



**THE LAST  
PARSEC  
SCIENTORIUM**

# THE LAST PARSEC SCIENTORIUM

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# CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTERS

Known space is vast.

Humans and their alien counterparts occupy thousands upon thousands of worlds, lit by all manner of stars. Travel the space lanes in any direction as far as you can go and you will find someone who has come just as far from the opposite direction. Known space spans a volume so enormous that even the number of nebulae and superclusters it contains cannot be accurately determined. Where does civilized space end? How many worlds are there, with how many intelligent creatures on them? None can say.

Megacorporations like JumpCorp cannot even define their own enormity accurately. Galactic business' natural ebb and flow might sway their ranks by several million in only one standard day. They employ whole planets of accountants and moon-sized computers all trying to measure themselves, when in the final analysis the answer is more a matter of philosophy than census.

Less comprehensible still is the vastness of time. Galactic time's passage defies understanding by beings evolved to scratch out simple survival from moment to moment. Living experience is lost generation to generation, civilization to civilization, epoch upon epoch, in the time galaxies barely spin once.

Yet despite all this, most humans claim to know much of the universe. In fact, they know nearly nothing. But there is an enormous amount of information to be had, for the few who know where to look...

## SHADOWS OF AN ANCIENT EMPIRE

The galaxy has known many civilizations, piled one upon another over thousands of centuries. The oldest of these have been erased as their stars and planets were obliterated to atoms in novae and consumed by singularities. One more recent civilization, however, occupied this entire galaxy for a period of a half-million years. In some places, hidden beyond pulsars or obscured by remote

pockets of dark matter, its traces remain, but for the most part this Ancient Empire is naught but vaporous memories.

In its time, this empire encompassed hundreds of starfaring races reaching to the tips of each spiral arm. It achieved knowledge and science beyond anything yet discovered by the galaxy's present occupants. To call it an empire is a misnomer, since over its span it had any number of governments and monarchs. But for millennia it was the unifying force that held sway over every living world. Why it vanished is a mystery. What exists today is built unknowingly upon its ruins.

What a civilization that must have been...

## A VAPOROUS AWARENESS

Although most scholars realize the galaxy has played host to uncounted previous civilizations, few pursue them beyond mere intellectual awareness. Practical application falls to the archaeologists, but plumbing the depths of time to unearth evidence or artifacts from the Ancient Empire has never been undertaken in an organized manner. That sort of knowledge dances only fleetingly along the halls of colleges and universities, dismissed as quackery by tenured fools.

In the modern day, the Ancient Empire does not reveal itself easily. It exists only in vague rumors and stories, in dreams of adventurous madmen and the clinically disturbed. Almost no one speaks of it openly, even if they know of its existence, any more than one would share details of ghosts or specters.

A scant handful of people know of the Ancient Empire, and of these fewer still dare believe there exists a repository of all that civilization's enormous knowledge. But there does, and it awaits explorers brave enough to journey to its fabled location.

## JUMPCORP EXPLORERS

Scientorium is a unique artifact just beyond the edge of the Known Worlds. Few know of its existence, and fewer still have ever visited it in the present epoch. Because of its mind-obscuring super technology, Scientorium defies all mundane efforts to seek it out. Travelers are left befuddled, navigation systems wiped clean, memories jostled. Space skills are essential to overcome these unnatural obstacles and find the way to the Library of Scientorium's star system.

The JumpCorp team is uniquely privileged to wander its corridors and tap into its wealth of historical data and experience. So there's no brochure, no guide, and no trid travel documentary that one can watch to prepare for what the ancient library may have to offer. Newcomers are left to their own devices.

The Library of Scientorium is a virtually abandoned, isolated space station. Aside from the Librarians who prefer to remain secluded, the place is empty of other sentient life. Many of its components are no longer functional, requiring investigation and activation, while those still working offer few instructions as to their proper use, forcing novices to puzzle them out or resort to trial and error.

Scientorium enforces unwritten rules as well, punishing offenders with security systems when violations are noted. Delving into the Experience Chambers runs the risk of all the dangers there, distanced in time and space, as well as those that might follow the explorers back through to the present universe. Lasers and armor may be the unwary library visitor's last resort.

### SAMPLE CHARACTERS

**Artificial Being:** Perhaps no character is more at home in the abandoned corridors of Scientorium than an artificial being. There is a kinship there, an understanding of semi-life and electronic consciousness. Systems that a living explorer might find baffling may be more easily understood by a cybernetic mind.

**Pilot:** Scientorium is on no star chart, and most people have never made a blind jump to an unknown star system halfway across the galaxy. Pilots know the risks of deep space journeys and are prepared for the consequences.

**Psychic:** A finely tuned mind uses discipline to control its processes, to defy tampering or at least warn the consciousness when such tampering is afoot. Such a person seeking Scientorium could help pull away the station's shroud.

**Science Officer:** Every system warrants examination. The Librarians and their minions, too, deserve scrutiny. The library presents many scientific mysteries: its age, its origins, its creators, its purpose. These and a plethora of other data might be laid bare.

**Security:** While the technically skilled and curious crawl about Scientorium like excited children, its many dangers must be guarded against diligently. Who knows what threats lurk in the station's corridors?

**Scout:** Once inside the station's seemingly endless corridors, someone needs to lead the way. Stealth and observation are vital to the exploration of the library's potential.

**Team Leader:** In many ways, the ancient library's discovery and exploration is like any other JumpCorp mission. The team leader must keep the group together and alive, maintain everyone's focus, and watch out for details that might be beneficial to the company. Investigate and report.



# CHAPTER TWO: A GALACTIC WONDER

*If you're a player, read no further. Everything from here on out is solely the province of the Game Master.*

## SCIENTORIUM

Once, the Ancient Empire collected its total knowledge into an enormous network of libraries that dotted the galaxy. Citizens could visit these to draw upon that knowledge like drawing water from a well. A newly emerged intelligent race could, in a single visit, amass the wealth of knowledge necessary to uplift itself technologically and sociologically to a suitable level. Any citizen could visit a library and experience any aspect of the Empire across both space and time. These libraries encompassed everything about the Empire and made it available to all citizens and worlds. And at least one of them still exists today.

Scientorium is a library of the Ancient Empire. Locked within it is more knowledge than can be accurately measured. But it is now hidden and guarded, its purpose strangely twisted by time, much of its functionality withered and some about to cease forever. Woe to the foolhardy who learn of it and survive the journey. Scientorium is more than a place, more than a repository. It is in many ways a living thing, with a consciousness and an agenda all its own. Scientorium brooks few intruders.

## A RECLUSIVE LIBRARY

Scientorium does not want to be found. For the most part, the mists of history are sufficient to shroud the library's existence. It predates most existing civilizations. The wisest and oldest know nothing of it. This alone keeps the curious at a distance.

However, when time alone is insufficient to keep its secrets, Scientorium has ways of further clouding awareness. Using science so advanced it touches upon magic, the library knows when others suspect its existence. It can probe the cosmos for such thoughts and then befuddle their owners with doubt and forgetfulness. The library

wants to be left alone and has means to purge knowledge of its existence from curious minds, or so it has always believed: A mind somehow immune to its confusions would be a tremendous asset, one that might help it complete its final task before inevitable decay.

Scientorium lies beyond the Known Worlds. There is no registered astronavigational beacon in its star system, so anyone going there must "jump blind." Getting there requires a lengthy journey, taxing even the most seasoned travelers and their starships. Those who make the journey sacrifice many months or even years in the effort.

Moreover, in the same manner the library affects the minds of those who seek it out, it strengthens obstacles along the journey as a further deterrent. Whatever can go wrong, goes wrong. Ship components break down. Hyperdrives homing on existing astronav beacons along the way get confused and end up in the wrong system. Piracy and raiders become more frequent and deadly. Governmental and regulatory interference increases dramatically. Supplies become more difficult to obtain. The universe seems to turn against those seeking the library.

## THE EXPERIENCE CHAMBERS

Originally, the knowledge contained in each shaft was devoted to a specific area of study, though from the outside there is no way to know which is which, and gradual decay has vexed that scheme. Each shaft consists of floor upon floor of comfortable courtyards and plazas connected by broad stairways and elevators, all centered around Experience Chambers. These are the primary conveyance of information to the library's guests: semi-reality simulators that allow the occupant to experience its knowledge firsthand. In better times, visitors moved around the library freely, going from chamber to chamber, then gathering with others to discuss their newfound knowledge in comfortable, even beautiful surroundings.

Now, however, Scientorium guards its knowledge. Entering an Experience Chamber is

a potentially deadly experience. Anyone hoping to get information for free is disappointed. The library's knowledge must be earned.

Scientorium's vast repository of information holds the potential for enormous riches and power. Locked away in its Experience Chambers are the locations of all sorts of valuables, from ancient technological gadgets to deposits of monopoles and anti-matter beyond imagination.

The Ancient Empire reached technological heights far beyond what is available to the Known Worlds today. The library holds the secrets to a dozen faster-than-light technologies, superior manufacturing and energy techniques, interdimensional travel, immortality, and more. Tools and artifacts aplenty exist here for study and direct acquisition.

Finally, every exotic lifeform the Ancient Empire ever encountered—from bacteria to immortal super beings—is catalogued. Each lifeform's complex biological details are as valuable as any technology. Most are long-extinct, either by natural events or extinguished purposefully, but they can be revisited at Scientorium.

## POWER PLANT AND PROPULSION

Scientorium draws power from a single fusion power plant at its core. The Librarians maintain it and its massive store of fuel. Left undisturbed, it will power the station for several more centuries.

The library is equipped with limited chemical thrust rockets used for orbital correction and station-keeping. This automated system keeps it in a stable position. Were someone to tap those rockets directly, they could destabilize the library's orbit and induce a catastrophic descent into the gas giant moon. However, the rockets are insufficient to give the station any meaningful propulsion. They cannot move the station to another planet or star system.

Scientorium is an irregularly-shaped, planetoid-size space station in orbit around a remote world. Ninety-seven shafts reach out in all directions from a 50-kilometer-diameter central hub. Each shaft ends in a disk-shaped spaceport facility, where ships once visited and drew from the library's well of knowledge.

Each shaft is half a kilometer in diameter and 50 kilometers long, making the entire station a 125-kilometer diameter sphere. Each spaceport disk is roughly five kilometers in diameter.







## VESTIGIAL SYSTEMS

Sciencorium was built with infrastructure to serve a continuous stream of visitors from civilizations that have long since vanished. Since the Librarians have limited resources at their disposal, over time they allowed this system to deteriorate. Much of it lies in disrepair.

Cafeterias and food replicators have not served a meal in centuries. A massive waste disposal system is corroded and leaking. Pleasant gardens are nothing but rocks or completely overgrown. Data collection points wait patiently for wandering probes that never come. All these contribute to an inescapable sense that this place is best left undisturbed. Every step seems an intrusion in an ancient, reverent tomb.

## SPACEPORT PLATFORMS

Each of Sciencorium's 97 stalks is capped by a nearly identical spaceport platform. Designed to accommodate a variety of strange vessels from across the vast Ancient Empire, each can easily accept the vessel of new visitors.

Incoming space traffic control is completely automated. On approach, the system engages the incoming ship's navigational system and adjusts its landing information directly. From the pilot's point of view, his panels come alive with the correct vector information for a smooth landing. Sciencorium does not take total control, though, so the pilot is free to take his own approach, switch landing pads, leave the area, or maneuver among the station's stalks.

The landing pads are fully automated. Approach and landing lights blaze to life as the visitors' ship comes to rest. The surface has simulated 0.9 standard gravity to hold the ship in place. A suitable standard atmosphere is held in place on the spaceport platform's surface to a depth of 50 meters—held in place above and around the sides by sophisticated magnetic fields, should anyone investigate, which also reduce incoming cosmic and background radiation to safe levels.

Humanoid passengers can exit their ship onto the platform without vacuum suit protection. Non-humans may need protection depending on their environmental needs.

The spaceport platform's surface stretches five kilometers from side to side, so assuming the visiting ship sets down halfway between the center and the edge it is 1,200 yards to where they are able to look over the side. In its ever-present dim blue-gray lighting, the surface is a patchwork of single-ship landing pads. The outlines of their dark landing lights show they can accommodate ships of all shapes and sizes, from single-occupant scouts and fighters to enormous passenger liners.

Should the visitors venture to the edge, they can look down and see that the spaceport platform disk itself is 40 meters thick. An individual cannot look over the side to see down their particular stalk without getting several meters away from the edge.

Nothing prevents a visitor from stepping out over the ledge, and he or she need only account for the sudden change in atmosphere and gravity. There is no gravity or rotational compensation necessary beyond the disc's edge. A visitor merely floats in place unless otherwise propelled.

From the spaceport platform's edge, a visitor can easily see an entire hemisphere of Sciencorium, roughly 48 of its 97 stalks with their spaceport platform disks fanned out "below." The nearest stalks terminate in their spaceport platform disks (which from this vantage point can only be seen

## STALK LEVELS

from slightly below, so there's no direct view of what might be on their spaceward surfaces) just 20 to 30 kilometers away. The most distant are at the station's furthest extreme, terminating more than 100 kilometers away. A five-kilometer diameter disk viewed from a distance of 20 to 30 kilometers is still a massively impressive site.

Once landed, a series of automated features activate to service the ship and arriving passengers. The bright landing lights illuminate bays sliding open, elevators emerging, and service umbilicals reaching out. All these systems adapt automatically to any arriving ship, mating to the appropriate systems precisely. The platform quickly readies the visiting ship with new consumables, fuel, and other necessary resources. Had the passengers reservations, their luggage would be spirited away to their rooms.

