

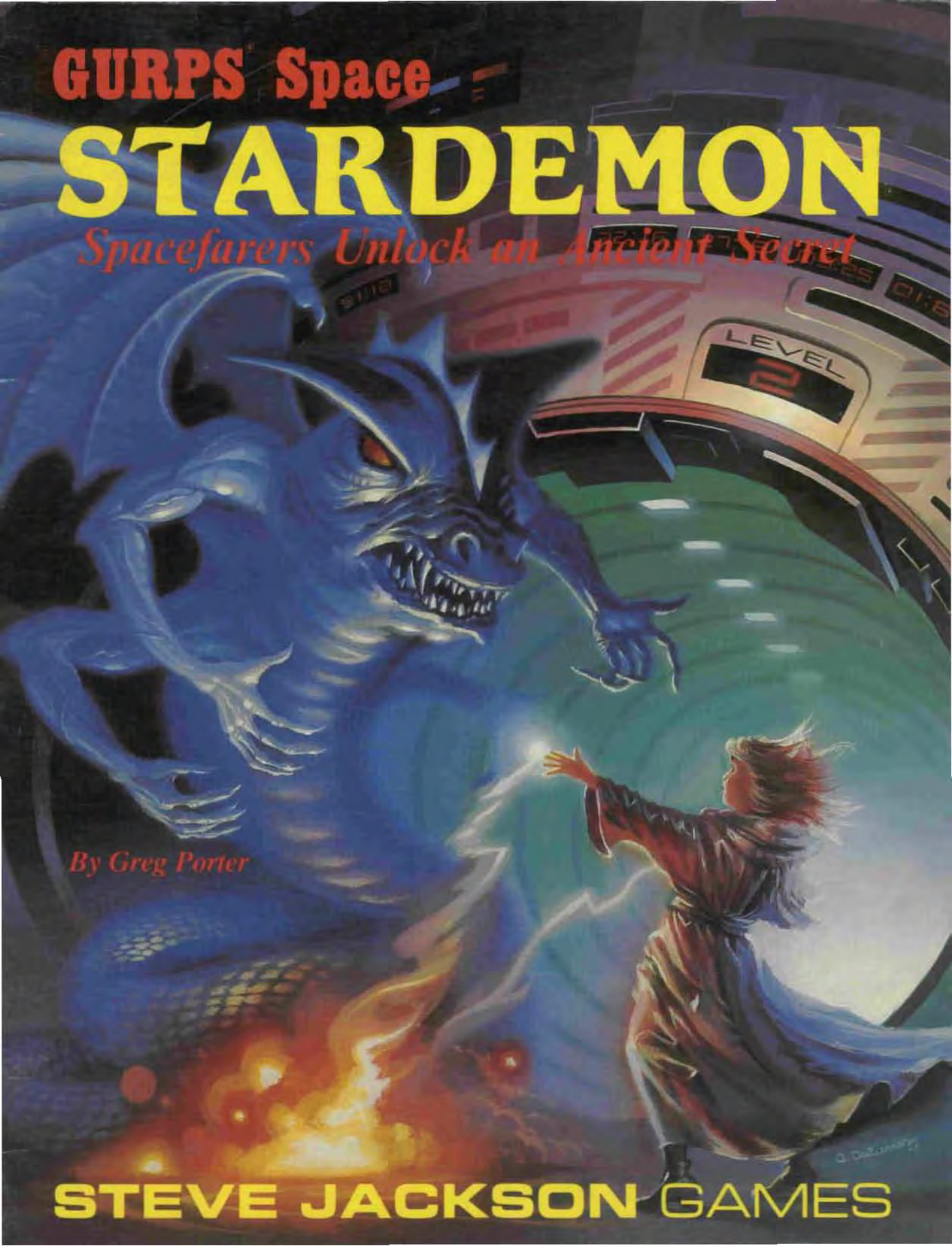
**GURPS Space**

# STARDEMON

*Spacefarers Unlock an Ancient Secret*

*By Greg Porter*

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**



**GURPS® Space**

# STARDEMON

*Spacefarers Unlock an Ancient Secret*

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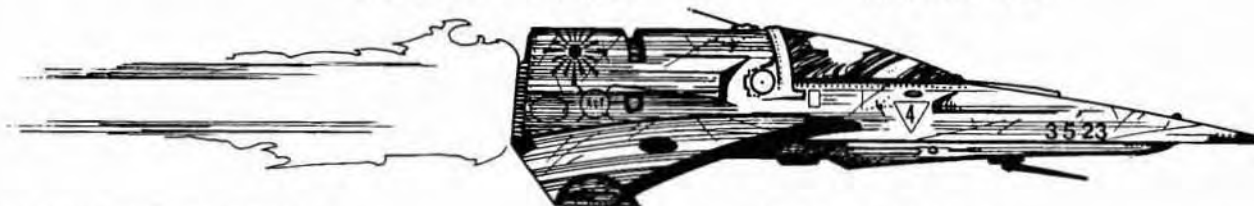
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**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

# 1

# ANSON (Abstoric II)

## About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

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## Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set* (Third Edition). Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the *Basic Set* — e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set* (Third Edition). There are also references to *GURPS Space*; they are preceded by S (e.g., p. S68).



Anson is a fairly busy place, at least for an out-of-the-way, low-tech dirtball. Once a thriving colony, it was abandoned and nearly forgotten. Anson collapsed to barbarism, and fought its way back to civilization with a stubborn pride.

**(GM's information: This is what any simple database program will provide when queried on the subject of Anson.)**

Anson was colonized long ago. A geologically old world, it had a wide variety of native life, but no intelligence. Development progressed rapidly, with many separate colonies and industries taking advantage of the virgin system.

During this period of rapid expansion, Anson was still heavily dependent on outside technology. When the Long Night fell, Anson suffered more than most. As the ships stopped coming, shortages of high-tech equipment degenerated into nuclear war. The world slumped into a Dark Age of squabbling city-states, with knowledge of the rest of the galaxy reduced to myth. By the time the planet was rediscovered, about a century ago, Anson was just reaching Tech Level 7 in most fields, and was finally under a loose global government.

The planet is ruled by the elected government of Ceebolt, the major southern landmass. The major northern landmass, Thaldar, is divided into three separate countries: Valdaaw, Stjaga and Viga. All owe nominal allegiance to Ceebolt, but squabble among themselves via espionage, guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Ceebolt does not squelch this — after all, if the northern lands could set aside their differences and combine against Ceebolt, they could be a significant threat. Anything that doesn't hurt the *Ceebolt* economy is "overlooked."

There is only one spaceport, a Class III facility some 200 miles outside Ceebolt's capital, Tostum. It is strictly quarantined by the local military. The "Startown" area is rowdier than most, since it is the only place on the planet for high-tech entertainment.

The quarantine is a strict planetary policy. The government wants no chance of another Long Night. Therefore, most imports of advanced technology (TL8+) are prohibited to make sure the world remains self-sufficient.

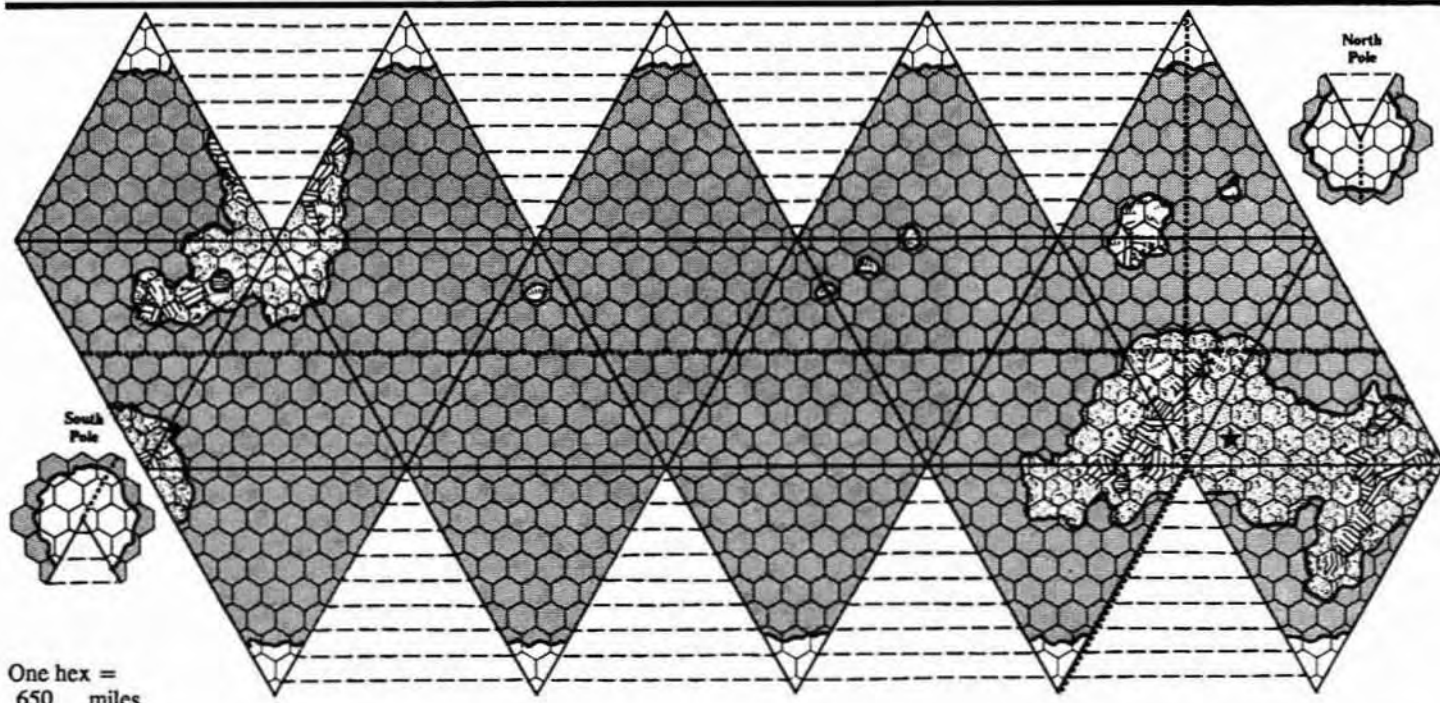
Any TL8+ equipment brought on-planet must be placed in storage within the spaceport grounds. The few items that are imported are strictly for research use, so that they can be copied on-planet. A very few TL8-9 items (mostly medicines) are now produced locally, but at triple the normal cost.

The people of the planet cannot get most of the technology they have seen and heard about, but they crave as much information as they can get about the rest of the galaxy. Entertainment/documentary tapes bring 150% the normal price, provided that they use TL7 equipment, and offworld entertainers are usually in high demand.

The technology quarantine means little trade comes to the planet. Most of Anson's exports are native meat and vegetable products, which they skillfully market as "gourmet foods."

Ceebolt has purchased several retired survey ships and warships, and has six space stations. It also has an aggressive home-built air force, with a "shoot first and ask questions later" policy toward unannounced ships. This makes technology smuggling a lucrative but dangerous business — see Chapter 7.

# PLANETARY RECORD: Anson (Abstoric II)



Planet type Earthlike Diameter 9,288 mi. Gravity 0.94 G Density 4.4 Composition Low-Iron  
 Axial Tilt 18° Seasonal Variation Earthlike Length of Day 32 hrs. Length of Year 142 days/ .52 Earth years  
 Atmosphere: Pressure 1.03 (Standard) Type and Composition Nitrogen 80%, Oxygen 19%, Argon and Trace 1%  
 Climate Earth-normal Temperatures at 30° latitude: Low 63° Average 80° High 97°  
 Surface Water 81% Humidity 64% Primary Terrain Forest, Jungle  
 Mineral Resources: Gems/Crystals Scarce Rare Minerals Ample Radioactives Scarce  
 Heavy Metals Ample Industrial Metals Ample Light Metals Plentiful Organics Plentiful  
 Moons None

**Biosphere:** Dominant life form Higher animals, Humans (imported)  
 Other significant life forms Earthlike ecology

**Civilization:** Population(s) 1.6 billion (PR 9) Tech Level(s) 7 (8) Control Rating 3 (4), 4 (6)\*

Society Factionalized. Southern (Ceebolt): Representative Democracy; Northern: Dictatorships (Valdaaw, Viga); Oligarchy (Stjaga).

Starports Class III — 200 miles outside Tostum

Installations None notable

Economic/Production Self-sufficient. Government buys small quantities of all technology for research use. Imports off-world entertainment. Exports local organics, luxury food items. Strict control on high-tech (TL8) imports.

**Other notes:** \* (6) is weapon legality. The nations of the northern continent have CR 4. Six orbital space stations are maintained by the Ceebolt government for defense and customs enforcement. There are four national governments; see political map, p. 4.  
 ★ = Tostum, capital of Ceebolt and *de facto* planetary capital. Capitals of other nations are shown on p. 4.

## System Information:

Star Name Abstoric Type G3 VI Location \_\_\_\_\_  
 Biozone 0.5-0.8 Inner Limit 0.0 Number of Planets 6

Planet	Orbit	Distance	Type	Diameter	Density	Gravity	Atmosphere	Notes
Gap	1	.3	Hot rockball	1,200	3.2	.09	None	—
Anson	2	.6	Earthlike	9,288	4.4	.94	Nitrogen-Oxygen	Detailed above
Farnham	3	.9	Hostile terrestrial	5,200	5.3	.63	Carbon Dioxide	Thin atmosphere
—	4	1.5	(Empty orbit)	—	—	—	—	—
Egg	5	2.7	Metallic	800	7.6	.14	None	—
Sicscuub	6	5.1	Gas giant	32,000	1.3	.95	Hydrogen-Methane	4 moons
—	7	9.9	Asteroid belt	—	—	—	—	Icy
Oddball	8	19.5	Cold rockball	600	2.8	.04	None	Eccentric orbit

## Adventure on Anson

### Espionage

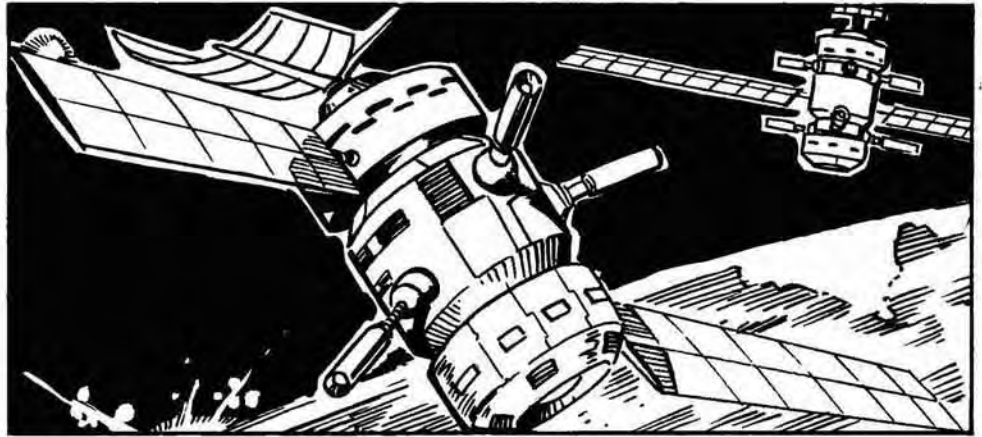
It is an ill-kept secret that all the intelligence agencies on Anson flagrantly violate the technology quarantine . . . with the blessings of their respective governments, as long as they don't get caught at it. Clandestine operators from offworld may expect only the crudest of intelligence equipment to be used against them, not TL10 or higher spy gear. Local agencies may hire offworld adventurers to smuggle some high-tech gear in. A competing agency might get wind of it and try to collect some free goodies.

### Crash Landing

Any ship which approaches Anson will be challenged by the Ceebolt Space Command. If a ship fails to respond, whatever the reason, the CSC will do its best to shoot it down! Spacemen who have a communications malfunction may crash in the wilderness with a shot-up ship. If they land in the northern jungles, their technology may quickly be in high demand. If they land in the middle of a brushfire war, they may have to choose sides to have their ship repaired.

