

Shantor Rebellion

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Part I of the Rise of the Fallen Trilogy

An Adventure for Fading Suns [VP & d20]

Background

This is a tale of two tragedies. Two wrongs that will make a right if all that is fated to be comes to pass as it is meant to. All revolve around the work of heroes, those who make a mark upon the sinful stars. A mighty passion play has begun, and for good or ill the results will resonate for centuries to come.

The First

The Shantor have lived under the yoke of oppression for thousands of years. While the burden of their captivity has ranged from light to unbearable, none deny that they still live in the shadow of the humans who stole their planet. Even during the enlightened days of the Second Republic, they suffered as second-class citizens, often denied the replacement of lands once stolen from them.

There is among their number a prophesy of one who will come and free their people from the yoke of the oppressed, and that they will once again roam free among the wild grasses and endless plains of Shaprut. The Dark Walkers scoff at this, for they have long since turned from the ways of their ancestors, believing that the technology and cultural sophistication of humanity will ultimately lead to their triumph and redemption. And yet they too drown their sorrows in perpetual despair and misery, partaking of the worst among human vices in order to escape what they perceive as a dismal and ultimately pointless fate.

The Second

The Masseri were a mighty house that once made the world of Daishan their home. They enjoyed prosperous fields and the gentle clime of their realm. Today that realm lies in ashes, the victim of the terrible war against the Symbiots. The shattered remains of their still proud house lie on the harsh winter world of Severus, so near and yet so opposite of the temperate Shaprut.

The Masseri have sworn revenge against the Symbiots, but have also come to grow angry at their 'generous' hosts, the Decados who gave them the harshest part of the world in exchange for severe taxes and humiliating service. The Masseri have still managed to

survive, and defend their territory with a rigor almost unequalled among the houses in the Known Worlds. Still, they have grown cynical and bitter. The house crumbles from within as well as from without.

Most openly mock Marquis, including his own daughter Mina. Mina Masseri ran away from home at the age of ten with a significant chunk of the family fortune. She refused to allow her natural curiosity and exceptionally keen mind to go to waste and eventually found herself drifting to Leageheim, in search of forbidden knowledge and technological secrets. By paying the vast majority of her fortune, and passing rigorous exams, she bought herself an apprenticeship in the guild of Engineers. Over time, she studied with the masters Lycatos Zorast and Helicate Nainitsu and became one of the foremost experts in Terraforming in the known worlds.

Happenings of Late

The Shantor have begun to work in organized rebellion in largest such outbreak in hundreds of years. Indeed, not only are they well coordinated, but they have a powerful psychic working for them who has begun to visit the more powerful members of the ruling branch of House Al-Malik with terrible visions of the crimes committed against the Shantor. Some members of the house have slowly begun to grow mad from the lack of sleep, and their irritability has placed a strain on guilders, churchman and peasant alike as they seek relief and shielding. Thus far, however, no cure has been found.

The acts of sabotage and raids have largely been in the countryside, and while some native humans have begun to look upon the Shantor with increased suspicion, the ruling noble Governor Lydask has a great desire to appear lenient and progressive. He sincerely hopes that this is just a fringe element and that if he can show a sufficiently benevolent hand that the Shantor will turn against those causing problems and aid their human masters. He might be a bit naïve in this assumption, but it also seems to partially be the case. In the cities and even in the reservations, the vast majority of them seem to go about their business casually.

The rebellion has been going on for about seven months now, steadily gaining momentum. Still, for the most part Governor Lydask has kept a tight reign on it, and it has not really become an issue of note on other worlds. All that changed two weeks ago, when a whispering campaign began to spread of a Prophet among the Shantor, the promised one who would free them from humanity. This caught the immediate attention of the church.

Many have claimed to be the answer to the Prophecy in the past, generally the leader of a failed rebellion, but none have laid claim to the title for quite some time due to the extremely harsh reaction by the church to such heresy. The inquisition has come to the planet more than once and always-left misery in its wake. Indeed, the last purge was so successful that it has largely discouraged any from claiming the title for a good while. Even now, the Church is moving swiftly to deal with the situation, though things are

more complicated than they used to be. Different factions of the church have different agendas on this issue.

Another unbalancing factor in the equation has been the discovery of large gold deposits on Masseri territory a month ago. While it was very good news indeed for the impoverished house, the Baron realized the problems this might cause as well. As such, he sent an impassioned plea to his daughter begging reconciliation. The tone was so apologetic and different from his previous treatment toward her that she relented and met him on Severus. She confirmed with her skills in mineralogy what they had already hoped. The fortune beneath their land was extensive.

The Baron knew he had to act. They had to move to prevent the Decados from simply moving in and taking it from them. Once the Decados realized that the land had value, they could come up with any number of convenient 'accidents' that might befall the Masseri line in order to get it back. House Masseri has a very healthy respect for the Jackovian agency. As such, he sent his daughter to negotiate a treaty with the Duke of Shaprut for protection and the establishment of a joint mining operation on Masseri lands. The Shaprut had more knowledge of mining than most anyone in the Known Worlds, and with the might of House Al-Malik to back him, the Baron felt his house could finally end its decline and begin its march once again to greatness.

However destiny works strange and inscrutable paths in the Known Worlds, and a chance at destiny is soon to come as multiple interests converge. For the Shantor have developed a final desperate plan in order to demand cooperation by the Al-Malik. They have seized one of the massive mobile fortresses that once roamed the plains of Shaprut and fixed it. They have moved it over one of the planet's Terraforming Nodes and have threatened to destroy Shaprut if their demands are not met. Already they have begun affecting the winds and the weather patterns to prove their point.

Factional Information:

House Al-Malik: House Al-Malik wants the trade treaty with the Masseri, however they only have the vaguest idea of what it is about due to the Baron's incredible secrecy. They are awaiting the arrival of Mina Masseri with intense interest. They regard the Shantor rebellion as a direct and highly dangerous threat to their rule, and while Duke Lydask has expressed patience, that ended with the threat on the Terraforming node. At the urge of House Jundistas, he has agreed to let one covert attempt be made to stop them. Else wise, he plans to have the fleet destroy the entire fortress from orbit, including the Terraforming node, in hopes that somehow they can repair the damage using the other nodes on the planet. Any characters from House Al-Malik will be asked by Lydask to put the interests of their house first, and the interests of the empire second.

House Decados: Rivalries are common in the house, though they have definite rules by which they much conduct themselves while engaging in them (what fun is breaking the rules if there are none?). The current situation with House Masseri involves a potent

rivalry between Sir Lexi Decados and Dame Katara Decados, both from rival families on Severus. While the Jakovian agency is awake and aware of the gold on Masseri land, they do not yet realize its scope or the efforts by the Baron to ally with House Al-Malik. However, Sir Lexi and Dame Katara are very aware of it. They have used some of their own contacts on Shaprut to set their plan in motion. Sir Lexi is from second most powerful branch of the family on the planet, and should they shame the Duke sufficiently, they would stand an excellent chance to claim rulership. Dame Katara is one of the Duke's many love interests and has made it her personal mission to make sure that no ill befalls him. She was the one who quietly provided the schematics to the Shantor of the Terraforming Node and the Fortress. She knew that with the arrival of Mina Masseri and her knowledge of Terraforming, they would very likely ask her to join any party sent to deal with the rebellion. So far Dame Katara's suspicions have proven correct, and thus she planned a surprise for Mina should she attempt to mess with Terraforming node in the wrong way.

House Hawkwood: House Hawkwood has no direct knowledge of this affair, though maintain close ties with House Al-Malik and would generally enjoy any chance to see House Decados get a pie in the face. House Masseri revolting from their ranks would definitely prove an opportune chance to do so. For the same reason, they frown on the Shantor rebellion, though they also empathize with the plight of the aliens and would like to see it resolved peacefully (though forcefully if need be.)