On departure from the ship, additional lights guide the way to the nearest elevator platform. There are many of these around the landing surface, so the nearest one is less than 50 meters away. The elevator platform is a well-illuminated, featureless four-meter diameter white circle on the ground. It can hold any mass and up to eight human-sized passengers. It is sensor-activated and begins its descent into the station when the passengers remain still for a few seconds. The one-minute trip leads through a blue-gray lit shaft to the first stalk level below the spaceport platform. The spaceport platform's interior is packed tight with elevator shafts and the complex automated ship servicing equipment and stores, should the visitors venture inside (there are no obvious access hatches).

Impressive as it is, the mood on the spaceport platform's surface is strange. It is empty and still, as if no one has been here in a long, long time. The mood is at once welcoming and lonely.

**Firing on the Station:** Scientorium has no point defense weapons or shields. However, the materials of its manufacture are especially tough and enhanced by the station's million-gauss electromagnetic fields, making it damage resistant. Only a concerted effort by an especially powerful warship can cause significant damage.

**World Killer Starship:** Size 40, Acc/TS 20/200, Climb -5, Toughness 80 (25), Mods 150, Crew 50K, Energy 2,000, Cost C\$30B

Each of Scientorium's 97 stalks is divided into 500 10-meter-high levels between its spaceport platform and the station's core. In effect, the station is a collection of mammoth skyscrapers protruding from a central point.

Even considering servicing ducts and support systems, each 500-meter-diameter level holds an enormous usable space. Most of the levels are unique in decoration and layout, but are functionally identical, devoted to the Experience Chambers, their associated parks and plazas, and surrounded by the staterooms and hotels necessary for all their visitors.

### ENVIRONMENT

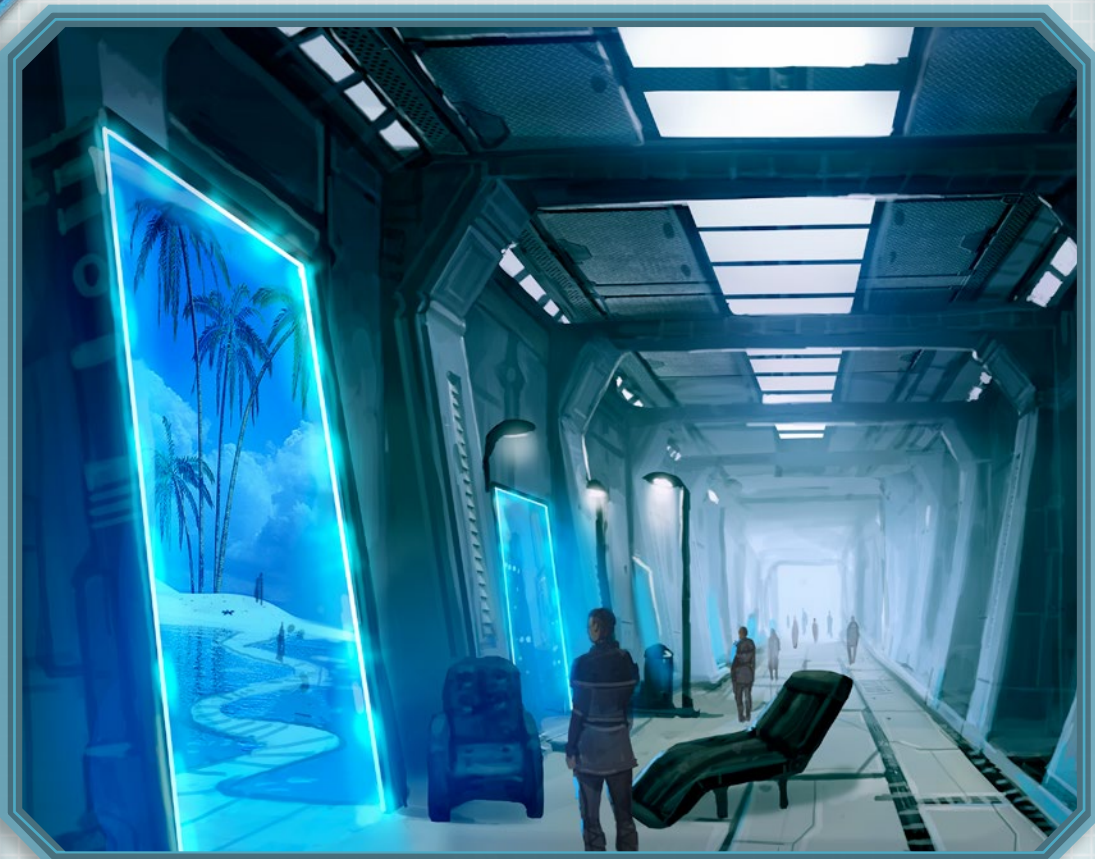
Scientorium's environmental controls are set to a comfortable standard: 0.9 artificial standard gravity (always pulling "down" toward the station's core), standard oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere at suitable pressure, and air temperature 30° Celsius (85° Fahrenheit) with 70% humidity. Stalk levels are well-lit, dimmed for a night-cycle 10 out of every 30 hours.

All of these environment settings are humanoid comfortable. However, since visitors once came here from all over the Ancient Empire, entire stalk levels' settings can be radically changed to better accommodate large parties. Each level's environmental controls are part of its integral electronics—a visitor would have to hack into these to make a change—but always accessible by the Librarians.

Each level has a spacious interior height of nine meters, which is architecturally enhanced to seem more spacious still. Lights adjust and air circulates to make the interior seem open and pleasing to claustrophobic visitors. The most immediate cure for claustrophobia, of course, is to enter an Experience Chamber.

### PARKS AND PLAZAS

There are between two and 10 Experience Chambers on any stalk level, and each one is surrounded by its own unique cluster of parks and plazas. The designers wanted to please all manner of visitors, to give each comfortable places to prepare for and later discuss their experiences. Each one is themed differently, usually either made to resemble some particular environment or decorated artistically.



## EXPERIENCE CHAMBER ENVIRONMENTAL THEMES

Each Experience Chamber is essentially a black wall with a gray obelisk control panel before it. Each Experience Chamber has its own theme. These are real, permanent settings around the black wall that give visitors a frame of reference as they learn and enjoy the library. Some are easily identifiable, such as woodland, orbital agricultural habitat, cratered desert, floating gas giant processing station, caverns, nebular asteroid field, city skyline, and so on. Others seem especially strange to visitors, made to appeal to the denizens of numerous odd worlds: dark webbed warrens, amoeba-filled pools, hive complexes, glittering egg chambers, and more exotic realms. Most of the latter are not suited at all to humanoid use, but are not off limits, either.

One Experience Chamber in five is completely submerged to accommodate oceanic lifeforms or even lava- or plasma-filled settings that are inaccessible to most living creatures.

Not only are the parks and plazas made to physically resemble the unique setting, but all senses are served. Jungles smell of dampness and

exotic flowers, cityscapes thrum with activity, meadows buzz with strange insects.

No matter the environment, the parks and plazas have many places to sit and relax as groups or individuals. Remember that an Experience Chamber's exterior theme has nothing to do with the experiences held within.

## DECORATIVE THEMES

Rather than assuming environmental themes, roughly half the library's Experience Chambers have their parks and plazas decorated with unique art gathered from all corners of the Ancient Empire. Its beauty, of course, is in the eye of the beholder.

The art around a single Experience Chamber is usually themed to a particular artist, art style, or from a single civilization. Often this is readily identifiable, such as a painting or sculpture, holographic dance or music, jewelry or body decoration. Sometimes it is more strange—psionic impressionism, neural rhythms, or personality switching—even to the point of defying interpretation by the humanoid mind. No matter what, the art is strictly decorative and harmless.

## ACCESS

Access between levels and Experience Chambers is by foot. Wide walkways crisscross each stalk level, leading around each Experience Chamber's parks and plazas, between them, and then on to the various staterooms and escalators and elevators leading to other floors. Most often there is a stalk transport pad somewhere near the center of each stalk level. Most of the pedestrian walkways eventually lead there, as well.

**Stalk Transport Pads:** These are centrally located on each stalk level. These offer instantaneous transit between levels and stalks, but are prone to malfunction (see page 18).

**Walkways:** Within each Experience Chamber's grounds, the character of the pedestrian walkways takes on something suitable for that environment. For instance, in a jungle the walkways are narrow paths edged with dense foliage, while in an ancient fortress setting they might be cobblestones. Outside these, in each stalk level's "neutral ground," the pedestrian walkways are a stain-resistant white rubbery material, at once comfortable to walk upon and damage resistant. The walkways glow blue-gray, barely noticeable until the stalk level's lighting is reduced for the daily 10-hour night-cycle. Indeed, visitors can tell when they enter or leave an Experience Chamber's grounds by the nature of the walkway at their feet.

If there were ever anti-grav or wheeled conveyances to accommodate aliens for whom pedestrian access would be difficult, there is no evidence of them today.

**Inter-Level Access:** Access between levels is accomplished via stairs, escalators, and elevators placed regularly around each stalk level's otherwise modular, interchangeable design. Generally speaking, there are 16 stairways located around the outer perimeter of each level, eight escalators placed roughly 100 meters farther into the structure, and four elevators positioned nearest to the center stalk transport pad.

**Stairways and Escalators:** Each of the stairways and escalators is "offset" with the floor below. Half of them lead up (toward the spaceport platform) and half of them lead down (toward the core). No single stairway or escalator continues more than a single level. Taking either of these conveyances to ascend or descend multiple levels forces one to change one level, then in order to

continue walk 100 to 200 meters to the next one going in the desired direction, and so on.

Stairways and escalators are large and comfortable, 15 meters across with vaulted height above. Each stair has a tread depth of 70 centimeters and rise height of 15 centimeters. Standard human stairs are more commonly 25 and 18 centimeters, respectively, so these have a much easier, more gradual slope. To achieve the entire 10-meter ascent or descent to the next stalk level (i.e., the "rise"), the entire "run," or horizontal distance, is just short of 40 meters over a total of 56 steps. Each stairway or escalator's design is different. Some curve in a wide arc, others double back upon themselves once or twice along the way, but all adhere to these basic measurements.

**Elevators:** Apparently shaftless, offset elevator platforms move between the stalk levels. Four of these are placed in the cardinal directions 80 meters from the level's center. Elevator pads are much like those leading down from the spaceport level: a well-illuminated four-meter-diameter white metal platform that can hold any mass and up to eight human-sized passengers. The elevator is sensor-activated when passengers board and remain still for a few seconds, beginning a relatively slow 30-second trip to the next level.

However, unlike the spaceport platform elevators, those connecting the stalk levels have no shafts and rise or fall through midair. In fact, there is an invisible, magnetic field shaft that prevents passengers and objects from "easily" falling over the sides. That barrier is strictly a safety measure. A visitor can push through it with his hand. It feels like a 15-centimeter barrier of thick gelatin. One can easily lean against it. Maliciously, a person could be pushed through it to fall, and weapons could be fired through the barrier, suffering a reduction in effectiveness, accuracy, and range. One could force a handheld weapon through the gel and fire it normally.

The elevator platform itself can be damaged, but its operations are controlled by powerful magnetic fields so strong that they cannot practically be tampered with.

At any one elevator position, there are two pads, one leading up and the other down. In either direction, the pad delivers its passengers or cargo, then returns to its "home" level. No one pad keeps moving more than a single level. To move through several levels using the elevators, visitors must change to each successive

level's other elevator platform to continue in the desired direction. Descending to a new level on an elevator offers a good, high-vantage view of its nearby layout, but not of the entire level (the observer is only 10 meters above a 500-meter-diameter construct).

## HOTELS AND STATEROOMS

Roughly half the space on any given stalk level is devoted to accommodations. These are primarily designed for humanoid occupation, but some are suited to vastly different lifeforms. Visitors today can take advantage of these comfortable living spaces, though many of their amenities no longer function.

Like the Experience Chamber grounds, each "hotel" has its own unique character drawn, presumably, from the cultural conventions ascendant at the time of the library's construction. As a rule, roughly half of the hotels are of "modern" construction (as measured against a star-spanning civilization at the height of its power, so "extraordinary") while the remainder are "themed" (just as luxurious, but built with a unique, interesting character).

**Staterooms:** The standard stateroom is designed for two humanoid guests, and by most standards would be considered a deluxe suite of multiple rooms. All surfaces are video or holographic panels. Furniture reforms to any desired shape by touch alone. Lighting, temperature, and ambient sounds respond to simple voice commands. Personal hygiene amenities are automated and comfortable, even luxurious. All the doors slide open and closed automatically—the station knows if someone has permission or deserves access.

The problems confronting new visitors are twofold: lack of instructions and absent or malfunctioning support systems.

Most everything responds to voice commands, but the library is not familiar with any modern languages. Getting anything to function—say, the screen wall to display something or the bath to fill with water—necessitates frustrating and time-consuming pointing and repeating. Once the stateroom is properly "trained" with a successful Persuasion roll that single function is permanently established, not only here but everywhere on the station.

Also, most of the support systems are lacking. For instance, after finally getting the bath to fill, there might not be enough water, or it might

be brown sludge from centuries-old pipes, or it might not heat properly. The vid walls can receive a million input channels, but most of these went dark long ago. Food replicators may function, but what they produce may not be edible.

**Exotic Staterooms:** Some of the humanoid rooms are clearly made for smaller (one-meter height) or larger (three-meter height) residents. Some are made for avian species (with higher ceilings and perches) or tree-dwellers (crisscrossed with jungle-gym-style branches and vines). Strictly aquatic races could enjoy fully submerged staterooms suited to their unique requirements. Extraordinarily exotic creatures—star-surface lifeforms, planetary core creatures, black-hole fringe denizens—have their living spaces within Scientorium, as well, though these are held in powerful magnetic bottles so as not to damage the more mundane adjoining areas.

**Leisure-Time Common Areas:** Apart from the Experience Chamber grounds, the hotel areas offer pools, sports arenas and exercise areas, meditation spaces, and everything that passes for "spa" services pleasing to a wide variety of lifeforms. However, unlike the mostly automated staterooms, these common areas were more dependent upon staff for their operation. Without that staff, they are simply abandoned spaces near the stateroom areas, filled with broken or malfunctioning equipment...the lowest priority for the Librarians to fix.