### Mountain Climbing

Almost every one of the northern islands is centered around a single, very old but still active volcano. These peaks rise from the ocean floor into the upper atmosphere. Several off-planet documentary crews have been here, filming everything from high-altitude para-sailing to caldera climbing. Journalists may be here on assignment. Or they may be offworld agents on a covert mission.



## Fitting Anson Into The Universe

The world of Anson, as described, can be dropped into any background. Anson is an obscure world, and its government wants to keep it that way, at least until they develop their own version of Galactic technology!

### Anarchy

The adventure, as written, fits an anarchic background perfectly well. Ceebolt's paranoid self-sufficiency becomes more reasonable if the whole galaxy is falling apart.

### Alliance

Anson manages its own affairs with little or no outside interference. The Patrol tries to intercept smugglers, but most of the work is left to the Ceebolt Space Command.

### Federation

Anson is not a Federation member; it holds tight to its policy of independence and self-sufficiency. The Federation does everything it can to encourage trade with Anson, in the hope that trade and offworld goods will lead to public demands to join the Federation. The Federation may or may not be actively supporting the smuggling of high-tech goods onto Anson. If it is, the characters might be Federation hirelings, or even agents, aiding the smugglers!

### Corporate State

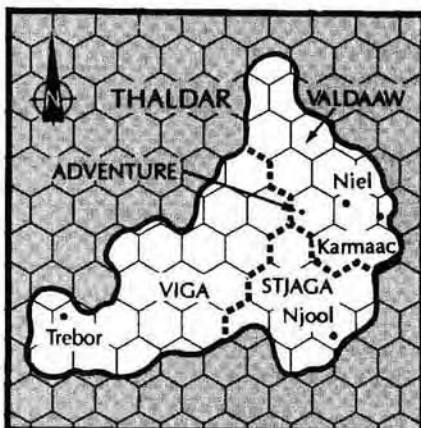
The party was abandoned by a megacorp after a botched job on Anson. The contract originally included round-trip transport, but now it seems that the tickets were strictly one-way.

Anson hasn't been exploited much, as it is fairly out of the way. Its raw materials would be profitable, but the planet's military is just strong enough to keep the corporations from moving in and taking over. For now, Goliath GmbH is content to use the northern continent as a market for obsolete weapons, and, very occasionally, a testing ground for new ones.

### Imperial Galaxy

Anson is on the fringes of Imperial space. As a result, the long arm of the Empire intrudes only rarely. Anson pays its taxes, and otherwise does whatever it wants on-planet; in return, the Ceebolt government cheerfully supports Imperial policy offplanet. The northern governments might support rebels just out of contrariness, if they could. Anson's restrictive policies regarding ship identification are to prevent *Rebel* ships from sneaking onto the planet.

## Political Map of Thaldar



1 hex = 650 miles

# BROKE ON ANSON

# 2

The first thing for the GM to do is to get the player characters to the world of Anson. Once there, they must be put into a position where they need money. There are several ways to accomplish this (see sidebar).

The information on pp. 2-4 is available from any major database; they could have learned it all before coming to Anson. To find out much more, though, they will have to land.

## Starport And Startown

The sole Class III facility on Anson is a typical backwater starport. It is located on a salt plain 200 miles outside the capital city, Tostum. Transportation to Tostum is by a single road or by air shuttle.

The facility is a fenced-in area with several large runways and landing pads for VTOL ships. These pads have adjacent warehouses and fuel depots. The prime spots are located close to the Startown. Docking charges range from a dollar per ton for choice locations, to a dollar per 10 tons for pads up to a mile away from the main facilities.

As a rule, the more remote or low-tech the world is, the rowdier the Startown. Anson is no exception. Life goes on as it would at any Class I or II facility, but a lot goes on below the surface that might be expected only in a Belter den.

The businesses that service Startown overcharge by 50%, since they have a monopoly. Anything that requires TL9+ facilities must be done at the starport; the equipment is not available anywhere else on the planet. It is a four-hour ride (\$50) by ground transport to Tostum. Air transport takes an hour (\$100), but only four flights are scheduled a day. Travelers without urgent business at the starport stay in other, less expensive facilities in Tostum.

## Taking Care Of Business

Tostum offers a variety of entertainment and lodging brokers, travel agents and short-term employment services, willing and eager to help visitors — for a fee. A few businesses change their names every time a new ship lands, and change their addresses nearly as often. These are the ones that prey on the desperate or naive, milking them of their last few dollars for non-existent jobs or vaporous tickets off-planet. Adventurers who have the Gullible, Impulsive or Illiterate disadvantages are especially easy prey.

There are always jobs for individuals, but it is unlikely that the group will want to split up for an unknown period of time on a strange planet (unless they are *all* gullible). The party may have a tough time finding suitable work. Very little professional work is available for a period of less than a year. While the possibility of mercenary work on the Thaldar landmass may look promising, no contract there is for less than six months. The only readily-available work is for “strong backs and weak minds.”

The party can find such jobs in the want-ad section of the Tostum news flimsy, or they may be referred by a local employment agency. In the latter case, a \$100 fee will be automatically deducted from each person’s first paycheck, if he gets the job. Whether an individual gets work is based on an appropriate skill or attribute roll (usually ST), at -5. Success means 2d days of employment at \$20 a day, after expenses are taken into account. If the group chooses not to go this route, or tries hard to find something better, they will see the following advertisement.

## Setting the Scene on Anson

To start this adventure, the GM needs a reason to send the party to Anson, or to “accidentally” trap them there for long enough to look for a job. Valid reasons include:

1. The party is low on funds. This is where they ran out of money. In order to continue, they’ll need some cash.

2. The group had other business here (perhaps a previous adventure), and is waiting to leave. Anson doesn’t get a lot of traffic. Perhaps ships don’t run on a regular schedule, or perhaps the next scheduled ship is three months away.

3. A PC, or dependent, got into trouble with the local authorities. The rest of the party needs money for legal expenses. Or perhaps they just need to pass the time until the prisoner’s trial (or sentence) is over. (The most likely crime, of course, is smuggling — see Chapter 7.)

4. The adventurers have their own ship, but they need money to fix or maintain it. They can’t risk open space without a costly overhaul, and perhaps special parts from another system. A vicious GM could have the party run afoul of the Ceebolt Space Command, and *accidentally* be shot up on approach.

5. The party has a ship and a contract to ship goods from Anson. However, they arrived early or their cargo is late. In either case, they would lose more money by dropping the contract than they would by waiting. To defray expenses, they need some short-term work.

Any of these can be tailored to the particular game world backgrounds in *GURPS Space*.

Adventurers needed – Position R-5532. Department of Archaeology at Ceebolt Vree Universitat needs assistants for survey expedition to explore possible sites in Thaldar jungles. Duration: 30-40 days. Pay: Based on qualifications, \$100-\$150 per day, plus expenses. An equal opportunity employer.

To apply for this job, the party will have to go the Ceebolt State Employment office in downtown Tostum. At the university employment office, each applicant will be asked to fill out three forms — previous references, past jobs, criminal record, etc. There is a clause on the form warning of penalties for falsifying official documents. (Whether anyone will ever check up on the applicants' answers is entirely up to the GM. It seems unlikely.)

*I hereby state that all information on this form is complete and true to the best of my knowledge, and understand that willful falsification of this form renders me liable to prosecution under statute 112.34a of the Ceebolt Uniform Criminal Code.*

-----  
Full name (printed)

-----  
Full name (signed)

The prospective employees are unable to learn anything about the job. The only information available was listed in the want ad. Local bureaucrats are either unable or unwilling to help. However, if anyone is bright enough to look up the Department of Archaeology in the phone book and call, he will obtain useful information.

The secretary answering the comm will be able to tell the caller that the job is to carry gear into the jungle. "You know, backpacking kind of stuff."

If the GM wishes, Sage Densen Wright, the professor in charge, may speak to the caller himself. He repeats only the information the secretary gave, but will invite the applicants for an informal interview. The professor will be interested if they mention their off-worlder status, especially if they have outdoor experience. He will be somewhat cooler if any of them have more than a passing archaeological background. Anyone in on the conversation may make a Detect Lies-2 roll. On a successful roll he realizes the professor is hiding something.

If the group does not talk to the professor, they will have to wait for their applications to be processed. During this time, prospective employees must maintain a constant address so they may be contacted. It may be important to mention this, since high-tech spacers may be used to computers automatically forwarding calls and packages to the current address.

Should anyone attempt to check up on the professor, a successful Research roll will easily reveal that he is a well-known and highly respected archaeologist. In fact, Sage Wright is as much of a public figure as any academic is likely to become on Anson!



## The Professor

Se. Densen Wright (Se. is an abbreviation of Sage, an educational honorific on Anson) has just received a government grant to investigate certain ruins in the northern hemisphere, with the cooperation of officials in that country. He needs assistants to carry supplies into the rain forests and back, and to provide legwork as he pursues the investigation. Normally, this sort of job would be handled by graduate students on Universitat stipends, but not this time . . .

Actually, Se. Wright is investigating the possibility of Precursor ruins in the northern hemisphere. Over the past ten years he has put together various bits of legend and obscure anachronistic relics, and concluded that in the distant past an advanced civilization existed on this planet. Unfortunately, he can't just go out and ask for money to investigate this possibility.

Even if Se. Wright's theories were taken seriously, the Thaldar nations would most assuredly block any southern research on the site until someone else had thoroughly explored it (and more importantly, taken credit for the discovery). Se. Wright has constructed a plausible, mythical culture that is vital to the planet's colonial heritage. The location is, coincidentally, in the same area he expects to find the Precursor ruins.

Se. Wright wants totally non-professional help, people who won't know ancient relics from yesterday's trash. He wants people who won't interfere or won't notice when he deviates from his official plans.

## The Interview

Se. Wright is a tall, spare man in his mid-50s, with a full shock of pale hair now going gray. He has just the right amount of outdoor exposure to give him a "rugged" look, despite the archaic round eyeglasses he affects.

The interview can be handled individually or as a group. Make an initial reaction roll for Se. Wright. This will determine how he treats the group as a whole. If needed, roll his reaction to each applicant, modified accordingly.

He welcomes each applicant with a warm handshake and friendly conversation, while sizing him up. Se. Wright must find reasons why only the candidates he has already "chosen" are good enough. While he must appear to follow government hiring guidelines, there is sufficient leeway for him to do anything he pleases, as long as he can present a plausible excuse for it.

The interview will be mainly a discussion of each candidate's qualifications: why they feel they are suited for the job, etc. Se. Wright will describe the expedition in details understood only by a fellow archaeologist or anthropologist. He doesn't want genuine interest; he wants feigned interest, muscles and limited curiosity. Interviewees may make a Detect Lies-2 roll to see if he is hedging or that the interview is taking unusual turns.

Se. Wright likes the idea of hiring a group of people that already work well together, but he doesn't like the idea of bringing anyone who has archaeology experience. Anyone with the Fast-Talk skill might be able to get an *all or none* deal for the party. The GM should assess a -4 penalty to the roll if Se. Wright does not perceive that person as the group's leader. On a critical failure, anyone with archaeological experience will be excluded from the party. Each point the roll is made by will result in a 5% increase in pay for each party member. A critical success should arouse the adventurers' suspicion; Se. Wright will be going to great lengths to accommodate them.

At the end of the interview, Se. Wright tells the party that they have the job, but the decision must be confirmed by the Universitat Personnel Office. They will be notified within two days. He assures them that the Universitat decision is a formality and outlines job terms.

## Se. Densen Wright

ST 11, DX 11, IQ 15, HT 11.  
Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Advantages: Intuition; Patron (Ceebolt government — through university, on 8 or less); Reputation (+5 within professional field, +1 to anyone).

Disadvantages: Age; Bad Temper; Overconfidence.

Quirks: Compulsive measurer; Prefers to sleep in a hammock; Uses horrible-smelling insect repellent; Wears archaic round eyeglasses.

Skills: Anthropology-15; Archaeology-20; First Aid-14; Guns (pistol)-12; Survival (Jungle)-14; Karate-14; Mechanic-13.

Possessions: Satellite navigation unit; small pistol; TL7 portable computer; utility knife.

Se. Wright is a well-known member of the archaeological community, famous enough that his disappearance would be a major news event. His fame is deserved. He is one of the top men in his field, with a distinguished career spanning 30 years.

He has picked up a lot of knowledge during this time, as well as a number of practical skills. Right now, he is on the edge of his greatest find to date, and is understandably anxious to start without delay.





## Valdaaw Culture

The expedition is going to Valdaaw, one of the northern nations. Anyone who wants more information about Valdaaw can easily learn the following. Ceebolt news and histories are not especially slanted; this information is accurate.

Valdaaw is a repressive totalitarian state under military rule. However, due to rampant corruption, this isn't quite as bad as it sounds. Anyone willing to spend a little money can evade problems, and the government has little reason to cause problems for anyone who can't pay to get out of them.

Average urban technology is TL6; the people in power have TL7 (or better). Rural Valdaaw is between TL5 and 6, depending on the area. The jungles are inhabited by descendants of the original colonists. They reverted to low-tech hunter-gatherers after the jungle wore down their high-tech equipment.

The Control rating is 4 and the maximum weapon legality is Class 4. Enforcement is vigorous in the immediate vicinity of troops and police. Elsewhere, criminals have access to heavy weapons.

All news is State-controlled or State-approved. Low-quality underground presses crank out tons of "subversive" literature each week, which is no less biased, but which at least covers the other side of the issues. TV and radio is much the same, but there are no "independent" stations, as they are too easy to track down.

Martial law is the normal state of affairs. The military is not omnipresent, but it does make its presence felt. Everyone has identity cards and passes, and smart travelers leave a \$10 bill in their ID folder in case they are stopped. Anyone caught with contraband can either go to jail, run for it, or "buy" a temporary "permit," which is like running for it — but with a 30-second head start.

Anything available on the planet can be found in the black market. TL6 items are normal price, but of dubious origin and have no guarantees. TL7 items cost double the normal price; weapons are also double cost. A black market source may be found with a successful Streetwise roll, -2 if looking for weapons, and -4 if looking for TL7 items. Carousing skill may be used at GM's option, but at an additional -2 penalty. One roll per hour may be made by each group. Splitting up allows more rolls, but is not recommended, especially after dark.

Each party member will be paid ST × 10, plus \$20 per day for meals. All lodging costs will be handled by Se. Wright, and paid by the Universitat. Once in the jungle, all supplies will be provided by the Archaeology Department.

If any prospective employee needs cash up front, Se. Wright tells him that it is possible to get up to one week's pay in advance, once the employment contract is verified. This is not an uncommon occurrence, since there are always last-minute purchases of equipment. The remaining pay will be credited to an account in any bank on Ceebolt, to be collected on return.

Se. Wright also informs them that each prospective employee is required to report to the Universitat Health Office for vaccinations. Since they are traveling with a "government" official, ID cards that replace normal travel passes will be issued when they get their shots. He instructs the group to meet him when they receive their verification.

At the Universitat Health Office, each employee will be required to sign more forms and have his picture taken. (High-tech spacers may find the idea of a "picture" intriguing. It is not a three-dimensional image; it is an old-fashioned, two-dimensional likeness.) The employee will then be vaccinated and issued a temporary ID card. The injection results in a -1 penalty to any skill roll involving that part of the body. The adventurer may pick the shot's location (within reason), but the impairment will last two days. (Truly vicious GMs might wish to give exaggerated detail concerning the size of the needle, the color of the liquid and the nurse's sadistic smile.)

The party is free to spend the waiting period as they choose. The GM may improvise adventures to challenge the group and keep the tempo moving. If the players enjoy the encounters, the GM may lengthen the waiting period as necessary. If the players seem bored, have them verified the next day.