House Hazat: This is in a very distant region of space from their lands. Indeed, about the only direct interest that they might take, is that any heresy by the Shantor turns attention away from their efforts to start a crusade against the Kurgan. As such, anything that ends the rebellion quickly is fine with them.

House Li-Halan: They support the church, and as such they dislike the rebellion. Aliens should be kept in their place. Outright rebellion must not be tolerated. They view the fact that the Al-Malik allowed this to happen in the first place as a sign of weakness.

Orthyodoxy: There is a fight within the church ranks about whose jurisdiction this falls under. The powerful Metropolitae of Aylon (of the conservative Hiyana branch of the church) believes this a purely local affair and has sent his own representative to deal with it. This has caused resentment by the resident Archbishop, Kaligos (a member of the more moderate Miyhana). Each has in turn summoned backup from Holy Terra. The Kalinti have sent a representative to deal investigate possible signs of demonic influence, the Inquisition (mostly led by the Avesti) have arrived to do what they always do when Heresy raises its ugly head, and the Synacula, represented by the sole and powerful agent Bishop Becket Oscura has arrived to ensure that the fighting branches of the church do not cross the line and violate the interests of the Patriarch.

Brother Battle: The Symbiots threat is on the rise. The recent incursion they made against the station at the jump gate only shows how dangerous they have become. Any threat or distraction against that fight is a threat to the known worlds and the Pancreator. The order is slightly sympathetic to the plight of the Shantor, but the Al Malik are

generous patrons both in political support and in tithes. They will side with the Al Malik without hesitation should a conflict arise, though they would rather resolve the situation peacefully if possible.

Almathean: Sanctuary Aeon has long been the faction most looking out for the interests of the Shantor on their world. Each of the reservations has a Sanctuary Aeon that listens to the concerns of the Runners, and cares to them medically. Because of their large and constant efforts at making peace, a number of Shantor have converted to their ways. They always advocate a peaceful path, so ironically they do not support the rebellion. They have urged those who know about it on the reservations to encourage a peaceful resolution to the problem, though the Shantor believe this a largely unrealistic solution. Then again, they had viewed revolution as an unrealistic solution until recently as well.

Avesti: The situation is much clearer for the Avesti. There are no torn loyalties of any kind. The Ukari used the Shantor against humans in the war thousands of years ago, and are therefore tainted as the Ukari are tainted. The Shantor are following a heretic prophet. Thus, the highest level of suspicion and guilt are assigned to any who would follow or even sympathize with the false Prophet. Burn them. Burn them all.

Eskatonik: The Eskatonics have no part in this conflict, though the possible actual fulfillment of the prophecy interests them. The other thing they find quite interesting is the potential manifestation of psychic powers in Shantor, who have hitherto never demonstrated such powers. As such, they largely suspect that some kind of Ur artifact or influence has been exercised here, and are thus quite interested in studying the situation, from a purely neutral perspective of course.

Scravers: The Scravers view the Shantor as a potentially valuable market commodity. They have tried to induce pregnancy in Shantor females using hormones (Shantor females can normally elect whether they become pregnant or not). Moreover, the fact that they managed to fix the mobile fortress has definitely attracted their attention. There are numerous places where such a thing could be highly profitable so they are most interested in the results of the character's mission.

Muster: Shantor troops are deadly in battle. Shantor slaves work hard and carry their weight in gold. The idea of loosing either as a source of revenue is unacceptable. The rebellion must be put down, and if push comes to shove they will offer the Al-Malik (a house with whom they enjoy excellent relations anyway) a fairly discounted rate to help put it down.

Reeves: The Reeves have no reason to care about the rebellion one way or another since it does not affect their business at all really. From a purely academic stand point, they watch with amusement as humans have broken more treaties and laws with the Shantor than any other alien race (including the Ukari). Indeed, every human era including Diaspora, the Second Republic or even the decrees and treaties of numerous noble houses have at one time or another made generous, and to a degree binding promises that have failed to be enforced or kept. The Reeves aren't expecting anyone to enforce them any

time soon either; and a case defending the Shantor is something no advocate in his right mind would want; because being right on paper means little compared to being right via might.

Engineers: The mobile fortress is a potential treasure trove of interesting technology, and they also find the potential idea that the Shantor might have evolved psychic potential potentially lucrative. Some of the more idealistic among them are sympathetic to their cause, though unlikely to aid them any time in the near future. In general, the Engineers couldn't care less about the situation.

Charioteers: If any guild can have sympathy for the oppressed Shantor it is the Charioteers. They understand what it means to roam free among the stars, and the horror of losing that freedom by being locked away on a reservation somewhere. However, neither the head of the guild nor the Hongs has any desire to lose business with the Al-Malik (who have always supported the guilds) so while the rank and file might sympathize with the rebellion, the leadership will never aid them, nor permit those that work under them to do so.

In short, on paper at least, the Rebellion is doomed. The vast majority of humanity within the Empire is against them, and even their allies like FAR, Sanctuary Aeon and House Jundistaas advocate a peaceful resolution. Still, their seizing the Terraforming Node is something new entirely. Anyone with knowledge of Terraforming (like Mina Masseri) could explain that damage could turn Shaprut into a wasteland. Shaprut was lucky enough to require minimal terraforming, though that did not prevent the planetary governing authorities from putting such engines in place during the Second Republic to go from "pretty good to perfect." Those engines now run through the network of the entire planet. Simply blowing up a node would cause a disaster, but should the Shantor successfully modify them with a sufficient amount of skill, they could make life on the world difficult at best for Human and Shantor alike.

On the other hand, after thousands of years of oppression with no hope of liberation in sight, something this desperate might be the only choice they have left. They might be right, though fate (as mentioned before) has a way of intervening in interesting ways. Ultimately the characters will decide the fate of worlds through their actions, and whether Known Worlds will come out ahead as a result of it remains to be seen.

Effects of Previous Modules:

While all modules are written to be interchangeably, those following a strict chronological order would find "The Lone Watchtower" set before this one. As an option of the GM, he may wish to have the results of that module affect the results of this one, especially if the characters took part in both.

If the characters successfully saved the station from the Symbiots and exposed the threat of who had been betraying the station, add +6 to all of their encounter rolls with the Al-Malik nobility and +4 to all their rolls with anyone else from Shaprut.

If the characters saved the station but failed to prove (i.e. provide evidence beyond their own testimony) or exposed the threat but failed to save the station, add +2 to their rolls with the Al-Malik nobility and +1 to their rolls with anyone else from Shaprut.

If the characters conducted themselves in an extremely cowardly fashion, especially if it involved the destruction of the station, subtract up to five to all their rolls with the Al-Malik nobility and three from their reaction rolls with NPCs from the rest of the planet.

Final Note: The Module works with the assumption that the party are based around a group of Questing Knights, sent by Emperor Alexius and the Order of Questing Knights. However, the module is flexible as is the situation. In general, characters can have multiple reasons for coming together (and this scenario certainly allows it). Indeed, it is entirely possible that the characters might have diametrically opposing agendas in this instance, especially if they remain true to their faction or if some do but others desire to support the Shantor. Such is the nature of Fading Suns, for politics and intrigue play as much a part of the dynamic as the rest. While it might pose a challenge to the GM, if all out chaos breaks out with the party, remind them that the world itself could die, and that the characters are currently on it.

The Adventure

Introduction

Read the following to the players.