**Food and Waste Services:** As a general rule, success on a daily Survival roll (+2) means roaming visitors find enough working replicators to provide food for one person (or five adults with a raise), along with working waste disposal units. Linger too long in one place, however, and guests begin to stress the system. Each successive day spent in the same area inflicts a cumulative -1 penalty to Survival rolls. It is an enormous station, though, so if the heroes keep moving around they can probably stay indefinitely, but such things are a persistent complication.

## SPECIAL LEVELS

Counting from the bottom, all of the stalk levels from 30 and up (all the way to 500) are devoted to visitors, their accommodations, and the Experience Chambers. Deeper in the station lie specialized levels for detention, Librarians, and fusion power plant control.

**Detention Levels:** Security robots deploy from these levels and bring unruly visitors here for

restraint. Rows of spartan cells sit unoccupied, sealed behind malfunctioning doors, intermittent security surveillance systems, all cold and dust covered. Maintenance rooms are full to overflowing with discarded security robot pieces. Few security robots remain operational, but they inevitably confront any intruders. A visitor who gets locked up here is in dire straits, because there is no justice system left to process him—the Librarians do not concern themselves with the security robots or their prisoners. Imprisonment is tantamount to a death sentence.

**Librarian Habitats:** The Librarians congregate in the lowest levels of each stalk, near the core. Entire levels are devoted to their needs as “stringers” (see page 87): their biological slime vats, spaces for repair and relaxation, etc. To a humanoid visitor, these spaces are unkempt and appear ruined, though they serve the stringer Librarians nicely.

## THE CORE

Scientorium’s core alone would constitute a staggeringly large facility. It is a 50-kilometer-diameter sphere the size of a small moon or planetoid, larger than most mammoth asteroids.

Much of the core’s surface area (roughly 80 square kilometers) is occupied by 97 emerging stalks (each covers a one-quarter square kilometer area). The remaining surface area is exposed to space and otherwise identical to the library’s exterior.

Scientorium’s core is taken up entirely by its fusion power plant and the equipment that creates and maintains the station’s exotic and powerful magnetic fields. The former is essentially a mini-star captured within magnetic fields with sufficient fuel to continue operations for many millennia. The latter is primarily accomplished at a subatomic level through sophisticated nanotechnology. Its mechanisms are virtually impenetrable, as is its science.

Scientorium’s deepest secret, one the team is unlikely to ever discover, is that the

library’s core achieved a rudimentary sentience millennia ago. But whatever intelligence the core may possess is trapped at the station’s center inside magnetic fields, with only a limited ability to influence the library’s functions. Further, the passage of eons and its own deterioration have caused Scientorium’s core to go insane.

Once the library’s unique powers helped its visitors *remember* new knowledge long after they departed. But now it has twisted that function to prevent new visitors from remembering Scientorium at all. Worse still, the core has limited influence over the station’s Experience Chambers. Sometimes it uses this influence to confound its own Librarians’ goals, and forces them to obey their instincts—even when that causes them to act in ways contrary to their own interests!



# CHAPTER THREE: SETTING RULES

This chapter contains rules designed to flesh out Scientorium and the characters' interactions with the ancient artifact.

## LIBRARY RECLUSIVENESS

Before they reach the library, visitors must deal with its uncanny powers to achieve its primary objective: to remain undiscovered and unvisited.

Essentially, the library has a cosmic awareness of any living creature that has an awareness of it. Proximity is irrelevant. In this matter, the library's reach is galaxy-wide. Once it identifies such awareness, the library engages its powers of confusion and forgetfulness to erase it.

Those powers manifest subtly. The existence of an ancient library filled with eons of knowledge and technology is profoundly unbelievable to begin with. The library exploits that doubt to drive a wedge between awareness and the conscious mind. The subject's doubts take on a dream-like quality, to the point where he wonders if the library was just something he imagined or even dreamt about. Unchecked, the library's cosmic influence upon that awareness eventually washes it away into something forgotten. The subject forgets that he has forgotten something, though tantalizing, unsettling traces of remembrance may linger for many years or even a lifetime.

Reminders can help the subject keep his awareness of Scientorium. If one has already booked passage on a passenger starship to journey closer to the library, that alone serves as a strong reminder. Detailed plans shared with companions or with a computer help keep the visitor focused. The visitor's mind may become fogged for a time, but exposure to solid reminders repurposes his thinking quickly.

To thwart these, the library engages even more powerful mind influences, directing the subconscious to disregard or even erase these troublesome reminders. Without even realizing why, the potential visitor deletes key information or "accidentally" books transport in an entirely wrong direction. He doubts friends who recount

stories about an ancient library, as they also doubt themselves.

If a visitor becomes aware that his mind is being so influenced, she can take steps to guard against it. Once she gets to the point where she's carving indelible messages on bulkheads, nesting computer alerts on machines where she doesn't have immediate access, and taking other concrete measures, she likely defeats the library's strange powers and holds awareness of it in her mind long enough to reach it.

Indeed, suspecting that Scientorium takes such exotic measures to remain secret makes its discovery all the more enticing.

**Mechanics:** Each day characters must make a Smarts roll at -4. On a success, the library has no effect on them and on a raise, they don't need to roll until a week has passed. If they fail, they gain a level of Doubt. Doubt is counted as Fatigue but only affects rolls concerning the Scientorium. A character "Incapacitated" by Doubt unconsciously performs an action determined by the Game Master to deter traveling to or remembering the Scientorium.

A spacer recovers a level of Doubt with 1d6 hours of discussion or reading information about Scientorium.

**Reminders:** A single reminder per day—such as previously booked passage—adds +1 to the Smarts roll. Two reminders per day add +2, and three or more reminders per day add the maximum of +4 to the roll.

**Psionic Flux Field:** A few extremely rare creatures such as brain bugs project an unconscious psionic field that blunts the effect of Library Reclusiveness. Characters in contact with such creatures for at least 12 hours out of every 24 gain a +4 bonus to their Smarts roll to remember the Scientorium.



## INTERACTING WITH SCIENTORIUM

Visitors may come to the library from a thousand different backgrounds and with a thousand different objectives. Once there, though, each must deal with the reclusive station as it exists today. Scientorium's original design parameters created a place where citizens could freely wander and explore through the enormous history and scope of their Empire. Some may make the mistake of thinking the library is as open to exploration now as it was in its heyday.

Players visiting here must deal with two primary physical adversaries—Automated Defenses and the Librarians—as well as the far more diabolical insanity that rules the semi-reality of its Experience Chambers.

**Automated Defenses:** When Scientorium was built (it and its many sister libraries now lost across the galaxy), the Ancient Empire was at its zenith. Peace and prosperity reigned. Its builders had no need for defense against direct attack. So, it has no turrets or weapons tasked with challenging approaching spacecraft.

However, the station has extensive anti-intruder systems made to deal with unruly visitors or

sabotage: Even the most pacific civilization has malcontents, who must be guarded against. These systems were designed to be nonlethal, and to control a subject for later collection and processing by the library's security personnel. Today, those security personnel are long gone except for a handful of autonomous robots.

Cautious visitors can learn to avoid the library's automated defenses, but only after some trial and error. Whole adventures can revolve around thwarting the security robots' efforts to capture and imprison characters in the detention levels.

**Librarians:** At first blush, visitors may think Scientorium is deserted. They might arrive, explore the place extensively, and leave without ever encountering the station's silent guardians. Indeed, anyone who wants to simply visit the library and learn from it is welcome to do so without interference, in the Librarians' eyes.

The Librarians only appear when someone tries to leave Scientorium with more than just knowledge. If someone tries to leave with a physical prize—or they suspect that's a visitor's intent—they muster their considerable strength to stop it. Being a just and traditional order, however, no one is executed without a fair trial...



## EXPERIENCE CHAMBERS

The focal points of most adventures are Scientorium's Experience Chambers. These are the means of conveying experiential data between the library and its visitors. In proper working order, they serve their purpose extremely well, allowing a patron to visit any time or place in the collective experience of the Ancient Empire in a safe, interactive simulation indistinguishable from reality. For instance, one can...

- Pick an **historical event** such as an important battle or political speech and experience it as a casual witness or even as an active participant.
- Select a **field of study**, such as extra-solar physics or the unique biology of a particular alien creature, and attend either a single lecture or an entire doctorate course on the subject (all in a brief visit owing to the time compression feature).
- Choose an **historical figure** and experience a portion of that person's life or the entirety of it.

Experience Chambers were once able to tag a collection of data, such as star charts or chromosome sequences, and flash-embed it into a visitor's memory, but this ability has been lost over time.

## ENTERING A CHAMBER

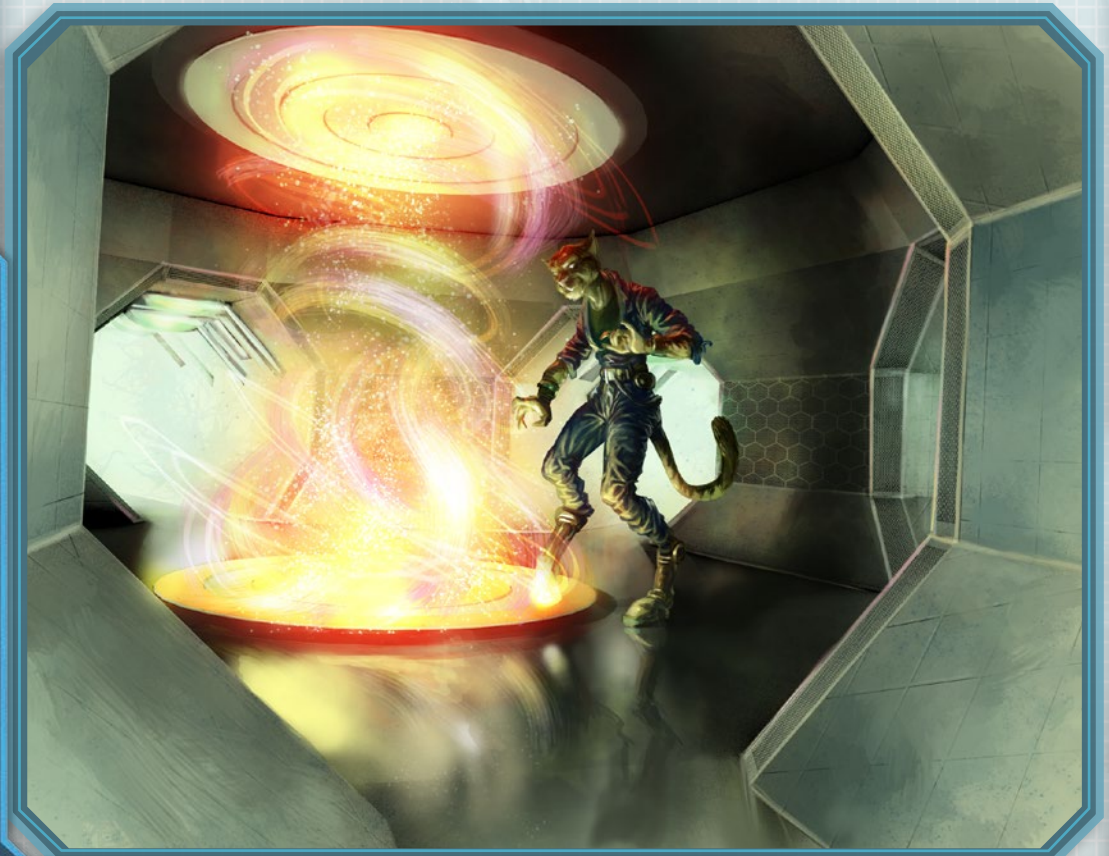
An Experience Chamber's interface is versatile and effective. Upon entry, a visitor need only convey his wishes to the device, and also make one critical choice:

- **Virtual Reality:** safe, experience-only mode.
- **Semi-Reality:** dangerous, physical contact mode.

Visitors hoping to extract knowledge from Scientorium generally do so in Virtual Reality mode. There is no physical contact within the Experience Chamber, and no consequences for removing data acquired in this manner.

Semi-Reality mode, on the other hand, affords the ability to take items from the Experience Chamber out into the real world. A character could find an exotic neural disruptor weapon, for instance, and bring it back with him when he leaves the Experience Chamber. However, there are three deterrents to doing so:

- Events within the Experience Chamber in Semi-Reality mode have immediate physical consequences: Things inside can kill you.
- Because of the enormous amount of time that has passed, the Experience Chambers' control systems are malfunctioning, doomed



to complete failure quite soon. Chances are it goes out of its way to kill occupants in Semi-Reality mode, due to the core's insanity.

- Taking any physical item out of an Experience Chamber angers the ever-more-insane library core, which intervenes to make sure those items never leave the library. Such removal is only possible as a service to visitors who wish to remove small items for further study within the confines of the Experience Chamber only, where they might use better instrumentation in a peaceful, more controllable environment. Taking items away from the Experience Chamber or out of the library is simply not allowed (even if those items manifest in the present-day universe for a restricted period of time) and such action draws the entire station's wrath.

## REPEAT EXPERIENCES

Heroes discover that for particularly dangerous tasks in the Experience Chambers, they can do any number of "trial runs" in Virtual Reality mode to hone their skills, learn their adversaries, etc. However, this is where the Experience Chambers' psychosis manifests itself most effectively: It has no qualms with tossing in a new complication or two once the visitor decides to switch into Semi-Reality mode to claim its prize.

Originally, the library did not function this way and such visits were not subject to strange twists and complications. These are a result of the station's aging and deteriorating software, a creeping protective element that is becoming more dangerous for visitors over time.

## THE STATION

For all its marvelous Experience Chambers, Scientorium is first and foremost an enormous space station. Its systems and maintenance are complicated by its extreme age. Even excellent self-repairing technology suffers after a few thousand centuries.