When the party meets with Se. Wright after their confirmation, he will tell them that everything is proceeding smoothly; they will depart in two days. He will hand out verified ID cards and inform them that any cash advances can now be handled. He also mentions that the only item not provided by the Universitat is a good pair of outdoor boots, preferably of a synthetic material that resists mold and mildew. He suggests several local brands, all costing \$100 per pair.

He will tell the party that the gear each person will carry into the jungle has been packed according to that person's physique and qualifications. Personal gear carried will add to this. The load will lighten by one pound per day, as the supply of dehydrated food is consumed.

Each porter will be required to carry ST × 8 Encumbrance. In the hot jungle, this load will result in 4 Fatigue per hour. The GM should not allow anyone to exceed ST × 12 or he will take 5 Fatigue per hour. It should also be noted (but not mentioned) that gear soaked with water from the frequent rains will be significantly heavier, pushing a ST × 10 or 11 load over the ST × 12 level.

## The Flight North

Once all preparations are complete, the party will take a Universitat vehicle to the Tostum International Airport. Equipment will be brought in a heavily-laden van. The flight north will be by a conventional hydrocarbon-powered jetliner (TL7). All luggage will go in the baggage compartment; none will be searched. Each passenger will be allowed one carry-on bag weighing less than ten pounds.

All passengers and carry-on bags will be searched and checked by a weapons scanner (TL7). Since this is a cursory search, overt contraband will be spotted on a 12 or less, and hidden items on a 6 or less. Holdout lasers or disguised plastic or ceramic weapons will not be spotted at all.

The flight will be as uneventful as the GM wishes. To liven things up, a

flight of interceptors could pace the plane for a few minutes, as the plane overflies Viga territory, before peeling off. The airliner lands at Karmaac Airport, in Valdaaw. Valdaaw is the easternmost of the three mutually-antagonistic Thaldar nations, and is no better or worse than the other two.

### Valdaaw Customs Inspection

Like the other two Thaldar nations, Valdaaw has a suspicious government mentality. There is always a lookout for contraband, foreign spies, etc. On the other hand, the situation has been like this for so long that some of the provocateurs know Customs agents on a first name basis. Getting through Customs quickly and easily is a matter of bribery. Se. Wright has long experience with this, and will brief the party.

When handing a Customs official luggage, a traveler should palm a \$20 bill for each suitcase, and cup it under the handle of the last bag. The Customs agent will take the bill, and only open the luggage briefly. If nothing incriminating is visible, he waves the owner through. A \$10 bribe will also work, giving only a cursory search. If not bribed, he will search the luggage thoroughly.

Se. Wright will caution his assistants not to talk back to a Customs official or act nervous. He will tell them that this money must come out of the employee's funds, since the University doesn't reimburse for bribery expenses.

The professor will follow his own advice, allowing him to get several very questionable items through the local security. Among these are a small semi-auto pistol by Ceebolt Military Industries (a Model 14 *Meinring Cub*, Malf crit., Dmg 2d-1, SS 9, Acc 2, ½D 100, Max 1,400, Wt 1, RoF 3, Shots 5+1, ST 8, Rcl -1, Cost \$300, TL 6, +2 to Holdout), ammunition (50 rounds), and several seismic charges for underground soundings (6d concussion each — must be detonated electrically).

Adventurers who follow this advice will have no trouble. Party members caught with illegal items will have them confiscated. Illegal weapons (anything more lethal than a machete) will be confiscated, and the owner will either pay a fine equal to double the item's worth or spend a month in jail.

The professor anticipated losing a couple of his assistants due to local trouble or accident. He will not bail out anyone who gets in trouble due to their own stupidity or stinginess. If this makes the adventurers threaten to quit, he will threaten to leave the country without them. They will not be allowed to exit without valid papers, which only he can authorize. He is in charge and will not tolerate challenges to his authority.

Once everyone is through Customs, a taxi will take the party to a hotel, while Se. Wright acquires transport to the expedition area.

### On The Way Out

Adventurers begin earning their keep at daybreak the next day. Se. Wright has booked passage for the group on a bus and contracted a local guide he has used on similar expeditions. The guide knows the best paths, how to survive off the land, and the locations to avoid, such as the local crimelords' bases.

### The Trip To Niel

Each party member (except Se. Wright and the guide) will take 1d Fatigue in loading their gear on the bus. Have the last adventurer loading his equipment make a Vision roll. If he makes the roll, he sees a heavily-laden duffel bag slip from the top of the stack. If he makes a successful Dodge roll, the bag misses him. If he fails his Dodge roll, or if he didn't see the bag, he takes 1 point of crushing damage to his shoulder. (The player may choose which shoulder receives the damage.) The injury is not serious, just annoying.

### The Interloper

This option is offered if the GM wishes to add more challenge to the jungle expedition.

Departure time is quickly approaching and Se. Wright is agitated. The hired guide has not arrived. There are only a few minutes left when a man in a bush hat rushes in. He tells the professor that the regular guide is unavailable, but he has been sent as a replacement. Se. Wright grumbles and agrees.

The replacement guide is a government agent, assigned to investigate the professor's deviation from his expedition schedule. The previous guide has been placed in "protective custody" for a few days.

This agent has a TL8 satellite communicator/beacon with which he can call help. He will preserve his own hide first, do his job second, and let everything else go last.

### The Replacement Guide: Staa Borslaw

ST 12, DX 14, IQ 12, HT 12.

Speed 6.5; Move 6.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Night Vision; Patron (Valdaaw government, on 11 or less).

Disadvantages: Duty (to Valdaaw Secret Service, on 11 or less); Intolerance (of offworld strangers); Overconfidence.

Quirks: Always wears bush hat; Laughs at "greenhorn" experiences with jungle plants and animals; Tells bad puns.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Valdaaw jungles)-17; Camouflage-14; Climbing-15; Computer Operation (TL7)-14; Criminology (TL7)-13; Detect Lies-14; Fast-Talk-13; First Aid (TL7)-16; Guns (pistol)-15, (rifle)-15; Interrogation-13; Knife-13; Knife Throwing-13; Leadership-13; Naturalist-15; Shadowing-12; Strategy-11; Streetwise-12; Survival (jungle)-16; Swimming-14.

Possessions: TL9 stun pistol; TL8 satellite communicator/beacon; utility knife; Valdaaw *Defender* rifle (TL6; treat as M1 Garand, p. B209, with 10+1 shots).

A member of the Valdaaw Secret Service, the guide is an experienced jungle explorer recruited to help battle the influx of illegal high-tech weapons.

### ***Additional Encounters***

While it makes no sense to decimate the party before the main adventure gets under way, the overnight stay in Niel can be complicated by a variety of factors. Some may take party members out of the adventure or give them an edge to use later on.

#### ***Stop, Thief!***

A local pickpocket steals a valuable item from one of the explorers. He isn't quite good enough to avoid being noticed, but he has a six-yard head start.

If the thief can increase this lead to 20 yards or more, he gets away. The theft could be a lure into a side alley, where three accomplices will assist in beating the pursuer up and taking his possessions.

#### ***A Gamble***

The party is approached by a man whose dress declares that he is a tourist. He grins broadly as he announces, "Boy, those suckers never had a chance. These locals don't know anything about gambling systems, I can tell you. If you want to make a killing, go over to The Lucky Dragon."

If the party falls for the shill and goes to The Lucky Dragon, all the games are rigged. Use Contests of Gambling; the house has Gambling 16 when betting honestly, up to 20 in a fixed game. Gambling or Vision rolls (see p. B63) can spot the cheating.

#### ***Unfriendly Natives***

The locals just don't like outsiders, especially ones from Ceebolt. This could lead to a bar brawl. It also provides justification for levying \$100 fines on the adventurers as a result of the brawl (or a \$50 bribe to the appropriate official).

#### ***An Evening's Entertainment***

The Valdaaw government is far from universally loved and respected. Several small guerrilla bands supported by Stjaga and Viga occasionally stage attacks on targets of opportunity.

The local police station/barracks is one such target. An assault on these buildings will occur during the late afternoon, continuing into the night. The townspeople close their businesses early and come to watch, setting up chairs and drinking local beer from what they consider the safe distance of about 50 yards.

The rebels will win the day, after most of the police desert the scene. The rebels will depart after causing as much damage as possible. Government reinforcements will take two days to arrive. They are in no hurry to get involved in combat.

This makes a nice breakout possibility if any adventurers have managed to run afoul of the law during their short stay. It also provides an easy way to acquire a random selection of firearms and ammunition, most of it TL6, with a few TL7 pieces.

The bus is an old, decrepit heap packed with a wide cross-section of humanity. It is an eight-hour drive to the destination, a little town called Niel, which is about 100 miles from where the professor thinks "his" ruins are.

The GM may feel free to improvise encounters along the route. The bus may break down, or another broken-down vehicle might block the route. It is hot and muggy; tempers are short and strained. The guide will respond to questions concerning the area, the weather, etc., but will not initiate or prolong a conversation. The ride to Niel is less than restful. Travelers will not recover lost Fatigue until after they get off the bus.

Niel has a population of about 10,000 and is largely a support center for the local agriculture. There is little available that the party might want, except heavy-duty clothing and brush-clearing tools. Prices in Niel will be at least 15% more than those in Ceebolt. Unless there was a long delay during the trip, the adventurers will have a few hours before the businesses close for the night. If they decide to wander around, they may try to pick up information or gossip.

Party members who use their daily food allowance should be asked what they eat. If they don't specifically ask for an item, assume they don't care — which means they are likely to get sick. The GM should secretly roll against the character's HT. On a failure (treat a critical failure as a normal failure), inform the unlucky individual that he now has a case of diarrhea. It is mild because of the vaccinations. This reduces that person's HT and DX by one for a day and mandates at least one rest stop an hour during that time. Adventurers with Panimmunity can eat what they want with no ill effects.

#### ***Impounded***

Once in Niel, any high-tech devices flashed around in the mistaken belief that "security is more lax here" will result in fines or confiscation of the items. Unless, of course, the appropriate officials can be bribed.

#### ***Big Business in a Small Town***

There is a cleared area behind the local general store, which shows evidence of being a helipad. If pressed, one of the residents will explain that a local plantation owner uses a helicopter to get supplies. However, the marks of the skids show that at least two types of helicopters have been here.

There seems to be a lot of money floating around for such a backwater town. If anyone asks about the local prosperity, the resident mumbles something about a good harvest and abruptly walks away.

When making a small purchase, one of the visitors gets a piece of off-world currency (like a penny) as part of his change. If asked about the coin, the salesclerk will shrug and offer to replace it. No explanation will be offered.

A few buildings have pockmarks and bullet holes. Make a Reaction roll for anyone asked about the damage. On a critical failure, the person asked will brandish a gun and belligerently tell the party to "go back where you came from." On an ordinary failure, the inquisitive stranger is ignored. A successful roll brings a nonchalant smile and a shrug. "Rebels are everywhere," is the only information given. Treat a critical success as a regular success; these people don't trust outsiders.

Let the explorers draw their own conclusions. Reward any truly unique information-gathering attempts with hints about smuggled military supplies and nearby rebel camps. If the replacement guide (see sidebar, p. 9) is in the group and he overhears these hints, have each party member make a Vision roll. On a successful roll, he sees the guide slip off into the jungle to contact his superiors in Valdaaw. Roll a Quick Contest of Stealth skills if any of the adventures attempts to follow him. They are at a -6 penalty because of the unfamiliar, rugged terrain. It is likely that the guide will soon lose anyone tailing him.

# INTO THE JUNGLE

# 3

Bright and early the next morning, the party heads into the hills. If more than one of his helpers has been injured, or severely incapacitated by local food or drink, Se. Wright will relent and allow a day for recovery, provided that everyone remains indoors at the hotel. He will spend the day poring over his notes and maps with the guide. (If the new guide is with the party, Se. Wright will spend the day reviewing his notes alone.) If no one is out of commission, the expedition departs as planned.

The guide hires a local driver with a flatbed truck to take the party out of town. Once off the road into the rain forest, they enter another world entirely.

Adventurers without jungle experience will be learning many new things, mostly the hard way (see *Jungle Encounters* sidebars, pp. 13, 15, 17-18). Aside from the constant screeching of animals, the bugs, rain, heat and humidity, it is not too bad. There is no undergrowth to be hacked through, and while there are no paths except animal trails, the walking is fairly easy.

Once in the jungle, the guide opens his pack and assembles a semi-automatic hunting rifle with open sights (see *The Replacement Guide* sidebar, p. 9). He will generally lead the party under the professor's direction, scouting for obstacles and hostile wildlife.

While any of the adventurers may have maps, pinning down an exact location will be difficult without one of two things: personal knowledge of the area or a satellite-linked direction finder (TL8). The guide has the area knowledge; Se. Wright has the direction finder, which he keeps in a padded case. It is with him at all times.

The direction finder is about the size of a textbook. Used with a set of tables and maps, it allows the professor to locate the position of the party to within 200 yards. This piece of equipment is vital to the expedition. While Se. Wright or the guide could probably find the site he is looking for through simple map navigation, it would take considerably longer.

The PCs are carrying four to five weeks of provisions each. The site the professor wants to reach is roughly 100-150 miles into the jungle. Given a reasonable hiking speed and taking the rugged conditions into account, this should give the party about seven to ten days on site. Of course, things might not be that easy.

## Wish Upon A Falling Star

On the last day of hiking, Se. Wright pushes the party more than normal. This gets the the party to the investigation area before nightfall, but also increases their fatigue. By the time camp is set up, it is too dark to do anything except cook dinner.

The night mists settle and stars shine in a clear sky uncluttered by city lights or other artificial interference. Se. Wright is impatient, but in a better mood than for most of the trip. After dinner he assembles the expedition members like a group of students, assuming a lecturer's pose in front by the fire. Se. Wright tells them things to look for in the coming days — straight lines in the vegetation that might cover a structure, caves of any type, or anything that looks out of place in an untouched jungle.

A deafening sonic boom interrupts his instructions. The GM can simulate this with any degree of creativity and pyrotechnics desired. (A large book slammed on a table without notice should work adequately.) In the distance, a black silhouette blocks out the stars. A bright engine flare illuminates a broad,

## Jungle Travel

Jungles are not pleasant places, and the rain forests that cover most of the northern continental interior are no exception. The average temperature is 85°F, cooling down to 75°F at night. The humidity is almost always at the maximum the air can hold. The GM may assess an extra point of fatigue to anyone without a suitable background.

Almost all light is blocked by a thick canopy of vegetation. The ground is fairly open. It is always damp or wet, and covered with a thick mat of leaves and decaying organic matter. Insects and snakes move soundlessly through this layer. This provides a nasty surprise if stepped on, or if someone sits or lies down on the forest floor for more than a few minutes. (A Fright Check for phobics, at the very least.)

It rains almost every day. Roll 2d. If the result is 10, 11 or 12, it doesn't rain. On any other result, roll 1d-1. This is how many hours after noon the rain starts. Rain will last for an hour and will range from heavy to torrential.

Between the rain and humidity, any item capable of rusting or corroding will begin to do so immediately. Unless the item is sealed in an airtight container, it will lose performance if not maintained religiously. After 2 days, it takes a -1 penalty when used. After a week, the penalty becomes -2; after a month, it becomes -3. Items made especially for jungle use, or made of stainless steel or other durable materials will last a month without maintenance. This applies to clothing as well. Wet items stored in a pack will begin to mildew overnight, and items that are hard to dry (such as body armor made of ballistic fabrics) are especially susceptible.

Most TL9+ items, clothing, etc., will be wholly weather-resistant. But remember . . . it's all illegal!

While characters have had vaccinations as a routine precaution, only those with Panimmunity will be totally safe. All water must be purified, all local food must be cooked and insect repellent is mandatory. Any failure to observe these precautions requires a HT roll. A failed roll results in a bout of some local "bug" which will take 2d hours to manifest itself. This will reduce ST, DX and HT by the amount the roll was missed by, for an equal number of days. Proper treatment by a medic will halve the effect (round down).