You are here on behalf of the Questing Knights, the Order of the Phoenix and the Emperor himself. You have been sent on a mission, which should you choose to accept it could result in bodily harm, political ruin and perhaps the untold destruction of millions of lives should you fail. In short, another typical mission on behalf of the recently crowned emperor. At least on the surface.

The truth is that there has been a great deal of tension on the ship for quite some time. The official reason for being sent here is that you are good will ambassadors to House Al'Malik, simply letting the local nobility know that the Emperor is aware of Shaprut and its problems, including the rising Symbiot problem. However, a rather shady character who claimed he was a mere bureaucrat, but that every fiber of your being screamed was a member of the Imperial Eye explained that you are also to keep an eye out for a representative for House Masseri, and if possible befriend them if you believe that their services might be useful to the Empire.

Of course, once you were on the ship and stopped off at other Al-Malik worlds along the way you heard of the rumors of the Shantor rebellion. Indeed, you are surprised you had not heard about it until now, since supposedly it had been occurring for several months. There are several important people that have accompanied you on the ship, more than likely here to deal with the problem. Specifically, there is a church Bishop, a Scraver official, and a Decados nobleman. All of them have kept to their quarters and remained relatively quiet during the trip.

At this point, if the GM feels time warrants it he may allow the characters to introduce themselves to each other since they should have had time to get to know one another on the ship (at least three or four weeks). If not all the characters are associated with the Questing Knights, and you have time, you might back narrate something to allow all of the party members a chance to get to know one another. Generally speaking, most the NPC's traveling on the ship are being quiet since they don't know what the others are up to, however if you feel it warranted as a chance to give your characters more information before they land, feel free to do so as you believe time available warrants. If time is to be short, you should probably skip this section entirely and move to Encounter #1.

[VP System: If you are using the VP system, you should choose this moment to make any Rivalry or Enemy disadvantages come to the forefront. This will depend on how you decide to proceed, but should not take up a huge amount of time. Generally, it should either humiliate or enrage the character and should occur in an area when they are not present. A possible duel on board the ship might also be warranted if it can be accomplished without taking too much time. A good fall back would be to find their room trashed and a message left directly written to them. If more than one player has this disadvantage, you should randomly select one of the players that has it to affect. More than one enemy appearing at random at this point would appear silly (unless the player for some reason took, 'Duke of Shaprut' as the person hunting them, in which case they are in for a very rude shock in the very immediate future.)]

Encounter Number 1-Shuttle Shock

Read the Following to the Players.

It has been a long and treacherous journey through multiple star ports but you have finally arrived at Shaprut. This planet has long been famous for its modest, temperate climate. Indeed the settlers who came here so long ago found that they had little need to terraform the planet. And yet they could not leave well enough alone, and-in typical fashion of the hubris of the Second Republic-turned a good climate into an excellent one. Much has been made of the problems surrounding this, since the nobility now depend on the Engineers to maintain the terraforming nodes. Good business for the guild, bad business for the Al Malik. It is one of the few areas of true tension between the normally guild-friendly house and the guilds.

The shuttle lies in a large hanger of the imperial warship that brought you here, with rusted metal walls and dozens of boxes strapped down in case of gravity failure. The shuttle itself is in relatively pristine condition, and is clearly a relic from days gone by. A few miniscule cracks appear in the wings and the fuselage, but like so many items from the distant past it still manages not only to function better than anything manufactured today, it does so with style. The gleaming violet and green hull shines like polished coral and bears the colors of House Al-Malik. A steady stream of VIP's that you have known to be on board since you arrived.

The first is a Bishop, with large piercing eyes and the staff of office in his left hand. The second appears to be a noble woman, very young with quite a bit of cyberware. One might initially mistake her for a Decados were her facial features not so gaunt and her hair so pale. The final person to board the shuttle is a large noble as well, and quite definitely a Decados, wearing full plate regalia with a rapier by his side bearing the colors of the house.

At this point you should allow the characters to board the shuttle. Anyone attempting to search (perhaps worried or paranoid by the cracks in the fuselage mentioned in the flavor text) will find that the shuttle is in excellent working conditions and contains no unwanted surprises. The Imperial Navy is very good at what they do and knows that a great many VIP's are boarding. They want to make sure that no untold treachery happens on their watch.

The door shuts and everyone waits for a few moments. A few minor chattering conversations occur but for the most part silence fills the cabin as everyone straps themselves into their seats under the watchful eye of the Charioteer pilot. A few nobles brazenly refuse to strap themselves in, which causes the Charioteer to roll his eyes in disdain and move to the front before they can challenge him to a duel for his insolence. The air inside the cabin is remarkably fresh and clear for such a voyage and the shuttle an especially large one.

You hear the bay doors snap open with a loud metallic 'snick' as the thrusters temporarily increase your weight behind and underneath you. As the shuttle leaves the ship behind, you see Shaprut in all its golden green glory before you. The shuttle moves rapidly down toward the planet below.

Things go relatively uneventfully for about an hour and forty-five minutes. The wisps of atmosphere first tease the edge of the shuttle, causing its wing tips to glow red hot in the upper atmosphere, before they eventually cool and show you the vast fields below you, many of them with cultivated areas of grain and winding dirt roads. You fly over the Vangora Mountains and the lush forests of the southern part of the continent, and then head toward your destination at the capital city.

Just then, the shuttle lurches, and you all feel that something hideously wrong is going on in the cabin. As you look around, you notice several passengers grab their head and

babble incoherently, or simply pass out unconscious. That is when you hear the voices inside of your head.

At this point each of the characters needs to make a save to avoid going unconscious [VP: Endurance+Stoic Body-4 Successes/d20: Fortitude DC 17]. Those that succumb to the effect find their head filled with horrific visions of crimes not directly of their doing. Those that manage to resist find that their companions and shuttle mates have fallen into some kind of deep slumber, including the pilot. The shuttle has begun to waver and spin steadily out of control.

Read the following to those inflicted by the visions

You run free upon the plains, the sun across your back. The herd is strong this day and you go to war. Your people are mighty and their just cause will surely succeed. You then watch from a distance as Shantor move upon the colonists, driven by a voice in the back of their heads that they do not understand, and are summarily executed. Over time you see each of those that survived shackled and put to work in mills like their terran counterparts. They are moved to and fro as beasts of burdens, while their prayers and misery sing forth towards the heavens in Windspeech. You understand every one in perfect detail though you cannot reflect the beauty and symmetry of the language in simplistic Urthish....

If for some reason ALL of the characters succumb to the effect, periodically have them make saves during the visions and have those that make it wake up. The charioteer pilot was able to put the shuttle in an autopilot mode, though he only did a partial job. Moreover in a few minutes time the shuttle will run into the mountains and crash entirely.

Once the characters are conscious several options remain open to them. If any of them have the necessary skill then they can attempt to correct the fall of the shuttle with some difficulty [VP: Pilot Flitter-5 Successes/d20: Pilot Flitter DC 17]. If none of them have the slightest clue how to do this, they can attempt to access the think machine and activate the autopilot [VP: Think Machines-5 Successes/d20: Use Think Machine DC 17]. Finally, they can attempt to revive the charioteer pilot so he can pilot the thing. If any of them have the requisite skills [VP: Physic 5 Successes/d20: Heal DC 18 (or a psychic/theurgic ritual)] then they can accomplish it. If they are still without ANY of these skills (and at this point must have a horribly unbalanced party) then a search of the cabin will reveal a nanotech med-pack, which, when injected into the pilot will revive him enough to make a very rough landing.

You should avoid killing the players outright because of a series of failed rolls. The only way they should honestly die in this encounter is if they simply give up and stop looking for options. On the other hand, you should do your best to make the players THINK that they are going to die at any time. The objective here is to drive home the seriousness of the rebellion and its consequences.