Scientorium has a number of systems and features that are unusual and have a bearing on any adventure taking place there.

### SENSORS

Sophisticated sensors monitor the station's systems and all creatures within it. The very materials of its construction are permeated with these nanoparticle devices. There are no visible cameras or sensor ports to be found. To disable the sensors one would have to destroy the station.

The library's sensors monitor all these activities:

- **Living Energies:** Includes all of a creature's vital signs, abnormalities (however small), and psionic activity or potential.
- **Electronic Activity:** Includes all gear and device use.
- **Communications:** Includes all comm, radio, and similar transmissions.

In short, the library gets a reading on everything going on in its environs, and even outside it in a five-kilometer radius. The Librarians have up-to-the-minute readings from all the station's sensors merely by having contact with it.

The sensors cannot be eliminated, but they can be blocked. High-tech shields are available, but these are expensive, rare, and usually specialized (one that blocks vital signs does nothing to block electronic activity, for instance). Also, unless a visitor has been to the library before he would have no idea such devices are necessary to confound the station and its Librarians.

Sensor data is not well protected. Concerted effort allows visitors access to the entire data flow, and once achieved the Librarians do not object. This is treated as a Dramatic Task using Knowledge (Electronics) at -2.

### STALK TRANSPORT PADS

A visitor could spend a lifetime exploring just one of the library's 97 stalks, using the many staircases, escalators, and elevators to get from floor to floor. To travel between stalks, though, the designers inserted stalk transport pads.

When these were in perfect working order, a visitor need only walk onto the glowing pad with a destination in mind to appear on that pad in another stalk (or another level on the same stalk). They still work that way today, but two complications present themselves.

First, the transport pads are governed by the station and, therefore, by the Librarians. They cannot stop an unruly visitor from using the pads, but they can drastically alter the results, chiefly by changing to some other pad, selectively transporting some material possessions to a different pad, or suspending a visitor in the transport beam for several hours. Apply any complication that best serves the unfolding adventure.

Second, due to the transport pads' extreme age, whenever a visitor uses one there is a chance of malfunction. Draw a card from the Action Deck. Clubs of 10 or less indicates malfunction:

## STALK TRANSPORT PAD MALFUNCTIONS

2d6	Result	Immediately Apparent?
2	Long-Term Sensory Loss	No
3	Fright	Yes
4	Delusions	No
5	Equipment Loss	Maybe
6	Errant Destination	Maybe
7	Transporter Failure	Yes
8	Nausea	Yes
9	Equipment Damage	Maybe
10	Temporary Sensory Loss	No
11	Injury	Yes
12	Molecular Damage	No

**Long-Term Sensory Loss:** Select one of the five senses at random (sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch). That sense is either severely reduced or lost entirely (50% chance each way) for 1d6 weeks.

**Fright:** Roll on the Fright table (see *Savage Worlds*).

**Delusions:** The character suffers from the Delusional Hindrance (Major), effective immediately and lasting until the condition can be cured or treated.

**Equipment Loss:** Select one piece of gear at random. It has vanished, permanently, sent who-knows-where by the malfunctioning transport pad. The loss is not immediately apparent, especially if the item is small and seldom used.

**Errant Destination:** The visitor ends up at a different transport pad than the one intended, determined randomly. If the visitor is not familiar with the intended destination, this error may at first go unnoticed.

**Transporter Failure:** The transporter pad doesn't function until a Librarian effects repairs.

**Nausea:** The visitor is sickened after transport and must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue, which dissipates in six hours.

**Equipment Damage:** Select one piece of equipment at random. It no longer functions until repaired. The damage is not apparent until the item is used.

**Temporary Sensory Loss:** Same as above, but the effect is temporary, with onset occurring in 1d6 hours and lasting 1d6 days.

**Injury:** Roll on the Injury table (see *Savage Worlds*).

**Molecular Damage:** The experience has induced subtle but ultimately dangerous core damage that affects the character's long-term health. Without high-tech medical attention, the character gradually weakens. In game terms, the character rolls once on the Injury table (see *Savage Worlds*) with the passing of every month of game time. These effects are not immediately apparent and only manifest over time.

## SELECTIVE MAGNETISM SYSTEM

Every component of the library is part of an extensive electromagnetic system, powered by the station's massive fusion power plant. Though not readily apparent to visitors, the station uses powerful magnetic field lines in conjunction with its odd, stalked shape to induce temporal rifts between different realities: Experience Chambers are, essentially, magnetically powered. But this system is failing over the vastness of time.

A byproduct of all that controlled power is the library's Selective Magnetism System.

As directed by the Librarians, the station can selectively engage a variable gauss magnetic field at any time. That field can be directed to:

- Grab a particular metallic item away from a visitor.
- Safely pin that item against the wall or crush it atom flat.
- Hold a metallic item in place so that it cannot move.
- Move any metallic item from point to point gently or with obliterating force.
- At one time it could capture a starship and keep it from leaving, or even push against an approaching craft to keep it at bay, but this ability is beyond the failing mechanism's capacity.

The force can be adjusted from subtle to lethal, as the controlling Librarian wishes. Essentially, the system is a tool for the Librarians to enforce their will upon visitors.

The best defense against the Selective Magnetism System is to rid oneself of metallic items and then keep clear of them while in the library. Also, magnetic dampening technology is available on higher tech level worlds. Such tech is expensive, but the station has no provision to defeat it, so it would be completely effective for visitors so equipped.

**Malfunction:** In any critical situation, the Selective Magnetism System is subject to temporary malfunction and failure. In a tactical situation, there is a 50% chance that the system cannot engage at all, and even when it does there is a 25% chance that any action fails (pinning a character in place, grabbing a weapon).

## EXPERIENCE CHAMBER CONTROLS

Most adventures in Scientorium involve its Experience Chambers. They are the windows into the library's enormous stores of information. How they operate is integral to the progression of each adventure.

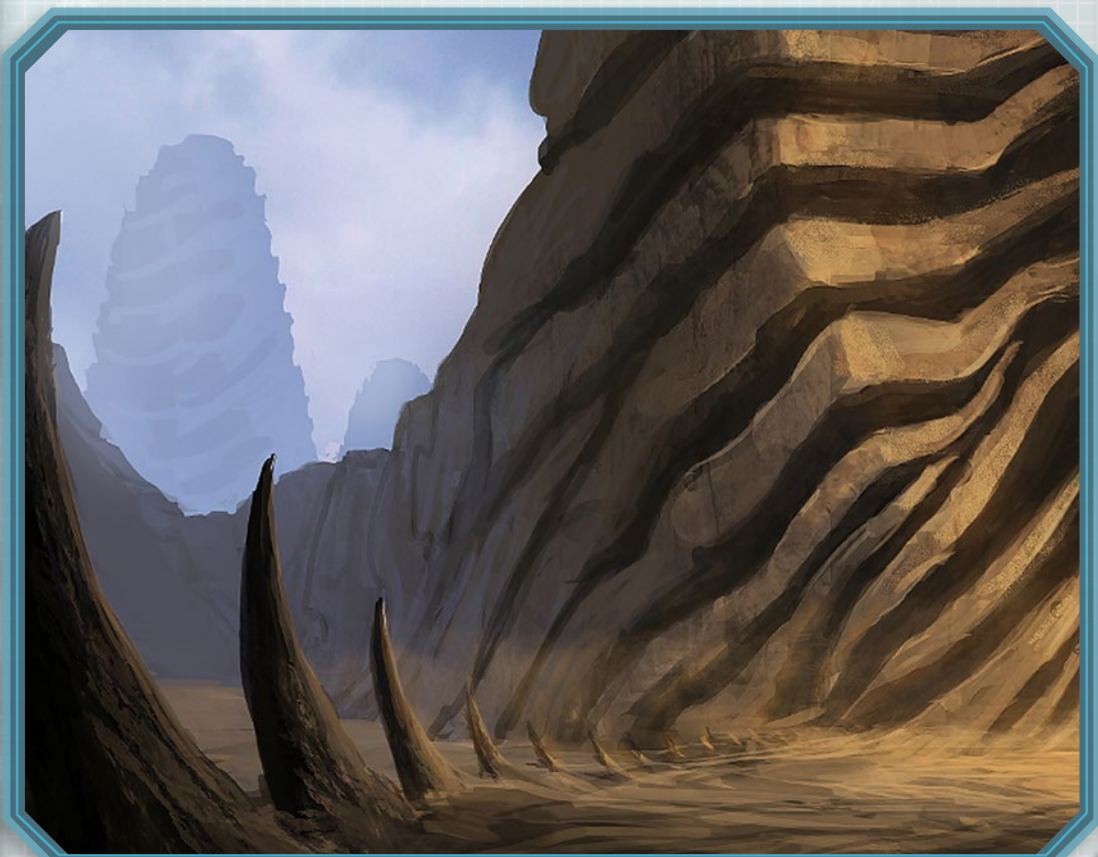
**First Impressions:** Visitors coming upon an Experience Chamber for the first time may not recognize it as such. Its more familiar

elements—the surrounding courtyards, sunken seating areas, benches and tables—seem park-like. Indeed, the many sculptures, frescoes and tapestries, the holograms and gardens, soothing sounds and smells appear to be the focus of attention. First-time visitors may not realize these are merely courtyards where visitors can relax and discuss their experiences.

The black wall looming behind a nondescript, gray monolith probably goes unnoticed at first. But that black wall leads to innumerable experiences and simulated realities—it is the entrance to an Experience Chamber.

**Interpreting the Controls:** Experience Chambers are controlled from the gray monoliths. The flat side facing away from the black wall is the control surface. Touching it activates the chamber to give a visual image of its present setting. The controls are designed for use by any creature via touch alone, making them language neutral.

Figuring out how the Experience Chambers work takes time. If the GM wants to fast forward a bit, how long it takes to figure them out comes down to a Smarts roll at -2. Only one roll is allowed but other characters can make Cooperative rolls of their own. If the roll is failed, it takes 1d6 days



to fully determine how the Experience Chambers work. On a success, it only takes 1d6 hours, and on a raise, the characters learn how to use the controls in 2d6 minutes. The “black wall” remains impenetrable and featureless until the control panel is appropriately touched, and then it leaps to brilliant, three-dimensional life:

## SPACE

Touch the control surface with one finger (or appendage).

Movement right to left moves from system to system on a huge galactic map, up to down scrolls through planets and planetary features within a single system.

**Default (mid-control panel) Setting:** a star system in the Milky Way’s core (one of many thousands), focused on the primary habitable planet.

## TIME

Touch the control surface simultaneously with two fingers (or appendages).

Movement right to left moves backward or forward in time, up to down broadens or shrinks the expanse of time to be examined.

**Default (mid-control panel) Setting:** the height of the Ancient Empire (about a million years ago), with a one-day-long experience.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Touch the control surface simultaneously with three fingers (or appendages).

Movement right to left for macro to micro environments, up to down for mental to material applications.

**Default (mid-control panel) Setting:** objects of everyday size (beings, vehicles, personal items), with basic Newtonian motion mechanics.

## SOCIOLOGY AND LITERATURE

Touch the control surface simultaneously with four fingers (or appendages).

Movement right to left scrolls through philosophies, up to down moves through literature in all media.

**Default (mid-control panel) Setting:** basic societal laws and principles, with media demonstrating their application.

## CITIZENS

Touch the control surface simultaneously with five fingers (or appendages).

Movement right to left scrolls through citizens based on racial origin, up to down scrolls through each race’s complex social hierarchy.

**Default (mid-control panel) Setting:** humanoids (the Ancient Empire was dominated by a humanoid race), with a mid-level military official (there were billions of them).

## PRESENTATION MODE

Touch the control surface simultaneously with six fingers (or appendages).

Movement to the right sets the Experience Chamber to Virtual Reality (safe) mode, while movement to the left sets it to Semi-Reality (dangerous/physical reality) mode.

**Default Setting:** an Experience Chamber defaults to Virtual Reality mode.

## EXPERIMENTING WITH EXPERIENCE CHAMBERS

This is something you and the players can have fun with. They may be completely startled when an Experience Chamber is activated.

Once they figure it out, navigating it is a matter of touch sequence and movement. Generally, each subsequent touch adjusts the previous topic in terms of the new input request. Here are some examples:

If a visitor touches the control panel with a single appendage right in the center (a likely experimental starting point), the “black wall” lights up with a vivid depiction of a star system at the Milky Way’s core that quickly shows all the planets and then centers on the most habitable one. If the visitor drags his finger to the left the scene is quickly replaced with a galactic view and a red dot chasing through it. When he stops his finger the image dives in on that new star system. If he drags his finger down, the scene switches from an orbital view of that main habitable planet down to continents, regions, cities, down to a “street view” at its finest fidelity, perhaps in front of a particular crystal-clear and concrete residence.

In another example, a visitor touches the control with three fingers in the lower left, indicating micromaterial science and technology. The Experience Chamber brings up encyclopedic

information on meson energy conversion. Assuming the visitor knows that a two-finger touch moving to the left advances the topic through time, that leads to the Ancient Empire's latest, therefore most advanced knowledge of that particular (pun intended) technology.

Use the touch controls and movement variations as guides for your imagination.

For instance, if a visitor starts by touching the control panel in the center with five fingers, use the default setting indicated: a humanoid, mid-level military official's dossier. There's probably nothing special about this long-dead fellow, but you get his 3-D image and all manner of details about his existence, though much of it is written in languages the visitor cannot understand. Tracing up with the finger eventually leads to the Ancient Empire's Emperor, again with associated data and images. If the visitor then touches the control with two fingers in the lower right, that adjusts time, in this case backward and in narrower focus. So, the Experience Chamber refocuses on an earlier portion of this Emperor's life, and in narrower focus, say one particular day in his training as a Star Fighter Pilot in the Imperial Navy.