### ***Masquerade's End***

If and when one of the adventurers discovers that the new guide is not what he seems to be, he must decide what to do. There are several possible courses he might take, either alone or with the rest of the party.

#### ***Friendly Persuasion***

If the adventurer confronts the guide, the agent will do everything (including bribery) to persuade him to help. "My government believes that Se. Wright is involved in the smuggling in this area. That is why he has changed his expedition schedule. That is why the delta wing was in this area — to meet with him." If the agent can't get the adventurer to join him, or cannot get a promise of silence about his true identity, he will attempt to use force (see below).

#### ***A Little Extra Effort***

If the adventurer attacks the guide (or if he won't cooperate with the guide), roleplay the combat. The guide's complete stats are on p. 9. The guide will not reveal his illegal stunner unless the adventurer shows a weapon first. If the guide knocks out his opponent, he will call for his fellow agents to collect the prisoner (who may be captured first by the Ombivoz, if the GM desires). If the guide is overcome, he may either be killed, left to the predators or brought to Se. Wright (see below).

#### ***An Impromptu Party***

If Se. Wright is told of (or confronted with) the replacement guide, give the informant a \$100 bonus. Se. Wright will be more worried than angry. He will order the other party members to bring the guide ("unhurt, please") to him.

Se. Wright will make a speech, in his best angry-professor manner: "Your suspicions are totally without justification, and an insult to both myself, the University, and the people of Ceebolt. Once I have concluded my investigations here, I will turn you over to your government for a complete public apology. While I abhor that you joined my expedition under false pretenses, you have been a competent guide. You will be allowed to remain unbound if you agree not to attempt to escape. If you attempt to escape, I will have you bound until we break camp."

Everyone but Wright will be assigned to be guards, in shifts, whether or not the agent agrees not to escape.



flat delta wing as it banks sharply to the right. Two more sonic booms and the screech of turbines shatter the jungle's abrupt silence as two smaller silhouettes swoop after the first craft. Each one fires a spread of missiles at the retreating delta wing, only to be nailed by laser fire from their intended victim. Both pursuers disappear in blinding explosions, raining flaming metal and fuel over a broad swath of jungle.

In the brief light from this carnage, the party can see the delta wing veer wildly to avoid the missiles. Most of the spread misses, but one missile is too close. The survivor's left wing explodes in a bright yellow fireball, sending the ship spinning into the darkness.

The flare from the wreckage dies down at this point, and nothing more can be seen. Adventurers may scramble for any night scopes they have brought, but whatever it was will be gone by the time they get them in hand. The jungle slowly returns to normal. The nearest possible piece of wreckage is in the valley below, a half-hour's walk during the day. However, it is in the general investigation area, and the professor will insist that any search can wait until the next day.

If the replacement guide is with the party, make a Vision roll for anyone with the Alertness advantage. If the roll is successful, he sees the guide hastily glance around and then slip into the darkness. If the roll fails, tell him that Se. Wright is visibly shaken by the incident. If the adventurer attempts to follow the guide, roll a Quick Contest of the guide's Stealth vs. the follower's Shadowing or Stealth. If the guide wins, he loses his tail. If the follower wins, he follows the guide to a clearing well out of hearing distance of the main party. Once at the

clearing, the guide will produce a long-range radio from his pack and try to report the smuggler's escape (he is certain that the delta wing was a smuggler). The adventurer now has several choices; see *Masquerade's End* (sidebar p. 12).

## A Needle In A Haystack

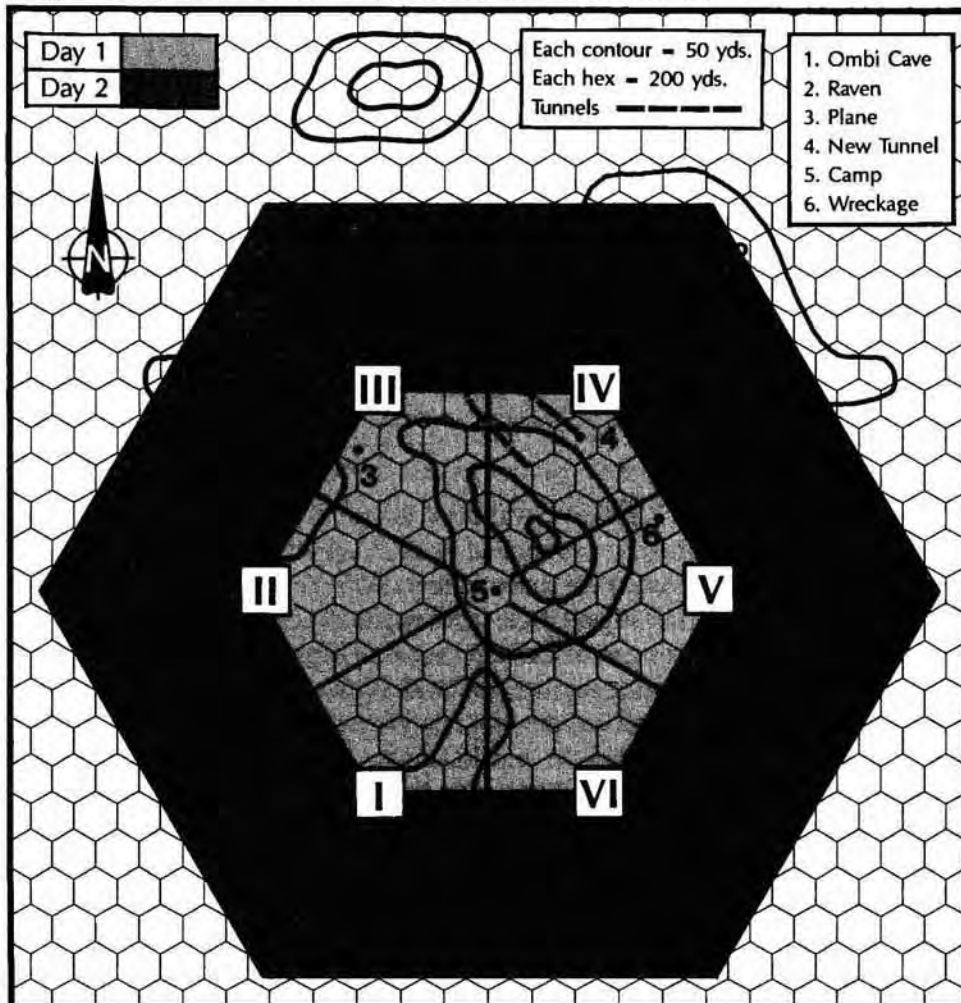
Se. Wright is eager to get moving the next day, but he is apprehensive as well. Even the guide is somewhat disturbed, and has stripped and cleaned his rifle, just to make sure it is in good working order.

The professor orders everyone to investigate in pairs. Today is a reconnaissance day, seeking any traces of sites of habitation. The camp is on a small hill and is easy to spot, but to make sure, a bright-orange spotting balloon is tethered to the ground near the campsite. Visible for miles, it can be used as a constant reference point. (Adventurers may have to climb a tree to see it in the thick growth.)

Each search team has a small two-way radio with a two-mile range. The professor gives everyone a map. It is divided into pie-shaped sections, centered on the camp. Every team is assigned a section or sections to explore today. If nothing is found, other techniques will be brought into play tomorrow. The sections to explore are not that large, but there is some undergrowth here to hamper visibility and movement, and the areas need to be searched very thoroughly.

Either let the players pick sectors, or assign sectors randomly, with an equal number of characters per area.

It will generally take 2d hours to find anything of interest in a sector, if there is anything. The GM may improvise extra encounters for each sector, using the *Jungle Encounters* sidebars on pp. 13, 15, 17-18 for ideas.



## Jungle Encounters: Eelar

This alien species, and the others described in this chapter, are suggested jungle encounters designed to enhance the *alienness* of Anson. The GM is encouraged to create additional, preferably non-lethal, encounters suitable for his party.



Eelar are found in small colonies all over Anson. These flightless insects resemble praying mantises and usually live underground. Eelar are also capable of stinging, although they generally do not attack unless molested. However, a swarm can be quite dangerous. Swarms do not occur except in tropical areas. These swarms live above ground and will eat anything in their path.

A swarm is about 1,000 eelars, with a Speed of 2. It does stinging damage of 1d-1 per turn, unless the foe is completely covered. It is dispersed by 15 hits. A single eelar will deliver 1 hit per turn, until killed.

The GM should make a secret HT roll for any character stung by an eelar. Any result other than a critical failure will produce a mild rash in the area of the sting. This will cause itching and -1 DX for the next 24 hours. The affected person must also make a Will roll any time complete silence is required, to avoid scratching.

On a critical failure, the adventurer is infected by bacteria carried by the sting: the stung body part swells alarmingly and the victim will develop a fever lasting 2d hours. That person will be at -4 DX for the next 36 hours. Genericillin (see p. S68), if the party has any, will reduce the effects to mild swelling and a slight fever; the victim will be at -2 DX for the next 24 hours.

## Captain Joph Astor

ST 11, DX 12, IQ 14, HT 12.

Speed 6; Move 6.

Advantages: G-experience; Patron (Big O, on 8 or less); Reputation (+3 with ex-military and smugglers).

Disadvantages: Enemies (wanted by patrol, on 11 or less); Intolerant (civilians and accountants).

Quirks: Keeps boots spit-polished; Never uses anyone's first name; Paces when talking.

Skills: Astrogation-17; Beam Weapons-15; Computer Operation-14; Free Fall-14; Guns (pistol)-13; Leadership-17; Pilot-17.

Possessions: blaster pistol (Amt. 2d+6, SS 10, Acc 6, ½D 100, Max 300, Cost \$2,000, Wt. 2, Rcl -1, Shots 20/C, RoF 3~, TL 9, — see p. S58); heavy monocrys vest: PD 2, DR 24 (PD 1 DR 2 vs. thrusting weapons).

Formerly a naval pilot, Astor retired several years ago. Losing his pension in a fraudulent planetary development scheme, the only way he found to make a living was through "free enterprise."

Astor is not a cutthroat, and neither are most of his crewmen. It's just a job. However, none of them will hesitate to shoot first and ask questions later rather than face heavy jail sentences or mindwipe because they let someone get away. The Captain's main worries are crew, ship and cargo, in that order.



## Sector I

A number of fresh metal and plastic fragments, evidently from last night's air battle. None weighs more than 10 pounds; none is of any use. Few are identifiable.

## Sector II

Nothing of interest.

## Sector III

Moderate amounts of *older* wreckage, evidently from one or more TL7/8 aircraft. Roll 1d for each person in this sector. The high roller finds a nearly complete but heavily damaged one-man jet fighter. It carries Valdaaw markings, but it is not one of those that was shot down yesterday; this one has been here for months. There is nothing useful to be found in the plane.



## Sector IV

There is a medium-sized cave in the side of one of the hills. It goes in 50 feet before being closed off by rubble. There are no drafts to indicate further chambers or air circulation. Dank, fungal growths and stalactites hang from the ceiling and walls. It appears natural. However, anyone who goes to the trouble of scraping off the growths can make a Vision roll to notice the faint parallel grooves on the wall, as if the tunnel was cut with some sort of machinery.

Se. Wright will most definitely be interested in the cave mouth, and will abandon the area he is in to look at it. He will notice the parallel grooves and he and at least one other character will spend the rest of the day combing that particular area for more such sites, without success.

### A Rough Landing

Captain Joph Astor, former naval pilot turned smuggler, is having a little trouble. His ship, the *Raven*, was spotted by the Ceebolt Space Command during atmosphere entry. He eluded the space fighters, only to be set upon by two flimsy, atmospheric jobs virtually over the landing site. The *Raven's* lasers took care of the jets, but not before one of them managed to blow a sizable hole in the engine compartment. Reactor number one was blown to hell, but the precious thrusters were spared. Even so, the landing gear was crushed by the hard landing. The ship bottomed out in the small clearing where they were scheduled to unload their cargo of weapons. The captain's thoughts are not pleasant right now:

*Malkovitch, the quantum mechanic, is badly hurt and will be on crutches for weeks, but at least he can still work on the technical repairs.*

*Jones reports radio traffic just over the next hill. It sounds like some crazy explorers out looking for a lost city. Their asinine little balloon is swaying in the wind, saying "Here we are, come and find us!" Damn.*

We've got the goods unloaded into the old storage bunker, and Fritz is trying to patch that hole in the hull with what's left of the wing. We won't need the wing on the way out, anyway. We'll be light enough to just stand her on her tail, and blow this planet.

All we need now is for the local puffed-up border bandit to come here and pay us for all these goodies. He's late already. At least this time he's paying in nice, light gems and raw pharmaceuticals. He knows the deal. If he's not here in two days, we take the stuff and sell it to his enemies instead. Now, what to do about those pesky grave-robbers?

## Sector V

There is a door-sized piece of dark, non-metallic composite lying on the ground, with melted patches and scorch marks. It is featureless, smooth and covered with a very non-reflective black coating of some type. It is definitely TL8 or higher. Further combing of this sector may reveal smaller pieces of similar construction. (These are pieces of the *Raven*.)

## Sector VI

After several hours of searching, a cavern is discovered. It has obviously been inhabited by low-TL humans within the past dozen years, but not within the past year. The cavern is rather small, and actually contains nothing of interest, but may serve to warn the explorers that savages are about.

## Once More Into the Fray

A lot will happen today. The party may be split up. When events happen will be as important as the events themselves. The GM should read this section before running it, to figure out the best sequence of events, given the exact situation the party is in. If the GM does not wish to have the group split up, see the *All Together Now* sidebar on p. 19.

Se. Wright is greatly encouraged by the cave found the previous day. He is doubling the initial search pattern's radius. He will select one or two adventurers to stay at the cave with him and attempt to find out if the tunnel continues past the blockage.

If asked about the cave's origin, Se. Wright will explain that it was created when the continent was originally settled. Suspicious party members may make a Detect Lies roll. If they succeed and confront him, he will bluster and say "Who knows more about this, me or you?" Any further questions will be met with an order to mind their own business. Actually, Se. Wright has ancient maps that indicate that this area was never settled heavily before the Long Night. He has taken samples from the cave wall to date the excavation when he returns home.

## Same Thing, Different Day

Investigators in expanded sectors I, II, III and VI will find nothing of interest. The GM is encouraged to select optional encounters from the *Jungle Encounters* (see sidebars pp. 13, 15, 17-18), or create adventures to fit the party. Keep the atmosphere tense; build the anticipation. Party members in these sectors may either be left uncaptured to act as the cavalry, or they may be captured when the searchers in the other sectors are taken (see *A Game of Darts* on p. 16). More options for keeping the party intact may be found in the *All Together Now* sidebar on p. 19. If they are to remain uncaptured while other party members are taken, have them alerted to the abduction by distant shouts. Arriving in a clearing some distance away, they find signs of a struggle, an item belonging to one of the kidnapped investigators and an obvious trail back into the jungle.

## Raven Crew Member

ST 11, DX 12, IQ 13, HT 10.

Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Advantages: Patron (Big O, on 8 or less).

Disadvantages: Enemy (Patrol, on 11 or less).

Skills: Computer Operation-12; Guns or Beam Weapons-14; Gunner (Heavy or Light Laser)-14; Knife-12; one Scientific Skill-16.

Possessions: Dagger; medium monocryst armor: PD 2, DR 18 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. thrusting weapons); beam pistol and/or rifle.

A random technical person, probably ex-military, kicked out for disciplinary reasons or petty crimes, who drifted towards the underground of smugglers, pirates and other space-faring outlaws. May or may not have a random mental disadvantage.

## Jungle Encounters: Meinring

ST: 16-20

Speed/Dodge: 10/7

Size: 2

DX: 14

PD/DR: 1/1

Weight: 80-250 lbs.

