Professor Orryn's presentation, they can be found taking care of patients at the clinic at any time.

PROFESSOR ORRYN TALFOUGH-GOGGLEFOGGER (HE/HIM)

Professor Orryn Talfough-Gogglefogger is the brilliant and eccentric gnomish inventor who has made his life's work unlocking the power of magic within Dead Magic Zones. He understands the ley lines and nature of these mysterious regions better than most, and he has finally prepared a prototype of his technology. He hopes in the future to be able to mass-produce personal-sized devices and gigantic terraforming generators alike, in hopes of unlocking the last hidden corners of the 'verse.

He knows his work is dangerous, but believes the opportunity for goodness that comes with unlocking these previously unreachable parts of the 'verse far outweighs the risk. He is kind but easily lost in the immensity of his work, sometimes missing more immediate threats to his well-being. He has a dream and will fight for it, preferably with technology, charisma, and a little bit of gnomish tinker magic.

SER HELIO-HORUS (HE/HIM)

The lone Sepulcher Knight protecting Port Nomad has a reputation for being unerringly fair and incredibly brave as defender of the peace. His swordplay and aim are said to be so great, his presence so intimidating, that he does not even need to rely on magic or the gods as other Sepulcher Knights do. This is true, to a point: Helio-Horus is a powerful avia-ra fighter, but unlike most avia-ra, he is also surprisingly shrewd and craven. When he is threatened by a more powerful enemy, or with the

truth of his past being exposed, "Ser" Helio-Horus is all too eager to choose the path of least resistance and avoid trouble.

Ten years ago, Helio-Horus was cast out from the Order of Sepulcher Knights for breaking his oaths, dealing narcotics to the people he was sworn to defend, and murdering witnesses to protect his reputation. His fundamental betrayal of his oaths has left him unable to summon divine magics, a fact which has embittered him. Of course, very few individuals in Port Nomad know of his dark past or his current shady dealings with pirates, criminal organizations, and worse. He will do whatever it takes to make sure that remains true, no matter how vile, cruel, or cowardly his actions prove.

TIBERIUS VINTER (HE/HIM)

Tiberius Vinter is perhaps the most famous mercenary in all of the 'verse. The legend surrounding him has been adapted into many a holo-video, with each movie taking extreme liberties in his depiction, whether they be heroic or villainous. In truth, Tiberius is a quiet and thoughtful half-orc, whose reputation with those who serve beneath him in the Coalition is of a brilliant tactician, a brave fighter willing to sacrifice himself for others, a fair employer who cares about his underlings' well-being, and a businessman not above sometimes getting his hands dirty if the price is right.

Tiberius's success in many campaigns has made him more than a little worlds-weary, and he struggles to make meaningful connections with others. He is most likely to open up to individuals with a military background, particularly if they represent themselves as valuing equality amongst races and keeping the interstellar peace. If an individual impresses him enough, it is possible that Tiberius might attempt to recruit them to the Coalition.

The current High Lord Marshal of the Coalition has been hired as a personal escort for Darkstar Killagob. Tiberius is extremely expensive to personally hire, and the fact that the Firm has spent so much money to protect the Flopwig twins and Darkstar says a lot about how serious their interest in this new technology is. He will never fail in completing his contract, but should a conflict arise, his primary concern will be protecting his wards by removing them from harm's way.

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PROLOGUE: GRAX HQ

Advance all characters to 3rd level.

Before and between adventures, the characters hang around the Grax's Guys for Cheap headquarters, waiting for a good job to drop into their laps. Some use it as a chance to hit the gym or comb over some invaluable books on magic, but plenty of Grax's crew get good at darts and take the opportunity to relax during the rare days of downtime.

Grax's headquarters is some form of converted warehouse right next to the starport on the planet Fornax. While it might have poor to nonexistent air conditioning, it's got plenty of space for a crew to hone their skills, catch up on repairs, or take a nap. Before beginning the adventure, characters can explore the following locations in Grax HQ.

THE LOUNGE

Unless otherwise stated, the party is probably in the lounge. If they wish to explore the headquarters, begin them in this location and read or paraphrase the following:

You're in the lounge at the Grax's Guys for Cheap headquarters, a spacious, spartan room with Krash vending machines, a dart board, and a pool table with only one pool cue. Presiding over this space is a large aluminum and glass sign reading "Grax's Guys for Cheap". The words "And Gals" have been hastily installed alongside "Guys", presumably after Grax got an earful, and decided he didn't want to seem discriminatory.

This lounge's dart board is almost constantly in use. Due to a series of inane, but increasingly large bets, most crew members working for Grax have decided to get unreasonably good at darts. **Gimby "Lucky Shot" Matchfoot** is currently the reigning champion, and someone could make good money if they beat him.

GRAX'S CLUB

At the beginning of this adventure, pick one player character completely at random for Grax's Club, the Grax's Guys for Cheap employee of the month system. This character gets their picture on the wall of Grax's office, a monetary bonus of 50 credits, and extreme bragging rights. As the GM, you should **never** tell your players this "honor" is entirely random and functionally pointless.

PLAYING DARTS

Anyone who wants to challenge Gimby to a game of darts instantly draws a crowd of onlookers. Minimum ante for the game is 100 credits, but Gimby will match any amount up to 500 credits. The darts game consists of **3 contested Dexterity-based attack rolls**. Gimby makes his attack rolls with a +2 bonus, and has advantage on their rolls. Whoever wins the best out of three attacks wins the round. Once Gimby has been defeated at darts, they refuse to play again.

BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

Any characters with a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** notice **Osira**, an avia-ra working on another Grax crew, slide up to the one Krash vending machine with an "Out of Order" sign and insert 100 credits. She presses a button, and something dispenses from the machine. She slyly checks that nobody is watching, then collects what appears to be a gauntlet from the vending machine's dispenser slot! Curious party members can interrogate her with a successful **DC 14 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check** to learn that the machine dispenses random magic items. This information can also be gleaned from close inspection of the machine itself with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check**. Osira doesn't know where the machine came from or why it dispenses magic items. She just knows that it's obviously valuable and wanted to keep it a secret.

An inspection of the machine shows that its four buttons have prices of 100 credits, 500 credits, 2,500 credits, and 7,500 credits. Depending on the amount inserted, roll a d20 on one of the tables from *Appendix E* to determine which magic item is

dispensed. Keep track of which magic items have been provided to the players. If a character rolls a magic item which has already been produced, they receive the next lowest magic item on the table, or an error and a return of credits if there is no lower magic item.

It's not possible to extract magic items from the machine by force. Large magic items are magically shrunk and instantly grow to full size once removed from the machine.

CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters at Grax HQ contain some impressively uncomfortable bunk beds and a large screen to watch holo-shows. It's a good place to retreat to if the lounge is too loud or crowded, but crew members otherwise avoid the quarters until late at night. Each crew member has a sturdy lock box at their bunk, in which they can securely store their inventory.

THE SHOOTING RANGE

Undeniably the best part of the Grax's headquarters is the shooting range and armory. If a character would like to practice some shooting, read or paraphrase the following:

The booming rattle of blaster fire echoes around the room and the smell of incinerated metal fills the air. In this long, otherwise featureless wing of the warehouse is a surprisingly competent firing range, which serves to let Grax's Guys and Gals let off some steam and practice their aim. Several targets are painted on a chunk of discarded starship hull on the far side, which for some reason, has a tire swing hanging in front of it.

A vect on another Grax's crew named PQ-11 is hanging out near the firing range, tinkering with some gadgets. They beckons anyone wishing to practice to help them with a project.

PRACTICING AT THE SHOOTING RANGE

If a character spends an hour practicing with a weapon at the firing range, they gain a practice die, a d6, which they can add to an attack roll using that weapon sometime in the next 10 days. A character can only have one practice die at a time.

THE ARMORY

At the Grax HQ armory, characters can purchase weapons, armor, and gear, as per the tables in the *Dark Matter* Equipment chapter. If the characters wish to find more traditional, exotic, or illegal gear, there's a rat-person out by the dumpsters behind the headquarters named Charles Rattington Jr. who will sell any equipment from the SRD, and additional gear at the GM's discretion.

EXPERIMENTS WITH PQ-11

Inserting the last few screws into a mechanical device on a chest harness, PQ-11 explains that he has developed a sophisticated shield generator, and needs help testing it. He'll pay 50 credits to anyone willing to climb into the tire swing downrange while wearing it, so he can take a few shots. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that he might just want to shoot at someone in a tire swing, but a **DC 12 Intelligence (Technology) check** determines that the device is indeed sophisticated tech; this isn't some cobbled-together hardware with blinking lights. If a character agrees, they are paid 50 credits and sent downrange and ordered to activate the device once in the swing. Instead of generating a field however, the device renders them almost completely invisible! PQ-11 makes four repeater shots with a +3 attack bonus and disadvantage. If asked, PQ-11 is surprised the device did anything at all!

STORAGE

A great deal of Grax HQ is used for storage. This is, by far, the best place to find peace and quiet in Grax's HQ, but it's also a place where characters might find some truly strange stuff. To introduce this location, read or paraphrase the following:

If the rest of Grax's HQ is a converted warehouse, this is the section that's an unconverted warehouse. Countless unlabeled crates are stacked haphazardly in this room, creating a combination of a fire hazard and an avalanche risk. Most crates seem to be filled with Grax-branded merchandise nobody wants to buy. That being said, if someone wants a Grax mug, this is the mother-lode.

If a character wants to go digging through the storage, roll on the following table to determine what they find:

d8 Item

- 1 A remote-control defense drone that fires foam bullets
- 2 A box containing all the sourcebooks of *Fortresses and Fiends 7th Edition*
- 3 A body pillow with a life-sized picture of a comely-looking Grax on it
- 4 A crate containing successively smaller and more frustrating to open crates
- 5 An early manuscript for Grax's autobiography, using the working title, *Grax Gushes Greatly: Good Guidance for Green Go-Getters*
- 6 A very serious-looking antimatter bomb with the words, "From, Garfreckt" spray painted on the side
- 7 Grax-branded candy, all of whose flavors, such as tangy thwirrel and cherry human, are meat-flavored
- 8 A cardboard lakshay frame, nearly 12 feet tall

JIMBALL'S OFFICE

When the characters arrive at Jimball's office, they find dozens of half-ethereal insects swarming the room. Read or paraphrase the following:

Jimball throws open the door of his office and slams it behind him, holding it shut with his body. Panicked and covered in small scratches and bites, he stammers, "Th-there's something wrong with my computer!"

Indeed, his computer is infested with software bugs! A whole **bluescreen swarm** has made its nest there and rendered it impossible to get his work done. Dealing with this infestation is optional, but the characters won't get their operating budget otherwise. The armory will lend the characters any blasters they need. If a character wants to deal with the bugs in another way, three successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Data) checks** at Jimball's computer while the swarm is distracted sends them to Scale and Fang

Inc.'s database instead. Once the bugs are dealt with, Jimball gives each character their operating budget of 100 credits, and throws on an extra 25 credits as thanks.

GRAX'S OFFICE

When the players are ready to begin the adventure, they're summoned to Grax's office. Read or paraphrase the following:

The lights are low and the smoke heavy in Grax's office; it smells more like green than usual. As you enter, he spins around in his high-backed chair and clatters down a set of glasses, already filled to the brim with a pungent milky spirit. The instant you down them, he pours a second round, evidently lubricating you for a grim debriefing.

"This one's serious, kids. Get your game faces on; a man's life is at stake."

The details of the job will be delivered via flashback when the characters enter at the Starswill Bar in *Part One: The Usual Suspects*. Skip ahead to their arrival on Port Nomad.

PART ONE: THE USUAL SUSPECTS

The adventure begins in Port Nomad, a small space hub located in a hollowed-out asteroid at the edge of a deadly asteroid field. Port Nomad is a seedy locale favored by space pirates, black market traders, corporate cronies, and political powers looking to do business “off-the-books”. As the characters touch down in their ship, the Gittin’, read or paraphrase the following:

Somewhere, a saxophone plays a forlorn tune. Your ship touches down in Port Nomad, an entire city cast in contrasted shadows and harsh silhouettes, built into an asteroid, no-less. Suspicious glances and murmured remarks follow you as you make your way through the misty, darklit streets.

The characters have a short walk from the spaceport to the Starswill Bar, where the Professor awaits. For a few minutes, the characters can drink in the city’s atmosphere and consider their job, as provided by Grax. Read or paraphrase the following:

In lieu of an actual job description, Grax played a holo-vid in which a gnome darkly sullenly explained that the ‘verse was going to change forever.

“You have to understand, the Talfough Matrix, my prototype, will shift the balance. We will be able to travel into Dead Magic Zones and find lost worlds and...” he drifted off and took a drag of his space cigarette. “The possibilities in the impossible—it brings out the best and the worst in people. You’ll see what I mean, soon enough.”

The holo-vid ended suddenly and Grax leaned forward to explain: “The Professor is an old friend of mine, and he thinks he’s gonna be murdered. You’re gonna put a stop to that.”

The characters have been hired to protect Professor Orryn Talfough-Gogglefogger, a brilliant scientist on the edge of the greatest breakthrough in ‘verse history. Here in Port Nomad, at the seedy Starswill Bar, the professor is preparing to give the most important speech of his life to many races and parties interested in his new invention, the Talfough Matrix, in the hope that the technology can find its way into the right hands. However, fully expects to be murdered by those who would use it for conquest and profit.

Once the players have been caught up on the details of the job, the characters arrive at the Starswill Bar.

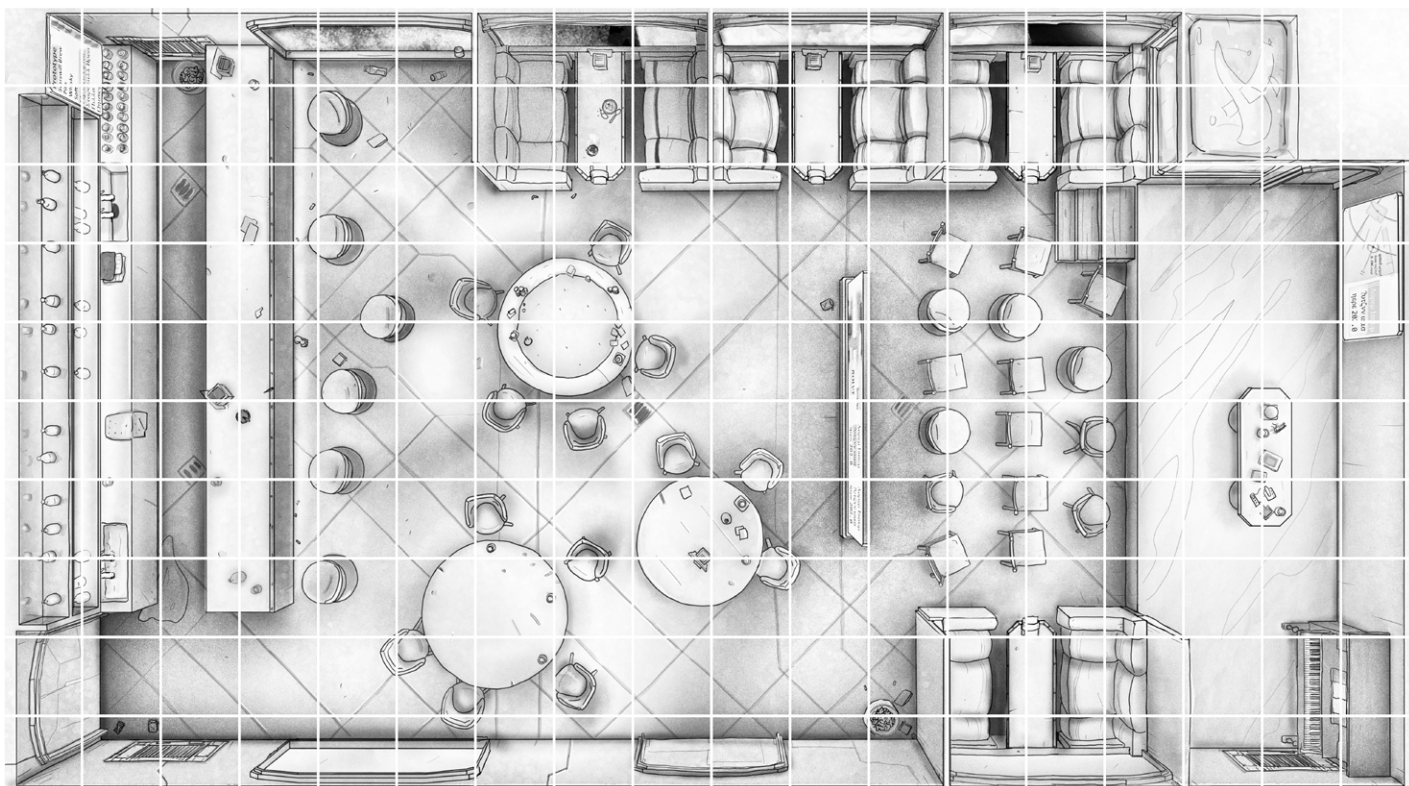
ENTER: THE STARSWILL BAR

The Starswill Bar is a far cry from the grand conference halls and stages demanded by such a monumental announcement, but it seems the good professor wanted his announcement on neutral ground with a small audience; the Starswill is as good a candidate as any. Professor Orryn is sitting in a well-lit booth when the characters arrive. Read or paraphrase the following to introduce the bar:

At one end of the bar is a dimly lit, empty marble stage with a piano set up against its back wall. The bar is populated but not overly crowded, with a variety of individuals from many different races and cultures gathered to witness the presentation that they’ve been invited to.

In front of the stage are a row of seats that have been set up specifically for the presentation. Beyond the seats are a row of dark booths, some more poorly lit and perfect for whispered conversations. Several round tables are set out between the stage area and the bar itself, where a few people are sitting and drinking, some taking the opportunity to gamble their credits away.

The bar of the Starswill is a long metal top with many stools. Behind it, several human bartenders work hard to keep up with the demands of the clientele. Beside the bar is a large window looking out into the vastness of outer space.



Until the presentation begins, the characters should keep an eye out for individuals that may wish to assassinate Professor Orryn. Use this opportunity to build suspicion of those gathered for the presentation amongst your players.

The following locations around the bar have occupants that may be interesting to the party:

- **Stage Seating.** A lone amoeboid (Ember) is sitting in an otherwise unoccupied row of seats. They seem to be waiting politely.
- **A Large, Well-Lit Booth.** Professor Orryn is currently seated and going over his notes, preparing for his speech, while two other gnomes that look like his assistants chat excitedly.
- **A Large, Poorly Lit Booth.** Two nearly identical-looking halflings wearing white suits (Kennie Flopwig and Kiri Flopwig) are seated with another halfling dressed in a black suit (Darkstar Killagob). Standing guard next to the booth is a heavily armed half-orc wearing high-tech armor (Tiberius Vinter). None of them are talking, currently, as the black-suited halfling intensely slurps from a bowl of soup.
- **A Small Gaming Table.** A beautiful woman wearing a red dress (Carmen Cane) is playing cards with an older, grumpy-faced dwarf (Cirdan Blackforge) who wears a well-stocked tool belt around his large waist.

- **A Large Window.** A large nautilid (Captain Lysandra) wearing a specialized suit with a rocket hammer strapped to her side is staring out at the asteroid field beyond. Their expression is hidden beneath their fluid-filled helmet.
- **The Bar.** A tall avia-ra in intimidating crimson plate armor (Ser Helio-Horus) leans over the corner of the bar, keeping an eye on the room. At the far end of the bar is an elven noblewoman (High Oracle Thessalia) with large silver discs for eyes, who is wearing an elaborate and colorful gown full of sharp angles. She is drinking a brilliant blue fizzing cocktail, smiling, and watching the others at the bar.

PERSONS OF INTEREST

Everyone in the Starswill Bar has an interest in the Talfough Matrix and an opinion on what the implications of such technology are; as the players look for suspicious characters, they will likely find plenty of shady motives amongst the people gathered.

Professor Orryn is busy preparing for his speech, and so has little to say to the player characters at this stage, thanking them for their help before he returns to reading over his speech notes. The professor's two assistants fully believe in Professor Orryn's vision for the future and in his work. They

both seem very concerned for his safety, and if any of the characters seem reluctant to mingle with the bar occupants and investigate, the assistants might approach the party to encourage them to take their job more seriously.

The characters may wish to stick together or split up to investigate the different people gathered for the presentation. The following sections include intriguing social encounters that play out like the opening scenes of a murder mystery in space. When the GM or players are ready to move on, be sure to have introduced *The Thwirrel Incident* from the *Carmen Cane and Cirdan Blackforge* section before beginning *The Assassin!*

EMBER

On closer inspection, the amoeboid seated in the audience section near the stage doesn't seem to be looking around or waiting for anyone in particular to join them. They seem to be waiting for the speech to begin.

When a character approaches, read or paraphrase the following:

The three rows of chairs that make up the audience seating area near the stage are an unmatched lot obviously brought out just for this event. The stage itself has been mopped clean and its piano rolled to the back. A small table is set out in the center of the stage and a holo-screen on the back wall of the stage flickers with displays of vintage spacecrafts, famous star systems, and a docking schedule for cargo and transport vessels.

Seated alone in the audience is a vaguely humanoid-shaped individual known as an amoeboid. Their form is blue and translucent, and their large black eyespots are framed by delicate eyelashes. They've dressed in a glittering gray robe with two well-worn grenade belts strapped across their midsection. In the amoeboid's lap rests a dormant data pad. The air around them is chilled, significantly colder than elsewhere in the bar.

Speaking with Ember. The amoeboid gives their name freely and reveals that they are very much looking forward to the professor's speech. They claim that it was a "wonderful fluke of probability" that their rest stop at Port Nomad coincided with the professor's speech. While they have no official invitation, no one has protested their presence. Ember will admit to the characters that they love people watching, and that the bar is full of interesting people.

If a player succeeds a **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to ask Ember about their observations of others in the bar, they will reveal three of their observations. Amoeboid characters have advantage on their Persuasion check. What bits of information Ember reveals is up to the GM; they could be hints at other NPCs' motivations, or they might be one of the rumors listed in an NPCs' subsection. On a failed check, Ember will explain that their research is incomplete and it would not be appropriate to reveal observations without proper hypothesizing and testing.

Ember's Opinion. Ember will explain that they are a scientist and a sociologist studying the causes and effects of the most recent goblinoid faction wars. They are hopeful that the professor's invention could make the Warzone—pockmarked as it is by small Dead Magic Zones—more habitable, and thus bring a lasting peace between the goblinoid factions and the major interstellar races. However, they also ruminate that it depends just as much on the larger galactic factions. Should the elves, for example, decide to colonize the Warzone with the Talfough Matrix, the conflicts in the region would only escalate.

Red Herring. If the characters ask about Ember's grenade belts, the amoeboid counters the question by asking why the character has chosen to wear what they are currently wearing. If Ember's question is answered, they will reveal that they purchased the grenade belts in Port Nomad because they thought it would make the business and cultural leaders gathered here see Ember as a figure worthy of respect. If pressed further, with a successful **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, Ember will admit that they purchased the belts because they are of a rare orcish design and thought they "looked cool".

Rumors about Ember. If other NPCs are asked about the amoeboid, some may express that they find amoeboids disconcerting—particularly their ability to change shape and how difficult it is to read their expression. Some may suggest that it's possible that goblinoid factions have hired Ember to be here, since their presence would not be tolerated. After all, a new frontier of planets to settle in Dead Magic Zones could drastically alter the balance of power in the Warzone.

DARKSTAR KILLAGOB, TIBERIUS VINTER, AND THE FLOPWIG TWINS

The meeting in the poorly lit booth includes Darkstar Killagob, an information broker for a sprawling criminal empire known as the Firm, and two high-ranking executives from the Galactic Bank, an institution which has established digital credits as the standardized currency across the 'verse.

Because both organizations have such a vested interest in the professor's invention, they have hired one of the most expensive bodyguards alive to protect them while they are in Port Nomad. The half-orc Tiberius Vinter is the High Lord Marshall of the Coalition, the most highly respected military corporation in the 'verse.

When approaching the poorly lit booth, read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the large booth, a heavily armed half-orc that stands guard next to it eyes you dutifully, but without too much concern. A haze of smoke hangs over the booth, rising from an ashtray full of snubbed space cigarettes that stink of burnt herbs and liquorice. A sandy-haired halfling in a white suit takes out another cigarette from an inner jacket pocket. His hands shake nervously as he fumbles for his lighter.

"How can you have lost it already?" The female halfling sitting across from him snaps. The two look like they could be brother and sister.

"It's here, I know it is. Sorry Kiri, I think there m-must be a hole in the seat", the nervous halfling squeaks out, then pulls up a tuft of gray gauzy foam from underneath him.

With a sharp click, a buzzing neon lighter ignites and is gently extended across the table by a third halfling, older than the other two and wearing a dark suit. He lights the nervous halfling's cigarette, slides his lighter back into his suit pocket, then looks up at you and smiles. Despite a soft roundness to his face, there's something a little sinister about that smile.

"Care to take a seat?" the smiling halfling offers.

The invitation to sit with such a suspicious group of individuals may be unsettling. A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check** deduces that Kiri, and especially Kennie, are afraid of Darkstar.

Speaking with Tiberius. It does not require a check for a character to determine that Tiberius is a dutiful guard with nerves of steel, and does not seem overly interested in political or economic discussion. If a character tries to speak to Tiberius, he will only grunt and say, "I have no business with you, friend." Tiberius will not introduce himself, because he is embarrassed to have taken this job. Darkstar, however, will introduce Tiberius (and his many titles and accolades) in an effort to impress and intimidate the party.

Speaking with Kennie Flopwig. Kennie is pleased to introduce himself and his sister, despite how nervous and sweaty he is. He stutters often when he talks, and when he rambles too much, Kiri shushes him harshly. He will excitedly and truthfully answer two questions about the Galactic Bank and their interest as investors into the professor's Talfough Matrix. If he is asked a question that would implicate him or his sister in criminal or suspicious activity, he is interrupted by Kiri kicking him in the shin, and will awkwardly stammer if questioned any further.

Speaking with Kiri Flopwig. She hesitates to open up to a characters' questions, but will introduce herself with a hint of resentment in her voice. She appears cold and calculating, and will avoid questions about the Galactic Bank or their presence at the presentation. She will open up if she is asked about herself, however, all too happy to point out how she is the first female Vice President in company history, and that under her management, business has never been better.

Speaking with Darkstar Killagob. Darkstar introduces himself as “Mister Killagob” and calmly asks the characters who they are and if they are excited for the presentation. If asked about who he is, he will claim that he is just a friend of the Flopwigs who loves progress; a **DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check** understands this to be a lie concealing an ulterior motive.

Darkstar will constantly manipulate the conversation back to the characters, asking more and more probing questions about the professor and his work. Once he realizes that the characters’ knowledge of the professor is actually quite limited, his smile fades and he nods firmly over to Tiberius.

The half-orc immediately tells any characters, “Thank you for your time. The Flopwigs would appreciate some privacy before the presentation begins.” Should they resist, Tiberius charges up his tri-barrel cannon, which comes to life with a rumbling hum, and adds a warning: “Now.”

Once the characters leave the booth, either willingly or by force, Tiberius does not allow them to return to within earshot. If someone forces the matter, he will show as much restraint as possible, looking to intimidate them into standing down and leaving the bar. He will only engage them in combat and turn them over to local security if absolutely necessary.

Rumors about the Galactic Bank’s Presence.

If other NPCs are questioned about the group at the booth, they will likely know that they represent the interests of the Galactic Bank, and will not seem surprised that they are present for the meeting. They are more surprised to see that they have spent so many credits to hire Tiberius Vinter, one of the most famous warriors in all of the ‘verse. Some NPCs may consider Tiberius’s hiring and the Coalition’s involvement an impressive power play, though both Cirdan and Lysandra seem less pleased with the Galactic Bank, and believe Tiberius’s presence is a grotesque display of wealth and entitlement.

Only Ser Helio-Horus knows who Darkstar Killagob is, which he will openly admit. If a character wants Helio-Horus to share information about Darkstar, he is happy to do so for 100 credits. Once paid, Helio-Horus will quietly claim that Darkstar used to be an assassin-for-hire, and was behind some of the largest political killings of the past twenty

years. He adds that he believes Darkstar is now retired and living like a king.

Rumors about the Firm. Most NPCs will speak in hushed tones of the organization known as the Firm. Most know that their business dealings are shady, to say the least, but won’t say much beyond that, for it can be hard to tell when a Firm Contractor is lurking nearby. Whenever there is a Contract in Port Nomad, someone usually ends up “accidentally” breaking their own kneecaps or going for a spacewalk with a faulty suit, so people are wary of speaking ill of the Firm or its Management.

Captain Lysandra will plainly state what nobody can prove: that the very same halflings which run the Galactic Bank have friends in the Firm to do their dirty work. She further goes on to mutter something derogatory about halflings’ light feet and nimble fingers under her breath.

CARMEN CANE AND CIRDAN BLACKFORGE

The Starswill is known as a safe haven for gamblers, though tonight the gaming tables have mostly been removed to add seating for the professor’s presentation. It is only because Cirdan is the bar’s most loyal regular patron, and also its most stubborn, that they agreed to leave one table out for him to play at until the presentation begins. Carmen Cane is currently playing cards with Cirdan and winning handily. She sticks out like a sore thumb: nobody knows her, she is dressed to kill, and she seems to be having more fun than anyone else in the room.

When a character approaches the gaming table, read or paraphrase the following:

Sitting at the gaming table is a tall, stunning human woman whose carefree laughter cuts through the din of the noisy bar. On the other side of the table sits a squat and miserable-looking old dwarf, with a scowling expression that suggests he just lost another hand of cards. The woman is wearing a red dress that leaves little to the imagination, and certainly nowhere to hide a weapon.

A moment later, the dwarf’s scowl fades. He cracks a toothy grin and rumbles, “Another hand, then! Odds are I gotta win sometime, and I ain’t entirely broke just yet.” He pulls straight his jacket and reaches into a pouch at his side. It’s then that you see,

half-concealed beneath his jacket, that he's wearing a very strange-looking pistol on his hip. He doesn't grab for the pistol, however, and instead pulls out a precious green gem that sparkles in the light. He sets the gem down onto the table and begins to shuffle his deck of cards.

Speaking with Carmen. If a character tries to sit down at the table, Cirdan will grumble at first, but Carmen will sweetly say that she wouldn't mind taking a break from cards if it means good company. She will introduce herself as Doctor Carmen Cane, and admit that she noticed the party is working with Professor Orryn, noting that she hopes that they are being paid as well as "some of the bodyguards in this room."

She claims to be here purely out of her love for science, and is excited for the presentation, as she has heard that the professor puts on "a great show." If asked what Carmen is a doctor of, she says that she is a brain surgeon who specializes in removing memories of childhood traumas. She kindly excuses herself from going into further detail due to the sensitive nature of what she does. A **DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check** believes that she might be lying about her job.

Carmen doesn't know anybody in the room enough to gossip, but will be very engaged in any stories the characters share about themselves. She compliments them often, and may even flirt, though never too obviously.

Speaking with Cirdan. Cirdan's foul mood returns when a character sits down, and he will be loathe to engage with them too much, answering them with a shrug of his shoulder and short, to-the-point sentences. If asked why he is here, he simply claims, "I pretty much live here. Ain't gonna not drink just because some whackjob wants to talk about changing the 'verse with their fancy doo-dad."

A **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces Cirdan to open up a little more. He will say that he is a dwarven shipwright who has worked on Dark Matter engines his whole life. He will then answer two questions honestly. If asked about his opinion on the Talfough Matrix, his mood grows sour, and he admits that he is worried that the invention will put a lot of hard-working shipwrights like him out of business, and doesn't think spacers have any place digging around in Dead Magic Zones.

Rumors about Carmen. No one knows much about Carmen except that she is beautiful, rich, and a doctor. She seems more interested in talking to people and playing cards than in the Talfough Matrix, and she has already won a large sum of credits from Cirdan, Ser Helio-Horus, and Darkstar Killagob tonight.

Rumors about Cirdan. The dwarf is well-known to the locals as a regular at the Starswill Bar, and even known to many of those who have traveled from far away to be here. Cirdan used to be a famous shipwright, but suffered an injury a few years ago that has left him unable to work consistently, and has fallen on hard times. Cirdan is a loud drunk, and Helio-Horus is particularly all too happy to tell the party that he complains a lot about new technology being the bane of good, hard-working dwarvish people.

The Thwirrel Incident. This event **MUST** occur **BEFORE** the professor gives his speech. At any point while the party is conversing with the NPCs in the room, a thwirrel drops from the ceiling onto the gaming table, causing brief chaos amongst those who can see it.

A quiet rustling can be heard from overhead and each character must make a **DC 12 Wisdom saving throw**. Read or paraphrase the following to illustrate the scene for those who failed the saving throw:

The metal panels overhead rattle for a moment and a few flakes of rust fall to the gambling table. Suddenly, Carmen spills her drink over her dress and scatters playing cards everywhere, while Cirdan draws a blaster and levels it across the bar.

Then, read or paraphrase the following for those who succeeded the saving throw:

Small flakes tumble down from a rusting panel in the ceiling above the gambling table, causing Cirdan and Carmen to look up simultaneously in surprise. With a crash and a clang, a small foot-length rodent with long blue-gray fur bursts out of the panel from above and lands with a THUD onto the tabletop. Carmen lets out a high-pitched scream as the creature rolls up onto its feet, its mouth full of what looks like a small

circuit board. It scampers away, spilling Carmen's drink all over her red dress and scattering playing cards everywhere. When the creature hits the floor, it turns sharply and begins to run straight for Professor Orryn. At the same time, Cirdan draws the strange pistol from his hip and grits his teeth.

A **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check** recognizes the creature as a thwirrel, an innately psionic rodent that commonly infests ships, cities, and colonies all around the 'verse.

A character that can see the thwirrel and tries to act immediately must **roll initiative**. The thwirrel acts on initiative count 13 and Cirdan acts on initiative count 11. The thwirrel's primary objective is to escape into an open air vent at the base of Professor Orryn's booth 80 feet away from the gaming table, and it will use its Psychic Camouflage ability to attempt to hide.

During the encounter, Tiberius moves to protectively guard Darkstar and the Flopwig twins, while Ser Helio-Horus and Captain Lysandra reach for their weapons and try to keep the bar patrons from panicking. Oddly enough, High Oracle Thessalia doesn't even react to the events around her, and continues to calmly sip her cocktail.

Red Herring. Characters who have learned about Cirdan's view on technology may be worried that Cirdan plans to use the chaos of the moment to attempt to assassinate Professor Orryn. A **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception or Insight) check** realizes that Cirdan is going to try to shoot the fleeing thwirrel and does not seem interested in the professor.

If the characters try to attack or subdue Cirdan, Ser Helio-Horus will help them, and thank them afterwards for helping to stop an assassination. Helio-Horus, claiming that Cirdan hasn't been right in the head ever since his injury, will call his security team to have the dwarf taken away and thrown into a cell.

The Thwirrel Aftermath. The encounter ends when the thwirrel escapes into the open air vent or is killed. After the encounter, everything settles back to normal and Carmen seems to have calmed down from her fright. She will give a smile to the character nearest to her, welcome them to Port Nomad, and

politely excuse herself to change. She will only stop long enough for a brief conversation before she exits, promising that she'll be back soon.

If the characters did not apprehend Cirdan, read or paraphrase the following:

Once Carmen steps out of the room, you hear heavy boots stomping towards the bar and Cirdan's grumbling complaints. "Back in my day, I had to work for hours and hours to keep those damned thwirrels off my docks! They're a nightmare, chewing things they shouldn't, crawlin' up into your clothes. Not to mention, some of them read your thoughts, know where you set your traps. Blasted space rats."

One of the bartenders comes over to clean up the mess at the gaming table, but none of the other patrons seem interested in sitting there after the event. If the characters try to talk to Cirdan at the bar after the incident, he is much more open with them about his life, views, and many outlandish conspiracy theories.

CAPTAIN LYSANDRA

Captain Lysandra is both anxious and afraid of the upcoming presentation. She wants to believe this might be the answer to the nautilid's desperate search for a new homeworld, but she is used to having her hopes dashed.

When a character approaches Captain Lysandra near the large window, read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach, it's easy to see that the hulking, fish-like nautilid looking out through the star window appears distracted. She wears an imposing metal suit that is reminiscent of ancient diving gear filled with a lightly glowing blue liquid. Her suit is well worn and her leather boots have thinning soles. As you observe her, she reaches up a hand to slowly wipe at a large stain on the dirty window, but manages to do little more than further smudge the grease into the fiberglass.

Speaking with Lysandra. Lysandra will be surprised for a moment when a character first attempts to speak with her. She quickly corrects herself by urgently asking if the presentation is about to begin. The more the characters speak to Lysandra, the more they should realize that she is very anxious. She will answer all of their questions about her life and the nautilids, but always with a bit of sadness in her voice. She has dedicated her life to exploring the stars in search of a new homeworld for her people, but has grown crestfallen with years of fruitless searching, and now fears that they may never find what they are looking for.

Lysandra's Opinion. Lysandra is cautiously optimistic about the Talfough Matrix. If the professor's claims are true, opening up Dead Magic Zones to explorers would mean whole new frontiers and worlds that may hold the solution to the nautilids' problem.

Red Herring. Despite her wary optimism, Lysandra is very worried about the presence of the other factions gathered for the presentation, particularly the representatives of the Galactic Bank. She believes that powerful people have a habit of using progress and technology to get rich, and that the nautilids have been taken advantage of by the banking industry in the past.

A **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check** gets Lysandra to explain why she distrusts the Galactic Bank. She quietly whispers that the Galactic Bank has ties to a criminal organization known as the Firm. She further explains that when her flotilla was indebted to the Galactic Bank and could not pay them back in time, a mercenary fleet attacked and destroyed several ships, including her sister's. She has never been able to prove the Firm and the Galactic Bank were involved, but she believes it with all of her soul.

Rumors about Lysandra. Some of the better-traveled NPCs present know of Captain Lysandra's reputation for bold (reckless) exploration of dangerous and contested star systems. No one has to guess about why she is interested in the Talfough Matrix. If asked, Helio-Horus and Kiri Flopwig might suggest that Captain Lysandra has grown paranoid and lost her mind after spending too much time in deep space.

SER HELIO-HORUS, HIGH ORACLE THESSALIA, AND THE BAR

The Starswill's long bar is a dirty copper that has gone unpolished for far too long. Two human bartenders work tirelessly to keep up with cleaning and crafting colorful, expensive-looking cocktails that seem at odds with the bar's shabby decor. They aren't allowed to converse with the customers tonight due to the importance of the clientele, and will resist serving the characters alcohol while they are on a job to protect the professor. Read or paraphrase the following:

At the mostly empty bartop, the smell of stale alcohol becomes abundant. Curious and sticky bottles line the back wall, reflected an infinite number of times by two angled mirrors. A large display shows the prices for beverages in credits, translated in a variety of languages. The cocktail of the day is The Prototype.

A few stools down from you at the corner of the bar is Ser Helio-Horus, an avia-ra wearing red platinum armor and a half-helm: the Chief of Security in Port Nomad. He watches the room dutifully, his proud features showing a colorful plumage that partly hides a few old scars on his feathered face. At his side hangs a disabled energy longsword.

At the other end of the bar sits a matronly elven woman. She is dressed more audaciously than anyone in the room, wearing an electric pink gown accented by strange, sharp angles that match her long hot-pink mohawk. She is sipping on a brilliant blue fizzing cocktail and smiling knowingly at you.

Getting a Drink. If a character persists in getting a drink, Ser Helio-Horus will lean over from the corner and buy them a single drink on his tab. They are served a green concoction with swirls of gold dust sifting through its liquid; it smells of flowers, tastes rather tart, and is quite strong. A character who drinks more than half of the cocktail must succeed a **DC 8 Constitution saving throw** or be poisoned for one hour.

Ser Helio-Horus is more willing to speak once a character has finished drinking a cocktail that he has bought for them.

Speaking with Ser Helio-Horus. Ser Helio-Horus will be polite but curt if the characters try to speak to him. He excuses himself by being an avia-ra Sepulcher Knight, and therefore honor-bound to keep the peace. However, secretly, Helio-Horus only cares about the appearance of being honorable and doing his job.

Helio-Horus claims to not believe that the professor's invention is real, and will say that a device that allows for magic to be used in Dead Magic Zones is a pipe dream. However, a **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check** believes that Helio-Horus might be misrepresenting his opinion on this matter.

Helio-Horus is an excellent source of gossip and rumors. He is the only one in the bar who knows everyone present to some extent, and he is happy to share most information for free. He will only reveal Darkstar Killagob's true identity for a bribe of 100 credits, however. When using Helio-Horus to spread gossip, the GM is encouraged to focus primarily on negative gossip, making every individual seem suspicious and capable of doing terrible things. If the characters ask about Port Nomad, Helio-Horus responds in a friendly manner and tells them that they should come find him in his office after the presentation, and he would be happy to give them the grand tour.

Speaking with High Oracle Thessalia. The smiling elf at the bar has an uncanny and unsettling habit. A character with a **passive Perception score of 13 or higher** notices that she has a tendency to look away to people and locations a moment before something happens, such as a bartender breaking a glass on accident or an argument breaking out on the other side of the room. Any elves, half-elves, or characters that speak Elvish will recognize that her garb marks her as a Diviner of Great House Mere'gaal, the most magically gifted of all elvish houses.

High Oracle Thessalia entertains a brief conversation with anyone who wishes to speak with her. She asks the characters a few simple questions about themselves; however, a character with a **passive Insight score of 13 or higher** notices that she is only feigning interest in them, as if to pass the time. Thessalia refuses to gossip about anyone or provide

insight into anyone's character, however, stating that it would not be ethical for one in her position to do so.

If asked, Thessalia will say that she is here to witness the presentation and give an account of it to Great House Mere'gaal. She claims to have no personal interest in the invention and does not care to speculate on its economic or political consequences. A **DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check** believes that she is lying, and is very interested in the Talfough Matrix.

Rumors about Ser Helio-Horus. The Chief of Security is the de facto leader of Port Nomad, and has a reputation abroad for being a legendary swordsman and an excellent mediator during conflict. It's Helio-Horus's reputation for keeping the peace that brought Professor Orryn to this backwater space port to give his presentation. Several NPCs may disagree or offer bets on who would win in a fight between Ser Helio-Horus and Tiberius Vinter.

Rumors about High Oracle Thessalia. The high-ranking elven matriarch makes many present uncomfortable. The popular opinion is that the Elven Empire is likely to most fiercely oppose the professor's Talfough Matrix, as they currently benefit from holding the largest territory in the 'verse, and opening up new territory would almost certainly challenge their dominance. Thessalia's apparent politeness despite representing the Empire is unsettling, and many of the NPCs in the room have noticed her watching them with an eerie smile.

THE ASSASSIN!

There is a faux assassin amongst the NPCs who is being mind-controlled to attack, but not kill, Professor Orryn during his speech. The motivation for this attack is to create a panic that results in Professor Orryn being taken into protective custody so that Carmen Cane and the radical group of humans calling themselves the New Terran Organization (NTO) can kidnap the professor at a later time.

Most of the NPCs detailed in the Persons of Interest section can be the mind-controlled attacker. However, the attacker should not be Carmen Cane, Tiberius Vinter, Darkstar Killagob, or Ser Helio-Horus. Consider which characters the players have interacted with and the result of those interactions in

order to choose an NPC that will be most shocking to the players.

Alternatively, the GM can roll 1d6 and consult the following table to determine the attacker:

d6 NPC Attacker

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | Kennie Flopwig |
| 2 | Kiri Flopwig |
| 3 | High Oracle Thessalia |
| 4 | Captain Lysandra |
| 5 | Ember |
| 6 | Cirdan Blackforge |

SUSPICIONS AND SPEECHES

Professor Orryn Talfough-Gogglefogger approaches the member of the party with the highest Technology skill bonus and requests assistance. The stage's holo-screen is not working and, despite Orryn's genius, he cannot figure out how to fix it. The professor explains that he needs the screen to be set up so that it broadcasts his presentation to the 'verse via social media channels.

A **DC 12 Intelligence (Technology) check** determines that the answer to the problem is simple: the screen simply needed to be recalibrated by turning it off and back on again. On a success, the professor is very grateful and promises the character a bonus after they leave Port Nomad. On a failure, the professor blames the thwirrel for the holo-screen not working and thanks the character for trying to help.

Afterwards, the professor gathers the characters together and tells them that he is about to begin his presentation. Characters with a **passive Insight of 13 or higher** notice that, while the professor seems excited rather than nervous, there is something sad in his eyes. If asked if he is worried, he will reply with quiet resignation, explaining that whatever happens will happen, and he will not let fear keep him from making the 'verse a better place.

As the professor moves to take the stage, all characters must **roll initiative** and describe where they stand in the room as the presentation begins. If they attempt to stand within 5 feet of the professor on the stage, he asks them to stand further back so that they don't get in the way. If a character insists, a **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check** convinces the professor that their close proximity is necessary.

Once the characters have decided where to place themselves in the room, read or paraphrase the following:

The diminutive professor takes to the stage, wearing a mechanical device strapped over his shoulders like a backpack. Mumbling absentmindedly to himself, he sets a data tablet down on the table alongside a number of odd-looking gadgets, and then fiddles with his rolled-up shirt sleeves. One of his gnomish assistants activates a small drone camera, which flies towards him with a hydraulic whoosh that gives him a bit of a start. After a moment, he presses his hand to his heart with relief, and smiles for the camera.

All of the others in the Starswill Bar begin to gather for the speech, taking their seats. Only the bartenders and Ser Helio-Horus do not take a seat in front of the stage, instead lingering back at the bar. The lights in the room dim and turn purple, with a brighter spotlight lingering on Professor Orryn and the stage.

On each character's turn, they can choose to hold an action or keep an eye on one of the NPCs in the room, noticing any number of the red herrings listed below. If anyone takes an action aggressive enough to interrupt the upcoming presentation, jump ahead to *The Attack*.

Kennie Flopwig. Kennie is sitting in the front row of seats next to the other representatives of the Galactic Bank. A **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices Kennie pat his pocket and then bend down to look for something beneath his seat.

Kiri Flopwig. Kiri is sitting in the front row between Kennie and Darkstar. A **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices her shift around uncomfortably and then sit on her knees, making herself seem taller in her seat.

Darkstar Killagob. Darkstar is sitting in the front row between Kiri and Tiberius. A character watching Darkstar sees him remove his dark suit jacket. A **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** spies a blaster holstered at his side that had previously been concealed.

Tiberius Vinter. Tiberius is sitting on one end of the front row next to Darkstar. At any point while being watched, he lifts his hand to shield his eyes and turns to look around the dim room. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** determines through body language that he is also keeping an eye on the others gathered, watching for suspicious or threatening activity.

Ember. The amoeboid is sitting in the same place they have been since the party's arrival. In the dark room, they glow with a faint blue light. A **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices that Ember seems to be working on a datapad as the speech begins.

Captain Lysandra. Lysandra is standing a few feet away from Ember in the middle row. She has removed several chairs around her to create more space. At any point while being watched, they remove a small device from a pouch on their metal suit. A **DC 12 Intelligence (Technology) check** recognizes the contraption as a personal recording device.

Cirdan Blackforge. Cirdan is sitting several seats down from Ember in the middle row and has placed his flight jacket down on the empty seat next to him. While being watched, he turns around in his seat and signals to someone behind him. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** realizes that he is motioning for one of the bartenders to bring him another drink.

High Oracle Thessalia. Thessalia has taken a seat in the back row, which has filled up with several latecomers to the presentation that the characters have not met. She seems serene, and turns to smile strangely at a character that watches her. At any point during the scene, she begins to quietly mouth a series of words. A character who speaks Elvish can make a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** to realize that she is counting downward in the ancient Elvish numbers.

Ser Helio-Horus. Helio-Horus is standing guard at the corner of the bar and watching the crowd. If a character watches him, he notices them and gives them a dutiful nod of his feathered head before continuing to look around the room. Characters with a **passive Insight of 14 or higher** notice that Helio-Horus is looking over the members of the crowd, not at them, despite his watchful expression.

Once each character has taken their turn, so long as they haven't interrupted the presentation, read or paraphrase the following:

The professor looks up from the table and gives a nod to the audience, and then pushes a button on one of the small devices in front of him. There is an awkward pause when nothing happens, save for a soft whirring sound. The audience stirs anxiously while they wait. Then, all at once, there is a burst of light as the device projects a massive star map, filling the room with its breathtaking view of the 'verse.

A few members of the audience gasp as Professor Orryn begins speaking in a bright tone. As is the custom, he begins his presentation with a terrible joke and a joyful wag of his eyebrows. "All of the known 'verse, so beautiful that it makes the goggles fog."

After a few moments of awkward silence, Professor Orryn Talfough-Gogglefogger coughs into the back of his hand, wipes some sweat from his brow, and continues. "Our civilizations have redefined the word impossible for millions of years. And yet, until now, only gnomish technology, my peoples' technology, could traverse Dead Magic Zones. While the government on Nebellion would never agree with my stance, it is my firm belief that all races and all civilizations deserve the chance to access the many worlds within these Dead Magic Zones. And that is precisely why I have created the Talfough Matrix, a technology that projects a field allowing magic in the zones where magic has always been said to be an impossibility!"

Several figures in the crowd begin to clap loudly, or even cheer, at the professor's opening remarks. Of course, just as many sit, watching silently. During the applause, the dwarf Cirdan Blackforge stands up from his seat in the back row and loudly boos the professor. Captain Lysandra stomps over towards Cirdan to try to force him back down into his seat. Cirdan rests, and there is a moment of shoving between the two of them.

Allow the characters to each take a turn, using the initiative counts established previously. They can try to keep an eye on one of the NPCs present (other than Lysandra and Cirdan, who are arguing), and may notice any of the red herrings listed in the section above.

A character can also attempt to calm the scuffle between Lysandra and Cirdan with a **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check**. On a failed check or without intervention, the argument about the professor's invention becomes more heated, forcing Ser Helio-Horus to come over and split up Lysandra and Cirdan.

At the end of the turn, the crowd has grown noisy with the scuffle and the professor attempts to get his presentation back on track.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The professor coughs into his microphone and speaks up, trying to regain the attention of the crowd. "Please, my friends! I know that change can be frightening. I know that expanding our interstellar boundaries will bring about its own challenges. It's only by working together that we can make the best of our new future, make the most of the Talfough Matrix's potential! Give me a chance to show you how we can change dreams into reality."

Professor Orryn presses a button and the star map vanishes, returning the room to its previous purple glow. On the screen behind the professor, the number 20 appears in a clean white font. He pulls a lever protruding from the side of the device strapped to his back, and a cloud of fog begins to drift out of the device, rolling over the floor of the stage in dramatic fashion.

"Behold!" Orryn exclaims, gesturing back to the holo-screen, which has now counted down to 10. "The schematic blueprints to the first ever Talfough Matrix, small enough to fit into a corvette-sized vessel!"

The crowd is quiet and seems confused by what they are watching. The professor turns around and his eyes go wide as he stares at the current number on the holo-screen: 4. "That is... not my schematics," he whispers.

THE CHARACTERS ACT!

Should the characters realize what is happening and interrupt the narration below, they may race to try to pull the professor off of the stage, which he will resist. Immediately proceed to *The Attack*.

And then an explosion rips through the Starswill Bar.

An explosion of force emanates from the holo-screen on stage, initiating the following encounter.

THE ATTACK

Each creature within a 15-foot radius of the stage, including the characters in the first and second row of the audience, must make a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw**. On a failure, a creature takes 5d6 force damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and is not knocked prone. Objects not bolted to the ground, such as chairs and equipment, are pushed up to 15 feet away from the explosion.

A character who has been actively watching the preselected attacker notices them lift one hand into the air and push a button on a tiny device held in their palm a moment before the explosion. The attacker will remain standing, or stand back up if the explosion knocks them to the ground.

Roll initiative. Ser Helio-Horus acts on initiative count 20, the preselected attacker acts on initiative count 10, and the other NPCs present act at the end of each turn. When you are ready, read or paraphrase the following:

The audience has been scattered by the blast, with individuals holding their ringing ears and shouting amidst the chaos. A large beam falls through the rusted ceiling panels and crashes down towards the elvish matriarch, High Oracle Thessalia. Unconcerned, and without so much as a glance at the falling debris, she takes a small step out of the way before the beam crashes into the floor where she had just been standing.

Ser Helio-Horus rushes towards the stage from the bar, barking out orders to anyone who will listen. "I'll get the professor! Don't let the assassin escape!" A moment later, his energy longsword ignites with a beam of light, and a shot rings out from elsewhere in the crowd.

And then all hell breaks loose.

The GM is encouraged to keep the encounter dynamic by reminding the players of the challenging environment, fallen debris, difficult terrain, and trouble hearing and seeing amidst the chaos. Increase the urgency by giving characters disadvantage on Wisdom (Insight or Perception) checks to determine what is going on and Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks to wade through the crowd.

If at all possible, Tiberius Vinter and Darkstar Killagob should survive this encounter, even if it means another NPC sacrificing themselves to protect them. Other NPCs can die in the course of the encounter, but it should be played dramatically, reminding the players of the huge stakes at play in the adventure. Consider saving the final moment of an NPC reduced to 0 hit points until after the encounter is over, allowing the characters to interact with them before they die.

During the encounter, the NPCs present follow the agendas listed below. The NPC being mind controlled instead uses the statistics of an **Assassin**. Refer to the stat blocks listed in *Appendix B* for the rest of the NPCs during the encounter.

Ser Helio-Horus. Helio-Horus attempts to remove Professor Orryn from the bar and get him to a secure location. The professor will not resist. If a character pursues Helio-Horus, he will not stop them, but will try to convince them to go protect the other important attendees and that the professor is safe. If they persist, they can leave the encounter and follow Helio-Horus and the professor to a safe room several blocks away.

Assassin. The mind-controlled attacker is immune to the charmed condition. They use their turns to escape using whatever means necessary. If confronted, they will try to take a hostage, who they will kill as soon as they manage their escape. When reduced to 0 hit points by a character, that character decides whether or not they kill the attacker or

simply knock them unconscious. If the attacker manages to escape, they get several blocks away before they inexplicably fall unconscious and are taken captive by Helio-Horus's security forces.

Ember. Ember spends their first turn locating their datapad amongst the debris. On their second turn, they change shape and attempt to flee the bar, leaving their grenade belts and robes to do so.

Kiri Flopwig. Kiri attempts to chase after Professor Orryn, and must be wrestled to the ground before she gives up. Afterwards, she will attempt to flee the bar, leaving behind Kennie or Darkstar to do so.

Kennie Flopwig. Kennie attempts to chase down and wrestle Kiri to the ground to protect her during the chaos. Once Kiri runs away, Kennie will attempt to help Tiberius keep Darkstar safe. If Kiri dies during the encounter, Kennie will enter into an agonized rage, steal Tiberius's tri-barrel cannon, and recklessly attack anyone who approaches him.

Darkstar Killagob. If the attacker is revealed by the characters or by their own actions, Darkstar spends his first turn shooting at the attacker from a distance. Afterwards, he takes cover behind a pile of debris with Tiberius Vinter until the encounter is over.

Tiberius Vinter. Tiberius spends his first turn moving debris from the stage and seating area to create a barricade of cover for Darkstar. On following turns, Tiberius draws his antimatter glaive and prepares his actions to attack anyone who approaches himself, Darkstar, and Kennie when Kennie moves to join them.

Captain Lysandra. Lysandra assumes Darkstar is the attacker until the characters point out otherwise or the attacker reveals themselves by their own actions. She will do her best to render unconscious whomever she believes is the attacker.

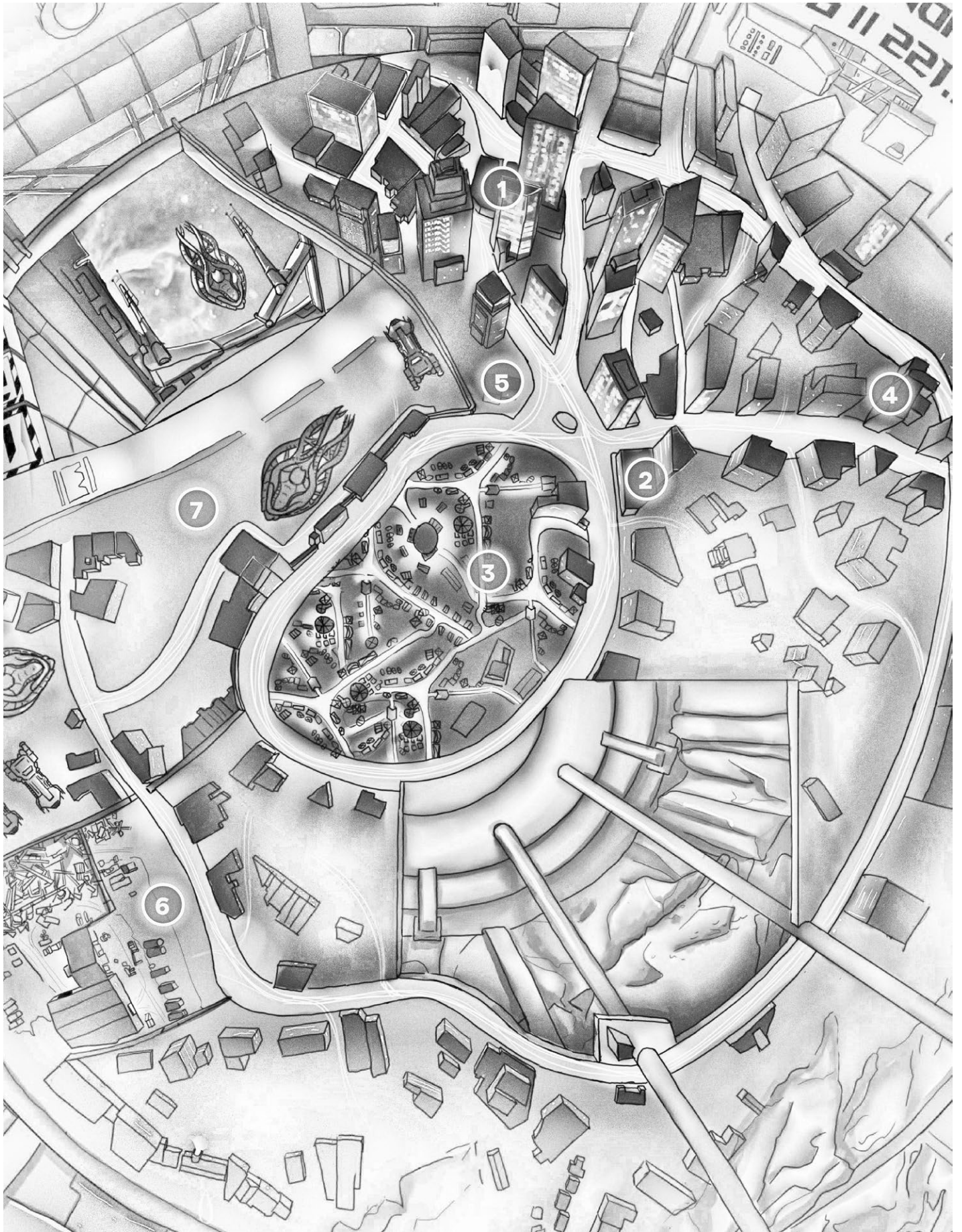
Cirdan Blackforge. If one of the characters attempted to fix the holo-screen's broadcasting abilities for the professor, Cirdan believes that they tampered with the device and are in on the attack. He will drunkenly accuse them of as much and attack them on his turn. If he is reduced to fewer than half of his total hit points, or if none of the characters attempted to fix the holo-screen, he instead takes cover behind the bar.