Alternately, let's say the visitor touches the control panel with three fingers to start it in the upper right. That's the macro-mental area of science and technology, so as the Game Master you might initiate a university lecture on the mass migratory practices of an intelligent space whale species. If the visitor further touches the panel with, say, four fingers in the lower left, that adjusts the first topic in terms of sociology and literature, specifically Ancient Empire philosophy in some media. You could change the image to a holographic play depicting the complex lives of individual migrating space whales.

We'll call these examples *a random residence on a random world*, *the secrets of meson energy conversion*, *a day in the life of an Ancient Emperor's flight training*, and *a drama of migrating space whales*.

**Entering the Experience Chamber:** The Experience Chamber's "black wall" merely presents a tantalizing view of its present setting. Visitors may believe that this is the extent of the experience, make mental note of what they see and move on. Those visitors are missing out, though. The Experience Chamber's treasures are inside its Virtual or Semi-Reality environment.

Moving into the Experience Chamber's "black wall" takes the player into a uniquely created

extradimensional space. It appears as vast or as small as is necessary for the topic chosen and the actions undertaken therein. The visitor is affected by the Experience Chamber's environment as if he were really there. The Experience Chamber puts the visitors into the situation in the most advantageous position to learn and interact with the situation chosen—this position is psionically conveyed to visitors as they enter.

From the examples given above:

*In a random residence on a random world*, the Experience Chamber might place the visitor on the street as an ordinary observer, or at a point in time when the primary resident appears to enter or leave the residence, or it might assign the visitor some duty (such as a maintenance person or other family member) who has access to the home and can enter to learn more about it.

*In the secrets of meson energy conversion*, visitors may appear in a college classroom or at a flash-data facility (common in the advanced Ancient Empire) that imparts all of this wondrous technology's secrets in the wink of an eye. Alternately, they might appear as observers in the laboratories where the final tech was developed or at the demonstration of the first spacecraft to use meson energy conversion for propulsion.

*In a day in the life of an Ancient Emperor's flight training*, visitors could be other pilots or teachers, rival pilots, or even spies from another faction or an influential megacorporation that wants to observe the young Emperor more closely.

And in *a drama of migrating space whales*, the visitor might become part of the drama, assuming the role of a space whale, granting first-hand experience of life as an alien being, or they become part of the production crew that created the drama in this particular media.

**Modes and Interaction:** Primarily, the difference between Virtual Reality and Semi-Reality modes is a matter of lethality and danger. Visitors killed or wounded in a Virtual Reality environment return to the real world unscathed. In a Semi-Reality experience, death and injury are real and extend into the real world.

But beyond that, the selected mode also alters how the Experience Chamber environment reacts to the visitors.

Virtual Reality mode is fairly passive to its visitors. The universe tends to ignore them. When they take action that "alters" the flow of the story, it tends to gloss over that change and refocus on

the unfolding experience as if the visitors were not really there. Information can be taken out of the Virtual Reality experience, but nothing else.

Semi-Reality mode views any visitors quite differently. The universe *wants* to interact with the visitors. It welcomes changes they introduce and, for purposes of the experience, makes those changes permanent. "Murphy's Law" becomes more intense. Random chance appears to work against the visitors. Foes become more malign. Anything can be removed from a Semi-Reality experience back to the real world, but the chamber does not want to give anything up easily, and removed items eventually disintegrate.

### ENDING THE EXPERIENCE

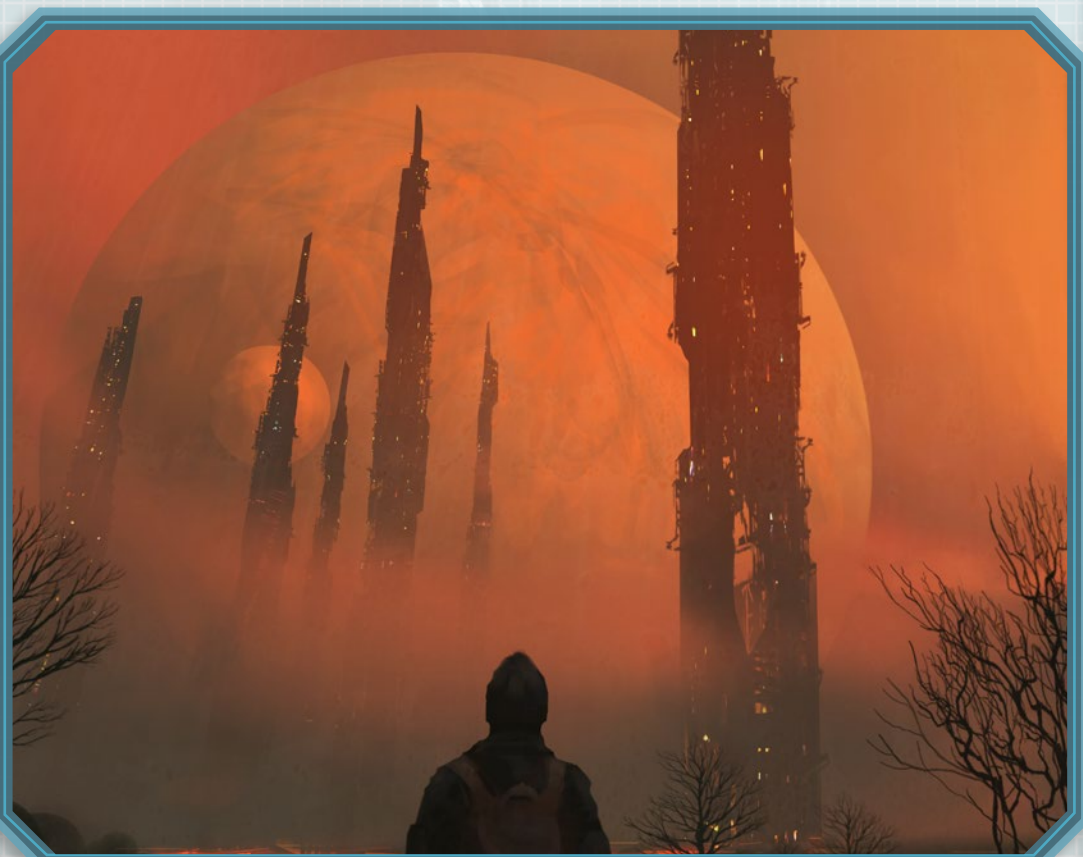
Ending the experience is simple: Get back to the physical location where you appeared and say in any language, "End experience." That's it. In a Virtual Reality environment, there's never a problem ending the experience. In a Semi-Reality environment, on the other hand, complications tend to pile upon complications, making it more difficult than it should be.

In Semi-Reality mode, the experience unfolds in a manner that takes the visitors ever farther

from their original point of entry. Barriers, both physical and story-related, insert themselves. Walls appear where they did not exist before, or streets suddenly take a different turn than expected. Weather deters travel, plot complications drive the visitors in the opposite direction, and so on. The more the visitors plan to break the library's rules, the more the Semi-Reality mode senses this and makes that attempt more difficult. Shielding one's thoughts is impossible. Inside the Experience Chamber, the device knows all.

**Glitches:** Although the Experience Chambers receive the bulk of the maintenance attention by the Librarians, they too are ancient machines subject to malfunction. Glitches tend to be both outrageous and short-lived.

Experience Chamber glitches are cross-data loops. Something from an entirely different situation is interposed upon the experience. For instance, while attending lectures on a planet's exotic culture, a historical person completely out of context appears and chaos ensues. Or, while examining hyperspace jump routes in detail, a historical disaster manifests, such as a meteor strike or power plant accident.



The library's massively interconnected computer system quickly identifies these glitches, however, and tries to set things right. Most often, the anomaly disappears from the experience as quickly as it appeared. Sometimes, though, the experience is allowed to unfold more naturally so the anomalous portion exits as a more believable portion of the original story. In Semi-Reality mode, the Experience Chamber may use an errant portion of the simulation against the visitors.

## DISSOLUTION

It is possible to remove items from the Experience Chambers to the real world—despite the best efforts of those chambers and the Librarians to keep visitors from doing so—but those items exist for a limited time before dissolving from reality. Dissolution begins quickly, within 2d6 days, and then proceeds rapidly over 1d6 additional days. During that time, devices and living things lose their functionality, reducing uniformly in mass until almost transparent and then disappearing entirely. During the first day of dissolution, an item or living thing may still function intermittently, but after that it becomes a mere shadow of itself, eventually fading entirely from reality.

For example, the Game Master rolls for a weapon removed from the Experience Chamber and finds that it begins dissolution in five days (something he does not announce to the owners). The weapon functions normally during those five days. After that, he rolls again and finds that it completely dissolves in three more days. Dissolution may not be immediately apparent until functionality becomes obviously impaired.

## RESPONSE IN KIND

Visitors who emerge from the Experience Chambers in possession of anything other than pure knowledge incur the wrath of the Librarians. Whenever possible, though, they do not directly intervene, opting instead for “Response in Kind”—their peculiar *modus operandi*, wherein they draw forth denizens of an Experience Chamber into the real world to achieve their ends.

In terms of the unfolding adventure, the Librarians review the offending visitors' most recent experience and call upon the most likely enforcers from that environment. They can interpret this quite broadly. The visitors may or may not have actually encountered those enforcers in the Experience Chamber. For instance, visitors who steal an exotic weapon from

a remote military station may have successfully avoided the battle-armored military police in the Experience Chamber, but the Librarians may well call those forces into the real world to pursue the visitors and steal the weapon back.

The selected enforcer's connection to their Experience Chamber visit is not necessarily obvious. Making off with a primitive civilization's holy artifact may seem like child's play at the time, but the Librarians may call upon the Empire's super-high-tech Prime Directive Operatives to deal with them in the here and now.

Response in Kind enforcers emerge from the same Experience Chamber where the visitors committed their offense. But, if in the Librarians' opinions the visitors are making a successful escape, they can call upon enforcers from any other Experience Chamber (for instance, one located along their escape route). The Librarians tend to stick with the same sort of enforcer, though, even if they emerge from a different Experience Chamber.

Calling these enforcers into the real world is a massive drain on the station's energies and the Librarians' computing power. Even in the most desperate situation, they never draw out more than twice the offending visitors' strength to thwart them at any one time (though they can replace losses to keep that advantageous ratio). Measuring that strength is relative, taking into account relative numbers of creatures, technology differences, and firepower. As Game Master you must use your best judgment.

## SEMI-REALITY'S FINAL PERFORMANCE

Scientorium is on the cusp of losing its capacity to engage Semi-Reality mode from any of its Experience Chambers. The system is failing, as evidenced by its increasing insanity.

Before it fails completely, the library and its Librarians know it must be used to impart information vital to the completion of one final galaxy-impacting mission, as presented in the Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest*.

After that occurrence, Semi-Reality mode fails and is forever beyond repair, though Scientorium's visitors can still experience all the Experience Chambers' magnificence in Virtual Reality mode.





# CHAPTER FOUR: PALIMPSEST

*Palimpsest* is a galaxy-spanning Plot Point Campaign for four to six starfaring characters in the employ of the megacorporation JumpCorp.

## SYNOPSIS

The characters team up with a Egautian to follow and aid an eccentric showman on his quest to find a cache of powerful, derelict starships. The key to its location can only be found at a mysterious ancient library, one only hinted at in the molecular data remnants stored on centuries-old computing devices in his possession, an electronic palimpsest showing the way to unimaginable riches.

The overall Plot Point spans considerable distance and time. Entire side adventures may transpire along the way. This is especially true during the long period of travel to the ancient library, Scientorium, when the library's mysterious powers cause spacers to lose focus on their objective, or try to. One of their number is strangely immune to its befuddling influence, making them ideal allies to accomplish the library's final desperate mission before its vital systems fail, a mission that involves them all.

★ **Kerastus Prelude (page 78):** Run this Savage Tale at any point before the campaign begins to introduce Professor Kerastus, a key character.

## PART ONE: LOCATE AND MONITOR

The JumpCorp team receives a transmission from their security branch, JumpSec, with new instructions:

*Locate and monitor citizen Jeromm Hychus, a Egautian humanoid implicated in the trafficking of controlled materials.*

*Independent JumpSec investigation connects Hychus with the theft of three religious artifacts from a museum on Rigelus VI two years ago, "The Rigelian Spheres." He was never charged or identified by civil authorities. Artifacts were of ancient origin with alleged curative properties.*

*Hychus is known to be traveling under the alias "Nearstar," last authorized jump visa dated two weeks ago and arriving at the Vicchut system's Main Starport.*

The characters are under contract with JumpCorp to perform a variety of legal and semi-legal tasks as instructed (see the JumpCorp sidebar on page 26), and these new orders fall within those terms. They are obliged to comply.

Although they don't realize it yet, the scope of this endeavor most likely outlasts their contractual terms. "Short timers" with only a few months left on their JumpCorp contracts are required to complete this new mission, regardless of its length, or suffer severe consequences for breach of contract. Of course, the adventurers continue to receive pay and benefits for the full term as well, but they may end up so far from occupied space that those do them little good.

## LIBRARY DATA

A search of public data sources and success on an Investigation or Knowledge (Computers) roll turns up the following pieces of information, one per success and raise.

**Rigelian Spheres:** Rigelus VI's archaeologists unearthed the three spheres as part of an ancient star-visitor site dated 300 million standard years ago. The spheres have attracted a religious following of people who claim proximity has cured a variety of common and complex ailments, though these claims are not peer reviewed. The Rigelian Spheres were stolen from a museum on a tour of major population centers two years ago, and were never recovered.

**Jeromm Hychus:** Hychus, Jeromm. Male Egautian, 34 standard years of age. Secondary education in accounting, specializing in trans-system business. Employed by Juneel Manufacturing. Employed by Ketstrung KHB. Resigned position four years ago.