IQ: 5

Damage: 1d cut

Origin: SF

HT: 15/13-19

Reach: C

Habitats: F, J

This is an arboreal creature, vaguely feline in appearance, with chameleon abilities. This ability gives a -8 penalty to Vision rolls to see the meinring when it is motionless among the foliage. Even if a successful roll is made, as long as the "cat" remains motionless, the character will only see a brief glimpse of fangs or glowing eyes — apparently bodyless.

The meinring's roar is all out of proportion to its size; it sounds like a dinosaur! Its favorite tactic is to stalk its prey from above, emitting thunderous roars to frighten its intended victim into running. A meinring will goad its victim into exhaustion and disorientation. The meinring will then spring for the neck, attacking with either claws or teeth.

The meinring is an excellent leaper. It can cover six yards in a single bound, and can leap more than 13 yards.

It will not attack people unless provoked. Most meinrings will avoid people altogether, but younger ones have been known to stalk a hunting party for hours — just to make them jumpy.

The roars should be spaced to keep the party jumpy and uncertain. The guide and the professor will assure the adventurers that the creature will not harm them. But it will be noted that they both jump when they hear the roar, and look overhead. The guide, in particular, will become irritated with the meinring as soon as the party is no longer frightened by it, and will look for it in order to shoot it.



### Expanded Sector III

The guide should be with this party. The searchers are looking diligently for signs of long-dead civilizations in the hot, humid jungle when their calm is shattered by a wild-eyed man careening through the jungle towards them. When he sees them, he begins screaming madly at the top of his lungs,

“Demons! Demons! Creatures from the Abyss! Aiiiyyyy! They ate my wing man! Can’t you hear him screaming! Oh, God, make it stop! Aaaghh! . . .”

He collapses into the arms of the nearest explorer, unless he is shot first. His face is smeared with paint and he is wearing the tattered remnants of a flight suit with the emblem of the Valdaaw Air Force. One foot is bare and bloody. He has to be one of the pilots of the planes that were shot down. Anyone with the Diagnosis or Physician skill may make a roll at -4. A successful roll will reveal that he has been drugged; this examination will not tell what drug was used. If the roll is failed, it is only apparent that this man is terrified and in shock. His pulse is weak and rapid, and pink froth comes from his mouth when he coughs.

He regains consciousness, but is still in a wild, delirious state. With the strength of the possessed, he grabs the collar of the person trying to give him medical attention.

“She . . . the sorceress . . . she summoned up the demons, the demons. They fed him, my wing man, they fed him to the demons. He screamed, he’s still screaming, can’t you hear him . . . I saw the demon . . . he tried to eat me, but I got away . . . hahaha . . . but they’re after me, yes, they’re still after me, I’ve got to run . . .” (To portray this scene, the GM may adopt a tremor, very wide eyes and an intermittent cackle.)

The pilot lapses into unconsciousness again, but revives for a short time a minute later, describing a scene which, conveniently enough, somewhat resembles the cover of this adventure: a tunnel, leading to a large room or cavern. Flashing lights are everywhere. In the center of the cavern, a robed woman is summoning a horrible blue giant with claws and fangs. It is like no creature indigenous to Anson (the guide will confirm this), but it might suggest a creature the party has run into on some other adventure. If the adventurers think this, the GM should do nothing to discourage their error. If anyone uses psi or any other method of sharing the pilot’s memories, they will see that he is deranged, but he *is* describing exactly what he remembers seeing!

The pilot then lapses into a coma and, despite any efforts to save him, dies shortly thereafter. He has no sign of injury, except for various scrapes and splinters acquired in his frantic flight through the forest.

#### A Game of Darts

While the investigators are puzzling over the pilot’s demise, there is a soft “fiipp!” and a random person will take a puncture wound, probably to the leg. It is a long, thin shaft of wood with a fiber tuft — a blowgun dart, striking with enough force to penetrate any DR1 clothing or open-weave armor (e.g., Kevlar). Pulling the darts out is easy, but futile, and reveals that they are coated with a sticky substance. A full description of the blowgun and drug effects is in the sidebar on p. 20-22.

*Fiipp! Fiipp!* Each member of the party is hit in the next few seconds, unless they immediately dodge and run away. Anyone *completely* covered by rigid armor is safe. The darts come from the bushes; no one, unless he is fully armored, will possibly be able to take the fight to the enemy. It takes a Vision-6 roll to see any of the dozen ambushers, and they are all in good cover (-4 to hit).

This is an ambush by the jungle natives, the Ombivoz. The likely result is that all those in Sector III will fall unconscious from the drug and be taken prisoner by the natives — see Chapter 4.



## Expanded Sector IV

Investigators in this section will eventually come across the *Raven*, torn and listing, on the soft forest floor. It is under camouflage netting, and almost impossible to spot from either the ground or the air. Unfortunately, this first view is likely to be at gunpoint.



This spot has been used before as a smuggler's rendezvous point, and the entire forest within 300 yards is seeded with camouflaged TL10 intrusion detectors. These are linked to a central processor on the *Raven*, which tracks the intruder's every move. When the party members reach a convenient point to be apprehended, they will be stopped by three or four men with stun rifles. "It's real simple, mate. Hands on the back of your heads, link your fingers, and no sudden moves. Now march!" Anyone attempting to escape will be shot. His unconscious body will be taken to the bunker, along with his more sensible team members.

The intruders will be escorted to the storage bunker. This is a fairly deep and wide tunnel extending into the hillside behind the *Raven*. There are several electric lanterns to push back the gloom and, if nothing else, it is pleasantly cool. There are a few hundred tons of new, crated material stacked in neat rows near the mouth of the bunker. Further back in the tunnel, there are an equal number of moldering crates and even a vehicle or two, all of which appear to be very early TL6 equipment. See map. p. 21.

"We'll figure out what to do with you later, but for now, you stay put! Weld 'em to that stuff left over from the last world war."

One of the crew members runs a portable scanner (effective Holdout skill of 16) over each adventurer, which will find any metal weapons or objects radiating at levels common to high-tech weapons and communication devices. Anyone wishing to conceal an item must roll a Quick Contest of Holdout skills against the scanner. The GM should assess bonuses and penalties according to the item's size and composition (see p. B66).

After the intruders have been scanned, another crew member uses a laser welder to weld a steel cable snugly around each captive's waist. Those who struggle will take 1d of damage from contact burns. The other end of the cable is welded securely to one of the old TL6 vehicles. This is a ½" cable with PD 2, DR 8 and welds of identical quality. It is long enough to allow normal movement, sanitary functions and sleep, but not enough to get near anything useful.

The captives will be fed ship's rations, but largely ignored. Adventurers who try to cut their cable will find out that the vehicle they are welded to acts as a resonator, amplifying the sounds within the cavernous bunker. At least two crew member will investigate the noise. One person (pick randomly) will be kicked a few times as a reward, taking 1d-2 of damage. (The smugglers aren't

## Jungle Encounters: Tybor

ST: 5	Speed/Dodge: 2/6
Size: 1-2	DX: 13
PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 10-15 lbs.
IQ: 4	Damage: 1d-3
Origin: SF	HT: 15
Reach: C	Habitat: J

The tybor is popular as a pet; they like people and will stay near anyone who feeds them and talks to them. This harmless lizard-like insectivore can mimic any sound, including human speech. Natives keep them in and around their bedding, since they dispose of the numerous insect pests of the area. Their disconcerting habit of popping up or down into someone's face and speaking in random snatches of human speech is their most dangerous characteristic (Fright Check for unsuspecting outsiders; phobias against reptiles or ghosts will be affected).

Their small forelimbs are not used for walking, but for grasping. They move by slithering. In the wild, the tybor is basically an arboreal creature.

It has an inflatable throat bladder that vibrates and produces the sounds. The tybor's jaws unhinge when it "talks," until only a gaping maw, flickering tongue and beady red eyes can be seen. There are two flaps of skin directly behind the head which act as feelers; these flare out when the bladder inflates, making the little creature appear much more impressive.



## Jungle Encounters: Haldon

ST: 18            **Speed/Dodge:** \*  
Size: 3           **DX:** 13\*  
PD/DR: 2/6       **Weight:** 500 lbs.  
IQ: 1             **Damage:** \*  
Origin: SF        **HT:** 8/50  
Reach: C-3       **Habitats:** J, S

This is an immobile plant; its DX and Speed/Dodge are based on the vines that it uses to snare its victims. It has a central portion two yards across, with 10 to 20 vines radiating another two yards from the center. The main portion of the plant's weight is in the deep roots anchoring it in place.

There is very little about the haldon's central fronds to distinguish it from the surrounding foliage. Careful inspection (Vision-3), preferably from outside the reach of its tendrils, will reveal a faint purplish color on the edges of the fronds. Anyone making a Smell-6 roll will be able to discern a faint decaying odor in a 10-yard radius about the haldon.

Anyone coming within four yards of the plant will be subjected to grappling attacks from all the vines that can reach it — usually five or six at once. Unless the victim is very strong or dextrous, there is little reason to play this out; the plant *will* catch him. Someone who had a sword or machete in hand might be able to cut the vines, but few high-tech explorers will have such a thing. The only handgun that will even be noticed by the haldon (on short notice, anyway) is a flamer. That would cook the vegetable foe very quickly. Other weapons will puncture it without doing real harm.

Once the victim is grappled, it is dragged to the central section where fronds encase it. The haldon secretes a tranquilizing mist that delivers 1 Fatigue per turn encased; it will not affect those outside. It will then produce a mild acid which will do 1 hit of damage every 30 seconds. A haldon concentrates on one victim at a time; once it catches one person, it will ignore others.

The haldon, however, does not care for the taste of humans; part of the vaccination they all received was Haldon repellent! It will take the plant 3d seconds to discover this. When it does, it will abruptly unfurl its fronds and deposit a groggy and goopy adventurer at the edge of its perimeter, its vines drawn back in distaste. The only lasting ill effects will be to the victim's clothes, which will shortly fall apart. Plastic body armor is unaffected.

Both the guide and the professor know that the haldon is non-lethal, and will do nothing to rescue a trapped adventurer. Indeed, they will be amused; Se. Wright will grin sardonically, and Borslaw will laugh in delight. This reaction is sure to upset offworlders who think their friend is being crushed to death by this vegetable horror.

out to injure their captives, just keep them quiet.) The smugglers are very tense — their ship has been shot up and their buyer is late.

Anyone who saw the grooves on the cave walls will recognize the same pattern on the walls of the storage bunker. This, and the fact that the bunker extends into the hills further than the lights show, may give them the idea that the "cave" and "bunker" are somehow related, and that more information might be gained by a suitable application of high explosives. This is indeed the case.

## Meanwhile, Back at the Cave

The blockage is proving stubborn. Se. Wright lays out a portable seismic survey unit, which consists of about 20 sensors stuck into the ground, attached to a computer/printer. By analyzing the reflected shock waves from small explosive charges, he will create an underground map. This shows that the tunnel does continue past the blockage, at least as far as the 200-yard path the transmitters were laid out on.

Encouraged, Se. Wright will risk using more charges to dislodge the tunnel blockage. It works; a man-sized hole is made in the top of the rubble heap. After the dust settles, a smooth, obviously artificial corridor stretches into the distance, well beyond the range of his flashlight.



Investigation of the tunnel will begin almost immediately. Se. Wright is extremely excited, but refuses to say why. He radios the rest of the party that the cave appears to extend further into the hillside. However, he won't mention the artificial origin. Everyone else is to keep investigating while he and his assistants investigate the tunnel.

Se. Wright will hand someone a flashlight and tell him to crawl through the opening. The professor will then hand the recording equipment through the hole and the rest of the group will crawl through into the tunnel proper.

If any adventurer suffers from Claustrophobia, he must make a Will roll (-2 for a mild phobia, -6 for a severe phobia) to enter the crawl space. If the roll fails, the phobic will be unable to enter the forbidding opening. Se. Wright will heave a sigh of disgust and order the afflicted one to "stay here and guard the sensor equipment." If the roll is successful, the sufferer may enter the tunnel, but will be at -2 IQ and -2 DX as long as he is underground. He must also make a Will roll at a successive -1 per ten minutes the party is in the tunnel. If he fails this roll, the GM should roll on the table on p. B94 for his reaction.

Inside the tunnel, it smells musty, and there is a thin layer of mud on the floor from centuries of accumulated dust and moisture. The portable radios cease to receive outside transmissions 100 yards into the tunnel. This is normal, the professor explains. "The high-frequency radio waves are blocked by the rock. Anyway, everyone knows where we are."

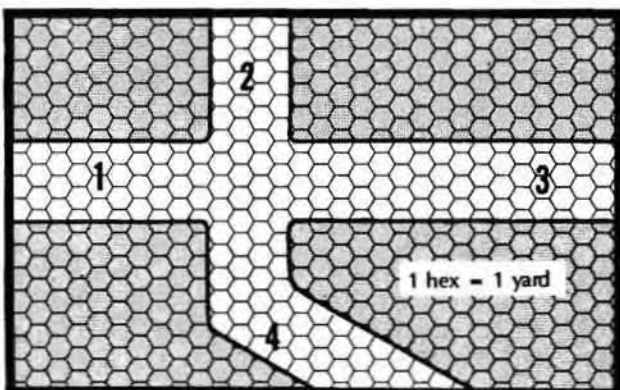
The walls, floor and ceiling are all grooved, as if they were hewn by a machine. Characters with a professional skill of Miner or the Engineer (Mining) skill (defaults to IQ-6) at TL8+ would know that the tunnel was made by a fusion cutter, the grooves created by the cooling plates used to congeal the molten rock.

The tunnel extends flat and featureless for 300 yards before branching into three paths. One tunnel continues in the original direction; another branches to the right at a 90° angle; and the other seems to double back toward the entrance. Have party members make a Hearing roll at -1. Anyone who succeeds will hear muted sounds of some kind of activity, both muffled speech and mechanical sounds, echoing from *somewhere* ahead. If no one succeeds, the professor will be the one to hear the noises.

Walking some 100 yards down the straight-ahead path will clearly reveal a sort of mechanical humming or vibration, as well as human voices. (This leads to the cavern of the Ombivoz, some 300 yards farther on.)

The path to the right, after about 600 yards, bends further to the right until it is headed due east. It now clearly echoes with machine-shop sounds and an occasional voice. (This leads to the smugglers' cave, another 700 yards away.)

The path which doubles back travels some 200 yards and then begins to angle down, more and more steeply, until it is too steep to traverse. At the bottom, the explorers can see and hear water. (They will never know what mysteries may lie here.)



1. To Cave of the Ombivoz: 400 yds.
2. To Smuggler's Cavern: 1,300 yds
3. To New Tunnel Opening: 300 yds
4. Downwards: 200 yds. flat, 100 yds. angled down, then full of water.

## All Together Now

Many GMs do not like splitting up their adventuring party . . . but the adventure, as written, can split the party into as many as three different groups. Some suggestions for avoiding this:

### Avoiding the Natives' Trap

The Ombivoz may hit only part of the team in Expanded Sector III, and be driven off by the remaining adventurers. Or a radio call may bring the group from Sector II and have them drive away the tribesmen. This would give the Sector II team something to do and, most likely, have the adventurers jumping at the slightest noise.

It would also be possible for the team in Sector III to radio the other groups when the panicked pilot bursts from the jungle. This would allow the other party members to converge on the scene, aborting the attack or insuring that everyone is captured.

If the entire party is to be captured, the GM should allow at least one NPC to escape to bring in reinforcements at the last moment, if the party is overwhelmed. A good candidate for the escapee might be the government agent, if he is present.

The natives might capture valued NPCs instead. This would make the adventurers the rescuers rather than the captives. Having the agent captured would get him out of the way, and might be an angle to have the agent owe them a favor.

### Avoiding the Ravens' Trap

Instead of being captured by the *Raven's* crew, the team in Sector IV could radio their discovery of the downed ship to the rest of the party. This would bring interaction with Captain Astor much earlier, and possibly provide additional problems if the agent is with the expedition.