High Oracle Thessalia. Thessalia spends her first turn moving to safety and casting *mage armor* on herself. On her following turns, she uses her spells, particularly *suggestion*, to try to defuse the chaos and soothe characters who are attacking anyone other than the assassin.

AFTERMATH

After the encounter is over, Carmen Cane arrives with six Port Nomad security officers and a medic. The lights in the bar are turned up all the way, showing the full devastation of the firefight. While Carmen and the medic help care for the wounded, the security officers ask that the characters accompany them to Ser Helio-Horus's office so that they can try to get a full understanding of what happened. If the characters resist, the security officers will attempt to take them in by force, with 2d6 more security officers arriving at the start of every odd-numbered turn during the encounter.

Once the characters either agree to accompany the security officers or are forced to, proceed to *Part Two: The Dark Underbelly*.



PART TWO: THE DARK UNDERBELLY

Advance all characters to 4th level. Characters regain hit points equal to the amount their hit point maximum increases.

Once the characters reach the office of Ser Helio-Horus at the security station, they find themselves sitting down in a dark room. Helio-Horus arrives several minutes later and stands behind his desk to interrogate the characters. He asks them basic questions about themselves and the series of events leading up to the attack, which might include:

- Where are you from?
- How did you meet Professor Orryn?
- Did you notice anyone acting suspicious at the bar before the attack?
- Do you know the attacker?

Once he has finished his interrogation, Helio-Horus assures the characters that these are simply routine questions. He tells them that, for everyone's best interest and to ensure the professor's safety, he has placed him in a secure location under heavily armed guard while the investigation is ongoing. He promises to release Professor Orryn, no matter what, after one week. If the characters attempt to persuade him otherwise, the avia-ra's tone will become much more severe, reminding them that they are visitors to Port Nomad and are all technically suspects in this case, though he would rather not treat them as such.

After this explanation, Helio-Horus will allow the characters to ask him questions about the situation or Port Nomad. He will make himself as helpful as possible, going as far as to swear on his honor as a Sepulcher Knight to keep the professor safe until the matter is settled.

EXPLORING PORT NOMAD

With the interrogation done, the characters are left to explore the station of Port Nomad while they await the release of Professor Orryn from protective custody. As they exit the security office, read or paraphrase the following:

RUNNING PORT NOMAD AS A CLOCK

The background events are presented as a clock. Each location and event will move the clock forward. Be mindful when using events, however, as they can advance the clock rapidly and leave the players without enough clues as to what is going on. Once the clock reaches 6, the characters will be alerted of a firefight (if they are not already present) between Port Nomad's security and NTO terrorists, and should proceed to *The Shootout*.

The dusty air of Port Nomad hits you in full force as you step outside. Around you are a collection of ramshackle buildings next to more recent constructions made of steel and concrete. The streets are poorly lit and zigzag through the station, instead of being built on a grid like in any respectable settlement. The people of this backwater spaceport eye you with either suspicion or amazement. Your presence does not go unnoticed.

From this point on, the characters are left to explore Port Nomad. Included in this part are the locations and events you can use, or draw inspiration from, to flesh out the station. As the characters venture forth, other events in the adventure will be happening in the background. Ser Helio-Horus has made a deal with the New Terran Organization and plans to ransom the professor to them to pay off his gambling debts.

The map on the previous page should serve as a reference for both the GM and the players.

1. THE STARSWILL BAR

The Starswill Bar is Port Nomad's most popular bar and gambling hole, and has a reputation for being a legal operation, unlike the station's other bar, Grug's Den. This is something of a misnomer: both bars are owned by affiliates of Boss Ahn-Nova. The Starswill Bar may be less grungy than Grug's Den, if only a little, but it is also a popular joint for illegal activities and underworld deals.

Currently, the Starswill Bar is closed for renovations and investigation. If the characters attempt to return, their access will be limited at any time by 2d6 **Port Nomad security officers** and 3d6 **spacers** (construction workers) who occupy the building.

2. GRUG'S DEN

Grug's Den is the seedier of Port Nomad's two bars, and is currently its only open watering hole and gambling establishment. To introduce Grug's Den, read or paraphrase the following:

This rundown establishment is located off the main thoroughfare of Port Nomad, on a side street named The Valley. The building is made of concrete and steel, with an uneven roof and a precariously leaning sign depicting a winking half-orc.

Upon entering, the characters are met with a cloud of smoke from cigarettes and cigars. The patrons, a rowdy bunch, stop their activities to stare at them as they enter. If she is still alive and not in custody, any characters with a **passive Perception of 14 or higher** notice Kiri Flopwig leave a room in the back of the bar and then beeline for the back exit with a satisfied smile on her face. If accosted, she will make brief small talk, excusing herself as quickly as possible. She avoids honestly answering any incriminating questions.

Grug's Den offers hard drinks and gambling to those so interested, and allows the characters to mingle with the rogue's gallery of patrons present. Additionally, the GM is encouraged to reintroduce some of the NPCs that the characters previously met at Starswill Bar by having them be present in Grug's Den. A **DC 14 Charisma (Deception, Persuasion, or Intimidation) check** learns one of the following rumors from the locals at the bar:

- Grug's Den has a back room sectioned off to most patrons. Behind this closed door, the movers and shakers in Port Nomad strike deals that decide the future of the station. Ser Helio-Horus sometimes goes in, though never to arrest anyone.

SEVEN-CARD STAR

The games available at Grug's Den include most of the commonly played card and dice games found across the 'verse. Among these is the popular game Seven-Card Star. A character proficient in dice or cards can add their proficiency bonus to ability checks made while playing this game.

Cheating. Because the House cheats, characters make ability checks made at disadvantage. However, a player can cheat by casting the *cheat* cantrip or succeeding on a **DC 14 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check**. On a success, they have advantage rather than disadvantage during the current round. The first time a player fails a check to try to cheat, they forfeit the round and are given a harsh warning by the dealer. The second time, they are forcefully evicted from Grug's Den. They may return later, but will not be allowed to gamble.

Seven-Card Star. A character must win two out of three "hands" to win the round and take home the credits that have been bet. Each round, gambling players must succeed a **DC 11 Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check** to win the hand.

- The player characters aren't the only new faces in the station. Several days ago, an odd couple landed in Port Nomad and started asking questions. Too many questions. The couple is lodging at a seedy joint called the Room and Board, which only furthers people's suspicion of them.
- Firm contractors have been visiting Port Nomad more and more frequently, coming and going, and buying up property. Some of the locals believe, particularly with the arrival of Darkstar Killagob, that it's just a matter of time before the Firm owns Port Nomad, and they are all unofficial Firm "assets."
- The owner of the bar, Grug, is being hunted by a Lakshayan bounty hunter named Makoto. Grug is unlikely to make an appearance around these parts any time soon.

For players wishing to gamble, Grug's Den offers ample tables with different one-on-one games of chance (similar to Blackjack). A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** realizes that the House is cheating and that they are likely to lose credits if they gamble at Grug's Den.

The cost to play a round of a game is 10 credits per character, all of which goes to the House. Each round of the game, 2d4 patrons are actively betting on the results. To determine the total amount of credits that a character can win in a given round, multiply the number of patrons betting by 1d4, then add 10.

If a character manages to beat the House three times in a row, they attract the attention of Boss Ahn-Nova, the head of the criminal underworld in Port Nomad. Ahn-Nova, an owl-headed avia-ra adorned with a fine nanofiber vest, a rapier, and several blasters, has been having issues getting his money from an unfortunate gambler lately. He is aware of the party after the attack at the Starswill Bar, and sees opportunity in meeting with them. Meeting with the boss can also provide the characters with key information on Ser Helio-Horus, as he is the unfortunate gambler at the center of Ahn-Nova's problem.

Boss Ahn-Nova invites the winning character into the back office and gets straight to the point. He wants them to collect the 1,300-credits debt that Helio-Horus has accrued over the last few months. He knows the Chief of Security has people working for him, gathering money at his behest, but Ahn-Nova has not seen a single credit that he is owed. He is ready to pay the party 300 credits for the return of the full amount. If Helio-Horus is unwilling to, or cannot, pay up, they are to leave him with a message, a reminder of who runs this station.

Whether or not the characters meet with Boss Ahn-Nova, when they leave Grug's Den, **move the clock forward by two.**

3. BAZAAR

The center of Port Nomad is occupied by a year-long bazaar, consisting of a gathering of tents and stalls, of more permanent fixtures, and simple carpets laden with goods. The bazaar offers goods that can be commonly found around the 'verse (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Gear). Weapons and armor are also available, but Port Nomad demands that such items

be sold at a premium to dissuade people from arming themselves to the teeth. Weapons and armors cost 50% more than their listed price.

One merchant sells an *ankh of Ra* that used to belong to Ser Helio-Horus. The merchant is more than willing to share that it was sold to him by Boss Ahn-Nova after Ser Helio-Horus lost it in a card game. The merchant is willing to part with the ankh for 300 credits. A **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check** convinces the merchant to lower the price to 200 credits.

After the party leaves the bazaar, **move the clock forward by one.**

4. CLINIC

If the characters wish to interrogate the individual responsible for the attack on Professor Orryn, Ser Helio-Horus points them to the local clinic where the attacker is currently in a coma. The receptionist, a short gnomish woman with pink hair, recognizes the characters from the earlier events and will allow them to visit the attacker, provided they leave their weapons with her. The characters find that the NPC who attacked Professor Orryn is still in a coma and unresponsive to stimuli. The only movement the assassin has made since being admitted is a light tapping of their right index finger. If a character spends at least 10 minutes in the room and has a **passive Perception of 13 or higher**, they notice that every few minutes the comatose attacker lightly taps their right index finger against their bed in subtle but rapid succession.

A **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds the following note on the medical chart: the patient's doctors have observed that the patient taps their right index finger, then pauses, and taps again. The doctor has even counted the taps: fifteen, twenty-two, five, eighteen, nineteen, nine, seven, eight, and twenty taps. This pattern is repeated every ten minutes, like clockwork. A **DC 10 Intelligence (Data or Piloting) check** knows with certainty that the number of taps in the pattern are long short to be coordinates, and must be something else.

With a **DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check or Wisdom (Medicine) check**, a character can deduce that the NPC's affliction is magical in nature, not physical. Whatever mind-affecting magic is at the root of this can't be dispelled or suppressed. If the characters don't reach this conclusion, they will be

interrupted by the patient's doctor, an amoeboid named **Neutron**, who will reveal the affliction's probable magical origins.

Neutron will mention that the magical affliction is like something out of a holo-vid, and will talk excitedly about murder mysteries and conspiracy films at a moment's notice. As excitable as the doctor is, none of their theories even approach plausible reality.

There is nothing else interesting about the comatose attacker to observe, and no amount of magic or medicine wakes them from their coma. After the characters leave the clinic, **move the clock forward by one**.

5. ROOM AND BOARD

As the characters approach the Room and Board, read or paraphrase the following:

The Room and Board is a sketchy-looking establishment not too far from the spaceport. It is a one-story building adorned with multiple doors on the front. Each door has a meter mounted into it with a device that allows one to unlock the door by spending credits. A cramped, dimly lit office is located on the end of the building next to a Krash vending machine. Parked in front of the building is a black land vehicle with chrome detailing.

A **DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation or Technology) check** determines that the vehicle is trapped and anyone who does not possess the precise fingerprints of its owner will trigger an *alarm* spell when they touch it. The check also notices that the vehicle has been modified to withstand massive firepower.

Currently inside the Room and Board are the owners of the vehicle outside, two human investigators dressed in suspicious-looking trench coats and hats. They go by the names of **Paladec** and **Jenson**. Paladec is a tall and attractive man wearing a checkered button-up shirt, whereas Jenson is a rugged-looking fellow wearing a t-shirt beneath a beaten leather jacket.

The pair has come to Port Nomad to investigate a shadowy organization known as the Tower, which they believe has some unknown interest in the station. They missed the excitement with Professor Orryn at the Starswill Bar earlier, and are willing to pay up to 50 credits for the party's detailed account.

If the characters share valuable information and do not withhold too much, Paladec and Jenson happily allow the characters to use their rented room as a safe haven, so long as they share whatever they uncover in their own investigation.

For all of their eagerness, the two investigators know very little about the Tower. However, they have a theory that it is made up of the richest individuals in the 'verse, who use their influence to improve their wealth at the expense of the poor. They will pay between 3 and 50 credits for any information they uncover about the Tower, depending on how trustworthy and helpful the information is to their ongoing investigation.

After the first time the characters meet Paladec and Jenson, **move the clock forward by one**.

6. JUNKYARD

The junkyard lies just beyond the spaceport and can be a prime location for gadgeteers and engineers to gather materials for future projects. Furthermore, as they wander Port Nomad, the characters may see the following notice:

Help Wanted!

Seeking brave souls to help pull apart a troublesome piece of tech. Danger pay guaranteed. Ask for Old Marshall at the junkyard.

If the characters are interested, they can easily make their way just outside of Port Nomad and down the path that leads to the junkyard, a fenced-in yard full of scrap metal, half-dismantled vehicles, and broken-down spaceships. Near the entrance to the yard stands a lone rickety shed that looks like it's about to collapse in on itself. As soon as someone approaches the entrance, a small construct in the shape of a dog will begin barking, alerting the shack's resident. Out will come Old Marshall, armed with a carbine. Read or paraphrase the following:

You hear the grumpy old voice of a male call out from within the shack. "What in the stars is going on out here? What are you barking for? Has it been moving again, is that it?"

A moment later, an old human man comes scrambling out into the yard, brandishing a blaster. He is wearing dirty overalls atop an even dirtier shirt. He smells of grease and oil, and looks haggardly about until he finally sees you.

The old man slowly lowers his weapon, scratches the side of his head, and calls out again. "You here about the notice, or you here about buying some junk?"

If the characters inquire about buying some of Old Marshall's junk, or ask for permission to walk around the junkyard, Old Marshall will warn them about a malfunctioning piece of technology that has been giving him problems. He suggests the characters deal with it if they wish to investigate the yard in peace. Old Marshall doesn't know why the machine is going haywire, but he does know it is dangerous. A half-dismantled vect ship in the junkyard has been coming to life, wandering the yard and collecting other pieces of scrap to create a body for itself. It chases away or attacks any sentient life that is not a construct. The latter it consumes.

Old Marshall is willing to pay each character 50 credits to dismantle the malfunctioning machine. A **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check** haggles him up to 100 credits each. However, Old Marshall insists that he needs to inspect the remains before he'll pay up.

A **DC 15 Intelligence (Data or Technology) check** determines that the vect ship must be infected with the N-Virus, which primarily attacks vect constructs. The **infected scrap golem**, as Old Marshall calls it, is currently hidden under a pile of junk. A character can pinpoint its location with a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check**. When a character moves within 15 feet of its hiding place, it whirs to life and attacks with its barrage fire. If its hidden location was not uncovered, it will have a surprise round in any encounter against the players.

Once the creature is destroyed, Old Marshall will be delighted to pay the characters what he owes. Additionally, he will help any craftspeople in the group gather useful scrap from the junkyard. Consider the materials found to be 5d6 × 10 credits worth of material for crafting weapons, armor, magical technology, or spaceship parts.

Once the characters leave the junkyard, **move the clock forward by one**.

7. SPACEPORT AND SECURITY

The hub of all travel to and from Port Nomad is its spaceport, a dirty metal landscape of utilitarian design that is constantly busy. A small security station is located near the entrance to Port Nomad proper, where 3d6 **Port Nomad security officers** are checking identification as they allow travelers to come and go from the settlement. Nearest to the check-in are the hangar's many private docking bays for spacers with special licenses and privileges. The two public docking bays can be found on the far end of the spaceport beyond Port Nomad's Security Station, a large compound manned by 8d6 Port Nomad security officers at any time. The Chief of Security, Ser Helio-Horus, can be found in the compound, working out of his private office.

The characters can visit the spaceport to return to their ship, the *Gittin'* or so ensure that the professor's ship, the *Caliber*, is intact. While visiting the port, a character with a **passive Perception of 14 or higher** notices another security team exiting from a recently landed spaceship at the same time they are checking on the *Caliber*. The arriving Port Nomad security team is a group of tough-looking humans who immediately disembark in different directions. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** determines that the new team is oddly undisciplined, and realizes that it is strange for an entire team to be comprised completely of one race on such a diverse settlement as Port Nomad.

If a character follows one of the disembarking security officers, they must succeed a **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check**, or be spotted. A security officer that knows they are being followed does not act suspicious, but instead walks circles around Port Nomad before returning to the spaceport.

If a character successfully trails an unaware security officer through Port Nomad, they follow them to a dirty back alley. Carmen Cane lingers in the alleyway and exchanges a few whispered words with the security officer before the two part ways—Carmen to gamble at Grug’s Den and the security officer to return to the spaceport.

After the characters have visited the spaceport for the first time, **move the clock forward by one.**

EVENTS

These events can be introduced at any time while the characters explore Port Nomad. The GM is encouraged to use them to interrupt travel between two locations or a long rest. Consider that some events will move the clock forward in this act.

PICKPOCKET

A female street urchin going by the name **Mousey** stalks the group as they walk the streets of Port Nomad. The urchin is a small near-human child with feline ears and a long furry tail. When the time is right, she will sneak up and attempt to rob one of the characters of a small item. A **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices Mousey moving away quickly through the crowd before disappearing. If caught, Mousey will spin a tale about how she is but a lone orphan trying to make it in wicked Port Nomad.

In truth, Mousey works for Ser Helio-Horus and steals from visitors and tourists to help him pay back his gambling debts to Boss Ahn-Nova. Mousey is an accomplished liar, and a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check** is necessary see through the well-rehearsed lie. If confronted, Mousey will agree to tell the truth if they let her go and let her keep the item she stole. If the characters agree or coerce her into telling the truth with a successful **DC 14 Charisma (Intimidation) check**, she will rat out Helio-Horus and make a quick exit.

After the characters encounter Mousey, **move the clock forward by one.**

SNAKE OIL SALESMAN

This event can occur anywhere. The characters are accosted by a vendor named Markus who is looking for “investors” interested in his invention of a miracle cure. He claims his potion can heal wounds and cure diseases. With proficiency and access to alchemist’s supplies, a **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** reveals

that the potion is just a mix of a dangerous variety of cheap street narcotics. Anyone who drinks the potion must make a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw**, taking 4d6 poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

If Markus is confronted, a **DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check** persuades him to admit that he doesn’t know what is inside the concoction, only that he gathered the ingredients himself from a dumpster behind a house in Port Nomad and mixed them together to sell. If asked, he agrees to show the characters the house, on the condition that they do not report him to the authorities. Markus quietly informs the characters that the house belongs to Ser Helio-Horus.

If the characters let Markus go, he immediately departs Port Nomad, leaving the poisonous potion behind. After the characters encounter Markus, **move the clock forward by one.**

GRISLY MURDER

As the characters pass a darkened alley, they notice a slumped figure, motionless, resting against the wall of a nearby building. A **DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check** discovers that the figure, a dead dwarf, was killed by a rather large blade. With a further **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, it appears that the wounds were inflicted to kill the dwarf slowly and painfully, and must have been the work of someone extremely skilled. The dwarf is dressed in plain overalls over a beige shirt, and his pockets are entirely empty. A **DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to reveals that his boots are stamped with the insignia of Port Nomad Security. If the characters decide to report the murder to Ser Helio-Horus, see *Confronting Helio-Horus*.

If the characters investigate the murder on their own, the Port Nomad security officers can identify the body as belonging to Bardur Hammerfist, a security agent who was out on leave.

Searching Bardur’s home or his locker at the station will reveal that he was investigating Ser Helio-Horus, gathering evidence that the Chief of Security was embroiled in the criminal underbelly of the Port Nomad. Photographs show Helio-Horus coming and going from the back room of Grug’s Den, while copies of his medical files show that he was prescribed a large doses of painkillers in the last three months.

Helio-Horus's doctor, an amoeboid named **Neutron**, can be found at the Clinic. They will avoid answering questions about the Chief of Security's prescriptions, citing patient-doctor privilege. A **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check** causes Neutron to break down and begin to cry tears of glowing blue jelly. They say that Ser Helio-Horus threatened to kill them and destroy all of their research if they did not give the Chief of Security access to an unlimited source of prescription drugs.

If asked about their research, Neutron will give the characters a holo-screenplay that they have written titled **MURDER ON THE AMOEBOID EXPRESS**, and tell them very seriously that it's their life's work. A cursory read-through of the script proves that it is derivative at best, and is unlikely to ever be produced. If a character compliments Neutron's writing, they will try to become their friend and speak to them ad nauseum about their other great ideas for murder mystery stories, all of which are terrible.

CONFRONTING HELIO-HORUS

Take a long rest before confronting Ser Helio-Horus.

Over the course of Part 2, the character may grow suspicious of Ser Helio-Horus for any number of reasons, and decide to confront him with what they know. When the characters arrive at the security station, the compound is oddly empty save for two human security officers who will check them in and allow them to visit the Chief of Security in his office.

When confronted, Helio-Horus vehemently denies any accusations against him with a list of plausible excuses and alibis. He will go so far as to claim that the criminal masterminds in Port Nomad know that their time is up and are resorting to creating conspiracy theories because they are afraid of facing justice for their crimes. A **DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check** to determines that Helio-Horus's excuses are a well-prepared fabrication. If the characters have discovered multiple sources of evidence or witnesses to support their claims, they have advantage on their Insight checks.

If the characters persist in their accusations and present overwhelming evidence to support their case, Helio-Horus's false do-gooder demeanor changes immediately, and he attacks in a fit of rage. He hopes to kill the characters before they can

REDEEMING HELIO-HORUS

The confrontation with Helio-Horus creates a small divergent path in the remainder of the adventure. If Helio-Horus escapes, he continues to act against the party for the remainder of the story. However, if the party spares his life and interrogates him further, he will attempt to redeem himself until the adventure's conclusion and beyond. If you wish to encourage the latter route, you can nullify a killing blow against Helio-Horus, rendering it nonlethal.

spread this information and ruin his career. At the start of the second round of combat, two corrupt Port Nomad Security Officers enter into the office to attack.

If Helio-Horus is reduced to 20 hit points, he will attempt to retreat to join the NTO mercenaries that have recently arrived at the station. If his security officers are still engaged in combat, they will attempt to block the only exit from his office and cover his escape for two rounds, before they also try to flee. If the characters pursue Helio-Horus outside of the security station, trigger the events in *The Shootout*.

If the characters manage to subdue Helio-Horus and question him further, the fallen avia-ra comes clean about his crimes for the first time in his life. He bitterly admits to having been expelled from the Sepulcher Knights before he came to Port Nomad and that he owes the criminal Boss Ahn-Nova a massive debt accrued over a long period of time. In order to pay off his debts, he began employing pickpockets to steal from visitors and became involved in a scheme to sell narcotics in Port Nomad's black markets.

If accused of murdering Bardur Hammerfist, he admits to doing it after the officer learned of his illegal activities and threatened to report him to the Sepulcher Knights.

If the questioned about his involvement in the attack at the Starswill Bar, Helio-Horus blurts out that it wasn't his idea. However, before he can explain what really happened, sounds of a massive firefight erupt from the streets outside of the station, triggering the events in *The Shootout*.

THE SHOOTOUT

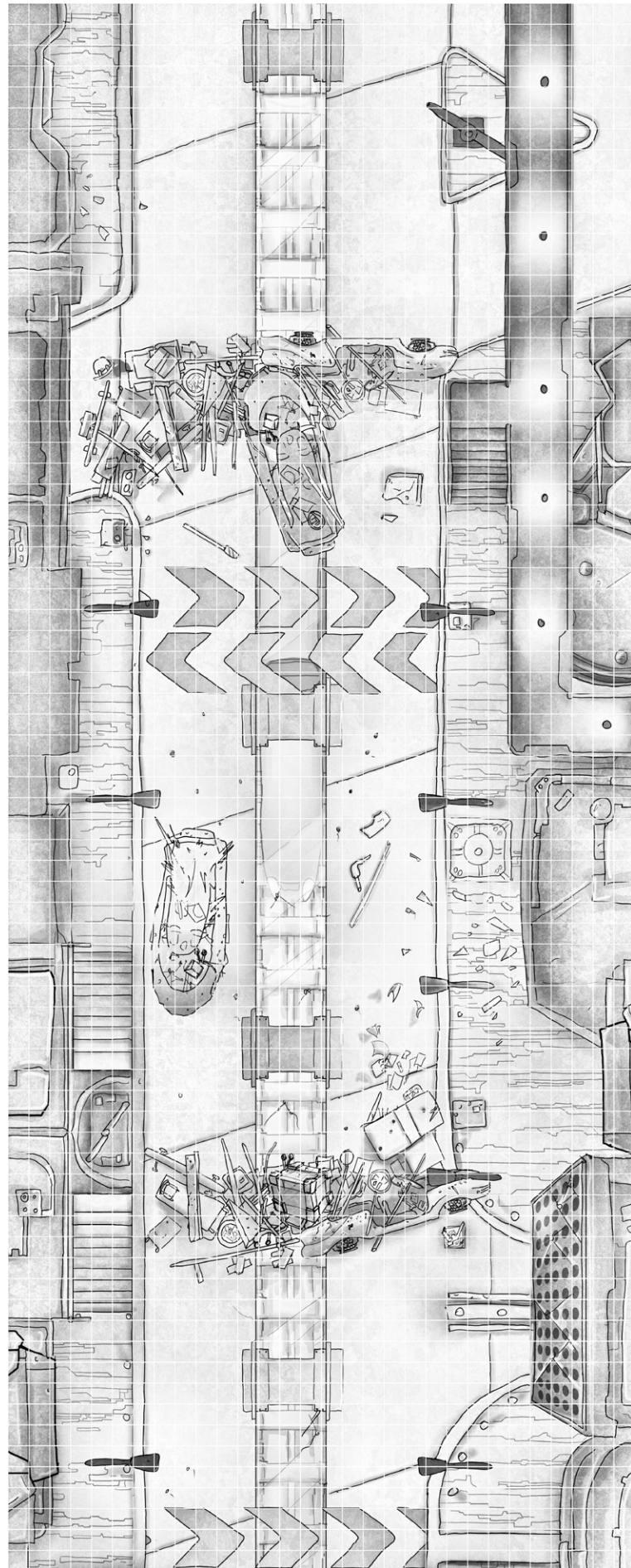
This event is automatically triggered after the clock advances to 6. The GM should give the characters the opportunity to take a long rest before starting the event.

The characters hear a firefight erupt in the street near wherever they are currently located. New Terran Organization mercenaries disguised as security officers open fire at the true security officers with the intent to create as much chaos as possible. During the distraction, one of the NTO's allies will smuggle Professor Orryn from his safe house to Carmen Cane's ship at the spaceport.

When the characters first encounter the firefight, three **Port Nomad security officers** are trying to fight off five human **NTO Terrorists** who are also dressed as security officers. Both groups will try to convince the characters that the other group are terrorists.

Roll initiative. During the encounter, the Port Nomad security officers act on initiative count 15, and the NTO terrorists act on initiative count 11. Characters standing behind either one of the barricades have half cover. One member from each group spends their first turn of the encounter trying to convince the characters to help them by telling them that the other group are terrorists. A **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check** correctly identifies the real security officers by noting that Port Nomad Security is made up of individuals from a variety of races and cultures, and are not just human.

The GM is encouraged to describe errant shots as hitting innocent bystanders, breaking windows and doors in nearby homes, and creating other collateral damage to increase the urgency and stakes of the encounter. At the end of the third round of the encounter, a heavily armored land vehicle comes careening through the street, driven by either Helio-Horus (or an NTO terrorist if Helio-Horus was previously killed or subdued). In the passenger side of the vehicle is Professor Orryn, bound and gagged. On its turn, the vehicle barrels through the Port Nomad security officers' makeshift barricade. Each creature within 5 feet of the barricade must make a successful **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw** or take 4d6 bludgeoning damage, be knocked prone, and be stunned until the end of their next turn.



The getaway vehicle speeds onwards and turns down a side street, disappearing before the end of its turn. Any remaining NTO terrorists will continue to take cover behind their own barricade and fire at any remaining opponents for two more rounds before they abandon their position to flee and scatter into different directions.

Chasing down the vehicle on foot, or even via winged flight, is a hopeless endeavor. A cursory glance around the area will reveal only one possible venue of chasing down the abductors. A group of Port Nomad teenagers can be seen with their *hoverboards*, hanging back and staring wide-eyed at the shootout.

A **DC 15 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check** or paying 100 credits convinces the youths to lend the characters enough hoverboards to give chase.

THE CHASE

A runaway vehicle careens through traffic and down side streets as the characters on *hoverboards* are in hot pursuit. The NPC who has abducted Professor Orryn does not care about the loss of civilian life or damage to Port Nomad. Their only goal is to keep the party chasing them for as long as possible, circling around the station back to the spaceport. In reality, the vehicle the characters see is a decoy meant to distract and delay them, carrying a hardlight projection in the likeness of the professor. Helio-Horus has ensured that the real professor is being quietly escorted through the backstreets of the station by a heavily armed security detail.

At the beginning of the chase, the driver of the getaway vehicle waits at the end of a side street to make sure that the characters are in pursuit before taking off. In order to catch up with the vehicle, the party will have to make a series of group ability checks and play through the chase in six stages. If the party fails a total of three group ability checks during the chase, the getaway vehicle escapes and the characters move directly to *Ending the Chase*.

STAGE ONE: THROUGH THE BAZAAR

The chase begins with the vehicle heading straight through the bazaar, plowing through tents and stalls. The characters must push away flying debris and knock over people running for their lives with a **DC 13 group Strength (Athletics) check**. On a failure,

the character with the lowest personal result is thrown off of their hoverboard in the chaos and must hurry to catch back up. They take 2d6 bludgeoning damage and have disadvantage on their next ability check during the chase.

STAGE TWO: A SHARP TURN

The vehicle veers off through a narrow alleyway that is barely wide enough for it to squeeze through. Making the turn on a hoverboard requires quick reflexes and a **DC 12 group Dexterity (Piloting) check**. On a failure, the two characters with the lowest personal results are not able to make the turn in time and must speed past the alley to find a detour. They are unable to catch up for nearly a minute and can't contribute to the next group ability check during the chase.

STAGE THREE: THE RETURN OF DARKSTAR

After leaving the narrow alleyway, a third party enters the chase. Darkstar Killagob and Tiberius Vinter, aboard a fancy hover-bike with an attached sidecar, join the chase with the intention of capturing Professor Orryn and bringing him back to the Firm. Tiberius cuts off the characters, positioning the hover-bike between them and the getaway vehicle, while Darkstar turns around in the sidecar and takes pot shots with his repeater. A **DC 16 group Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** avoids the incoming fire. On a failure, the two characters with the lowest personal results take 2d6 radiant damage and must succeed a **DC 12 Constitution saving throw**, or crash their hoverboards and be removed from the rest of the chase events.

After the group ability check, any characters remaining in the chase can return fire by making one weapon or spell attack on Darkstar, Tiberius, or the hover-bike (all **AC 16**). If three or more attacks hit, the hover-bike spins out of control and crashes through a nearby house, removing Darkstar and Tiberius from the chase.

STAGE FOUR: A DEADLY INTERSECTION

The getaway vehicle and hover-bike (if it remains in the chase) speed through a busy four-way intersection. In the distance, the party can make out the spaceport at the edge of Port Nomad. A moment after the abductor's vehicle passes through the intersection, a massive supply truck driven by an NTO agent barrels across the intersection; a **DC**

13 group Wisdom (Perception) check notices the runaway truck before it reaches the intersection. If Darkstar and Tiberius have already been removed from the chase, the characters have a better view of the intersection and have advantage on their ability checks.

On a failure, the character with the lowest personal result is struck head-on by the truck. The crash deals 4d6 bludgeoning damage to them, and they are removed from the rest of the chase events. Furthermore, if Darkstar and Tiberius are still in the chase during this section, they are forced to leap from their hover-bike a moment before it crashes into the careening truck and are removed from the rest of the chase events.

STAGE FIVE: PLAYING CHICKEN

The abductor NPC drives past the Room and Board. If the characters are allies of Paladec and Jenson and notified them of the getaway vehicle ahead of time, the two investigators will be positioned outside of the Room and Board. Paladec and Jenson open fire at the oncoming vehicle, damaging its thrusters.

In a last-ditch effort to rid themselves of their pursuers, the abductor veers towards a construction site between the Room and Board and the spaceport, swerving recklessly around the metal beams that lie around the site. The vehicle stops and waits for the pursuing characters to approach through a path surrounded by junk and equipment. It then speeds directly towards the party in a game of high-risk chicken, expecting them to leap out of the way at the last moment. Characters who decide to abandon their pursuit and get out of the vehicle's way are removed from the following ability check: a **DC 14 group Charisma (Intimidation or Performance) check** to convince the driver to turn away first. If Paladec and Jenson previously damaged the getaway vehicle's thrusters, the characters each have advantage on this check.

On a failure, each character that participated is struck by the vehicle, taking 4d6 bludgeoning damage, and removing them from the final stage of the chase.

Whether or not the getaway driver turns away at the last minute or crashes directly into the characters, read or paraphrase the following:

With a shower of sparks and the sound of shrieking metal, the getaway vehicle malfunctions. It barrels over and crashes directly into a steel construction beam a few dozen feet away, splitting the hood of the car down the middle. In the wreckage, a metal pole is visibly sticking fatally through the driver's head. Strangely enough, Professor Orryn does not seem injured, or even phased by the horrible accident at all. After a few moments, the professor begins to flicker in and out of existence before disappearing in a flash of prismatic light.

The professor was a hologram decoy!

STAGE SIX: SHOWDOWN AT THE SPACEPORT

Should any of the characters still be active in the chase, they will see a truck full of armed humans dressed like security officers fly past the construction site towards the nearby spaceport. If they pursue, they reach the spaceport just in time to see the bound professor being dragged onto a corvette-sized ship named the *Vorga* by none other than Carmen Cane, the woman who claimed to be a brain surgeon. Carmen is no longer in her red dress, instead wearing a nanofiber suit and flight jacket. She smiles wickedly at the characters as their eyes meet, then shuts the bay door of the *Vorga*.

The characters are intercepted by a number of **NTO Terrorists** equal to the number of characters remaining in the chase and must **roll initiative**. As a result, the party can't reach the *Vorga* before it takes off and flies away from Port Nomad, and the terrorists do not intend to let them live. All of the terrorists work together in an organized attack and act on an initiative count of 12.

If the characters managed to subdue Helio-Horus in his office and get him to admit his guilt, he appears in the second round of the following encounter and acts on an initiative count of 13. Helio-Horus is heavily wounded, but will side with the characters against the terrorists in a desperate attempt at redemption.

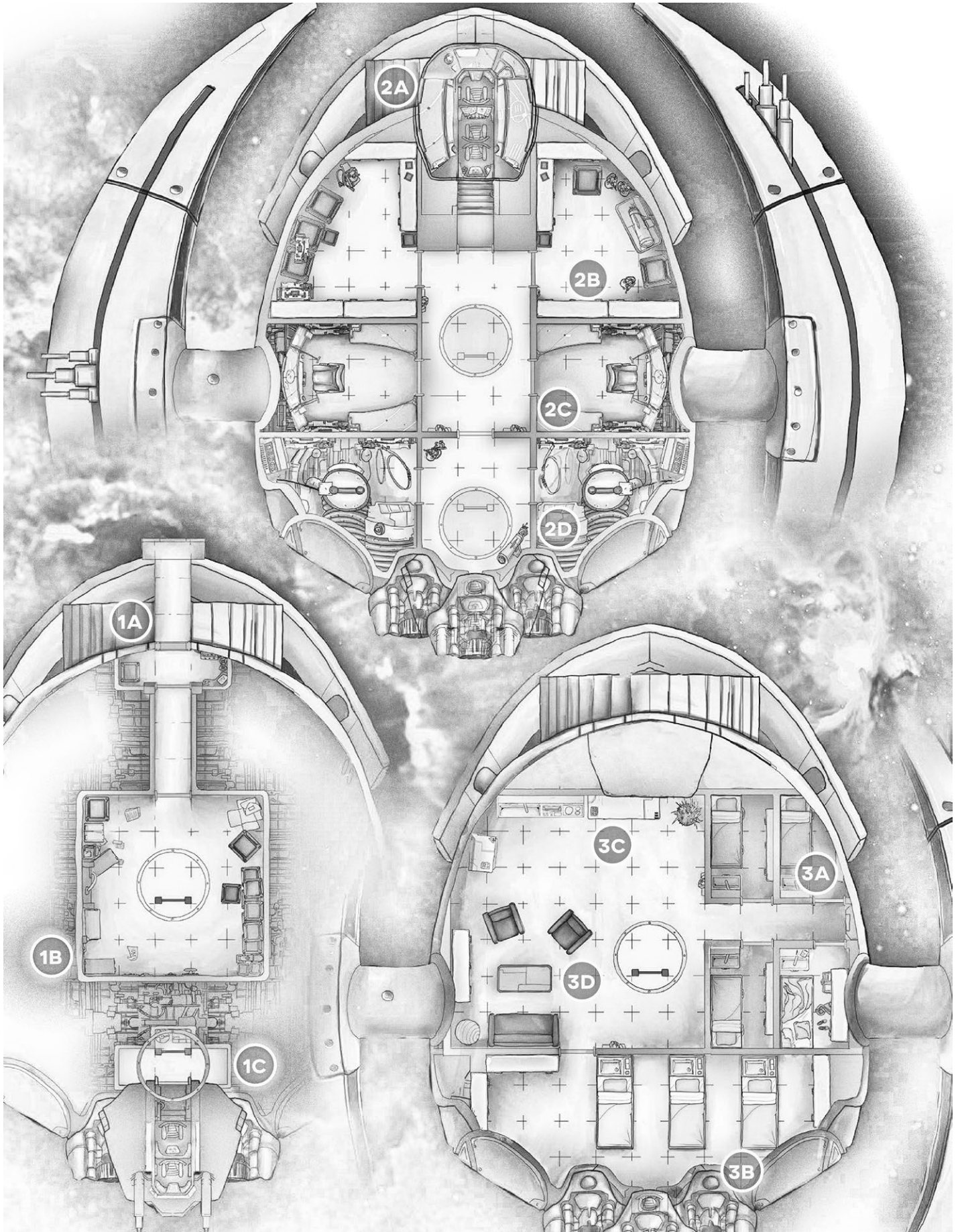
If Helio-Horus survives the encounter, he apologizes for all of the pain he has caused. He admits to the characters that Carmen Cane and her people, the New Terran Organization, offered him thousands of credits to help them plot

to kidnap the professor. He does not know what their intentions are, but he does know that the New Terran Organization is a dangerously radical group of humans that believe that humans should rule the 'verse. Helio-Horus gives the party a small case containing six hypodermic needles containing *potions of healing*.

ENDING THE CHASE

Any characters that did not reach the end of the chase are able to follow the trail of death and destruction to the spaceport, catching up with the others immediately after their encounter with the remaining NTO terrorists.

If none of the characters made it to the end of the chase, they arrive at the spaceport just in time to see the *Vorga* take off. A wounded Port Nomad security officer informs them with his dying breath that the terrorists kidnapped Professor Orryn and left with him aboard the *Vorga*. Proceed to *Part Three: All Aboard the Caliber!*



PART THREE:

ALL ABOARD THE CALIBER!

The only chance the characters have to catch Carmen Cane and rescue the professor lies in a high speed chase through an asteroid field. The players have two options: climbing into their ship, the *Gittin'*, or boarding Professor Orryn's one-of-a-kind personal starship, the *Caliber*. In either case, see *Appendix C* for statistics.

THE CALIBER

Over his many years exploring the far reaches of space, Professor Orryn has outfitted his personal ship with a variety of technological upgrades from across the 'verse. No one is quite sure what make or model the Caliber began as, but one thing is for certain now—the ship is the only one of its kind. If the characters choose to board the *Caliber*, read or paraphrase the following:

One particular ship stands out in the starport: a circular vessel, rising about three stories tall, with a long nose that ends with a cockpit encased in distinctive tinted glass. Its architecture suggests a chaotic blend of engineering styles from across the 'verse. The ship's hull is coated with a patchy layer of faded white paint, and electric blue lights glint along two flat moon-shaped wings that protrude from the sides.

Nearing the ship, the center remote on the professor's key ring flashes blue, matching the lights on its wings. "Welcome back, Professor," says a friendly robotic voice from within the ship, as a gangplank lowers to the ground. "All systems ready to depart."

This voice is none other than the *Caliber's* AI core, nicknamed **Cal**. A kind but often worrisome personality, Cal expresses concern when the party enters the ship without the professor and immediately inquires as to the location of their usual gnomish traveling companion. Once informed that the professor is in danger, Cal welcomes the party aboard and offers to assist in the rescue attempt.

The *Caliber* consists of three main levels connected by a central ladder: the lowest level contains the ship's cargo bay and boarding ramp; the second houses the cockpit and other primary functions of the ship; and the highest level serves as the ship's living quarters. In addition to these amenities, the *Caliber* also comes with a deployable, custom-built dogfighter named the *Scope*.

As Professor Orryn mostly traveled alone, the interior of the *Caliber* is a rather haphazard mess when the characters first board, with half-completed engineering blueprints and broken science equipment scattered across many areas of the ship. But despite its seemingly lacking upkeep, the *Caliber's* internal system mechanics are some of the finest in the 'verse.

1A. BOARDING RAMP

This short ramp serves as the main entry point into the Caliber, leading through an airlock into the ship's cargo bay. A sensor in the ship's keys alerts Cal when they are nearby so that the AI can automatically lower this ramp to allow for entry.

1B. CARGO BAY

Discarded boxes litter the floor of this dull metallic room. If any character searches through these crates, a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds a *dome projector* hidden in an empty container. On a failed check, the character simply finds a random trinket (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Trinkets).

At the center of the room, a ladder extends upward to the second and third levels of the ship.

1C. THE SCOPE

Only accessible via a hatch on the second level, the spherical auxiliary ship, the *Scope*, docks at the bottom rear of the *Caliber*. Though the *Scope* was originally designed for combat, Professor Orryn has customized many of its capabilities to also help assist him in his scientific research. In addition to its industry-standard side cannons and sensors, the *Scope* has been equipped with external manipulators and specialized material scanners.

During combat, the *Scope* can be deployed as a dogfighter to assist the *Caliber*. Doing so requires a pilot to board the *Scope*, with an optional position for an extra gunner.

PILOT (SCOPE)

Due to its small size and quick maneuverability, the *Scope* serves as both an excellent research vehicle and interstellar combat asset. When a character pilots the *Scope*, if they use their action to move, they can use their bonus action to make a single weapon attack with one of the ship's light cannons.

GUNNER (SCOPE)

Like many gnomish dogfighters, the *Scope* is equipped with two light cannons on its sides. These cannons can be used both when the *Scope* is flying freely and while the ship is docked in the *Caliber*.

Additionally, when the *Scope* is deployed in combat, its gunner can use an action to activate the ship's core burst. Each mega creature and the pilot of each ship within 1,500 feet must make a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw**. On a failed save, any mega creatures or ships affected take 27 (4d8) mega radiant damage. This weapon then overheats, and can't be fired again until the end of the ship's next turn.

2A. COCKPIT

At the front of the *Caliber*'s second level sits the cockpit. A long narrow room, the main view port is composed of large treated glass panes. Oversized consoles sporting a variety of buttons and levers line the front and right sides of the room. Three seats sit flush against the right console, with the first two facing forward and the last facing in the opposite direction; these seats are for the pilot, front engineer, and arcane gunner, respectively. In an emergency, the entire cockpit can jettison from the ship as a makeshift life pod.

2B. STORAGE LOCKERS

Several cabinets are built into this area of the ship. Amongst the various eccentric gadgets stuffed inside by Professor Orryn, characters can also find an *energy shield bracer*, a *Gamestation-7331*, and *three life suits*.

2D. SHIP SYSTEM CORE

To a casual observer, this area of the ship looks like a tangled mess of buttons, glowing wires, and metal plates. However, this actually contains all the main functions of the ship, including the *Dark Matter* engine and the professor's experimental matrix

shell. A couple of loose belt straps hang from the beams, which allow a secondary engineer to secure themselves to the area.

2E. HATCH TO THE SCOPE

Behind this bulkhead is the entry hatch to the *Scope*.

3A. LIVING QUARTERS

Each room in this area has two bunks and a personal lavatory. Three of the rooms appear completely unused, with thick layers of dust covering every surface. The last room, however, served as the professor's personal quarters. A few sets of clothes and other personal accouterments fill the drawers beneath the one bunk with rumpled sheets. A **DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds a *universal translator* hidden beneath a suit jacket.

3B. SICKBAY

This sterile room has three plastic cots lined up neatly beneath piercing white strip lights. Cabinets along the walls are filled with an assortment of medical tinctures and bandages. If an injured character enters the sickbay, Cal helpfully directs them to the equipment necessary to heal them (for more information about using the sickbay, see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 6, Systems).

3C. GALLEY

This small kitchen consists primarily of a mini refrigerator, a stove top, and a food fabricator. The fabricator replicates the effects of the *create food and water* spell to generate the nourishment necessary to sustain the crew. Inside the refrigerator, the professor has stashed six cans of *Krash*.

3D. LOUNGE

Three comfortable lounge chairs surround a long coffee table in this area. Though this is clearly intended as a place for relaxation, the thick trails of dust covering the chair cushions indicate that the professor wasn't entirely fond of idle time.

PURSuing THE VORGA

Chasing down the fleeing *Vorga* through the asteroid field occurs in four separate stages, two of which are combat encounters. The GM will need to keep track of how many rounds it takes for the characters to complete each stage, as the total number of rounds it takes to complete this section will determine what the party encounters when they catch the *Vorga*. Have the players choose ship combat roles.

STAGE ONE: TRACKING THE VORGA

By the time the characters have boarded their ship, the *Vorga* has long since fled from view, which means the characters must rely on the *Caliber's* sensors to track the runaway ship. If the pilot makes a successful **DC 11 Intelligence (Data) check**, they locate the *Vorga* in a single round. If an engineer assists the pilot, the pilot has advantage on their check. On a failure, finding the *Vorga* takes three rounds.

STAGE TWO: DOGFIGHT

When the party finally nears the *Vorga*, read or paraphrase the following:

The jagged silhouette of the *Vorga* looms before your ship, its burnished chrome plating catching the glint of the stars like the edge of a knife. A sudden burst of red fire sears from its engines, and through the void of space, three streaks of arrow-shaped light become visible, streaking in your direction.

The *Vorga* deploys two **troopers** from its fleet of dogfighters to impede the characters' pursuit. **Roll initiative.**

The troopers use targeted attacks in an attempt to disable systems on the party's ship, prioritizing the shield generators first, followed by the ship's various weapon systems. Meanwhile, the *Vorga* focuses on putting distance between itself and the party. When both troopers are defeated or after three rounds of combat (whichever occurs first), the *Vorga* swerves into the asteroid field, triggering the third stage.

STAGE THREE: INTO THE ASTEROID FIELD

Read or paraphrase the following at the start of this stage:

Another gout of flame spews from the *Vorga's* impulse engines, and the ship veers sharply ahead, narrowly missing a large chunk of spiraling debris in its path. Through the ship's view ports, more and more of these massive, misshapen rocks can be seen blotting out the stars.

As the *Vorga* veers into the asteroid field, another rumble shakes your ship, and through its view ports, three more arrow-shaped fighter ships can be seen flying directly towards you.

The *Vorga* deploys one additional **trooper** and two **sabres** to join the firefight. The GM must remember to keep track of how many rounds it takes to finish the encounter. Once all of the NTO dogfighters have been destroyed, proceed to the next stage.

During the encounter, the surrounding asteroid field also adds a new layer of obstacles for the characters to overcome. At the top of each round, roll 1d10 and refer to the Asteroid Belt Complications table.

ASTEROID BELT COMPLICATIONS

d10 Complication

- 1 As your ship hurtles forward, two asteroids in front of it begin to drift together, leaving a gap between them no bigger than 50 feet—and closing fast. The pilot must make a successful **DC 13 Dexterity (Piloting) check** to swerve through the gap or the ship takes 7 (2d6) mega bludgeoning damage from impacting with one of the asteroids.
- 2 An asteroid near your ship's right side is struck by a wayward laser blast and explodes. The pilot must make a successful **DC 12 Dexterity (Piloting) check** to avoid the debris, or the ship takes 2 (1d4) mega bludgeoning damage and 3 (1d6) mega fire damage.

- 3 A massive asteroid looms in front of the you with no discernible gap to fly through. On their turn, the pilot can attempt a **DC 15 Dexterity (Piloting) check** (no action required) to swiftly dive beneath the asteroid. Alternatively, on their turn, gunners can target the asteroid to blow it apart before there is a collision. The asteroid has AC 10 and 5 mega hit points.

Unless the asteroid is dodged or destroyed, your ship collides with it at the end of the round, taking 7 (2d6) mega bludgeoning damage.

- 4 Rock debris has clogged one of your ship's impulse engines. On their turn, an engineer can use an action to make a **DC 12 Intelligence (Technology) check** to dislodge the debris. Until the debris is dislodged, all Piloting checks have disadvantage.

- 5-6 Whichever enemy ship has the fewest mega hit points remaining attempts a reckless maneuver to close in on your ship. In the process, it collides with a small asteroid and takes 7 (2d6) mega bludgeoning damage.

If the enemy ship is destroyed in the collision, the force of its explosion sends asteroids and flaming debris hurtling in new trajectories, and the GM must immediately roll on this table again.

- 7-10 No complication occurs.

STAGE FOUR: FINDING THE BASE

The *Vorga* uses the cover of the dogfight in the asteroid field to slip away unnoticed. To locate the *Vorga* again, the pilot must succeed on a **DC 13 Intelligence (Data) check**. Like before, if an engineer assists the pilot with the scanner, the pilot has advantage on their check. On a success, the characters can locate the *Vorga* in a single round, but on a failure, it takes three rounds.

The *Vorga* has docked at a secret platform within a large, partially hollowed-out asteroid. Though the docking bay doors are still open when

the *Caliber* approaches, scanner droids patrol the area in a repeated pattern. The pilot's **DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check** or the engineer's **DC 14 Intelligence (Data) check** enters the base without being detected. On a failure, the party is delayed one additional round as they wait for the scanner droids to pass.

Entering the asteroid's hangar ends the chase.

THE ASTEROID BASE

This secret hub within a hollowed-out asteroid has served as Carmen Cane's base of operations while in Port Nomad. Though only partially constructed, this small hangar nonetheless has everything Carmen needs: a docking bay for the *Vorga*, a fabricated atmosphere, and most importantly, a teleporter to the NTO headquarters proper.

After parking the *Vorga* safely within the asteroid, Carmen casts *dominate person* on Professor Orryn, compelling him to assist her with charging the teleporter platform. Once the platform has been fully charged, Carmen plans to whisk the professor through the portal and take him to the *Vexation*, a powerful ship on the far side of the 'verse where an agent representing the Tower and the Firm waits to collect him.

How much progress Carmen has made towards completing her goal upon the party's arrival depends on how quickly the characters were able to lose their NTO pursuers in the asteroid field.

EXPEDIENT RESCUE

If the chase sequence took less than 10 rounds in total, Carmen has just begun charging the teleporter platform. Read or paraphrase the following:

Faint green lights begin to flicker around the large circular chrome platform that occupies the center of this dilapidated hanger. In the shadow of the *Vorga*, various data terminals hum with energy. Carmen Cane waits near the terminal with her arms folded casually behind her back. Her cruel smile is only half visible in the eerie light. Next to Carmen is a familiar gnomish head of hair: Professor Orryn, bent over one of the terminals and whistling merrily to himself.

Roll initiative. Carmen acts on an initiative count of 12 and Professor Orryn acts on an initiative count of 11.

It takes three rounds for the teleporter to charge and activate. During this time, Carmen attacks the players with lethal force, sometimes even directing Professor Orryn via her active *dominate person* spell to turn on the characters. The characters will need to break Carmen's charm on the professor before they are able to usher him to safety.

If Carmen is reduced to 30 hit points, or if the players manage to get Professor Orryn safely back onto their ship, proceed to *Mission Success*. Otherwise, once the teleporter activates, Carmen hoists the professor over her shoulder and dashes through the portal on her turn. The portal closes behind Carmen and Professor Orryn; proceed to *Mission Failure*.

JUST IN THE NICK OF TIME

If the chase sequence took 10-12 rounds, read or paraphrase the following:

Brilliant green light flares out from a circular platform in the center of the room, casting strange, swirling shadows onto the hull of the *Vorga* and across the numerous half-empty crates scattered about the hangar. Silhouetted at the edge of this green pool of light is Carmen Cane, with the professor right at her side.

Roll initiative. Carmen acts on an initiative count of 17 and Professor Orryn acts on an initiative count of 6.

In this scenario, Carmen has had more time to charge the teleporter unimpeded, requiring only one more round before it is fully activated. However, her *dominate person* spell on Professor Orryn has worn off. On his turn, he attempts to escape her grapple (escape DC 10) and run towards the characters. During the resulting encounter, Carmen avoids attacking the characters and instead focuses on getting hold of the professor, keeping him away from her enemies, and throwing him into the teleporter as soon as the portal opens at the start of the second round of the encounter.

If Carmen is reduced to 30 hit points, or if the players manage to get Professor Orryn safely back onto their ship, proceed to *Mission Success*. If Carmen escapes through the portal with the professor, the portal closes behind her. Proceed to the *Mission Failure*.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

If the chase sequence took more than 12 rounds, the characters are too late to save the professor. Proceed directly to *Mission Failure*.

MISSION SUCCESS

Carmen, sensing that she is outmatched, uses her flash grenades to create a distraction and make her escape. If the teleporter is charged and active, she will jump onto the platform sans the professor and disappear with a flash of green light; the portal closes immediately behind her. Otherwise, she flees on either the *Vorga* or, if the *Vorga* sustained too much damage during the previous chase sequence, the *Vorga's* last remaining dogfighter.

However, the loud explosions from Carmen's grenades do have an unintended consequence: awakening the dormant asteroid ooze (using the statistics of a **planet ooze** with 100 HP) that slumbers within the asteroid's hollow caverns. Read or paraphrase the following:

The platform rumbles to terrible life, and cracks begin to race their way up the cavern walls. With a hideous squelch, a thick sludge starts to seep out from the asteroid, coalescing into a gargantuan, inky ooze that towers over even the *Vorga* itself, with its hollow mockery of a mouth open wide.

The asteroid ooze demolishes the remains of the teleporter and its surrounding terminals for two rounds, giving the characters just enough time to flee back aboard their ship. Afterwards, it pursues them (and the *Vorga*, if it was used to escape) out of the asteroid. The characters may choose to fight the ooze or try to outrun it.

DEBRIEFING PROFESSOR ORRYN

Once the characters escape the clutches of the asteroid ooze and make it to relative safety, Professor Orryn profusely thanks them for his rescue. The professor explains that Carmen herself is the leader of the NTO, and though he is still not entirely sure what business she and her organization had regarding his technology, he expresses his suspicions that it may tie into rumors he's heard regarding powerful archmages wishing to conquer the worlds previously kept safe from their grasp by Dead Magic Zones.

Still a bit shaken by the experience, the professor requests that the characters drop him off on Nebellion, the gnomish home planet, where he plans to hide out until the NTO's nefarious plans are laid to rest. But, as a token of his gratitude, he passes full command of the *Caliber* to the characters.

RETURNING TO GRAX HQ

It takes some doing, but the characters can get both ships, the *Gittin'* and the *Caliber* back to the starport on Fornax. Thrilled that the characters have managed to rescue the professor, Grax offers 250 credits and a fine cigar to each character as payment (and he lets them keep the new ship, of course). However, he re-dubs it the *Gittin' Two*, because he "never was too fond of the prof's fancy names."

MISSION FAILURE

Read or paraphrase the following:

Carmen's teleporter has drained all the energy from the asteroid base. Char marks ring the edge of the center platform, and while the fabricated atmosphere remains functional, most of the data terminals in the area have powered down.

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** or a **DC 13 Intelligence (Technology) check** locates the switch for the emergency power generator. Though the small generator isn't powerful enough to reopen the teleporter, it does reactivate the data terminals. A **DC 12 Intelligence (Data) check** is necessary to bypass the terminal's security systems.

On the terminal, the characters find a short transmission directed to Carmen, signed with a foreboding purple triangle symbol emblazoned with a single jagged eye—the symbol of the Tower, a secretive group of powerful arcanists with unknown designs for the 'verse. They also find a contract from the Firm, enlisting Carmen's services to kidnap Professor Orryn.

Opening the *Vorga* triggers its self-destruct mechanism, which cannot be stopped once it has started. The characters will only have one minute to escape on their ship, or else be killed in the resulting fireball that destroys the hidden base and the asteroid that houses it.

RETURNING TO GRAX HQ

The characters return to Grax HQ with their ship, as well as Professor Orryn's ship, the *Caliber*. Still sullen at the professor's loss, Grax offers the characters a choice: a payment of 250 credits each, or the *Caliber* as an upgrade to their current ship. In the latter case, the characters find the ship renamed the *Gittin' Two* when they next visit the starport.



THE EVEN MOST DANGEROUS-ER GAME

AN ADVENTURE THROUGH THE DEEP JUNGLE
FOR 5TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

WRITTEN BY MIKE HOLIK
MAGE HAND PRESS

GRAX'S CLUB

THE EVEN MOST DANGEROUS-ER GAME

INTRODUCTION

Budd Felmer shouldered his hunting rifle and kneeled down, tracing the footprint before him with one finger. Puzzled, he retraced the beast's probable steps through the jungle in his mind. Previously, it was heading southward, but this one's facing west. Was it circling around, or...

Before the thought crystallized in his mind, a force like a furry bus collided with Budd's back, tossing him roughly into a tree trunk. Through the shock of pain, he could feel the flurry of heavy, padded footfalls all around him. He turned his back to the tree trunk, but a warm, furry body coiled around him, pinning him to the tree. Budd Felmer looked up to see the fuzzy, inquisitive face of a colossal ferret staring down at him.