Once the players successfully land, an Al Malik landing party will rapidly catch up to them (even if they ended up landing in the middle of nowhere). Medics will treat them immediately with theurgic ritual and elixir until they are healed of all damage. Assuming they are willing (and if they don't it is an awfully short adventure), they are taken to the capital and Lysack who is waiting for them.

Encounter #2-Having a Ball

The characters are received warmly by Duke-Governor Lysack. He offers them quarters befitting their station and taste and gives them some time to freshen up. The characters are informed that a formal ball is taking place in their honor and they are invited to attend. Anyone with a suitable knowledge roll [VP: Wits + Etiquette 3 Successes /d20-Knowledge (Nobility) DC 12] will understand that it is rather important that everyone from the party attend, though it would be an absolute insult for a noble character to fail to do so. This is the kind of thing that duels are fought over.

Once the characters arrive to present themselves for the ball, they will be searched. Nobles will only be permitted a ceremonial melee weapon. There are two exceptions to this: If one of the characters is a veteran of the Stigmata garrison, they are permitted any weapons and equipment they care to bring in. The second is if any of the characters were heroes of the Lone Watch Tower (they saved the station and stopped the symbiots). In this case they will be permitted a ceremonial melee weapon, but will still not be permitted to bring firearms of any kind. Brother Battle characters will also be allowed a ceremonial weapon if a veteran of the Stigmata garrison or if they helped save the station. Anyone else will not be permitted weaponry of any kind. Those attempting to sneak weapons in must get past the guards [vp: Dexterity+Sleight of Hand-7 Successes/d20: Sleight of Hand DC 22]. Those caught trying to smuggle weapons in must make a reaction check, modified by circumstance [See above at the beginning of the adventure. VP: Wits+Charm or Etiquette Roll/d20 Diplomacy or Bluff]. Those failing will be arrested and placed in an Al-Malik prison cell, they are out for the encounter and probably the rest of the session (there are exceptions that will be noted in Encounter #3). Those succeeding but caught will be given a warning and have the item confiscated. Anyone who successfully gets an item past the guards, must still avoid their prying eyes though it will be much easier on them at this point [vp: Dexterity+Stealth or Sleight of Hand-3 Successes/d20-Hide or Sleight of Hand DC 14]. Make checks periodically.

Any items checked will be returned to them once they leave, and the Stewart will give them assurances of such. All these requests are perfectly without the bounds of proper etiquette for the occasion. Note: On the extremely off hand chance on of the characters is playing a Shantor, they will still be permitted entrance but will be searched VERY thoroughly, no matter what their credentials, veteran or not.

Once the characters have been successfully searched, they will be announced by rank and title. Characters of greater rank will be announced first, and assigned titles fitting their station. The seneschal has done his research properly and wants to make a favorable

impression on the player characters. While he will be able to make the obvious title claims such as ‘Sir X of House Y’, he will also fill in additional titles if information about them was at all available to the public. For example, if they successfully saved the station he will tack on, ‘Savior of the Station’. If they are a veteran of Stigmata, he will tack on, ‘Veteran of Stigmata.’ Other possible examples of titles include, ‘Servant of the Emperor’, ‘Duelist of a thousand and one fights’. Nobles will get more attention here, but the seneschal will give each of them a similar treatment. The GM is encouraged to be creative as such time allows, but if pressed, simply state that they are announced by name, title and rank. Characters who are not nobles, guild members or church characters (unless veterans of Stigmata) will simply get announced by name, and as ‘Servant of’ whichever of the other characters they seem to get along with the least.

Read the following to them once they have all been announced and cleared the waiting hall.

You pass through the thick velvet curtains of the waiting hall and move into the ball before you. The curtains had hid the magnificent view before you. White marble columns inlaid with emeralds and topaz line the walls of Ballroom. Dozens of nobles from all over the known worlds (though primarily Shaprut) have gathered here. They all wear rich and stylish clothing that the profitability, peace and stability of the empire has brought them. Shaprut is not only doing well, it is doing very well. Everyone here is dressed in the height of fashion.

The Duke himself sits in a gilded throne made of gold (most assuredly Shaprutian gold) is ornately carved with runic language marked in the graceful tongue, mythical beasts and playful Shantor. Four large Shantor in running form are at the base of the throne and under each of the arms of the might throne. The Duke is dressed in long flowing vermillion and emerald robes in the house colors and his Ducal scepter lies lightly in his hand. The throne of the Duchess to the right is no less elaborate, made out of gold inlaid with Emeralds and Diamonds.

The combination of dull glow light and torch light, reflects off the emeralds (no doubt placed by the Luminary guild) with the large sapphire winking above the dance floor creates a pale luminescent green above the room almost as if it were taking place on the floor of the ocean. Heaping plates of meat from beast killed throughout the known worlds, Cadavus, Shaprut, Unga Vorox, Holy Terra, and even the wild Vuldrock lands to the north. Each of these is garnished with elaborate vegetables from a dozen worlds in minutely carved portions portraying famous scenes in the history of the house, though several of them have large bites taken out of them.

In the center of the room, Nobles, courtiers and the sundry invited VIP’s dance about in the latest style from Byzantium Secundus and Aylon. To the side and north of the hall, a large number of priests have gathered and are having a rigorous debate on the nature of theology, while most of the guilders are either brazenly dancing with the nobility, or joining in with the numerous cliques and conversational circles that dot the room.

Despite the incredibly impressive announcements by the Stuart, the party continues in full swing though many nod and smile pleasantly at you.

Behind it all, along the walls and the four entrances in each walls, almost invisible, the guards in Ceramsteel Plate with Laser Rifles stand at attention and watch vigilantly over the security of those present. It is truly a grand affair, appropriate for a Duke's court.

Give the characters some time to mingle amongst the guests. Feel free to use the factional information and the background section for tidbits of gossip that they might pick up by talking to others. Mina Masseri is quite conversational, though she tends to go in sporadic fits and starts, quite one minute, violently conversational the next. She does not reveal any details about the house's affairs, even when pressed specifically about the point but instead dances around the question as much as possible. She will generally not approach the characters herself, though if one of them is an engineer with Terraforming experience she will look them up and talk with them on the subject in great detail.

About half way through the evening, Mina and the Duke will sit at the table and have a conversation. Those attempting to listen in will find it impossible. Indeed, anyone with a technical knowledge and background who makes a successful skill roll [VP: Wits+Volt Redemption 7 Successes/d20-Volt Redemption or Knowledge (Technology) DC 26] will recognize that the Duke's table uses a Second Republic technology called a Whisper Suppressor making eavesdropping from the outside impossible. Anyone attempting to read their lips may do so [VP: Perception+Read Lips 4 Successes/d20-Read Lips DC 17], though they will shortly learn the more relevant details anyway. Mina skillfully negotiates with the Duke, and has managed to pique his interest in the Masseri gold. The possibility of a joint venture is very likely, but the Duke mentioned a minor problem he has been having lately with the locals. Mina is curious about this and asks what he could mean. At this point, the Duke reveals the basics of the situation with the Shantor, the Terraforming Node and the Mobile fortress. Mina agrees to perform the mission in exchange for sealing the bargain between them. The conversation then ends, and she continues flirting and talking with others. If someone failed to make their read lips roll, feel free to include any details that you feel will elicit the most paranoia possible in your group. The more they failed, the more false information you should feed them.