The Ombivoz might interrupt the meeting between the expedition members and the smugglers, either capturing everyone — after someone sends a frantic call for assistance from the Valdaaw government — or capturing important NPCs. If everyone is captured, and if the adventurers are badly outnumbered, government troops can be brought in to even the score.

### Getting Everyone Into the Cave

Having finally blown an opening in the cave's obstruction, Se. Wright will radio the other teams to meet him at the cave. He is jubilant; he knows he is on the verge of proving his theory and wants witnesses.

This would allow the possibility of the party surprising the Ombivoz during their ceremony and rescuing the captive pilots. The adventurers might also be able to sneak up on the smugglers, perhaps holding them for the government officials or arranging a bribe to forget their existence. Or the Ombivoz might be waiting for them in the tunnels . . .

# 4

# THE ROUNDUP

## Blowguns

Type & Amt: see below. SS 10, Acc 1, ½D ST × 2, Max ST × 5, \$40, 2 lbs.

This is the big brother of the blowpipe, and uses the same skill. It is a long tube, about 1.5 to 2 yards long. At low TLs, it would be made of hollowed wood or bamboo; at higher TLs (TL6+), it would be aluminum or composite tubing. Most blowguns will have PD 2, DR 1.

The darts are sharp, thin needles, 4 to 6 inches long. Low TL darts are made of wood, while high-tech ones are usually steel. There will be some sort of fletching, like a tuft of fabric or plastic, to stabilize the dart. The needle-like darts will automatically penetrate any DR 2 armor. They will also penetrate "open-weave" armor such as chainmail, kevlar and monocrys because they will slip through the weave. In general, anything with a DR of 2 or less against *impaling* attacks will admit a dart.

Against small game (HT 3 or less), the darts do 1d impaling damage, because they are likely to hit a vital spot.

Against larger targets, the darts produce a wound which is painful but does no HT damage unless it hits the eye or the vitals. (However, the victim is always at -1 to DX and IQ for the next turn, as though he had taken a hit of damage.)

A dart that hits the eye or vitals will do 1d-2 (minimum 1) impaling damage. A dart that does more than 2 hits of damage to the eye will blind it. A dart in the vitals will always seep blood (see p. B130) if bleeding rules are used.

Most cultures that use blowguns will poison the darts for added effect. The poison will usually take full effect if any damage is done by the dart. This is what the Ombivoz do; see the next page.



If the GM does not wish to have his party split up, ignore this chapter and refer to the *All Together Now* sidebar on p. 19. Otherwise, read the following entries carefully. All these events should happen more or less simultaneously in terms of game-time.

Whatever happens to one group should take place out of hearing and sight of the others. For instance, adventurers captured by the natives won't wake up for at least an hour, so move to another group. Likewise, the group exploring the cave will start before the other team is captured by the *Raven's* crew. They will be out of touch with both groups, unaware of what has happened.

The best sequencing is to start with Se. Wright's group at the cave. The party near the *Raven* in Sector IV should be captured at almost the same time the pilot comes staggering out of the forest in Sector III. No one should know exactly what has happened to any other group. By late afternoon on the second day, an interesting stage has been set, with a possible three-way party split.

## Radio Silence

Captain Astor of the *Raven* has been monitoring the radio traffic of the expedition. His crew captured several members of the archaeological party, and the remaining groups have fallen silent. Although he doesn't care about what happens to these crazy grave-robbers, he can't afford to have them attempt an attack to regain their comrades. He selects four unhurt crew members and sends them to check the expedition's camp. See *Back to the Camp* on p. 22.

If the professor's party has left the cave, they are wondering why they can't get anyone else on the radio. Apprehensive and nervous, Se. Wright leads the way back to check the camp. See *Back to the Camp* on p. 22.

If Se. Wright's team has not left the cave, see *The Smugglers' Back Door* and *Into Another World* below.

## The Smugglers' Back Door

Se. Wright's party takes the tunnel that leads to the smugglers' bunker. They will not be visible to anyone within the bunker unless they enter the light. It is possible for an adventurer to get near the captives, if he stays behind the cover of the equipment stacks. Have anyone attempting this make a Stealth roll. On a failure, a crew member comes to investigate, possibly delivering another kick to a captive (1d-2 damage). On a critical failure, the intruder makes a spectacular blunder and alerts the *Raven's* crew to his presence.

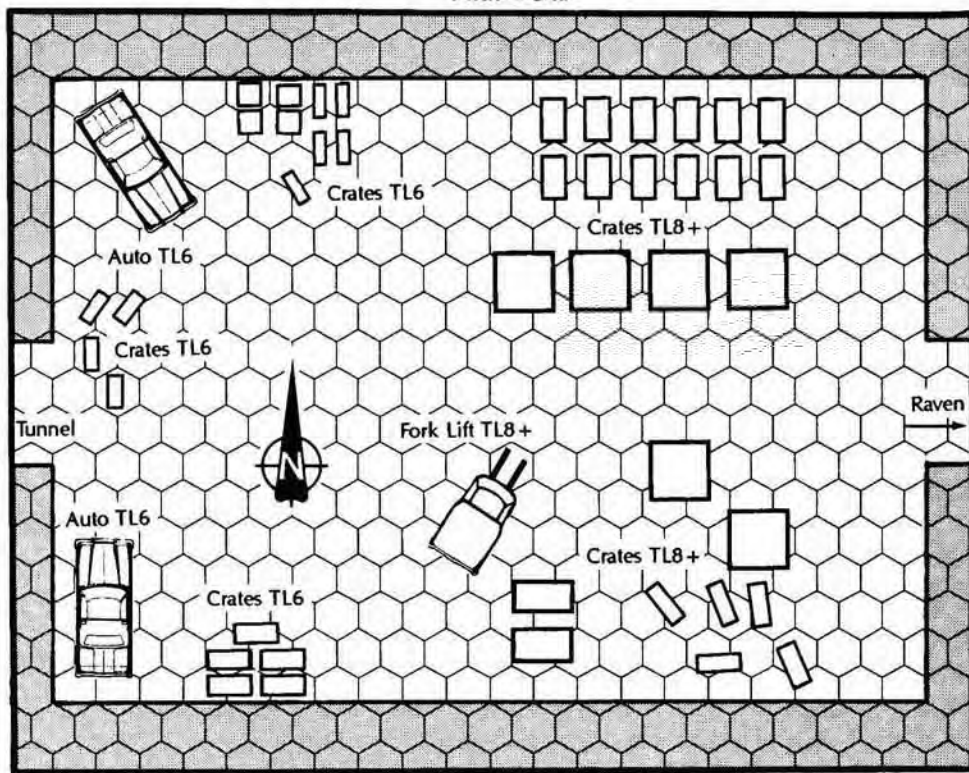
Even if the adventurer succeeds in getting to the captives, he is unlikely to have tools that will silently cut the cables. Getting such a tool from the *Raven* is out of the question. One of the seismic charges is not likely to cut the cable, but would probably blow apart whatever it is attached to. This would free the captives, but leave them encumbered by a sort of ball and chain. However, Se. Wright used the last of his charges removing part of the blockage. The remaining seismic charges are back at the main camp, which is due for a visit from the smuggler party.

## Into Another World

After spying on the smugglers, Se. Wright's party returns to the tunnels. When the intersection is reached, the Sage insists on checking the tunnel leading to the mechanical hum. They eventually reach a place where the roof has

## The Smuggler's Cave

1 hex = 5 ft.



collapsed, but the sound is very close. Anyone who clammers to the top of the rubble will find a few hand-sized openings. Through these, they can see the same scene described on p. 23, *In the Demon's Clutches*.

Have anyone viewing the scene for more than a minute make a Vision roll. If the roll is successful, he will see the captive expedition members. If the roll fails, tell him that the lighting is very poor and it is very hard to make out details. If no one else sees the captured expedition members, the sage will spot them.

Se. Wright is ecstatic. Muttering about incontrovertible proof for his theory, he raptly observes everything in the chamber. He dismisses the captives with a passing gesture. It's not that he doesn't care about their fate, but in his eyes, there are more important things at stake. He hasn't gone over the edge, however, and will become more reasonable in a few minutes. (Attempts at Fast-Talk or Diplomacy may hasten the professor's return to reality, as will threats of physical injury.) The GM should portray Se. Wright as someone whose professional dreams have finally come true after decades of work. Everything else fades in comparison.

It might be possible to let the captives know of their friends' presence, but this is at the discretion of the GM, and should require some cleverness. The rubble blocking the tunnel here is fairly loose, and a man-sized opening could be cleared in perhaps 15 minutes with tools, or immediately with an explosive charge. (Which would also obscure visibility with a lot of dust, both in the tunnel and in the area immediately outside in the main chamber.)

### Back to the Camp

The party from the cave heads back to camp, either openly or surreptitiously. At this point, they have seen some of their party in the clutches of painted natives, and others held prisoner by (apparently) ruthless smugglers. No doubt they will be arguing about their next move.

## The Ombivoz Drug: The Darts

The Ombivoz drug is derived from fungi collected from a chamber at the back of the temple. It must enter the bloodstream to work. The natives use it in varying dosages.

The amount contained on a standard blowgun dart will cause nausea and severe muscle cramps. Normal humans will lapse into unconsciousness within three to five minutes.

Added doses will increase the chance that the victim will fall unconscious, but it would require several dozen darts' worth of drug to kill someone.

Anyone injured by an Ombivoz dart must make a series of rolls to determine the drug's effect. If the victim pulls the dart out within one second of being hit, he gets a +1 on all HT rolls to avoid the effect of that dart.

First, the victim must make a HT-2 roll. On a regular success, he takes 3 Fatigue due to nausea and is at -2 DX for the next 30 combat turns (5 minutes) due to muscle cramping. On a critical success, he is wholly unaffected; perhaps the dart hit a fatty area which absorbed the poison.

Anyone who fails his HT-2 roll will take 1 Fatigue every 10 seconds for the next minute. He then rolls at HT-4. Any successful roll will stop the fatigue loss; on a failed roll he loses another Fatigue every ten seconds for another minute, and rolls at HT-6 . . . and so on, until he falls unconscious or makes a successful roll. (Example: Mat's HT is 13. He failed his initial HT-2 roll with a 12. One minute (6 Fatigue) later, he must roll a 9 or less to stop the Fatigue loss. After the second minute, he must roll a 7 or less; after the third minute, 5 or less.) If this roll succeeds, any additional Fatigue stops.

Superstim (if the party has it) is a partial antidote (see p. S69). It will add +2 to the roll for each dose taken.

Anyone hit by more than one dart must go through a separate sequence of rolls for each dart. However, do not start figuring the effect of a second dart unless the victim makes a successful HT roll to shake off the effect of the first one. Also, the severity of the muscle cramps is not increased by additional doses, though the time they last is measured from the last dart the victim takes. Multiple doses don't work faster — but they add up.

Anyone who falls unconscious makes a HT roll an hour later. A success allows the victim to regain consciousness. Another roll may be made every 5 minutes thereafter, at a cumulative +1 each time, until the victim awakens. Victims will be at -1 DX and HT for the next 24 hours.

## The Ombivoz Drug: The Splinters

To keep their captives cooperative, the Ombivoz use splinters with a dilute form of the drug. A very small dose (perhaps 1/10 the amount required to cause sickness) will produce a mild hallucinogenic effect characterized by heightened senses and euphoria. The victim becomes very susceptible to suggestion.

Anyone scratched by a drugged thorn or splinter must make a HT-1 roll. On a regular success, he will be at -1 to all Will rolls for the next 1d hours. On a critical success, he person is unaffected (but must roll again for any further splinters that scratch him). Anyone who fails his HT-1 roll will be at -4 to all Will rolls for the next 3d hours. Superstim (if the party has it) will counteract some of the effects. Affected characters will be at only -2 Will for the drug's duration.

Affected characters become very suggestible, and surroundings take on an intense, surreal quality. Ordinary items take on new significance, which is easily influenced by simple visual cues. A wiggling rope becomes a serpent and bright colors glow with a light of their own.

During the period of the drug's effect, a command cannot be resisted unless a Will-4 roll is made. If the command is contrary to the victim's nature or beliefs, the GM may allow a +1 bonus to the Will roll; if the command is violently opposed to the victim's beliefs, the bonus should be +2 or even +3.

If the Will roll is successful, the drugged character may resist the command as long as he concentrates on not obeying. Have him make another Will-4 roll, modified if appropriate, every minute he attempts to resist a repeated command. If he fails, he will obey the last command given to the best of his ability. If he succeeds, he continues to resist. Any injury inflicted while attempting to resist applies a penalty to the victim's Will-4 roll equal to the amount of damage done.

If a critical failure is rolled, especially if the command in question is violently opposed to the victim's nature, he will either become catatonic or Berserk (GM's choice). The victim will suffer from flashbacks for 2d months after the adventure; these flashbacks are triggered by stress, as per the Berserk character disadvantage.

Additional splinter-doses do not increase the hallucinogenic effect. Should anyone encounter more than seven splinters in quick succession, though, he is in danger of accumulating a dose large enough to knock him out. Make a HT-2 roll for the eighth, and each additional splinter. When a roll is failed, treat it as a single dart dose (above), and erase the Will-sapping effects.

When they return to the camp, they will find the four-man expedition from the *Raven* already there. They may choose to hide and watch, to negotiate or to attack (this last option would be unwise, as the Ravens are well armed). Se. Wright will say "Let's watch and see what they're up to, boys." If anyone insists on talking to the Ravens, the sage will permit it grudgingly: "All right, you can negotiate, but they're smugglers. Don't tell them where the rest of us are."

Those who enter the camp may talk to the Ravens; they react at -2 but are neither trigger-happy nor unreasonable, and may actually become friendly. The Ravens will report, by radio, what they have found.

The real threat is the Ombivoz. Minutes after Se. Wright's group returns, everyone in the camp is attacked by the drugged darts. The normal jungle sounds will be shattered by weapons fire and by radio calls to the *Raven* for assistance, calls which become more frantic as the native drugs take hold. In the end, the four Ravens, and anyone talking to them, fall and are carried away.

Anyone watching from the woods will be safe. The Ombivoz think of themselves as masters of stealth. In fact, they are sickly and not too alert. When they overran the camp, they assumed that the Ravens belonged there; it never occurred to them that someone would be spying on *them!*

They are human, but shorter and thinner than average, wearing loincloths and carrying only blowguns and wooden or stone knives. They seem reasonably strong, however, since two of them can carry a victim (lashed to a pole) without undue effort. There are a surprisingly large number of them, enough to carry all the new captives and maintain an adequate rear guard. They disappear silently into the jungle, unless attacked by the remaining party members.

## An Uneasy Alliance

At this point, half of the *Raven's* crew are captives of the Ombivoz. Some of the expedition are their captives as well. And of course, the professor has a site to investigate and findings to report.

It's time to negotiate. People must be rescued, one way or the other. The *Raven* is flyable, but dangerously understaffed. The explorers have knowledge of the hidden tunnels, but do not have the weapons to exploit the knowledge. Despite mutual suspicion, it should be obvious that it is in everyone's best interest to cooperate . . . for now. (If none of the players think of this, either Se. Wright will suggest it or Captain Astor will come looking for his search party.)

Negotiations could be handled by radio or face-to-face. Captain Astor is not thrilled with the idea, but sees little choice if he wants to get his crew back and his ship off the planet. His local contact never showed up (he was killed by government troops). All profits are out the airlock anyway because he can't reload the gear and still do a vertical takeoff. So the uneasy alliance begins. At least there is no shortage of weapons; the *Raven's* load was Gauss needlers and stun rifles (see p. B209 or S55).