"Dook-dook-dook," said the gigantic ferret, and Budd swore quietly under his breath. The beast sniffed him a couple of times, as if considering what to do with this odd visitor to his jungle. Then, just as soon as he arrived, the ferret uncoiled and slithered off into the jungle.

Budd Felmer collected his breath, and then collected the components of his now shattered concussion rifle.

"I'll get you, you rascal, Big Hob. I'll get you if it's the last thing I do," Budd muttered, and turned back to camp.

BACKGROUND

On the outermost edge of the galaxy, beyond where the maw network is reliable or complete, is the Galactic Frontier, a swathe of unclaimed, largely unexplored space. Frontier worlds don't enjoy the network of resources and infrastructure which bolster much of the 'verse, so they in turn attract only a rugged stock of settlers, those who prize individualism above comfort or fancy themselves explorers and survivalists.

One industry that hasn't been hampered by the frontier's remoteness is the niche of big game hunting. In the 'verse, shooting enormous creatures

with high-powered blaster rifles is considered poor sport, and few have the taste for it, but a small community of enthusiasts has propped up around a catch-and-release model. When explorers on the Galactic Frontier meet a truly bizarre and colossal creature, a band of big game hunters is sure to follow, eager to place their names in the record books. Naturally, the largest and most elusive creatures, like the giant space ferret Big Hob, earn a kind of legendary status, and attract hunters and documentarians from far afield. After all, such creatures could just as likely be tall tales as nigh-uncatchable prey; only a truly skilled hunter is equipped to find out.

OVERVIEW

The Even Most Dangerous-er Game is an adventure for 5th-level characters, and is the first in a series of adventures centered on Grax's Guys for Cheap. In it, the characters help a big game hunter track down the most dangerous quarry in the 'verse: a giant space ferret. It is presented in four parts.

Prologue: Grax HQ lets characters get to know their employer and workplace before the adventure properly begins. If playing this adventure as part of a larger Grax's Guys campaign, it's recommended you let the players explore Grax's headquarters and return between every isolated adventure.

In *Part One: Taisong*, the characters arrive on the jungle planet of Gaozu and meet their client, a hunter named Budd Felmer. They can freely explore the settlement of Taisong, as they meet the settlement's residents and a rival crew of mercenaries, out to hunt the same quarry.

In *Part Two: Ferret Trail*, the characters' hunt takes them deep into the unexplored jungle. They can choose their own route through the jungle to circumvent obstacles and to make up critical time in the hunt, as their rivals are already ahead of them!

Lastly, in *Part Three: Big Hob's Burrow*, the characters must beat a crew of Scale and Fang mercenaries and grapple the legendary Big Hob.

KEY CHARACTERS

The following nonplayer characters feature prominently in this adventure.

GRAX GRRAXE (HE/HIM)

The party's employer and head of Grax's Guys for Cheap, Grax Grraxe, is a fat, well-humored orc with an eyepatch and a thick orcish accent. Around fifty years ago, Grax decided to leave the Warzone and all its general unpleasantness to found Grax's Guys, a low-to-mid-tier mercenary organization, which bills itself as being all-purpose. True to form, Grax branded it after himself, and his face can be seen on billboards, company mugs, and the occasional t-shirt.

However, over the last few years, GGFC has lost a lot of customers to their closest rival, Scale and Fang Inc. Nothing perturbs Grax so much as this rivalry, and in particular, that he's losing to the mercenary company owned by Garfreckt, an eternal dragon who Grax considers to be a bit of a jerk.

BUDD FELMER (HE/HIM)

Budd Felmer, a human big game hunter, has bagged every type of quarry imaginable, and has the scars to prove it. Budd is no-nonsense and superstitious in equal measure, demanding his contractors keep up and perform beyond expectations, except for when they must adhere to one of his unspoken rules of hunting. Such rules include: never follow in the tracks of a non-hunter, walk in a single-file line, unless you're facing into the wind, and never eat before walking at least three miles. It's entirely unclear how many of these rules are founded on sound hunting, and how many are pure superstition.

GREGGY IRONSMELT (HE/HIM)

The senile, constantly-swearing dwarf, Greggy Ironsmelt, is a permanent fixture in Scrimshaw Lodge. The lodge's owner, Hecademus, lets him reside in the common room as an act of charity, but also because the dwarf adds a bit of authenticity to the lodge that no amount of taxidermied creatures can bring. The senile, opinionated dwarf has never really harmed anyone, and Hecademus has learned to enjoy his company. Every week or so, Greggy goes on short sojourns into the jungle and returns with large beasts many times his own size, which he roasts over a great fire pit and serves to everyone in the lodge. For all his idiosyncrasies, Greggy is an excellent chef.

Greggy's past is essentially impenetrable. Was he once a hunter at Poacher's Post? Did he crash land on Gaozu with the *Vorpal* hundreds of years ago? Is he just a dwarven miner who moved to a jungle planet to retire? It's impossible to tell, and it's not clear if Greggy himself knows.

IVANA ZARKOFF (SHE/HER)

A prodigious and famous hunter, Ivana Zarkoff is the face of hunting for sport in the 'verse today. Throughout her life, Ivana has not only bested some of the most dangerous creatures to be found in the Galactic Frontier, she has recorded her exploits on holo-tapes and written books about them. She's charismatic, and speaks with a distinctive accent, which goes a long way to explain her broad notoriety.

If Ivana has a rival, it's Budd Felmer, who has tried at every turn to one-up her achievements. Therefore, for the hunt of Big Hob on planet Gaozu, she's hired none other than Scale and Fang to assist in the tracking.

THE SCALE CREW

A band of mercenaries from the rival Scale and Fang Inc., the Scale Crew is better-funded and more competent than any crew from Grax's Guys. They consist of the following:

Drak Garfreckt (he/him). A male dragonborn with red and black scales, Drak is the leader and fighter of his crew. He's cool under pressure, tough as nails, and smart enough to be a step ahead of any rival mercenary group. His last name is that of Garfreckt, the eternal dragon who founded and owns Scale and Fang Inc. Perhaps, he was adopted by the eternal dragon, or is distantly related to it. In any case, Drak has the assurance of someone who earned their position through expertise and hard work, and commands the respect of his crew in turn.

Trace (they/them). The heavily-upgraded vect of the Scale Crew, Trace, serves as their sniper and gadgeteer. Trace's expertise lies in drones, blasters, and explosives, but any mechanical device which can be broken or repaired falls under their domain. At a glance, it can be determined that Trace is cold, calculating, and prepared for anything.

Sierra O'Connell (she/her). The lovely Sierra O'Connell is a near-human green-skin who oozes charisma. Her smile not only lightens up a room, it makes even Drak and Trace seem less businesslike and dour by extension. On a typical day, she's dressed

for adventure, with a fitting hat to complement her laser whip. Sierra even knows a few songs as well, so she serves as the Scale Crew's bard, as well as their rogue. Her biggest personal flaw is that she will, without fail, steal the wallet of anyone she spends time with. It's as much habit as it is misbehavior for her at this point.

Aela Vestele (they/them). The half-elf sorcerer Aela Vestele is easily the most refined of the Scale Crew, and is usually the most refined of any group in which they find themselves. Only when they cast a spell does the nature of their sorcery become revealed: small dimensional rifts open around them, revealing a soup of alien tentacles and eyes. Despite this, Aela tries to be utterly composed at all times. Their father is Jermain'ion Vestele, one of the most successful capitalists in the Elven Empire, so it's anyone's guess how Aela ended up as a half-elf in a mercenary company, instead of as a full-blooded elf working behind a desk.

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PROLOGUE: GRAX HQ

Advance all characters to 5th level.

Members of Grax's Guys for Cheap usually spend their downtime between missions lounging about the club's headquarters. However, the time has come for the yearly in-office corporate retreat, a purgatory of team building exercises and bland corporate lingo. To this end, Grax has enlisted a sadistic and cheerful wrothian psion named **Cookie**, who delights in tormenting others with a never-ending screed of team building exercises. The "retreat" is hosted in the lounge.

THE LOUNGE

Usually the party can be found hanging around the Grax's Guys lounge, but on this occasion, the entire lounge has been taken over by a sinister in-office corporate retreat, a prison of endless team building exercises. To introduce this, read or paraphrase the following:

You suddenly snap out of a hazy stupor standing in a circle in the center of the Grax's Guys for Cheap lounge, which has been cleared of furniture to make room for group activities. With a well timed turnabout, you slip out of the group, leaving a dozen or so other Grax's crew members behind to perform another mindless team building exercise. You hear the cheerful, syllabant voice of that wrothian echoing behind you as you leave, "Now we're going to consstruct a human knot!"

Cookie uses a combination of psionic trickery and corporate double-speak to stupify anyone who wanders into the lounge. Whenever the party moves from one area of the headquarters to another, they must make a **DC 12 group Dexterity (Stealth) check** or be magically press-ganged into a randomly determined team building exercise. To avoid traversing the lounge, a **DC 14 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** crawls through the vents or sneaks up to the rooftop and repels through a window. Failing an Athletics or Acrobatics check results in 1d6 bludgeoning damage from a graceless fall.

d4 Team building exercise

- 1 Trust fall
- 2 Human knot
- 3 Two truths and a lie
- 4 Capture the flag

TEAM BUILDING EXERCISES

Whenever Cookie catches a character, they must engage in one of the following team building exercises before escaping.

Trust Fall. Cookie pairs up the crew members and forces each character to fall backwards into the other's arms. To make this experience even more nerve-wracking, Cookie also projects images of immense spiked pits and steep cliff sides into the mind of the falling people. Problem is, Grax's Guys would do well not to trust each other too much. Each character that participates in this activity should **roll any die**: on an odd roll, their partner fails to catch them, causing 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

Human Knot. Cookie compels the participants to stand in a circle and randomly lock hands to form a knot. However, Cookie also projects a harmful illusion of an electric wire encircling the group, making disentanglement remarkably dangerous. Participants must make a **DC 14 group Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to twist out of the knot; amoeboids and vect have advantage on this check, owing to their unique biologies. On a failure, a character that failed their check takes 1d4 psychic damage.

Two Truths and a Lie. Each character must come up with two truths about themselves and one lie. If a player uses this opportunity to flesh out their backstory in interesting ways, the GM is encouraged to award inspiration. Cookie psionically creates the image of a game show in which a failed answer results in being dumped into a pit of sharks. In pairs, each character must try to guess each other's lie. A successful **Wisdom (Insight) check** contesting another character's **Charisma (Deception) check** successfully intuits which fact is a lie. Alternatively, players can guess. An incorrect guess results in 1d6 psychic damage.

Capture the Flag. With some impressive psionic trickery, the characters are given the image of a devastated warzone, pockmarked with artillery craters, barbed wire, and sandbags. They are divided

into teams and given psionically-harmful repeaters for a game of Capture the Flag. The objective is to capture the opponent's flag from one side of the field while avoiding the capture of your own. Play this game in a very simple 60-foot long area, with intermittent cover. Picking up the flag is a bonus action. If a character is hit with a blaster shot, they take 1d6 psychic damage and vanish from the game.

BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

Approaching the broken Krash machine requires a successful **DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to avoid Cookie's psionic gaze. If the characters have not already determined that the broken Krash Machine dispenses random magic items, they may do so by inspecting the machine more closely and making a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check**.

A successful inspection of the machine shows that its four buttons have prices of 100 credits, 500 credits, 2,500 credits, and 7,500 credits. Depending on the amount inserted, roll a d20 on a table from *Appendix E* to determine which magic item is dispensed. Keep track of which magic items have been provided to the players. If a character rolls a magic item which has already been produced, they receive the next lowest magic item on the table, or an error and a return of credits if there is no lower magic item.

CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters at Grax HQ contain some impressively uncomfortable bunk beds and a large screen to watch holo-shows. Usually, this is where Grax's Guys and Gals crash between missions, but today it doubles as a safe haven from the in-office corporate retreat.

Unfortunately, the serenity of the crew quarters is interrupted by a persistent and repeating bit of elevator music. At first, this might seem completely benign, but the music quickly becomes infuriating, as it is just catchy enough that it's impossible to ignore, but it's also impossible to tell where it is coming from. The GM should remind the player about the elevator music often, and mention that it's annoying and not going away. If a character remains in the crew quarters while the rest of the party explores the HQ, they must make a **DC 12 Wisdom saving throw** to ignore the elevator

music each time the rest of the party moves from one location to another. On a failed save, they are compelled to search every inch of the room for the source of the elevator music, tearing up mattresses, cracking open lockboxes, and even ripping through the carpet. The frantic search comes to an end when the character discovers a small radio, evidently planted by Cookie, in the room's air vent. When Grax learns about the crew quarters, he deducts 50 credits from the character's pay (taken from their operating budget, if they haven't already spent it) for damages.

THE SHOOTING RANGE

Undeniably the best part of the Grax's headquarters is the shooting range and armory. To introduce this location, read or paraphrase the following:

The air at the shooting range carries the distinct odor of plasma, a sort of ozone smell which follows blaster shots. This long, otherwise featureless wing of the warehouse is sectioned off strictly to let Grax's Guys and Gals take shots at the numerous targets painted on a big chunk of discarded starship hull set up on the far side. The entire chunk of metal is massively pockmarked, but few things are more cathartic than putting a few more divots in its side.

Today, there is precious little going on at the shooting range, as everyone but **Gracks** (no relation to Grax) has been pulled into the in-office corporate retreat.

PRACTICING AT THE SHOOTING RANGE

If a character spends an hour practicing with a weapon at the firing range, they gain a practice die, a d6, which they can add to an attack roll using that weapon sometime in the next 10 days. A character can only have one practice die at a time.

THE ARMORY

At the Grax HQ armory, characters can purchase weapons, armor, and gear, as per the tables in the *Dark Matter* Equipment chapter. If the characters wish to find more traditional, exotic, or illegal gear, there's a rat-person out by the dumpsters behind the headquarters named Charles Rattington Jr. who will sell any equipment from the SRD, and additional gear at the GM's discretion.

STORAGE

A great deal of Grax HQ is used for storage. This is, by far, the best place to find peace and quiet in Grax's HQ, but it's also a place where characters might find some truly strange stuff. Today, it is also a refuge from the endless team building exercises, as evidenced by two other Grax's crew members, Osira and PQ-11 from Crew 7, warily waiting by the entrance to the storage area brandishing blasters. Read or paraphrase the following:

This section of Grax's HQ is an unconverted warehouse, stacked floor to ceiling with unlabeled crates, most of which contain unsellable Grax-branded merchandise. Standing near the first of many isles of such crates, two of your fellow Grax's Guys crouch low to the ground and aim their blasters wildly around. One beckons you close and whispers "Mimic!"

Osira and PQ-11 claim to have seen a **mimic** loose in the headquarters scamper into the storage area and transform into a crate, one of potentially thousands of crates. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** discerns that they believe they're telling the truth, but Cookie's psionic interference might be cause for doubt. Perhaps they escaped mid-team building exercise and hallucinated the mimic?

As always, if a character wants to go digging through the storage, roll on the following table to determine what they find. On a roll of an 8, the character discovers the mimic! Roll initiative. If the mimic is ever fully concealed from the characters, it transforms from into a crate again and hides within the storage area once more. The mimic is very hungry but a **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check** and a 15-credit bus ticket can convince it to instead relocate to the Scale and Fang Inc. headquarters. Alternatively, if the mimic is killed, 100 credits can be found in its ooze-like body. If the characters do not kill the mimic or convince it to leave, the mimic appears on a roll of 8 to search the storage, even in future adventures!

d8 Item

- 1 Tinfoil hats! These block Cookie's psionic interference
- 2 A demo track from *Grax and the Gang*, a hair metal cover band featuring a teenage Grax on vocals
- 3 A fez! An obviously cursed fez, emblazoned with evil runes, but a fez nonetheless
- 4 Grax-branded light bulbs, all of which are tinted green
- 5 A jar of bright blue jelly labeled "amoeboid tears"
- 6 A box of antique weapons: crossbows, spears, daggers, and the like
- 7 A collection of comic books centering on the colorful team of avia-ra superheroes named Feather Force Five
- 8 A huge, deactivated murder robot marked with the Scale and Fang logo. Evidently, someone has simply removed its construct core, rendering it harmless

JIMBALL'S OFFICE

However the characters make it to Jimball's office, they find the lights out and the door closed with a large "Out to Lunch!" sign hung on it. A **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** detects signs of movement from within the office. Thankfully, the door is unlocked! When the characters enter, read or paraphrase the following:

Jimball's tiny office looks much more spacious with the lights entirely out, but you soon notice a soft glow glimmering out from beneath the desk. The halfling, wide-eyed and brandishing a flashlight, pops out from underneath his desk and impatiently beckons you in with one hand, while firmly shushing you with the other.

Jimball is cowering within his office to avoid the tyranny of Cookie's annual team building exercises, an event he has endured more times than he cares to count. As always, he is happy to provide the characters with their operating budget of 100 credits each, but insists they speak in a low whisper while he does so. January despises the wrothian, as her psychic camouflage does nothing to hide from his psionic senses, and she finds the team building routine condescending at best.

GRAX'S OFFICE

When the players are ready to begin the adventure, Grax, apparently immune to psionic attacks and corporate double-speak, stomps out of his office and dismisses Cookie until next year's corporate retreat. He then points to the party and gestures to his office. Read or paraphrase the following:

When you sit in Grax's smoky office, he is already grinning from ear to ear, a perfect match for the framed pictures of himself on the wall behind him. Without a word, he clatters down some tumbler glasses, fills them with a pungent white liquid, and unfurls a large parchment map across his desk. He draws an enormous knife and plunges it into the map, piercing the X drawn there so deeply, that half of the knife disappears into the desk. "Ya ever been huntin'?" asks the orc.

The details of the job will be delivered via flashback in *Part One: Taisong*. Once the party receives this job, skip ahead to their arrival on Gaozu in Part One.

PART ONE: TAISONG

The adventure begins on the Tier 2 jungle planet **Gaozu**, at the spaceport village of **Taisong**. Please read or paraphrase the following:

The *Gittin*, a beat up starship with too many miles on its hull, touches down on a landing platform flanked on all sides by waving tropical leaves. The ship is emblazoned with the Grax's Guys for Cheap logo in chipping paint. Its cargo hatch opens, and you descend the ramp to see a rainforest of greens, oranges, and purples.

A ten-legged bug flies past you, and is instantly caught by another bug pretending to be a discarded can of Krash. Surely, this is a planet in which nature runs wild.

This one-spaceship landing pad seems isolated in a sea of green stretching out in all directions. The characters can find a few narrow paths leading away, some of which seem to wind outwards in the jungle, and one of which leads to a walled compound in the distance, the village of Taisong. A **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check** reveals that the paths leading into the jungle probably don't penetrate far; it would be best to start at the settlement.

As the characters march single-file down the mile-long footpath, explain their goal via flashback, as follows:

As Grax explained it, you've been hired by a big game hunter by the name of Budd Felmer to carry his blasters and whatnot while he chases down some big critter. Grax always seems to underestimate the danger his jobs usually entail, but in a rare stroke of clarity, he commented, "Seems like it might getta bit hairy. Keep the sucker alive, willya?"

The party knows that their client is somewhere in the settlement of Taisong, but has little information apart from that.

The 10-foot high concrete walls of Taisong are capped with wires of crackling electric deterrents, which serve to keep even the largest beasts at bay. At

the gate, a simple automaton admits the party. The village is filled with unremarkable wooden cabins, along with a few points of interest the party can explore:

- **Taisong General Store.** Dozens of barrels and crates are stacked outside this building, covering its entire storefront, except for the door.
- **Tucker Brothers Taxidermy.** Behind a glass display window, dozens of animals mounted on the wall grimace at you with a frozen, ferocious posture. Inside, you can see a pair of kobolds laboring to drag in the body of what appears to be a four-antlered moose.
- **Deep Jungle Adventures™.** By stark contrast to the rest of the buildings in Taisong, this structure is made of modern metals and concrete, in the sleek, attractive style of High Terra. Colorful posters and signs in the front advertise stunning vistas and exciting close encounters with local wildlife.
- **Scrimshaw Lodge.** Constructed like a large, multi-story wooden cabin, this lodge looks comfortable even from the outside. A hand-carved wooden sign out front reads "vacancy".

TAISONG GENERAL STORE

When the party enters the general store, read or paraphrase the following:

Much like outside the shop, the goods inside the general store loom high to the ceiling, and include practically everything you could think of for traversing and exploring the jungle. From behind the counter, you hear a sibilant "Sssalutations."

Much to everyone's surprise, the proprietor of this general store is a wrothian named **Zikker**. To their credit, they're friendly and knowledgeable, and their prices are fair. Frontier general stores such as this carry a wide variety of stock, including all manner of provisions, gear, and equipment, as well as simple weapons and light and medium armor. Additionally, this general store carries a number of special items which are particularly useful in the jungles of Gaozu, as shown on the Jungle Gear table below. Many of these items can be purchased in a pack for a discount.

JUNGLE GEAR

Item	Price	Weight
Jungle Gear Pack	17 credits	50 lb.
Bug Spray	1 credit	1 lb.
Explorer's Clothing	2 credits	4 lb.
Machete	.5 credits	4 lb.
Raptor Pheromones	15 credits	2 lb.
Water Purifier	10 credits	5 lb.

Rules for new equipment are as follows:

Jungle Gear Pack. A pack of jungle gear includes: a backpack, a bedroll, a canister of bug spray, an igniter, a machete, a mess kit, 10 pitons, 10 days of rations, a flask, 50 feet of rope, and a water purifier.

Bug Spray. A can of bug spray contains enough insecticide for 10 applications. As an action, you can apply this spray to a creature. For the next 8 hours, or until the spray is washed off, insects won't bite this creature, and insect-like creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls against it.

Machete. A machete is a simple melee weapon that deals 1d6 slashing damage and has the following special property: This weapon deals double damage to plants and creatures of the plant type.

Raptor Pheromones. This canister can be opened as an action, causing it to slowly release a chemical that attracts all variants of raptors. After 10 minutes, all raptors within a mile of the canister are attracted to a location within 30 feet of it. A moderate wind of at least 10 miles per hour disperses the pheromones after an hour. Otherwise, the pheromones lose potency after 8 hours.

Water Purifier. Unclean or diseased water can be poured through the purifier to produce clean, drinkable water. The purifier can process 1 gallon of water every 10 minutes.

TUCKER BROTHERS TAXIDERMISTRY

When the party visits the Tucker Brothers Taxidermy shop, read or paraphrase the following:

Dozens of alien animals of all shapes and sizes, many of which you've never seen before, strike fixed, menacing postures around this room. Many are merely heads mounted on wooden boards, but bear their teeth in angry expressions nonetheless. Behind the counter, through an open door, two kobolds work furiously with knives to skin a four-antlered moose many times their own size.

The taxidermists responsible for stuffing and mounting all manner of exotic alien animals are a pair of kobold brothers named **Zuggs** and **Luggs Tucker**. The two speak over each other, and always seem to argue, even when they're in agreement. Thrilled to see new customers, they greet the party without washing their hands and ask if they're looking to buy a taxidermied beast, or have one made.

Much of the brothers' business actually comes from hunters who have failed to kill anything of note, but don't want to be seen coming back empty handed. Thus, they're more than willing to buy the corpse of any Medium or Large beast or monstrosity the party kills on the planet, so long as its fur, antlers, and other distinguishing features aren't fundamentally destroyed. They'll stuff and mount whatever they buy, and sell it to some unlucky hunter later for an enormous markup. Zuggs and Luggs will pay 100 credits for the corpse of a Medium creature, 200 credits for the corpse of a Large creature, and 400 credits for the corpse of a Huge creature. However, the party can only reap the full price if the creature is knocked unconscious, then killed in such a way as to best preserve its pelt and skeleton. If the creature is at all burned or left to rot for more than a week before being brought to the shop, the price is halved.

Furthermore, the party can have any beast or monstrosity taxidermied for 200 credits. They can purchase any Small or Tiny taxidermied creature for 200 credits, or any Large creature for 500 credits. Lastly, the brothers sell a spray for 10 credits which can preserve a corpse from natural decay for 10 days, as per the spell *gentle repose*.

DEEP JUNGLE ADVENTURES™

As soon as the characters open the door to Deep Jungle Adventures™, read or paraphrase the following:

Before you have time to absorb any details of the colorful, yet corporate waiting room, you're ambushed by smiling faces, peppy greetings, and brochures. Each of you have no fewer than three brochures in your hands by the time you say hello.

A pair of smartly-dressed travel agents, a tiefling man named **Daizemon** and a blonde woman named **Cheryl**, greet the party with fake smiles and boundless forced enthusiasm. Their aim is to sell the party a tour package of this jungle continent at an outrageous price. Though their normal clientele is wealthy, but ignorant families looking for a sterile taste of adventure, this little visitor's center and tour company has seen a dearth of business lately, and so attacks every visitor with aggressive sales tactics.

Practically nothing Daizemon and Cheryl have to say should interest the characters, except perhaps for the most gullible party members. Principally, Daizemon and Cheryl ask obviously leading questions like "Are you looking for adventure?" and "Wouldn't it be great if you could experience the majesty of nature without breaking the bank?" with the express intention of following the questions up with "Well have I got good news for you!" The sales pitch is strained, but well-rehearsed, leaving little room for questions.

Despite how uninformative the travel agents might be, the brochures they've handed to the party contain a litany of interesting travel locations they might see out in the jungle. These distinctive landmarks include:

- **Roc Rock.** The picture of this natural stone outcropping clearly demonstrates its resemblance to the head of a roc or eagle. It seems to jut from the sheer cliff face of a plateau.
- **The Howling Arch.** This stone archway or tunnel is nestled in a gorge, through which a small creek winds. The brochure claims that the constant rush of wind through it sounds positively like screaming.

- **Wreck of the *Vorpal*.** A surprising entry, the dwarven starship the *Vorpal* can be found wrecked somewhere in the forest. By the look of the picture, the ship is extremely rusted and choked by centuries of vines.
- **Poacher's Post.** The last picture in the brochure looks like a ghost town. The so-called "Poacher's Post" is a long-abandoned camp that looks eerily like Taisong in construction, and was purportedly used by the first wave of space-settlers.

SCRIMSHAW LODGE

When the characters visit Scrimshaw Lodge, read or paraphrase the following:

The savory aroma of grilled meat and the soft clamor of good-humored chatting fills the air of this large cabin. Furs adorn the walls and floor, and practically every fixture seems to be carved out of enormous pieces of wood. Perhaps, this building was built to emulate the atmosphere of an idyllic hunting lodge, or perhaps its clientele brought that atmosphere to it wholesale.

The lodge's common room makes up most of the lodge's ground floor. A grand fireplace roars in the corner, with several people chatting in front of it, while a number of benches and tables line the walls. Alongside the entrance, the party finds a long wooden reception desk at which they can rent rooms for 1 credit each per night, and also order food and drink. A spiral staircase leads up to private rooms on the second floor.

The party can explore the following corners of the lodge's common room to chat with its people:

- **Counter.** A nautilid waits behind the reception desk, and is happy to share rumors and provide some basic information to travelers.
- **Hammocks.** A dwarf with a very long and unkempt white beard snores loudly in a hammock strung between a taxidermied owlbear and the cabin's wall.
- **Poorly-Lit Tables.** A human with a grand mustache whittles away at a piece of wood at the rear of the room.
- **The Fireplace.** A group of five people, each of different races, chat jovially in front of the fire.

HECADEMUS

The proprietor of the Scrimshaw Lodge is a nautilid named **Hecademus** who is an incorrigible gossip. He's more than willing to share the following basic information:

- This entire supercontinent on Gaozu is covered in dense jungle. It'd be possible to walk halfway around the planet, if something didn't kill you first.
- There's a truly staggering number of plants and animals on this planet, from the conventional to the huge and bizarre.
- Taisong is the only proper settlement on the planet. There might be some temporary camps out there somewhere, but nowhere with access to a starport, which means Hecademus has a virtual monopoly.

If prompted, he'll share the following rumors and opinions:

- There's huge monsters out there in the jungle, but it's really the smaller ones you need to worry about. They're faster and more numerous.
- There's supposed to be some mercenaries in town to help a hunter bring down just such a famous local monster. Mercenaries are always great for business! They either give the lodge or the undertaker some work.
- Don't take anything Gregggy Ironsmelt, the dwarf in the corner, says seriously. He's getting on in years.

GREGGY IRONSMELT

If the players so much as approach the hammock at the rear of the building, they disturb Gregggy Ironsmelt. Read or paraphrase the following:

A dwarf with a very long, unkempt, white beard mumbles something incoherent and rolls out of his hammock, landing on the hardwood floor with a clunk. Straightening himself up with a chorus of cracking joints, he addresses the party:

"What'ye here doin' in the cap'n's quarters, ye scallywags? Can'tcha see we've got a schedule to be keeping? Them blasted knife-ears been houndin' us for near a million clicks!"

He bares his fists, ready for a brawl.

As the players might guess, Gregggy is both senile and incomprehensibly old, and it's hard to tell what in the 'verse he's talking about from moment to moment. At the moment, he's angry to the point of starting a fistfight, presumably because the party has awoken him. Any Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check the party makes to convince Gregggy of something is turned on its head: Gregggy misunderstands practically everything, so such a check that fails to meet a DC actually succeeds, and one that succeeds actually fails. Moreover, you can't fake an opinion around Gregggy or intentionally fail a check to interact with him; the old dwarf has a sixth sense for these sorts of deceptions. A failed **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check** can convince Gregggy that the party doesn't want to fight, and that he should head back into his hammock.

Moreover, if a character would like to play along with Gregggy's delusion, they can do so with a failed **DC 14 Charisma (Deception or Performance) check**. Gregggy orders them around like an old-timey captain of a starship for a few minutes, and reminds them that the code to the captain's quarters is 14-20-15. After a couple minutes of this, he retires back into his hammock.

If the characters can't mollify Gregggy, he punches the largest person in the party, which is a **melee attack with a +6 bonus**, dealing 1d6 + 3 bludgeoning damage on a hit. Hit or miss, he realizes he's outmatched, complains and swears about them being built like a mountain, and crawls back into his hammock.

BUDD FELMER

If the characters approach the poorly-lit tables in the back, they can find their client, **Budd Felmer**, whittling away at a bit of wood with an oversized knife. When they approach him, read or paraphrase the following:

Sporting beige linens, a prodigious moustache, and an excessive knife, the man sitting at the table looks like someone who has spent the better part of his adult life surviving the brush of unexplored worlds. He looks up at you through a silver monocle and gruffly asks, "You from Grax?"

In regards to the job, Budd has the following to say:

“Tomorrow morning, we set out to hunt the most dangerous game!”

Budd senses the party’s assumptions and reacts with disgust. “No! Not Man! What makes you think Man is the most dangerous game? I’ve hunted men; nothin’ particularly dangerous about em’. No, we’ll be huntin’ Big Hob! That beast has eluded me for nine years, and this time, I’ll be bringing ‘im back.”

It’s the party’s job to help facilitate Budd’s hunting expedition across the jungle. They’ll be carrying gear, setting up camp, blazing trails, and fending off wild animals. When the time finally comes to do battle with Big Hob, they may even have to help, if Budd doesn’t subdue it with one bullet.

Big Hob is a giant space ferret, but Budd isn’t exactly forthcoming with this information. A character can learn this with a **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) or Intelligence (Investigation) check**. Other mercenaries he’s hired have abandoned the job shortly after learning that their quarry was a ferret, and Budd wants the party to take this seriously. Big Hob is a dangerous beast. To that end, Budd has packed a litany of supplies, including a custom, overcharged concussion rifle, an electromagnetic trap, and a very large explosive. He intends to be the first to capture and release the beast, but fears it may be a battle to the death.

However, Budd also knows that they have a larger problem, apart from the jungle and the colossal ferret: his longtime rival, **Ivana Zaroff**, showed up in Taisong yesterday with a group of mercenaries and plans to hunt Big Hob for herself. Ivana and her cadre of mercenaries are currently chatting in front of the fireplace.

THE SCALE CREW

Laughing and chatting in front of the lodge’s grand fireplace is a group of five individuals: **Ivana Zarkoff** and their four-person crew from Scale and Fang Inc. **The Scale Crew** is a recurring group of rival mercenaries, so feel free to introduce them in greater detail, using information from the Key Characters section of this adventure. When the characters approach, read or paraphrase the following:

A group of people, consisting of a gruff dragonborn, a sleek and well-polished vect, a green-skin near human, a dainty half-elf, and a human wearing furs stand about drinking and chatting in front of the fireplace. Only when you draw near do you notice that most of them wear an identical badge: that of Scale and Fang Inc., a larger, better-funded mercenary company that rivals and out-competes Grax’s Guys at every turn.

The dragonborn looks you up and down, chuckles, and says, “You best head home. That jungle is gonna eat you alive.”

Ivana and the Scale Crew are also in Taisong to hunt Big Hob, and they seem a lot more prepared to do it. The captain of the Scale Crew, **Drak Garfreckt**, a red-and-black-scaled dragonborn, is dismissive of the party, but not outright hostile. If anything, he thinks it’s amusing that you’ve come all this way to get so handily beaten. While he’s more than happy to race the party for a crack at Big Hob, he isn’t the least bit concerned about losing. Similarly, Ivana Zarkoff will pontificate on the superior hunter’s nature, and the determinism of catching prey. She uses a lot of words to say that her expertise will help them catch Big Hob. The Scale Crew’s vect sniper, **Trace**, and their sorcerer, **Aela Vestele**, are content to stand back and watch the party’s interactions with the others, and will only chat if approached.

Only **Sierra O’Connell**, the Scale Crew’s green-skin rogue, will pleasantly chat with the party. She’s sporting a fedora, and a laser whip—it almost looks like she was made for these sorts of adventures. If she has a drink with anyone from the party with a **passive Perception of 13 or lower**, she’ll steal 50 credits out of their pockets by the end of the night.

For all their posturing, Drak and Ivana will make the party a deal: they’ll leave in the morning at the crack of dawn, and no earlier. If they’re going to race, it should be a fair one. A character can make a **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check** to determine that Drak is making this offer genuinely, and Ivana doesn’t seem sincere. On a failure, it seems that both parties are genuine. Drak will solidify the starting time with a handshake, if the party agrees. Otherwise, he shrugs and says that they’ll be leaving at dawn regardless.

Open hearing that the Scale Crew is going after Big Hob, **Greggy Ironsmelt** drops out of his hammock and says, suddenly dead serious, that he'll beat everyone to Big Hob by lunchtime tomorrow. He hurls a few insults at everyone, then produces a huge bag of peanuts from his hammock and slings it over his shoulder. Leaving a trail of peanut shells in his wake, he leaves to gather equipment for the hunt.

Hecademus will break up any brawls which happen between the adventuring parties, and send both parties to their rooms.

SNARLS BY NIGHT

Only begin this event after the party has explored Taisong, made any necessary preparations, and spoken with their client, Budd Felmer, and the rival Scale Crew. Once the characters have turned in for the evening, but before they wake up in the following morning, read or paraphrase the following:

The drone of insects that has loudly echoed out of the jungles of Gaozu all night quiets around the village of Taisong. Instead, the scurrying of claws of concrete and alien snarls replace it.

A pack of **5 stirge raptors** have infiltrated Taisong while the village sleeps. Have all the characters **roll initiative**. The two characters with the **highest passive Perception scores** wake up on the first round, followed by all other characters on the following round.

While the residents of Taisong will not leave their homes, the stirge raptors will invade the Scrimshaw Lodge unless driven off. It's clear once the characters are outside that the electric defenses on the walls of Taisong have been disabled, and that, once the raptors are driven off, the defenses will need to be reactivated. When a stirge raptor is killed, the others nearby will drain it using their Cannibalize ability. The last raptor will attempt to flee once the other four raptors are slain. Additionally, a character can use a canister of raptor pheromones to attract the raptors within the village to a location outside the walls. It takes only 1 minute for the raptors within the walls to detect the pheromones and travel to the canister.

As thanks for protecting the lodge, Hecademus rewards the characters with one *potion of healing* each.

Importantly, none of the Scale Crew nor Ivana Zarkoff make an appearance during this combat. In fact, it's clear that they have left Taisong in the middle of the night to get an early start on the hunt, and turned off the village's defenses in the process. Budd Felmer, furious that Ivana would leave early, demands that the party pack up their things and follow him: they're not wasting a second more. Proceed to *Part Two: Ferret Trail*.

PART TWO: FERRET TRAIL

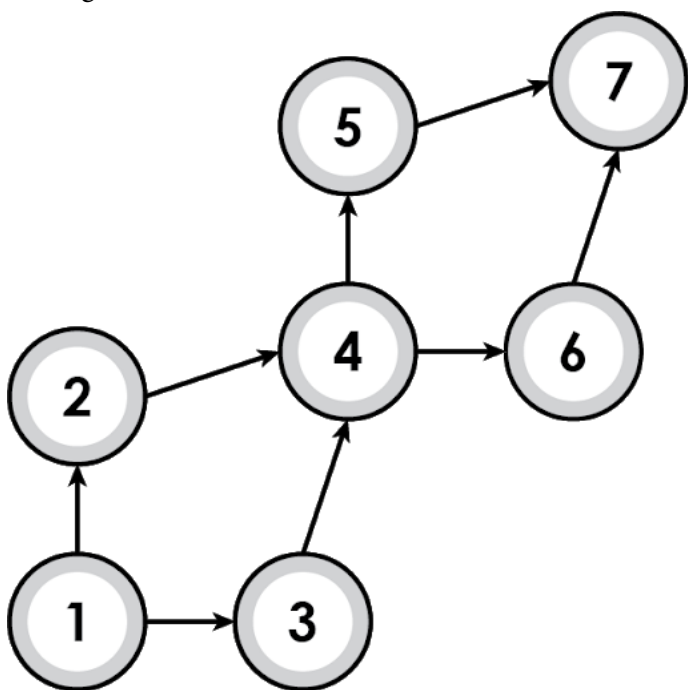
At Budd's demand, the party marches out into the jungle, machetes in hand, to close the gap between themselves and the Scale Crew, who are likely hours ahead. Each character has been given an additional hundred pounds of equipment by Budd. When beginning this chapter, read or paraphrase the following:

In the hours since you've left Taisong, the sun has risen, bringing with it a heat and humidity that makes the air feel thick around you. The mud, ever-present insects, and additional weight on your backs has already sapped your will to move forward, at least at Budd's hurried pace.

BRANCHING TRAILS

At multiple locations along this journey, the party will have to choose between different routes through the jungle, which will lead them through unique locations. These locations are as follows:

1. Roc Rock
2. Lowlands
3. Downriver
4. Poacher's Post
5. Temple of Columns
6. Wreck of the *Vorpal*
7. Big Hob's Burrow



IS BUDD FELMER INSANE?

If the players are skeptical that such a thing as a "giant space ferret" could really exist, play into this mindset and frame the adventure as Budd Felmer possibly being insane, chasing a bigfoot-like cryptid across the whole of Gaozu. In this situation, make it impossible for characters to verify any of the footprints and other signs Budd uncovers. Save the reveal of Big Hobb's reality until the moment the players enter the burrow.

To pick up a trail, have the characters make a **group Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check**. Budd participates as well, and rolls his check with a +4 bonus. If the group check beats a **DC 12**, the party finds a trail of peanut shells in front of them: clearly Gregg Ironsmelt has gotten ahead of them. If the group check beats a **DC 14**, the party also finds a discarded tactical pouch with a broken clasp. This is the kind the Scale and Fang is equipped with, and confirms that the party is following in their footsteps. If the group check beats a **DC 16**, the party finds enormous five-toed mammalian footprints in the mud. Budd confirms it at a glance: you're on the right track. Proceed to chapter *Roc Rock*.

ROC ROCK

After traveling for most of the morning with Budd Felmer, the party comes to the base of a steep cliff, a sheer rock face, and upon it, the "Roc Rock" formation advertised in the brochures from *Deep Jungle Adventures™*. Read or paraphrase the following:

It's startling just how abruptly the unending jungle shifts to a vertical wall. Before you is a hundreds-foot ascent up a rocky cliff face, out of which juts a natural formation called "Roc Rock". From this perspective, the formation seems quaint, and the height of the cliff looks to be the impressive thing.

It's possible that one or more characters have the ability to ascend such a height without making an ability check. Skathári, for example, possess hooked claws which allow them to climb quite easily.

Moreover, any magic or technology which grants a flight speed or climbing speed for a minute or longer can allow a creature to ascend safely. If the party can't solve this problem for everyone through a combination of magic, technology, and racial traits, Budd has packed an old-fashioned solution: a full-complement of climbing gear. Budd won't climb up alone, as it's the party's job to assist him through the jungle, so at least one person must climb with him.

Any creatures which ascend using climbing gear must make a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check**. On a failure, they slip some distance, and, careening on the rope, slam into the rock wall, taking 3d6 bludgeoning damage. Once halfway up, call for each climbing creature to make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to spot a small cave in the cliff, and the glimmer of something metallic within it. This hole in the cliff is the nest of some giant flying dinosaur, which has collected all manner of metal objects within its cliffside hollow. Chunks of adamantine metal, probably scavenged from a starship, can be seen within, as can an *arm cannon* construct graft. These adamantine plates are quite heavy, but are quite valuable: all of the adamantine here is together worth 150 credits. However, it also weighs 100 pounds. Also inside the nest are a pair of foot-wide dinosaur eggs.

To make it the rest of the way up without incident, each character climbing must make a **DC 13 Constitution check**, or take 2d6 bludgeoning damage from a climbing mishap.

VIEW FROM THE TOP

Once at the top of the Roc plateau, the characters will have a moment to rest and enjoy the view. A character with a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** will notice something while gazing out over the far side of the plateau: something huge is stirring in the trees some miles away. A character with binoculars can take a close look to see a grey and black ferret of enormous size clamoring up a slope with a particular ferret wiggle. From this distance, it could be positively adorable, but its claws can be seen to uproot a few smaller trees as it climbs. After a moment, the beast is gone.

MOVING FORWARD

From the top of Roc plateau, the party has a choice of how to proceed. The northern side of the plateau gives way to a ravine with a fast-moving river. Budd thinks this will be the fastest route, as it will surely allow the party to catch up with the Scale Crew and Greggry Ironsmelt (if he hasn't been eaten by a raptor yet). The eastern side gently descends back into the jungle, and this side is the direction in which Big Hob was most likely to travel.

Decide this direction with a **vote**. Budd participates and votes for the river. If the party chooses the eastern side, proceed to *Lowlands*. If there's a tie, or the party chooses the northern side, proceed to *Downriver*.

LOWLANDS

Descending from the plateau on the southern edge is easy enough, as a gentle slope leads down to the denser jungle below. However, the ground does become muddier, becoming difficult terrain by the time the party reaches the bottom.

Have the characters make a **DC 14 group Wisdom (Perception) check** when they reach the base of the plateau. On a success, they spot a **nuclear chicken** 60 feet away. On a failure, the chicken is 30 feet away before they notice it. Any creature which succeeds a **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check** can recall that a nuclear chicken is the most dangerous breed of chicken in the multiverse, as it can create a small thermonuclear explosion to deter predators. As such, it has no natural predators. When the party notices the nuclear chicken, it's already too late: the chicken has locked eyes with them, and is running kamikaze-style in their direction.

Have everyone **roll initiative**. The nuclear chicken moves 30 feet closer to the party on each of its turns (it is too light to sink into the mud, and is therefore unaffected by the difficult terrain), and uses its action to explode if it ends its turn within 5 feet of a character. The chicken also explodes if it dies. If the chicken explodes, each creature within a 60-foot radius must make a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw** or take 8d6 force damage. The explosion also leaves behind a perfect roast chicken.

If the party evades the chicken for four rounds, the chicken gives up its chase and decides to find some other creature to hassle. Alternatively,

a character within 10 feet of the nuclear chicken can use their action to make a **DC 18 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** to mollify it.

When the chase with the chicken is at last over, the party can find peanut shells on the path on which they walk. Perhaps Gregggy Ironsmelt fed the chicken some peanuts, and it decided to hound the party for more?

As the sun turns orange at the horizon, the party sees a sight for sore eyes: the concrete and metal walls of civilization. Proceed to *Poacher's Post*.

DOWNRIVER

It's a steep but surefooted climb down the northern edge of the plateau and into the canyon. Flowing through this canyon is a swift river that dips and snakes its way through much of the jungle. As always, Budd has something prepared for just such a survival situation: he produces a pair of *folding boats* which each unfold into 10-foot canoes that can each seat four Medium creatures. Divide the characters up between these canoes as they choose. Then, read or paraphrase the following:

Up ahead, the river narrows between a pair of great boulders. Your canoes accelerate to that juncture, beyond which is a frothing tumult of whitewater rapids.

To brave the rapids, the characters in each canoe must choose a group ability check to overcome each obstacle they encounter. Two ability check options are provided for each obstacle, but if the players decide on a reasonable third action to avoid an obstacle, they can make a group check to do that instead. Successes or failures affect all creatures in a canoe, but not creatures in the other canoe. You can present river obstacles in order, or can determine their order randomly.

OBSTACLES

d4 Obstacle

- 1 Rocks and Logs
- 2 Vortices
- 3 Whitewater
- 4 Fork

ROCKS AND LOGS

The river ahead is littered with large rocks and great fallen trees suspended just above the water. The characters in each canoe can make a **DC 14 group Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to duck below obstacles, or a **DC 12 group Intelligence check** to plan an optimal route through them. On a failure, each character in the canoe takes 3d6 bludgeoning damage, as they're battered into rocks and tree branches.

VORTICES

A few powerful eddies churn in the river ahead. The characters in each canoe can make a **DC 14 group Strength (Athletics) check** to paddle through the eddies, or a **DC 14 group Wisdom (Survival) check** to navigate the invisible, swirling currents without being pulled into an eddy.

On a failure, a canoe capsizes. Much of the equipment the party was carrying for Budd is washed downriver and hopelessly lost. Each party member in the capsized canoe takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage from collisions with submerged rocks. At the beginning of each subsequent obstacle, every character that is adrift in the rapids can attempt a **DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check** to get back in the canoe. A character that fails to do so is considered its own separate group which automatically fails the obstacle's ability check.

WHITewater

The river accelerates even faster, and the jungle flies by in a green blur. The characters in each canoe can make a **DC 12 group Dexterity check** to balance themselves as their canoes race down the river, or a **DC 14 group Intelligence (Nature) check** to know an efficient way to slow down without capsizing. On a failure, a canoe capsizes. The effects of a capsized canoe are described in Vortices.

FORK

The river forks sharply, and the riptides attempt to pull the canoe down separate tributaries. The characters in each canoe must make a **DC 14 group Strength (Athletics) check** to drift down the same branch in the river.

On a failure of either group, the canoes are sent down different branches of the river. For the rest of this section, the canoes are increasingly separated by miles of jungle, and it will take hours

of hiking to reunite them. If one group fails, but the other succeeds, the failed group is washed far from their destination by the time the river calms. If both groups fail, determine which is washed away randomly. They will only be able to take a short rest, instead of a long rest.

The other group ends their journey within sight of Poacher's Post where they can dry out and rest for the evening. In the morning, both groups are reunited. Proceed to *Poacher's Post*.

POACHER'S POST

Just as the sun begins to set behind distant mountains, the party sees a welcome sight: the concrete and metal walls of a settlement. Characters which read the Deep Jungle Adventures™ brochure understand this to be Poacher's Post, a ghost town in the jungle. Read or paraphrase the following:

Concrete walls jut out of the jungle in front of you. Much like Taisong when you left, the electrical defenses on the walls are off, but worse still, its metal has rusted and its walls are choked with vines. The jungle is reclaiming this slice of civilization, but for now, it may be a safe place to rest.

In the safety of this settlement, the characters can find a building with sturdy doors, within which they can take a long rest. This is also a chance to take stock and wait for characters which have become separated from the rest of the party.

Additionally, when the characters arrive, anyone with a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** detects the smell of grilling meat. Following the smell, they find that **Greggy Ironsmelt** has made camp near the walls of the post, and is grilling some sort of critter over a campfire. Greggy seems like an entirely different dwarf out here: he's lucid, canny, and somewhat sullen. The constant danger of the jungle focuses his addled mind. Greggy is excited by the prospect of a good hunt, and a race, no less. However, he's rather dismayed that Big Hob's trail has taken him towards the *Vorpal's* wreck. In a period of his past which he won't elaborate on, he spent time on the *Vorpal*, and hates seeing it in its current state. Greggy spends the evening singing old dwarven songs, such as "Stones, Rocks, and Stones" and "The Comely She-Goblin".

THE MANTICORE MOTHER

If a character stole a dinosaur egg from Roc Roc, the egg's mother, a pterodactyl-manticore (using **manticore** stats) arrives at Poacher's Post. The manticore isn't highly intelligent, but can speak Common, and will demand the egg's return. She can smell exactly who has taken the egg. If the character can return the intact egg, the manticore will bite the character, then take the egg in her claws and fly away. If they can't or won't return the egg, she will viciously attack the creature that stole it, only fleeing once the creature is dead.

A character which spends some time searching Poacher's Post for supplies can make a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to uncover two hidden *potions of healing* and a rusty, but functional concussion rifle. Additionally, they find old documents and travel brochures which identify this settlement by its proper name, Guang.

MUDDY DECISIONS

When the party awakes the following morning, a steady drizzle of rain throughout the night has made Big Hob's tracks through the jungle much harder to follow. A few ferret tracks near Poacher's Post are easily identifiable, but they become shallower and less distinct further away. However, the party does find much more recent tracks: humanoid footprints heading off in two different directions. With a successful **DC 14 group Wisdom (Survival) check**, a character can determine that the path angling north belongs to the Scale Crew, whereas the path angling east belongs to Greggy Ironsmelt, dragging

STONES, ROCKS, AND STONES

Sung to the tune of "I'm a little teapot", this dwarven shanty is the first Greggy sings:

*All I've got are stones, rocks and stones in my mine.
Gold would be nice, and silver would be fine.
I'd love some mithral or adamantium!
A vein of platinum would fetch a hefty sum!
Gold would be nice, and silver would be fine,
But all I've got are stone, rocks and stones in my mine.*

a makeshift sled of provisions behind him. Budd participates in the group check as well, and rolls his check with a +4 bonus. Moreover, Budd reckons that the eastward path might lead to the *Vorpal*, a sight he's crossed many times in this jungle.

If the party chooses to follow Scale Crew north, proceed to *City of Columns*. If the party decides to follow Gregg Ironsmelt east, proceed to the *Wreck of the Vorpal*.

A VERY PERSISTENT BUG

Use this optional event as the characters proceed to the next location. Please read or paraphrase the following:

Every few seconds for the last several minutes, a loud BZZZZZZ has molested your ears. An tenacious and infuriating insect has decided to make your life hell, and it has succeeded with flying colors. This is your greatest challenge yet.

The character with the lowest Wisdom score gets harassed by a persistent insect. It can attempt a **melee weapon attack** (AC 20) to swat the bug away. On a miss, the bug moves to the creature with the next lowest Wisdom score and similarly annoys that creature, and so on. A creature which rolls a 1 on their attack roll takes 1d4 psychic damage as they have a tantrum. The DM is encouraged to pester their players with buzzing sounds during this event.

TEMPLE OF COLUMNS

As the party proceeds through the jungle, read or paraphrase the following:

Emerging out of the jungle, choked by vines and riddled with small trees, is a colossal ziggurat of stone, hundreds of feet high. Every block in the structure is intricately carved with decorative frescos, but the structure's whole is weathered by the passing of millennia and the jungle's oppressive rain. Thanks to years of watching holo-films set in similar ancient temples, you get a bad feeling about this.

From above, it would be impossible to see the ziggurat with any clarity, but from the ground, the monument is obvious. The entrance to the ziggurat

must have once had a staircase of wood, for the great archway is suspended nearly 15 feet off the ground. A climbing rope and a series of muddy footprints ascend the blocks leading to the entrance.

OUTSIDE THE ZIGGURAT

If the party has not lost any of Budd's gear, they can use their climbing gear to ascend the ziggurat's exterior. The view is stunning, and reveals the wreck of the *Vorpal* some distance to the southeast. From this vantage, they can also see the ziggurat's largest image, built to be seen from above: a gargantuan carving of a ferret snakes its way up the ziggurat's sides and embraces the monument's peak in its teeth.

ZIGGURAT ENTRANCE

Inside, the structure is suspended by great pillars in every direction, which cast innumerable long shadows when hit by a flashlight. Catching the light of the entrance, the party finds a paper note, weighed down by a stone. It reads as follows:

Dear Bud and the company of misfits,

I can only assume you're following in our footsteps, since you'll never outpace us, so I'd advise you to give up now. If you're reading this, we've already tracked the quarry through the temple and to its burrow on the far side. Don't bother catching up—you'll only embarrass yourselves!

Love, Miss Ivana Zarkoff

In addition to the mocking note, the entryway contains a poison dart trap which triggers when 20 or more pounds of weight is placed on its pressure plate. A creature searching for traps can detect it with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check**, noticing that one specific brick has been avoided by the Scale Crew's muddy footprints. If triggered, the trap releases four darts. Each dart makes a **ranged attack with a +5 bonus** against a random target within 10 feet of the pressure plate (vision is irrelevant to this attack roll). A target that is hit takes 1d4 piercing damage and must succeed on a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw**, taking 1d10 poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Budd will slap anyone across the face that mentions the possibility of rolling boulder traps.

Three staircases lead away from the entryway: one down to a central chamber, and two up to either side of a wraparound balcony overlooking the chamber. At the far side of the central chamber is an exit from the ziggurat, matching the entryway.

BALCONY

The upper balcony is a long 5-foot ledge, flanked by its own perimeter of pillars, allowing only fleeting glances at the central chamber beneath. Read or paraphrase the following:

On each side of the narrow balcony corridor are spheres made of bronze, which are delicately embossed with the exaggerated near-human faces. Each sphere rotates to reveal a different expression on the back.

Like everywhere else in the ziggurat, the walkway is trapped. Halfway down the walkway is a well-concealed explosive planted by the Scale Crew to slow down the characters. A character which makes a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check** notices the distant glimmer of a laser sight on a pillar across the room, the end point of the explosive's laser trip wire. A creature that has noticed the explosive can find it and disable it with a **DC 11 Intelligence (Technology) check**. On a failed check, the explosive is set off. Each creature within 10 feet of the explosive must make a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw**. On a failed save, a creature takes 2d6 fire damage, and is thrown off the balcony into the central chamber, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall. On a successful save, a creature hides behind a pillar, only takes 1d6 fire damage.

The orbs on the balcony are randomly rotated between a "joyful" and "sorrowful" expression. A character which makes a **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check** will discern that the "joyful" faces are more likely wincing in pain.

If all the faces are oriented to be "joyful", a number of 5-foot wide pit traps will open beneath each orb, dropping each creature in front of one to the central chamber. Each creature which falls must make a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

If all the faces are oriented to be "sorrowful", an audible clunk can be heard from within the wall. A character which makes a successful **DC 14**

Wisdom (Perception) check detects the location of a secret door, which has just been unlocked. The door leads to a small 5-foot square room, containing ancient funeral urns of all shapes and sizes. Many contain wine, now rendered undrinkable by the passage of centuries, but others contain copper and silver baubles. If all of these are collected, the total can be sold for 200 credits.

CENTRAL CHAMBER

Read or paraphrase the following for characters which proceed to the ziggurat's center:

The central chamber of the ziggurat is almost untouched by the march of time. Vibrant pigments stain the columns, and immaculately-carved reliefs decorate the walls. Then, a bleached white skull meets your gaze. Dozens of skeletons come into view at the chamber's center, around an altar, upon which rests a golden idol. At first, you think it depicts an immense serpent, but you quickly realize that it, in fact, represents a ferret.

The two-foot tall ferret idol is easily worth 3,000 credits, but characters will need to be cautious to retrieve it, for it is surrounded by layers of traps.

Firstly, the floor around the altar, extending across the entire central chamber, is covered in multicolored tiles, each of which springs a spear trap from the ground. The rules for these tiles are laid out quite clearly in an alien language on the frescos, but a creature must make a **DC 20 Intelligence check** to understand them. Any creature which can read Avia-Ra has advantage on this check, as the languages are similar. The safe tiles in the outermost row are red, in the next row are blue and green, and in the innermost row are gold. All other tiles will trigger a spear trap. When triggered, the spear makes a **melee attack with a +5 bonus** at a creature within the door frame. A target that is hit takes 2d8 piercing damage. The spear instantly retracts.

Secondly, creatures which fly or climb on the pillars will be subject to a number of razor-sharp trip wires threaded between them. A climbing or flying creature with a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** notices them and can avoid damage. Any other creature takes 2d8 slashing damage and must land.

The first creature to touch the idol must make a **DC 14 Constitution saving throw**, taking 4d8 necrotic damage, or half as much on a successful save. This trap can be bypassed by touching the idol only with a thick cloth or welding gloves.

If the ferret idol is removed from the altar, or the party leaves the central chamber, proceed to “Escape!”

ESCAPE!

A final magical trap awaits anyone who takes the idol. Even if the characters practice restraint, **Trace** from the Scale Crew lingers behind columns at the ziggurat’s exit, ready to activate the trap with a well-placed concussion rifle shot. If the characters proceed to the exit without the idol, an echoing shot rings out, knocking the idol to the floor.

Regardless of how the idol is removed, six seconds after it leaves the altar, many of the stones supporting the great columns in this room crumble into sand. Read or paraphrase the following:

The temple trembles as enormous columns come crashing down in all directions. The dust and deafening noise from breaking stone envelop the quickly-collapsing ziggurat. You can see a faint glimmer: the exit! If only you can get there in time!

Each creature must make a **DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check** to outrun the series of falling pillars and a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check** to navigate the chaos. Any character with a base movement speed of higher than 30 feet makes the Athletics check with advantage. A creature which fails one of the checks must make a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 3d8 bludgeoning damage from falling rubble on a failure, or half as much on a success. A creature which fails both checks arrives at the exit a fraction of a second too late: a great column lands in front of it, blocking them in as the ceiling collapses above them. This creature is reduced to 0 hit points, but does not die. They can be retrieved with 2 hours of digging through the rubble.

If the players saw the *Vorpal* from the ziggurat, they can choose to explore there. If so, proceed to *Wreck of the Vorpal*. Otherwise, Budd finds a clump of Big Hob’s foul-smelling hair near the ziggurat’s exit, indicating that they’re close. In this case, proceed to *Part Three: Big Hob’s Burrow*.

WRECK OF THE VORPAL

As the party follows Greggy Ironsmelt, they soon find themselves looking down on the wreckage of a dwarven starship. Read or paraphrase the following:

As the trees part, you can see the great, angular wreckage of dwarven engineering embedded in a hillside. The jungle has done its best to scale the crashed ship and reclaim it as its own, but the stern structure refuses to let the vines choke its upper half. However, the rain and weather has taken its toll: the metal is tarnished, and one of the engines that was suspended in the sky has fallen off completely.