**Egautians:** Natives of the planet Egaut IV, a humanoid sub-species sharing a high percentage of human DNA. Egautians are tall, slender, with

## JUMPCORP

In *The Last Parsec*, the player characters are employees of the galaxy-spanning corporation JumpCorp.

As such, they are collectively called "the team" or "the JumpCorp team" throughout this adventure, or more generically the "explorers," "rangers," or another term in keeping with their spacefaring lifestyles.

**Compensation:** Each JumpCorp team member has agreed to a retainer of C\$1,000 per week, which they get paid even between assignments. When they are on an active mission, each team member receives an additional C\$2,000 per week; JumpCorp expects a concerted, all-hours effort, even in difficult or hazardous conditions, in exchange for that generous salary. The standard mission completion bonus, should one be offered, is C\$10,000 per team member.

**Assets and Aid:** JumpCorp has regional offices in many star systems and sectors throughout Known Space, as well as research stations, trade and travel offices, and independent operatives in many far-flung corners of the galaxy. While these can sometimes offer some material assistance, clarification of instructions and advice, they are seldom in a position to lend direct aid to their team members, who they consider to be independent contractors who are expected to be self-reliant.

especially long fingers and thumbs. Egautians suffered a near race-extinguishing war blamed on the too-rapid advance of technology, and so have a cultural bias for traditional ways and methods. Common elsewhere in the galaxy, they tend to form separate enclaves. Egautians prefer to live in the oldest portions of a city or world among traditional buildings and societies, wear older styles of clothing, and enjoy time-tested means of entertainment.

## INITIAL PURSUIT

Hychus' last known whereabouts—the Vicchut system—is just three star systems away. When the team arrives there, another Investigation or Knowledge (Computers) roll finds that he moved on under the alias Nearstar for two further systems before he dropped off the grid entirely:

- Interstellar passage from Vicchut system to Leriast system (5.81 light years) via the Commercial Liner *Dredoria*, First Class.
- Stayed in the Hotel Castor, deluxe suite, for six days.
- Interstellar passage from Leriast system to Rimaraa system (12.75 light years) via the private yacht *Yersee's Pride*.
- Stayed in the Barony resort orbital facility, for three days.
- Interstellar passage from Rimaraa system to Tithus system (9.98 light years) via the Subsidized Merchant Liner *Rynaria*, First Class.
- Stayed at the Hotel Ambassador, reserved suite, for four days.

A successful Streetwise or Investigation roll allows searchers to track other guests and passengers who can identify Jeromm Hychus as Mr. Nearstar. His image can be hacked from local security cameras, as well. He wears no disguise.

**Clues:** Hopefully a JumpCorp contractor notices that Mr. Nearstar is traveling in high style aboard expensive liners and staying at fine hotels (he is in the employ of a mysterious organization that gives him an unlimited expense account). Also, they might question why the subject of their search is stopping at each world for several days along his path. If Nearstar is on his way somewhere, he's certainly taking his time about it. Additionally, his accommodations are never far from the planet's starport (the Egautian is following someone else, who is traveling at a leisurely pace from starport to starport). A Notice or Investigation roll discovers any of these.

**Speculation:** Hychus' direction of travel points toward a series of well-documented, high population worlds. One in particular, the Gusheeda System, is known for its several ancient sites and associated artifacts. These are valuable tourist attractions and well-advertised as such. Hychus is, in fact, headed toward that system, but not because of the ancient sites there. A successful Notice or Knowledge (Antiquities) roll picks up on this.

**Ancient Asteroid Miners:** The Tithus system's best-preserved ancient artifacts are remnants of asteroid mining facilities in a nearby belt. Shuttle tours are offered right from the orbital starport, advertised extensively around the facility. A shuttle trip there and back takes a full day, to a modern facility where many of the ancient tools and devices recovered are on display. Security is fairly high, with everything protected behind glass and watched over by guards. The facility teems with tourists.

This is a red herring, though, demonstrating that Jeromm Hychus is not in this system to steal the local artifacts. Watching the shuttle bays, a successful Streetwise roll, or visiting the facility shows that the Egautian has not visited them.

## TITHUS ORBITAL STARPORT

The adventurers catch up with Hychus at the Tithus Orbital Starport, where he is patiently watching his own quarry, Professor Kerastus and his Exotic Menagerie. His apprehension and story are the subjects of the next Plot Point.

There is no record of Jeromm Hychus or Mr. Nearstar arriving through Tithus Orbital Starport. He has checked into the starport's best hotel, the Freefall, under the name Mr. Faraway.

Upon arrival at the Firefall Hotel, "Faraway" spread a little money around. All of the hotel staff are in his pocket, watching for anyone suspicious lurking around, and keeping tabs on anyone asking questions about him. The Egautian also hired an electronic surveillance company to debug his room, and set up state-of-the-art alarms and security devices. He "donated" to station security for a little extra attention to his personal security, and used his newfound contacts around the hotel to hire some private security—a dozen local toughs to keep an eye on things.

He also purchased his own starship, a broken-down tramp freighter called the *New Pequod* that he picked up in a cash transaction, as a cover for his travel over the next few systems on his path.

## NEW PEQUOD

**Medium Starship:** Size 8, Acc/TS 55/700, Climb 2, Toughness 25 (6), Crew 5, Cost C\$23.55M, Remaining Mods 2

**Notes:** AI, AMCM, Atmospheric, 2× Crew Space, Deflector Screens, FTL Drive, Planetary Sensor Suite, Shields, 2× Speed

### Weapons:

- Dual Linked Heavy Lasers



## "PORT SECURITY! AN ANIMAL HAS ESCAPED!"

At some point in their search for Jeromm Hychus a ruckus occurs that dramatically introduces the JumpCorp team to the presence of Professor Kerastus: a creature escapes from his menagerie to run amok through the orbital station.

Ideally, the escape happens the first time the adventurers get a glimpse of the quarry. Perhaps they have tracked him to the Firefall Hotel or tapped into the starport's security system and pegged him with facial recognition software.

At that point, the entire Orbital Starport erupts in alarm. A terrifying creature has gotten loose from a traveling carnival in the amusements sector. Panicked citizens run everywhere, flashing lights sound, and security seems overwhelmed. The creature, a plasma elemental, rampages toward the JumpCorp team.

The adventurers must contend with the plasma elemental for three rounds. After that time the surprisingly agile yet decrepit-looking Professor Kerastus appears. The plasma elemental immediately succumbs to the Professor's presence and slinks back toward the carnival. Security

quickly swarms in and surrounds the old man, threatening him with fines and imprisonment, settling eventually on expulsion—he and his menagerie must leave the starport immediately. The ruckus subsides, the professor departs for his menagerie, and Jeromm Hychus retreats to his well-protected hotel.

◆ **Professor Kerastus:** See page 95.

◆ **Jeromm Hychus:** See page 95.

- **Plasma Elemental (1):** See the *Science Fiction Companion*.

### THE EGAUTIAN'S STORY

Run this scene when the JumpCorp team meets Jeromm Hychus by tracking him to the hotel or on the Egautian's terms. He is a reasonable humanoid, open to cooperation to achieve all parties' ends.

### 'MR. NEARSTAR WANTS A WORD WITH YOU'

Jeromm Hychus is well funded and cautious. Whenever he takes up residence or checks into a starship's stateroom for a journey, he pays for any additional security that is available, and

usually just one level more than what's legal (or at least semi-legal).

In short, the JumpCorp travelers have a difficult time sneaking up on Jeromm Hychus. It's difficult, but not impossible. If his privacy measures can be overcome by the team and its skills, then they may catch the cautious Mr. Nearstar when he is unprepared for a meeting. If anything, such a demonstration of skill further impresses him.

Learning that Professor Kerastus must now depart the orbital starport, Hychus sends a message offering his tramp freighter to take the entire menagerie wherever they want to go next. Fortunately for the Egautian and his plans, the professor accepts.

In the meantime, one way or another, the adventurers either sneak past the rogue's many security measures, forcing an encounter on their terms, or they get pegged by one of Jeromm Hychus' many informants. If the latter, he sends his thugs to "check them out," led by Rixian, a human bounty hunter. If things go against these henchmen, a number of police officers come to their aid. If the henchmen subdue the adventurers, they haul them before the Egautian in an unused



room off the hotel's kitchens. If the police do so, they take them to a security interrogation room, at which time the Egautian arrives a short time later. Either way, Jeromm Hychus remains calm and presents his story.

- ✦ **Rixian:** Use the Bounty Hunter profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.
- **Thugs (2 per hero):** See the *Science Fiction Companion*.
- **Police Officers (2 per hero):** Use the Law Enforcement profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## THE COLLECTORS

Hychus begins by asking why the adventurers are following him. If they are truthful and say they are working for JumpCorp, he sees no particular harm in that and relates his story. If they lie, it requires as an opposed roll of the character's Persuasion versus Hychus' Smarts. Hychus gains a +4 to his roll, as he checks out their story with every electronic means at his considerable disposal. If caught in a lie, the rogue does not reveal his knowledge of the deception, but continues his tale. He keeps that bit of knowledge hidden away until a later time when it might serve him or his employers.

*"Three years ago I was an accountant, nothing more. I had a steady job, no trouble with the law, no trouble with anyone. Then one day I came home to my apartment to find a gold bank card and a simple hologram message saying: 'A man will steal the Rigelian Spheres from this museum in three months. Steal them from him.'*

*"That was it. I thought it was a joke. I didn't even touch the bank card for a week, then on a lark I tried it out—I hate those things, really, cash is so much better. I just bought myself dinner. It worked without a hitch. That night I got a message from my employer that my request for a paid leave of absence had been approved. I never put in for leave. I don't know, it just got the better of me, so on a whim I booked passage to Rigelus. First class. No questions asked.*

*"I had no idea what I was doing then. I set myself up in a hotel suite near the museum on Rigelus and made a plan. I hired a private investigator to track down the sphere thief from the hologram message. He turned me on to another thief to liberate the spheres once they were stolen. I didn't really do anything. I just managed it, pulling out credits to pay everyone I needed.*

*"The heist made all the newsfeeds. Then my thief stole the spheres from him. The next day someone stole them from me. That was it. The bank card stopped working, but I had pulled out plenty of cash to get back home in style.*

*"I don't know who hired me. I call them the Collectors, but I don't know anything about them. It was hard going back to being an accountant.*

*"Two months ago I found a new bank card and a new message: 'Find and follow this man. Take control of what he finds.' The hologram showed Professor Karastus.*

*"Honestly, I don't care how long it takes for the professor to find what he's looking for. I'm content to follow him forever. I could use some extra security, though..."*

Jeromm Hychus is cautious but willing to work with the heroes. He is confident that his pervasive electronic investigation and surveillance protects him against the adventurers should they turn against him. He has several escape plans depending on the situation, and the bounty hunter comes along with him as his personal bodyguard for the journey—however long that takes.

He reveals his ship and his plan. He wants to take advantage of the unsuspecting professor's plight and become his transportation, wherever he is going. This plan succeeds unless the adventurers take some action to thwart it.

If the JumpCorp team wishes to continue its original mission—to monitor the Egautian—he embraces that notion wholeheartedly, welcoming the team to accompany him and his henchmen as they tag along with the professor and his circus. After all, he explains, what better way to keep an eye on him than to travel with him? Jeromm requires that the team not interfere in his business with the professor, as he is doing nothing illegal.

Hychus' primary concern is the menagerie and its dangerous, exotic creatures. Take the rampaging plasma elemental, for instance! The Egautian wants the adventurers on hand to keep an eye on them, just in case.

To sweeten the offer for reluctant JumpCorp employees, he offers a considerable sum to hire the JumpCorp team, as much as twice their normal wage (which would be in addition to whatever the company is paying them). He also offers a simple shares system that gives the travelers each a roughly one-percent stake in whatever it is that Professor Kerastus leads them to.

Time is of the essence, though. The Egautian has his plans, and if the adventurers choose not to take part he dispenses with them quickly. He instructs station security and his various creatures to keep the JumpCorp team busy while he makes arrangements with the professor, loads the menagerie into his freighter, and departs. This forces them to track Hychus and the professor through deep space, with no idea where they are headed, and with the Egautian acutely aware of their desire to follow him. It is a difficult but not impossible task to follow in the wake of his tramp freighter, the *New Pequod*.

If they cooperate with Hychus, he tells them where the *New Pequod* is berthed, lets them board and stow their gear for the journey, and asks them to accompany him to meet with Professor Kerastus. If they have their own ship, he strongly suggests they sell it or leave it behind, but does not object to making this a two-ship journey.

## PART TWO: THE MENAGERIE OF PROFESSOR KERASTUS

The JumpCorp team first encountered the Professor and his traveling sideshow on the Tithus system's orbital starport. Such amusements are not at all unusual around the docks and market stalls common wherever travelers congregate. You can introduce the menagerie and its venerable proprietor earlier in their visit, if you like, but until the meeting with Jeromm Hychus there is no indication that they are in any way relevant to the unfolding adventure.

Regardless, the travelers get at least a glimpse of the distinctly unforgettable Professor Kerastus and one beast from his menagerie—the plasma elemental—during **Port Security! An Animal Has Escaped!** in the previous Plot Point. After that, they get a chance to see the entire carnival show close up as it is hastily taken down, hurried across the starport, and packed haphazardly into all the available space aboard Jeromm Hychus' tramp freighter.

### PROFESSOR KERASTUS

Professor Kerastus seeks a cache of super-powerful ancient starships hidden somewhere in the galaxy. His clue to their existence is in the centuries-old computer equipment he carries around as part of his sideshow. The shadows

of data overwritten hundreds and hundreds of times—a digital palimpsest—tell him of the starship cache's existence, and of the only way to find it, a visit to a mythical ancient library called Scientorium.

If asked, the professor claims he has business in nearby galaxies, and the ancient starships he seeks have superior intergalactic navigation capabilities. In fact, he wants to find and destroy the powerful ships so they are not found and turned loose on the galaxy, thus fulfilling a promise he made to a long-lost love many years ago (this is a lie; he seeks the ships simply because they are exotic and ancient, with no firm plan what to do with them if they truly exist).