As the evening progresses, anyone attending the ball should make an appropriate social skill roll [VP: Wits or Extrovert + Charm or Etiquette /d20 Diplomacy, Bluff]. Those who critically fail the roll [vp: If they a combined 'score' under 5 and roll a 1 or if they have a higher score and roll a 1 and then roll under 5 in a second roll/d20: If they a skill rank of less than 5 and roll a 1 or if they have a higher amount of skill ranks and roll a 1 and then roll under 5 in a second roll] have made a serious social blunder with one of the factions present. You may allow the character to choose when and where (unless they do something in the course of actual role play which merits such a blunder.) If the character offending character is a noble, and the other offended party is a noble, they are challenged to a duel. The GM should determine how much time they have available and run it (time permitting). Otherwise, the duel is scheduled well after the events of the

actual adventure. Mark the results of the failure on the character's log after the adventure is done, potentially having a negative impact on their relations with that faction.

Eventually, however, Duke Lysack will want to get down to business. Towards the end of the evening, when some of the more unruly guests have gone home, he will invite the characters to his table. He will ask them to sit and inform them that they may be assured that no one is listening in. He will then have Mina Masseri sit at the table.

Read the following.

The Duke talks to himself a moment, as if trying to remember something and then nods to the air. He looks at each of the members of the party, looking them directly in the eye as if trying to size them up. Finally, he speaks.

“You are going to do something for me, and then I am going to do something for you. That is the way this kind of thing works. An arrangement has been made. Ms. Mina Masseri is going to be accompanying you on a raid against the Shantor who are, as we speak, occupying a terraforming node which they threaten to use to send the world into another ice age if we do not conform to their demands.

Gentlemen and Lady(ies) I think it goes without saying that House Al-Malik will never permit this. What you might not know is that I am prepared to send you this very night. The entire purpose of this gaudy ball was to distract the spies within my court who are working with the aliens. I have my suspicions as to who they are, but that is besides the point. The Shantor have given us 48 hours to decide. We have 36 hours remaining. A foolish person might assume we would train you in some capacity, and give you a detailed briefing. I have much more confidence in you than that, otherwise the Emperor would not have wasted his time in sending you.

The Mobile fortress is well defended, thus it is my plan to have you arrive by glider. I am well versed with the fact that most of you don't have a clue how to fly one. Don't worry, they are two man gliders, each of which are pilotable by my best men. This is Mina Masseri, she is an expert on Terraforming, and she will be able to help you fix the Terraforming node should that become a necessity.”

At this point, if the characters say this is a dumb plan, have them make a roll [vp: Extrovert+Charm or Impress/d20: Diplomacy, Bluff or Intimidate]. If the Duke wins, then the character has just made a serious error of judgment since the Duke is rather annoyed by their presumption at dismissing his plan. If the character wins, he will listen to any plans that they might have.

More than likely, the characters will simply ask a lot of questions. The Duke only has limited information to provide them.

- The Mobile fortress carried powerful anti personnel and anti vehicle weaponry. If they could fix the motors that let those move around, they probably fixed the

weapons too. The fortress will also have powerful sensors, which is why the decision was made to go in with unpowered gliders.

- He will not reveal who the spy is, but if someone goes down the list of potential factions, anyone making a successful skill roll [vp: Perception+Observe 5 Successes/d20: Sense Motive DC 22] will notice a slight annoyance at the mention of the Decados though he denies any implicit responsibility on their part.
- The Shantor are armed, some with firearms, some with energy weapons. They do not have armor or shields.
- The largest amount are on the ground around the complex, and there are a lot of them.

He will offer reasonable terms, and offer to take things into consideration depending on what the characters ask for in terms of assistance or equipment. If someone has the gauche to ask, "What's in it for me?" then quietly make a note that the Duke will have a word with their patron at a later date. He will provide the characters with any reasonable equipment they ask for; including firearms (not energy weapons), armor (of the primitive variety), intelligence gear (Whisper pins, synthsilk rope etc.) or 'normal' equipment. He will not go out of his way to offer this since he assumes them competent enough to ask for it if they need it. Blur suits will only be given to noble characters or Imperial cohorts, and only if asked for specifically.

Once he has answered their questions and negotiated any necessary details (he will avoid specifics as long as he reasonably can, and should someone annoy him sufficiently he might just have them shot. He is a Duke after all.), he will have them sent to a shuttle which takes them to the forward Mutasi base. If the characters have their own plan, he will do what he can to help them with it within reason.

Encounter Number 3-Ambush

When the characters come within sight of the mobile fortress, read them the following.

The high walls of the immense machine are a sight to behold. With huge wheels hundreds of feet tall it is only outmatched by the size of the edifice itself which measures over two thousand feet in height. The massive structure is bristled with ancient grime and moss, though parts of it gleam with the metal of days before the Second Republic when they were at their height of power. Some of the weapons have been cleaned and repaired as they move about searching for someone to unleash their deadly ruby fury upon.

Around the base, like hundreds of tiny Urth ants, the Shantor move about with gun and spear holding back any who might sneak into the facility and disrupt their only plans at liberation. While not all Shantor might not agree with them, those familiar with Shantor culture might be intrigued by the sight of Darkwalker and tribal Runner walking and patrolling side by side. Whoever leads them inside, they have done so in a way that has not united them for centuries.

The Hard Way – (Other Methods addressed)

There are numerous methods that the characters can attempt to use to sneak into the mobile fortress. However, the easiest is probably the duke's plan of flying them in on gliders during the night. The fact is that the number of Shantor on the ground around the fortress make a stealthy approach by that light extremely difficult.

The fortress's guns are indeed in working order (though only about half the batteries have actually been repaired.) They will fire on anyone detected approaching by air or by land in a powered vehicle of some sort. The weapons do a tremendous amount of damage [vp: Hvy Laser – 20Dice/d20-Heavy Laser 20d6], though if you are feeling kind allow the players a chance to leap out of the vehicle at the last moment before it is melted into molten slag. A method of doing this might be a near miss to demonstrate the extremely powerful destructive capacity of the guns on the fortress.

Anyone attempting to negotiate through the ground must deal with one of ten Shantor patrols examining the area, each of whom is fully armed.

Shantor Guards

VP: S: 6 Dex: 5 End: 7 Wits: 4 Per: 5 Tech: 2 Dodge: 6 Fight: 6 Melee: 6 Observe: 6 Shoot: 2 Vigor: 2 Vitality: 7 Boxes-Spear + Chain mail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

D20: +3 Base Attack +3 Dex. AC: 16 HP: 22 Fort: +5 Ref: +3 Will: +2 Spot: +7-Spear + Chain mail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

They all have rather sharp senses, and sneaking past them is difficult (though not impossible.) Anyone detected attempting to sneak in will be fired upon, though if someone surrenders the Shantor will accept an honorable surrender.

Anyone taken prisoner will be bound hand and foot and taken inside of the complex to meet with the head of their order. Ironically, this is one of the most efficient ways of bypassing the Shantor defenses and moving on to Encounter #4, though the characters will be unable to do much due to their restraints. Escaping the restraints is difficult and the characters will be watched almost all the time. [vp: Dexterity+Escape Artist 7 Successes/d20: Escape Artist DC 21].

Up on the Roof-Going the 'normal way'

There are only seven guards on the roof. If the characters are careful, they should be able to take them all out stealthily, though admittedly this will be difficult. Four of the seven are mounting anti aircraft guns, two in each of the turrets. The other three are mounting a mobile patrol as they move about.

Careful coordination by the characters would allow them to take out one of the three rotating guards without the other two immediately knowing it. However the rotation of the patrol is such that they will only have a short time [vp: 3 Minutes/d20: 5 Rounds] before the next guard arrives at their position. Thus, unless they strike all three guards at the same time, they will have to deal with taking out the guard AND disposing of the body in that amount of time.