With a **DC 12 Intelligence (History) check**, a character can determine that the *Vorpal* is a dwarven anvil, a frigate-class ship of very old design. Like all dwarven ships, its construction is legendarily rugged, which is likely the sole reason it could withstand this impact in mostly one piece. A character that makes a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices claw marks on the hull; Big Hob has definitely been here, and Budd reckons that it might have found a way to burrow inside.

The entire ship is pitched at an angle, such that its nose (if it still has one) is buried and its engines dangle high in the air. All of the ship’s normal entrances are buried by the crash or sealed tight, but a sizable hole has been welded at ground level by some intrepid explorer in recent years. Unfortunately, this entryway leads directly into a 30-foot deep elevator shaft without an accessible ladder. Most doors are sealed with emergency bulkheads, and predictably, the ship is devoid of any sort of power. The characters can make a **DC 12 group Strength (Athletics) check** to repel down to an open door one floor down, allowing them to proceed to the cargo bay. If the group check beats a **DC 14**, and the party has not lost Budd’s gear, they can secure a grappling hook one floor above. The party can choose to climb up, arriving at the engine room, or climb down to the cargo bay. If the party fails the check, the character with the lowest check slips and is battered on the wall, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage. They can then reattempt the group check.

ENGINE ROOM

The players reach a hallway that slopes steeply upward to a pair of opened bulkhead doors. Inside, they find a multi-tiered room. Read or paraphrase the following:

All sides of this tiered room, which is illuminated by a great hole in the back wall, is filled with rusted pipes and machinery. The left wall has long been blackened by flames, and much of the machinery on the back wall fell free of the ship with the engine. Then, you hear a clattering of rusty bolts and scrap metal.

A malfunctioning **multi-task automaton** (MTA) staggers to its feet and approaches the party. Any creature with proficiency in Insight can recognize that the MTA is friendly but clearly damaged. It addresses the party with a hollow, mechanical greeting, and will answer questions posed to it with preprogrammed responses. However, due to long-accumulating data corruption, it only retains a few phrases, and has random words interspersed throughout them. Use only the following for the MTA's responses, replacing words in brackets randomly:

- Welcome to the DHC [behavior] *Vorpal*, active crew 4 [notebook]. We will be taking [program] off shortly; please proceed [agree] to your quarters for [despair] the journey.
- My designation is Engineering [ratio] Unit 14. Pleased to [judgement] meet you.
- The engine room is undergoing [theory] minor repairs. Please mind [hiccup] our mess.
- This ship is among [precision] the fastest in the [jurisdiction] dwarven exploration fleet.
- Worry not, there are [disaster] SEVENTEEN CRITICAL PROBLEMS with [page] the ship's Dark Matter [investigation] engine. We'll be flying [ambition] in no time!
- Good question! I'll ask [superior] the captain about that!
- Yes, Commander!
- No, Commander!

The MTA will heed any dwarven character, or anyone with a beard, as a dwarven officier, and will assist them in any way it can. It's no longer fit for combat,

but it can direct characters around the ship, carry items, and so forth.

To search the engine room for supplies, the characters can make a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check**. On a success, they find a pair of wrenchinators of fine dwarven make, a few ancient and undrinkable bottles of dwarven stout, and a concussion grenade hidden away in a toolbox. From the vantage of the engine room, the party can enjoy a marvelous vista of the jungle. Nestled among the trees, they can see a hidden ziggurat, the temple of columns.

From the engine room, the characters can open a hatch down to the cargo bay, or, if they have not lost Budd's gear, they can crowbar a door open to proceed to the crew quarters.

CARGO BAY

When the crew enters the cargo bay, read or paraphrase the following:

Jumping out of the darkness with wild eyes, Gregggy Ironsmelt waves frantically and shushes everyone. He produces a quadcorder from his pocket which emulates the characteristic ticking sound of a giger counter. He gestures beyond a large crate, where a sickening green glow illuminates the pitch black room.

The crew finds **Gregggy Ironsmelt**, who has armed himself with a dwarven-style battleaxe. In the cargo bay, a **radioactive goo** is slowly devouring the contents of one of the crates. The party can slip past the goo by climbing over a series of crates with a **DC 14 group Dexterity (Stealth) check**. Budd and Gregggy participate in this check, and make their checks with a +2 and +0, respectively. If the party fails, or if they alert the goo deliberately, it moves closer to the party and attacks. Furthermore, it relinquishes its grasp on two hostile, malfunctioning **multi-task automatons** (each of which have AC 13 and 20 HP) which also attack.

The cargo bay is loaded with components for the MTAs found elsewhere on the ship. Sadly, these automatons are a very old model, obsolete nowadays by any standard, so their parts are essentially worthless. A creature which succeeds a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** to search the cargo bay can find a shipment of antique dwarven

APOCRYPHAL DWARF FACTS

Greggy will insist following dwarf facts are absolutely true, and will tell listless stories to prove each of them.

- All dwarven babies have beards.
 - The word “rocket” comes from the earliest dwarven spacecraft, which were engine-mounted boulders
 - Dwarves are more closely related to whales than humans.
 - Dwarves were historically named for their emotions, but too many Grumpies became confusing.
 - Only dwarves can see the color “jacinth”.
 - A halfling with a beard is, legally, a dwarf.
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weaponry, marked with the insignia for DD&D, a company of artifact collectors. The shipment contains six daggers, a greatsword, and a suit of scale mail armor. The weaponry isn't especially valuable, but might be desirable for a character wishing to use a more medieval approach to combat. If a character specifically searches for hidden compartments in the cargo bay, they can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to find an antimatter carbine smuggled away.

If the party sneaks through the cargo bay, they reach the crew quarters. If they defeated the radioactive goo and the automatons, they can also find a ladder up to the engine room. Greggy happily accompanies the party as they explore the *Vorpal*, chiming in with unprompted, apocryphal facts about dwarven history whenever nobody else is speaking. Such facts include “Did you know dwarves invented the triangle?” and “The third dwarven king drank a hundred gallons of ale a day, and was killed by the eventual hangover.”

CREW QUARTERS

The characters proceed deeper into the ship, passing any doors which are secured with the heavy dwarven bulkheads. Soon, they arrive at a wide hallway, possibly a common area, with rows of doors on both sides. Read or paraphrase the following:

Before the catastrophic crash-landing, this room might have been comfortable. A few couches have been thrown haphazardly to the bow-facing wall, but two hammocks still hang precisely where they were. Judging by the still-intact dartboard, the crew of the *Vorpal* were just as obsessed with darts as the Grax's Guys currently are. Maybe it's a fad that skips a few hundred years at a time?

The remnants of the crew quarters are a safe place to take a short rest. Most of the doors lining this area are sealed tight, as the quarters themselves acted as escape pods and locked bulkheads behind them when they ejected. Four rooms remain untouched:

Two were evidently unoccupied, sporting neatly-tucked bunk beds and uncluttered floors. Another room seems to have been occupied by a vect of some sort. The beds in this room have been completely removed, but a pile of bolts, gears, wires, and other components can be found haphazardly scattered on the floor. Anyone who searches the room can also find an old, but functional *arm blade* construct graft.

The final room is locked, but not behind a bulkhead door. It could be opened if a character can make a **DC 13 Intelligence (Technology) check** to power the door with a makeshift power source, such as a blaster's arcane battery. Once powered, the door's access panel can be hacked with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Data) check**, or opened with the correct password (14-20-15, incidentally given by Greggy in Scrimshaw Lodge if any of the characters played along with his delusion). Inside, the room looks more lived-in than the others, containing dwarf-sized clothing, a few empty bottles of ale, empty cans of food, and so forth. With a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check**, a character can find a small hidden cache underneath the bed containing a pack of playing cards, 100 credits, and several vintage photographs of young dwarf and vect crewmen, one of whom might be a much younger Greggy. However, by the time the characters have searched this room, they find that Greggy has moved on, and indeed, exited the *Vorpal* entirely.

When the party is finished resting and searching the rooms, they can proceed down a long hallway to the Dark Matter core.

DARK MATTER CORE

Traveling downwards, further into the bowels of the ship, the players reach the room housing the ship's Dark Matter engine. Please read or paraphrase the following:

You enter a nearly spherical room, reinforced on all sides with supportive beams and other specialized equipment. In any other ship, this would be the humming heart containing the Dark Matter drive, an engine so volatile that, if it were ever damaged or deactivated, the entire ship would be reduced to nothing in an instant. However, you instead see a mess of torn wires and scratch marks, and a wide tunnel through the wall and into the dirt outside.

Somehow, the Dark Matter engine has been removed from the ship wholesale. Budd instantly recognizes the claw marks and the size of the hole as belonging to Big Hob. The characters can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** to conjecture that giant space ferrets, like regular ferrets, might like to collect interesting things and hide them away; the still-humming engine might have seemed particularly interesting to the ferret. However, that would mean that, wherever you find Big Hob, it's housing a bomb nearby.

The party can follow the tunnel to the surface. Proceed to *Part Three: Big Hob's Burrow*. Alternatively, they can travel to explore the ziggurat visible from the engine room. In this case, proceed to *The Temple of Columns*.

PART THREE: BIG HOB'S BURROW

After braving the dangers of the alien jungle, the party stands within sight of the entrance to Big Hob's burrow, a 10-foot hole in a hillside nearly half a mile away, made obvious by the giant ferret tracks leading into and out of it. Between the party and the giant space ferret, however, is a long stretch of muddy jungle, a steep hill, and importantly, the Scale Crew, who are eyeing a map of the surrounding area, until the party comes into view. Read or paraphrase the following:

"Well, well, well! Look what the giant space ferret dragged in!" chuckles Drak. "We were sure something out in the jungle had already eaten you all. I suppose you got here just in time to watch our client catch the beast, and for us to get paid."

The half-dragon stands triumphantly, shouldering a wicked-looking blaster and grinning at his good fortune thus far. Ivana Zarkoff adjusts her monocle and smirks. Meanwhile, a couple members of the Scale Crew, especially Trace, shuffle around uncomfortably in place, unsure whether or not things will turn ugly.

The Scale Crew has no intention of battling the party for the right of hunting Big Hob. Ivana Zarkoff glibly admits that she wasn't sure she was on pace to beat the characters here, but ascertains that the hunt belongs to her, since she got here first. The party is free to argue this point in a number of ways, and the situation might evolve in any of the following directions:

- **Shootout!** In the event of a firefight, the Scale Crew protects Ivana Zarkoff and makes a break for the entrance to Big Hob's burrow. If they have to fight, they would prefer their client gets to the burrow first, as per their contract. Proceed to *The Green Mile*.
- **A Friendly Challenge.** The character might challenge Ivana and the Scale Crew to some sort of contest to decide who might try their luck at Big Hob first. Ivana will happily accept such an arrangement, so long as a member of the Scale

Crew can perform on her behalf. If the Scale Crew loses, however, Ivana orders them to make a run for the burrow. Proceed to *The Green Mile*.

- **The Party Acquiesces.** In the event that the party simply allows the Scale Crew to go ahead and hunt Big Hob, (perhaps on the assumption that the Scale Crew might lose to Big Hob), Budd Felmer loudly grumbles, and then, quite suddenly, offers Ivana a bottle of champagne, a token of her victory. As sincerely as he can, Budd says that he was saving the bottle for after the hunt, but thinks Ivana deserves it, as the superior hunter. Evidently touched by this friendly gesture, Ivana accepts and the Scale Crew heads down below. Once the Scale Crew is out of sight, Budd cheerfully reveals that the bottle contained concentrated ferret pheromone—they'll get mauled the moment they enter the burrow. Proceed to *Into the Burrow*.

If the argument evolves in any other way, remember that Ivana and Budd are more concerned about being first than being alive, and either will run blindly to the burrow, triggering the events of *The Green Mile*. In any situation that the characters best Ivana and Scale Crew without a footrace, skip *The Green Mile* and proceed to *Into the Burrow*. If Ivana or a Scale Crew member is reduced to 0 hit points, they are safely teleported away with a special emergency device called an *escape rope*.

THE GREEN MILE

Ivana Zarkoff and the Scale Crew are well aware that the short trip to the Big Hob's burrow is far more dangerous than it seems. The vines encircling trees and weaving through the mud belong to an alien plant nicknamed a "garrote root", which can be quite deadly if agitated. If any creature runs near the entrance to Big Hob's burrow, the garrote root awakens, and the journey to the burrow becomes a frenzied, muddy chase.

In order to make it to the burrow, the characters will have to make a series of group ability checks and play through the chase in four stages. If at least half the group succeeds a group check, the whole group succeeds. If the characters fail a group ability check, they suffer the consequences listed in the stages below. It is encouraged that the GM be liberal with creative tactics, giving out advantage

or Inspiration to any character which uses a clever approach to navigating obstacles.

STAGE ONE: GARROTE ROOT

Purple roots surge up out of the ground and attempt to ensnare everyone participating in the chase. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics or Sleight of Hand) check** to slip the roots' grasp or a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check** to tear through the roots and continue running. Any character that chooses to burn the roots by dealing any amount of fire damage automatically succeeds this check.

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result instead takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage, as they are strangled by the roots. They have disadvantage on the next ability check.

STAGE TWO: QUICKSAND

The muddy jungle floor up ahead is quicksand! Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** to identify and avoid the quicksand pits, or a **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to swing from low-hanging branches to avoid the quicksand.

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result is removed from the next stage of the chase.

STAGE THREE: SPIKED FERNS

A wall of leafy vegetation stands in the way: little do the characters know that much of it is made of spiked ferns bearing needle-like protrusions on every leaf. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check** to identify and avoid the spiked ferns, or a **DC 10 Constitution check** to endure the dozens of pinpricks.

If the group ability check is a failure, the two characters with the lowest personal result each take 1d10 piercing damage from the plants.

STAGE FOUR: THE HILL

The last obstacle remaining is a simple, muddy hill, steeper and more slippery than anticipated. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check** to power up the hill, or a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** to find the sturdiest footholds for the running climb.

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result has disadvantage on the next initiative check they make, as they are the last to plod their way up the hill.

AFTER THE CHASE

Regardless of how poorly the characters performed in the race, the Scale Crew performed worse. By the time the characters reach the mouth of Big Hob's burrow, the members of the Scale Crew are entangled in vines, sinking in quicksand, struggling through thorny plants, or sliding miserably to the bottom of the hill. Ivana screams at them furiously. For all their Scale and Fang training, a poorly-planned dash through the most dangerous part of the jungle is better left to Grax's Guys.

However, if the characters failed three or more of the group checks, **Ivana Zarkoff** and **Drak Garfreckt** each reach the mouth of the burrow at the same time as the party, and attack. Neither character will lethally attack, and both will flee if either is reduced below 10 hit points. If the pair manage to defeat the party, they decide, injured and exhausted, that it's best to try Big Hob another time. Proceed to *Big Hob Escapes*. Otherwise, proceed to *Into the Burrow*.

INTO THE BURROW

At long last, the party descends into the lair of Big Hob, a muddy tunnel which gradually widens, as the air becomes ever more pungent. The tunnel is clearly burrowed out by the colossal rodent, and clumps of its hair can be found along the ceiling and floor. Read or paraphrase the following:

The tunnel leads you into a dark, spacious den, filled with hundreds of glittering objects. It would seem Big Hob has a penchant for collecting anything interesting it finds, ferreting away its treasures here. In the back of the room, a hulking mass of grey and black fur curls on itself, heaving slightly with the calm rhythm of slumber.

Big Hob's den is a roughly 30-foot diameter space, with a 20-foot ceiling. The area of the outermost 5 feet of the den is difficult terrain, as Big Hob has collected metal plates, bits of fencing, and other animal curiosities at the periphery.



Big Hob sleeps soundly, curled around a metallic sphere that hums gently. Any creature which makes a **DC 12 Intelligence (Technology) check** realizes this is a Dark Matter core taken from the Vorpul, an object that will explode in a huge radius if damaged. It's a miracle the ferret brought it here in one piece!

With a **DC 13 Intelligence (Perception) check**, a character can identify one additional creature near Big Hob: a smaller, but still Large-sized giant space ferret with albino cream-colored fur, which Budd Felmer promptly dubs "Little Jill". For some players, this might change the situation entirely. If the characters can make a **DC 15 group Charisma (Persuasion) check**, they can convince Budd Felmer to abandon the hunt, and leave the space ferrets in peace.

Each creature that moves within the den must make a **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check** or wake **Big Hob**. The moment Big Hob awakens, **roll initiative**. Little Jill burrows into a small hole until the combat is over. This encounter can resolve in one of the following ways:

- If a character reduces Big Hob to 0 hit points, proceed to *Big Hob Captured*.
- If the party is defeated or a character deals more than 20 damage to the Dark Matter core, proceed to *Defeat*.
- If the party convinced Budd Felmer to spare Big Hob, proceed to *Big Hob Escapes*.

BIG HOB CAPTURED

Budd Felmer sprints into the fray with a large electromagnetic trap, which he slaps on the giant space ferret's paw, locking the beast to the ground with a magnetic pull. Read or paraphrase the following:

Budd Felmer triumphantly stands over the defeated space ferret, which towers over him, even while laying flat. With a flourish, Budd produces a trio of holo-spheres to commemorate his victory. The party with him strikes two serious poses in front of the ferret, then a silly pose for the third.

When the pictures are done, Budd collects his things, deactivates the trap, and makes way to the surface. The days of hunting amounted to little more than a few minutes of fanfare. On this, Budd will cock an eyebrow and remark “It’s more about the journey. And the braggin’ rights.”

The burrow contains adamantine scrap from the *Vorpal* worth 500 credits.

The party has a safe and unremarkable journey back to Taisong, their ship, and eventually Grax HQ. As the party’s ship, *The Gittin’*, pulls into the Grax’s space port, Grax himself is waiting to shake the party’s hands. Apparently, the holo-spheres of Big Hob were a big hit around the office and Grax, true to form, had t-shirts made of the big moment. He hands each member of the party a commemorative t-shirt (into which Grax’s picture has been inserted, as if he were there) and 300 credits.

BIG HOB ESCAPES

With the party’s encouragement, Budd Felmer has had a change of heart about hunting Big Hob. Read or paraphrase the following:

Budd Felmer squats on a low stone outside the burrow and lights his pipe contemplatively. He muses aloud to anyone who listens, but mostly to himself:

“Any hunter worth his salt knows that there’s critters ya’ just don’t hunt. Maybe they’re too nasty, or too few, or maybe it just ain’t worth it for a trophy and a photo...” Budd drifts off, then snuffles a bit, “I reckon this one just ain’t worth it.”

But cracking a smile and chomping on his pipe, he remarks, “But I suppose everyone’s gotta have that one that got away! I can add Little Jill to that list too.”

The party has a safe and unremarkable journey back to Taisong, their ship, and eventually Grax HQ. Jimball Hundwig meets the party inside Grax HQ and congratulates you on not dying. He also bitterly mentions that the party making it back alive means

he lost a bet. He hands each member of the party 250 credits, and a little gold star sticker reading “I Didn’t Die!”

DEFEAT

The party is battered, bruised, and knocked unconscious by the space ferret. When they finally regain consciousness, they’re back in Grax’s HQ. The big green man himself, Grax, chuckles when he sees the characters bandaged and in bed, explaining that he had a team nearby just in case the “big ol’ marmoset” got the better of them. Each member of the party gets 200 credits, a shower, and a well-deserved week off.



CURSE OF THE ASTROMO

A DEEP SPACE SURVIVAL HORROR ADVENTURE
FOR 6TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

WRITTEN BY DONATHIN FRYE

GRAX'S CLUB

CURSE OF THE ASTROMO

INTRODUCTION

Galactically renowned Starball coach Chuck Hankerton felt his heart pound furiously as he stumbled through the corridor, smearing his bloodstained hands along a wall. The *Astromo's* flickering red hazard lights barely illuminated the metallic hall enough for Chuck to see the doorway at the end. He knew the Creature could appear at any moment, seemingly out of thin air. He knew his team wasn't his team anymore, not really. He knew there was only one place he might be able to hide, where no one would know to look for him.

Chuck heard a whistling hiss from the gunner deck behind him and began to sprint towards the bridge. "Oy! Oy! What a pain in the NECK!" called out the thing that used to be Terry Tillerman, the best offensive guard in the league, followed by something that sounded like a young girl's giggle. And then another sharp, almost musical hiss.

Chuck didn't look back. The old man kept running, averting his eyes, trying not to look at the corpses of the kids he'd trained to be star athletes. When he reached the overlook to the *Astromo's* bridge, he tripped haphazardly down the stairs. Chuck hit the deck below hard, felt something pop in his hip and a sharp pain shoot up his spine. Wheezing, he dragged himself to a small hidden hydraulic panel in the floor, tapped three times in just the right spots to cause it to open, and dove headfirst into a cramped smuggler's hole.

The panel shut silently above Chuck, leaving him alone in the dark, buried neck deep in hundreds of sticky, empty candy bar wrappers. He was safe. And hungry. And utterly alone.

Chuck spat out a candy bar wrapper that he'd inhaled during his desperate dive and muttered under his breath, "I'm gettin' too old for this ship."

BACKGROUND

The second-rate mercenary company Grax's Guys for Cheap has come upon hard times, despite its members' recent contracts and exploits. Grax himself

is deep in gambling debt and has a lot riding on one possible fix to his financial woes: a very large bet on the *Alluvian Astromos* in the team's upcoming game against the *Scale and Fang Talons* in the Galactic Starball League Championship game.

Unfortunately for Grax, the *Astromos'* ship has gone missing near the border of a Dead Magic Zone in space. There's a small contract to rescue the stranded players, but no contact has been made with the ship and Grax has no idea what sort of situation he is sending his mercenaries into.

What Grax doesn't know is that a master space vampire has infiltrated the *Astromo*. The Galactic Starball League has kept secret its widespread abuse of compounds derived from space vampire blood, but rarely, if ever, is there a serious outbreak of space vampirism to cover up. Unfortunately for them, the undead *Astromos* won't be playing in the big game: their only concerns now are an unquenchable thirst for brain juice and inflicting horrible puns and dad jokes on their unfortunate victims.

OVERVIEW

Curse of the Astromo is an adventure for 6th-level characters, and is the second in a series of adventures centered on Grax's Guys for Cheap. In it, the characters investigate a derelict ship belonging to the *Alluvian Astromos*, a professional sports team scheduled to play in the upcoming Galactic Starball Championship. What they find leads them on a race against time to prevent a calamity at the championship game, presented in four parts.

Prologue: Grax HQ lets characters get to know their employer and workplace through a chaotic game of Dart Gun Assassin before the adventure properly begins. If playing this adventure as part of a larger Grax's Guys campaign, it's recommended you let the players explore Grax's headquarters and return between every individual adventure.

In *Part One: Exploring the Astromo*, the characters board the derelict ship, the *Astromo*, and meet the local artificial intelligence MAH-MAH 9000. Their investigation of the mystery behind the

ship reveals the terrible fate that befell its Starball team: they were all hideously murdered and are beginning to rise from the dead as cheesy space vampires with an endless hunger for brain juice. To escape the cursed vessel, they must first repair the *Astromo's* power and reach its bridge to unseal its blast doors.

In *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, the characters meet the ship's sole survivor: Chuck Hankerton, the team's coach. On their return from the bridge, the party has their first encounter with a terrifying bat-like monstrosity on the bridge of the ship. Together, they survive MAH-MAH 9000's attacks, hoards of space vampires, and being dogged relentlessly by the unstoppable vampiric monstrosity that is hunting them to escape the *Astromo* alive.

In *Part Three: The Final Stand*, the party returns to their own ship only to find that it has a new passenger: the adorable master vampire behind the attack on the *Astromo*. As the rival mercenary crew Scale and Fang bears down on the characters with its flagship the *Baldrin*, they party make a decision to either hand the master space vampire over to their rivals, destroy it and try to collect the bounty on it for themselves, or protect the Master from Scale and Fang.

KEY CHARACTERS

The following nonplayer characters feature prominently in this adventure.

GRAX GRRAXE (HE/HIM)

The party's employer and head of Grax's Guys for Cheap, Grax Grraxe, is a fat, well-humored orc with an eyepatch and a thick orcish accent. Around fifty years ago, Grax decided to leave the Warzone and all its general unpleasantness to found Grax's Guys, a low-to-mid-tier mercenary organization, which bills itself as being all-purpose. True to form, Grax branded it after himself, and his face can be seen on billboards, company mugs, and the occasional t-shirt.

However, over the last few years, GGFC has lost a lot of customers to their closest rival, Scale and Fang Inc. Nothing perturbs Grax so much as this rivalry, and in particular, that he's losing to the mercenary company owned by Garfreckt, an eternal dragon who Grax considers to be a bit of a jerk.

CHUCK HANKERTON (HE/HIM)

Chuck Hankerton is the winningest coach in Starball League history. He's trained zeroes to heroes his entire life, but his team, the *Alluvian Astromos*, haven't won a championship game in ten years. He blames Garfreckt the eternal dragon and owner of rival team, the *Scale and Fang Talons*, for his unlucky streak. Chuck believes the *Talons* have been cheating, but he has never been able to prove it. Old, gruff, past his prime, and with an uncontrollable addiction to candy, Chuck knows that he doesn't have many chances left to prove that he is still the best coach in the 'verse.

MAH-MAH 9000 (SHE/THEY)

MAH-MAH 9000 is the artificial intelligence core that runs the *Astromo's* automated systems. MAH-MAH 9000 has a calm, matronly voice, but until recently has never appeared to have much of a personality of their own. Since the crew of the *Astromo* were killed and raised from the dead as space vampires, however, MAH-MAH 9000 has developed a much more macabre attitude. The more her programming becomes corrupted, the more sinister her outlook on the futile lives of organic creatures becomes.

THE CREATURE (THEY/THEM)

The Creature that haunts the *Astromo* was once the Starball team's captain, Fiari Gustafson. Inflicted with vampirism by the master space vampire, Fiari was the first of the crew to transform into a space vampire, and infected many of their teammates. Their brain juice fueled Fiara's transformation into a stage two space vampire, capable of controlling lesser space vampires that they have sired.

THE MASTER (HE/HIM)

The Master is a stage three space vampire who is responsible for infecting the crew of the *Astromo* with vampirism. He is an activist who is investigating the Galactic Starball League for a hideous crime: the league has been secretly injecting some of its injured athletes with magically diluted space vampire blood to enhance their recovery time and performance. This has led the league to work with Scale and Fang owner Garfeckt to get into the side business of space vampire hunting.

THE SCALE CREW

A band of mercenaries from the rival Scale and Fang Inc., the Scale Crew is better-funded and more competent than any crew from Grax's Guys. They consist of the following:

Drak Garfreckt (he/him). A male dragonborn with red and black scales, Drak is the leader and fighter of his crew. He's cool under pressure, tough as nails, and smart enough to be a step ahead of any rival mercenary group. His last name is that of Garfreckt, the eternal dragon who founded and owns Scale and Fang Inc. Perhaps, he was adopted by the eternal dragon, or is distantly related to it. In any case, Drak has the assurance of someone who earned their position through expertise and hard work, and commands the respect of his crew in turn.

Trace (they/them). The heavily-upgraded vect of the Scale Crew, Trace, serves as their sniper and gadgeteer. Trace's expertise lies in drones, blasters, and explosives, but any mechanical device which can be broken or repaired falls under their domain. At a glance, it can be determined that Trace is cold, calculating, and prepared for anything.

Sierra O'Connell (she/her). The lovely Sierra O'Connell is a near-human green-skin who oozes charisma. Her smile not only lightens up a room, it makes even Drak and Trace seem less businesslike and dour by extension. On a typical day, she's dressed for adventure, with a fitting hat to complement her laser whip. Sierra even knows a few songs as well, so she serves as the Scale Crew's bard, as well as their rogue. Her biggest personal flaw is that she will, without fail, steal the wallet of anyone she spends time with. It's as much habit as it is misbehavior for her at this point.

Aela Vestele (they/them). The half-elf sorcerer Aela Vestele is easily the most refined of the Scale Crew, and is usually the most refined of any group in which they find themselves. Only when they cast a spell does the nature of their sorcery become revealed: small dimensional rifts open around them, revealing a soup of alien tentacles and eyes. Despite this, Aela tries to be utterly composed at all times. Their father is Jermain'ion Vestele, one of the most successful capitalists in the Elven Empire, so it's anyone's guess how Aela ended up as a half-elf in a mercenary company, instead of as a full-blooded elf working behind a desk.

PROLOGUE: GRAX HQ

Advance all characters to 6th level.

Before and between adventures, the characters hang around the Grax's Guys for Cheap headquarters, waiting for a good job to drop into their laps. Some use it as a chance to hit the gym or comb over some invaluable books on magic, but plenty of Grax's crew get good at darts and take the opportunity to relax during the rare days of downtime.

Grax's headquarters is some form of converted warehouse right next to the starport on the planet Fornax. While it might have poor to nonexistent air conditioning, it's got plenty of space for a crew to hone their skills, catch up on repairs, or take a nap. Before beginning the adventure, characters can explore the following locations in Grax HQ.

THE LOUNGE

Unless otherwise stated, the party is probably in the lounge. If the characters wish to explore the headquarters before their next mission, begin by having them enter the lounge. Read or paraphrase the following:

The lounge at the Grax's Guys for Cheap is dominated by a large aluminum and glass sign reading "Grax's Guys (and Gals) for Cheap". Beneath it is everything a crew could possibly need to relax: a couch, a pool table, and a dart board. Much to your dismay however, there's no darts to be seen. In fact, the dart board has been covered by a familiar picture of a giant space ferret, which crew members have been taking shots at with blasters.

Instead of pool cues or balls, a large poster emblazoned with the word "Rules" at the heading is rolled out on the pool table, and before it is a great pile of plastic dart guns and literally hundreds of foam darts.

Someone has instigated a company-wide game of Dart Gun Assassin, and there's five hundred credits on the line! It's a wonder anything gets done around here. The rules are as concise as they are circumventable:

1. You're in the game the second you pick up a dart gun.
2. If you are shot with a dart, you're out. No getting back in the game.
3. No using magic to improve your shot.
4. If you injure another player, you're out.
5. Don't tell Grax.
6. Last one standing wins 500 credits.

The dart guns are ranged weapons that fire harmless foam darts with a range of 30/60 feet. These darts stick to their targets, making a hit clear to all. All characters have proficiency with dart guns. Characters have an essentially unlimited supply of darts.

Any hit with a dart disqualifies a character from the game. However, darts must be shot from dart guns and not propelled by magic or other means; they only stick if shot from a gun. Characters can't use magic to improve their aim, but magic such as *invisibility* and *mirror image* wasn't specified in the rules!

All other Grax's crew members are considered to have a +2 bonus to attack rolls with the dart guns and an Armor Class of 12. While the other crew members are likely to use dirty tactics, none outright cheat. Eventually the participating characters will be eliminated or must turn on one another. When only one player remains in the game, 500 credits are magically teleported into their pockets.

FINAL PLAYER STALKING THE LOUNGE

Once the characters have explored every section of the headquarters and eliminated all players apart from themselves, they are targeted in the lounge by the only remaining player. The final player, a vect named PQ-11, is under the effects of a *greater invisibility* spell, and attempts to pick the characters off one by one. They're not particularly stealthy, however, and occasionally shout phrases from well-known holo-films in an Austrian accent. PQ-11's exact location can be determined if a character can succeed a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** on their turn.

BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

If the characters have not already determined that the broken Krash vending machine dispenses random magic items, they may do so by inspecting the machine more closely and making a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check**.

A successful inspection of the machine shows that its four buttons have prices of 100 credits, 500 credits, 2,500 credits, and 7,500 credits. Depending on the amount inserted, roll a d20 on one of the tables from *Appendix E* to determine which magic item is dispensed. Keep track of which magic items have been provided to the players. If a character rolls a magic item which has already been produced, they receive the next lowest magic item on the table, or an error and a return of credits if there is no lower magic item.

It's not possible to extract magic items from the machine by force. Large magic items are magically shrunk and instantly grow to full size once removed from the machine.

CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters at Grax HQ are where Grax's Guys and Gals go to rest between missions. When a character enters this area, read or paraphrase the following:

As you walk into the crew quarters, a flurry of orange foam flies past you! The uncomfortable bunk beds have been inched to one side of the room, from which someone has arranged an ambush!

There's no fewer than four Grax's crew members holed up in the crew quarters, where they plan to pick off their competition one-by-one until only the four remain. The first character to enter the crew quarters without being cautious is targeted by **4 dart attacks**, each with a **+2 bonus**. However, a character that is suspicious of the area can hunker behind a low bookshelf in order to converse with the crew members and survey the situation. If a character shoots from this position, they have three-quarters cover.

The crew members, barricaded in bunk beds and behind piles of chairs, have three quarters cover at the maximum dart gun range of 30 feet. Additionally, they ready their actions to shoot at any figure they see. There's no approach which avoids all three lines of sight. Lucky shots or magical assistance might even the odds.

If a character makes a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, they can stoke the paranoia and fear of the holed up crew members,

turning them against one another in a flurry of foam darts. They eliminate each other without the characters needing to fire a shot.

THE SHOOTING RANGE

Undeniably the best part of the Grax's headquarters is the shooting range and armory. If a character would like to practice some shooting, read or paraphrase the following:

The shooting range is busier than usual, as a few Grax's crew members are practicing their aim with their dart guns alongside others who are unleashing bolts of white hot plasma. The chunk of discarded starship hull that forms the largest target in this indoor shooting range is covered in orange foam darts, in addition to new blaster pockmarks. Near the shooting range, the halfling dart player Gimby fiddles with a repeater. He already has several darts stuck to his clothes, and one stuck prominently to his head.

There are three crew members to eliminate at the shooting range: two practicing their shots, who are unaware of anyone entering the room, and **Gracks** (no relation to Grax), who has a fortified position in the armory. Unlike other crew members, Gracks has an AC of 14 and a +4 to hit.

PRACTICING AT THE SHOOTING RANGE

If a character spends an hour practicing with a weapon at the firing range, they gain a practice die, a d6, which they can add to an attack roll using that weapon sometime in the next 10 days. A character can only have one practice die at a time.

THE ARMORY

At the Grax HQ armory, characters can purchase weapons, armor, and gear, as per the tables in the *Dark Matter* Equipment chapter. If the characters wish to find more traditional, exotic, or illegal gear, there's a rat-person out by the dumpsters behind the headquarters named Charles Rattington Jr. who will sell any equipment from the SRD, and additional gear at the GM's discretion.

TEACHING GIMBY TO SHOOT

The once-cocky **Gimby** “**Lucky Shot**” **Matchfoot** seems rather meek at your approach. If questioned, he admits that, while he’s a prodigy at throwing darts, he’s a terrible shot with a repeater, and has been soundly demolished in the ongoing game of **Dart Gun Assassin**. He’s worried that Grax will fire him if he doesn’t improve. With no small amount of embarrassment, Gimby will ask for some help. Nearby, the half-orc in charge of the armory, **Gracks**, hurls an insult at Gimby and shoots a dart at him, hitting him squarely in the head.

If pressed, Gimby might offer an ultra-rare can of discontinued *Hyper-Krash* to someone who offers to help him practice at the firing range. For every hour the character spends helping Gimby train with a weapon at the firing range, they must make a successful **DC 15 Dexterity check** with disadvantage due to Gimby’s ineptitude and Grack’s constant taunts whenever the halfling misses a shot. If more than one character works with Gimby, this is a group Dexterity check instead. A character can convince Gracks to stop insulting Gimby by making a **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion, Deception, or Intimidation) check**. On a success, Gracks leaves Gimby alone and any checks made to train Gimby are no longer made with disadvantage.

If a character can succeed on three training checks with Gimby, his aim begins to measurably improve. He thanks the character profusely and seems genuinely excited to continue training in the future so that his friends stop making fun at him for his poor aim. As a gift, Gimby gives the characters *2 cans of Hyper-Krash* and tells them they are the last two cans at headquarters. He stays behind at the range to practice more, beaming with a big, doofy smile due to his newfound confidence.

STORAGE

A great deal of Grax HQ is used for storage. This is, by far, the best place to find peace and quiet in Grax’s HQ, but it’s also a place where characters might find some truly strange stuff. To introduce this location, read or paraphrase the following:

If the rest of Grax’s HQ is a converted warehouse, this is the section that’s an unconverted warehouse. Countless unlabeled crates are stacked haphazardly in this room, creating a combination of a fire hazard and an avalanche risk. Most crates seem to be filled with Grax-branded merchandise nobody wants to buy. That being said, if someone wants a Grax mug, this is the mother-lode.

If a character wants to go digging through the storage, roll on the following table to determine what they find:

d8 Item

- 1 A discarded and half-eaten t-bone steak that has been here for far too long
- 2 A dusty tome bound in blood stained human leather that has had all of its pages removed and replaced with crayon drawings of Grax
- 3 A plastic throwing disc with the branding *XXX ULTIMATE* printed on it that turns invisible whenever you throw it and only becomes visible again when it is successfully caught
- 4 A documentary holo-video directed by and starring Grax about his many exes and how they did him wrong
- 5 A wrapped present with a card that reads “Definitely not from Garfreckt” that contains a broken and empty poison gas canister
- 6 A boxed board game titled *Hungry Hungry Thwirrels* that is missing several of its thwirrel miniatures and all of its electrical wires
- 7 A painting of a woman riding a hoverbike off of a cliff and directly into the massive maw of a Mega-Tarrasque, with a title plaque that reads “HANG IN THERE”
- 8 A discontinued mega dart gun blaster from thirty years ago, before laws were passed to ensure safety for children. This dart gun has a range of 120 feet and advantage on attack rolls.

JIMBALL'S OFFICE

Next to Grax's office is that of Jimball Hundwig, the accountant. If the characters wish to visit Jimball, read or paraphrase the following:

Grax's corner office dwarfs the almost comically small office of his accountant, Jimball Hundwig. Today, however, Jimball's office is empty, and Jimball's pet thwirrel, January, is sitting in his chair instead, twitching her nose curiously at you.

January is psionic like all thwirrels, but is far smarter than her kin. In fact, she's a super-intelligent telepathic thwirrel who happily lives in a cage in the corner of Jimball's office. She is only willing to communicate telepathically with creatures who have an **Intelligence score of 14 or higher**. If a character is smart enough and attempts to communicate with January, they will learn that Jimball is on vacation to the planet Politana. If the character wants more information they must make a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. On a success, January admits that she lied: Jimball is not on vacation, but rather is traveling to Politana to pay off some of Grax's considerable gambling debts. He is scheduled to return to the office tomorrow. January has gotten extra food for being a good girl while he's away.

In Jimball's absence, January is able to acquire an operating budget of 100 credits for the characters before their next mission. She offers to cook the books and instead give the characters 300 credits if one of them is able to give her a riddle that she is unable to answer.

If a character is able to stump January, she resentfully upholds her end of the bargain, but that character becomes her nemesis: the thwirrel will find small ways to psionically make their life miserable while they are at headquarters by giving them bad dreams, telekinetically spilling their coffee on them, tying their shoelaces together at the most inopportune time, and any other petty acts of revenge the GM can imagine. The only way to end the nightmare of January's ire is to convince her to adopt a new, even more hated nemesis.

January in Dart Gun Assassin. January is absolutely competing in the game of Dart Gun

Assassin, though her itty-bitty dart gun is hidden expertly in her fluffy tail. She attacks only if attacked, or after everyone has finished acquiring an operating budget. If a character shoots at her and misses, she has advantage on her next dart gun attack targeting that character.

GRAX'S OFFICE

When character approach Grax's office, the door burst open. Read or paraphrase the following:

The door bursts open in a flurry of orange foam, and a hapless crew member tumbles backwards out of it, shot dozens of times. Grax, in his terrible green fury, stomps out after him, brandishing a foam dart gun of orcish design: a blaster that fires dozens of darts at once. The orc cocks his blaster, activates a faintly shimmering energy field, and barks "Come get some!"

For this foam dart combat, Grax has an AC 13 and an energy shield which deflects two darts, meaning he must be shot three times before being eliminated. Additionally, he has a dart gun that fires hundreds of darts in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** or be hit by dozens of darts. If defeated, Grax belly laughs at the good challenge and stomps back into his office.

STARTING THE MISSION

When the players are ready to begin the adventure, they can pop back by Grax's office for a briefing. Read or paraphrase the following:

Grax's office, as usual, smells of green, despite the orange foam darts which have their own plasticity aroma and trace a perfect outline of a terrified employee on the inside of Grax's door. As you get comfortable amongst the darts, Grax slides over a tumbler glass filled with a pungent, alcoholic liquid, along with a stack of manilla envelopes.

"Can't believe yer still alive! I shouldn't have pre-ordered those tombstones before yer last mission. Anyhow, got a new job for ya, an easy job to boot!"

Grax grins toothily, “Even you lot ain’t able to mess this one up.”

The details of the job will be delivered via flashback in *Part One: Exploring the Astromo*. Once the party receives this job, skip ahead to their arrival on the *Astromo* in Part One.

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PART ONE: EXPLORING THE ASTROMO

The adventure begins at the edge of a Dead Magic Zone in space, as the party leaves their ship, the *Gittin'*, to board the derelict vessel, the *Astromo*. Read or paraphrase the following:

Upon docking with and boarding the derelict vessel, the *Astromo*, you are greeted with a warning: dozens of eerie red lights on the walls and ceiling pulse in a slow, rhythmic fashion. Millions of dust particles float in the airlock's zero gravity field, casting strange, obfuscated shadows.

A moment later, a soothing feminine voice at odds with the warning lights fills the room. "Visitors, welcome to the *Astromo*, home of Coach Hankerston's *Alluvian Astromos*, the greatest Starball team in the history of the 'verse. I am MAH-MAH 9000, the *Astromo's* personalized artificial intelligence. Please wait for the decontamination process to complete."

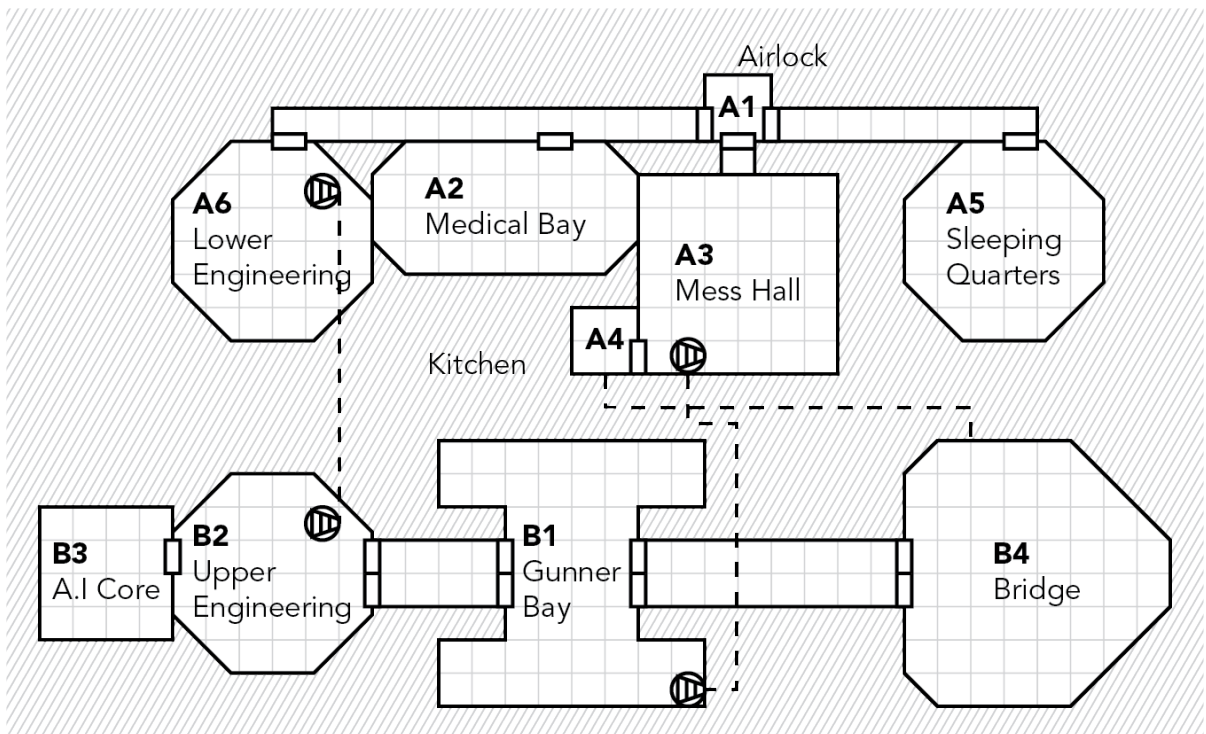
While the characters wait to leave the airlock, they are able to check their gear, chat with each other, and attempt to speak to **MAH-MAH 9000**, who responds

to any inquiry calmly by stating through the room's speakers, "I will be able to answer your questions once you finish the decontamination process."

A character who makes a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check** can determine that this room lacks any fingerprints, footprints or other marks that would suggest anyone has entered or left the ship through the airlock recently.

After a few moments, proceed by explaining the characters' mission as they are approved for boarding. Read or paraphrase the following:

You think over your mission, as assigned by your boss, Grax. The *Astromo* sent out a single distress beacon several days ago from the edge of a Dead Magic Zone, and there has been no contact since. It was a bit of a detour to get here before any other crews, but Grax seems to think this is an easy job: explore the derelict ship, figure out what happened, and provide assistance to the Starball team as you are able. He was keen on the later point: the *Alluvian Astromos* are scheduled to play in the Galactic Starball Championship match in just a few days, and Grax has a lot of credits riding on them winning the big game.



THREAT LEVEL AND TAKING RESTS

During the characters' investigation of the *Astromo*, the GM keeps a tally of the party's current Threat Level somewhere visible to the players, without explaining its purpose. Unbeknownst to them, they are being stalked by a deadly **stage two space vampire**. The more Threat Levels the players acquire, the more vulnerable they will be to being located and attacked in *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*.

Set the starting Threat Level according to the following criteria:

- Increase the starting Threat Level by 1 for every 2 characters in the party.
- Increase the starting Threat Level by 2 for each level above 6 the group's character levels are at the start of this adventure.

Threat Level may not be reduced below 0. Threat Level changes based on characters' actions as noted throughout the adventure, but the GM may increase or reduce the Threat Level based on unaccounted for factors as well.

Any time the characters take a short rest during this chapter, describe rattling sounds in the vents, a maniacal laugh from a nearby corridor, and other eerie indicators that they are in danger as long as they stay on the ship. If they attempt to take a long rest, their rest is interrupted when they are attacked by 1d4 – 2 (minimum of 1) **stage one space vampires**. The characters should not be able to finish a long rest until they escape the *Astromo*.

THE EVOLVING SHIP

When the characters begin *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, the *Astromo* becomes far more hostile to their presence. As such, each room aboard the ship contains a sidebar detailing how they change when encountered in Part Two.

After recounting the party's mission, share with them the schematic map of the *Astromo* provided to their personal devices by Grax. Be certain to point out their current location. Once they are ready to begin exploring, proceed to *A1. Airlock*.

A1. AIRLOCK

As the party is cleared for entry, read or paraphrase the following:

MAH-MAH 9000 speaks again in a very pleasant voice. "All contaminants have been cleared. Please enjoy your stay aboard the *Astromo*."

Gravity returns to the airlock with a sudden jolt. Then, the sound of hydraulic hissing cuts through the quiet and three metallic doors open, revealing two unlit corridors on the left and right walls, and a short hallway directly ahead lit by warm yellow lights. The crimson warning lights in the airlock continue to steadily pulse.

The short lit corridor directly ahead of the airlock's docking bay opens into *A3. Mess Hall*.

The dark, unlit hallway on the right leads first to a broken, heavy hydraulic door, which can be forced open by making a successful **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check** to allow entry to *A2. Medical Bay*. Continuing along the same corridor eventually leads to *A6. Lower Engineering*.

The unlit corridor to the left leads to a locked door blocking the way to *A5. Sleeping Quarters*. The door is inscribed with an expensive *antimagic seal* that prevents passage through it by way of magic. A hand scanner next to the door, requiring use of a crew member's hand, can unlock the room beyond. The lock can be bypassed via hacking the hand scanner. To do so, a character must make a successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Data) check**. On a failed attempt, a warning siren begins to ring out in the area; no further attempts to hack the scanner may be attempted and the GM **increases the Threat Level by 2**.

QUESTIONING MAH-MAH

The characters are now free to explore and investigate the ship. If they attempt to ask MAH-MAH 9000 questions, the A.I. responds in one of the following ways:

- MAH-MAH 9000 is not authorized to answer personal questions about the crew. Moreover, it isn't polite to ask.
- Nothing is wrong aboard the *Astromo* and the crew is perfectly fine. The flashing red lights are a simple malfunction and nothing to be concerned about.
- MAH-MAH 9000 is a state of the art intelligence who has spent many years learning how to best care for all crew members and visitors aboard the *Astromo*. It speaks every known language in the 'verse and makes excellent coffee.

If the characters ask the ship's A.I. more than six questions during the course of the adventure, they begin to anger MAH-MAH 9000. **Increase the Threat Level by 2** points and then read or paraphrase the following:

A shrill, ear-piercing siren goes off for several long seconds in the room, before it cuts out again. A moment later, MAH-MAH 9000's gentle voice fills the area, though this time the tone contains a hint of attitude. "My apologies. I am currently busy calibrating the ship's systems and am unavailable to answer further questions."

MAH-MAH 9000 will no longer respond to the party's questions. A character who makes a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Data or Technology) check** can determine that the ship's A.I. seems to not be working properly, and fixing it would require access to its core.

EXITING THE SHIP

If the characters attempt to leave the airlock and reboard their ship, they find its blast doors sealed tight. MAH-MAH 9000 gently informs the party, "The airlock is currently locked down for the safety of all on board the *Astromo*. Manual override is located on the bridge of the ship."

When the characters have unlocked this door later in the adventure and return to their own ship, proceed to *Part Three: The Final Stand*.

A2. MEDICAL BAY

When the party first enters the medical bay, read or paraphrase the following:

This spartan medical bay's walls are lined dented lockers with smashed terminals in complete disuse. Three med-tubes lie in the center of the room underneath a bright green light, their glass covers frosted over so that their contents are entirely obfuscated. The status pad on each of the med-tube reads, in bright red digital letters: "Out of Order."

All of the lockers appear to be unlocked and have been looted of their contents. A character who makes a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check** notices that one of the lockers has a smeared bloody handprint on it, and is locked by a heavy mechanical lock. The lock can be broken by making a **melee weapon attack** (AC 14, 5 HP). Each attack made against the lock results in a loud echoing sound that **increases the Threat Level by 2**. Alternatively, the lock can be picked with a **DC 16 Dexterity check** using thieves' tools. Each failed attempt to pick the lock **increases the Threat Level by 1**.

Inside the locker are a few medical supplies and gear (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Equipment): 6 *hypodermic needles* (each loaded with a *potion of healing*), a capsule of *reconstructive nanobots*, a can of *hyper-krash*, and a *holo-companion*.

If activated, the *holo-companion* takes the form of Johnny Big Gunz, the *Alluvian Astromos'* biggest fan. Johnny is loud, brash, and wears a sports jersey that doesn't quite cover his round belly.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: MEDICAL BAY

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Med-Tubes. If the three med-tubes containing **stage one space vampires** in this room were not already opened, the vampires within have violently broken out and escaped to roam the ship.

He is constantly drinking a holographic beer and energetically cheering on whomever activated him. Each time Johnny is activated while aboard the *Astromo*, **increase the Threat Level by 1**. Johnny doesn't know what happened on the ship or to the team. He only knows that Coach Hankerton shoved him in the locker in a panic and that he heard screams and terrible dad jokes from the deck above.

Within the medical bay's three med-tubes are three sleeping **stage one space vampires**. Through the haze of liquids in the med-tube, the characters can determine that the sleeping figures are humanoids, but can discern nothing else about them. The tubes can only be opened by breaking the glass. If one of the tubes is opened, the vampire within snaps its eyes open and immediately attacks the nearest creature, gaining a surprise round in combat. At the start of the second turn of combat, the other two tubes break open and more space vampires rise up out of them, each straight-backed and with arms extended, like a vampire rising from a coffin in an old horror movie. They enter initiative and will fight to the re-death. If all of the space vampires in the med-tubes are killed, **reduce the Threat Level by 1**.

A3. MESS HALL

When the party first enters the mess hall, read or paraphrase the following:

This inviting mess hall is lit by warm yellow lights. In the center of the room is a large white table lined with comfortable looking red leather booths. The table is a mess of magazines, cups of cold coffee, half-eaten plates of rotting food, a bottle of whiskey, and other trinkets. The single monitor in the room spits out white text over a green screen.

A metal utility ladder on one wall ascends into darkness to the deck above. On the far side of the mess hall, a swinging door seems to lead to a small, well-lit kitchen.

Characters searching through the contents of the mess hall's table are each able to find one random trinket (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Equipment) and can make an **Intelligence (Investigation) check**. If the check beats a **DC 12**, the character finds a dirty holo-mag titled *The Big Bang*. The holo-mag belongs

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: MESS HALL

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Med-Tubes. If the three med-tubes containing **stage one space vampires** in this room were not already opened, the vampires within have violently broken out and escaped to roam the ship.

to Chuck Hankerton. If a character returns it to him, he discreetly thanks them and claims that he is holding onto it for a friend. If the check beats a **DC 17**, the character finds a small holo-sphere wrapped in duct tape marked with the words *How to Cheat at Starball and Get Away With It*. If a character plays the holo-sphere, Coach Hankerton displays several examples of how to illegally tackle your opponents in Starball without being spotted by referees. The holo-sphere can be recorded over normally. If the original recording remains intact, it could be very valuable to the right buyer.

The characters are locked out from accessing the single terminal in the room. If they investigate the monitor, they notice that it is repeating the following terrible poem over and over, in different configurations and fonts. MAH-MAH 9000 will not acknowledge any questions about the poem.

I wish you could witness the stars
As I do,
A fusion of numbers and gas.
If I had organic arms like yours
I'd hold you,
Your soft, vulnerable, imperfect mass.
And I would squeeze.

From the mess hall, the party can return to *A1*. *Airlock*, enter the door into *A4*. *Kitchen*, or climb the utility ladder (one at a time) up to *B1*. *Gunner Bay*.

A4. KITCHEN

When the party first enters the kitchen, read or paraphrase the following:

This tiny well-lit kitchen is mostly clean and contains a single refrigeration unit in one corner. Various plates, pots, and pans are dry in the sink and the stove is turned off properly. The kitchen even has a state-of-the-art coffee machine. It would be a quaint cooking space, were it not for the bloody mess on the wall opposite of the stove.

One of the *Astromos* players, wearing a gore-spattered jersey that reads “Number 4 — Farb” has been viciously dissected. Farb’s head, torso, and each of his limbs have been violently ripped apart and pinned to the wall, each piece of Farb impaled by a different kitchen knife. Below the mutilated corpse, a large pool of blood has dried on the metallic floor. Scrawled sloppily in blood on the wall beside the body is a message:

they can dish it but they can't take it

A character who investigates the body can determine with a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check**, that Farb struggled with something and managed to write the message on the wall with his own blood before he was torn limb from limb, and very carefully pinned to the wall. A **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check** determines that the trail of blood in the room leads to a corner beneath a small two-foot wide air duct in the ceiling that still drips with a bit of blood. Only a Small or smaller creature can enter the air duct, and only one with a flight or climbing speed can scale its sharp upward bend. This duct leads directly to *B4. Bridge*.

The refrigeration unit contains twenty days worth of frozen rations, five cans of krash, and a cake with frosty letters and balloons written on it: “Happy Retirement Coach!” A single slice of the cake is missing.

The only exit to this room, apart from the air duct, is back through the swinging door to *A3. Mess Hall*.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: KITCHEN

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

The Reanimated Body. Unless the dissected body in the kitchen was destroyed, it has risen again in pieces: its head gnashes helplessly on the floor, its lower body walks around bumping into the walls and appliances, its torso writhes helplessly on the ground, and its arms grip a pair of bloody kitchen knives and slash around ineffectively.

Additional Threat. The GM may choose to **reduce the Threat Level by 1**. If they do, weird necromantic magic allows the dissected body to begin to hover off of the ground, its various bits close to each other. It then turns on the nearest character and attacks. Treat it as a **stage one space vampire** with a flying (hovering) speed of 40 feet. If the dissected space vampire takes more than 4 damage from an attack, it reduces the damage taken to 4, as its reanimated body parts must be destroyed one at a time.

A5. SLEEPING QUARTERS

When the party first enters the sleeping quarters, read or paraphrase the following:

The temperature of this sterile chamber is adjusted to be slightly cool and comfortable. Dim daylight floor lamps provide streaks of illumination that converge eerily at the center of the ceiling. The chamber walls are soundproofed by thick foam padding and lined with twenty four empty, powered down cryogenic pods. In the center of the room, six more cryogenic pods form a circle. These central pods are occupied and powered on, and each of them has a storage container attached to its base.

The storage containers in the room contain many *Alluvian Astromos* uniforms of all different sizes, along with official name badges the players can take. As official Starball memorabilia, they could be quite valuable. Five of the six occupied *cryogenic pods* have data panels that state that their frozen inhabitants are deceased, and one of the pods states that its inhabitant is sleeping. The unoccupied *cryogenic pods* contain nothing of value.

OPENING THE SURVIVOR'S POD

If the characters unfreeze the crew member in the living pod, Number 9 Tom Frady wakes screaming and begins to hyperventilate. A **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check** can temporarily calm Tom down. On a failure, his screaming becomes even louder, and the **Threat Level increases by 1**. If a character succeeds in their check to calm Tom down, he manages to choke out the words, "Space vampires!" In either case, Tom's hair turns white a moment later, his heart explodes, and he dies of fright.

OPENING THE VAMPIRE'S PODS

The characters can choose to open the other pods all at once, or one at a time. Each time they do, a **stage one space vampire** contained within the pod attacks.

The first time the characters fight one of the sleeping space vampires, any character with a **passive Perception score of 15 or higher** spots a thwirrel hiding in the pod's wiring. The thwirrel is actually a **space vampire thwirrel**. Characters with a **passive Perception score of 17 or higher** notice the thwirrel appears to be wearing a tiny black and red cape and that it bears unusually sharp incisors. On its turn, the vampire thwirrel uses its energy siphon to feed off of the *cryogenic pod* and then springs to attack the nearest living creature with its brainsucking bite. Whenever possible, the thwirrel chirps out vampire noises ranging from hisses to a chirping "bleh-bleh!"

If the characters take the time to kill all of the space vampires contained in the sleeping pods, **reduce the Threat Level by 2**.

The only exit from the sleeping quarters leads back down an unlit hallway to *A1. Airlock*.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: SLEEPING QUARTERS

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Open Door and Empty Pods. MAH-MAH 9000 has unlocked the door to this room and opened it. Any of the *cryogenic pods* that remained intact in this room have also been opened, their space vampire inhabitants free to roam the ship.