# IN THE DEMON'S CLUTCHES

# 5

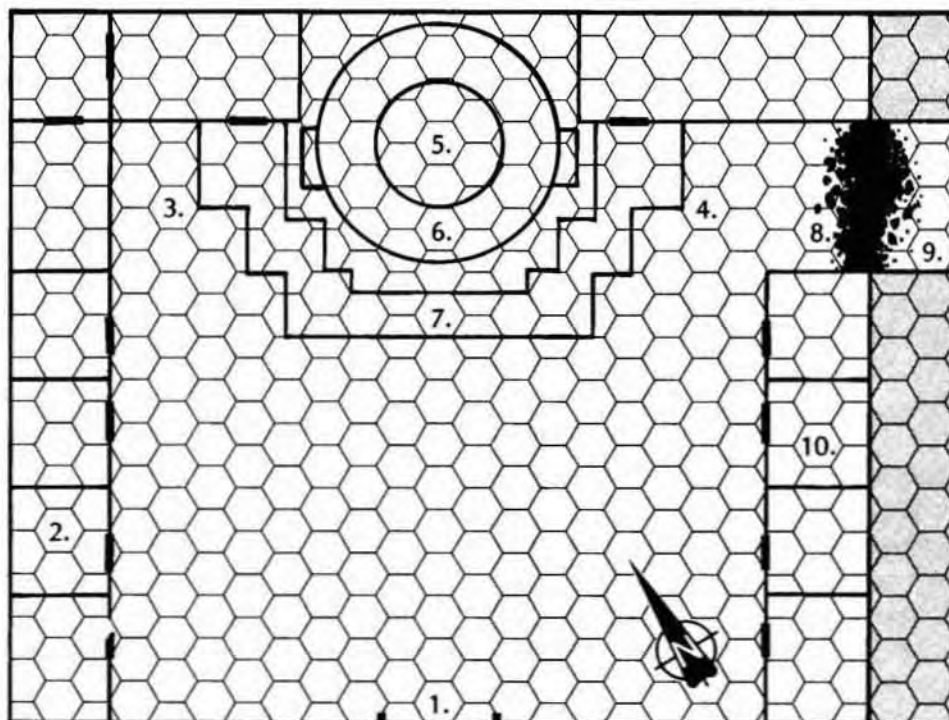
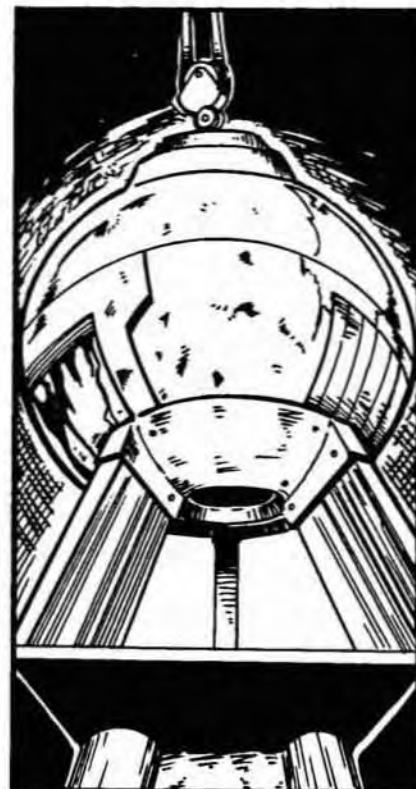
Those drugged by the darts will wake up in order of HT, over a period of half an hour. They are in a dimly-lit cave. The chamber is large, and they will have difficulty seeing things clearly due to the aftereffects of the drug. They have been stripped of everything except their pants and shirts. Jewelry, wristwatches, shoes, etc. are nowhere in sight.

The captives are not bound, but are in a holding cell. It is a small, square room with a grille of heavy wood over the doorway. There is a similar grille over the back wall, with wooden supports connecting it to the front grille. It seems purposeless. A closer examination of the wood reveals that it is covered with thorns, smeared with a substance like that on the darts. Each thorn has a light dose of the Ombivoz drug. See the sidebars on pp. 20-22.

As the prisoners' vision improves, the extent of the chamber can be seen. It is large, about 20 x 25 yards, with a ceiling 10 yards high. The chamber was obviously dug by high-tech equipment.

One wall is dominated by a huge altar, with large, ornate low-tech trappings that must have required years to finish. But the altar pales beside the object it frames. A polished sphere of silver metal, five yards in diameter, rests on pivoting supports that look strong enough to cradle a battleship. Although no source of external power is visible, it transmits a faint vibration that can be felt through the wall. The top of the sphere fits like a tight lid and is hooked to a crude, massive block and tackle arrangement. Smaller, and more ominous, is the other block and tackle, with a number of wooden crosses and baskets stacked to one side.

A large opening in the wall opposite the altar can be seen from the cell; it appears to be a tunnel. Shifting light patterns indicate that it leads aboveground. Various smaller openings with wooden grilles across them can be seen on the other side of the cavern.



## *The Ombivoz Cavern*

1 hex = 1 yard

1. Cave Mouth
2. Holding Cell I
3. Crane I (Lid)
4. Crane 2 (Sacrifice)
5. Lid
6. Reactor Sphere
7. Altar
8. Blockage
9. Tunnel
10. Holding Cell 2



Their captors are human, shorter than average, and not very energetic looking. Most are fairly young, and have either shaved heads or hair only in irregular tufts. The men and women are identically dressed, and are very serious about polishing the altar and its trappings. They chant in a very corrupted form of Standard, but will not communicate with the captives. Anyone succeeding with an IQ-2 roll will be able to make out bits and pieces of their chanting: "demon," "hungry one," "devour," "sacrifice."

## Let The Ceremonies Begin

Later in the afternoon, judging by the light in the tunnel, new arrivals are dragged in (members of the *Raven's* search party). The door of the adventurer's cell is opened while a dozen tribesmen with blowguns and crude spears stand ready. The unconscious prisoners are dumped on the floor near the door, and all is as it was before.

Several hours pass. The sudden night that falls on the jungle is complete, and there is nothing visible towards the the mouth of the artificial cavern except perhaps the flickering glow of torchlight. The new occupants of the cell have had time to get acquainted with the other prisoners. Negotiations may be taking place; that is, "We help each other get out, and then we forget all about each other, right?" The effects of the narcotic that knocked them out have worn off, although they will be at -1 DX and HT for the next 24 hours. Dinner is served, a thick sort of vegetable paste which actually doesn't smell too bad.

Any suspicions that their food and water are drugged become irrelevant a half-hour later. Six priests arrive at their cell. They are dressed more spectacularly than the others, with bizarre face paint and ragged tufts of hair. Now that they are close, the captives can see that most of them have large sores on their bodies and blackened fingernails.

Anyone with either the Diagnosis or Physician skill, or a professional skill where contact with radioactives is common, may make a roll to discover the cause of the natives' appearance. Any successful roll will indicate that they are victims of radiation poisoning. Once this has been discovered, anyone succeeding with an IQ roll may realize that a sudden, high dose of radiation would account for the strange behavior and sudden death of the pilot encountered earlier.

The priests begin pulling the wooden supports at the front of the cell. The thorny back wall advances, pinning the captives between the ever-narrowing walls. When the walls are nearly touching the party, they stop. The priests bring forward small spears, tipped not with blades, but with half a dozen splinters of wood. They thrust these through the thorn walls into the flesh of the prisoners, who soon feel the effect of the drug (see pp. 20-22).

Before long, everything seems to move very slowly, and becomes extremely interesting to the drugged characters. The entire Ombivoz tribe filters into the cavern, forming concentric rings around the shining, glowing, mystically bright sphere at the center of the altar. The drums begin, a thundering heartbeat, the life pulse of a huge and powerful being, one whom they may soon meet . . .

## To The Rescue

### *If the Explorers Have Joined the Raven's Crew:*

If Se. Wright's team did not discover which tunnel led to the Ombivoz cavern, Capt. Astor will argue for following the trail left by the tribesmen when they took the *Raven's* search party. Se. Wright will reluctantly agree, though he still believes that the tunnels hold the answer.

If Se. Wright's team found the tunnel which leads to the Ombivoz cavern, they will use the Precursor tunnels, guided by the advanced scanners from the



*Raven*, to reach their comrades. Anyone outfitted with a radiation meter (one of the smugglers, if not one of the expedition) will hear it suddenly peak, chattering madly for a few seconds before dying down to a safe, but still abnormally-high level. The source is ahead of them.

If the adventurers think of it, a forklift or other loading vehicle may be obtained from the smuggler's bunker, for faster travel down the tunnel.

### ***If the Explorers Are Separate from the Raven's Crew:***

If the GM feels that the adventurers are strong enough to face the Ombivoz by themselves, the smugglers won't appear at the cave. If the expedition members need help, or are losing badly, have the *Raven's* crew charge to the rescue.

## **The Demon**

The prisoners, led by the painted priests, join the ceremony. More wildly-painted tribesmen work the block and tackle attached to the huge lid of the glowing sphere. It slowly opens and is pivoted to one side. The drugged prisoners experience something like this:

*There is a hissing, like an angry animal, and the cavern is bathed in a blue radiance emanating from the opened sphere and reflected from the pitted ceiling. An awe-filled cry of "Deeemmmooonnn" fills the air. Vaporuous tendrils slither down the sphere's side like misty snakes. Glittering claw tips rake the sphere's edge, sending a shower of bright metal flakes down upon the altar.*

*The warriors, fantastic mutants of jungle animals and men, motion you towards the altar with spears that snap and hiss with the heads of serpents. You obey. Once there, you feel very small in the presence of the demon, whose power you can feel in the soles of your feet and see in the glow of his aura. A fantastic priestess approaches you, her long robe flowing behind her. Her eyes are red, very red, like glowing red coals. She stops before you.*

*Her fingers stroke your face and you are anointed. One of your friends takes a jungle cat's stripes, and changes. Another takes iridescent snake scales, and he too changes. She names you also a beast of the jungle, a name full of power, and you are transformed.*

*The offerings begin. All your possessions are placed in a small basket which rises slowly into the air as though summoned. It moves over the mouth of the demon and slowly lowers. The demon hisses and spits, his impatience and anger palpable. The priestess utters a command and the basket disappears in a bright flash. The demon roars his acceptance of the sacrifice.*

*The tribesmen prostrate themselves before the altar, worshipping He Who is ever hungry, Who bathes us with His light. The demon is not content with the offering. He wants more. A distant part of you feels there is something wrong here, but it is drowned by the hungry wail of an angry god . . .*

### **The Rescuers Arrive**

The rescuing party may see this scene either from the tunnels, or from the entrance of the cavern. Either way, they are not noticed; none of the Ombivoz dares take his eyes away from the demon sphere.

The beat of drums can be felt through the tunnel's floor, an incessant, demanding throb. There are about 200 tribesmen kneeling around what looks like some sort of reactor vessel, with high-energy radiation scattering off the ceiling around it. This is not lethal, but is certainly not a healthy exposure (five to eight rads/hr, depending on proximity to the opening).

A group of ceremonial guards, wildly-painted and armed with simple weapons, stands before a primitive altar erected in front of the sphere. A tall, ancient-looking woman, her head covered with random tufts of hair, stands in the



### *The True "Demon"*

The sphere is actually a TL 14+ Precursor matter convertor. It was originally intended to power the city that the jungle now covers. The ancestors of the Ombivoz discovered it, and other wonders, in the caverns. A helmet with a taped telepathic message gave instructions in its use. The Ombivoz understood only that the sphere was powerful, and that they should feed it . . . and generations of savages have fed the "demon." Unfortunately, all the other high-tech wonders have been sacrificed long ago, including the "magic helmet," and the constant exposure to radiation has made the whole tribe unhealthy.

place of honor at the altar's center. She is dressed in a simple shift, embroidered with a stylized design.

The captives, obviously under the influence of some sort of drug, are led before the hag. They walk slowly and show little awareness and no resistance. They stand motionless while she puts some sort of paint on their faces. Although one or two stiffen, they gaze towards the shining vessel with what appears to be unbridled awe.

Then, what appears to be the adventurers' gear is loaded into a crude wicker basket and hauled to the top of the vessel by a small block and tackle. It is lowered within, causing a crackle of radiation and a flash of blue fire. The rope is pulled up, the frayed end still smoking. It is maneuvered over to what looks like a simple wooden cross and the end tied to a loop in the top. The priestess motions to one of the captives, who dutifully walks over to the cross and allows himself to be tied on . . .



## The Grand Finale

It is assumed that the rescuers are not standing idly by, but are preparing to make some sort of entrance and save their friends. Pick one unlucky prisoner to be tied to the cross. The ceremony will get this far before anyone is able to make an entrance. It can go further, if the GM feels that dramatic effect requires the death of an NPC . . .

*Your companion goes first, the place of honor. He goes to become one with the Hungry One. He stands with his arms spread and rises into the air. He moves over the One and looks directly upon His brilliance. And screams.*

*Claws tear at him as he is slowly sucked into the demon's gaping maw. He struggles, swinging from side to side, but slowly slips down. He grabs the edge of the demon's mouth, screaming even louder as smoke pours from his ruined hands, but he does not let go. His flesh is weaker than his will and he falls suddenly. The demon roars, spraying the temple's ceiling with the carbonized life's blood of the sacrifice. HE is not satisfied. HE is still hungry.*

*You are next. The priestess commands you, and you cannot resist. Your spirit cries out in terror as your legs carry you forward . . .*

The temple map is on p. 23. There are 2d ceremonial guards, armed with stone-tipped spears. Another 2d tribesmen are armed with blowguns. The six priests are armed only with stone knives. The other tribesmen will attempt to flee out the main entrance the instant the attack begins. The priestess will disappear behind the altar before anyone can intercept her.

This is not much of a match. The rescuers should be able to make quick work of the defenders, all of whom will fight fanatically to the death. Anyone hit by darts will still be able to fight until unconscious. Even the drugged captives can fight, if prompted by their rescuers to do something.

The spell upon you is broken, as the earth itself cries denial. A band of warriors bursts through the mists, laying waste to the Abomination's priests. One of the avenging angels cries your name, speaking the Word to unbind your will. "FIGHT!" he commands. You grab a weapon; in your hands, it becomes a shaft of light, a tool of righteousness to slay all that stand in your path. You remember the Word, and nothing else. Fight! Fight! *Fight!*



A captive commanded to fight is now Berserk (see p. B31), attacking tribesmen until commanded to stop. Ranged weapons will be of little use, as the chance of hitting a friend is very high. Projectiles will ricochet off the walls, losing half their damage in the bounce, and hitting someone (pick randomly) on a roll of 6 on 1d. Energy weapons will only bounce off the shining sphere, with a similar ricochet chance, but they will not lose any damage in the ricochet.

If not outnumbered, the remaining Ombivoz are most certainly outmatched.

### Ombivoz Priestess

ST 7, DX 9, IQ 13, HT 7.

Speed 4; Move 4.

Advantages: Clerical Investment; Status 3; Will +2.

Disadvantages: Age; Fanatic; Megalomania; Primitive.

Skills: Area Knowledge-12; Detect Lies-13; Knife-10; Leadership-16; Performance-15; Theology-15; possibly others!

Possessions: ceremonial vestments (DR 1); decorated stone knife.

Haiiila has ruled the Ombivoz for three generations. Her health has long since failed, and only her mighty will keeps her going. She was once strong and beautiful; now she is quite mad. For many years she was content to take sacrifice-slaves from the other native tribes, while leaving the fearsome sky-people alone. But several recent "portents in the sky" (aerial battles between smugglers and Valdaaw fighters) convinced her that the sky-people were foes of the Demon, and she has determined to catch as many as she can.

A clever explorer could negotiate or Fast-Talk Haiiila, but only on a great success should the GM feel any obligation to deflect the adventure from its probable tragic conclusion. The old priestess is thoroughly insane, and her people obey her every whim.

### Ombivoz Priest

ST 8, DX 10, IQ 12, HT 8.

Speed 4.5; Move 4.

Advantage: Clerical Investment; Status 2.

Disadvantages: Berserk; Fanatic; Primitive.

Skills: Knife-12; Leadership-15; Performance-14; Theology-14.

Possessions: Ceremonial vestments (DR 1); stone knife.