The covert Collectors who employ Jeromm Hychus know what Professor Kerastus seeks. They want Hychus to take control of the starships once found and turn them over to their organization—for a tidy sum, of course.

Professor Kerastus is no fool. He embodies the wisdom of his many years. He sees right through Jeromm Hychus' ploy right away, but takes him up on his offer for transport nonetheless. The Egautian, with all his expensive surveillance gadgetry and hired spies, is no match for the wily professor. Kerastus stays one step ahead of him throughout the adventure.

The professor's faithful and capable assistant is a humanoid dwarf mute he calls Cassretoo. The companion is quick and wily. He seems to defy time and space, always at hand whenever the professor calls to him, yet always absent the rest of the time.

✦ **Professor Kerastus:** See page 95.

✦ **Cassretoo:** See page 94.

## A THOUSAND ALIEN CREATURES TO DELIGHT THE EYES!

The menagerie's fading tapestries are colorful and overly boastful. In fact, there are only a dozen or so creatures that the Professor travels around with for his show. Its more mundane denizens inexplicably rotate in and out over time. Introduce others from the *Science Fiction Companion* if they suit your unfolding adventure.

**Behold the Last Prince of Vegetaria!:** Jungle drums and rhythmic chanting accompany swirling lights upon a potted acid pitcher held within a crystal case.

• **Acid Pitcher:** See the *Science Fiction Companion*.



**Put Your Hand Into the Mind Spider's Lair, if You Dare!:** A floating sphere of steel fibers lets visitors see the mind spider within. One arm-length opening lets visitors reach in all the way to its core.

- **Mind Spider (1):** Use the Bone Spider stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

**Can You Stand the Fright of the Hounds From Hell?:** Two alien, cybernetically enhanced, dog-like creatures wander a large, mirror-filled habitat, making it seem like there are dozens of them. The beasts are tattooed and bizarrely combed to make them look even more ferocious.

- **Cyber Dogs (2):** See the *Science Fiction Companion*.

**Extra Insurance Required to View the Extradimensional Horror!:** Additional curtains hide the plasma elemental's dodecahedral enclosure, made more terrifying by swirling winds that change rapidly from flame to frigid.

- **Plasma Elemental (1):** See the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## THINGS UNSEEN IN THIS SECTOR!

These three creatures are permanent menagerie residents and lend special powers to the professor and his quests.

**Match Wits With Brain Bugs!:** Children are encouraged to perform mathematical calculations more quickly than these seven mushroom-sized brains with tiny feet. These brain bugs are essential to the professor's quest for the library. They partially defy Scientorium's psionic efforts to keep its existence secret by unconsciously projecting a psionic flux field (see the **Library Reclusiveness** Setting Rule on page 14). Without them, Kerastus becomes as forgetful and lost as any other seeker.

**It's True! The Dead Walk Among Us!:** A desiccated corpse lies beneath glass, with one device showing minimal brain activity and another showing that its heart is not beating. This is the body of Kerastus' dearest love and Cassretoo's mother (though he doesn't know that). The professor holds this as his most prized possession, one that he would give his own life to protect, that he hopes to reanimate one day when he finds the right technology or magic.



**From Deepest Space, Meet the Omega Child!** A pulsing white light floats in a vacuum chamber, containing a tiny, embryonic creature in a sealed jar. Often dismissed as the menagerie's least interesting exhibit, the Omega Child is an enormously powerful creature. Kerastus is vaguely aware of its power, but he stole it from an adversary long ago and keeps it mainly out of spite. The Omega Child reveals its true nature when the starship cache is found.

## THE PROFESSOR'S TRUNK

Kerastus has a trunk only he can open. It defies all efforts of technology and brute force to open otherwise. The professor is psionically linked to it, as well, so he knows when it is being scrutinized. The trunk contains all his clothes, jewelry, and stage makeup, as well as a lifetime's worth of trinkets. The trunk's interior is far larger than its exterior would indicate.

Two items that would otherwise attract no notice are particularly useful for the professor:

**Force Field Ring:** One simple-looking metal band is, in fact, a powerful defensive device. Wearing it creates a five-centimeter-thick wall of force around the wearer, invisible but impervious to normal damage (+12 Heavy Armor). The ring works against 1d6 attacks before it needs to "recharge." No one knows how it recharges, but 24 hours later it has 1d6 uses. These don't accumulate over consecutive days; all charges must be used before the ring recharges for another 1d6 uses.

**The Great Bard's Mask:** This is a simple theatrical mask of white and black, held with one hand by a stick to conceal the eyes, nose, and forehead. Seemingly unremarkable, it has strange powers that draw interest to the wearer. The professor might perform to a handful of disinterested passersby, but when he dons the mask, the crowd swells. Their enthusiasm soars. Claps turn to cheers, then to a roar. The effect lasts for 1d4 hours, so the professor must be careful with its timing or else have people following him around long after performances. The mask grants the user Charisma +4 for purposes of drawing others' casual interest.

## THE LOAD-IN

Cassretoo does most of the work breaking down the menagerie and hauling it into the *New Pequod*. He grabs up canvas and tent poles and drags carts with cages and magical accoutrements. Rixian helps out, but Jeromm deigns not to get

involved. The adventurers are welcome to help out—indeed, watching the diminutive dwarf do all the heavy lifting should tug at their heartstrings—and doing so they get an up-close look at all the creatures and their habitats.

## PART THREE: A JOURNEY MISREMEMBERED

So begins an odyssey across the stars. A considerable amount of time passes getting from Tithus across the Known Worlds and beyond to the distant library Scientorium. None but Professor Kerastus know of their ultimate destination when the journey begins.

Several side adventures can take place along the way. Every star system, spaceport, or blip on the deep radar might be pirates or hijackers, customs agents, or smugglers, friends or foes. Months pass on the *New Pequod's* curious flight across the sectors, in classic science fiction style.

The path from Tithus to the ancient library the professor seeks leads beyond the edge of the Known Worlds. Blind jumps toward the library's star system falter and the expedition ends up falling short multiple times.

The journey affords the heroes and their strange ally Jeromm Hychus ample opportunity to learn the professor's story and objective—and then forget it completely again and again, except for the Immune Traveler—all about their fellow passengers (even the alien ones) and come to rely on each other more and more as they pass far beyond familiar space, civilizations, and customs.

★ **Salvage (page 75):** The travelers receive word of a hulk, possibly of great value, adrift in space.

## THE PROFESSOR'S STORY

Kerastus avoids all contact aboard the *New Pequod* before the interstellar jump, other than to request desired destinations of Jeromm Hychus. He remains taciturn, tending to his menagerie in its haphazard, cramped accommodations. About midway through the journey, his mood softens and he selects the friendliest of the heroes to make a friend. He tells that one person tall tales and performs simple illusions and tricks.

Sometime later, he freely tells his newfound friend and anyone else on the ship of his ultimate destination: the ancient library and starship cache beyond. From a roleplaying standpoint, it may seem that the professor is too conveniently free

with this information. Kerastus has an ace up his sleeve, though, since he knows the strange powers of the library make travelers forget their destination over and over again (unaware one of them remains mysteriously immune to those effects).

Partially protected against that forgetfulness by his brain bugs, Kerastus fully expects he can find one such opportunity to just slip away from the *New Pequod* and make the final leg of that journey on his own.

*“I was traveling as first mate on a tiny merchant ship, much like this one—oh, that was many, many years ago now—on the business of the Duchess of Antares Sector, as I recall. I met a tiny fellow, tinier than Cassretoo, here, who claimed to be a time traveler. Was he really a time traveler? Maybe he was and maybe he wasn’t. He knew a few things that lent credence to his story, but that a century hopper would end up like this fellow, a drug-addled hobo living in alleys, who can know? It was he who first told me of the ancient starships.*

*“Years...oh, many years later...I signed on with a salvage team dismantling a forgotten mining world for scrap. I took their pay, but I was after something particular, these centuries old computers I have here. Junk, by most standards, so I made off with them with no payment. Can you imagine that? For free! For years after I sought out experts, archaeologists, historians, anyone who could help me dig through the data stored on these. You see, beneath every level of data is older data...that’s how these old things worked, you know. Strip one layer away, read what’s beneath it, and so on for, well, for decades, I suppose. At the bottom of this strange palimpsest, that’s where I found it: the location of the most magical place left in existence.*

*“There’s a library, you see, a library left from the times of the Ancient Empires that preceded everything you know in this galaxy—the Scientorium! It holds all the data, records, technology, and wonders of millennia gone by! I know where it is, the palimpsest has betrayed it to me! I must reach it, for it contains a million secrets, including the location of the ancient starship cache!”*

Not only does Kerastus speak freely of his plans, confident only he remembers them, he weaves endless tales of the library, the information it holds, and the tidbits he knows about the long-forgotten civilizations that made it. As quiet as he was early in the trip, after some time he

becomes the center of attention, which he loves, taking every opportunity to entertain with tales of Scientorium, library of the ancients.

## FLEETING PURPOSE

Scientorium does not want to be found. It has a variety of physics-defying means to keep seekers at a distance (see **Library Reclusiveness** on page 14). Professor Kerastus knows the library wants to be left alone, but because of his seemingly innocuous brain bugs, he can hold Scientorium’s existence in his head despite its will.

## IMMUNE TRAVELER

Due to possessing the one-in-a-trillion genetic makeup required to naturally resist Scientorium’s galaxy-spanning influence, one of the heroes is immune to the library’s forgetfulness effects.

The Librarians detected this character some time ago and used the station’s strange influential powers to manipulate events in the character’s life, directing them toward a spacefaring life, toward JumpCorp, toward this mission, leading him to this point and time. These influences have been minor and the hero is unaware of his special ability or the importance it will play in the *Palimpsest Plot Point Campaign*.

Secretly choose the character with the highest Psionics skill. If none possess Arcane Background (Psionics) then the hero with the highest Spirit is blessed or cursed with the task of uncovering and destroying the spaceship cache.

Once the character hears Professor Kerastus’ tale of Scientorium, he or she never forgets it. The Immune Traveler is unaffected by the **Library Reclusiveness** Setting Rule (see page 14). Whenever the travelers fail to recollect the goal...the Immune Traveler remembers.

At virtually every point along the way, adventurers other than Kerastus and the Immune Traveler lose track of their journey altogether. Most often all the unprotected characters forget about Scientorium simultaneously. Perhaps one or two retain some inkling, but their fellows cannot corroborate, putting their retained notions in question. The professor feigns ignorance when it serves his purpose, but gladly reintroduces the library—as if revealing its existence for the very first time—when he wants to get back on track toward his destination.

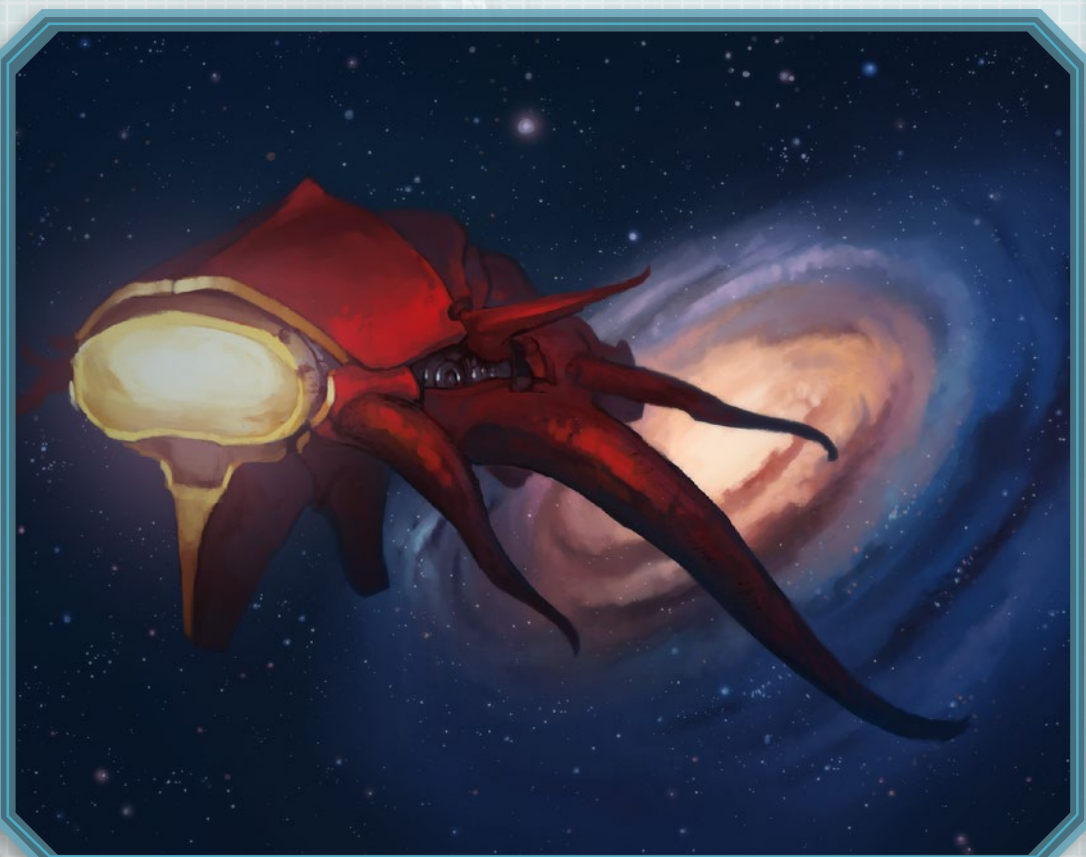
This requires some genuine roleplaying on the part of the players—those who embrace it should be awarded a Benny. Most JumpCorp team members are subject to the library's reclusiveness powers. When they make further plans to get along their path the GM may have to intervene, asking, "What library?" At that point the player characters must continue to play as if they have no idea of their adventure's destination. Long periods of time may pass between remembrances. Everyone except the Immune Traveler is at Professor Kerastus' mercy. He reintroduces them to his secrets only when it suits his purposes.