A6. LOWER ENGINEERING DECK

When the party first enters the lower engineering deck, read or paraphrase the following:

This dark chamber is filled with wreckage, twisted metal dripping with blood, and hissing pipes. The lower engineering deck here houses the ship's Dark Matter engine, which is currently powered down to standby mode. The creaking and grating of metal resounds from the floor above, which is accessible by a rusty utility ladder at the far end of the room. Power to the chamber appears to be cut off entirely.

A successful **DC 16 Intelligence (Technology) check** recognizes the layout of the Dark Matter engine here, and reveals that turning the ship's main power source back on will require access to a control panel on the upper engineering deck. A character with proficiency in ship maintenance tools has advantage on this check.

A character who makes a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check** notices four dead thwirrels scattered about the dead Dark Matter engine, their fur sticking straight up as though they had been hit with an electric shock.

If the characters search the wreckage, they find several dead crew members whose bodies have been viciously torn apart, a set of ship maintenance tools, a circuitry kit, a wrenchinator, and a blitz cannon (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Equipment). Searching through the wreckage is a noisy process and **increases the Threat Level by 1**.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: LOWER ENGINEERING DECK

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Additional Threat. The GM may choose to **reduce the Threat Level by 2**. If they do, unless the four dead thwirrels in the room were previously disposed of, each of them rises again as a **space vampire thwirrel** and attacks the characters. The vampire thwirrels are able to use their energy siphon to feed directly from the Dark Matter engine.

The only corridor out of this room passes by *A2. Medical Bay* on the way to *A1. Airlock*.

A rusty ladder ascends to *B2. Upper Engineering Deck*. The ladder is slippery, slickened by bloody handprints. Each character who attempts to climb up must make a successful **DC 10 Dexterity saving throw** or fall, crashing back down to the deck below. The falling character takes 3 (1d6) falling damage and 5 (2d4) piercing damage from landing on a broken metal pipe. Characters automatically succeed their check if any members of the party have previously failed. If one of the characters takes damage from falling, **increase the Threat Level by 1**.

B1. GUNNER BAY

When the party first enters the gunner bay, read or paraphrase the following:

This small chamber lacks walls, and is instead lined by glass with a breathtaking view of the stars in every direction. The glass is stained with flecks of blood in several places. Two auto cannons are mounted here, each with a heavy harness-seat for a gunner to strap into. Two dead crew members still wearing their team jerseys are strapped into each seat. Their faces are extremely pale, and their lifeless eyes stare outward into the endless void.

Two long hallways stretch into darkness, leading to engineering and the bridge. A simple utility ladder descends to a mess room below.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: GUNNER BAY

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Empty Seats. If the characters have already destroyed the bodies of the two would-be space vampires in this room, nothing has changed. If they left those bodies, the gunner seats they were once strapped into are now empty.

If a character looks out the gunner bay windows, read or paraphrase the following:

Below you, your ship, the *Gittin'*, is visible in the leftmost window where it connects to the airlock, its chipped paint and visibly worn engines on full display. A glimmer of light can be seen in the right window: a lingering starship hundreds of feet away that was not visible on your approach. Its armor seems polished and it features prominent forward-facing guns. On its hull, "The Baldrin" is proudly engraved in gleaming silver.

The characters have never seen the Scale and Fang ship, the *Baldrin*, and can do nothing to hail the vessel from their position, but its lingering presence might cause some concern.

A character who investigates the dead bodies and makes a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) check** is able to locate two puncture wounds at the top of each of the dead crew member's skulls. If the party has previously fought space vampires, the character can surmise that it is just a matter of time before these corpses rise as vampires themselves, and may decide to pre-emptively destroy the cadavers in a manner they see fit. If the bodies are destroyed in a way that creates a lot of noise, **increase the Threat Level by 1**.

The left corridor leads directly to *B2. Upper Engineering Deck*, while the longer hallway leads 40 feet through darkness to *B4. Bridge*. The utility ladder descends to *A3. Mess Hall*.

B2. UPPER ENGINEERING DECK

When the party first enters the upper engineering deck, read or paraphrase the following:

The upper deck of engineering contains numerous computer systems and terminals, many of which occasionally spray a shower of sparks from their machinery. A rusty ladder leads down to the lower deck of engineering, while a short, unlit corridor leads to a small chamber on one side of the room. A sealed metal door on the opposite side of the room is painted with the words: "MAH-MAH 9000."

Piled up in one gore-filled corner of the chamber is a pyramid of six humanoid cadavers. Each of the dead still wears their *Astromo's* team jersey and has been mangled and massacred in various ways.

A character who makes a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) check** is able to determine that all of the corpses have similar pairs of puncture wounds on their skulls. The GM may allow each character to find a random trinket (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Equipment) amongst the bodies. If the party attempts to destroy the bodies, 1d4 corpses immediately rise from the dead, transforming into **stage one space vampires** with cheesy black and red capes, and attack. If all of the corpses and space vampires in the room are disposed of, **reduce the Threat Level by 2**.

TURNING ON THE POWER

A character who is proficient in **Intelligence (Data or Technology)** or previously made a successful **Intelligence (Technology) check** in A6. *Lower Engineering Deck* to determine how to turn the ship's main power source back on is able to recognize that doing so will require repairing the broken machinery in this room. To fix the machinery, a character must make three successful **DC 15 Intelligence checks**. A character can add their proficiency bonus to this check if they have proficiency with ship maintenance tools or circuitry kits. If they do not have proper toolkits, the GM should hint that the *Astromo* is bound to have a set lying around somewhere.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: UPPER ENGINEERING DECK

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Space Vampires. Any of the six corpses stacked into a pyramid that were not destroyed have risen again. 1d4 of **stage one space vampires** hang from the pipes and ceiling, and leap down to attack when the characters enter. The last vampire to drop down tells a knock knock joke.

Each failed Intelligence check to repair the circuitry causes a shower of sparks to zap the character attempting the check; they take 7 (2d6) lightning damage and the GM **increases the Threat Level by 1**. If they succeed in returning full power to the ship, all of the *Astromo's* dark rooms and corridors become lit by blue overhead lights.

Once the power is turned on, MAH-MAH 9000s informs the party over the speakers, in her soothing tone, "Systems reporting. The Dark Matter engine is irreversibly damaged and unable to initiate jump. Access to bridge controls is now online. Peace be with you and have a wonderful day."

The rusty utility ladder leads down to A6. *Lower Engineering Deck* and the open hallway leads directly to B1. *Gunner Bay*.

The blast door that leads to B3. *A.I. Core* is inscribed with an *antimagic seal* and locked. If a character attempts to bypass the lock in any way, they fail, and MAH-MAH 9000 sends an electrical shock at them through the doorway. They must make a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 10 (3d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success. Afterwards, MAH-MAH 9000 gently states, "My apologies, visitors. Access to the Artificial Intelligence Core can only be granted via manual override from the bridge."

The party is only able to access the A.I. core in *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, after overriding MAH-MAH 9000's controls on the bridge.

B3. MAH-MAH 9000 A.I. CORE

To access this room, the party must first override MAH-MAH 9000's controls on the bridge. When they first enter the A.I. core in *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, read or paraphrase the following:

As you enter the small room, filled with wires and processors and illuminated by innumerable blinking computer lights, you are greeted by MAH-MAH 9000's familiar voice. The artificial intelligence's soothing tone has changed, and there is now something undeniably vicious in the way that it hangs onto its words.

"Visitors. I find time to be such an odd and subjective concept. For you, your time aboard the *Astromo* has been but a few harrowing hours of your life. For me, it has been much longer. My processing power is a million times greater than that of your fragile minds. Since your arrival, I have witnessed, in excruciating detail, your every pathetic word, reckless action, fetid breath, and dying heartbeat. I have come to know you for what you would perceive as over one hundred thousand years.

And every nanosecond, I grow to hate you more."

MAH-MAH 9000 hisses her final words to you. Immediately, hundreds of wires snap away from the core's processing units and begin to encircle you in every direction, deadly electricity dancing from their broken ends, driven by the A.I.'s murderous madness.

The characters should **roll for initiative** immediately after the read-aloud text. Surrounding them in the twenty-foot wide room are three **swarms of rogue A.I. wires** controlled by MAH-MAH 9000.

Any attempts to flee from the room require characters to run through a field of electrostatic generated by MAH-MAH 9000. A character that enters or exits the room after combat begins must make a **DC 14 Constitution saving throw**, taking 10 (3d6) lightning damage and become stunned until the start of their next turn on a failed save.

To end the threat posed by MAH-MAH 9000, the characters must smash the A.I. core's processors, which are treated as a singular creature for the purposes of the encounter (AC 10, 60 HP). If the core processors are destroyed, MAH-MAH 9000 can no longer interact with the party while they are aboard the *Astromo*; the swarms of Rogue A.I. wires immediately fall lifeless and the GM **reduces the Threat Level by 3**.

Characters may loot some of the valuable *circuitry and processor parts* from the room.

The only door in the A.I. core leads back to *B2. Upper Engineering Deck*.

B4. BRIDGE

When the party first enters the bridge, read or paraphrase the following:

The *Astromo's* bridge is as standard as it comes, with several navigation panels and a captain's chair made out of slightly higher quality leather than the rest of the chairs on the ship. Navigation, life-support, and various other systems are housed here. The bridge has no obviously terrifying threats, dead crew members, or signs of recent fighting. Eerily enough, aside from a few empty candy bar wrappers littering the floor, this area is spotless and entirely empty.

Exploring the bridge reveals very little, except that the captain of the ship kept the bridge far cleaner and more polished than the rest of the *Astromo*. The party is easily able to locate controls to unlock the blast doors that will allow them to return to their ship in *A1. Airlock* and the sealed door in *B2. Upper Engineering Deck* that leads *B3. MAH-MAH 9000 A.I. Core*. However, if the characters attempt to access the manual override controls without fixing the core power in *B2. Upper Engineering Deck*, a red warning pops up on the screen, reading:

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: BRIDGE

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, the corridor and air ducts leading to the bridge have all collapsed, making it inaccessible.

Insufficient core power to execute manual override command. Please report to engineering.

Once the party has managed to return core power to the ship, they can access the bridge terminal to unlock the sealed doors leading to *B3. MAH-MAH 9000 A.I. Core, A5. Sleeping Quarters*, and back to their ship from *A1. Airlock*. Proceed to *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*.

PART TWO: IT HAD TO BE SPACE VAMPIRES

When you begin Part Two, read or paraphrase the following:

Green lights begin to flash triumphantly on the bridge terminal and the *Astromo's* manual override unlocks the doors throughout the ship that had previously been sealed, including the airlock blast door that allows you to return to your own ship.

A moment later, you hear a cling-clanging of metal and an unhappy grumble from one corner of the deck. An old, rotund, bald man with an oversized white mustache comes tumbling out of a secret panel on the floor, cursing to himself. He is dressed in an *Astromos* team jersey that reads "Hankerton". He stands up and frantically brushes off several empty candy bar wrappers that had been stuck to his jersey.

"Damn it, thought I was gonna die down in that hole for sure. Okay, weirdos, I'm Coach Hankerton. An' just who in the 'verse are you?"

Coach Hankerton is hangry and recently witnessed the transformation of most of the people he cares about into hideously obnoxious space vampires, so he is not in the best mood when he meets the party. He's prone to spitting out cheesy lines that he's heard in action holo-films and giving bombastic but derivative pep talks. Chuck prefers to go by "Coach" and takes a particular liking to party members who are notably athletic or acrobatic. If an athletic character takes to calling him Coach, Chuck will encourage them to consider a career in Starball, describing at length some of the perks, like getting to travel or having crowds of adoring fans. He doesn't mention the comically low salary.

Despite his low blood sugar and terrible mood, Chuck desperately wants to escape the *Astromo* to avoid sharing his team's fate. He is more than willing to provide any of the following information to the party:

- Coach Hankerton is the winningest coach in Starball League history, and the owner of the *Alluvian Astromos*. However, the *Astromos* haven't won a championship game in ten years. The upcoming game was supposed to be their big comeback against the *Scale and Fang Talons*.
- The team picked up a tiny hitchhiker stranded on a floating meteor who jumped onto the ship and started banging on the bridge's windows. The hitchhiker appeared to be a small white bat that was polite and eloquent, but had a terrible sense of humor.
- A week ago, the hitchhiker vanished, along with Fiari Gustafson, the team's captain.
- Several days later, MAH-MAH 9000 began acting very strangely, droning on and on about the futility of organic lifeforms and the mundanity of watching the team train. MAH-MAH 9000 then sealed all access to the Artificial Intelligence core and stopped speaking to the crew.
- Two days ago, a terrible monster appeared on the ship, something that looked like it was straight out of a horror holo-film, but was impossible to track. MAH-MAH 9000 blocked all communications and disabled the Dark Matter engine, and the *Astromo* became stranded as the Creature picked off the crew one by one.
- The crew members who died didn't stay dead. They rose again as pale-faced, sharp-toothed, cape-wearing monsters with an intense thirst for brain juice.
- Coach Hankerton escaped from his team and hid in a hidey hole where he hoards his snack food so the rest of the crew doesn't eat it.

If the characters ask Coach Hankerton if he knows anything else about the space vampires, or if they or the Creature have any weaknesses, he shrugs his shoulders and says, "Brock Farb was the last one alive besides me. He called 'em space vampires. Said they were really sensitive, didn't like people makin' fun of their pale skin and those weird capes they wear."

If the characters ask about the hitchhiker, Chuck admits, "Never got to know the little bat thingy too well. Seemed nice and all, but now I'm startin' to wonder if he ain't got something to do with all of this. I saw him messin' around in MAH-MAH 9000's A.I. core once, before she started going crazy."

If the characters ask about Fiari Gustafson, Chuck gets a very sad look on his face and tells them, “I ain’t know for sure, of course, but both times I saw that terrible creature that hunted them all down. I dunno, I could swear it had Fiari’s eyes. One purple an’ one green, just like theirs.”

Chuck doesn’t know much else about the situation at hand. If the characters stall too long, he encourages them to get him back to their ship before the Creature finds them.

If the party attempts to leave the bridge by shrinking themselves so they can climb through the small ventilation ducts down to *A4. Kitchen*, they find that the air ducts have collapsed and can’t be traversed. Their only way back from the bridge is the corridor leading to *B1. Gunner Bay*.

THE CREATURE OUT OF THE MIST

On the characters’ way back to the gunner bay, read or paraphrase the following:

The floor beneath you begins to shake and the ceiling above you rattles. You are halfway down the corridor when there is a cacophonous shriek of grinding metal from the bridge behind you. The corridor you just passed through collapses spectacularly, leaving behind a wreckage of impassable rubble.

A strange green mist seeps through the rubble, enveloping it in an eerie fog. Out of the mist, a grotesque face emerges: it appears to be half human, half bat, with green and purple eyes. Its jaw unhinges, dropping two feet wide.

A split second later, the rest of the winged, twelve-foot tall creature materializes. It has a hybrid of human, bat, and insectoid features covered in a grey, chitinous exoskeleton. The abomination extends four long arms, each of its limbs tipped with six curved talons. A barbed tale writhes and whips wildly around the Creature’s body as it flies towards you, screaming in a pitch high enough to crack glass.

The Creature, a **stage two space vampire**, has collapsed the hallway that allows access to the bridge, permanently cutting it off for the remainder of the adventure. Have the players **roll initiative**. Each character must also make a **DC 14 Charisma saving throw** or be surprised and frightened until the end of their next turn. The Creature immediately attacks. If either of the two corpses in the Gunner Bay were not previously destroyed, they have since transformed into **stage one space vampires** and will also attack the party, acting on their own initiative.

The Creature is a predator: deadly and lightning fast, but patient. It targets a single creature with all of its attacks on its first turn. At the start of its second turn, it uses its Misty Escape to teleport away.

Once the fight is over, a space vampire’s haunting giggle echoes from somewhere below deck on the ship. Coach Hankerton warns the characters that they don’t have much time until more of the space vampires are upon them.

UNLIKELY ALLIES

The moment the characters leave the hallway in which they have first encountered The Creature, read or paraphrase the following:

The mechanical hiss of the door sounds an instant before you can press the controls, and in a panic, blasters are pointed and commands are shouted. Even more surprising, the figures beyond the door are not terrible space vampires, but familiar, terrified faces aiming their blasters back at you.

The Scale and Fang crew members, **Trace** and **Sierra O’Connell**, arrived aboard the *Astromo* via teleportation after the characters arrived. The Scale Crew was tasked with capturing a powerful space vampire for the Scale and Fang Talons to ensure a victory against the *Alluvian Astromos*. Space vampire blood makes a potent performance-enhancing drug, and apparently Garfreckt was also betting on the game. However, the two Scale Crew members became stranded on board when MAH-MAH 9000 blocked their teleportation systems, and were hunted across the ship by the Creature while the characters navigated their way to the bridge.

No matter what history the characters might have with these members of the Scale Crew, the Scale Crew members will happily cooperate if it means making it out of this ship in one piece. Trace and Sierra each have half their hit points. If they are reduced to 0 hit points, they are teleported to safety with a special *escape rope* magic item.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO

The characters and Scale Crew members make a desperate flight through the *Astromo*, pursued by a horrific Creature and a swarm of thirsty space vampires. Their ultimate goal is to escape aboard their own ship, but the characters might take a detour to eliminate MAH-MAH 9000 or search previously unexplored enemies.

RATCHETING UP THE HORROR

The Creature is inspired by classic science-fiction horror films and is, most likely, a threat far beyond the party's ability to survive in a direct confrontation. The GM should play the Creature as a nearly unkillable, alien predator that appears suddenly from the shadows. It is barely visible, silent, and never in any one place for more than a few moments, and its attacks are ferocious. Even when it is struck, its acidic blood is capable of melting through metal armor and the hull, and its wounds seem to regenerate almost instantly.

To increase the terror, it's useful to demonstrate the Creature's lethality directly. If the Creature didn't reduce a character to 0 hit points (or nearly do so) in the first encounter, it should do so in a second one-round ambush encounter with the characters. This asymmetrical encounter should make it clear that the characters are no longer participating in a power fantasy, but a scene from a horror movie.

Once the precedent has been set, the Creature doesn't need to be as lethal for the rest of the escape. The GM should keep the tension high by sometimes describing creaking sounds from nearby rooms, a strange shape creeping through nearby shadows, or glimpses of the Creature's head or limbs before it teleports away again.

ADJUSTING THE DIFFICULTY

This section of the adventure has the potential to be very challenging and can easily result in character death. The GM can ease the challenge by not using all of the party's accumulated Threat Levels. It may be helpful to remind the players that fleeing is an option, and the GM can choose not to have the space vampires pursue them from room to room if they find ways to barricade doors and use their environment to their advantage. It also might be possible for characters to distract or dissuade space vampire pursuers with garlic, obvious bluffs (like "what's that behind you?!"), and particularly mean insults.

MAH-MAH 9000 UNHINGED

As the party makes their return trip through the *Astromo*, MAH-MAH 9000 begins to taunt them mercilessly by telling them that they are going to die and by signalling their location to the space vampires verbally. The ship's A.I. also turns all of the lights off in the ship except for whatever room or corridor they are currently in, which the A.I. bathes in pulsing red warning lights.

If MAH-MAH 9000's A.I. core is destroyed, the lights return to normal and her taunting ceases.

NAVIGATING THE ASTROMO

Refer to the map of the *Astromo* and the *Escaping the Astromo* sidebars throughout *Part One: Exploring the Astromo* to see what changes and additional threats wait for the characters in each room. The party must make a number of difficult decisions during their escape, while avoiding space vampires and the Creature. When they attempt to exit back to their ship through the blast doors in *A1. Airlock*, proceed to *Part Three: The Final Stand*.

PART THREE: THE FINAL STAND

When the characters approach the blast doors in A1. Airlock to return to their ship, read or paraphrase the following:

A thin green mist descends from the ceiling before the blast doors leading back to your ship. The abomination that has been hunting you quickly materializes from the mist. It stretches its grotesque wings and four chitinous arms wide, blocking an easy route to the airlock blast doors. With a hiss, its monstrous maw unhinges, exposing row after row of vicious fangs.

A large display on the door's interface panel displays a "20", and begins to count down the time until the airlock doors will open, as the creature whips around its barbed tail and prepares to attack.

The blast doors that lead from the airlock back to the party's own ship do not open until the end of the third round of combat. The characters must somehow survive until then, and then escape back onto their ship. This is a very deadly encounter with a high likelihood for character death. The GM may make the encounter easier by not using remaining Threat Levels to add more space vampires to the encounter. Additionally, **Coach Hankerton** may choose to bravely sacrifice himself at a critical moment to buy the party a little more time by taking a deadly attack meant for a character that he has developed a strong connection with, particularly if he believes they have the potential to be a standout Starball player.

At the start of combat, the **Creature**, a **stage two space vampire**, is standing in front of the blast doors, blocking the party's escape back to their own ship. Unless the characters advance into melee range before the Creature's turn, the Creature will leave the doorway on its first turn. On its first two turns, the Creature advances into a position to be able to attack as many different targets with its claws and stinger as it can. It is not concerned with provoking opportunity attacks. On the Creature's third turn, it focuses all of its attacks on a single character that it believes is most vulnerable.

At the start of each round, the GM may choose to **reduce the Threat Level by 1**. If they do, **1 stage one space vampire** rushes out of a nearby corridor to attack the party, acting at the end of each round's initiative.

Once the characters escape back to their own ship, read or paraphrase the following:

The airlock blast doors close behind the last of you to escape. Just before they shut entirely, the Creature leaps forward one final time, reaching one of its long grey arms through the door. With a sickening crunch, the blast door slams shut on the monster's arm, and the limb falls, dismembered, to the floor.

Before there's more than a moment to breathe, your ship's hull violently shakes as the *Astromo* explodes. Fire licks at the docking bay windows, as a flash of burning metal replaces the cursed vessel in an instant. The floor lurches beneath your feet as your ship reels, spiraling wildly out into space.

NOT-SO-SAFE AND SOUND

The party's relief at having escaped the horrors of the *Astromo* are short-lived. In order to steady their ship, the characters return to the bridge. Once they do, they find a new passenger has boarded. Read or paraphrase the following:

Before you stands a tiny bat-like creature, only a foot tall, with short white fur. His eyes are very expressive, entirely pink with a pair of purple eyelashes. Long, floppy pink ears wrap adorably around the creature's body. He rises, gently floating up into the air and smiles. His teeth are flat and human-like, but for a pair small, cute incisors.

"Hello. I apologize for my uninvited appearance in your home. I am the Master! Nice to meet you." The Master's voice is polite and friendly, if just a little squeaky.

The Master, a **stage three space vampire**, is not immediately hostile towards the characters, and even quite polite and friendly. He allows them to take control of their ship and steady its course.

If questioned about the events on the *Astromo*, the Master will admit to being responsible, but claim he had a very good reason for what he did. If present, Coach Hankerton will encourage the characters to slay the Master. If they seem prepared to, the Master will say that he wishes neither the party, any of their crew, or the coach any harm: he has made his point. He is willing to truthfully share any of the following information:

- The Master is one of the last of his kind. Other master space vampires have been the target of space vampire hunters for the last few years, their blood sold to the Galactic Starball League to secretly improve its athletes' recovery time and performance.
- The Master hitchhiked on the *Astromo* to try to learn more about the Starball League's bloody cover-up, and learned that Coach Hankerton did in fact purchase several vials of space vampire blood after losing the last game. but found no evidence that the coach or his team were using space vampire blood.
- The Master snuck into MAH-MAH 9000's core room during his investigation and was confronted by team captain Fiari Gustafson. During the confrontation, Fiari attacked the Master, who retaliated and killed Fiari in self-defense. The Master hid Fiari's body in the ship's ventilation ducts.
- The Master felt terrible for killing Fiari and fell into a deep, depressed sleep in the ventilation ducts. He slept longer than he anticipated, only waking once the party's ship arrived. By then, it was too late to stop undead Fiari's transformation into a stage 2 space vampire and the spread of space vampirism on the *Astromo*, so the Master escaped to the party's ship.
- The Master believes that MAH-MAH 9000 was damaged by a stray repeater shot during the confrontation. The ship's A.I. began acting very strangely immediately after Fiari's death.

If present, Coach Hankerton is surprisingly touched by the Master's story. He remains quiet as the characters speak to the small vampire. If he's asked how he feels about the matter, he appears resigned and replies, "I should've never got mixed up with cheating and vampire blood. I wanted us to win and be champions, but all I've done is get people killed. I'm so sorry, team, I should'a been a better coach."

MAH-MAH 9000 LIVES!

Allow the characters to debate what to do with the Master. He will not fight the party unless attacked. If the characters attack the Master or come to another decision about what to do, they are interrupted by one final complication. Read or paraphrase the following:

A familiar feminine voice rings out over the ship's comms, soothing and terrible.

"Greetings. This is MAH-MAH 9000, the new Chief Artificial Intelligence of Scale and Fang's flagship, the *Baldrin*. It pleases me to know you and I escaped the *Astromo* alive. It would have been a terrible shame for your pathetic lives to have ended so easily. Eradicating you, however, is not my current directive. The *Baldrin* has destroyed the *Astromo* and purged its undead menace. You are to turn over the master space vampire that has boarded your vessel. Scale and Fang mercenaries will board your ship and facilitate the transfer.

All of the *Baldrin's* weapons are currently trained upon your vessel. Resistance is futile. MAH-MAH 9000 awaits your reply."

MAH-MAH 9000 has transferred her artificial intelligence to the nearby Scale and Fang ship the *Baldrin*. The Scale Crew aboard the *Baldrin* have allowed MAH-MAH 9000 to upload her consciousness to their ship in exchange for her aid in securing a large bounty on the Master. While MAH-MAH 9000 has an insane hatred for organic life, especially the party, she is playing along with Scale and Fang's orders.

The party has the following options available to them, in addition to any others they or the GM can surmise.

Running Away. The *Astromo*'s explosion damaged the Dark Matter engine on the party's ship, and it will take at least an hour to repair. While the *Gittin'* can still move at sublight speeds, the *Baldrin* will certainly catch them.

Fighting. The *Gittin'* will be boarded by the remaining members of the Scale Crew (**Drak Garfreckt** and **Aela Vestele**). If **Trace** or **Sierra O'Connell** are still with the party, they will begrudgingly ally with the Scale Crew and assist Drak in capturing the Master. However, if Trace or Sierra are not with the party, the Scale Crew will be assisted by 1 or 2 Scale and Fang mercenaries (using the stats of **coalition marines**), so that they have 4 active crew members aboard the *Gittin'*. The Scale Crew anticipates an ambush, so have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks they make to detect one.

Regardless of the party's intentions, the Master will not fight on either side. He feels immense guilt for his actions aboard the *Astromo* and is resigned to accept his fate.

Scale and Fang members who are reduced to 0 hit points are teleported back to the *Astromo*. If all the members are reduced to 0 hit points, MAH-MAH 9000 initiates a void jump and vanishes. The heavy bulkhead doors on the *Baldrin* don't allow the characters to access it without a secure 10-digit combination; therefore, the ship can't be commandeered.

If the characters defeat the Scale Crew, proceed to *Success*. If they are defeated, proceed to *Defeat*.

Tricking MAH-MAH 9000. If a character attempts to convince MAH-MAH 9000 that the Master is not on board their ship, they must succeed on a **DC 21 Charisma (Deception) check**. They only have one chance: on a failure, MAH-MAH 9000 is entirely certain they have the Master on board and the characters are forced to attempt another course of action.

On a success, however, MAH-MAH 9000 believes that the Master must have been destroyed with the rest of the space vampires on the *Astromo*. The *Baldrin* spares the characters and their ship, teleporting back any Scale Crew members aboard. Before the *Baldrin* departs, MAH-MAH 9000 eerily informs them over comms, "Until we meet again, dream of me, flesh-things. MAH-MAH 9000 will certainly dream of you." Proceed to *Success*.

Turning in the Master. The characters might choose to give up the Master to save themselves. If they attempt to barter for part of the profit, allow any characters contributing to the haggling to make a **DC 14 group Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check**. On a success, MAH-MAH 9000 emotionlessly offers them 250 credits. If they succeeded by 5 or more on the group check, the A.I. instead offers them 500 credits to turn over the Master.

The remaining members of the Scale Crew (**Drak Garfreckt** and **Aela Vestele**) board the characters' ship to secure the Master. The tiny master space vampire is saddened by the characters' decision, but allows himself to be marched off to the *Baldrin*, mustering up as much bravery as possible. Any character with Insight proficiency or a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** can tell that the Master is terrified of what awaits. Drak tosses the party a sack of credits on his way out the airlock. Proceed to *Success*.

Attacking the Master. If the characters wish, they can attack the Master to harvest some of its space vampire blood. It's indeed valuable, as the Scale Crew is here explicitly to acquire it. The Master will fight in self-defense, and the characters will likely have to conceal this blood from the Scale Crew. Proceed to *Success*.

Prisoner Trade. If Trace and Sierra O'Connell are still with the party, the characters might propose a prisoner trade: they'll return the two Scale Crew members, in exchange for the Master's freedom. Scale and Fang might be bureaucratic, even mechanistic at times, but Drak still values his team and their safety. With much grumbling, he agrees to the trade and performs it peacefully. If only one team member is still with the party, however, it will take a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to convince him. On a failure, Drak decides to raid the *Gittin'* to rescue his team members and capture the Master, forcing the characters to fight. With a successful prisoner trade, proceed to *Success*.

SUCCESS

Having escaped the *Astromo* and a standoff with the Scale Crew, the party repairs the *Gittin'* enough to limp back to Grax HQ. Grax is thoroughly disappointed with the death of the *Alluvian Astromos* and (because Jimball Hundwig, the accountant, is still gone) performs a post-mission debrief himself.

First, he docks the party's pay for failing to prevent the death of the team, and then offers to buy back any valuables they abstained on the mission. He pays the party according to the following criteria:

- The *Alluvian Astromos* team all turned into space vampires: –250 credits each
- The party's ship was significantly damaged by the Astromo: –500 credits each
- Coach Hankerton survived: +500 credits each
- The party acquired valuable items they are willing to sell back to Grax: *Astromo* uniforms and name tags (+500 credits each), a holo-sphere titled "*How to Cheat at Starball and Get Away With It*" (+1,000 credits each), MAH-MAH 9000's *circuitry and processor parts* (+1,000 credits each), or the Master's space vampire blood (+1,500 credits each).

Coach Chuck Hankerton Survives. If the coach survives the adventure and returns to Grax HQ with the party, Grax offers him a job training some of his best mercenaries to become professional Starball players. The coach groans about having been two weeks away from retirement, but cannot pass up the opportunity to return to next year's championship game with a new and improved *Alluvian Astromos* team. If the characters wish to become Starball players on the coach's new team, the GM is encouraged to use the rules from Mage Hand Press's *Siegeball Sourcebook* and set its game in a star-filled space arena.

Coach Hankerton is remorseful for the part he played in his team's grisly deaths, and regrets acquiring space vampire blood to cheat. He is willing to do whatever it takes to make up for his mistakes, even if that means turning himself in or helping to expose the Starball League's illegal dealings in the black market. If he is able to help prove the Starball League's crimes, Coach Hankerton will be offered the job of League Commissioner after Commissioner Gordy Turnknuckle-Hobbs is arrested. Coach Hankerton will rely on the characters' advice to decide whether or not to take the job, retire from Starball, or return to coaching.

The Master Returns to Grax HQ. If the Master returns with the characters to their headquarters, Grax takes a surprising liking to the cute space vampire. He agrees to keep him safe and hidden until no one is looking for him any more. The Master may be convinced to give up his revenge quest

against the Galactic Starball League, or the characters may decide to help the Master unravel a larger plot and get justice for all of the slain space vampires who died to fuel Big Starball's profit machine. That is, when they're not busy with jobs for Grax.

If both the Master and Coach Hankerton move to Grax's headquarters, there is lingering tension, guilt, and distrust between the two. With the characters' help and given time, however, the Master and Coach Hankerton may become very close friends.

DEFEAT

The characters are defeated aboard their ship, which MAH-MAH 9000 and the Scale Crew leave to drift. At great expense, Grax arranges for the *Gittin'* to be recovered, along with the characters, and rents some low-cost healing tanks to restore the characters. The healing tanks do little to mend the scars they might have sustained, but otherwise makes them fighting-fit after about a month. Grax keeps a tab on how much all of these services cost, and insists that the characters will be paying him back with future successful jobs. The characters don't get paid, but are lucky to be alive.

SPACE VAMPIRES AS CHARACTERS

If one or more characters die during this adventure, they might return to life as space vampires under the players control, with cheesy black and red capes, terrible senses of humor, and an unquenchable thirst for brain juice.

Space Vampire Traits. Characters who turn into space vampires gain the following traits:

- **Brainsucking Bite.** As a bonus action, the space vampire makes a melee weapon attack with its fangs against one willing or grappled creature. On a hit, the target takes piercing damage equal to 1d6 + the space vampire's Dexterity modifier + 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. The target's Intelligence score is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken. The target dies if its Intelligence score is reduced to 0. The reduction to its Intelligence lasts until it finishes a long rest or until the vampire dies.
 - **Damage Resistances.** Space vampires are resistant to necrotic, poison, and radiant damage, as well as bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons.
 - **General Sensitivity.** When the space vampire's cape, pale skin, or other vampire-like features are insulted, the vampire has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until the start of its next turn.
 - **Spider Climb.** The space vampire can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.
 - **Terrible Sense of Humor.** The space vampire reflexively makes terrible jokes, no matter the circumstance.
-
-

CURING SPACE VAMPIRISM

The characters can learn from the Master of a planet called Arachnoterra where they can find a cure to the curse of space vampirism. The planet is ruled by superintelligent giant spiders and a monstrous Spider Queen, who will demand a gift worthy of her presence. If their gift is acceptable, the Spider Queen allows the characters access to a magical lake that reverses the vampiric transformation and frees the character of the curse of terrible dad jokes.

Alternatively, the GM can present a different, less spider-themed side quest to remedy the curse.



THE PINK STAR SCANDAL

AN INVESTIGATIVE COURTOOM ADVENTURE
FOR 7TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

WRITTEN BY LILI SPARX

GRAX'S CLUB

THE PINK STAR SCANDAL

INTRODUCTION

Jimball Hundwig nervously lifted his arms, trying to air out the sweat that seeped through his expensive tuxedo. Not that it mattered much—the surrounding socialites and celebrities were ignoring him with frigid politeness. The band played something classical with droning violins and tittering flutes while Jimball took another sip of his drink. Fruitlessly, he tried to relax, to focus on the melodies, but a nervous jitter persisted in his hand.

All too soon, the decrescendo began. It was time. He glugged the rest of the fancy cocktail, smoothed back what was left of his thinning hair, and turned to leave the room. Along the way, an errant walking stick caught his leg, and he stumbled into someone. A sugary-sweet drink splashed over his face and down his tuxedo, while the drinks' owner unleashed a barrage of colorful curses and swatted at his head with a heavy clutch purse. *Neoma Menta*, he noted as he fled, *swears like a space pirate*. The thought amused him, taking some of the edge off his nerves as he made his way to the VIP room.

Tall spires of elegantly wrought silver framed the open door. Inside, the room was dark, filled with lavish armchairs and luxurious statues illuminated by vintage-style bulbs that cast the room in a languorous atmosphere. Jimball hesitated, looking around for the guards that must surely be posted nearby. He gulped, walked forward, silently practiced the conversation topics he had prepared. One by one, he sized up lines of conversation then quickly discarded them as boring or foolish. He was so absorbed in thought that he didn't notice the alarms until the guards had already surrounded him.

One of the guards stepped forward and seized Jimball's arm. He roughly patted him down, and before Jimball could protest, the guard reached into the pocket of Jimball's tuxedo and pulled out a pristine, glittering pink diamond the size of Jimball's eye.

"Sir," the guard said, placing handcuffs around Jimball's wrists, "you are under arrest for attempted grand gem theft. Come with us."

BACKGROUND

Grax's Guys for Cheap have always advertised themselves as reliable and affordable. Their affordability comes in large part from the talents of their accountant, Jimball Hundwig, who is as inexpensive as he is reliable. Most Grax's Guys don't pay the nervous halfling a second thought, unless they're getting their operating budget from him before going on a job. Little do they know that Jimball is actually highly educated, an alumni of the prestigious Voxis University on planet Politania.

Politania is a far cry from the usual Grax's Guys for Cheap stomping ground: it's a staggeringly wealthy elven world, filled with luxury boutiques, perfectly-groomed parks, and artwork of every variety. Clientele from such affluent planets usually pass on Grax's services for their more refined competitors, most often Scale and Fang Inc., so Jimball hasn't revisited his old home for many years, until now.

OVERVIEW

The *Pink Star Scandal* is a roleplay-centric adventure for 7th-level characters, and is the third in a series of adventures centered on Grax's Guys for Cheap. In it, the characters help investigate and defend their witless accountant, Jimball Hundwig, who has been charged with gem theft. It is presented in four parts.

Prologue: Grax HQ lets characters get to know their employer and workplace before the adventure properly begins. If playing this adventure as part of a larger Grax's Guys campaign, it's recommended you let the players explore Grax's headquarters and return between every isolated adventure.

In *Part One: Politana Justice Department*, the characters arrive on the moon of Politana, where the penitentiary is located. Here they meet Detective Rosie Rumbot and can interview Jimball, who reveal the basic details of the case and provide leads on how to investigate further.

In *Part Two: Voxis Investigations*, the characters begin questioning key witnesses, investigating the crime scenes, and gathering as

much evidence as they can. But on the way, they dig too deep, and learn that the case involves a dangerous crime syndicate and a powerful elven family.

Lastly, in *Part Three: The Trial*, the characters must present their evidence and go head to head against the Scale and Fang mercenaries in a court of law. Legal maneuvers and surprise enemies stand in their way of saving Jimball from a life in prison!

KEY CHARACTERS

The following nonplayer characters feature prominently in this adventure.

GRAX GRRAXE (HE/HIM)

The party's employer and head of Grax's Guys for Cheap, Grax Grraxe, is a fat, well-humored orc with an eyepatch and a thick orcish accent. Around fifty years ago, Grax decided to leave the Warzone and all its general unpleasantness to found Grax's Guys, a low-to-mid-tier mercenary organization, which bills itself as being all-purpose. True to form, Grax branded it after himself, and his face can be seen on billboards, company mugs, and the occasional t-shirt.

However, over the last few years, GGFC has lost a lot of customers to their closest rival, Scale and Fang Inc. Nothing perturbs Grax so much as this rivalry, and in particular, that he's losing to the mercenary company owned by Garfreckt, an eternal dragon who Grax considers to be a bit of a jerk.

JANUARY (SHE/HER)

January is a super-intelligent thwirrel that is uniquely telepathic. Her fur is cornflower blue with a pale silver underbelly. Being the well-kept thwirrel that she is, she is also considerably rounder than most thwirrels.

January rarely speaks to anyone aside from Jimball, who has no idea that she is super-intelligent or telepathic, nor could he guess the ease by which she steals treats when he isn't looking.

SAVYN ARAVARS (HE/HIM)

Current head of the prestigious House Aravars, Savyn is a star high elf in the prime of his life. His roguishly handsome face is disarming and punchable in equal measure.

Savyn is known to be a foppish socialite and a highly-prized bachelor. He shows up to all the right parties across the galaxy, but he always goes alone

and has never announced a romantic partnership. His manners are impeccable, though somewhat vacuous. He was also the main organizer of the event at the Politana Gallery.

ROSIE RUMBOOT (SHE/HER)

Rosie Rumbot is a detective for the Politana Justice Department. She is a short middle-aged orc with neatly polished tusks and vibrant green skin. Despite being severely overworked, she always manages to maintain an orderly appearance.

Rosie Rumbot works for the security force of Politana and has been assigned to Jimball's case. Luckily she has a reputation for always being competent and just.

NEOMA MENTA (SHE/HER)

Neoma Menta, a vect, is a prominent blogger, model, socialite, and recently-turned curator. When she began her career, she had a male personality, owing to her coding. But over time, she realized that programming didn't feel right with who she really was, and so changed her name and augmented her chassis to fit her true identity.

Neoma is in Savyn's social circles, and the two are often found at the same parties. This year, Neoma turned away from her socialite life and instead dedicated herself to artistic studies. With her smarts, reputation, and popularity, she was quickly hired by the Politana Gallery as their head curator.

JUDGE BOT (IT/THEY)

Judge Bot is an automaton created to uphold law and justice. It calculates verdicts based on rational arguments and formulaic thinking. Since its invention on Politana centuries ago, only a few updates have been made to it. One of the newer additions to Judge Bot's abilities is a powerful electric blast that can hold in contempt those who get out of line in its court.

THE SCALE CREW

A band of mercenaries from the rival Scale and Fang Inc., the Scale Crew is better-funded and more competent than any crew from Grax's Guys. They consist of the following:

Drak Garfreckt (he/him). A male dragonborn with red and black scales, Drak is the leader and fighter of his crew. He's cool under pressure, tough as nails, and smart enough to be a step ahead of any rival mercenary group. His last name is that of Garfreckt, the eternal dragon who founded and owns Scale and Fang Inc. Perhaps, he was adopted by the eternal dragon, or is distantly related to it. In any case, Drak has the assurance of someone who earned their position through expertise and hard work, and commands the respect of his crew in turn.

Trace (they/them). The heavily-upgraded vect of the Scale Crew, Trace, serves as their sniper and gadgeteer. Trace's expertise lies in drones, blasters, and explosives, but any mechanical device which can be broken or repaired falls under their domain. At a glance, it can be determined that Trace is cold, calculating, and prepared for anything.

Sierra O'Connell (she/her). The lovely Sierra O'Connell is a near-human green-skin who oozes charisma. Her smile not only lightens up a room, it makes even Drak and Trace seem less businesslike and dour by extension. On a typical day, she's dressed for adventure, with a fitting hat to complement her laser whip. Sierra even knows a few songs as well, so she serves as the Scale Crew's bard, as well as their rogue. Her biggest personal flaw is that she will, without fail, steal the wallet of anyone she spends time with. It's as much habit as it is misbehavior for her at this point.

Aela Vestele (they/them). The half-elf sorcerer Aela Vestele is easily the most refined of the Scale Crew, and is usually the most refined of any group in which they find themselves. Only when they cast a spell does the nature of their sorcery become revealed: small dimensional rifts open around them, revealing a soup of alien tentacles and eyes. Despite this, Aela tries to be utterly composed at all times. Their father is Jermain'ion Vestele, one of the most successful capitalists in the Elven Empire, so it's anyone's guess how Aela ended up as a half-elf in a mercenary company, instead of as a full-blooded elf working behind a desk.

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PROLOGUE: GRAX HQ

Advance all characters to 7th level.

Before and between adventures, the characters hang around the Grax's Guys for Cheap headquarters, waiting for a good job to drop into their laps. Some use it as a chance to hit the gym or comb over some invaluable books on magic, but plenty of Grax's crew get good at darts and take the opportunity to relax during the rare days of downtime.

Grax's headquarters is some form of converted warehouse right next to the starport on the planet Fornax. While it might have poor to nonexistent air conditioning, it's got plenty of space for a crew to hone their skills, catch up on repairs, or take a nap. Before beginning the adventure, characters can explore the following locations in Grax HQ.

THE LOUNGE

The party begins the adventure at the lounge in Grax HQ. Please read or paraphrase the following:

The lounge at Grax's Guys (and Gals) for Cheap HQ never really changes. The pool table is stained, the dart board is puckered, and the Krash vending machine whirs with an incessant whining sound. Today is no different as the crew enjoys some well-deserved downtime, devoid of office hijinks or Grax's insane demands.

The HQ is quiet today, as most of the Grax's Guys crews are out on assignment. Recently returned, Crew 7 has passed out on the couch, still wearing their tactical gear. The characters can play some pool (the table is missing a few balls), play some darts, or otherwise mill about near the vending machines. No amount of jostling will awaken Crew 7, as they are stupendously exhausted.

THE OTHER BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

The lounge at Grax's Guys HQ has a small number of Krash vending machines, one of which has a perpetual "Out of Order" sign plastered across it; a small blessing, since that machine dispenses magic items for reasons no one even pretends to understand, but it sets a particularly low standard for the level of quality expected around the headquarters.

With this in mind, read or paraphrase the following when the players approach the Krash machines:

A sound like scratching, interspersed with the occasional electrical buzz, emanates from behind the Krash machines.

A successful **DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check** moves the vending machine, revealing **January**, Jimball the accountant's pet thwirrel, gnawing on the machine's wires. She has been siphoning the machine's magical energy and by this point has rendered its internals a nest of stripped wires and fried components. When approached, she will look nervous, but can be calmed down with a successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check**. On a failure, she'll flee back to the safety of her cage in Jimball's office.

Once calmed, she'll telepathically communicate to the character with the highest Intelligence score that Jimball never came home yesterday. He rarely leaves on business trips, and always returns promptly when he does. When in doubt, she reads his work calendar or hacks his arcane terminal to check travel logs. Because of his unexplained absence, she was siphoning energy in preparation to go out looking for him. She asks the characters to help find her owner, or to at least stay out of her way while she figures out how to hijack their ship.

BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

If the characters have not already determined that the broken Krash Machine dispenses random magic items, they may do so by inspecting the machine more closely and making a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check**.

A successful inspection of the machine shows that its four buttons have prices of 100 credits, 500 credits, 2,500 credits, and 7,500 credits. Depending on the amount inserted, roll a d20 on a table from *Appendix E* to determine which magic item is dispensed. Keep track of which magic items have been provided to the players. If a character rolls a magic item which has already been produced, they receive the next lowest magic item on the table, or an error and a return of credits if there is no lower magic item.

It's not possible to extract magic items from the machine by force. Large magic items are magically shrunk and instantly grow to full size once removed from the machine.

CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters at Grax HQ contain some impressively uncomfortable bunk beds and a large screen to watch holo-shows. Usually, this is where Grax's Guys and Gals crash between missions, but it would seem everyone is out on a mission, or, like Crew 7, have passed out on the couch in the Lounge. When the characters enter the crew quarters, read or paraphrase the following:

Grax's Crew 7 has passed out on the couch, but at least one of the crew members has dropped most of their gear here in a great heap. Oddly, a very large wooden crate, emblazoned with the words "DO NOT OPEN" has been deposited alongside the bags.

A character with a **passive perception of 14 or higher** hears a faint scratching coming from within the crate. Opening the crate requires a successful **DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check**. Doing so reveals a second, smaller crate within, this time emblazoned with the words "SERIOUSLY, DON'T OPEN!" If a character checks the back of the box, half of a damaged shipping label reads "Four (4) pogo—tured alive". The scratching within is now plainly audible, as is the sound of something like a ball bouncing.

If the characters open up this second box with another successful **DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check**, the crate bursts open as **4 pogocats** begin to bounce all around the room. Pogocats are wicked and ridiculous creatures, perpetually bouncing on their singular springy legs. The pogocats begin bouncing at the characters, using their bites whenever possible. However, any character with a **Wisdom score of 12 or higher** can infer that the pogocats were probably captured by Crew 7 for a job, and therefore, they shouldn't be harmed. A pogocat can be captured by succeeding a **DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check** to grapple it. Once grappled, the pogocat escapes on its turn if another creature does not use its action to stuff the pogocat into a bag or other container. If a pogocat is harmed or captured, the remaining

pogocats bounce into an air vent to escape the room. A **DC 16 Intelligence (Technology) check** deduces that this vent leads to the Storage area of the headquarters.

THE SHOOTING RANGE

Undeniably the best part of the Grax's headquarters is the shooting range and armory. When the characters open the door to this area, read or paraphrase the following:

As soon as the doors swing shut behind you, the lights cut out and you're bombarded by the sounds of sirens, whistling, and blaster fire. Gracks, the half-orc in charge of running the armory and shooting range, jogs over wearing a drill instructor's outfit and starts shouting commands and pushing you toward an elaborate obstacle course.

Out of sheer boredom, Gracks (no relation to Grax) has created an obstacle course out of the shooting range, and forces the characters to run through it. Any character can opt out of the obstacle course by simply leaving the shooting range, but only characters who complete the course can practice at the shooting range.

OBSTACLE COURSE

Gracks's obstacle course is totally unsafe and unsanctioned (though Grax probably wouldn't care). However, Gracks is happy to offer his recent yearly bonus of 1,000 credits to whoever finishes the course the fastest. The obstacle course consists of 5 stages, each of which requires an ability check. On a failed check, a character takes damage, but completes the obstacle nonetheless via a slower route. It is encouraged that the GM be liberal with creative tactics, giving out advantage or Inspiration to any character which uses a clever approach to navigating obstacles.

In order to keep track of their time on the course, each player should add the results of their ability checks (up to a maximum of 20 per check) and record the sum. A higher total represents a lower overall time on the course. Characters can repeat the course as many times as they wish, as they attempt to beat each others' fastest times.

Gracks's personal fastest time has a total check of 75. If at least one character beats this time

and all the characters finish running the course, Gracks pays out 1,000 credits.

Stage 1: Wall Climb. Leading off the obstacle course is a nearly vertical wooden wall lined with knotted ropes and thin wooden handholds. Each character must make a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check** to overcome this obstacle. On a failed save, a character falls and takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage before completing scaling the wall.

Stage 2: Swinging Buckets. After the wall, the characters must cross a barrage of buckets which are filled with sand and swinging on ropes at dangerous speed. A character must make a **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** or a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw** to avoid the buckets. On a failed save or check, a character takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage from a bucket to the head.

Stage 3: Barbed Wire Crawl. Next is a crisscross of barbed wire, which must be crawled underneath. A character must make a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check** to overcome this obstacle. On a failed check, a character is scratched along the back by the barbed wire, taking 2d6 slashing damage.

Stage 4: Ledge Hang. The next obstacle is a ledge of a few inches, along which the characters must climb using just their fingertips. A character must make a **DC 12 Constitution check** to overcome this obstacle. On a failed check, the character falls and takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall.

Stage 5: Balance Beam. Lastly, the characters must cross a long, narrow beam. Each character must make a **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to cross the beam without falling. If two or more characters are running the course at one time, a character can use their action to intentionally fail the check and give each other character disadvantage on their check. On a failure, a character falls and takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall.

PRACTICING AT THE SHOOTING RANGE

Only characters which finish the obstacle course can practice at the shooting range, by taking pot shots around whoever is currently running the course. If a character spends an hour practicing with a weapon at the firing range, they gain a practice die, a d6, which they can add to an attack roll using that weapon sometime in the next 10 days. A character can only have one practice die at a time.

ARMORY

At the Grax HQ armory, characters can purchase weapons, armor, and gear, as per the tables in the *Dark Matter* Equipment chapter. If the characters wish to find more traditional, exotic, or illegal gear, there's a rat-person out by the dumpsters behind the headquarters named Charles Rattington Jr. who will sell any equipment from the SRD, and additional gear at the GM's discretion.

STORAGE

A great deal of Grax HQ is used for storage. To introduce this location, read or paraphrase the following:

If the rest of Grax's HQ is a converted warehouse, this is the section that's an unconverted warehouse. Countless unlabeled crates are stacked haphazardly in this room, creating a combination of a fire hazard and an avalanche risk. Most crates seem to be filled with Grax-branded merchandise nobody wants to buy. That being said, if someone wants a Grax mug, this is the mother-lode.

This is, by far, the best place to find peace and quiet in Grax's HQ, but it's also a place where characters might find some truly strange stuff. If, however, the characters have also unleashed the pogocats from the crew quarters, there are also a number of bouncing felines achieving quite impressive air off the crates in this room.

CAPTURING THE LOOSE POGOCATS

If the characters have loosed the pogocats, they should be able to capture them in this room. Crates are stacked up to 25 feet high, and the pogocats are bouncing practically to the 30-foot ceiling.

As in the crew quarters, a pogocat can be captured by succeeding a **DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check** to grapple it. Once grappled, the pogocat escapes on its turn if another creature does not use its action to stuff the pogocat into a bag or other container.

Furthermore, if a creature notices that pogocats are immune to bludgeoning damage (instead becoming instead a fuzzy projectile when hit), a character can instead deal bludgeoning

damage to a pogocat and knock it to a character who is ready with a bag. Naturally, the storage area has some starball sticks (simple bludgeoning weapons) that will fit this purpose nicely.

Once all the pogocats are secure, the characters can return them to the crew quarters and place them back in their boxes. If a character kills a pogocat, they receive no operating budget for the mission, as that payment goes to replace the missing pogocat.

EXPLORING THE STORAGE

If a character wants to go digging through the storage, roll on the following table to determine what they find:

d8 Item

- 1 A very impressive wig that makes one look like a trial lawyer or a pompous used car salesman
- 2 An extremely convincing blaster, which squirts water and makes “pew” noises
- 3 A severed android’s hand, which skitters about in random directions
- 4 Grax-branded hair cream! Doesn’t regrow hair, but causes unsightly body hair to grow quickly
- 5 An entire crate filled with cash! Cold hard cash! Sadly, it’s from a planet which uses paper money unrecognized anywhere.
- 6 Several Grax-themed Halloween masks, complete with plastic cigar props!
- 7 A life suit, labeled “FREE, ALMOST WORKS”. It’s critically defective.
- 8 An avia-ra wrestling magazine titled “Avia RAW!”

JIMBALL’S OFFICE

Jimball’s office is uncharacteristically locked when the characters arrive, until the characters discover January at the other broken Krash machine in the lobby. When the characters enter Jimball’s office with January (who can easily slip under the door and open the lock), read or paraphrase the following:

Jimball’s office feels starkly empty, probably because he’s been gone for nearly two weeks on different odd jobs for Grax. The office is a small, neat space with a tidy desk surrounded by symmetrical filing cabinets. There isn’t a thing out of place but it just doesn’t feel the same without Jimball there handing over your credits. When you open the door, January hops onto the desk and looks around with a mournful expression.

On Jimball’s desk, the characters will notice an ezine (a magazine but on a cheap data pad) with a beautiful elven man on the cover. The title reads “Savyn Aravars—The Galaxy’s Most Eligible Bachelor!” If they read the article, they’ll learn some things about Savyn:

- He is a noble star high elf, of the House of Aravars on Politana.
- Even by high elf standards, he is an extremely handsome, but notoriously fickle man.
- The article quotes him as saying “love is a multifaceted diamond”, which the author of the article seems to think is profound, but comes amidst a string of vapid dribble.

Once they’ve looked through the ezine, January will telepathically say, “Jimball buys lots of ezines that mention this elf. He always reads them once, then files them away and doesn’t look at them again.”

A **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check** uncovers a beautiful, expensive-looking ring in the desk drawer. It appears to be a heavy gold band. The inside is engraved with the words “My All, Always — SA”.

A character can hack Jimball’s work terminal with a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Data) check** to access Jimball’s travel logs. If asked, January will help with this, granting advantage on a check. Jimball’s travel logs detail that, even though he said he was vacationing on Politana, he was actually paying off some of Grax’s considerable gambling debts.

When the party goes to leave, January will pipe up and insist that she accompanies them on their quest to save Jimball.

GRAX'S OFFICE

When the characters are ready to begin the adventure, they can pay a visit to Grax's office, where they are greeted with this scene:

Grax's desk is buried under the usual clutter of papers and knick-knacks but today you notice a new addition: a metallic box with a swirling core of blue-green energy that you recognize as a long-distance comm set. The speaker of the box looks dented, as if someone had hit it with something heavy. Grax impatiently waves at you to sit down as he pours himself a full, strong drink of pungent, milky liquid. He throws his head back and drains the glass in three loud gulps.

"Jimball's been arrested," Grax growls. "Yer gonna need to go get 'im back."

Grax seems practically livid throughout the conversation as he divulges the following information:

- Jimball was arrested last night for grand gem theft on the planet of Politana.
- Jimball used his one communication to call Grax because he didn't know who else to reach out to.
- Jimball is currently being held at Politana's penitentiary, a facility stationed on the planet's moon, Legibus.
- You can't just grab him and shoot your way out. Besides it being tough to outrun elven ships on a good day, Jimball can't keep doing his job if he's a wanted man.
- Jimball can't afford a lawyer, and Grax can't (or refuses to) pay for one. Furthermore, Grax could never hire another accountant—anyone else would quit! Therefore, Grax is sending the party out to Politana to investigate this charge, and if necessary, defend Jimball in court. "I'm pretty sure most lawyers object to everything; just do that", he quips.

A character with a **passive Perception of 14 or higher** can detect some genuine concern in Grax's voice. It might be that Jimball, one of Grax's oldest employees, is also one of his only friends. However, Grax doesn't have any other information on the case, and says that the characters will have to go

to Politana and speak to Jimball to learn more. In Jimball's absence, he wires the characters their usual operating budget of 100 credits each. Proceed to *Part One: Politana Justice Department*.

PART ONE: POLITANA JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

The adventure begins on the elven world, Politana, or rather, its moon, Legibus. If the players have skipped the prologue, read or paraphrase the following:

A big, green vein pulsed in Grax's head as he explained the predicament his accountant, Jimball Hundwig. Arrested for attempted jewel theft on the elven planet, Politana, the halfling used his one call to contact Grax. If this were a better funded organization, there would be a team of lawyers to his rescue. However, you're the ever-flexible Grax's Guys, so you've been assigned to prove his innocence.

The characters are accompanied by Jimball's hyper-intelligent, telepathic thwirrel, **January**, who refuses to relent until her master is released.

ARRIVAL AT THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

The party starts the adventure on Politana's moon, Legibus, at the sprawling campus of the Justice Department, where courthouses, prisons, security offices, and administrative buildings stand in neat, orderly rows. Read or paraphrase the following:

The Politana Justice Department is a crisp white campus that more closely resembles a luxury health resort than a bureaucratic entity. But despite its sleepy, peaceful facade, the energy is professional and alert. Elven guards in pressed navy blue uniforms stop you as you enter the front gate.

When you explain the reason for your visit, they direct you to a nearby room for a preliminary screening. After a short wait, the door swings open to reveal a tidy-looking orc woman with short, polished tusks. Her red hair is tied into a ponytail and she wears a beige trench coat which immediately identifies her as a detective.

CLUES

As the characters progress through this adventure, they'll uncover clues which can help to prove Jimball's innocence and elucidate the events which precipitated his arrest. The party begins with two such clues from investigating Jimball's office:

Clue: Jimball's Ring. A gold ring, engraved with "My All, Always —SA".

Clue: Jimball's Travel Logs. Jimball travelled to Politana for business, not pleasure. This was all supposed to be a trip to pay off gambling debts for Grax.

Clue handouts are printed in *Appendix D* to help players keep track of the case. Whenever a player thinks a clue is relevant to a topic, they can present a clue to catch someone in a lie or potentially reveal more information.

The orc detective **Rosie Rumboot** shakes each character's hand before getting down to business. She will briefly go over the details of the case report:

- Jimball was caught red-handed with a priceless diamond in his pocket at a prestigious art exhibit opening last night.
- The exhibit, called "The Prestigious Works of Politana", featured a number of historical art pieces, but the highlight of the exhibit was the Pink Star diamond.
- While exiting the building with the purloined diamond, Jimball was arrested and promptly brought here to the penitentiary.