The gliders themselves are very silent, and the pilots can move them in essentially unseen and unheard unless the characters request a landing point directly in the field of view of one of the turrets or the rotating guards. Disembarking from the glider is relatively easy but does require some skill [vp: Dexterity + Dodge or Vigor 4 Successes/d20: Tumbling DC 10]. Should the disembarking character do so, and do so stealthily they will be unheard.

Since the two turrets are on top of the main entrance moving by them by stealth without taking them out first will be extremely difficult but possible. In general, the characters should at least be able to get on the roof and begin to fight without being seen unless they scream at the top of their lungs or some other nonsensical thing while on top of the glider. In the unfortunate even that a character goes deliberately out of their way to get the turret to notice them, the following stats have been included for the turret[vp: 15D damage, Heavy Slug Gun-Autofire/d20-15D6 Damage, Autofire]. If the character somehow manages to survive this, they must deal with the fall to the ground over 2000 feet below.

Combat is a very likely possibility at some point, since a party with all stealthy characters would be rare indeed. The turrets are useless at firing at a location on the roof itself since they were designed for anti-aircraft fire. The guard's stats are as follows

VP: S: 6 Dex: 5 End: 7 Wits: 4 Per: 5 Tech: 2 Dodge: 6 Fight: 6 Melee: 6 Observe: 6 Shoot: 2 Vigor: 2 Vitality: 7 Boxes-Spear + Chainmail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

D20: +3 Base Attack +3 Dex. AC: 16 HP: 22 Fort: +5 Ref: +3 Will: +2 Spot: +7-Spear + Chainmail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

[Special VP System ONLY Note: If any of the characters has the 'enemy' affliction, the first shot will be fired at them during this combat, if they are visible. Dame Katara has already begun an investigation into the characters. When she heard that this specific character (it should only be one of your choosing), she decided to collect the bounty on their head and issued instructions to the Shantor throughout the base that this person had murdered huge numbers of Shantor in a particularly gruesome and dishonorable way. This 'grudge' effect will only occur if combat occurs. If the character surrenders, they will be taken prisoner like everyone else.

Furthermore, if the character is a Shantor then the Shantor will ignore this effect (though they will still fire as normal in combat). No Shantor would believe another truly capable of the acts described by Dame Katara.]

Encounter 4-Through the Bowels of the Fortress

It is of course, entirely possible that the characters have been captured by the Shantor. If this occurs, they will be led into the bowels of the building and locked up. If one of them has escape artistry they might successfully get out and free their comrades, though this will be difficult to do. They will have to face down four armed Shantor, one of whom is pretty much watching them all the time. Then again, player characters can get creative. Ironically, this still remains the easiest way to get in to see Wind-Runner, the head of the rebellion. On the other hand, as mentioned before, they will have little option but to talk, and Dame Katara will limit their options to do that.

VP: S: 6 Dex: 5 End: 7 Wits: 4 Per: 5 Tech: 2 Dodge: 6 Fight: 6 Melee: 6 Observe: 6
Shoot: 2 Vigor: 2 Vitality: 7 Boxes-Spear + Chain mail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

D20: +3 Base Attack +3 Dex. AC: 16 HP: 22 Fort: +5 Ref: +3 Will: +2 Spot: +7-Spear +
Chain mail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

If the characters have successfully taken the roof and the entrance, it will take a long time for the Shantor to get up to their level. If the characters have an engineer with them, they can sabotage the elevators to give them direct and exclusive access down to the level where the Terraforming chamber is located. It is only minorly complicated [vp: Tech+Volt Redemption 5 Successes/d20: Disable Device DC 12].

On the other hand, if they decide to fight their way in, or if for some reason they take the roof by stealth but then decide to fight their way through with force, they will be faced with essentially unlimited groups of 10 Shantor guards inside. (The actual number is not unlimited, but there are thousands of them outside.) Assuming they head directly to the terraforming chamber, allow them to reach it after they have dispatched over ten groups by force, trickery or evasion.

VP: S: 6 Dex: 5 End: 7 Wits: 4 Per: 5 Tech: 2 Dodge: 6 Fight: 6 Melee: 6 Observe: 6
Shoot: 2 Vigor: 2 Vitality: 7 Boxes-Spear + Chain mail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

D20: +3 Base Attack +3 Dex. AC: 16 HP: 22 Fort: +5 Ref: +3 Will: +2 Spot: +7-Spear +
Chainmail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

Encounter Number 5 – The Terraforming Node

Sooner or later, unless they are simply dead, the characters will reach the terraforming Node. When they do, read the following to them:

The high dome before you lies over a hundred feet beneath the ground. It is a vast chamber, with a ceiling covered in layered green crystal. Dozens of spiked metal ducts work their way into the center of the node which hums with a bizarrely contented hum. A strange electric feeling of vitality fills the air and ozone reeks in your nostrils. The Node itself is a blade metal cube with largish globs of a tar like substance oozing out the side. The ducts connect in between the globs.

At the far side of the chamber a large and impressive console shows a map of this region of Shaprut. It is quite definitely the product of the Second Republic, although the large red warning lights flashing all about on the display tell you, even without the slightest bit of technical knowledge that something exceedingly bad is about to happen. If those don't, then the large cracks that have appeared on the screen-cracks not in the glass but on the map the screen shows certainly will.

There are five Shantor in this room, along with five humans. Four of the humans are working at the console, operating some kind of program, while the fifth talks to a much older Shantor in the middle of the room dressed in ceremonial garb. He (the Shantor) looks up upon your entrance and simply says, "Come in. Welcome."

Of course the circumstances beyond "Come in. Welcome." Will vary widely. If the characters have successfully snuck in to the room, then everyone else will look up in shock or surprise. The characters will get a surprise round in which to take action. If the characters do not fire, no one else will-though the human near the Shantor will slowly go for his weapon [vp: Perception+Observe 3 Successes/d20 Spot: DC 15] to notice. If the characters do attack, they get a free action.

If the characters simply come in all guns blazing, it is unlikely that they will even hear the words spoken by Windrunner. [vp: Perception+Observe 10 Successes/d20-Listen: DC 22] to do so. The others will all fight back and the technicians at the console will begin doing unpleasant things, initiating the count down to cause massive damage on the planet above. While they had set up the program, they had not yet initiated it. Once the program is initiated [vp: Tech+Terraforming 5 Successes/d20: Knowledge (Terraforming) or Use Device DC 25] to recognize it for what it is], the characters will have 10 actions/rounds to fight past the 'bad guys' and still shut it down. And doing that poses some problems (see below). Wind Runner does not attack the characters.

If the characters come in bound, then the human next to the Shantor will smack the toughest looking one around a bit, until Wind Runner orders him to stop. Wind Runner at this point will ask who the characters are and why they have come.

Shantor Stats

VP: S: 6 Dex: 5 End: 7 Wits: 4 Per: 5 Tech: 2 Dodge: 6 Fight: 6 Melee: 6 Observe: 6
Shoot: 2 Vigor: 2 Vitality: 7 Boxes-Spear + Chain mail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

D20: +3 Base Attack +3 Dex. AC: 16 HP: 22 Fort: +5 Ref: +3 Will: +2 Spot: +7-Spear +
Chainmail. Autorifle with 9 clips.