The loyal servants of the Hungry One. By the time they have gone through the training to become a priest, most have taken an eventually-lethal dose of radiation from the "demon" they worship. Few live past the age of 35. Typical signs are poor health, loss of hair, blackened or missing fingernails and chronic tumors or lesions.

### Ombivoz Guard

ST 13, DX 15, IQ 11, HT 13.

Speed 6.5; Move 6.

Advantages: Peripheral Vision; Toughness (DR 1).

Disadvantages: Berserk; Fanatic; Primitive.

Skills: Area Knowledge-14; Blowgun-20; Spear-16; Stealth-20; Survival (Jungle)-15.

Possessions: Blowgun and drugged darts; primitive spear.

Unquestioningly loyal, fanatic to-the-death guard.

But they have one last trick up their sleeves. When all seems lost, the high priestess pulls a hidden lever on the altar. There is a very loud “Ker-chunk!,” and slowly, almost imperceptibly, the shining vessel begins to pivot, turning the opening towards the ground. Perhaps she perishes in a hail of gunfire, but she completes this, her last action.

*Just when you are victorious, when the last of the foul Beast-men have been slain, you realize that the evil Priestess has escaped. No, she is on the altar with the Rod of Command.*

*You turn, and hurl your spear. It flies with the power of the holy and buries itself in her heart. But not soon enough. With her last breath, she speaks the words of Doom in a voice of thunder. The demon is released.*

*He slowly turns towards you, his light nearly blinding you. There is something you must do, but your will is bound again in the dying witch’s sorcery . . .*

Have anyone not engaged in fighting make a Vision roll to notice the tilting sphere. Anyone with Danger Sense may also have a definite sense of impending disaster. If none of the party notices their danger, someone (perhaps Se. Wright, who is not a fighter) will see the priestess’ last act. Anyone with a radscanner (see p. S47) will also hear it chatter wildly as the sphere rotates downward, unleashing a more intense field of radiation (150 rads/minute).

The field will take nearly a minute before it reaches a level low enough to release whatever is contained within. The release lever appears to only work one way, and there is no other lever in sight. The only thing left to do is . . . run!

### Disaster Unleashed

Any explorers who stay to study the falling sphere will be annihilated. If anyone wants to stay, an NPC (Se. Wright or one of the crewmen) will shout and try to drag them away. For purposes of the story, assume that anyone who escapes the cavern, and keeps running, will live. Thus, no survivors will see the dramatic last moments of the “demon.” But they will all *hear* them.

As the vessel slowly tips, the self-generated containment field shorts out dramatically, ripping the sphere from its mounts. The uncontained matter-converter unit slams into the floor . . .

The initial blast crumbles a section of the cavern’s ceiling, which impacts the radiation corona around the unit. It is still in the vessel, creating a jet of flame which is directed like a cannon, destroying the cavern entrance, and obliterating the entire Ombivoz nation and a path of forest nearly a mile long.

The matter converter, now free of its vessel, continues to digest rock, and begins to sink into the crust of the planet itself. But its designers didn’t intend it as a world-destroyer. It is less than a half-mile underground when it overloads and explodes, creating a medium-sized earthquake and sending a jet of rubble into the air. Aftershocks ripple through the continent.

*At the last second, one of the avenging angels tears you from the grip of the demon, who howls in rage. You escape his wrath. The demon howls in fury, his massive fists beating against the earth as he tries to dig you out. But you are too fast for him, and his rage strikes blindly.*

*At last, all is well. You have found Paradise. There, the angelic hosts tend to your injuries, and you rest, rest, rest . . .*

“Is he going to make it?”

“Sure, all the injuries are minor. However, he’s really hyped up on something. It could be days before he comes down.”

“What was it? He’s been babbling since we found him.”

“Don’t know, but I wish we had some. There’d be a hell of a market for it off-planet.”



# AFTERMATH

# 6

Miraculously, the characters are not blasted into oblivion. The Ceebolt Space Command will send fighters to investigate the explosions; it looks as if the planet is under bombardment with atomic weapons, but absolutely nothing can be detected as the cause. The Valdaaw will think they are under attack.

If the Valdaaw agent has survived, he will radio for immediate pickup. The adventurers may leave with the government officials, spending days in interrogation and debriefing. If the agent is not with the party, the adventurers may be picked up by investigators from either Valdaaw or Ceebolt, or by Universitat personnel. Wright, of course, is returning in triumph!

The party may also gain transport from Captain Astor for their help rescuing his crew members. He will offer them a berth on the *Raven*, if they are interested; he is short-handed after the crash and likes their style. Or he will offer to arrange for transport back to Anson after docking with the *Raven's* mother ship. Captain Astor plans to head out-system as fast as possible.

If the GM wishes one final bit of combat, the *Raven* will have to fight its way past two or three space fighters as it reaches orbit.

## Rewards

Sage Wright is blunt and egotistical, but basically a very good man. Anyone who did not cause too much trouble for him will be remembered as a loyal companion in adversity (the Sage feels a bit guilty, because he was looking for ignorant pack mules, and expected no serious danger). This won't translate directly into money, but adventurers could find it useful to have Ceebolt Vree Universitat owe them a favor. And a return trip is possible — see below.

Wright won't mind if the PCs sell their story. Off-planet news crews will pay up to \$10,000 for exclusives, depending on how fresh it is, and how uncommon Precursor finds are.

And perhaps the stone spear points of the elite guards were actually something a bit more valuable, or the altar had precious stones set into it. (The value of anything found is entirely up to the GM.)

## Consequences

Calculate radiation exposure for each survivor (or simply give everyone 20 rads).

Anyone who was drugged by the Ombivoz darts may acquire a quirk, or even a delusion. This could involve persecution by the Precursors, or just fear that a gigantic blue-glowing demon is hungrily stalking . . .

## Sequels: Back To The Jungle

If the party stays on Anson, they can keep busy. Se. Wright will certainly want to return to see if any of the Precursor site survived. Of course, the new expedition will be no secret, and will therefore be infiltrated by all sides. Therefore, the Sage will want someone along whom he can trust!

It is also possible that the biology department of the Universitat, and the various Anson intelligence services, will send groups to investigate the mind-altering drug. Even if the Ombivoz are gone, other tribes might know the secret! The PCs will be in demand as "experts" on the tribesmen.

Other possible adventures are suggested on p. 4. Between smuggling and political maneuvering, there is a lot happening on this backwater planet.



### *Smuggling and the Intelligence Corps*

On Anson, the smugglers' deadliest enemies are the intelligence corps of the various nations. The spaceport precautions make life difficult for amateurs, the people who want to make some quick credits by pawning off some TL9 wristwatches or pocket computers. However, it doesn't do much to stop the clever, intelligent professional smugglers. For this, the Ceebolt government uses its intelligence services.

Both internal and external intelligence services have jurisdiction over the spaceport, since it's within the country's borders, and deals with off-planet affairs. (Internal intelligence is handled by the National Police Detective Service, a civilian agency of the Ministry of Justice. External intelligence is the province of the Ministry of War; the agents are Army or Space Command officers.) The agents are highly motivated and relatively immune to corruption. This is a high-prestige job which allows easy access to high-tech equipment that is prohibited almost everywhere else.

The security forces have access to the best technology available, usually TL10, with a scattering of TL9 or 11 items in various fields. Technically, they are subject to the same penalties as everyone else once outside the spaceport, but enforcement is lax for government agents.

The two Ceebolt agencies maintain a very competitive relationship, and don't always know what the other group is up to. Rumors say that the two groups spent a year involved in separate *sting* operations, and the only individuals arrested were undercover operatives of the other agency. Another rumor is that a gun battle between operatives of both agencies prevented the capture of an important smuggler — neither agency wanted the other side to get credit for the arrest. Both rumors are true, but hard to prove.

Despite this, both groups are extremely competent. If adventurers wishing to smuggle goods out of the spaceport check first with off-planet spacers rather than the locals (Carousing or Diplomacy rolls), they will find that most of the black-market operations are elaborate entrapment schemes. Those who get snared have their goods confiscated and spend a month filling blast craters on the salt plains of the spaceport. This penalty might be a reason why the party is stranded on Anson.

Smuggling is a very lucrative business on Anson. While the Ceebolt government maintains a very strong anti-smuggling posture, the Thaldar nations desperately want high-tech military equipment. Many Ceebolt industries are willing to risk smuggling in off-planet technology to duplicate — to prevent government-contracted competitors from gaining too great an edge.

High-tech gizmos are also trendy among the rich and the elite, which provides a ready outlet for small items like pocket communicators, wristcomps and off-planet hallucinogens or entertainment drugs.

Most smuggling operations are run from off-planet, where these high-tech items are easy to procure and the responsible individuals are free from Ceebolt prosecution. On Anson, several underground networks distribute the merchandise and funnel payments off-planet. Since the Ceebolt anti-smuggling efforts are fairly successful, only a few operations maintain any consistent pipeline to and from the planet. As more people discover the potential profits, the problem will only increase. Whether the Ceebolt law-enforcement and intelligence services can keep up remains to be seen.

### **Through The Fence**

One way to get something on planet is through the spaceport, but this path is full of pitfalls. Travelers may do as they like within the spaceport, moving about, buying or selling high-tech items, making business deals, etc., but none of this may leave the spaceport. The entire perimeter of the perfectly flat spaceport is like a prison wall. A chain-link fence topped with concertina wire provides a visual barrier to stop the ignorant. Just past this is a minefield and a high-powered laser fence (TL10). Beyond that, another chain-link fence and more concertina wire completes the barrier. Breaching any of these defenses is likely to bring swarms of vehicles and helicopters.

The only vehicle gate in the barrier is at the main terminal. There isn't much hindrance entering, but departing vehicles are subjected to a full search and TL10 scan. The driver and passengers must disembark and be searched individually. Companies that have service contracts with the spaceport (food, drink and so on) usually modify their vehicles to bare skeletons, with no place to hide anything. This gets them past Customs much more quickly.

In addition, all persons leaving the spaceport must repeat and sign the following statement:

*"I declare that I have no prohibited technology in my possession, and I am currently not engaged in, nor do I intend to engage in, any activity which might cause prohibited technology to be brought to any location outside the Anson Spaceport."*

A TL10 scanner analyzes the behavior and vital signs of the person signing the statement, to ensure an honest declaration. The person's ID and holographic image is also checked against galactic criminal files. If a declarer is lying, he must make a Will roll in order to be passed through as "clean." Assess penalties to the Will roll equal to his reputation. For instance, anyone with a record as a con artist should make the Will roll at -2. The disadvantages of Honesty, Truthfulness or Compulsive Lying may either be a boon or a hindrance here. Anyone who fails the roll is very thoroughly searched, and not allowed to leave the spaceport that day. Another attempt may be made the next day, with a cumulative -1 per attempt.

The GM should note that the statement makes no reference to past attempts to smuggle items out, so anyone who has already smuggled an item outside the spaceport is technically telling the truth if he signs the statement. However, for lie detection purposes, this only counts if the player realizes this loophole and wants to exploit it.

It is possible to conceal small items, as long as they are not energy intensive. For instance, a good liar could carry several holdout lasers, if the power cells were removed and the lasers were disguised.

To smuggle in quantity, you need to know the right people to contact. It is highly unlikely that a visitor would know this information, unless it is specifically part of his background — like a special assignment by a Patron.





## In By Air



### The “Official” Smugglers

The national security agencies are allowed certain high-tech items. This equipment gives a very effective edge over the lower-tech Thaldar nations and local subversive groups. However, the quota is very low — far lower than the espionage and enforcement arms would like.

Therefore, Ceebolt intelligence has its own super-secret smuggling operation. Most of these goods come right through the Ceebolt spaceport! The very highest officials know about it and look the other way. Many lower officials suspect, but don't know. Some, either for political or ethical reasons, would like to catch the security organizations breaking their own rules!

If the party stays on Anson, the GM could involve them in an “official” smuggling scheme, or in an attempt to infiltrate such a scheme.

Of course, each of the Thaldar intelligence organizations does its best to bring in high-tech gear, too! Since they don't have their own spaceports, they usually just try to slip ships past the Ceebolt Space Command, just like any other smuggler. Occasionally, when a ship gets past the starfighters and is reported “destroyed by atmospheric craft,” it was really just escorted to a safe landing by the Thaldar fighter jockeys. The Thaldar nations are as desperate to get their own high-tech as they are to keep others from getting it. Where Ceebolt smuggles in detection equipment and hideaway weapons, the Thaldars bring in blast rifles and smart bombs.

Offworlders with their own ship might be recruited as part of such a scheme.

The other way to smuggle something onto the planet is to bring a ship down from orbit, avoiding the space defenses and Ceebolt Air Force, which has orders to shoot on sight. Ceebolt has TL8 space stations and patrol craft, mostly refitted with TL9 fusion plants. Some were acquired from planets which would otherwise have junked them. Then copies were built locally. These *new* TL8-9 designs make up the bulk of the Anson space navy, which is limited to several fighter squadrons and a half-dozen destroyer-class ships. They also have large number of TL7 ships, with TL8 sensors, built locally from off-planet plans. The Anson space sensors are of antiquated design, but they are still adequate to spot most ships as far as 10AU.

If an unannounced ship appears in Anson space, space and air fighters are immediately dispatched. If orders to surrender are not obeyed immediately, the standing orders are to shoot the ship down. Most fighters are armed with a dual load of conventional missiles and atomic warheads. Conventional warheads are generally used to prevent damage to the planet and its atmosphere. In space, whether or not the atomic warheads are used depends on the situation.

### Smuggler Tactics

Smuggling ships are usually carried in-system by a larger vessel which has legitimate business on Anson. Smuggling ships are small — rarely more than 100 tons — and are equipped with the best anti-detection gear and drives possible, usually reactionless drives.

A major smuggling run is usually timed to coincide with heavy meteor showers. The entry path mimics a meteor path. Once near the ground, the pilot fires up the motors and levels off, trying to stay below the radar horizon. Engine ignition usually does not occur until the ship is below cloud level because the heat flare from the drives is a sure signal of smuggling to orbiting scanners. More than one stealth ship is scattered across the Anson landscape because the pilot started his engines a second too late. Once in stable flight, the smugglers should be near their landing zone. They burn a landing pad with the engines, land, cover the ship with camouflage/antiradar netting, and unload their cargo.

### Delivery And Payment

The most lucrative markets on Anson are the Thaldar nations. Smugglers can sell TL8 weapons to them at up to double the normal price. The weapons are usually purchased from other planets who are upgrading their armament. Because the weapons are used, the smugglers are able to get them at a discount, so their net profit is even larger. Crafty smugglers also bring a small amount of TL9 or 10 equipment, as a special *gift* to the local leader making the purchase. They hope that these items will whet the local's appetite for newer, more expensive, merchandise. Of course, the rest of the goods are generally marked up to compensate for the cost of the higher-tech items, but *gifts* are always good for business.

Smugglers are paid in precious metals, gems, untraceable cash or other compact items which can be sold elsewhere for a profit.

Immediately after payment, the smugglers fire up and blast into space, counting on their oversized engines and reduced load to get past the orbital defenses.

Smuggling is a risky proposition, but the potential profits are high. A good run may bring in more than \$250,000 per ton of cargo. This makes a 100-ton run worth over \$25,000,000, or even more if a lucrative cargo is brought back for sale elsewhere.

# Welcome, Star Travelers!

Welcome to quaint, old-fashioned Anson, where life proceeds at the leisurely and graceful pace of the 20th century. Forget the rush and bustle of spacefaring civilization and learn the simple pleasures of:

Organized crime and guerrilla warfare in the steaming jungle  
Back-breaking labor for starvation wages  
Bugs, beasts and slimy critters in their native habitat . . . and your bedding  
Delightful, primitive religious rites (with a special place reserved for you!)

And don't worry about your ultra-tech gadgets and luxuries. The polite and efficient customs officers will return them in perfect condition—if you get back.



*Stardemon* is a *GURPS Space* adventure for 4–8 players

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