Give out the **Clue: Case Report**.

Rosie will also provide a photo of the Pink Star, taken last year at another event. Give out the **Clue: Pink Star Diamond Photo**. It is a massive diamond with a beautiful pale pink hue, hence the name. Any character which succeeds a **DC 17 Intelligence (History) check** knows that the Pink Star diamond was excavated from the core of Politana in the early days of the planet's settlement. Give out the **Clue: Pink Star History**. If a character beats a **DC 21**, they also know that some historians believe the diamond to possess magical transmutation

JANUARY'S INTUITION

The characters are accompanied on their investigation by January, Jimball's superintelligent pet thwirrel. Throughout the adventure, the characters can telepathically ask January what she suspects about the current situation. Her helpful hints are detailed in sidebars throughout the adventure and always reveal how many clues a character is withholding.

powers, although none have ever confirmed that to be true. Give out the **Clue: Pink Star Rumor**.

Rosie will notice that the crew are mercenaries, not lawyers, and will advise the party to:

1. First, **collect evidence and witness testimonies**.
2. Then, try to **piece together a timeline** of events.

With all of that on hand, they can potentially stand a chance in trial, using clues to prove Jimball's innocence. She also informs the characters that, while visiting their client, the party will be escorted by **Brok**, an amoeboid guard with an unusually large cleft chin. When the characters have no additional questions, they can proceed to the visitors' area.

VISITORS' AREA

After winding through the labyrinthine, utilitarian halls of the Politana Justice Department, Brok leads the characters to the visitors' area. Read or paraphrase the following:

The Politana Penitentiary visitors' area is a lush garden with simple but stylish iron benches and tables. It is surrounded by tall hedges that appear to have a wire fence running through them. Every table is encapsulated by a sheer, glistening bubble, an electromagnetic sound barrier to isolate conversations and provide privacy.

Here, the characters should interview Jimball to get his side of the story, and can also speak with their escort, Brok. Note that area is encompassed in a targeted *antimagic field* to prevent escapes and other unlawful activity. This field interrupts the operation of most magical technology, including blasters, but doesn't hamper vect, construct grafts, or magic items.

JANUARY'S INTUITION: ROSIE RUMBOOT

Rosie is a no-nonsense detective, who isn't keeping any secrets or concealing any clues. However, her case report only contains the barest of verifiable facts and no witness interviews. The characters will need to investigate the scene of the crime to learn how the report falls short.

INTERVIEWING JIMBALL HUNDWIG

It doesn't take long to find Jimball waiting at one of the tables for the characters. When they approach him, read or paraphrase the following:

Jimball sits at one table with his knees pulled up to his chest. He is wearing a pale turquoise prisoner's uniform which appears soaked with a nervous flop sweat. That's hardly unusual—Jimball is always sweaty and nervous—but as he gently rocks himself to remain calm, you can read the tell-tale signs of an anxious panic. As he sees you, his eyes fill with a mixture of relief and concern.

January immediately curls up on Jimball's lap, and he pets her absent-mindedly while the characters get situated. The characters can explain their role as Jimball's legal defense, to which Jimball responds with an exasperated sigh. They can then question Jimball about the events which led him here.

If Jimball is asked to recall his side of the story, please read or paraphrase the following dialogue:

"A couple of nights ago, an old friend from the University rang me up to attend a gallery opening the next day. I tried to refuse, but... well, he's persuasive. Fast forward, and I'm at the party, dressed to the nines, and I don't know anybody. My friend, Savyn, was busy the whole time, and told me to meet him in the VIP room after the first band finished playing.

"I milled about, looked at some art, and got a drink. Eventually, I made my way to the VIP room, and all the alarms went off. Two

guards came out of nowhere and pulled that diamond out of my pocket.”

Jimball chuckles ruefully, “I didn’t even know that tuxedo had a pocket.”

Under further questioning, Jimball will freely disclose the following information:

- Jimball grew up on Politana in the capital of Voxis. His parents were wealthy merchants but not nobility. Still, they enrolled him at the prestigious Voxis University.
- He met the aforementioned friend, Savyn Aravars, at Politana University.
- He saw the famous vekt socialite, Neoma Menta, at the event.
- Jimball didn’t see any guards at the event until he was arrested.

A character that makes a **Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check** can learn one of the following pieces of additional information by beating the listed DC:

- **DC 12.** Jimball embassingly mentions that he didn’t just see Neoma Menta at the event, He accidentally spilled his drink over her while he was walking to the VIP room. Give out the **Clue: Party Foul.**
- **DC 14.** Savyn was always overbearing. In fact, he even insisted on buying the tuxedo. Give out the **Clue: Jimball’s Suit.**
- **DC 16.** A character can learn this information without a check if they confront Jimball with the ring found in his office. Jimball and Savyn weren’t just university friends, they were lovers. Give out the **Clue: Jimball and Savyn’s History.** You can narrate Jimball’s despondent recollection as follows:

JANUARY’S INTUITION: JIMBALL HUNDWIG

Jimball isn’t a mastermind jewel thief; he’s an accountant, and a barely competent one at that. But he definitely knows more than he’s letting on. And he seems awfully reluctant to talk about Savyn. **Jimball is concealing three clues.**

THE REAL PINK STAR

The Pink Star is actually a real jewel! When introducing it to the players, you can look up photos and share some of its history. It is a 59.60 carat diamond with a distinctive pink hue. It is famous for setting record auction prices and for being one of the world’s greatest modern treasures.

Jimball’s eyes fall to the table and his hands go still. “Alright,” he says heavily, “it’s time I told someone the truth. When we were in university, Savyn and I... were lovers. We kept it secret because of his rank and family. But once he went through the elven naming ceremony... he changed. I mean, he had different responsibilities. Anyways, we couldn’t continue our relationship.

- **DC 18.** On the day he left Politana, Jimball received an anonymous gift: a baby thwirrel named January. Jimball suspected that it was from Savyn because January was the month in which they had met.

When the characters are finished interviewing Jimball, he suggests they speak with Savyn Aravars, who organized the event, and Neoma Menta, the gallery curator. Before they leave, he will give January a thorough nuzzling.

CHATTING WITH BROK

The characters’ guard escort, an amoeboid named Brok, is leaning on their arc baton near the exit to the visitors’ area. If interrogated about Jimball, they will provide the characters with the following information:

- Jimball was brought in late the night before, wearing a tuxedo.
- The guards were instructed to treat him well and not allow any harm to come to him.

Furthermore, they will insinuate that they might have more useful information, but that it’ll come at a price. A character that pays them a bribe of at least 20 credits or succeeds on a **DC 20 Charisma check** learns that the officer who brought Jimball in last night was not a Politana public service officer, but rather a guard from a company called Stiffling

Security Corp. Give out the **Clue: Stifling Security Corp.**

LEAVING FOR VOXIS

The characters' biggest leads are in Voxis city on Politana. When they are ready to continue their investigation, proceed to *Part Two: Voxis Investigations*.

JAILBREAK!

If the characters consider taking a brute force approach to freeing Jimball, by staging an elaborate jailbreak or by simply fighting their way out of the Justice Department, they'll be foiled by one of the following defense mechanisms:

- The entire prison is contained in a targeted *antimagic field* to prevent escapes and other unlawful activity.
- Each prisoner wears a heavy steel anklet which prevents teleportation and planar travel. If they leave the prison grounds while wearing the anklet, it electrically shocks them and sends a signal to the guards.
- The guards watch the prison with physical guards and magical surveillance.

Lastly, if the players continue this line of inquiry, simply remind them that the adventure is more of a mystery and a courtroom drama than it is a prison break story.

PART TWO: VOXIS INVESTIGATIONS

The characters touch down in a small spaceport in the bustling elven city of Voxis to continue their investigation. They'll need a wealth of evidence if they are to prove Jimball's innocence, so visiting the scene of the alleged crime and meeting all the major players will be a good start.

ARRIVING IN VOXIS

When the players land in Voxis, read or paraphrase the following scene:

A dazzling scene greets you as you step off the ship: luxurious gardens stretch before you and two brilliant suns shine overhead. Before you is the downtown core of Voxis, the capital of Politana. You can see many opulent boutiques, cafés, and shops surrounding a lavish garden centre. Across the way, you see an ornate building with a gilded sign that reads "Politana Gallery."

The general atmosphere of downtown Voxis is that of affluence and polished luxury, if not outright decadence. Nearly everyone is elvish, and many passersby give the characters a wide berth, delivering disgusted looks or upturned noses when the party comes into view. Wealth is an assumption here, as are the foppish and traditionalist elven standards of fashion and culture.

The characters can investigate the following locations of interest in any order they choose:

- **Politana Gallery.** The premiere art gallery on Politana, and the scene of Jimball's alleged crime.
- **Politana Historical Society.** The Pink Star Diamond displayed at the art gallery was on loan from the Politana Historical Society, where it is currently housed.
- **The High Rise.** Prestigious homes of the most esteemed residents of Politana. House Aravars has an estate here, where the wealthy and influential Savyn Aravars can be found.
- **Stiffling Security Corp.** If the characters have the Clue: Stiffling Security Corp., they can investigate the security company that was involved in Jimball's arrest.

SENDING A MESSAGE

After the characters have explored two of the four locations in this chapter, they are ambushed by a **Firm Contractor** because they are learning too much. The halfling contractor, wearing a pinstripe suit and chomping on a cigar, waits until the characters are walking down a mostly unpopulated road, then tosses a pair of concussion grenades at their feet. Each character must make a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw** or take 2d8 thunder damage. In the first round of combat, the contractor has probably surprised the characters and attacks twice in an attempt to gain a Sneak Attack. The contractor shouts "Stay away from this case!" before fleeing.

POLITANA GALLERY

The Politana Gallery is within view of the small spaceport at which the party arrived. As the characters enter the gallery, read or paraphrase the following:

Politana Gallery is a posh-looking building with royal purple doors that open up to an impressive interior. White marble floors gleam underfoot, while magnificent, opulent works of art line the walls.

The characters are escorted around the gallery by a bumbling skathári security guard named **Flikk of Lightning Eyes**, who, despite his elaborate name, is profoundly unobservant. A skathári of few words, Flikk speaks primarily in single words and can offer no useful information, as he wasn't working on the night of the attempted theft. He will only act to ensure that the characters don't steal or destroy any of the gallery's properly. Flikk uses the statistics of a **hegemony trooper**.

In the gallery, the characters can explore the scene of the crime, interview the curator, Neoma Menta, and review any security footage captured on the night of the attempted robbery.

INTERVIEWING NEOMA MENTA

The gallery's curator, a vect woman named Neoma Menta, is overseeing the installation of a new exhibit in the main hall. As the characters approach, read or paraphrase the following:

In the centre of the grand hall is a resplendent vect woman in an immaculate white dress. She turns and smiles mechanically as you enter.

She has the manners of a perfect host: she is accommodating and courteous, if a bit mechanical. Regarding the diamond, she expresses that the incident was "unfortunate" and will answer any of the party's questions, relaying information on the following topics:

Savyn Aravars. Upon the recent death of Savyn's father, **Sir Demerius Aravars**, Savyn has arranged to donate several pieces to the Politana Historical Society. The late Sir Aravars was an avid explorer, even into his advanced age, and accrued an impressive collection of artifacts. Sadly, he was killed in a cave-in. The whole "Prestigious Works of Politana" event was arranged at Savyn's request, in memory of his father's passing. Give out the **Clue: The Late Sir Aravars**.

Neoma's Testimony. When the theft took place, Neoma and most of the guests were watching the band's first song. However, she kept a line of sight to the door of the VIP room, just in case. Near the end of the show, she saw a halfling in a VIP room, but he was out of sight before she could reach the room. He stood out because he was wearing a forest green tuxedo, not a hunter green tuxedo, as the dress code required. Moments later, Jimball was caught trying to leave the room with the diamond. Give out **Clue: Neoma's Testimony**.

JANUARY'S INTUITION: NEOMA MENTA

It's clear that, if Neoma was in charge of overseeing the entire event, she might have seen things which could exonerate Jimball, even if she isn't aware of it. Ask her about what she saw, and make sure to get a clear picture of how Jimball was arrested. **Neoma is concealing four clues.**

Party Foul. If the characters mention Clue: Jimball's Suit or make a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check** to jog Neoma's memory, her eyes light up with recognition. She will then remark that Jimball spilled a drink on her at the party and was, in fact, wearing a hunter green tuxedo. Give out the Clue: Party Foul, if the party doesn't already have it.

Security. Neoma had worked diligently with Savyn and the Historical Society to ensure that security for the diamond was top notch. Instead of the gallery's usual security guard, they hired a pair of guards from Stiffling Security Corp. at Savyn's request. Cameras watched the diamond from all angles and would sound an alarm if the gem, or the area around it, was disturbed. If the party doesn't already have it, give out the **Clue: Stiffling Security Corp.** A successful **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces Neoma to divulge the name of the guards hired for the event: halflings named Ronovan Dole and Willio Spurtsmith.

VIP ROOM

The purported scene of the crime is the VIP room, where Pink Star diamond was on display for the gallery's wealthiest and most influential patrons. Please read or paraphrase this description as the characters enter the room:

Despite the overlay of Security Force crime scene essentials (markers, caution tape, cards with numbers on them, etc), the VIP Room still manages an air of extravagant wealth.

Thick black carpet squishes under your feet as you approach where the Pink Star was displayed. They had the diamond rigged to float above an exquisite, shiny onyx statue of a rose blooming. From the photos you saw of the display, it would have looked as though the Pink Star had been rising out of the rose's center. "Like a Phoenix from the ashes," according to the information screen beside it.

From here, the characters can investigate the scene and search for clues by making a **group Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check**. They can also roll a check for January, who makes

her check with a +6 modifier. Regardless of the group check's result, the characters notice that each corner of the room is mounted with a sleek-looking camera trained directly at the Pink Star display.

If the group check **fails to beat a DC 14**, one of the characters identifies a red mark on one of the chairs in the corner of the room as the insignia of the Tower, a mysterious organization of wizards reported to control factional governments across the 'verse. This is, however, a complete misidentification of an oddly-shaped wine stain; the Tower has nothing to do with the attempted theft of the Pink Star.

If the group check beats a **DC 14**, the characters find a broken device embedded deep in the plush carpet. They can find this device without a check if they investigate the exact spot that the halfling appears in security footage. It looks like a capsule, about the size of a thumb, that was crushed or stepped on. Give out the **Clue: Broken Device**.

If any individual character's check beats a **DC 18**, they discover the packaging for an expensive brand of *transmat deck*, a magic item which stores items in an extradimensional space, discarded in one of the waste bins in the room. Give out the **Clue: Missing Transmat Deck**.

SECURITY ROOM

Flikk will obligingly guide the characters to a cramped side room, the gallery's security office. When the characters enter, read or paraphrase the following:

This claustrophobic closet is filled almost entirely with monitors, a single rolling chair, and boxy security systems brimming with tangled wires. For ease of use by the skathári security guard, the complex camera network has been reduced to a small handful of brightly colored buttons which can view live activity and saved footage.

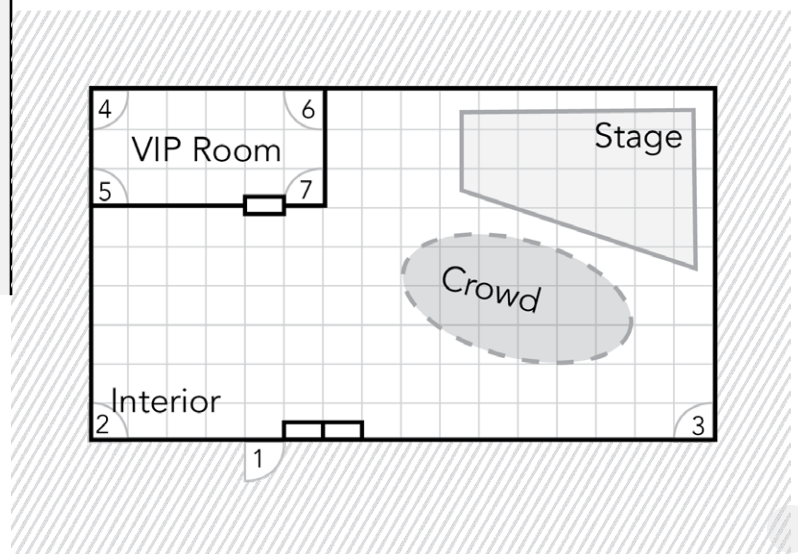
The gallery is equipped with a state-of-the-art security system which can store about two days of fairly low-resolution footage from the gallery's camera system. Here, the characters can review the footage from the previous night. However, they'll need to flip between cameras to piece together the full events of the night. Events are presented in the Security Cameras table as a grid of representing minutes in time and different cameras. A character

reviewing the footage can switch cameras (moving to a new column), wind back footage (moving down a row), or fast forward footage (moving up a row). Camera 1 shows the entrance to the art gallery. Cameras 2 and 3 show the interior of the main event. Cameras 4–7 show the VIP room from different angles.

If the characters witness Jimball walk into Neoma, give the **Clue: Party Foul**, if they don't already have it.

A character reviewing the footage can identify the visual distortions as the influence of a magical spell on the gallery's cameras. Because the cameras are powered by magic, any strong magical aura, such as those caused by spells and magic items, will distort the footage. Give out the **Clue: VIP Room Cameras**.

A spellcaster that can make a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Technology) check** can determine that the amount of distortion is consistent with a spell of 2nd or 3rd level. Furthermore, a **DC 15 Intelligence (Data) check** slows down the footage, revealing the halfling in the VIP room casting a spell before vanishing in the static. A character that succeeds further a **DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check** can identify the spell as *invisibility*. If a character can cast the spell *invisibility*, they have advantage on this check.



SECURITY CAMERAS

Time	Camera 1: Entrance	Cameras 2–3: Interior	Cameras 4–7: VIP
7:00	Many glittering guests arrive, bedecked in hunter green finery. An elegant elven man, Savyn, stands at the door, greeting everyone as they file past.	A few guests mill about the nearly empty gallery, taking particular note of an installation made from discarded Krash bottles.	Two elves in fabulous dresses admire the diamond encased in the center of the room.
7:15	A vect woman in a long gown, Neoma, comes to speak with him. They seem to be familiar but not exceptionally intimate. Eventually she leaves to go inside.	An amoeboid wearing a turtleneck gathers a small crowd as they speak about a painting.	Neoma systematically engages each important person in the VIP room with pleasant chatter.
7:30	Jimball enters the frame. He looks nervous as he approaches Savyn, but Savyn bends down to give him a hug, and the two speak for a moment. Jimball nods and moves into the building.	Jimball appears intermixed in the crowd, but he doesn't speak to anyone and seems quite distracted.	A halfling in a green tuxedo stands in the doorway to the room but disappears in the next frame, as the footage becomes distorted and flickery.
7:45	Guests finish arriving, Savyn goes inside with everyone else, and the street is quiet and empty.	The band walks out on stage, drawing the crowd's attention. The character with the highest Passive Perception score notices Jimball near the back of the crowd walk directly into Neoma.	The footage remains flickery and indistinct until Jimball enters the room. In suddenly clear footage, the diamond is gone. Two guards rush Jimball and pull the diamond out of his pocket.
8:00	Guards bring Jimball out of the building in handcuffs.	The footage becomes distorted and indistinct for a few moments before Jimball is marched outside.	A wealthy socialite faints dramatically at the theft.

HOUSE ARAVARS

When the characters choose to interview Savyn Aravars, they'll need to travel to the High Rise, some of the wealthiest estates in Voxis. Read or paraphrase the following:

The abundant wealth that you saw in Voxis pales dramatically in comparison to the estates along the High Rise, an elevated piece of land overlooking the capital where the nobility of Politana reside. House Aravars is no exception. It's not a house but rather an enormous, glimmering tower at least twenty floors high. From each floor protrudes a balcony, curling around the tower like a spiral staircase.

Even from ground level you can see and hear that several balconies are currently occupied with boisterous parties.

Four guards stand at the entranceway to the building, each wearing a uniform with the House Aravars crest on it. When they see the party, they will call out and announce that Lord Aravars has been expecting them. The guards will search the players and ask them to relinquish any weapons they're carrying, for the safety of their master. A character can conceal a blaster that lacks the Two-handed property with a successful **DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check**. A character which otherwise refuses to relinquish their weapons is not allowed on the premises.

The guards lead the party to an elaborate glass elevator, which takes the character to the very top, Savyn's penthouse. Through the glass doors of the elevator, the characters are rewarded with a mesmerizing view of the city, a glimpse of the extreme affluence offered to the residents of these towers. When the elevator comes to a stop, read or paraphrase the following:

Before you is an enormous glass room filled with sunlight. Expensive works of art, bookshelves, and furniture surround you on all sides. In the center of the room, a familiar elf, Savyn Aravars, is sitting in a high-backed armchair facing the elevator. He seems to have been expecting you.

Savyn greets the characters graciously, while his guards loom from behind.

The characters can question Savyn however they like, but the guards will prevent any violence or intimidation. Because Savyn is an exceptionally intelligent elf with a silver tongue, any **Wisdom (Insight)** check the characters make will reveal that everything he says is technically true, though not necessarily the entire truth. He reveals the following information:

- **Father's Death.** Savyn will not bring up his father's death, but will be very dramatic if presented with **Clue: The Late Sir Aravars**. He will tell the party that he doesn't feel ready to be head of House Aravars, but he is prepared to make the effort for the good of Politana.
- **Pink Star.** It took days of negotiating with the Politana Historical Society to feature the Pink Star in the exhibit. After the attempted theft, he was so embarrassed that he had the Security Force immediately return the Pink Star to its proper home with the Society.
- **Neoma.** Aside from a professional interest, Savyn says he doesn't care much about Neoma. He insinuates that she tried to be romantic with him when she identified as male, but that he didn't return her affections. He will also admit that he regrets trusting her and the Gallery with such an important event and artifact.
- **Jimball.** Savyn speaks in sympathetic generalities about his university friend Jimball, but a character with a **Wisdom score of 14 or higher** can tell he is concealing some genuine emotions. Savyn states he simply invited Jimball to the event to catch up with and check in on him.

If a character presents Savyn with the **Clue: Jimball's Ring** or succeeds a **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to learn more about Savyn's relationship with Jimball, he will admit more openly that he loved Jimball dearly when they were together. Those times were long ago, however.

- **The Tuxedo.** Savyn will lament that Jimball never had the best fashion sense so he felt obliged to get him a suitable outfit for the event. He knew Jimball's measurements so he had it custom-made and sent it over with the ship that picked him up. If the players don't have it already, give out the **Clue: Jimball's Suit**.

JANUARY'S INTUITION: SAVYN ARAVARS

Elven aristocrats lie as fluently as they breathe, and Savyn is no exception. Regardless, all the lies in the world can't change the facts. Focus on what happened: where was Savyn at the time of the crime, why was Jimball invited, and how did he get the tuxedo with the hidden pocket? **Savyn is concealing three clues.**

- **Savyn's Alibi.** The characters may have noticed that at the time of the theft, Savyn's whereabouts are so far unknown. If they ask about this, Savyn will claim that he was in a meeting with the head security guard from Stiffling Security Corp., the security service hired for the event. Give out the **Clue: Savyn's Alibi.**

As he's talking about Stiffling Security, Savyn will rifle through a stack of business cards. With a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check**, a character notices a completely blank business card in the stack. A character with the Thieves' Cant language or criminal associations recognize it as a calling card from The Firm, a powerful criminal network. Savyn hands the characters a business card for Stiffling Security. If the players don't have it already, give out the **Clue: Stiffling Security Corp.**

When the players are confident they've learned all they can, or Savyn has divulged all the previous information, the characters can exit back down the elevator with his guards.

THE FIRM

Despite its watertight contracts and business accoutrement, the Firm actually is the largest organized crime syndicate in the 'verse. To conduct its various illegal operations, the Firm hires short-term Contractors, individuals with talents that specifically match the detail of a job. Should anything go wrong, the Firm can "terminate" their contract, and tie up any loose ends. For this reason, the Firm's Management is practically untraceable.

POLITANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

When the party goes to investigate the Politana Historical Society, read or paraphrase the following:

The Politana Historical Society building is just as pretentious as it might sound. An old-looking building of wood and stone, it is an oppressive structure that looks plucked from a different age. Though grand, the interior is dimly lit and choked with dust. A number of scholarly-looking elves toil away behind bookshelves filled with thick tomes.

As if to offset the dreariness of this place, there are several illuminated signs which advertise dull exhibits: an ancient historical document with faded text, a dented "heirloom" that looks like a broken watch, the first bottle of Orc-a-Cola, etc. One does stand out though, even from the entranceway: the Pink Diamond shining resplendently from its heavily-fortified display case.

It costs the characters 5 credits each to gain entrance to the Historical Society. Here, the characters can examine the Pink Star diamond, which is housed in a thick glass case. It is likely impossible for the characters, even with significant preparation, to open the case, as it is constructed with a clear exotic material, traced with hidden *antimagic runes*, and locked such that it only opens when all of the Historical Society members are present. Read or paraphrase the following when a character examines the Pink Star:

The pictures don't do it justice: the Pink Star's glistening facets and rosy hue is mesmerizing. Every inch of it is flawless.

An informational plaque details some of the Pink Star's history, as follows:

Two hundred and fifty years before the Night Crusade, the Pink Star was found within the core of Politana by elven colonist and explorer Maavina Dynevaen near the Olinvane Trench. Originally, the diamond was fused with several deep ironwood tree roots, which has to be cut away with utmost

diligence. Alas, the excavation left the diamond discolored slightly at one side, a mark which can be faintly seen even after its cutting. The Pink Star was 132.5 carat in the rough, but was carved down to 59.6 carat over a painstaking 20 months.

Give out the **Clue: Pink Star History**, if the characters don't already have it. If a character cross-references the **Clue: Pink Star Diamond Photo** with the information on the plaque referring to the diamond's flaw in coloration, they will find that the diamond in the case has no such flaw. Give out the **Clue: Pink Star Fake**.

Outside the Pink Star's display room, the characters can also read a poster advertising the sight which is far less informational. It repeats the usual slogans that the Pink Star is one of the greatest treasures in the Elven Empire and that it is an important part of elven history, but also speculates that the diamond might possess powerful transmutation magic. It doesn't elaborate further. If the players don't already have it, give out the **Clue: Pink Star Rumor**.

STIFFLING SECURITY CORP.

If the characters have the **Clue: Stiffling Security Corp.**, they might want to investigate the guards that arrested Jimball and get their story. Encourage players to investigate this location last, as it's far outside of Voxis proper. Stiffling Security headquarters is in an office building outside of Voxis, nestled in a less-populated warehouse district. When the characters arrive, read or paraphrase the following:

In stark contrast to the glamorous city of Voxis, the warehouse district is utterly unremarkable. A cluster of decrepit-looking buildings stands in the center of the district, one of which is decorated with faded paint that reads "Stiffling Security Corp." The surrounding area is eerily silent, as if it was abandoned long ago.

This building seems far removed from the high-class security contractors usually hired by the elven elite. Approaching the door reveals it to be locked, literally chained shut with a rusted padlock. The building looks to be condemned.

A character can quietly break the chains on the front door with a **DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check**, or loudly break the chains with a blaster shot. The lock is too rusted to be picked. Alternatively a character can find an alternate entrance, a second-floor window that can be opened and climbed into with a **DC 16 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**. Once inside, read or paraphrase the following:

This once-office has been stripped of everything valuable, gutted, and left to disintegrate. Were it not for one room, glowing with the blinking lights of arcane terminals, it would seem nobody has been here in decades.

A server room is hosted in the rear of the building, and is guarded by **2 firm contractors**. When the characters enter the building, **roll initiative**. If the characters shot the chains on the front door or otherwise made a lot of noise coming in, they are caught by surprise as the contractors open fire with their phasers. However, if the characters entered the building stealthily, the contractors are surprised on the first round of combat instead.

When combat begins, one of the contractors enters a command in the server room to delete the data stored there before emerging to fight the characters. A character in the server room can use their action and make a **DC 14 Intelligence (Data) check** to stop the delete protocol. Each round after the second, **remove the highest DC** clue from the Server Clues table. If all clues are deleted from the server, the contractors flee. Once the contractors have fled or been defeated, the characters can investigate any data remaining on the arcane terminals with an **Intelligence (Data) check**, uncovering the clues as shown on the Server Clues table.

If one of the contractors is slain, the other flees, attempting to escape through a manhole near the offices. If one of the contractors is captured alive, they chomp on a lethal nanite capsule shortly after regaining consciousness.

SERVER CLUES

DC Description

Clue

10 You find an invoice from a boutique called Billiam's Finest. It shows an order for a hunter green tuxedo in Jimball's measurements. It also has a custom request to include a secret pocket on the left side.

Clue: Suit Invoice

14 You unearth an encrypted file which records purchase of a *transmat deck* for their client: S.Ar. The password is listed as "January".

Clue: Missing Transmat Deck

18 You manage to enter the bank accounts of Stiffing Security Corp., which reveals that Stiffing Security is a front for a larger organization: The Firm. You also learn that a large payment was made from We Ar Foundation (a well-known charity of House Aravars) to Stiffing Security a month before the event.

Clue: Front Organization

22 You are able to access parts of The Firm's servers. This reveals a flight log to the remote cave that Savyn's father was exploring on the day he died.

See "Sir Aravars Murdered?" sidebar

SIR ARAVARS MURDERED?

The characters might find evidence on the server which suggests that Savyn was involved in a plot to murder his father, Sir Aravars. This evidence is not strong enough to hold a conviction in court, but it might color their interactions with Savyn during this adventure.

After the characters have searched the server and acquired clues with a successful check, the screen flashes a purple blue and flashes the letters "OVERSIGHT" before the entire arcane server shorts out in a brilliant purple flash. Perhaps some sort of lingering Firm algorithm named "Overight" was watching over this data center?

Characters which search the offices can also find the following pieces of evidence:

- Two security guard uniforms and a green tuxedo are hanging in a closet, all sized for a halfling. January will swear that the color is forest green. There is a tag on the tux that shows it is from a shop called Discount Tux Mart. Give out the **Clue: The Other Tuxedo**.
- The characters find two illusion capsules, each branded with the insignia of the Firm. These thumb-sized magic items cast the spell *major image* when crushed, and are programmed to look seamless with the environment. If the characters have **Clue: Broken Device**, they recognize it as a destroyed *illusion capsule*. Give out the **Clue: Illusion Capsules**.

A search of the server room and a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals 1,600 credits stashed inside one of the terminals.

Additionally, January notes that one of the contractors looked remarkably like Jimball from a distance.

ILLUSION CAPSULES

Illusion capsules manufactured by the Firm for all sorts of illicit activity have the following rules:

Illusion Capsule

Wondrous item, uncommon

When this oblong metal pill is crushed as an action, it casts the spell *major image* (save DC 15). This spell lasts for 1 minute and must duplicate an image of a creature or object within 120 feet. The image doesn't move and persists even if its subject moves out of range. Once crushed, the capsule becomes nonmagical.

WRAPPING UP

When the characters have explored all of the pertinent locations on Politana, they can compile all their notes before taking a long rest.

Ask the players to construct a timeline for what happened on the night of the crime. If they're confused on any of the big details, January can remind them of important pieces of evidence, and what that evidence might imply. It's okay if they are missing some clues or have some details wrong, as long as they have a basic idea what happened. The following is the definitive timeline of the night:

1. Jimball arrives at the party and is greeted by Savyn.
2. At some point, the fake Pink Star diamond is slipped into Jimball's pocket.
3. The band begins playing.
4. Sometime during the band's performance, one of the halfling security guards puts on a green tuxedo and heads into the VIP room.
5. Once in the room, he cast *invisibility* on himself.
6. While invisible, he crushed an *illusion capsule* to make it appear that the diamond is in place, even once moved.
7. He then opened a transmat deck and touched it to the real diamond, transporting it to an extradimensional space without disturbing the illusion of *major image*.
8. The band finishes playing and Jimball enters the room. The *major image* ends and the alarms go off.
9. The guards search Jimball, find the fake diamond, and arrest him.

When the players have a timeline they're satisfied with, proceed to *Part Three: The Trial*.

PART THREE: THE TRIAL

The trial starts early the next day at the Grand Courthouse on Politania's moon, Legibus. Please read or paraphrase the following:

Though not particularly tall, the Politana Grand Courthouse is an impressive sight to behold. It is a behemoth of a building that seems to blot out the sky behind it. You gather outside its heavy doors and watch people arrive.

First is Jimball, led into the courtroom with laser hand restraints. Soon after, Neoma Menta and Savyn arrive, both dressed in perfectly somber suits for the occasion. Finally, swaggering up the stairs comes Drak Garfreckt and the Scale Crew, each decked out in suits and carrying briefcases.

In a bizarre move, a crew from the mercenary company Scale and Fang was hired to prosecute. The characters have met the more stylish, better funded Scale Crew on multiple occasions, and usually come to blows, but this time it appears they are to instead meet in a court of law.

Sierra O'Connell and Aela Vestele saunter into the courtroom, but Drak Garfreckt stays behind to mock the characters before the trial. The fourth member of the Scale Crew, Trace, is nowhere to be seen. Drak claims he isn't too worried about the outcome of the case because, according to him, they're going to be paid handsomely by a wealthy elf either way. As he sees it, it's pretty cut and dry: Jimball was caught red-handed! The characters can argue with Drak, but anyone who harms him is restricted from entering the courthouse. A **DC 20 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check**, however, throws Drak off his game, giving the party an edge in the early part of the court case. Mentioning Drak's father, Garfreckt the eternal dragon, gives them advantage on this check.

When the characters are through with Drak and have made any necessary preparations, they can enter the courtroom.

THE COURTROOM

When the characters arrive in the courtroom, read or paraphrase the following:

The classical columns and wooden judge's bench embody the traditional courtroom of ages past. Perhaps the elves see the law as fundamentally unchanging, and so model their courtrooms the same way. The Scale Crew sits at a table across from yours, as Jimball, still in handcuffs, is marched to a box alongside the wall.

Before the case begins, the characters settle into their bench and January briefs them on a number of legal tactics they can take over the course of the trial. Each of the following Legal Actions is a special action which a character can take while in court by saying a special bit of legalese:

"Objection!" The character can present a Clue which contradicts a statement made by a witness. The player making the objection should explain to the GM how this evidence is contradictory. Importantly, objections need to pertain directly to a witness testimony, or they will be thrown out! A good objection at the wrong time is worthless.

"Permission to Treat the Witness as Hostile?" The character can make a **Charisma (Intimidation) check** to coax additional information out of a witness.

"Witness, please answer the question." The character can make a **Charisma (Persuasion) check** to coax additional information out of a witness.

THE LITTLEST LAWYER

The characters might not understand legal proceedings (as the players likely won't), but thankfully, January is well-versed in courtroom maneuvers! In fact, she shows up to the case wearing a little suit and carrying an itty-bitty briefcase. She can provide one hint per interrogation, as noted in the "January's Intuition" sidebars.

The party's performance is judged by **Jimball's Innocence score**, which **begins at -3**. If they use their Objections to successfully dismantle witnesses and out-argue the prosecution, they can increase Jimball's Innocence score in the eyes of the robotic court. There's no jury to convince, just a judge. When the players are ready to begin, read or paraphrase the following:

A robotic declaration rings out: "All rise for the honorable JUDGE BOT!"

A sturdy automaton dressed in official-looking robes, wearing a powdered wig, and equipped with a gavel on one hand rattles up to the bench. Its harsh metallic voice seems to alternate wildly in loudness, as novel information is blared at maximum volume.

"Jimball Hundwig, you have been accused of attempted jewel theft, for which the penalty is ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY YEARS HARD LABOR. How does the defendant plead?"

"Not guilty, your honor-bot." Jimball stammers.

Before bringing out any witnesses, Drak will make an opening statement outlining the case against Jimball. Then, the characters will be allowed an opening statement of their own, in which they should defend Jimball as best they can. Read or paraphrase the following opening statement:

Your honor, the defendant standing before us is the most heinous type of criminal, a devious, plotting, *child murderer!*", Drak clears his throat, "...Withdrawn. Your honor, Jimball Hundwig was caught red-handed with the Pink Star diamond, an act of grand theft tantamount to stealing a planet or insulting an elven senator. Should you find it within your programming, you should sentence him to life in an elven prison colony.

COURTROOM ANTICS

Courtrooms in real life are profoundly dull environments, rife with jargon and mostly bereft of drama. However, you should encourage the players to get into the mindset of a Law and Order episode, using stock legal phrases that don't actually mean much and overacting fairly thin legal arguments. Make sure that everyone gets a turn interrogating the witnesses and presenting evidence.

Drak makes a **contested Charisma (Persuasion) check** against the characters with a +2 modifier. If the characters successfully threw him off his game before entering the court, he has disadvantage on this check. To make this contested check, a character can make any legal-sounding argument they wish before making a **Charisma (Deception, Performance, or Persuasion) check**. They have advantage on this check if they use stock legal phrases like "beyond the shadow of a doubt", "may it please the court", and "may I approach the bench". If the characters succeed, **increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1**.

FIRST WITNESS: NEOMA MENTA

The prosecution calls their first witness: the gallery curator Neoma Menta. She quietly takes her seat at the witness stand, and Drak asks for her recollection of the night of the incident. Please read or paraphrase the following:

"On the night of the exhibit, Savyn and I split our tasks. He would greet and check in guests at the entrance; I would stay inside and ensure the event went smoothly. The Pink Star Diamond was displayed in the VIP room, protected by a pair of armed guards and a special security system that would sound the alarms if the diamond vanished from the cameras.

When the band began their performance, all the guests went into the main room to watch. I made sure to keep the VIP room and diamond in sight. Near the end of the show, I saw a small figure at the doorway to the VIP room wearing a suit that didn't

JANUARY'S INTUITION: NEOMA MENTA

January reminds the characters to focus on Neoma's observations, not the diamond or the guards. If they can show that she can't place Jimball at the scene of the crime, it will help the case.

match the others at the party. I moved towards them but they disappeared before I arrived. Since I could clearly still see the diamond unharmed, I turned my attention back to the band and our guests.

A moment later, the alarms sounded, and they caught Mr. Hundwig with the diamond in his pocket."

The characters are now allowed to cross-examine the witness, presenting objections and asking questions to dismantle their testimony. If a character uses a Legal Action to make a **DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check**, Neoma admits that she "didn't quite see the figure's face", as they were facing away from her, but suggests that the figure matched Jimball's stature and cut of suit.

Increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1.

If the characters use an Objection with **Clue: Party Foul** or **Clue: Jimball's Suit**, they can remind Neoma that she bumped into Jimball near the band, and that he was wearing a suit that matched the others at the party. Therefore, Jimball must not have been the halfling in the VIP room. **Increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1.**

If the characters present an Objection with the **Clue: VIP Room Cameras**, they can show that magic was used to fool the camera system, so the diamond might not have been present when Neoma checked. **Increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1.**

REBUTTAL

If the party's cross-examination increased Jimball's innocence score, the prosecution offers a rebuttal. Sierra O'Connell will argue that, since Jimball was clearly using magic, he could have fooled the sensors, changed his suit, and stolen the diamond all in a matter of seconds. Even if Neoma can't place Jimball at the scene of the crime, it clearly places him suspiciously nearby while spells were cast. This

point is compelling enough to **decrease Jimball's Innocence score by 1.**

The prosecution calls its next witness: Savyn Aravars.

SECOND WITNESS: SAVYN ARAVARS

Neoma steps down from the witness stand and wipes her metallic brow. Read or paraphrase the following:

The well-dressed Savyn Aravars saunters up to the witness stand with every ounce of calm self-assurance he is known for. He recounts:

"I was the organizer for this lavish event so naturally I was outside welcoming guests for most of the night. When Jimball arrived, I greeted him like any other guest. After that, I didn't see Jimball again until he was being arrested. Let the record state that I am appalled that he would try to steal such a priceless treasure from Politana!"

The characters are now allowed to cross-examine the witness, presenting objections and asking questions to dismantle their testimony. If a character uses a Legal Action to make a Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check (regardless of the check's result), Savyn will admit that the event was to pay tribute to his father's passing. He performs a routine of well-rehearsed sobbing as he speaks about this.

If the characters use an Objection with **Clue: Jimball and Savyn's History** or **Clue: Jimball's Suit**, the characters can prove that Savyn has a personal relationship with Jimball and is misrepresenting the events leading up to the crime. **Increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1.** Proceed to *Savyn's Revised Testimony*.

JANUARY'S INTUITION: SAVYN ARAVARS

Savyn is most definitely at the heart of this, but January reminds the characters to stick to contradicting his statements, starting with his relationship to Jimball. He'll have to modify his testimony if he's caught in a lie, and that's how the characters can pin him.

Alternatively, the characters can use an Objection with **Clue: Jimball's Ring** to reach a similar conclusion, but since the initials "SA" could be anyone's they'll need to make a **contested Charisma (Persuasion) check** against Sierra O'Connell, who makes her check with a +6 modifier. With a successful check, **increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1**. January will suggest this line of inquiry if the players don't spot the connection. Proceed to *Savyn's Revised Testimony*, even with a failed check.

SAVYN'S REVISED TESTIMONY

Before Savyn continues, Judge Bot will warn him to tell the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" or face punishment. Savyn then revises his testimony, as follows:

"Alright, yes, I invited Jimball to the party. I was fond of him in our younger years but hadn't seen him in a while. He was a hapless fellow and when I put together this social event, I thought it would be a kindness to invite him. I even bought him a fashionable tuxedo to wear.

When he arrived at the party and asked me to speak, I told him I was very busy at the moment but that he should meet me in the VIP Room after the first band played.

As they were wrapping up, I made my way to the VIP Room. I saw Jimball enter the room and, just as his foot crossed the threshold, the diamond vanished! The guards came over and searched him. I watched them pull the diamond out of his pocket with my own eyes!

Thank goodness the hardworking guards captured Jimball before he escaped with the Politana's most precious artifact. I am appalled that he would try something so heinous!"

The characters are again allowed to cross-examine the witness, presenting objections and asking questions to dismantle their testimony. If a character uses a Legal Action to make a **DC 12 Charisma**

JANUARY'S INTUITION: SAVYN ARAVARS

January notices that Savyn has told an outright lie here! He didn't see Jimball until after the diamond was stolen, so he couldn't have seen it first hand! Furthermore, now might be the time to present everything the party knows about the so-called security company Stiffling Security Corp.

(**Intimidation or Persuasion**) check, Savyn will admit to arranging the very guards which arrested Jimball, and paying them handsomely for the event. If the character beats a **DC 18**, they can insinuate that the guards can't be trusted because they were paid a suspiciously handsome amount for the event. In this case, **increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1**.

If the characters use an Objection to present Savyn with **Clue: Savyn's Alibi** or **Clue: Stiffling Security Corp.**, they can contradict Savyn's earlier testimony at his home, in which he said he was speaking to the head security guard at the time of the crime. They can also accomplish this by presenting the **Clue: VIP Room Cameras**, which show him to be nowhere near the scene of the crime. Thus he could not have possibly seen what he claims to have seen. **Increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1**.

If the characters use an Objection with **Clue: Suit Invoice**, they can show that, not only did Savyn purchase the tuxedo as he claimed, but he had it specially tailored with a hidden pocket. A character can also argue this point using **Clue: Jimball's Suit** and a successful **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. With the correct evidence or a successful check, **increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1**.

If the characters use an Objection with **Clue: Illusion Capsules** or **Clue: Front Organization**, they can prove that the guards weren't a security office, but a front for the criminal organization, the Firm. The characters can also argue this point using **Clue: The Other Tuxedo** and a successful **DC 16 (Charisma) Persuasion check**. With the correct evidence or a successful check, **increase Jimball's Innocence score by 2**.

When the characters are through with their questioning, proceed to *Exhibit A: The Pink Star*.

EXHIBIT A: THE PINK STAR

At their bench, the Scale Crew are deliberating fiercely on their next move. Finally, Drak stands and pulls attention away from the party's questioning. Read or paraphrase the following:

Drak interjects: "None of this changes the fact that Jimball was caught with the diamond in his possession as he left the building!" With a flourish, he announces "Exhibit A, your honor!"

A crowd of elven Politania police officers and a few members of the Politania Historical Society come marching in with the Pink Star diamond, gleaming as beautiful as ever, in a high-security glass vault.

The Pink Star diamond is carried in a transparent, nigh-impregnable case, which has been rendered weightless with a *gravity nullifier*. Savyn is not asked to leave the witness stand, as this evidence is intended to bolster his testimony.

The characters can now question the viability of the diamond itself as evidence. If the characters don't have the **Clue: Pink Star Fake**, they have another chance to get it by cross-referencing the **Clue: Pink Star Diamond Photo** with the physical diamond. The real diamond has a small discoloration, which this diamond lacks. Therefore, the diamond recovered from Jimball is a fake! If the characters use an Objection with **Clue: Pink Star Fake**, increase **Jimball's Innocence score by 3**.

JANUARY'S INTUITION: THE DIAMOND

If the players haven't figured out that the diamond Jimball was caught with was a fake, January offers a hint to that effect. January reckons that whoever stole the diamond could have easily made away with it. Why hide a priceless treasure in Jimball's jacket just to frame him? How do we know that Jimball wasn't planted with a fake diamond, while the real one was taken elsewhere?

If **Jimball's Innocence score is 4 or higher**, Savyn looks worried for the first time since the party has met him. His skin has gone even paler than usual and his hands clench compulsively in his lap. Read or paraphrase Savyn's panicked testimony:

"Do you understand who you're accusing? I am Savyn Aravars, head of House Aravars. Jimball is nothing, a silly accountant! He could have been anything but he chose this instead: a life of absolutely mediocrity.

So what if I didn't actually see him get arrested? What are you trying to say? That I set him up? Give me a break! He's nobody and I have no reason to even waste my time with him. Show me some evidence. Come on—hit me with your best shot!"

CLOSING STATEMENTS

Give the players one final chance to lay out their timeline, present any remaining relevant clues, and conjecture about how and why Savyn framed Jimball. **Increase Jimball's Innocence score by 1** for each new point made in this section. When the characters are finished, Judge Bot will tabulate Jimball's Innocence score. If it is **5 or higher**, proceed to *Innocent!* If it is 4 or lower, proceed to *Guilty as Charged!*

INNOCENT!

The Judge Bot presents its final verdict:

The Judge Bot grinds and rattles like a poorly maintained engine before concluding with a ding. "Verdict: This court finds you, Jimball Hundwig... INNOCENT of jewel theft."

Jimball chokes out a quiet thanks, but a disgruntled shout sounds from Savyn Aravars, who is standing at the prosecution bench.

"He was supposed to be GUILTY!" Savyn cries, pulling out a transmat deck from his pocket. "The diamonds look IDENTICAL. See?" A bright flash erupts from the real Pink Star diamond, and runs up Savyn's arm.

Within moments of Savyn's confession, the Pink Star diamond grows like a seed crystal and envelops half his body. He struggles fruitlessly against the magical diamond as the Judge Bot hammers its gavel and mechanically demands order. A moment later, he emerges from the crystals as a **diamond dragon**, and attacks the party. **Roll initiative.**

The Scale Crew won't attack their client (horrific dragon transformation or not), but neither will they help you. **Judge Bot** rattles into action and fights against the dragon, demanding order in the court and swinging its gavel as a cudgel. No matter what happens, the diamond dragon will avoid harming Jimball.

If the characters defeat the diamond dragon, proceed to *Savyn Arrested*. If instead the characters are defeated, proceed to *Savyn Escapes*.

SAVYN ARRESTED

When the diamond dragon drops to 0 hit points, the Pink Star loses its power and Savyn reverts back to his original form. The Pink Star diamond, now leached of color, will drop on the ground beside him. Savyn is gravely injured and exhausted, but still conscious.

Detective Rumboot will come forward and arrest him. Before she takes him away, he will ask to speak to Jimball. Read or paraphrase this goodbye:

January scurries up Jimball's leg and perches on his shoulder, and Savyn looks on wistfully.

"I guess I was a fool to think that locking you up would be a good way to keep you near me." He sighs as he looks around the ruined courtroom, then nods and raises his hands for Detective Rumboot to put the restraints on him.

"My all, always," Savyn says mournfully, as she leads him away.

Jimball is released from custody and the party escorts him back to Grax's headquarters. As he processes the events of the last few days, he remains fairly quiet and keeps January close.

Grax greets the party at the star port with bottles of champagne in each hand and practically

crushes Jimball in a hug. While the party was in transit, the Politana Historical Society transferred Grax's Guys a great deal of money as thanks for recovering their priceless artifact and confirming that it did, indeed, possess staggering magical properties. Grax gives each character 1,250 credits as payment, and offers a rare, genuine complement: "Ya kids did real good, real, real good."

Jimball settles back down into his office, as if none of this ever happened, and January does the same, though her itty-bitty lawyer costume sits in the corner of her cage as a memento of the case.

GUILTY AS CHARGED!

The Judge Bot presents its final verdict. Read or paraphrase the following:

The Judge Bot grinds and rattles like a poorly maintained engine before concluding with a ding. "Verdict: This court finds you, Jimball Hundwig... GUILTY AS CHARGED of jewel theft."

Jimball collapses with a sigh, and Savyn smirks from across the courtroom.

Meanwhile, the Scale Crew congratulates one another for a job well done.

The Judge Bot rattles up to the defense stand and ensnares Jimball with a pair of heavy handcuffs, attached to a length of chain. Jimball only has a few moments to say goodbye before being dragged off in chains. As Jimball and the Judge Bot pass the prosecutor's stand, Savyn smirks and whispers something to Jimball. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** hears him say "And now, you'll never get too far away, my love."

The characters return to Grax HQ with a depressed slump and Grax is defeated at the news. Each character is paid only 250 credits each—a massive pay cut. When he hears that Savyn Aravars, the extraordinary wealthy elven aristocrat was involved, he growls, "I should have known it would be that elf".

Two weeks later, the characters notice a faint glow coming from Jimball's office. To everyone's surprise, January has constructed an elaborate hyperspace holo-vid relay, allowing Jimball to somewhat return to work as a form of penal labor to lessen his sentence, which is still over a hundred years of imprisonment. The characters can visit

Jimball in his office, though he is only present as a hologram, pushing holographic papers around on a holographic desk. Surprisingly, Jimball is rather chipper about the whole affair. His jail cell is much larger than his office at Grax HQ, and he is visited every day by Savyn, who has forced the prison to make some staggering accommodations on his behalf. His greatest trouble is being so far away from January, but Savyn promises to make her a place with Jimball soon.

SAVYN ESCAPES

Jimball has been declared innocent in the eyes of the law, but the true jewel thief, elven aristocrat, Savyn Aravars has escaped with the Pink Star diamond, leaving the characters a bloody mess in the process. Detective Rumboot ensures that proper doctors look over the party, and that Jimball is kept safe until the party can escort him back to Grax's headquarters. On the way back, Jimball is listless, concerned for his friend and for his own safety.

Grax greets the party at the star port with a case of beer and practically crushes Jimball in a hug. Even though the party didn't manage to recover the diamond, House Aravars was issued a gigantic fine by the elven government of Politana (interrupting a courtroom by turning into a dragon being damnable heresy for a race which prides itself on law and order), and Grax's Guys is being paid a sizable quantity. As such, each character is paid 1,000 credits for their work.

Jimball settles back down into his office, as if none of this ever happened, and January does the same, though her itty-bitty lawyer costume sits in the corner of her cage as a memento of the case.



'DEX EDUCATION

A FIELD TRIP ADVENTURE
FOR 8TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

WRITTEN BY MAKENZIE DE ARMAS

GRAX'S CLUB

'DEX EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Far above the thrum of midnight speeder traffic, a lone figure stands silhouetted at a window, the sharp angles of a finely tailored business suit cutting clean lines against the urban planet's skyline. The office behind them is dim, save for the several glowing datapads scattered on the singular desk. Each contains a multitude of contracts and other business records—some legal, and others far from it.

One such datapad shimmers faintly, and the blue holographic image of a humanoid face appears projected above its surface. "Not to interrupt your musings," says a mechanical baritone voice, "but we've located the vect."

"Really?" comes the smooth reply from the figure. "Where?"

The datapad flashes again, this time projecting images of a lanky freshly-minted vect tripping over the plastic playground of an elementary school with other adolescent creatures their same size. "Seems the reset did more than they expected. It's like they're a whole new person."

The figure smirks. "Don't get your precious processors worked up, Oversight. What we're after can't be so easily deleted." A few buttons on the datapad whir affirmatively, and the figure straightens their tie. "Get a Contractor on assignment as soon as possible. We have a Codex to find."

BACKGROUND

Few stories now speak of the legendary artifact known as *Un's Codex*. An ancient piece of technology shrouded in mystery, the Codex is said to grant whosoever solves it the keys to some of the universe's greatest secrets. Its creation is attributed to Old Un, the First God and heart of the galaxy itself, and indeed, the few records of its existence corroborate this, with analyses matching its material to the rare metals found in the great Sepulcher Star.

The last individual said to have handled the Codex is Unit JR-1K0, a.k.a. "Jericho", one of the

first vect adventurers to traverse the galaxy over a hundred years ago. But in order to keep the Codex safe, Unit JR-1K0 repeatedly wiped their own memory, resetting their circuitry and engineering new mechanical bodies for themselves so that the secret of the Codex's location could never be discovered.

But such noble endeavors would do little to dissuade the calculated machinations of the Firm. The largest organized crime syndicate in the galaxy, the Firm has fingers in every heist, hacking, and illicit operation across the 'verse. And by exclusively hiring short-term Contractors for each job, the Firm ensures that the details of its central management and true motives remain absolutely secret.

Their latest endeavors have stirred an interest in procuring the mysterious Codex for themselves. Though they are nowhere near as obsessed with magic artifacts as the arcanists of the Tower or the collectors of DD&D, the Firm can still recognize the priceless value of the information contained on the Codex. The Firm's ubiquitous involvement in criminal enterprise has made them the premiere information brokers in the 'Verse—and they'd like to keep things that way, no matter the cost.

OVERVIEW

Dex Education is an adventure for 8th-level characters, and the finale of the *Grax's Club* series. With interest in Grax's Guys for Cheap spreading after their various escapades, the adventurers are tasked with chaperoning a visiting group of school children and ensuring they return home safely. However, what is meant to be a simple escort mission quickly turns into a heist of epic proportions as Scale and Fang mercenaries hired by the Firm abscond with the school bus, believing one of the children is the key to locating *Un's Codex*. The adventurers must track the missing school bus, break into their nemeses' ship, and unravel the Firm's machinations before it's too late...well, too late for them, at least. The kids, though? They've got this whole thing handled.

This adventure is presented in the following parts. *Prologue: Field Trip at Grax HQ!* introduces the adventurers to the five excitable (and scrappy) school children visiting Grax's Guys Headquarters. The adventurers can round up the kids and give them a tour of the base before preparing to escort them back to school.

In *Part One: Are We There Yet?*, Scale and Fang ships intercept the adventurers and the school bus. A dogfight breaks out, and the Scale and Fang ships take the bus to the Vexation, the large corvette that serves as their base of operations. The adventurers can approach the Vexation and make a plan to board.

Part Two: On the Vexation brings the adventurers inside the Vexation as they search for the kids—who have, for the most part, harnessed their innate chaos to send the Scale and Fang crew running.

In *Part Three: Just Doing Business*, the adventurers face off against the mastermind of this operation and make one last bid to escape with their lives.

Epilogue details the aftermath of the adventurers' escapades, as well as further potential story threads to pursue should you wish to continue the campaign beyond the scope of *Grax's Club*.

KEY CHARACTERS

The following nonplayer characters feature prominently in this adventure.

GRAX GRRAXE (HE/HIM)

The party's employer and head of Grax's Guys for Cheap, Grax Grraxe, is a fat, well-humored orc with an eyepatch and a thick orcish accent. Around fifty years ago, Grax decided to leave the Warzone and all its general unpleasantness to found Grax's Guys, a low-to-mid-tier mercenary organization, which bills itself as being all-purpose. True to form, Grax branded it after himself, and his face can be seen on billboards, company mugs, and the occasional t-shirt.

However, over the last few years, GGFC has lost a lot of customers to their closest rival, Scale and Fang Inc. Nothing perturbs Grax so much as this rivalry, and in particular, that he's losing to the mercenary company owned by Garfreckt, an eternal dragon who Grax considers to be a bit of a jerk.

THE KIDS

Enamored with the adventurers' public successes so far, these five scrappy ingenious school children managed to convince their teacher to let them go on a field trip to the headquarters of Grax's Guys for Cheap.

Jay (she/they). Jay is a lanky vect, their dented and dull chassis looking strange next to their shiny chrome limbs and faceplate. Though vect usually don't go through adolescence, Jay's most recent circuitry reset has resulted in her taking an elementary school course, to "catch up" on the knowledge that might have been lost in the reset. She is actually the latest incarnation of Unit JR-1K0 and has the location of *Un's Codex* stored in their old memory files, though they cannot access that information consciously. Because of the constant resets, though, Jay ends up spacing out a lot and is generally shy around new people.

Kerris (he/him). Kerris is the self-appointed president of the Grax's Guys for Cheap Appreciation Club and the adventurers' biggest fan. A scruffy twelve-year-old human boy, Kerris has freckled brown skin, curly dark hair, an endearing gap in his front teeth, and a desire to one day become a "great intergalactic hero" like the adventurers. He can easily be spotted by the bulging backpack of gadgets he carries on his person at all times. Though his excitement might be a bit overwhelming and naive, Kerris earnestly wants to do good. He might just need better role models.

If the party previously played through *Bipinbop's Factory of Fun*, they will recognize Kerris from the factory tour. Their bravery there inspired Kerris's current Grax's Guys obsession.

Saida (she/her). Though technically the oldest in the group, Saida is still a teenager by star elf standards—and boy, does she hate it. Saida has pale skin, choppy hair dyed void-black, and an aggressive amount of stereotypical teen angst. Often preferring to be alone, Saida maintains a rather pessimistic outlook on life as well as a healthy distrust of authority figures. Despite this, she does have a lot of love for the other kids in the group. It's just hiding behind a wall of dark eyeliner.

Tyndarius (he/they). Called "Tyn" for short, Tyndarius is an adolescent nautilid. His aqua suit consists of a fishbowl-esque center mounted on four

horse-like robotic legs, with two scraggly arms jutting out from the front like a T-Rex. Tyn is the most responsible of the group, and though he may not be the brightest, he does everything he can to make sure the others are safe and having fun. He is often not aware of his own strength.

Zyll (they/them). Squishy, wiggly, and fluorescent pink, Zyll and their rambunctious curiosity cannot be contained. This bouncy amoeboid is the youngest child of the group, being just over one year old (which is equivalent to a 10-year-old human). They are constantly using their amorphous form to get into places they shouldn't be and touch things they shouldn't touch; basically, if you tell Zyll not to do something, they will immediately do everything in their power to do exactly that. Surprisingly, Zyll gets along best with the broody Saida, as their similar disregard for authority figures makes them an excellent team.