Randak Loosejoint

VP:

Attributes: S: 5 D: 9 E: 5 W: 6 P: 5 T: 4 Charisma: 5 Ego: 9

Skills: Charm: 6, Dodge: 8, Fight: 8, Impress: 5, Melee: 6, Observe: 6, Shoot: 7, Sneak:
8, Vigor: 5, Academia: 2, Drive: Aircraft: 2 Empathy: 3, Etiquette: 7, Focus: 9, Inquiry:
9, Knavery: 9, Lock picking: 10, Read: Urthish, Urthtech, Latin, Remedy: 7, Search: 10,
Sleight of Hand: 6, Space Suit, Stoic Mind: 5, Volt Redemption: 3, Think Machine: 3
Psi: 8 Powers: Intuit: 13 Emote: 12, Mind Sight: 13, Mind Speech: 12, Heart's
Command: 13, Head Shackle: 13, Brain Blast: 13, Sensitivity: 13, Darksense: 13, Subtle
Sight: 13, Toughening: 10, Strengthening: 10, Quickening: 10
Vitality: 9

d20

Level: 10 Psychic

Attributes: Str: 15 Dex: 19 Con: 15 Wis: 15 Int: 16 Cha: 12

Skills: Diplomacy: 9, Spot: 9, Hide in Shadows: 9, Move Silently: 9, Open Lock: 10,
Knowledge: Known Worlds: 7, Pick Pockets: 6

Feats: Stoic Mind, Iron Will, Xeno Empathy (Ukar), Gifted, Extend Psi, Enlarge Psi,
Coven Membership

Psi: Psyche: Mind sight-15, Mind Sway-15, Brain Blast: 10, Sixth Sense: Premonition:
16, Second Sight: 16; Soma: Control Body: 15, Alter Body: 15, Enhance Body: 20
Hit Points: 50

Notable Possesions: Mercurium Chain Shirt, Frap Stick, Heavy Pistol (autofeed) with
silencer

Human Technicians:

D20 AC: 16 (+2 Dex, +4 Plasteel Chain Shirt), Autofeed Pistols: 1d10

HP: 16, Hit bonus: +3 (+5 ranged) Spot: +4, Listen: +4, Search: +4, Bluff: +2

Terraforming: +3

VP: Chain Armor, Autofeed Pistol. Attr: S: 4 D: 4 E: 4 W: 3 P: 4 T: 2 Skills: Shoot: 5,
Dodge: 4, Fight: 4, Melee: 4, Vigor: 4 Vitality: 4 Terraforming: +3

Regardless, Wind Runner himself does not directly attack the characters. The reason is
because he has seen a vision in which the characters have the potential to act as the

saviors of his people. However, he knows that like all prophesy, some conditions come attached. He will not tell them about the prophesy until he is certain that they are willing to talk, and he will not initiate conversation until someone approaches him non violently. An individual can do this, so if all chaos breaks loose it is still possible to win him over. He has surrounded himself with a powerful psychic shield [vp: Anything under 20 Damage. Lasts 15. Has 10 Wyrd./d20: Anything under 20 damage. Lasts 15 rounds. Has 10 wyrd.]. If it looks like the characters will overcome it, he'll simply renew it. It is possible to actually kill him by draining him of wyrd but it will require a specific effort of will to do so.

He will not speak with anyone unless they approach him in a rational manner. That does not mean that they must drop their weapons, but they must approach in a manner indicating that they are willing to reason and to talk. "Die heretic/sinner/demon/alie n Scum!" does not constitute approaching in a rational or peaceful manner.

It is entirely conceivable the characters could come in, kill all the humans and Shantor in the room, shut down the terraforming node and walk off without a single clue of what has actually been going on in the background. If this occurs, merely skip to the conclusion and wrap up the adventure. They killed the bad guys. They win the glory. Such is the typical nature of how things go in the Known Worlds, and is thus not an entirely inconceivable outcome.

Disarming the Node

Mina is very good at what she does, but the odds are very likely that she will be distracted during the entire affair. If party includes an engineer who specializes in or has a high degree of Terraforming skill you should allow them to shine and move Mina to the background. On the other hand, if the party has no clue how to deactivate the node, then Mina will be the only chance they have of disarming it.

The deactivation itself is relatively simple. It requires a [vp: Tech+Terraforming 4 Successes or Wits+Think Machine 9 Successes/d20: Terraforming DC 9 Think Machine DC 17] in order to succeed. Regardless it will take three [vp: turns/d20: attempts (1 per round)] to complete. If two or more players are working together, use the standard VP/d20 rules for assisted skill rolls found in the Fading Suns rulebook/Fading Suns d20 Rulebook. If they fail one of the deactivation rolls, it simply delays them for a round, thus not requiring a great deal of trouble. If, somehow, they fail to deactivate the Node, then it immediately shifts a high melting of Shaprut's polar ice caps which causes major disasters all over the planet. They will begin to see the lights on the screen which flicker and fire. If the characters are very lucky, they will be able to repair the damage [vp: Wits or Tech+Terraforming 12 Successes/d20: Terraforming DC 20 or Use Device: DC 22], but even then a considerable amount of damage has been done.

[GM Note: Feel free to potentially fudge on this issue...it could cause shockwaves in the campaign if the characters screw up on this level. Basically, the only way this should

happen is if the players are not able to get Mina to the console in time for her to disarm it. She WILL require at LEAST three rounds at the console. If they fail to do that, even a fudged roll will result in total disaster. If a player insists upon doing it himself, you should not show as much mercy. While they should get a chance to shine and get the glory that results, they will also take the risk by doing so.]

However, even if they successfully deactivate the node, it has been trapped to explode five rounds after disarmed. There will be no immediate signs of what has occurred, though an extremely successful roll could gain some clue [vp: Perception+Terraforming or Think Machine 4 Victory Points/d20: Spot or Search DC 25]. The only real way they will learn this is if they talk to Wind Runner (who will tell them of the trap immediately) or finding the plans after searching the dead Randak Loosejoint. Once the trap has been activated the characters will have 10 minutes to leave the mobile station before it explodes. Once the trap is activated, there is no way to shut it off save an extraordinary roll [vp: Tech (or Wits) +Terraforming 4 VP/d20: Disable Device DC 27] which is more than likely beyond their skill to pull off. Thus, it is of vital importance that they either talk to Wind Runner (which is what they're supposed to do, but don't have to) or search Randak Loosejoint. The trap is simple to deactivate if someone knows it is there, and it doesn't even really require a skill roll to do so.

If the explosion goes off, it will do [vp: Endurance+Vigor 6 Successes for half damage. 10D/d20-10d6 Damage, Reflect Save: DC 20] damage in the initial area around the terraforming node and send a shock wave that will cause the station to collapse [vp: Endurance+Vigor 4 Successes for half damage. 7D/d20-7d6 Damage, Reflect Save: DC 15]. The characters can either run out through a hidden tunnel underneath the node [vp: Perception+Observe 7 Successes/d20: Spot or Search DC 15] to notice or run out of the station. The Shantor will not stop the party as they flee, because they have their own problems; the Al-Malik army has begun to attack their position. Unless the characters have been killed by the shockwave, they should be able to get out without too much problem.

Negotiating with Wind Runner

If the characters actually begin to talk and negotiate with Wind Runner, read them the following. (Note: You may have to modify this if the characters are attempting to do this in the middle of a firefight, but it should still serve as a general guideline.)

“I am Wind Runner. I have been expecting you. First, as a sign of good faith, know that the Terraforming engine has been trapped. The feedback monitors have been set up in a loop to cause a great deal of damage should you tamper with it in the wrong way. Many of my people, especially those who follow the old ways believe that I am the one who will lead them to freedom. I have repeatedly told them that this is not so, but they merely extol my humility.” This statement is surprising in that it does not seem to come from a Dolomei but a small sapphire attached to the old Shantor’s neck. “I have had a vision, shown unto me by the same gem which allows me to speak to you. It speaks of a place

where my people might run free, a place protected from the evils of men with dark hearts and a way to allow us to go there. It will be a dark and perilous road, one that requires champions to fulfill. I am prepared to negotiate the surrender of my people if you agree by your honor to undertake this quest.”