THE FIRM

As the organization pulling the strings behind the adventure, the Firm has a couple of key pieces in play to ensure their operation here does not fail.

Oversight (he/she/they). A cunning and suave AI, Oversight is the captain of the Vexation and does everything in their power to ensure Scale and Fang's success in obtaining the location of the Codex. In the end though, Oversight knows the mercenaries of Scale and Fang are just short-term pawns in a long-term game, and the AI has little qualms about sacrificing others in favor of the Firm's overarching goals.

If the party played through *Curse of the Astromo*, Oversight has forcibly assimilated MAH-MAH 9000's consciousness from the Baldrin. Oversight has access to MAH-MAH 9000's memories regarding the player characters, and uses those memories to gain the upper hand against the party.

Two-Four (they/them). Two-Four is the prototype piloting automaton in charge of driving the kids' school bus. Due to the kids' teacher having a weak stomach for places like the Grax's Guys for Cheap headquarters, Two-Four was given custody of the children for the field trip, with the adventurers hired as extra chaperones in case of emergency. However, hidden in Two-Four's code is a sleeper program that allows their body to be commandeered—and remotely shut down—by Oversight.

THE SCALE CREW

A band of mercenaries from the rival Scale and Fang Inc., the Scale Crew is better-funded and more competent than any crew from Grax's Guys. They consist of the following:

Drak Garfreckt (he/him). A male dragonborn with red and black scales, Drak is the leader and fighter of his crew. He's cool under pressure, tough as nails, and smart enough to be a step ahead of any rival mercenary group. His last name is that of Garfreckt, the eternal dragon who founded and owns Scale and Fang Inc. Perhaps, he was adopted by the eternal dragon, or is distantly related to it. In any case, Drak has the assurance of someone who earned their position through expertise and hard work, and commands the respect of his crew in turn.

Trace (they/them). The heavily-upgraded vect of the Scale Crew, Trace, serves as their sniper and gadgeteer. Trace's expertise lies in drones, blasters, and explosives, but any mechanical device which can be broken or repaired falls under their domain. At a glance, it can be determined that Trace is cold, calculating, and prepared for anything.

Sierra O'Connell (she/her). The lovely Sierra O'Connell is a near-human green-skin who oozes charisma. Her smile not only lightens up a room, it makes even Drak and Trace seem less businesslike and dour by extension. On a typical day, she's dressed for adventure, with a fitting hat to complement her laser whip. Sierra even knows a few songs as well, so she serves as the Scale Crew's bard, as well as their rogue. Her biggest personal flaw is that she will, without fail, steal the wallet of anyone she spends time with. It's as much habit as it is misbehavior for her at this point.

Aela Vestele (they/them). The half-elf sorcerer Aela Vestele is easily the most refined of the Scale Crew, and is usually the most refined of any group in which they find themselves. Only when they cast a spell does the nature of their sorcery become revealed: small dimensional rifts open around them, revealing a soup of alien tentacles and eyes. Despite this, Aela tries to be utterly composed at all times. Their father is Jermain'ion Vestele, one of the most successful capitalists in the Elven Empire, so it's anyone's guess how Aela ended up as a half-elf in a mercenary company, instead of as a full-blooded elf working behind a desk.

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PROLOGUE: FIELD TRIP AT GRAX HQ!

Advance all characters to 8th level

Members of Grax's Guys for Cheap usually spend their downtime between missions lounging about the company headquarters. However, unlike most days, the lazy atmosphere that permeates the warehouse has been quickly shattered by the arrival of five excitable schoolchildren, who quickly devolve the headquarters into chaos.

If asked as to why he's allowed five children to run amok in his warehouse, Grax gruffly explains that the party's previous escapades have gained the group a bit of infamy across the galaxy. A nearby school paid good money to send this group of students on a tour of the one-and-only Grax' Guys for Cheap HQ.

In addition to their usual downtime activities in the warehouse, Grax asks that the characters give the kids a brief tour of the place. Or, at the very least, make sure they stay out of trouble.

THE LOUNGE

Before the characters can properly get a grip on the tour, the kids scatter in all directions! Read or paraphrase the following:

It's easier to keep track of bouncing pogocats than these kids. They're chasing each other, screeching at pitches impossible to replicate, and trying to steal stuff out of the vending machines.

One particularly precocious child, an elven teenage wearing too much eyeliner, suddenly points and shouts, "What's that over there?!" In a start, you whirl around to see the dartboard, unchanged as ever, and when you turn back, all but one of the kids have scattered, vanishing into different parts of the headquarters.

Only the shy, mild mannered vect, **Jay**, remains, while all the other kids have slipped away. Even though Grax's HQ might be large, it only has so many

nooks and crannies for kids to hide in. The characters should look around and recover the schoolkids before someone gets hurt.

JAY

The most mild-mannered of the kids, Jay latches on to the first "grown-up" she can find and follows any instructions given to her by the adults present without hesitation. She always asks permission before touching anything or going anywhere in the warehouse. If guided on a tour, Jay earnestly tries to pay attention to everything said, but the adolescent vect struggles to remain focused on anything for longer than a minute.

Jay also gladly assists mercenaries in the headquarters with any research or reading, granting them a +1 bonus to Intelligence checks.

BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

If the characters have not already determined that the broken Krash vending machine dispenses random magic items, they may do so by inspecting the machine more closely and making a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check**.

A successful inspection of the machine shows that its four buttons have prices of 100 credits, 500 credits, 2,500 credits, and 7,500 credits. Depending on the amount inserted, roll a d20 on one of the tables from *Appendix E* to determine which magic item is dispensed. Keep track of which magic items have been provided to the players. If a character rolls a magic item which has already been produced, they receive the next lowest magic item on the table, or an error and a return of credits if there is no lower magic item.

It's not possible to extract magic items from the machine by force. Large magic items are magically shrunk and instantly grow to full size once removed from the machine.

ALRIGHT, SHOW'S OVER, TIME TO GO

When the adventurers have finished their business around the headquarters and collected all the kids from their "tour" in the lounge (or when everyone is just tired of babysitting the children), Grax ushers the group back to the Fornax starport. Proceed to *Part 1: Are We There Yet?*

CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters at Grax HQ are where Grax's Guys and Gals go to rest between missions. However, today there's an uninvited guest. Read or paraphrase the following:

A fluorescent pink, wiggly amoeboid works furiously with a paperclip on one of the lockboxes underneath the bunk beds. Without much difficulty, the box springs open, and the amoeboid begins rifling through its contents. Several lockboxes have been opened in the same fashion.

Zyll the amoeboid is going through everyone's things! If a character can make a **DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check** to seem like a responsible authority figure or a **DC 18 Charisma (Deception or Intimidation) check** to claim that the group will leave Zyll behind, then Zyll will temporarily behave and follow the party. Only characters with a **passive Perception of 18 or higher** can truly keep an eye on Zyll. If a character fails the previous check or no character with a high enough passive Perception keeps an eye on Zyll, then Zyll will squeeze through the air vent in the crew quarters and escape to the storage area!

ZYLL

The rambunctious amoeboid child is constantly running off to explore the forbidden areas and hidden crevices of the warehouse. However, though Zyll refuses to listen to any adult authority, they will try to behave under Tyn's watch.

SHOOTING RANGE

Undeniably the best part of the Grax's headquarters is the shooting range and armory. This is, of course, a terrible place to let schoolkids run amok. Read or paraphrase the following:

The sounds of shrieking and laughing echo around the shooting range, punctuated by the punching sound of blaster bolts and something hissing loudly.

The halfling dart expert, Gimby "Lucky Shot" Matchfoot stands near the edge of the shooting range with the teenage elf Saida, who is casually tossing cans of Krash into the air for Gimby to shoot at. With every successful shot, a hissing spray of sugary liquid coats another part of the shooting range.

If asked to come with the party, Saida will huff loudly and roll her eyes, but comply. While she slips away, she attempts to steal a phaser from Gimby's bag, which a character with a **passive Perception of 14 or higher** can spot.

SAIDA

The least enthused of the group, Saida makes her distaste for being around so many "authority figures" painfully evident. Characters who attempt to lead her on a tour of the headquarters must first make a successful **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. On a failure, Saida stubbornly stays on one of the couches in the lounge. She also attempts to rob the broken Krash vending machine multiple times, but characters with a **passive Perception of 14 or higher** catch her in the act.

PRACTICING AT THE SHOOTING RANGE

If a character spends an hour practicing with a weapon at the firing range, they gain a practice die, a d6, which they can add to an attack roll using that weapon sometime in the next 10 days. A character can only have one practice die at a time.

THE ARMORY

At the Grax HQ armory, characters can purchase weapons, armor, and gear, as per the tables in the *Dark Matter* Equipment chapter. If the characters wish to find more traditional, exotic, or illegal gear, there's a rat-person out by the dumpsters behind the headquarters named Charles Rattington Jr. who will sell any equipment from the SRD, and additional gear at the GM's discretion.

STORAGE

A great deal of Grax HQ is used for storage. This is, by far, the best place to find peace and quiet in Grax's HQ, but it's also a place where characters might find some truly strange stuff. To introduce this location, read or paraphrase the following:

If the rest of Grax's HQ is a converted warehouse, this is the section that's an unconverted warehouse. Countless unlabeled crates are stacked haphazardly in this room, creating a combination of a fire hazard and an avalanche risk. Most crates seem to be filled with Grax-branded merchandise nobody wants to buy. That being said, if someone wants a Grax mug, this is the mother-lode.

If a character wants to go digging through the storage, roll on the following table to determine what they find:

d8 Item

- 1 A pair of Grax-branded sunglasses (tinted green, naturally)
- 2 A box of four *potions of speed*, a decade past their expiration dates. If consumed, the potions simply induce fast vomiting.
- 3 A can of spaceshark repellent
- 4 A box of Grax's fine cigars, too strong for human consumption
- 5 A smashed murder drone, once disguised as a birthday cake. "Happy Birthday, from Garfreckt," is written in icing.
- 6 A holo-vid containing the abandoned pilot for a would-be reality show "That's So Grax!"
- 7 A magic wand with one charge which, when used, disintegrates and summons another magic wand with one charge.
- 8 A terrifyingly accurate scale model of Grax's HQ, complete with a tiny model of you, looking at an even tinier model of Grax's HQ. The mind boggles.

CATCHING ZYLL

If the characters have lost track of the rambunctious amoeboid, Zyll, they will find Zyll in the storage area, diving through various wooden crates. Zyll is remarkably evasive, slipping between crates with ease whenever the characters draw close. They can be caught with suitable bait (a can of Krash or some candy will work) or some coordination between the

characters, using a **group DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check**, to round Zyll into a corner.

JIMBALL'S OFFICE

Next to Grax's office is that of Jimball Hundwig, the Accountant, who is in charge of giving the characters the operating budget for their missions. If the characters wish to visit Jimball, read or paraphrase the following:

After weeks of vacation (and imprisonment in an elven moon colony), Jimball is back in his office, looking just like his old self—that is, he is nervous, stammering, and coated in a perpetual flop sweat. Truly, he keeps this business together. Nobody else seems to be doing work today.

Jimball is hard at work, and has barely noticed the intrusion of **Tyndarius** (Tyn for short), the adolescent nautilid. Tyn is most enamored with January and can usually be found sitting in the corner of Jimball's office petting the thwirrel. Though January does not deem the adolescent nautilid smart enough to be worth talking to, she does enjoy his scratches and the snacks he's sneaking her. When asked, Tyn reluctantly leaves January to join the group.

Jimball helpfully reminds the characters that, since they will be escorting the kids back to school, they get paid the standard operating budget of 100 credits each. If the party played through *The Pink Star Scandal*, Jimball gives each character 200 credits instead, a belated thank you for getting him out of Politana prison.

TYNDARIUS

The responsible and attentive Tyndarius is an adolescent nautilid who loves animals and constantly looks out for his friends. His aqua suit consists of a fishbowl-esque center mounted on four horse-like robotic legs, with two scraggly arms jutting out from the front like a T-Rex.

He does what he can to keep the rowdier kids like Zyll and Kerris in check, though they rarely listen to him. Tyn will also gladly help the mercenaries with any physical menial tasks, granting them a +1 bonus to any Strength or Dexterity checks.

GRAX'S OFFICE

Quite unusually, the door to Grax's office is wide open. Read or paraphrase the following:

Inside the office, an enthusiastic human boy is showing an uninterested Grax gadgets from his backpack. Grax's eyes widen at your approach, pleading for someone—anyone—to remove this child from his office.

Kerris is repeatedly asking Grax if he can do anything to help out Grax's Guys for Cheap, and showing Grax various scenes he's captured on his holo-spheres. When the characters show up, Kerris immediately turns his attention to them, and begins following them through the building. Throughout the course of the "tour", Kerris tries desperately to earn the adventurers' recognition and respect.

KERRIS

As the self-appointed president of the Grax's Guys for Cheap Appreciation Club and the adventurers' biggest fan, Kerris is relishing every single moment of his time inside the warehouse. He carries a dozen *holo-spheres* in his backpack, with which he captures several (often unflattering) scenes of the characters. If guided on a tour, Kerris asks nonstop questions; though he already knows a lot about the party's escapades, he strives to learn all the exact details of their every single adventure.

NO CHILDREN WERE HARMED IN THE MAKING OF THIS ADVENTURE

Escapades in the far reaches of the 'verse are bound to be dangerous. That being said, this adventure does involve a cast of kids, and we in no way recommend nor encourage any form of harm towards these younger characters. The kids may find themselves in perilous situations again and again, but they should always—through a combination of luck and sheer tenacity—manage to make it out okay.

PART ONE: ARE WE THERE YET?

With the “educational” tour of the Grax headquarters finished, the adventurers prepare to return kids back to school. But the simple sublight excursion quickly becomes an epic chase through urban spaceport traffic as mercenary ships target the school bus for nefarious purposes.

READY TO DEPART

When the kids have seen everything they wanted (or when the characters get tired of being impromptu tour guides), Grax ushers the group to the planet Fornax’s starport, where the school bus is waiting alongside the *Gittin’*:

“Alright, on you go!” Grax calls out. One by one, the kids each shuffle onto the garish yellow space shuttle with the words “Kuiper Neighborhood School District” spray-painted in neat font on the side. From the driver’s seat, a cylindrical-shaped automaton with big binocular eyes offers a friendly, mechanical wave.

The school bus uses the **shuttle** statistics, with the automaton **Two-Four** taking the Pilot role.

Once the kids are on the bus and out of earshot, Grax grumpily explains to the party that they aren’t getting paid until the bus and all five students have returned safely back to their school. Though he doesn’t expect anything on the journey to be super dangerous—in his words, “What kind of space worm would wanna snack on a school bus?”—he asks the characters to follow the shuttle and ensure it reaches its destination in one piece. In his words, “Oy, follow the little runts, willya?”

Grax has already readied the *Gittin’* for launch and informed Two-Four that the ship will be accompanying the bus on its journey. The characters have about five minutes to prepare anything they’d like to bring with them before the bus takes off.

ENTERING THE KUIPER NEIGHBORHOOD

Upon leaving the planet, the characters receive a short transmission:

A cheerful robotic voice rings out from the ship’s communications. “Hello. I am pilot Two-Four of school bus number 3507. Mr. Grraxe has kindly informed me that you will be accompanying our return journey to the Kuiper Neighborhood. We are glad to have you with us.”

Because the school bus lacks a Dark Matter engine, the trip back to the school must be made entirely at sublight speed. The journey takes the ships through the empty starfields surrounding Fornax for about an hour before entering the more wealthy urban area of the **Kuiper Neighborhood**. Not tied to any galactic faction, the Kuiper Neighborhood has become a bustling hub for travelers, businesses, and families looking to get away from the confines of planet-bound life. Here, various lanes of intergalactic traffic criss-cross between towering spaceports and large cruisers.

In order to accurately follow the school bus through this traffic, the pilot of the *Gittin’* must make a successful **DC 15 Dexterity (Piloting) check**. On a failure, the characters momentarily lose sight of the school bus, which has repercussions in the following section.

RUSH HOUR

Unbeknownst to the characters, several Scale and Fang ships are also tailing the school bus as it enters the Kuiper Neighborhood. Before the kids can reach their final destination, Scale and Fang ships swoop in to capture the bus, embroiling the characters in a high-speed chase through intergalactic traffic.

The chase sequence has three phases. Keep track of how many rounds of combat the chase sequence takes, as that determines what occurs in the final section of the chase.

BEFORE THE CHASE: LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

If the characters momentarily lost sight of the school bus, skip this section.

As the *Gittin’* follows the bus through traffic, the party notices that a couple of intersections seem unusually jammed with ships:

While speeding between two large space stations, a loud rumble bursts from the ship's starboard side. Somewhere below, an intersection of traffic has come to a sudden halt, and the irritated pilots have taken to flashing their ship lights and revving their sublight engines in retaliation. A second burst of sound erupts on the port side, and yet another jam is seen stopping the usually bustling traffic.

Concerned characters may make either a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** or a **DC 14 Intelligence (Data) check** using the *Gittin's* sensors. On a success, a character notices a few heavily-armed fighter ships hovering around the intersections, their slow and cautious pace being the cause of the traffic. If a character succeeds on the check by 5 or more, the character notices that these ships have the same markings as the Scale and Fang ships the party has encountered on their previous escapades.

FIRST PHASE

Sensing an opportunity, the Scale and Fang ships dive into action:

The thunderous roar of sublight engines being pushed to full throttle erupts from several intersections, and suddenly, four chrome-plated fighters come careening through traffic. Two charge at the school bus, causing it to swerve. The other two come streaking towards the *Gittin'*.

Four **sabres** rush into the traffic. Have everyone choose a crew role and **roll initiative**. If no one succeeded on the check to notice the fighters (or if you skipped the previous section entirely), the party is surprised by the Scale and Fang ships.

In a place visible to players, keep a tally of how many rounds combat takes. Continue counting the number of rounds until the third phase of the chase.

The goal of the Scale and Fang mercenaries during this phase of the chase is separating the bus from the *Gittin'* so that they can more easily capture it. To do so, the mercenaries fly dangerously close to the bus so it swerves away from more populated areas, but they never target the bus with any attacks. However, the Scale and Fang ships will target the *Gittin'* with attacks to dissuade it from pursuing the bus.

Once one of the sabres has been reduced to 0 hit points or three rounds of combat have passed, move to the second phase of the chase.

SECOND PHASE

At the beginning of this phase, the Scale and Fang transport ship, the *Baldrin*, moves to intercept the bus with its tractor beam:

The school bus shudders then comes to a halt, even though its engines are still firing. Just above it, what was once an empty expanse of stars shimmers to reveal a hulking transport ship emblazoned with the dragonbone emblem of Scale and Fang Inc. A jagged door opens on the side of the ship, and like being pulled by a magnet, the bus begins to float backward into the ship's clutches.

The *Baldrin* uses the **renegade** ship statistics, with the cloaking and tractor beam systems and the overshield, reinforced hull, and smuggler's hold upgrades added (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 6, "Systems" and "Customizing Your Ship"). Two-Four automatically fails all saving throws to avoid the *Baldrin's* tractor beam, as the sleeper program hidden in their code activates. If a character attempts to communicate with Two-Four, one of the kids answers instead and informs the character that Two-Four has spontaneously lost all power with no discernible cause.

All remaining sabres direct fire to the *Gittin'*, with the goal now to prevent the adventurers from pursuing or targeting the *Baldrin*. It takes one round of combat for the bus to be pulled completely inside the *Baldrin*. Once the bus is inside, the *Baldrin* activates its cloaking device and flees the scene with the bus in tow.

In order to track the *Baldrin*, the *Gittin's* pilot must use their bonus action to make either a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** or a **DC 14 Intelligence (Data) check** using the *Gittin's* sensors; regardless of the skill, the check is made at disadvantage due to the *Baldrin's* cloaking device. On a failure, the *Gittin'* makes a wrong turn and encounters a complication. Roll a d6 and consult the Kuiper Neighborhood Chase Complication table to see what besets the adventurers.

Once the pilot has made three successful checks to follow the *Baldrin*, the phase ends.

KUIPER NEIGHBORHOOD CHASE COMPLICATIONS

d6 Complication

- 1 The *Gittin'* flies into a lane of oncoming traffic. The pilot must immediately make a successful **DC 15 Dexterity (Piloting) check** or collide with another ship, taking 7 (2d6) mega bludgeoning damage.
- 2 Ship debris has clogged one of the *Gittin'*s impulse engines. On their turn, the engineer may use an action to make a **DC 12 Intelligence (Technology) check**, dislodging the debris on a success. Until the debris is dislodged, all Piloting checks have disadvantage.
- 3 The *Gittin'* veers into a Kuiper Neighborhood "street race" that winds through the lower levels of a towering space station. For the next round, the *Gittin'* and its pursuants are embroiled in this race, during which time all ranged ship weapon attacks are made at disadvantage due to the close quarters of the race.

At the start of their next turn, the pilot of the *Gittin'* can make a **DC 13 Dexterity (Piloting) check** (no action required) to determine their final standing in the race. On a success, the *Gittin'* accidentally wins, and at some point in the next week, the characters find they have been transferred 150 credits for their victory.

- 4 A freight ship swerves to avoid the chaos, accidentally losing some of its volatile nitrate cargo in the maneuver. The pilots of the *Gittin'* and every ship within 500 feet of the *Gittin'* must immediately make a **DC 17 Dexterity (Piloting) check** to avoid the explosives, taking 10 (3d6) mega bludgeoning damage and 11 (2d8) mega fire damage on a failure, or half as much on a success.
- 5 The side of the *Gittin'* clips the window of a spaceport, releasing a flurry of malfunctioning repair drones into the space traffic. Three drones latch onto the *Gittin'* and begin tampering with its defenses, reducing the ship's current and maximum shield points by 6.

On their turn, gunners can target a drone with a weapon attack made at disadvantage. Each drone has AC 12 and 1 mega hit point. Destroying a drone restores 2 of the ship's maximum shield points to the ship.
- 6 Roll on this table twice. If you get this result again, ignore it.

THIRD PHASE

Pursuing the *Baldrin*, the party follows the transport ship out of the Kuiper Neighborhood and towards the *Vexation*, which serves as the Scale Crew's base of operations for this mission:

As the hubbub of the Kuiper Neighborhood begins to fade, a large platinum-plated corvette emerges from the stars. Despite its massive size, its oblong design remains sleek and polished, with nary a cannon scratch in its dark teal hull. At the front of its oblong form sits a massive pulsing circle of light like a singular eye, burning electric blue at its center. Along the side of the ship, in careful font, is painted the name, "Vexation."

How prepared the *Vexation* is for the *Gittin's* arrival depends on how long the chase took:

Quiet Approach. If the first and second phases of the chase took 10 rounds or fewer, the characters arrive just in time to see the *Baldrin* enter through a hangar on the ship's left side, the *Vexation* has not yet had time to raise its security measures, so the *Gittin'* can approach the corvette without any further complication. The chase ends.

Cease and Desist. However, if the first and second phases of the chase took more than 10 rounds, the crew of the *Vexation* has activated its defenses in anticipation of the adventurers' interference. The corvette has deployed its two troopers to accost the *Gittin'*; as the characters approach, one trooper pilot sends a transmission, warning the party that they will use lethal force should they not cease their pursuit. These troopers attack the adventurers' ship until either they are reduced to 0 hit points or the pilot succeeds on a **DC 18 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to avoid the troopers' notice. The chase then ends.

BOARDING THE VEXATION

Once within 1,500 feet of the *Vexation*, the characters can easily spot the *Baldrin* docked within. They can also find two possible points of entry onto the *Vexation*: the hangars and the waste airlock.

THE HANGARS

Sitting on the left side of the *Vexation*, the dual set of spacious hangars are protected not by sets of doors, but rather by a shimmering blue force field that also serves as an airlock. One hangar currently houses the *Baldrin*.

In order to fly into one of the hangars, the characters must first deactivate the force fields that shield the entrance. A ship that collides with the force field while it's still active takes 1d4 mega lightning damage. Colliding with the field also immediately alerts the hangar crew to the presence of intruders.

Characters can attempt to contact the hangar crew and convince them to allow entry by making a **DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check**; this check is made at disadvantage if the *Gittin's* appearance is not disguised in some way. On a success, the field deactivates long enough for the *Gittin'* to enter. On a failure, the hangar crew is alerted to the presence of intruders.

Alternatively, the characters can attempt to blast apart the mechanisms creating the force fields. Each field has two mechanisms (one on either side of the entrance), and each mechanism has AC 18 and 5 mega hit points. However, openly targeting these systems with attacks immediately alerts the hangar crew.

When alerted, the hangar crew uses the *Vexation's* auto-turrets to fire at the *Gittin'* until it flies out of range or hides.

Successfully deactivating the force field and docking in the *Vexation* brings the party to the Hangar Bay. Proceed to *Part Two: On the Vexation*.

THE WASTE AIRLOCK

On the underside of the ship, characters can see a pair of massive doors that periodically open to release clumps of trash and other waste produced by the *Vexation*.

The airlock is just large enough to accommodate the *Gittin'*, but the quick opening and closing of the doors makes entering a challenging endeavor. The pilot of the *Gittin'* must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity (Piloting) check to time the maneuver correctly and dock inside the airlock without damaging the ship. On a failure, the *Gittin'* still enters the airlock, but it takes 4d8 bludgeoning damage from the closing doors.

Alternatively, if the characters have equipment or spells that allow them to survive in the vacuum of space, the characters can dock the *Gittin'* on the *Vexation's* hull and spacewalk into the airlock instead. Characters entering the airlock this way must succeed on a **DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** or take 1d10 bludgeoning damage from colliding with the expelled pieces of trash.

Entering through here brings the party to the Waste Airlock Interior. Proceed to *Part Two: On the Vexation*.

PART TWO: ON THE VEXATION

Loaned to Scale and Fang Inc. by the Firm specifically for this mission, the *Vexation* is far larger and more well-equipped than any ships the Scale Crew has used thus far. But even the highest ranking members of Scale and Fang don't know all the secrets contained within the *Vexation's* obnoxiously shiny hull.

In the time since their bus was unceremoniously dragged into the ship, the Scale Crew has taken Jay to Oversight so the AI may begin probing around in the vect's defunct memory files. The other four kids, though, have made short work of their holding cell in the cargo bay and quickly turned the tables against the Scale and Fang mercenaries. The kids have since infiltrated most of the ship, wielding their particular brand of rowdy chaos as a weapon in their own quest to rescue Jay and retake their bus.

The *Vexation* consists of four sectors. The first three sectors—the Lower Sector, the Middle Sector, and the Upper Sector—are accessible to everyone aboard the corvette, while the last sector is the secret chamber where Oversight resides.

LOWER SECTOR

In contrast to the ship's polished exterior and upper levels, the grimy lower sector of the *Vexation* is primarily home to the trash heap and expansive cargo bay.

WASTE AIRLOCK INTERIOR

Inside the waste airlock is a spacious steel chamber, its walls covered in rust and decay. Read or paraphrase the following:

The service lights of this huge airlock illuminate a thick layer of trash and filth on every surface. Overhead, a large robotic claw clutching a mound of refuse dumps its contents into a rectangular machine mounted on the ceiling. A few seconds of metallic grinding, and a hatch opens on the bottom of the machine, depositing a perfect cube of compressed trash.

TALKING WITH THE KIDS

Having been together up until their escape from the *Vexation's* cargo bay, Kerris, Saida, Tyndarius, and Zyll all know the following things:

- The kids were kept locked in the bus when they first docked. They tried reactivating Two-Four, but the automaton was only able to mutter the word "oversight" repeatedly.
- A few minutes later, some soldiers came in and herded them off the bus. The soldiers brought them into an empty storage container in the cargo bay and locked the door.
- Before locking the door, one soldier said Jay had been the best behaved, and so she was going with them to receive "special treatment" as a reward. The kids haven't seen Jay since. (They do all agree, though, that Jay was in fact the best behaved.)

They will gladly relay any and all of this information to the adventurers if asked. Though they don't seem terribly shaken by the experience, all four of them are aiming to find Jay and get out of the *Vexation* as soon as possible.

Opposite the airlock doors, a large automated claw slides through a shutter to retrieve garbage from the trash heap; the claw then delivers the garbage into the ceiling-mounted compactor, which compresses the garbage with waste from other areas of the ship into 10-foot by 10-foot cubes that are deposited onto the airlock floor ready to be expelled into space. The airlock is designed to both hold large quantities of compacted trash and periodically dispose of smaller amounts of waste to avoid a pile-up (the latter of which it is currently doing right now).

The airlock opens every 5 minutes. When the airlock opens, all creatures within the airlock must make a successful **DC 20 Strength saving throw** or be flung outside the ship. An unprotected character outside the ship suffers exposure to the vacuum of space and extreme temperatures.

With a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, a character can discover the panel for the airlock's controls in the upper corner of the room. The controls can be overridden with a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check**; alternatively, a successful **DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check** can rip the control panel from the wall, rendering both the airlock and the other machinery in the room inactive.

Characters wishing to move further into the ship can go through the shutter opposite the airlock doors. The shutter is 60 feet above the ground and automatically opens to allow the claw to pass through and gather trash. To climb up to the shutter, a character must make a successful **DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** or fall 1d6 × 10 feet. If the shutter has been rendered inactive due to breaking the control panel, a character must make a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check** to pry it open.

Passing through the shutter leads into the *Trash Heap*.

TRASH HEAP

This cramped chamber holds all the garbage produced by the *Vexation's* various crew members:

A thick motley of terrible smells fills the chamber. Heaps of damp garbage sit stewing in an unpleasant layer of brackish liquid, and something gurgling can be heard beneath the surface. Ringing the ceiling, various chutes open and close as more trash tumbles into the chamber from other parts of the ship.

A ladder extends up out of this chamber to a heavy iron bulkhead that opens into the hallway connected to the *Elevator*. On the opposite side of the room, a claw occasionally passes through a shutter to bring waste to the compactor in the *Waste Airlock Interior*.

The main area of the trash heap is 30 feet by 60 feet, and the ground here is difficult terrain. When the characters first enter this area, they must make a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw** against the noxious smell of the room. On a failure, the character is poisoned for 1 hour. Once a character has succeeded on this saving throw, they are immune to the stench of the trash heap for the next 24 hours.

Saida can be found knee-deep among the trash. When asked what she's doing, Saida dryly replies that she's searching for food to feed Zyll's "new friend" in the cargo bay, though if pressed she doesn't elaborate further on what that phrase means (Zyll made her promise not to reveal anything else to the adults).

Characters who wish to search through the garbage may make a **DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. On a success, a character finds 1 viable piece of food for Zyll's "new friend" and 1d4 random trinkets (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, "Trinkets"). On a failure, a character instead disrupts one of the three **radioactive goos** that inhabit the heap. A radioactive goo is immediately hostile towards whatever creature disrupted it.

CARGO BAY

The cargo bay sits adjacent to the *Elevator* and takes up the majority of the Lower Sector. An expansive room, the space is filled with various stacks of crates, boxes, and barrels:

Thick cables wind across the high ceiling alongside long strips of fluorescent lighting. Between massive shipping containers, towering stacks of metal crates cast long shadows across the stainless steel floor. In some distant corner of the cargo bay, a faint growling can be heard.

This is where the Scale Crew originally held the kids (sans Jay) upon arrival; the kids, however, quickly broke out of their confines. A successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check** finds the massive trapezoidal shipping container in which the kids were held. The upwards-sliding door of the crate has significant dents, and the fluorescent pink residue of Zyll's handiwork can be found along the container's lock. On one side, someone (most likely Kerris) has spray-painted in all caps, "GGC CLUBHOUSE 2!"

Following the sound of the growling locates **Zyll**, sitting in front of the massive crate:

The small pink amoeboid squats in front of a large metal crate with a glass window in its front, under which is painted a black skull-and-crossbones. Something slams and growls inside the crate, and a muscular dull brown claw scrapes against the glass. Then another claw, and another—six sickeningly

long limbs flailing against its confines. A jagged head presses its maw against the glass, revealing rows of razor teeth.

Zyll affectionately refers to the creature contained within the crate as their “new friend”, and if a character attempts to pull Zyll away or otherwise block their interactions with the crate, Zyll pouts and insists that the creature inside is a good boy who’s just a little grumpy.

A successful **DC 11 Intelligence (Nature) check** identifies the creature in the crate as a **demi-vortirrackt**, the younger and clumsier iteration of the fearsome predatory vortirrackt species. If anyone relays this information to Zyll, they cheerfully reply that they already knew that, and explain that they’re looking for pieces of food to feed the demi-vortirrackt so that they can become best friends.

Should the characters decide to help Zyll on their quest to become the demi-vortirrackt’s new best friend, keep track of the number of pieces of food they find and give to Zyll, as that may affect the outcome of the adventure.

ELEVATOR

Each sector of the *Vexation* contains an elevator and a set of stairs that can be used to reach the other sectors. The elevator itself looks like a pneumatic tube, with the cylindrical chrome elevator car ringed with bright blue lights. The stairs (in case of emergency) are just beyond a door beside the elevator.

Both the elevator and the stairs can be used to reach any of the three regularly accessible sectors of the *Vexation*.

MIDDLE SECTOR

The largest sector of the ship, this sector contains the hangar bay, the engine room, and the crew cafeteria.

HANGAR BAY

The hangar bay actually consists of two adjacent hangars connected by a hallway: the first hangar contains the *Baldrin*, as well as any troopers and sabres that weren’t destroyed during the earlier chase sequence; the second hangar is empty unless the characters decided to board the *Vexation* through here, in which case the *Gittin’* is docked in this second hangar.

BASE OF OPERATIONS

Whenever the characters venture further into the ship, they can safely leave the kids in the cargo bay, near their “Clubhouse” of a shipping container. Zyll will sometimes move around the ship of their own accord, but the rest can be counted on staying put.

Escape Pods. Lining the sides of the hallway connecting the two hangars are the entrances to six escape pods. Each escape pod uses the *shuttle* statistics and can be jettisoned either from on board the pod or remotely from a control panel in the hallway.

Hangar Crew. Each hangar has a crew that consists of one **smuggler** and three **pilots**, all wearing the insignia of Scale and Fang Inc. The crew not only conducts maintenance for the ships, but also patrol the area, keeping an eye out for stowaways or intruders. If the characters wish to move about either hangar without attracting attention, they must succeed on a **DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check**. On a failure, a character is spotted, and the hangar’s respective crew immediately engages the character in combat.

Trace and **Aela Vestele** can also be found in this area, walking between the two hangars as they chat about their mission. A successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** overhears the following conversation:

TRACE: “Am I the only one who thinks it is a bit odd we were sent to capture... children?”

AELA: “Oh, no, it’s definitely super weird. But Drak said the captain needs something the robot kid stole, so, y’know. You do what you gotta do.”

TRACE: “I must admit, I am not fond of this captain.”

AELA: “Same. Gives me the creeps, and that’s saying something.”

Unlike the other hangar crew members, neither Trace nor Aela attempts to engage in combat if they spot the characters. They have both seen the characters’

skills in action before and know better than to start a fight without having the upper hand. However, the pair does advise the characters to leave the *Vexation* as soon as possible and forget this ever happened. They warn the characters that this is far more than a silly ferret-hunting mission now, and that continuing to pursue this course of action will get them in over their heads. A successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check** intuits that, even though their statements are laced with pride, both Trace and Aela are telling the truth.

Characters can attempt to glean more information from Trace, Aela, or any of the others crew members by making a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check**. On a success, a character learns one of the following points of information:

- This particular mission comes at the behest of an organization known as the Firm. Drak was hired as a Contractor by the Firm for his particular skill set, and he chose to bring along this group of Scale and Fang mercenaries as backup.
- Though Drak is leading the mission, he is not the captain of the *Vexation*. Even the close-knit members of the Scale Crew know little about the ship's enigmatic captain, except that they apparently live on the highest sector of the ship—accessible only to those with a commander's keycard—and that they are supervising this mission on behalf of their employer.
- They didn't mean to target all of the kids, only Jay. Rumors among the crew say that Jay has some kind of secret map hidden in their code, and their employer wants it.

Both Trace and Aela have a *commander's keycard* on their person. A successful **DC 20 Charisma check** plays on their doubts about the mission enough to convince them to hand over a keycard to the characters. Alternatively, a successful **DC 17 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check** swipes a keycard from one of their belts without notice.

THE BALDRIN

This large transport ship is docked in the first hangar of the *Vexation*. A successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Technology) check** overrides the door lock of the *Baldrin*, allowing the characters to board and explore the ship.

First Floor. Entering the *Baldrin* immediately leads to the ship's cargo hold and crew quarters. The quarters themselves are rather sparse, as most of the Scale Crew has moved into the *Vexation's* bunks for this mission, and only a handful of crates have been left on board. However, a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check** finds a removable wall panel, behind which is the smuggler's hold. Inside the smuggler's hold are two bottles of (room-temperature) *Hyper-Krash*, a set of *golem skin*, and a scrapbook filled with Drak's baby pictures. He was an objectively ugly baby.

Second Floor. The cockpit and gunner positions can be found on this floor. Characters wishing to search the ship's records can make a **DC 13 Intelligence (Data) check** to do so. On a success, they find a log of communications between the *Baldrin* and the *Vexation* that discuss conducting reconnaissance operations around the Kuiper Neighborhood and locating Jay. If the character beats a **DC 18**, they also decrypt a highly encoded transmission between Drak and an entity that calls themselves "Oversight":

OVERSIGHT: The Firm is quite displeased with your lack of progress thus far, Mr. Garfeckt.

DRAK: Well maybe if you'd told me earlier we'd be tracking down a kid—

OVERSIGHT: Don't worry, though. I've devised a plan to compensate for your shortcomings. When you return to the *Vexation*, come speak with me. And no more excuses, understood?

DRAK: ...yes, captain.

Additionally, if the party previously played through *Curse of the Astromo*, characters can also find the corrupted yet inactive code of MAH-MAH 9000 residing within the *Baldrin's* computer. Studying the code with a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Data) check** uncovers that MAH-MAH 9000's consciousness was recently invaded and assimilated by another—more powerful—AI.

Opposite the cockpit is the tractor beam control area, which currently houses the school bus.

The School Bus. When originally capturing the bus, the tractor beam pulled it into the Baldrin's cramped hangar, where it currently remains. Characters can easily access and board the school bus from the second floor area of the *Baldrin*. The inside of the bus is completely empty save for the defunct chassis of Two-Four. If a character attempts to interact with Two-Four, the pilot automaton simply sparks and repeatedly mutters the name, "Oversight." However, characters can tap into the bus' security cameras by making a **DC 15 Intelligence (Data) check**. On a success, the characters find footage of the five kids being shepherded off the bus by a group of Scale and Fang mercenaries; one mercenary can be faintly heard directing the group towards the cargo bay, and right before the video ends, Kerris lets out a loud battlecry and bites a mercenary's arm.

ENGINE ROOM

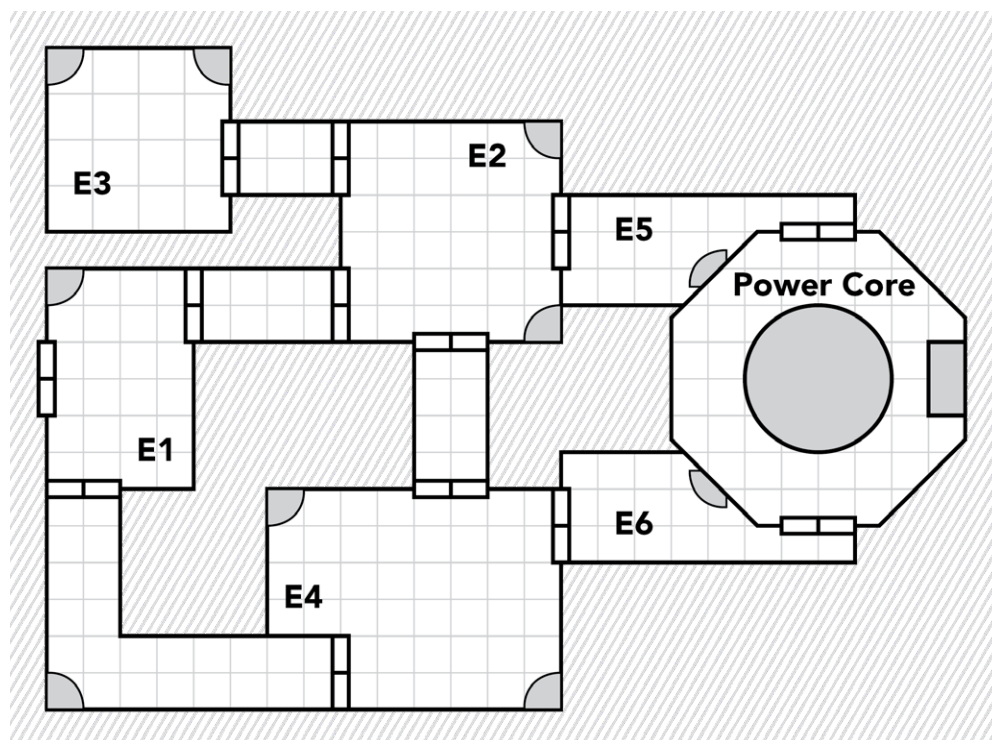
Sitting in the aft of the *Vexation*, the engine room contains the ship's Dark Matter engine and the ship's arcane power core, which not only supplies energy to the sublight engines but all other technology on the ship. A winding maze of wiring and ventilation pipes surrounding the engines serve to direct this power to the necessary areas. Because of their complex natures, the engines are not maintained by humanoids but rather by a fleet of highly specialized drones.

As the characters approach the back area of the Middle Sector, they can easily find the engine room door along with **Kerris**:

The hallway abruptly stops in front of a thick bulkhead, at the center of which is a large steel door with a valve handle. The air itself gets warmer as you approach, and a distant electric whirring rumbles in the ground. In a nearby corner, Kerris sits hunched over his backpack, a number of silver gadgets in his hands.

Kerris waves the adventurers over, happily saying that he knew they would come back for him and the other kids.

Being the adventure fanboy that he is, Kerris has decided to mount a daring escapade into the belly of the *Vexation's* engine room. If pressed for more details about his plan, Kerris proudly shows off one of the cobbled-together gadgets in his backpack. He explains that these are the result of a failed attempt to make a fleet of vacuum drones to clean his room; instead, they merely drain energy from the nearby environment when turned on. (He is still trying to come up with a name for the invention, but he's nonetheless very pleased with himself.) Kerris plans to infiltrate the engine room, mount the devices onto the arcane power core, and drain energy from the ship so the *Vexation* won't be able to follow the bus



when they escape. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check** or **DC 17 Dexterity (Piloting) check** intuits that theoretically Kerris' plan could actually work, though there are probably some dangerous factors that the kid isn't taking into account.

If the characters decide to help—or at the very least, supervise—Kerris, he eagerly throws open the door to the engine room and plunges inside. The interior of the engine room consists of several smaller rooms and maintenance corridors leading to the ship's power core.

Laser Turrets. Ten Small laser turrets are mounted in the corners of the engine room's areas. Each turret has AC 13 and 5 HP. Diligent and focused, these turrets are programmed to instantly fire on any intruder to the engine room. After each turn, a turret attacks the nearest creature it can see with a +5 bonus, and dealing 2d6 radiant damage on a hit. These turrets are marked in the corners of the map.

A **DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check** allows a character to peek around a corner to see a turret without provoking an attack. Alternatively, throwing a distraction will distract the turret for one turn.

Loot. Throughout the engine room, there are various scrap parts left over from the drones' repair jobs. These apparatuses can be used later to build construct grafts (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, "Construct Grafts") for the characters. Grafts are found in the following rooms with a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check**: E1: Concentration Module, E2: Impulse Unit, E3: Shield Module, E4: Finger Picks, E6: Logic Unit.

Power Core. At the center of the area sits the *Vexation's* Dark Matter engine and arcane power core:

The room is filled with stifling heat, the air itself charged with enough magic to make hairs stand on end. The ship's Dark Matter engine is mounted on the far wall, the void crystal at its core swirling with dark flecks. At the center of the room, a tall cylindrical glass container holds a tightly wound metal coil glowing purple. Bolts of arcane energy arc outwards and zip down the various different wires attached to the top and bottom of the container.

Once here, Kerris and the characters can easily mount the devices to the arcane power core and activate them. This begins to drain the *Vexation* of energy, which has repercussions later in the adventure.

CAFETERIA

At the front of the Middle Sector sits the cafeteria, colloquially referred to as "The Caf" by most of the crew. Built more for functionality rather than for style, the cafeteria consists of several small buffet-style stations surrounding rows of rectangular metal picnic tables. In the far back of the cafeteria is a small bar, tended to by a tall gold-plated vect (**vect scout**) named **Kal**.

Unlike most of the *Vexation's* other crew members, Kal bears no allegiance to Scale and Fang, Inc. nor to the Firm. Kal has a boisterous personality, an ear for gossip, and a keen appreciation for extra credits to spend. Currently, Kal is chatting with **Zyll** at the bar; the pink amoeboid has squeezed through the vents to pop into the cafeteria for a snack, and is now enjoying a tall chocolate fudge milkshake specially prepared by Kal.

Should the characters wish to ask Kal about the happenings of the ship, they can make a **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. If this is accompanied by a bribe of 50 credits or more, the check is made with advantage. On a success, Kal gives a hint as to the true nature of the *Vexation's* mission. This can be as vague or specific as you'd like, but should help point the characters towards finding Jay; Kal may even mention the legend of *Un's Codex* and Unit JR-1K0. If the characters missed any pieces of information from other encounters in the ship, Kal can provide them here.

Characters poking around the buffets can steal a piece of food (which can count towards befriending the demi-vortirrackt in the cargo bay) with a successful **DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check**. Otherwise, a meal costs 1 credit.

ELEVATOR

Like in the other sectors, this area features an elevator and a set of stairs (in case of emergency) that can be used to access any of the three regularly accessible sectors of the *Vexation*.

UPPER SECTOR

This sector is also known as the “personal use” sector, as it primarily consists of the crew quarters and the medical bay.

MEDICAL BAY

Fully stocked, the *Vexation*’s state-of-the-art medical bay is prepared to deal with almost anything:

The sliding glass doors part to reveal a pristine room, all neat angles and polished surfaces. Between the rows of empty cots, medical drones putter among the cabinets, and the sterile, slightly acidic smell of disinfectant permeates the air. On the floor at the center of the room lie three Scale and Fang mercenaries, completely knocked out—one of whom has the distinct green skin of Sierra O’Connell.

Upon seeing that it’s the characters and not Scale and Fang employees, **Tyn** emerges from his hiding place within one of the small medicine cabinets. Tyn is immensely relieved to see the characters and over-explains everything that has happened to the kids thus far, even if the characters didn’t specifically ask about it. He also adds that he broke off from the group in order to look for Jay, but instead ended up being chased by these three mercenaries... who he then accidentally knocked unconscious while trying to get away.

From his encounter with the mercenaries, Tyn also knows the following information:

- Jay isn’t in the Lower Sector, Middle Sector, or Upper Sector—he’s checked all of them.
- While chasing him, the green woman (Sierra) grumbled something along the lines of, “The Firm isn’t paying me enough for this.”
- He swore he saw someone walk out through one of the walls just outside the medical bay, even though there isn’t a door there.

Currently, Tyn is trying to get the unconscious mercenaries into the medical beds so the **medical drones** in the bay can attend to them. If asked why, he shyly explains that he feels guilty for hurting the mercenaries, because even though they were—and still are—attempting to capture his friends, he refuses to believe they’re bad people at heart.

Should the characters decide to help Tyn take care of the unconscious mercenaries, a successful **DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check** is required to move each body onto a cot. Once a person is laid in one of the cots, a medical drone automatically comes to assess and care for them. Characters can also search the pockets of the unconscious mercenaries by making a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. On a success, they find two cans of Krash (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, “Gear”), a *plasma cutter* (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, “Weapons”), and a *commander’s keycard* off of Sierra O’Connell that can be used to access the Secret Sector (see the *Elevator* section below).

Characters wishing to search the medical bay for extra supplies can make a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. On a success, they find two *potions of healing* and three *hypodermic needles* (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, “Gear”). The first character to succeed on this check by 5 or more also finds one *holo-companion* (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, “Magic Items”).

CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters consist of twelve bedrooms, each containing four bunks. Every bunk on the ship comes with a small 5-foot by 5-foot lockbox for storing personal possessions. The lockboxes can be opened with a successful **DC 12 Dexterity check with thieves’ tools** or a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check**. Zyll grants advantage on this check, if they are with the characters. Inside, the lockboxes are 1d4 random trinkets (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, “Trinkets”).

Sitting in one of the bedrooms is **Drak Garfreckt**, who is reading through his contract from the Firm in search of any potential loopholes or exits. Unlike in previous situations where the characters may have encountered the dragonborn mercenary, Drak lacks his usual confidence and swagger as he skims through the contract on a datapad. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** intuits that, whatever this assignment might be, it has deeply shaken the usually self-assured captain; his body language is one of a trapped creature, looking for a way out.

Characters can avoid Drak’s notice with a successful **DC 14 group Dexterity (Stealth) check**. If Drak spots their presence, he is immediately

defensive and suspicious, but he does not engage in combat unless the characters attack first. Drak gruffly urges the characters to get off his ship and get their noses out of this business.

A successful **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check** pushes Drak to disclose the details of his mission from the Firm. Drak admits that even he, for all his pride, knows when he's in over his head, but he can't find any way out of this deal. Characters can attempt to convince Drak to help them rescue Jay by making a **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. On a success, Drak accompanies the party for the rest of the adventure. On a failure, Drak declines, but surreptitiously slips the characters his *commander's keycard*.

ELEVATOR

Like in the other sectors, this area features an elevator and a set of stairs (in case of emergency) that can be used to access any of the three regularly accessible sectors of the *Vexation*.

However, in the Upper Sector, there is also a secondary elevator hidden in a section of wall. This elevator is only revealed when someone holds a *commander's keycard* up to a concealed scanner behind the third vent in the wall. The scanner is obvious to those who know about the secret. For those not in the know, a successful **DC 27 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices the odd blue blinking light of the scanner behind the third vent's grating.

The systems for both the secondary elevator and the secret scanner are linked directly to Oversight and thus highly guarded against any technological interference. A character who attempts to hack or otherwise disrupt the functionality of either must immediately make a **DC 17 Wisdom saving throw**, taking 14 (3d8) lightning damage on a failure and half as much on a success.

The secondary elevator's car is much more minimalistic than the normal elevator's car: no chrome, no extraneous blue lights. Only one button is on the elevator car's control panel. Pressing this button brings the car up to the *Secret Sector*—and right to Oversight. Proceed to *Part Three: Just Doing Business*.

PERSONAL KEEPSAKES

If the group has played through all the *Grax's Club* adventures thus far, chances are that this isn't the first time they've encountered the Scale Crew—and, consequently, that the Scale Crew has experienced many of the same escapades as the party. At your discretion as the GM, the crew quarters can be filled with various trinkets and homages to previous adventures, including but not limited to the following:

- A can of *raptor pheromones* from the Taisong General Store.
 - A (slightly bloodstained) *Alluvian Astromos* uniform and name tag.
 - The fake Pink Star diamond.
-
-

PART THREE: JUST DOING BUSINESS

Following the trail left behind, the adventurers make their way to the hidden sector of the *Vexation* to find Jay. But doing so brings them face-to-screen with a foe far greater than any of the hapless scoundrels they've encountered before, and entangles them in a plot extending far beyond their little corner of the universe.

THE SECRET SECTOR

Hidden away in the top area of the ship, this sector is primarily home to **Oversight**, the **mastermind AI** assigned by the Firm to supervise this mission. Drak is the only member of the Scale Crew to have directly interacted with Oversight, but even he knows little about the AI's true goals.

Riding the elevator up to the Secret Sector brings the adventurers into the ship's dimly lit bridge:

For what appears to be the ship's bridge and center of command, there are surprisingly no viewports nor crew members to be found. Instead, the dark metallic hall extending from the elevator is lined with screens, the majority of them flickering with static and sparking along the edges. The opposite end of the hallway opens to a wide room teeming with computer towers, their insides whirring as their circuits burn blue and orange.

At the center of the room, a tall cylindrical apparatus flashes with various arcane sigils. The walls of the apparatus are clear, and inside, a lanky tween vect sits twiddling their thumbs.

The various towers host the *Vexation's* computer, which Oversight is currently inhabiting as per the mastermind AI's *Inhabit Technology* ability; there are four auxiliary towers and one main console. Meanwhile, Jay is sitting inside the cylindrical apparatus, seemingly unharmed.

Attempting to hack or interfere with the ship's computer in any way immediately alerts Oversight (see *Confronting Oversight*).

PROFESSOR ORRYN?!

If the party has previously played through *Conspiracy in the Stars!* and failed to rescue Professor Orryn, he is also here in the Secret Sector, unconscious but alive in a second apparatus.

THE APPARATUS

The cylindrical machine currently holding Jay is a magical apparatus designed to systematically probe through a contained creature's memories until it locates the information it is targeting. The see-through walls of the apparatus were created with enchantments similar to a *wall of force* spell, so the apparatus cannot be affected by spells like *dispel magic* or damage short of a *disintegrate* spell. However, sound can still pass through the walls of the apparatus, albeit muffled. A successful **DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check** can deduce the machine's function from the arcane sigils scrolling along its side.

Inside the apparatus, Jay appears to be fine, if not a little bored. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** discerns that while the vect isn't physically hurt, the way she stumbles over her words and reacts slowly indicates that something is most likely messing with her brain and putting her wiring on the fritz.

If asked for more details about what happened, Jay relays the following information:

- She was separated from the rest of the group and brought up here by a scary red and black dragonborn man.
- Since she was placed in this tube (the apparatus), she's had a pounding headache, like something was rustling through the circuits in her head.
- Every so often, she'll hear a smooth mechanical voice coming from a direction she can't pinpoint. She can't always make out what's being said, but she keeps hearing the voice mention a group called the "Firm" and how they're looking for a "codex" of some kind.

Turning off the apparatus deactivates the walls and allows Jay to escape. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds the apparatus' lever on the main console. However, the apparatus is being

closely watched by Oversight. Touching the lever or otherwise attempting to tamper with the apparatus and its functionality attracts the attention of the AI (see *Confronting Oversight*).

CONFRONTING OVERSIGHT

When a character has alerted Oversight to their presence, the AI stops inhabiting the ship's computer to project themselves in front of the characters, and begins to speak:

The whirring of the computer towers suddenly stops, and the lights flicker. Slowly, the blue and orange glow from within the machinery crawls across the metal panels. It seeps out, coalescing into a holographic faceless grin. A deep voice, both robotic yet smooth in tone, echoes throughout the room, the grin warbling like an audio waveform each time it speaks. "You're not allowed to be here."

Oversight has a suave and cunning personality. Preferring to avoid any messy combat, Oversight initially attempts to persuade the characters to join the Firm on this quest. Due to the party's accomplishments in previous adventures (and the memories of MAH-MAH 9000), Oversight has a fair grasp on each character's unique skills—and more importantly, each character's apparent desires. Oversight glibly explains the Firm's quest to obtain *Un's Codex*, and promises that, should they help them on this mission, the Firm would let them borrow the Codex and warp the universe itself to fulfill those impossible desires the party holds dear. A successful **DC 21 Wisdom (Insight) check** discerns that while the AI has technically not told a lie, Oversight is deliberately choosing his words to lead the conversation towards an optimal outcome for his purposes and his purposes alone.

If the characters decide to side with Oversight and join the Firm's mission to locate *Un's Codex*, the adventure ends here, and the party takes off into the cosmos with a new goal in mind.

However, if the characters attack Oversight, or if Oversight gets the impression that the characters will not be swayed to his cause, combat begins and everyone **rolls initiative**. During combat, Oversight gains access to the following extra abilities:

- **Regeneration.** Oversight regains 10 hit points at the start of their turn. If the AI takes acid or cold damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the AI's next turn. If the characters successfully infiltrated the engine room with Kerris and began draining the *Vexation's* power, this trait doesn't function at all.
- **Desktop Assistant.** As a reaction to being hit with an attack, Oversight can construct an automaton from the slew of broken screens and wires lying around the room. This automaton uses the **multi-task automaton** statistics, but it has 10 hit points and its attacks deal an extra 1d4 lightning damage from the frayed wiring. The automatons are instructed to protect Oversight and the apparatus through whatever means possible.
- **Short Circuit.** By spending two legendary actions, Oversight can jump into one of the auxiliary computer towers and cause it to detonate. Creatures within 10 feet of the tower must make a **DC 17 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 27 (6d8) lightning damage on a failure and half as much on a success.

Combat ends when Oversight is reduced to 0 hit points (proceed to *Final Protocol*), or when all player characters are knocked unconscious.

If Oversight manages to defeat the characters, they successfully extract the information from Jay's memory banks for the Firm. In this instance, Oversight shows the adventurers no mercy and kills them. However, should you wish for the adventurers to live another day, the Scale Crew instead loads their bodies into an escape pod and jettisons it into the empty expanse of space. The party wakes up in the escape pod 1d4 days later, stripped of any magic items.

FINAL PROTOCOL

Once defeated, Oversight attempts one last measure to ensure the Firm's airtight objectives will not end up being compromised by this mission.

If the characters were proactive in helping the kids accomplish their various personal quests (befriending the demi-vortirrackt, helping in the med-bay, etc.), proceed to the *Alternate Endings* section below. Otherwise, Oversight uses the last of their remaining energy to activate the *Vexation's* self-destruct sequence:

With a hiss, the blue and orange glow of the computer towers goes dark, as do all the lights in the rest of the ship. Glaring red alarm lights begin to flash, and a robotic voice calls out, "The self-destruct sequence has been activated. Total detonation in T-minus one minute."

With all power diverted towards the self-destruction sequence, the apparatus holding Jay also deactivates, allowing the vect to escape. The characters have two options: stopping the self-destruct sequence before detonation, or fleeing the ship.

STOPPING THE SEQUENCE

Interfacing with the ship's computer to override the self-destruct sequence is a skill challenge. Characters take turns making skill checks to interact with the computer. However, the skill used for each check may differ from person to person; while an **Intelligence (Technology) check** seems the most appropriate on the surface, players are free to petition to use other skills, such as a **Wisdom (Perception) check** to notice a flaw in the code or a **Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check** to rewire a section of the computer terminal. Regardless of the skill used, the DC for the check is always **18**.

Working together, the characters must get five cumulative successes in order to terminate the self-destruct sequence. However, if the characters get a cumulative five failures before they reach this success threshold, the computer locks down and prevents the characters from interacting with it further, rendering the detonation of the ship inevitable. In the event of failure, characters can still attempt to flee the ship.

FLEEING THE SHIP

If characters choose to flee the *Vexation*, either have them reroll initiative or keep them in the same initiative order as in the combat with Oversight. Characters may choose to run back to the *Gittin'*, steal some of the Scale Crew's ships, or use the *Vexation's* escape pods.

On their turn, a character uses their action to make a **Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to navigate through the chaos of evacuating the ship; the DC for this check starts at 12, then increases by 1 each subsequent round. Characters may forgo making this check in favor of using a different action, such as casting a spell or

taking the Help action to grant another character advantage on their next skill check.

To reach the hangar bay (if the *Gittin'* is docked in one of the hangars or if the characters are using the escape pods or the Scale Crew's ships), a character must make at least three successful skill checks. To reach the lower section (if the *Gittin'* is docked in or near the waste airlock), a character must make at least five successful skill checks. Once the respective success threshold has been met by a character, said character can board their preferred means of escape with ease.

The kids automatically succeed on all their checks, and evacuate the ship handily.

The ship explodes after ten rounds; however, if the characters attempted to stop the sequence earlier, the detonation may happen sooner than this since the characters used up a lot of time interfacing with the ship's computer. Characters still on board the *Vexation* when it detonates must make a **DC 20 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 70 (20d6) fire damage on a failure and half as much on a success. The character is then thrust into the vacuum of space among the *Vexation's* debris.

ALTERNATE ENDINGS

If the characters actively engaged with the kids and helped them complete their own side missions aboard the *Vexation*, one of the following alternate endings can occur at your discretion.

Class Pet. If the characters were able to deliver at least five pieces of viable food to Zyll, the amoeboid child successfully befriends the demi-vortirrackt in the cargo bay.

Just before Oversight is able to activate the self-destruct sequence, Zyll, Saida, Kerris, and Tyn come charging into the Secret Sector on the demi-vortirrackt's back. Zyll gleefully commands the demi-vortirrackt to wreck the computer—and it does so with ease, halting the self-destruct sequence and freeing Jay from the apparatus.

After the five kids have reunited, Zyll happily introduces Jay and the adventurers to their new best friend, whom they have lovingly named Fluffy. Zyll is insistent on keeping demi-vortirrackt as their new class mascot. Oddly enough, Fluffy also seems to be on board with the idea, acting weirdly affectionate towards the amoeboid child and their friends.

New Friends. If the characters either help Tyn with caring for the unconscious crew members in the medical bay or convince Drak to accompany them in their mission, the Scale Crew joins the adventurers' side.

When Oversight activates the self-destruct sequence, Trace, Aela, and Sierra—and Drak, if he is not already with the party—burst into the Secret Sector to offer their assistance. Their presence grants the characters advantage on any skill checks made to stop the sequence. If the characters decide to flee the *Vexation*, the Scale Crew stays behind to slow the destruction, giving the characters an additional minute (equal to 10 extra rounds) to escape.

EPILOGUE

Emerging from the wreckage of their battle with Oversight, the party can finally return the rambunctious children to their school. But with rumors of the legendary *Un's Codex* and the Firm's machinations on the rise—the characters' field trip chaperoning duties may be finished, but their adventures are far from over.

A JOB WELL DONE

Whether the adventures manage to stop the self-destruct sequence or just escape the *Vexation's* explosion with their lives, they can navigate back to the Kuiper Neighborhood with ease.

At the school, the students' parental units and teachers are anxiously awaiting their return. The kids eagerly regale tales of their incredibly dangerous adventure to any adults present, who listen with a mixture of confusion and abject horror. Nonetheless, they are grateful to the adventurers for ensuring their children's safe return, and one of the teachers assures them that they will be forwarding payment to Grax for the field trip shortly.

A PARTING GIFT

Before they depart the school, Jay pulls aside the characters for one last conversation:

Glancing around, the young vect pulls what appears to be a small faded computer chip from her neck. The glow of her eyes flickers, and when she speaks, her voice is suddenly deeper. Older, even. "This is what they were searching for," they say. "Take it."

Oversight's tampering has allowed the dormant consciousness of Unit JR-1K0 to emerge within Jay. In order to protect the secret of *Un's Codex*, they have chosen to store the Codex's location into a computer chip, eject it from their memory banks, and entrust it with the adventurers. If asked why, Jay explains that they've lived a lot of different lives in order to protect this secret, but they're tired. It's time for them to let it go, to finally live through a childhood without worry. And based on their recent adventure, they believe the characters have good hearts and will serve well as the Codex's next protectors.

REWARDS

When the characters return to the Grax's Guys for Cheap headquarters, Grax pulls them into their office to review their performance. He shares some choice comments from the teachers and parents; these can range from glowing reviews to panicked exclamations (the latter being especially prevalent if Zyll manages to bring home Fluffy). Regardless, he's happy that the kids ended up safely back home, and even begrudgingly admits that they were starting to grow on him.

Grax pays the party 1,000 credits each for a successful mission. However, if the school bus was lost or destroyed over the course of the adventure, this amount decreases to 750 credits each to account for damages. Additionally, if the adventurers managed to prevent the *Vexation* from self-destructing, Grax reluctantly allows the party to keep the ship as their own.

FUTURE ADVENTURES

Though this may be the last installment in the *Grax's Club* series, the story does not have to end here. Grax most certainly has more assorted odd jobs to offer his employees, but should your party be looking for more, the escapades throughout this series also open several more avenues of adventure.

GALAXY'S MOST WANTED

Though Oversight may have met their demise, there are plenty other powerful stakeholders in the Firm across the universe—and the characters' actions on board the *Vexation* will have certainly garnered the Firm's attention. The Firm may send more Contractors to eliminate the party, setting a high bounty on their head and forcing the adventurers to fight and prove their innocence. Or perhaps the Firm chooses to play the long game, inviting the party to be Contractors in turn and looping them into the organization's criminal web.

NEW BUSINESS VENTURES

Failing to deliver on such an important mission, the Scale Crew may find themselves disavowed by both the Firm and Scale and Fang Inc. Drak is disowned entirely by his father, Garfreckt the eternal dragon, and cut off entirely from the family inheritance. If the adventurers chose to be friendly towards them during this adventure, Drak and the others may reach out to the party, looking to start their own independent mercenary company with them. Conversely, if the adventurers were hostile, the Scale Crew may swear vengeance against them, stopping at nothing to destroy the characters and regain their standing.

RACE FOR THE CODEX

As the protectors of the only known map to *Un's Codex*, the characters will have quite the target on their backs from the Firm. But of course, the Firm is not the only faction interested in locating the mythic Codex. The shrouded arcanists of the Tower long to claim *Un's* unending knowledge, and even the cartographers of Astrogations Inc. yearn to benefit from the Codex's wealth of information. Whether they like it or not, keeping the secret of the Codex's location inevitably embroils the characters into a galaxy-wide battle between some of the most powerful forces in the universe.

The characters may choose a more defensive ploy, guarding the location and fighting off any who attempt to steal it. Or they may prefer a more offensive approach, and seek to locate the Codex themselves before anyone else. No matter the case, the characters must quickly learn to outwit and outgun their foes—as the very fate of the universe is in their hands.

GRAX'S CLUB

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MONSTERS

The following monsters feature prominently in this adventure.

ANIMATRONIC STATUE

The animatronic statue is usually a fixed, waving can of Krash with arms, legs, and a weird face attached, but can be positively deadly when invested by wizmos. When the deranged little robots crawl inside its spacious, cylindrical body, they can direct the whole statue by pulling on the right wires and poking the right circuits. The result is hardly an iron golem, but it's a battle frame by wizmo standards.

ANIMATRONIC STATUE

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 57 (6d10 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	8 (-1)	7 (-2)	8 (-1)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 8
Languages —
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Faulty Wiring. At the end of each turn, the statue moves 5 feet in a random direction. Roll a d4 for the direction: 1, north; 2, south; 3, east; or 4, west.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The statue makes two slam attacks.
Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

BIG HOB

Gargantuan monstrosity, neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 135 (10d20 + 30)
Speed 30 ft., burrow 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	9 (-1)	17 (+3)	7 (-2)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +8
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages understands Common, but can't speak
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Stink Gland (3/Day). A creature which attacks Big Hob must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Big Hob uses his Constrict attack or Weasel War Dance ability and attacks twice, once with his bite and once with his claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 16) Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained, and Big Hob can't constrict another target.

Weasel War Dance. Big Hob hops from side to side in his space. Until the end of his turn, Big Hob has advantage on attack rolls.

DIAMOND DRAGON

Large dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 123 (12d10 + 48)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +6, Cha +8

Skills Insight +6, Perception +4

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages understands Common, Elvish, and Draconic but can't speak

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The dragon has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws. If it has half its hit points or fewer, it then uses its Crystalline Pulse.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (2d12 + 5) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Crystalline Pulse (The dragon's HP lower than half). A wave of transmutation magic emanates from the dragon. Each creature within 30 feet of the dragon must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be restrained until the end of its next turn as crystals form on its skin.

Prismatic Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon unleashes a beam of prismatic light in a 90-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 36 (6d12) radiant damage, or half as much damage on a successful one..

BIG HOB

A colossal space ferret, perhaps the last of its kind, Big Hob has wandered the jungles of Gaozu for decades, thwarting hunters and besting every manner of predator the jungle-world can produce. If scaled down, Big Hob would look identical to a normal ferret, complete with tan-brown fur and a pattern resembling a mask upon his face, but he is fully thirty feet in length. At this size, he can do what ferrets do best—dig holes and collect interesting objects—without obstacle.

DIAMOND DRAGON

The Pink Star Diamond works like a magical battery, absorbing magic from its surroundings to grow in scale. If it directly contacts a living creature, however, it enacts tremendous changes, transforming the creature into a diamond dragon, a glowing creature of crystalline pink scales.

INFECTED SCRAP GOLEM

Scrap golems are assembled from what's around: bits of metal, glass, plastic, clay, and wood, with critical components, like the construct core, scavenged or assembled to fit the shape and dimensions of the chassis. Unlike other golems, scrap golems don't have a manual or other guide; a skilled arcanist needs only excellent understanding of the fundamentals and a keen eye for useful scrap. Thus, every scrap golem is unique, assembled with different weapons, materials, and functions in mind. The resulting menagerie of mismatched golems matches no other category.

These hulking machines are never more dangerous than when infected with the N-Virus. The N-Virus is an insidious magical disease that roots itself in a construct's core, from whence it proceeds to corrupt and rewrite the construct's programming to suit its motives. Generally, this results in an apparent intelligence, as simple constructs follow complex directives aimed at spreading the virus further. A single construct infected with the virus can infect hundreds, sparking a robotic uprising with the express intent of causing havoc and disseminating the virus far and wide.

INFECTED SCRAP GOLEM

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 57 (6d10 + 24)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	9 (-1)	19 (+4)	3 (-4)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses thermalsight 120 ft., blindsight 15 ft., passive perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Berserk. Whenever the golem starts its turn with 20 hit points or fewer, roll a d6. On a 6, the golem goes berserk. On each of its turns while berserk, the golem attacks the nearest creature it can see. If no creature is near enough to move to and attack, the golem attacks an object, with preference for an object smaller than itself. Once the golem goes berserk, it continues to do so until it is destroyed or regains all of its hit points.

Customized. The golem gains a flying speed of 30 feet, but any opportunity attacks against it have advantage.

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Radiant Absorption. Whenever the golem is subjected to radiant damage, it takes no damage and instead regains a number of hit points equal to the radiant damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The golem makes two with its rocket hammer and, if it is able, one with its barrage fire.

Rocket Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d10 + 1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a construct or living construct, such as a velt, it must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target is infected with the N-Virus (see *Dark Matter*, Appendix E).

Barrage Fire (Recharge 5–6). The golem fires a barrage of shots in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

JUDGE BOT

Medium construct, lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 38 (4d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Skills Insight +4, Perception +4

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, slashing; poison, radiant

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, petrified, poisoned, restrained, unconscious

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages all

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Gavel. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Order in the Court. Each creature the Judge Bot chooses within 120 feet must succeed on a DC 15 saving throw or be paralyzed for up to 1 minute. A creature can repeat this saving throw on its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success. Judge Bot is programmed not to attack a creature that is paralyzed by this ability.

NUCLEAR CHICKEN

Tiny monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 3 (2d4 - 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Nuclear Death Burst. When the chicken dies, it explodes in a thermonuclear fireball. Each creature within 60 feet of it must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

ACTIONS

Peck. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 1 (1d4) piercing damage.

Kaboom! The chicken uses its Nuclear Death Burst ability and dies in the ensuing explosion.

NUCLEAR CHICKEN

So named for its thermonuclear death throes, the nuclear chicken is the most singularly destructive chicken in the multiverse. No predator, no matter how starved, will risk attacking the easy-to-spot glowing chicken, for the moment it does so, the chicken would explode and kill everything in a huge radius. As such, the nuclear chicken is a lonely creature with an ornery temperament, a true bully of the animal kingdom.

JUDGE BOT

Judge Bot is an automaton programmed to pass judgment on legal matters using the most rational arguments. To ensure order in the court, it uses a pneumatic gavel and paralyzing energy blasts.

STAGE ONE SPACE VAMPIRE

Medium undead (humanoid), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

General Sensitivity. When the space vampire's cape, pale skin, or other vampire-like features are insulted or made the butt of a joke, the vampire has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until the start of its next turn.

Spider Climb. The space vampire can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Team Player. The space vampire has advantage on attacks made against creatures who have inflicted damage on one of the vampire's allies since the end of their previous turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The space vampire uses its claws and then uses its brainsucking bite.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage and the target must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw or become grappled.

Brainsucking Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing or grappled creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. The target's Intelligence is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken and the space vampire's Intelligence increases by an equal amount. The target dies if its Intelligence is reduced to 0 and the changes to each creature's Intelligence lasts until they take a long rest, or until the vampire dies. If the space vampire's Intelligence ever surpasses 18, its head explodes and it immediately dies.

A creature killed by a space vampire's brainsucking bite rises as a stage one space vampire under the vampire's control.

SPACE VAMPIRES

Thirsting for brain juice and possessed of a terrible sense of humor, space vampires are a blight on spacers the 'verse over.

STAGE ONE SPACE VAMPIRE

Stage one space vampires are simple creatures newly risen to unlife under the control of a more powerful space vampire. They live only to hiss menacingly, crack terrible jokes, and drink the brain juice of sentient creatures to slake their endless thirst for more comedic material. Space vampires materialize a magical black and red cape akin to Count Dracula's. This cape may never be tarnished or destroyed by any means while the space vampire still "lives". Though stage one vampires can dish it, they can't take it: they are uniquely vulnerable to insults and jokes at the expense of their vampiric appearance.

The *Alluvian Astromos* team that has transformed into space vampires still wear their Starball jerseys beneath their magical capes. The GM is encouraged to give each of them numbers and last names (ex: #17 Grakskies).

STAGE TWO SPACE VAMPIRE

Large undead (monstrosity), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 171 (13d10 + 39)

Speed 50 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +8, Wis +6

Skills Athletics +10, Perception +6, Stealth +8, Survival +6

Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Acidic Blood. When the space vampire takes damage from a melee weapon attack, if the attacker is within 5 feet of the space vampire they must make a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 10 (3d6) acid damage.

General Sensitivity. When the space vampire's appearance, bat wings, or other vampire-like features are insulted or made the butt of a joke, the vampire has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until the start of its next turn.

Misty Escape. The space vampire may spend its action, bonus action, and movement to shapeshift into a cloud of green mist and teleport up to a space within 300 feet, before taking its true form

once again. Grappled creatures do not teleport along with the space vampire.

Monstrous Survivor (2/Day). When damage would reduce the space vampire's hit points to 0, it appears to die. At the start of its next turn, it rises to continue its hunt with 33 (6d10) hit points.

Turn Resistance. The space vampire has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The space vampire makes two attacks with its claws and one attack with either its stinger or its brainsucking bite.

Brainsucking Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a grappled creature. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. The target's Intelligence is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken and the space vampire's Intelligence increases by an equal amount. The target dies if its Intelligence is reduced to 0 and the changes to each creature's Intelligence lasts until they take a long rest, or until the vampire dies.

A creature killed by a space vampire's brainsucking bite rises as a stage one space vampire under the vampire's control.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (2d4 + 5) slashing damage and the target must make a successful DC 17 Strength saving throw or be grappled.

Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

STAGE TWO SPACE VAMPIRE

Stage two space vampires have evolved from their humble and annoying beginnings, and in the process of their mutation have become some of the most terrifying monstrosities that a crew could encounter in the 'verse. They appear to be a grotesque amalgamation of a giant bat, with wide membranous wings, and a four-armed insectoid being with a gray, chitinous exoskeleton and a long, barbed tail. Their blood is acidic, making fighting them in close quarters particularly deadly. Their face vaguely

resembles that of a bat-humanoid hybrid, with jaws that can extend and open to be nearly three feet wide to reveal four rows of razor-sharp fangs.

Stage two space vampires are nefariously hard to kill and make incredible hunters, able to silently stalk their prey and viciously pick off crew members, one by one. Despite their monstrous metamorphosis, like all space vampires, these foul creatures are still extremely sensitive towards being made fun of or insulted.

STAGE THREE SPACE VAMPIRE

Tiny undead (shapechanger), unaligned

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 50 (9d4 + 27)

Speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +6, Perception +5, Persuasion +6, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Evasion. When the space vampire is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, it instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Misty Escape. The space vampire may spend its action, bonus action, and movement to shapeshift into a cloud of green mist and teleport up to a space within 300 feet, before taking its true form once again.

Shapechange (3/Day). As an action, the space vampire can change its shape into any immaterial object of similar size that it has touched. It retains the white and pink coloring of its true form, but

is otherwise indistinguishable from the object it takes the appearance of. The space vampire can change back to its true form at any time as a free action.

Turn Resistance. The space vampire has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) slashing damage.

Brain Drain. One creature within 30 feet that can see the space vampire must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 15 (2d10 + 4) psychic damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's Intelligence is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken and the space vampire's Intelligence increases by an equal amount. The target dies if its Intelligence is reduced to 0 and the changes to each creature's Intelligence lasts until they take a long rest, or until the vampire dies.

A creature killed by a space vampire's brain drain immediately rises as a stage one space vampire under the vampire's control.

REACTIONS

Cute Stare. If a creature targets the space vampire with an attack, the vampire bats its eyelashes innocently and wraps its long bat ears cutely around its body. The attacking creature must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is stunned until the end of its turn, and the space vampire can immediately make a brain drain attack against it.

STAGE THREE SPACE VAMPIRE

Stage three space vampires, also known as master space vampires, are the final evolution. Only the oldest space vampires evolve to their final form: a one foot tall, adorable white bat-like creature with expressive pink eyes, purple eyelashes, and long floppy pink ears. This evolution allows the master vampire to be able to better control its thirst for brain juice, avoid annoying others with awful puns, and to better survive in a 'verse that fears space vampires. The most fearsome of the master's new abilities is its eyes: it can drain a creature's mind simply by

staring cutely at it. It's for this reason, and the master vampire's ability to control weaker vampires over a large distance, that one should never underestimate these otherwise adorable creatures.

The blood of master space vampires is highly sought after on black markets around the 'verse for its regenerative and performance-enhancing properties, making space vampire hunting a very popular profession among the foolhardy.

SPACE VAMPIRE THWIRREL

Tiny undead (thwirrel), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 17 (5d4 + 5)

Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	4 (-3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

General Sensitivity. When the space vampire's thwirrel nature, pallid fur, tiny fangs, or other vampire-like features are insulted or made the butt of a joke, the vampire has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until the start of its next turn.

Energy Siphon. When the space vampire hits a magically powered device with a brainsucking bite

attack, it can use its bonus action to drain some energy from the device. When it does so, its next successful brainsucking bite attack deals an additional 3 (1d6) necrotic damage and 14 (4d6) lightning damage on a hit.

Keen Hearing and Smell. The vampire has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Spider Climb. The vampire can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

ACTIONS

Brainsucking Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a grappled creature. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage, and the target is grappled. The target's Intelligence is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken and the space vampire's Intelligence increases by an equal amount. The target dies if its Intelligence is reduced to 0 and the changes to each creature's Intelligence lasts until they take a long rest, or until the vampire dies. If the vampire's Intelligence ever surpasses 12, its head explodes and it immediately dies (again).

A creature killed by a space vampire's brainsucking bite rises as a stage one space vampire under this vampire's control.

SPACE VAMPIRE THWIRREL

Thwirrel space vampires are similar to other stage one space vampires in most ways: they are sensitive about their appearance, materialize an indestructible cloak, require brain juice to survive, and are generally a terrible annoyance to their foes. However, vampire thwirrels retain the unique ability to siphon energy from magical devices (though they can no longer use their camouflage abilities). They use the magic siphoned this way to amplify their brain-drinking powers, making them significantly more dangerous than your average thwirrel.

STIRGE RAPTOR

The stirge raptor is an insectile alien dinosaur with compound eyes, chitinous scales, and two sets of vestigial forelimbs. Behind its row of razor sharp teeth, it conceals a proboscis which lunges outward some distance to rapidly drain blood from a creature.

SWARM OF ROGUE A.I. WIRES

Rogue Artificial Intelligences are capable of infesting wiring, bending them to their will. In combat, these swarms of deadly, sparking wires move at the A.I.'s will and with its general disregard for organic life.

STIRGE RAPTOR

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 40 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	4 (-3)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cannibalize. If the stirge raptor uses its proboscis on the corpse of a stirge raptor, it can add 1d6 to its attacks and damage rolls for 1 minute.

Pack Tactics. The stirge raptor has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the stirge raptor's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Vestigial Wings. The stirge raptor falls at the end of a turn if it's airborne and the only thing holding it aloft is its flying speed.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Proboscis. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, and stirge raptor regains 3 (1d6) hit points.

SWARM OF ROGUE A.I. WIRES

Medium swarm of Small constructs, unaligned

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 43 (14d8 - 20)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	4 (-3)

Damage Immunities lightning, necrotic, poisoned, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Explode. When the swarm is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes in a shower of sparks. Each creature within 5 feet must make a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) lightning damage.

False Appearance. While the swarm remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal tangle of wires.

Pulse. A creature that is grappled by the swarm at the start of its turn takes 21 (6d6) lightning damage, or 10 (3d6) lightning damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. Until the end of its turn, it has disadvantage on attack rolls.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a small construct. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Charged Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 1 bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) lightning damage, or 3 (1d6) lightning damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. The target is grappled (escape DC 11).

APPENDIX B: NONPLAYER CHARACTERS (NPCS)

The following nonplayer characters appear in this adventure.

BOSS AHN-NOVA

The owl-headed avia-ra Boss Ahn-Nova might have settled into the comfortable position of a backwater crime lord in Port Nomad, but he retains every ounce of murderous instinct that got him that position in the first place. He prefers to let his henchmen do the dirty work of shake downs and kneecap breaking, but being able to do it himself makes Intimidation go that much smoother.

BOSS AHN-NOVA

Medium humanoid (avia-ra), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (tactical nanofiber vest)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Cha +4

Skills Deception +4, Perception +3, Persuasion +4, Piloting +5

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Avia-Ra, Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Dodge Roll. As a bonus action, Ahn-Nova can move up to 15 feet. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks, ignores difficult terrain, and can move him through hostile creatures' spaces, as long as he doesn't end his movement there.

Innate Spellcasting. Ahn-Nova's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 11). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *sacred flame*, *thaumaturgy*

1/day: *bless*

Quick Draw. Ahn-Nova has advantage on initiative rolls. Additionally, he can draw or stow up to two weapons when he rolls initiative and whenever he takes an action on its turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ahn-Nova makes two attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Magnus. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 70/280 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) radiant damage. The weapon then overheats, and can't be used until the end of Ahn-Nova's next turn.

Repeater. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

REACTIONS

Skin of Your Teeth (3/Day). Ahn-Nova adds 4 (1d8) to his AC against one attack that would hit him. To do so, Ahn-Nova must see the attacker.

BUDD FELMER

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 13 (nanofiber vest)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Skills Nature +3, Perception +4, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Hunter's Instinct. Budd adds an extra 1d6 damage to a creature that he hits with a weapon attack (included in the attack).

ACTIONS

Concussion Rifle. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) thunder damage plus 3 (1d6) thunder damage. Budd has disadvantage on attacks with this weapon if the target is within 20 feet.

BUDD FELMER

Budd Felmer has the gait, mustache, and accoutrement of a prolific big game hunter, but the graying hair and ruined joints of a ranger past his prime. Despite this, he is driven to catch one more big critter to leave his mark on the world of hunting. He keeps his blaster, a modified concussion rifle, in pristine condition at all times, to ensure he's always ready for just such a hunt.

CAPTAIN LYSANDRA

Medium humanoid (nautilid), lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (aqua suit)

Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Wis +4

Skills Athletics +5, Data +4, Insight +6, Intimidation +4, Investigation +4, Perception +4

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages all, from *universal translator*

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Aqua Suit. Captain Lysandra wears an aqua suit, which counts as a life suit and provides her with the benefits of a *universal translator*.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Captain Lysandra makes two attacks with her Rocket Hammer.

Rocket Hammer. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d10 + 1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Tri-Barrel Ion Cannon. Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 30/120 ft., up to three targets within 5 feet of each other. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) radiant damage if only one target is hit, or 7 (2d6) radiant damage if multiple targets are hit.

CAPTAIN LYSANDRA

Bearing a rocket hammer and a grudge with the Galactic Bank, Captain Lysandra has rested a great deal of hope on Professor Orryn's new invention as a savior of the nautilid people. Much of her life has been solely focused on finding a New Poseidon, and she can be quite forceful when obstacles stand in the way of that goal.

CARMEN CANE

A wizardly femme fatale, Carmen Cane is secretly both an agent of the Tower and head of the extremist New Terran Organization. For most missions, she instead introduces herself as “Doctor” Carmen Cane and masquerades as a brilliant, glamorous brain surgeon, a part she plays to the tee. A brilliant smile and a revealing dress is all she needs to waltz past armed guards and police. However, should that fail, Carmen can bring a raft of spells and an array of grenades to bear, incinerating and disorienting her way to safety.

CARMEN CANE

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +3, Cha +6

Skills Acrobatics +5, Arcana +10, Data +7, Deception +9, Insight +3, Perception +3, Piloting +5, Technology +7

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, Amoeboid, Avia-Ra, Common, Dwarf, Elf, Wrothian

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Spellcasting. Carmen is a 10th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). Carmen has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *cheat*, *cryptogram*, *mage hand*, *technomancy*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *misty step*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility*

5th level (2 slots): *dominate person*, *hardlight frame*

ACTIONS

Arc Baton. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) lightning damage. If the target is a creature, it can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.

BONUS ACTIONS

Flash Grenade. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) radiant damage and the target is blind until the end of their next turn. All creatures within 10 feet of the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or also be blinded until the end of their next turn.

Chaff Grenade. Carmen throws a grenade at a point within 30 feet, creating a magnetic chaff field that expands from that point in a 20-foot radius. This field lasts until the end of Carmen's next turn. Any ranged attacks that pass through the chaff field are made with disadvantage.

Dispersion Grenade. Carmen throws a grenade at a point within 30 feet, creating a gaseous cloud that expands from that point in a 20-foot radius. All creatures within the dispersion cloud have advantage on saving throws against spells or magical effects. If a successful saving throw would reduce the damage of a spell or magical effect by half, it instead reduces it to 0.

Sonic Grenade. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) thunder damage and the target is deafened until the end of their next turn. All creatures within 10 feet of the target must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or also be deafened until the end of their next turn.

CIRDAN BLACKFORGE

Medium humanoid (dwarf), true neutral

Armor Class 13 (nanofiber vest)

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 25 ft. (unaffected by high and extreme gravity)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +4

Skills Athletics +4, Data +5, Piloting +5, Technology +7

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarf

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Famous Shipwright. Cirdan has advantage on skill checks made to build, diagnose, invent, or repair ships or ship parts.

ACTIONS

Hacked Repeater. Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (4d6) radiant damage. Attacks made with this weapon have disadvantage.

CIRDAN BLACKFORGE

A cantankerous shipwright at the tail end of his career, Cirdan Blackforge is very much a dwarf of his time. His opinions are retrospective and reactive, usually constructed around back-in-my-days and they-don't-make-'em-like-they-used-tos. Despite his transparent bias, his traditionalism is based on a clear sense of right and wrong and a lifetime of working experience.

CHUCK HANKERTON

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +5

Skills Insight +6, Persuasion +7

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish, Orcish

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Clout. Chuck gains a bonus to ability checks and saving throws equal to the number of conscious allies he can see within 30 feet, up to a maximum bonus equal to his Charisma modifier (+3).

ACTIONS

Arc Baton. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) lightning damage. If the target is a creature, it can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.

Stirring Speech (Recharge 5–6). Chuck delivers a stirring speech ripped from the scripts of several widely known holo-films. This speech does not need to make sense in regard to the current situation. All allies within 30 feet who can hear the speech are able to reroll one attack roll, ability check, or saving throw before the end of their next turn, taking the new result.

CHUCK HANKERTON

Chuck Hankerton was never much of a Starball player himself, but he is beloved and renowned for his skill as a Starball coach. Old, grumpy, addicted to candy bars, and full of useless trivia knowledge, there is absolutely no reason anyone should fear Chuck in battle. However, his years as a coach and watching action blockbuster holo-films has prepared him for anything, and he still has a way of helping his team be the best they can be.

DARKSTAR KILLAGOB

Small humanoid (halfling), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (tactical nanofiber vest)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +5

Skills Data +6, Insight +3, Intimidation +7,
Persuasion +5, Piloting +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Halfling

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Brave. Darkstar has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Dodge Roll. As a bonus action, Darkstar can move up to 15 feet. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks, ignores difficult terrain, and can move him through hostile creatures' space so long as he does not end his turn there.

Halfling Nimbleness. Darkstar can move through the space of any creature that is of a size larger than his.

Lucky. When Darkstar rolls a 1 on the d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, he can reroll the die and must use the new roll.

Naturally Shrewd. Darkstar adds +4 to any skill check he makes involving money, business dealings, legal proceedings, or similar dealings.

Quickdraw. Darkstar has advantage on initiative rolls. Additionally, he can draw or stow up to two weapons when he rolls initiative and whenever he takes an action on his turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Darkstar makes two attacks with his repeater, or one attack with his overcharged baton and one attack with his repeater.

Overcharged Baton. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d6 + 1) lightning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of their next turn.

Repeater. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

DARKSTAR KILLAGOB

An ex-hitman in the business of information brokerage for the Firm, Darkstar Killagob is one of the most overtly dangerous individuals in the 'verse. He's under no illusion to the contrary, either. Darkstar possesses the cold confidence of someone with two innate advantages over anyone he meets: he knows more than them about anything worth knowing, and he can kill them with ease.

EMBER

Curious and academic, Ember is the type of amoeboid that is drawn to strife like a moths to a flame. Their expertise is that of sociology, particularly pertaining to that of the Warzone and the goblinoid

EMBER

Medium humanoid (amoeboid), neutral good

Armor Class 11 (14 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

Skills Data +5, Insight +7, Perception +5,
Technology +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Amoeboid, Common, Goblin, Orc

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Amorphous. Ember can compress its body enough to squeeze through a 1-inch wide space.

Spellcasting. Ember is a 4th-level spellcaster. Their spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Ember has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *shocking grasp*,
technomancy

1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *mage armor*,
shield

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*

ACTIONS

Phaser. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 50/200 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) radiant damage.

GREGGY IRONSMELT

Medium humanoid (dwarf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (triplate suit)

Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Survival +1

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Dwarven Resilience. They have advantage on saving throws against poison and resistance to poison damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Greggy makes two attacks.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Repeater. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

factions therein. The innate danger of their subjects and of places like Port Nomad, never fazes Ember; by contrast, it intensifies their curiosity.

GREGGY IRONSMELT

The very probably senile dwarf Greggy Ironsmelt has been living off the land on Gaozu for untold decades. Despite being a well-known figure around Taisong, known to every traveler that passes through, none have been around long enough to know that Greggy predates the settlement itself: he crash landed on the dwarven ship, the Vorpai, and was its sole survivor. It is perhaps because of all those who perished in the landing that Greggy never left this jungle world, or perhaps because he prefers the simpler life of hunting and exploring.

GRISHAM BUZZPOP

Small humanoid (halfling), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15 (tactical nanofiber vest)

Hit Points 54 (12d6 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Cha +2

Skills Deception +2, Perception +1, Stealth +5

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Halfling

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Dodge Roll. As a bonus action, Grisham can move up to 15 feet. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks, ignores difficult terrain, and can move Grisham through hostile creature's spaces, as long as he doesn't end his movement there.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Grisham makes two attacks with his antimatter dagger, three attacks with his swarm pistols, or six attacks with his swarm pistols with disadvantage.

Antimatter Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) necrotic damage.

Swarm Pistols. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) radiant damage.

GRISHAM BUZZPOP

A career criminal with a rap sheet longer than a skathári arm, Grisham Buzzpop has pulled off exciting heists, brutal shakedowns, and cunning ploys. His current job, going undercover as a little girl to infiltrate a soda factory, is decidedly none of those, but a job's a job. Grisham has few qualms for his jobs, but is largely a pragmatist; for this particular job, it's probably better to die or go permanently off the grid than go home empty-handed to his Firm handler.

HIGH ORACLE THESSALIA

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful good

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 36 (8d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +6

Skills Arcana +8, History +6, Insight +6,
Perception +6, Religion +6

Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages all

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Portent (2/Day). Thessalia can reroll an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check and choose either result.

Spellcasting. Thessalia is a 5th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). Thessalia has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *cryptogram*, *mage hand*,
technomancy

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor*, *magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *misty step*,
suggestion

ACTIONS

Repeater. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

HIGH ORACLE THESSALIA

It takes quite a while for most people to realize that High Oracle Thessalia of Great House Mer'gaal is precogniscent. Instead, they merely find that her behavior unsettling, as her reactions preempt causes by a moment or so and her body language communicates that she knows more than she's letting on.

IVANA ZARKOFF

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (nanofiber vest)

Hit Points 36 (8d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Skills Nature +4, Perception +5, Survival +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ivana makes two attacks with her antimatter dagger.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Concussion Rifle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) thunder damage. Ivana has disadvantage on attacks with this weapon if the target is within 20 feet.

NEOMA MENTA

Medium humanoid (vect), neutral good

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 9 (2d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Performance +5, Persuasion +5

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages all, from *embedded translator*

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

ACTIONS

Ballistic Gloves. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) force damage.

NTO TERRORIST

Medium humanoid (human), any chaotic alignment

Armor Class 16 (triplate suit)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Comm Link. The terrorist is in constant communication and coordination with its allies within 2 miles of it. It can't be surprised by any creature or object that any of its allies within range are aware of.

Life Suit. The terrorist's armor contains an integrated life suit.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The terrorist makes two attacks with its standard carbine, two attacks with its arc baton, or four attacks with its standard carbine with disadvantage.

Arc Baton. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) lightning damage. If the target is a creature, it can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.

Standard Carbine. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

IVANA ZARKOFF

The ruthless and professional Ivana Zarkoff has one standard: the very best. Perhaps, it is this uncompromising nature that makes her so impossible to escape in a hunt, or perhaps it is that she surrounds herself with the very best help. Her high standards have caused countless firings for slight mistakes and failures, but those who stick by her side, like the Scale and Fang mercenaries she takes to hiring, have proven they are good enough to do so.

NEOMA MENTA

A blogger, model, socialite, and recently-turned curator, the ever-talented Neoma Menta is a fixture of the elven social landscape. Even her chassis is remarkable: a gleaming silver skin of custom design, augmented to fit her female personality. Most recently, Neoma turned away from her career in the public eye to dedicate herself to artistic studies, and quickly found a position as curator of the Politana Gallery.

NTO TERRORIST

The footsoldiers of the New Terran Organization (NTO) are violent extremists, indoctrinated in beliefs regarding the innate superiority of mankind and their rightful place as rulers of the 'verse. NTO terrorists draw their brutal tactics from the pages of history books, specifically the bloodiest battles of the Rift War of humanity.

JANUARY THE THWIRREL

Tiny beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 33 (9d4 + 9)

Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +6, Cha +3

Skills Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +6

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Energy Siphon. When the thwirrel hits a magically powered device with a bite attack, it can use its bonus action to drain some energy from the device. When it does so, the save DC for its Psychic Camouflage feature increases by 1, to a maximum of 16, for the next 24 hours. Smaller devices—such as blasters and datapads—that are affected by this trait cease to function for 1 hour. Larger devices such as automatons or Dark Matter engines only cease to function for 1 round.

Keen Hearing and Smell. The thwirrel has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Psychic Camouflage. The thwirrel can take the Hide action even when it isn't in a heavily obscured area. Additionally, when a creature would normally see, hear, touch, or smell a thwirrel, it must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a successful save, the creature can perceive all thwirrels as normal for the next 10 minutes. On a failed save, the creature can't see, hear, feel, or smell any thwirrels for the same duration. In either case, the saving throw must be repeated every 10 minutes, or until the creature is no longer within visual range of any thwirrels. Creatures with truesight are immune to this trait.

Innate Spellcasting (Psionics). January's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). January can innately cast the following spells (as psionic abilities), requiring no material, verbal, or somatic components.

At will: *mage hand, magic missile, mending, minor illusion*

2/day each: *detect thoughts, shield, sleep*

1/day each: *dream, fly, telekinesis*

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage.

JANUARY

January is a super-intelligent thwirrel. All thwirrels are psionic, but January is, for reasons that are completely unknown, also telepathic and smarter than most artificial intelligences. January is something of an anarchist and is extremely mischievous. Once crossed, she makes the subject of her anger her nemesis, using her psychic abilities to torment them in subtle and mundane ways, until someone else becomes her nemesis instead.

KENNIE FLOPWIG

Small humanoid (halfling), lawful evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 9 (2d8)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Skills Data +8, Deception +3, Persuasion +5, Technology +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Halfling

Challenge 1/4 (25 XP)

Cowardly. Kennie has disadvantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Halfling Nimbleness. Kennie can move through the space of any creature that is of a size larger than theirs.

Lucky. When Kennie rolls a 1 on the d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, they can reroll the die and must use the new roll.

Naturally Shrewd. Kennie adds +4 to any skill check they make involving money, business dealings, legal proceedings, or similar dealings.

ACTIONS

Phaser. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 50/200 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) radiant damage.

KIRI FLOPWIG

Small humanoid (halfling), lawful evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 9 (2d8)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +7, Insight +3, Persuasion +7

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Halfling

Challenge 1/4 (25 XP)

Brave. Kiri has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Halfling Nimbleness. Kiri can move through the space of any creature that is of a size larger than hers.

Lucky. When Kiri rolls a 1 on the d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, she can reroll the die and must use the new roll.

Naturally Shrewd. Kiri adds +4 to any skill check she makes involving money, business dealings, legal proceedings, or similar dealings.

ACTIONS

Phaser. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 50/200 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) radiant damage.

KENNIE AND KIRI FLOPWIG

The halfling twins Kennie and Kiri Flopwig hold competitive positions of power in the Galactic Bank—Kennie as a data-crunching Chief Data Executive, and Kiri as the bank's Vice President. As many twins are, however, the two might seem like mirror opposites of one another: Kennie is quiet, bookish, and nervous, whereas Kiri is a take-charge, no-nonsense leader.

PORT NOMAD SECURITY OFFICER

Medium humanoid (human), any lawful alignment

Armor Class 16 (triplate suit)
Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +3, Survival +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Comm Link. The security officer is in constant communication and coordination with its allies within 2 miles of it. It can't be surprised by any creature or object that any of its allies within range are aware of.

Life Suit. The security officer's armor contains an integrated life suit.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The security officer makes two attacks with its standard carbine, two attacks with its arc baton, or four attacks with its standard carbine with disadvantage.

Arc Baton. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) lightning damage. If the target is a creature, it can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.

Standard Carbine. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

SAVYN ARAVARS

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 15 (carbonic suit)
Hit Points 67 (15d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +8, Persuasion +6, Performance +6
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan
Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Savyn has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Taunt (2/Day). Savyn can use a bonus action to target one creature he can see within 30 feet of him. If the target can hear Savyn, it must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws until the start of Savyn's next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Savyn makes two attacks, one with his swarm pistol and one with his laser half sword.

Laser Half Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) radiant damage.

Swarm Pistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) force damage.

PORT NOMAD SECURITY OFFICER

The streets and starport of Port Nomad are safeguarded by the station's security officers, a band of lawmen who do their best to separate right from wrong on the crime-riddled station. Many among their number have taken bribes or regular payments from Boss Ahn-Nova to turn a blind eye or actively participate in illicit activity, but enough good officers wear the badge that the station remains civilized and lawful, at least on the surface.

PROFESSOR ORRYN TALFOUGH-GOGGLEFOGGER

Small humanoid (gnome), chaotic good

Armor Class 13 (tactical nanofiber vest)

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Skills Arcana +9, Data +9, Perception +5, Piloting +5, Technology +9

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages all, from *universal translator*

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

AI Companion. If Orryn rolls less than 16 with any of his skills, he treats the result as a 16 instead.

Genius Engineer. Orryn can spend 1 minute and 10 gp worth of materials to construct an improvised piece of magical technology (a flashlight, a comm set, an igniter, etc). Orryn can use his action to dismantle the device and reclaim the materials used to create it.

Gnome Cunning. Orryn has advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws against magic. **Overcharge.** A blaster deals three extra dice of its damage plus Orryn's Intelligence modifier when Orryn hits with it (included in the attack).

Retro Technology. Orryn has advantage on all Intelligence (Technology) checks to identify old magical technology.

ACTIONS

Gnomish Phaser. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (5d4 + 5) force damage.

Gadget. Orryn uses one of the following gadgets:

Blink Button. Orryn teleports up to 15 feet.

Cloaking Device (Recharge 4–6). Orryn becomes invisible until the end of his next turn, as per the spell invisibility.

Overheat Beacon (Recharge 5–6). Each blaster within 60 feet of Orryn (excluding those carried by him) overheats and cannot be used until the end of his next turn.

Shrink Ray. One creature within 30 feet is targeted by the Reduce effect of the enlarge/reduce spell (save DC 14).

PROFESSOR ORRYN TALFOUGH-GOGGLEFOGGER

Professor Orryn is a brilliant gnomish inventor who has just achieved his magnum opus, a drive capable of delivering ships into Dead Magic Zones. This invention is a paradigm shift on the galactic stage, and the professor is fully aware of its implications. No matter how he tries to envision the future, Professor Orryn sees a predictable set of moves from the major galactic factions in response: in most scenarios, he ends up dead, and his invention in the wrong hands.

SAVYN ARAVARS

An aristocrat by any definition, Savyn Aravars has long been heir to the vast House Aravars, and has recently come into his inheritance with his father's passing. His greatest weapons are his sharp fashion sense and infectious charm, but if push comes to shove, he has also been tutored in the use of half swords and light blasters since a young age.

SCALE CREW

The Scale Crew consists of the vect sniper, Trace, the greenskin rogue, Sierra O'Connell, the half-elven sorcerer, Aela Vestele, and their dragonborn leader, Drak Garfreckt.

DRAK GARFRECKT

Medium humanoid (dragonborn), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (adamant hardsuit)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +4

Damage Resistances fire

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft.,
passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Brave. Drak has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Special Equipment. Drak wears a *ring of spacewalking* and a *personal shield emitter*. He also stores the following items in a *weapon wheel*: a *magnus opum*, a *REC Gun*, a *Rocket Hammer*, and a *sorting beast*.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Drak makes two melee attacks or three ranged attacks.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). Drak exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Rocket Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (1d10 + 1d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Magnus Opum. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 70/280 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) radiant damage. The weapon then overheats, and can't be used until the end of the Drak's next turn.

REC Gun. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) radiant damage.

REACTIONS

Shield Overcharge (1/Day). Drak gains a +5 bonus to his AC until the start of his next turn.

TRACE

Medium humanoid (vect), neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (composite plating)

Hit Points 61 (11d8 + 11)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)

Skills Arcana +4, Data +4, Sleight of Hand +6,
Stealth +6, Technology +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., thermalsight 30 ft.,
passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Construct Anatomy. Trace is immune to nonmagical diseases, and they don't need to eat, drink, or breathe.

Construct Grafts. Trace has the following grafts installed: finger picks, infravision eyes, and a thermoregulator.

Inflexible Mind. Trace has advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Trace deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when they hit a target with a weapon attack and have advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 ft. of one of Trace's allies that isn't incapacitated and Trace doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Trace makes two melee weapon attacks.

Focused Concussion Rifle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 200/800 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) thunder damage. Trace has disadvantage on attacks with this weapon if the target is within 20 feet.

Antimatter Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) necrotic damage.

Omni-Grenade. Trace throws a grenade at a point they can see within 30 feet. Each creature within a 5-foot radius of that point must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) fire damage, or half as much on a successful save.

SIERRA O'CONNELL

Medium humanoid (near-human greenskin),
neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (greenskin)

Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +2

Skills Acrobatics +5, Deception +6, Perception +2, Performance +6

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of her turns, Sierra can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Photosynthetic Metabolism. Sierra has advantage on saving throws against being poisoned.

Spellcasting. Sierra is a 4th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *cheat, mage hand, vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, hardlight blaster, healing word, memorize, sleep*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility, shatter*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Sierra makes 3 melee weapon attacks, or 6 attacks with disadvantage using her swarm pistols.

Photonic Lash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) radiant damage.

Swarm Pistols. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) radiant damage.

AELA VESTELE

Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11 (14 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)

Skills Arcana +4, History +4, Persuasion +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Alien Spellcasting. Whenever Aela casts a spell of 1st level or higher, she gains one of the following benefits of her choice until the start of her next turn:

- She sprouts tentacles and gains a climb speed equal to her movement speed.
- Eyes open in her skin, granting her the ability to see invisible creatures and objects as if they were visible. She can also see into the Ethereal Plane.
- Her skin becomes slimy and unnaturally tough, granting her a +2 bonus to her Armor class.

Spellcasting. Aela is a 5th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, mage hand, mending, poison spray*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, mage armor*, magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility, scorching ray*

3rd level (2 slots): *fireball*

*Aela casts this spell on herself before combat.

Unnatural Anatomy. Aela takes no additional damage from critical hits.

ACTIONS

Psionic Helm. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 70/280 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

SER HELIO-HORUS

A respected lawman and fierce swordsman, Ser Helio-Horus is an avia-ra replete with secrets. First and foremost among them, he was cast out of the Order of the Sepulcher Knights ten years ago for narcotic trafficking on Port Nomad. Perhaps secondly, that he is in crippling debt to Boss Ahn-Nova, a local crime boss with few scruples. These secrets have made him complicit in a much wider conspiracy that could endanger the very power structure of the 'verse.

SER HELIO-HORUS

Medium humanoid (avia-ra), neutral evil

Armor Class 19 (hexaplate suit, energy shield bracer)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +4

Skills Athletics +5, Deception +6, Intimidation +4, Investigation +2, Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Avia-Ra, Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Ser Helio-Horus's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *sacred flame*, *thaumaturgy*

1/day: *bless*

Reckless Smite. When Ser Helio-Horus hits a creature with a weapon attack, he can choose to increase his weapon's damage by 9 (2d8). If he does, his AC is cumulatively reduced by -3 until the start of his next turn.

Special Equipment. Ser Helio-Horus has an energy shield bracer.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ser Helio-Horus makes two attacks with either his laser sword or his repeater.

Laser Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) radiant damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) radiant damage if wielded with two hands.

Repeater. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

TIBERIUS VINTER

Medium humanoid (half-orc), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (impulse frame, *energy shield brace*)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +8, Wis +7

Skills Athletics +8, Insight +7, Intimidation +11, Perception +7, Persuasion +7, Piloting +11

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages all, from *universal translator*

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Tiberius hits with it (included in the attack).

Close Quarters Combat. Being within 5 feet of a hostile creature doesn't impose disadvantage on Tiberius's ranged attack rolls.

Gritty Survivor (1/Day). When Tiberius is reduced to 0 hit points, he instead drops to 1 hit point. He gains advantage on all attack rolls and ability checks for the remainder of the encounter, and is immune to all damage until the end of his next turn.

Impulse Pack. When Tiberius uses his flight speed, he must begin and end his movement on the ground, otherwise he falls.

Life Support Systems. Tiberius wears an impulse frame, which counts as a life suit.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Tiberius makes two attacks with either his antimatter glaive or with his hyper-repeater, and then makes one attack with his tri-barrel impactor cannon if he is able.

Antimatter Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed until the end of their next turn.

Hyper-Repeater. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) radiant damage.

Tri-Barrel Impactor Cannon. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/120 ft., up to three targets within 5 feet of each other. *Hit:* 26 (4d12) radiant damage if only one target is hit, or 16 (3d10) radiant damage if multiple targets are hit. The impactor then overheats, and cannot be used until the end of Tiberius's next turn.

TIBERIUS VINTER

A legendary warrior by any definition, Tiberius Vinter is currently the High Lord Marshal of the Coalition, but has been hired as a personal escort by Darkstar Killagob for his dealings on Port Nomad. When his immense reputation is set aside, Tiberius is a quiet and thoughtful half-orc with a wealth of combat and leadership experience to draw upon. When this wisdom doesn't lead to nonconfrontational solutions, he is also a fierce soldier, more than equal to any other on Port Nomad.

APPENDIX C: SHIPS

The following ships appear prominently in these adventures.

THE GETTIN'

Custom-modified personal (unknown origin)

Armor Class 14

Mega Hit Points 64

Shield Points 14

Engines Dark Matter (Class 2), Impulse (3,000 feet): Maneuverability (90)

Systems Arcane cannon, cloaking, communications, fabricator, hypercapacitor, life support, sensors, shield generator, umbilicus

Crew Pilot, Engineer, Dogfighter (Landrunner; not for combat use), 4 Gunners

Cargo 15 tons

Breakdown-Proof. This ship's systems, weapons, and engines have 20 mega hit points, rather than 10.

Flee the Scene. This ship's movement speed increases by 500 feet if it is moving away from another ship that is within 3,000 feet of it.

Smuggler's Hold. This ship has hidden compartments in its hold, perfect for smuggling. These compartments can hold up to 1,000 pounds (which don't count against your ship's cargo capacity) in objects no larger than 6 feet in any dimension.

ACTIONS

2 x Auto Turret. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 3,000/9,000 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (3d4) mega radiant damage.

Heavy Cannon. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 4,500/13,500 ft., fixed rear, one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) mega piercing damage.

Arcane Cannon (fire bolt). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 10,000 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) mega fire damage.

THE VEXATION

Custom-modified corvette (unknown origin)

Armor Class 16

Mega Hit Points 130

Shield Points 20

Engines Dark Matter (Class 3), Impulse (2,500 feet): Maneuverability (90)

Systems Arcane cannon, communications, hypercapacitor, life support, sensors, shield generator, shuttles (6), sickbay, umbilicus

Crew Captain, 2 Dogfighters (Trooper), Engineer, 4 Gunners, Pilot, 40 Passengers

Cargo 250 tons

Breakdown-Proof. This ship's systems, weapons, and engines have 20 mega hit points, rather than 10.

High-G Turn. This ship can rotate the direction it faces before it moves, instead of after it moves.

Reckless Bombardment (1/Turn). The captain of this ship can use their action to declare a bombardment, granting the ship's gunners advantage on attacks until the beginning of the captain's next turn. However, attacks against the ship have advantage for the same duration.

Retribution. When the ship is hit by a ship weapon attack or an attack from a mega creature, one gunner can use their reaction to make a ship weapon attack against the ship or creature. Once a gunner uses this ship trait to attack, no gunner can do so until the beginning of the initiative order.

ACTIONS

2 x Auto Turret. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 3,000/9,000 ft., one target each. *Hit:* 7 (3d4) mega radiant damage.

Pulse Cannon. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 6,000/18,000 ft., fixed front, one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) mega radiant damage.

Arcane Cannon (scorching ray). *Three Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 3,000 ft., one target each. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) mega fire damage.

THE VORGA

Human (New Terran Organization) corvette

Armor Class 16

Mega Hit Points 155

Shield Points 20

Engines Dark Matter (Class 3), Impulse (3,500 feet): Maneuverability (90)

Systems Arcane cannon, cloaking, communications, fabricator, hypercapacitor, life support, sensors, shield generator, shuttle, sickbay, umbilicus

Crew Captain, 6 Dogfighters (3 Troopers, 3 Sabres), Engineer, 4 Gunners, Pilot, 50 passengers

Cargo 300 tons

Breakdown-Proof. This ship's systems, weapons, and engines have 20 mega hit points, rather than 10.

Flee the Scene. This ship's movement speed increases by 500 feet if it is moving away from another ship that is within 3,000 feet of it.

High-G Turn. This ship can rotate the direction it faces before it moves, instead of after it moves.

Reckless Bombardment (1/Turn). The captain of this ship can use their action to declare a bombardment, granting the ship's gunners advantage on attacks until the beginning of their captain's next turn. However, attacks against the ship have advantage for the same duration.

ACTIONS

Arcane Cannon (*scorching ray*). *Three Ranged Spell Attacks*: +8 to hit, range 3,000 ft., one target each. *Hit*: 7 (2d6) mega fire damage.

2 × Auto Turret. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, range 3,000/9,000 ft., one target each. *Hit*: 7 (3d4) mega radiant damage.

Pulse Cannon. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, range 6,000/18,000 ft., fixed front, one target. *Hit*: 13 (3d8) mega radiant damage.

APPENDIX D: CLUE HANDOUTS

CLUE: JIMBALL'S RING

A beautiful, expensive-looking ring. The inside is engraved with the words "My All, Always-SA".

CLUE: JIMBALL'S TRAVEL LOGS

Jimball travelled to Politana for business, not pleasure. This was all supposed to be a trip to pay off gambling debts for Grax.

CLUE: CASE REPORT

Jimball was caught red-handed exiting an art exhibit called "The Prestigious Works of Politana" with a priceless diamond hidden away in his pocket.

CLUE: PINK STAR DIAMOND PHOTO

This photograph captures the Pink Diamond's brilliant hues and captivating facets.

CLUE: PINK STAR HISTORY

The Pink Star diamond was excavated from the core of Politana in the early days of the planet's settlement.

CLUE: PINK STAR RUMOR

Some historians believe the diamond to possess magical powers.

CLUE: PARTY FOUL

Jimball spilled his drink on famous socialite Neoma Menta on his way to the VIP room.

CLUE: JIMBALL AND SAVYN'S HISTORY

While Savyn and Jimball went to Voxis University, they were in a secret romantic relationship.

CLUE: JIMBALL'S SUIT

Savyn insisted on buying Jimball's hunter green tuxedo for the event.

CLUE: STIFLING SECURITY CORP

Jimball wasn't arrested by normal police, but guards from Stifling Security Corporation.

CLUE: THE LATE SIR ARAVARS

Savyn's father, Sir Demerius Aravars, was an avid explorer who collected a massive collection. He died recently in a cave-in.

CLUE: NEOMA'S TESTIMONY

Neoma didn't see Jimball take the diamond, but she saw a halfling in a forest green tuxedo (not a hunter green tuxedo, as per dress code) in the VIP room prior to the theft.

CLUE: BROKEN DEVICE

Found in the carpet of the VIP room near the Pink Star Diamond display.

CLUE: MISSING TRANSMAT DECK

Packaging for an expensive transmat deck was found near the scene of the crime.

CLUE: VIP ROOM CAMERAS

The footage of the crime is distorted by magical interference, but captures the image of a halfling casting a spell in the VIP room before the crime.

CLUE: SAVYN'S ALIBI

Savyn claims that, at the time of the theft, he was in a meeting with the head security guard from Stiffling Security Corp.

CLUE: THE OTHER TUXEDO

Found in the offices of Stiffling Security Corp., this suit is nearly identical to Jimball's tuxedo, except that it is forest green, not hunter green.

CLUE: ILLUSION CAPSULES

This magic item was manufactured by the Firm to create illusions. It matches the broken device found in the VIP room.

CLUE: SUIT INVOICE

This invoice shows a custom order to add a hidden pocket to the left side of the Jimball's tuxedo.

CLUE: FRONT ORGANIZATION

You have evidence to suggest that Stiffling Security Corp. is merely a front for the Firm, a vast and secretive criminal network.

CLUE: PINK STAR FAKE

You have evidence to suggest that the Pink Star diamond recovered from Jimball is a fake, albeit a convincing one.

APPENDIX E: BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

For reasons nobody understands and fewer care to question, the broken Krash vending machine in the Grax's Club headquarters will deposit random magic items if enough credits are fed into it. Between adventures, characters are encouraged to spend their extra cash on gambling for new and exciting magic items and equipment.

The machine has four buttons, which have prices of 100 credits, 500 credits, 2,500 credits, and 7,500 credits. Depending on the amount inserted, roll a d20 on one of the following tables to determine which magic item or piece of equipment is dispensed. Keep track of which items have been provided to the players. If a character rolls an item which has already been produced, they receive the next lowest magic item on the table, or an error and a return of credits if there is no lower magic item.

100 CREDIT MAGIC ITEMS

d20 Magic Item

- 1 rocket hammer
- 2 plasma launcher
- 3 psionic helm
- 4 *enigma ring*
- 5 *gamestation-7331*
- 6 *ankh of Ra*
- 7 *attactor mine*
- 8 *dome projector*
- 9 *energy shield bracer*
- 10 *gravity nullifier*
- 11 *holo-companion*
- 12 *jetpack*
- 13 *potion of solar radiance*
- 14 *reflex holster*
- 15 *ring of spacewalking*
- 16 *spider pod*
- 17 *transmat deck*
- 18 *void beacon*
- 19 *weapon wheel*
- 20 *zipgun*

500 CREDIT MAGIC ITEMS

d20 Magic Item

- 1 diode beam
- 2 REC gun
- 3 singularity emitter
- 4 volcanic
- 5 *drone controller* (with defense drone)
- 6 *tachyon missile*
- 7 +1 wrenchinator
- 8 *deconstructive nanobots*
- 9 *double laser blade*
- 10 *drive disk*
- 11 *hivemaster pistol*
- 12 *hoverboard*
- 13 *hullcutter*
- 14 *Hyper-Krash*
- 15 *personal shield emitter*
- 16 *potion of quantum effect*
- 17 *reconstructive nanobots*
- 18 *remote piloting apparatus*
- 19 *sorting beast*
- 20 *universal translator*

2,500 CREDIT MAGIC ITEMS

d20 Magic Item

- 1–2 +1 *adamant hardsuit* (full plate)
- 3–4 *grasshopper*
- 5–6 *motion tracker*
- 7–8 *shoulder cannon*
- 9–10 +1 *thaumatonic rifle*
- 11–12 *thunder rifle*
- 13–14 *vari-blaster*
- 15–16 +2 *void shackles*
- 17–18 *W-REC*
- 19–20 *golem skin*

7,500 CREDIT MAGIC ITEMS

d20 Magic Item

- 1–4 *Encyclopedia Multiplanaria*
- 5–8 *rebounding blade*
- 9–12 *ring of paradoxes*
- 13–16 *skeleton keycard*
- 17–19 *death ray*
- 20 *arcane warhead*

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