Of course it goes without saying that the characters will have a lot more questions than the initial statement can offer. Wind Runner will be forthright with them, and tell them as much as he can. He will say that the world that they are supposed to go to is guarded by the Radiant Knight. Anyone making a successful knowledge: religion roll [vp: Wits + Lore (Religion) 5 successes/d20: Knowledge (Religion) DC 15] will realize that this might refer to Lextius the Knight, one of the eight original disciples of Zebulon who purportedly locked his world (Dogen) away because of the sin and lack of faith of the Known Worlds. Any church faction would be VERY interested in learning anything they could about such a world; as would the emperor for numerous reasons including the possibility of finding one of the Lost Worlds of the empire.

If the characters simply refuse the mission, Wind Runner will say something to his people, who will then immediately stop fighting the characters and run for the door. Wind Runner will shield his own people along the way with a powerful psychic shield and leave the humans to fend for themselves, since he is perfectly aware that they care nothing for the Shantor and merely are using them as a convenient political tool.

If the characters express interest in the mission but do not outright accept it (probably wise on their parts), Wind Runner will say that he does not know the details, only that the gem will reveal the way. He will then remove it from his neck and give it to the person who the GM feels was the most honorable, valiant and kind to the Shantor during the mission. This is a question of aura, not just what they've done in front of him. Anyone who has deliberately and willfully killed Shantor just because they were aliens or because they could will not get the gem.

If asked AGAIN what the mission is, Wind Runner says he does not know, but that the gem will show them at the appropriate time.

Anyone expressing instant enthusiasm for the mission or saying “I will!” will bypass the most honorable behavior exhibited and receive the gem. (The first one to say so wins. In the event of a tie go by the more honorable and kind behavior.) Again, no one who has deliberately gone out of their way to kill or dishonor the Shantor will receive the gem. If none of the Player Characters qualifies, Wind Runner will give it to Mina Masseri.

Once he has given up the gem, he will surrender peacefully and instruct his people to do so. At this, the humans and the human technicians will immediately attack and stop messing with the terraforming node. They will attack the person with the gem first and foremost in hopes of stealing it and getting away with it. The Shantor will not help in this combat unless specifically asked for help by one of the characters (Wind Runner is too old to fight though he will die to shield the wearer of the gem). They consider this a human affair and do not know the ways of humans in this instance.

Conclusion

There are numerous possibilities to the end game of this adventure; but the most probably possibilities will be addressed; specifically the 'golden path' of greatest success.

If the characters successfully negotiate with Wind Runner and successfully shut down the node, they will become heroes. They enjoy a +2 Reputation bonus to all diplomacy rolls with the Al Malik and the Shantor on Shaprut. They also receive a stipend of gratitude from the governor of 750 firebirds apiece.

All trace of the rebellion die out immediately and a period of peace exists between the Al Malik. Indeed, even the Dark Walkers and those who follow the old ways enjoy a great deal of excellent relations. No one is really sure why, and it greatly unnerves many of the Al Malik and certain church officials. This state of affairs lasts for several months though eventually things return to the 'normal' level of hostility that existed before the rebellion.

If the characters wantonly kill all of the Shantor but still shut down the Node, they gain the bonus for the Al Malik and 250 firebirds apiece. Please note that in general in the Known Worlds characters are not hired to go about a job such as this, they do it because of feudal ties. The extra 500 in the main reward is because of the governor's gratitude to the players for finding a way to end the dispute peacefully. The rebellion continues although it is eventually crushed by the Al Malik and dissipates after a few months. Wind Runner (if he escaped) is never caught but branded a heretic and a traitor by all, including his own people.

If the characters wantonly kill all of the Shantor AND the node is activated (something they will have to go very much out of their way to do) then they get no reward, and a -1 Reputation penalty to anyone who recognizes them for who they are-namely, "The Screwups of Shaprut", now the subject of several well made and highly comical magic lantern shows.

There are no equipment caps in Organized Fading Suns, which means the characters can attempt to sell anything they found along the way; though if it is something not listed in the book, you should use your judgment. Realize that if it is too outrageous a future GM at another table may just ignore it.

Mina Masseri will inform the characters that she is quite grateful for their help and looks forward to possibly working with them in the future. Anyone bothering to do some investigative follow up will find that her house has entered into detailed negotiations with House Al Malik and that there is talk of finally ending their feud. Unless one of the characters does an exceptionally good job investigating, they will not be told about the gold deposits, at least not at this point in time.

If the characters successfully capture Randak Loosejoint alive, he sings like a canary and implicates Dame Katara, who in turn implicates her patron on Severus. This could

potentially mean very good things in the future for House Masseri and represents one of the few times where the Decados actually get caught for one of their schemes. This only works if Randak is alive however, since dead men tell no tales and Katara kept her associations loose enough to maintain plausible deniability. Randak has evidence on her, but he's only going to give it up under torture.

Wind Runner's Gem

Wind Runner's Gem is in fact a powerful philosopher's stone. This would represent the only 'certed item' to yet appear in Organized Fading Suns. Philosopher's Stones are generally incredibly powerful Ur artifacts, sought after by all of the most powerful of nobles, church officials and guilders alike. Most of the origins of this particular philosopher's stone and its properties will become evident in future modules, but certain properties and consequences of its existence must be dealt with immediately.

The gem can only be given voluntarily or taken off its dead host. If the characters are smart enough to keep it secret amongst themselves, they may retain possession of it for future modules. If the characters make mention of it in their report, they will become the subject of intense interest to very powerful people, many of whom will make them very tempting offers for the gem.

The simple properties of the gem (for now) depend on those using it.

[d20]

If the character does not have the Gifted feat, they gain it. If they retain possession of the gem for at least four months they gain it permanently. Also while holding the gem, they gain +2 to all psychic/theurgic skill rolls.

If the character DOES have the Gifted feat, they gain a +4 bonus to all psychic/theurgic skill rolls while holding or wearing the gem.

Anyone 'turning in' the gem to their patron or someone else of note may get a one time bonus of two Social Feats. This should give them an idea that the gem is worth a great deal. The GM will have to use logic when applying these since certain feats are only available at chargen.

This bonus is only available to ONE character. This is a unique item. There may be only one of them per table. If two different characters show up that have possession of the gem, the one with the higher level retains possession of it, while the other is considered 'non-existent' for purposes of that adventure.

[vp]

If the character has no Psi or Theurgy, they gain a point in either (their choice). If they retain possession of the gem for at least four months they gain it permanently. Also

while holding the gem they gain an additional point of Psi/Theurgy that never becomes permanent.

If the character is already psi/theurgy active, they gain a +2 bonus to all psi/theurgy rolls while wearing or holding this gem. They also gain a +2 bonus to all Stoic Mind rolls and if they do not possess the skill are considered to have 1 point in it while in possession of this gem.

Anyone 'turning in' the gem to their patron or someone else of note may get a one time bonus of 5 benefice points (as if use in Chargen). Certain benefice, such as 'Heir' are inappropriate. However, increases in rank (within reason) are possible. In general the reward should come in the form of lands, titles, cash, favors, contacts etc. Increases in skills or attributes are not appropriate. Cyberware is appropriate.

This bonus is only available to ONE character. This is a unique item. There may be only one of them per table. If two different characters show up that have possession of the gem, the one with the higher wyrd retains possession of it, while the other is considered 'non-existent' for purposes of that adventure.

Experience

[d20]

3-8th level-Characters Raise a level.

9th-12th level-1/2 XP needed to gain a level.

Above 12th-1/4 XP needed to gain a level.

[vp]

8 Advancement points for completion and survival.