The Immune Traveler never loses track of the destination. As you explain the characters' confusion and Kerastus' odd behavior, point out that the Immune Traveler retains full knowledge of the library as their intended destination. That player can use that information as he or she sees fit, helping explain things to the other affected travelers openly, or perhaps in private.

When the professor eventually notices the Immune Traveler's unique ability (and this depends on how that is presented or concealed through roleplaying), he is intrigued and only slightly irritated. The Immune Traveler's existence robs him of the opportunity to make the journey to the library on his terms—dawdling here or there while he engages in side adventures of interest only to him—but also affords him a backup and even more effective means to consistently thwart the library's befuddlement and ultimately reach and experience it, something he desperately wants to happen.

### GETTING TO KNOW YOU

This part of the adventure should feel like a classic science fiction story, one with a long journey that reinforces the vastness of occupied



space in the galaxy. The travelers are swept up in the enormity of star systems passing by so quickly that they become a blur. They need and seek diversions, entertainment, sleep inducements, slow drugs—anything to help pass the time.

Use the **Interludes** rules (in *Savage Worlds*) to let characters get acquainted, should they still have any secrets from one another. They have ample opportunity to learn more about their fellow travelers during the voyage, too:

- **Professor Kerastus** is a consummate showman, a mysterious yet entertaining presence. He is apt to divert the mission often to seek a seemingly unimportant artifact, make a clandestine rendezvous, or swap out animals in his menagerie, though the Immune Traveler is wise to him whenever he uses the library's forgetfulness to his temporary advantage.
- **Cassretoo** becomes friendlier over time, when he can get away from the demanding Professor. He lingers near the glass-encased corpse they travel with. At some point during the trip Kerastus lets slip its true identity.
- **Jeromm Hychus** becomes complacent, spending money freely on creature comforts and security devices until his section of the ship becomes a reclusive harem. His Egautian nature presents itself, too, in his love of the traditional and familiar.
- **Rixian**, the bounty hunter, remains silent and foreboding, an ominous presence cleaning and re-cleaning his weapons.

## PART FOUR: FAR FROM HOME

Scientorium orbits a gas giant's moon some distance beyond the fringes of Known Space. There is no astronav beacon in its system, so a ship must "jump blind" to get there. Anyone coming upon it for the first time unveils its strangeness one element at a time.

### AN EPIC JOURNEY

Clues to the library's location are enigmatic, at best:

*"To the tip of the Great Dragon's tail and eight red stars beyond..."*

*"Where Lord Jakall died in fusion fire, along the ecliptic plane as the blue worlds oppose..."*

*"Find the ancient sector capital and reach toward its faint pole star..."*

Finding the path there takes months or even years of concerted effort. Clues are tracked and disproven, new information uncovered, journeys made, all the while fighting against the library's innate elusiveness. (In the case of the main adventure here, the player characters benefit from a non-player character's lifelong search. He sought the tomes and shades of lost data on their behalf.) In sheer distance, it is a distance of between 2,500 and 5,000 light years depending on where one begins in the Known Worlds, though still in the same galaxy. Each blind jump to the library's star system takes several months, the normal ramification of hyperspace travel without benefit of an astronav beacon (see *The Last Parsec Primer* for details), and the library's elusiveness confuses the hyperdrive, most likely forcing it to drop out of hyperspace at the wrong system.

The first two hyperspace jumps to Scientorium's star system fail, confused by the library itself. The ship arrives in the wrong system, closer to Scientorium and more or less along the correct path. All of its elusiveness befuddles the characters, and it may be some time before they realize they have forgotten their objective and regain the resolve to reach the library. Starting with their third attempt to jump blind to its system, they can avoid the hyperdrive's confusion with a successful Knowledge (Astronavigation) roll at -4, assuming at least one of the travelers can avoid the library's elusiveness and insist this special navigational effort be made.

Once definitively located, the journey should be a long one. It is not the sort of trip undertaken lightly. The travel alone is a life-changing experience, a once-in-a-lifetime epic. Wherever the visitors begin, the journey takes them to the far side of the Known Worlds and farther still. Jumping blind is a lengthy experience, and the library's elusiveness makes the trip grueling.

As a final challenge, the library's star system appears on no star chart. Its star is dim and red, difficult to observe telescopically even within a few dozen light years. Locals deny the star system even exists, saying only fools would thrust off into deep space in search of nonsense!

But that star system does exist—lonely, in a gulf of dark space many parsecs from other systems—and beyond its many asteroid fields are a handful of gaseous worlds. Around one of these orbits a gray, cratered world, and around that orbits a massive space station that emits no transponder signal...

The Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest* postulates the existence of a character who is immune to Scientorium's many befuddling techniques (see sidebar on page 33) and can hold the idea of it within the mind indefinitely. Such a person still must deal with the vast distances involved in getting to the library's star system from the distant Known Worlds.

**Observed Technical Data:** Scientorium has no shields against detection from an observer who reaches its star system. Its fusion power plant is easily detected by common sensors. Its shape and size are measured on approach: 97 stalks protruding from a central core, each one 50 kilometers long and ending in a five-kilometer-diameter platform, the whole thing massing many billions of tons of metal. Further sensor probes reveals internal atmosphere and moisture, living creatures, artificial gravity, and an unbelievable level of electronic activity—as if the entire station is one gigantic computer.

## INTO STRANGER REGIONS

The trip to Scientorium takes the *New Pequod* away from the familiar and into stranger regions of space. As their ship makes more and more failed blind jumps, introduce these changes as the expedition touches on the very fringes of explored space.

**After Two Blind Jumps:** While the heroes are still in regions of space considered economically or culturally tied to where they began, subtle changes present themselves. Accents become thicker and more difficult to understand. Customs and travel documentation that served well at the beginning of the voyage are no longer immediately suitable, so the red tape gets a bit stickier. Each successive world's Dominant Law gets more difficult to deal with, going from Lenient to Strict or Totalitarian at times. The local food, fashion, and customs are bizarre.

**After Several Blind Jumps:** Humans and humanoids are reduced to minority status in these distant systems, if they have a presence at all. Anyone who knows the human languages at all uses such a strange dialect that communication is difficult even with computer aid. Computer, electronic, even mechanical connections (like the ship's refueling hookups) are incompatible, requiring considerable extra effort to overcome. No one has ever seen a ship like the *New Pequod*. Interstellar authority vanishes but for a few multi-system governments amid megaparsecs of independent worlds.

**After Numerous Blind Jumps:** Consistently occupied space is left far behind. More often than not new systems are completely uninhabited. Frontier maintenance and refueling become necessary. The adventurers may find themselves landing on a barren planet's surface in search of sustenance or other supplies. Systems are home to isolated communities, strange alien presences, lone explorers, the odd recluse. Unless the travelers seek them out they are content to let the *New Pequod* pass through unmolested. But the closer the travelers get to their final destination, the more Scientorium may call upon these forces to intervene.

★ **Child's Play (page 84):** The travelers protect a famous girl, Yasmine, who has a unique effect on others.

★ **D'ruulean Dreams (page 84):** While the group seeks Scientorium, one team member begins to suspect she's been there before...

★ **Misjump (page 74):** The travelers end up in an area of space far distant from where they originally intended.

★ **The Pursuer (page 71):** Professor Kerastus' daughter Anastasia chases him across the galaxy. Run this Savage Tale when she catches up.

## PART FIVE: THE LIBRARY

The final approach to Scientorium proves the most difficult portion of the journey. Once there, the JumpCorp team must land upon it and lead the expedition inside. Professor Kerastus makes a confident bluster, but from this point forward he is as ignorant of the library's layout and function as his companions. While the Librarians are aware that the Immune Traveler draws near—setting in motion plans for their final mission—they take no direct action to assist or hinder their approach.

### NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK

Finding Scientorium challenges the expedition's pilots and navigators. Once they are within a few dozen light years, the library's resistance to awareness becomes acute. Kerastus is still immune because of his brain bugs, so he takes all sorts of measures to keep the rest of the crew focused on their goal, relying heavily upon the Immune Traveler, if he is aware of that character's ability: constant verbal reminders, getting flight plans locked into the ships' computers, written notes, and so on. Regardless, Scientorium fights to keep its system unexplored. When spacers take

any specific action to pilot or navigate closer to the correct star system, any character who is not immune to the library's influence is subject to the **Library Reclusiveness** Setting Rule (see page 14).

Once in the correct system, the station is still difficult to locate. There are several planets in the inner system and several gas giants with many moons further away. Scientorium orbits a nondescript gas giant moon in the outer system. Finding it takes a concerted effort.

## THE IMMUNE TRAVELER'S FIRST VISION

The hero who has proven immune to Scientorium's natural ability to remain hidden receives a direct telepathic communication when the JumpCorp team first detects the station with its ship's sensors. The message is brief and confused, as if coming from a truly alien consciousness, one that perceives neither time nor space in the same manner as humanoid creatures, gnarled with strange but oddly comforting images of tentacle creatures (the Librarians), and it says simply this:

*"We have been waiting for you. You are welcome here."*

It is not immediately clear to the Immune Traveler if the message applies to the group as a whole or to him or her specifically. The adventurer may reveal this communication to the rest of the JumpCorp team or not.

## LANDING AND DEBARKATION

Once in visual contact, even Scientorium can no longer deter visitors. The mammoth library is an impressive, awe-inspiring sight, easily the largest space station any of the travelers have ever seen. The pilots can fly around it, examine its stalks and core close up, then eventually select a stalk landing platform and set down.

The travelers must decide what equipment to take with them into the library. In addition they must decide if any of the menagerie are coming along, and if not, who stays behind to watch over them. The Professor secretly brings his brain bugs along in a tiny box, regardless.

Professor Kerastus merely knows that the library holds information about the starship cache, but he has no inherent knowledge of how that information is held or might be obtained. He and the others must learn about Experience Chambers from trial and error, though the Librarians may offer assistance in holoivid form.

## THE FINAL MISSION OF SCIENTORIUM

The Librarians know of the starship cache, consider it an immense threat to the galaxy, and want the Immune Traveler and his or her companions to succeed in finding and neutralizing it. They consider this their final contribution to the galaxy, and labor to keep the failing Semi-Reality capacity of the Experience Chambers working long enough to give the Immune Traveler and companions the tools they will need to find and destroy the fleet. Once that is accomplished, they will allow Scientorium's Semi-Reality capacity to collapse into disrepair, never to function again.

Introduce the players to Stalk 37, as presented on page 55. They land on the space port platform, observe and possibly explore the alien ship there, experience the automated ship servicing systems, then go inside and begin exploring through Level 500. Alternately, create your own new stalk with its own unique locations and obstacles.

★ **Stalk 37 (page 55):** Run this Savage Tale if the spacers' ship approaches Stalk 37, the only platform where another ship is already docked.

## ENCOUNTERS

The travelers learn much as they explore. The station is vast and ancient. It is watched over by the Librarians and by the automated security robots. They eventually find the different accommodations and the grounds surrounding each Experience Chamber, all of which suggests the enormity of the Ancient Empire that once operated this place.

On finding an Experience Chamber, Kerastus insists he is the only one who can operate it. However, it becomes apparent fairly quickly that he is just guessing until he stumbles upon the right combination to bring its black wall to life.



## AUTOMATED SECURITY ROBOTS

If the characters do not inflict any intentional damage on the station to draw their attention, invent some accidental damage to bring them on the scene, such as a weapon misfire, trying to figure out how to operate an Experience Chamber and damaging it, or perhaps a menagerie animal gets loose. The encounter should demonstrate the robots' existence and their relatively poor condition.

- **Autonomous Security Robots (1 per hero):** See page 93.

## THE LIBRARIANS

At some point while the team is exploring, the Librarians present themselves as holoivid images if any visitors are taking active measures to block their various station sensors. Even if none of the JumpCorp team does so, Jeromm Hychus most definitely carries personal security devices on his person that break this rule.

The Librarians are impressive creatures, and their presence may misdirect the adventurers to think they are the focus of their quest, rather

than the ever-present but mysterious Experience Chambers. Following the Librarians around to learn more about them is certainly possible, but fruitless. In time, the Librarians guide the players to an Experience Chamber and demonstrate its basic functionality, provided the travelers don't figure that out for themselves. The Librarians want the Immune Traveler to succeed in finding and neutralizing the starship cache, so they are helpful toward that end. Should any of them encounter the Immune Traveler within the library, however, they do not impart any sort of unique telepathic vision like the one sent earlier.

Aggression against the Librarians is met with all their force, including their selective magnetic control around the station. The travelers should learn quickly that they have no great power here, that the library outmatches them in all respects. They are welcome visitors only.

## PART SIX: RESEARCHING THE STARSHIP CACHE

Any Experience Chamber on Scientorium can be used by Professor Kerastus to eventually locate the starship cache. The travelers must navigate the library and deal with its various encounters and the potentially bizarre nature of the Experience Chamber's grounds before beginning. Once at the gray monolith, though, they can search through ancient history in earnest.

The Professor remains true to his blustering ways, insisting that only he knows how to operate the Experience Chamber's controls. He boasts that he has special knowledge of its use—knowledge he uncovered long before he started this journey—which is a lie. On initiating the Experience Chamber's black wall and its default setting, he shares a broad, confident smile. After that, it quickly becomes obvious that he is just guessing how to operate its controls and has no more idea than any of them how to make them work. Frustrated, Kerastus eventually concedes and accepts input from others.

This part of the adventure should take quite a while. Many hours pass as the Experience Chamber gets tuned to all manner of ancient images. Worlds, citizens, stories, images of all stripe come to the screen, but nothing that seems to satisfy what the Professor is sure he's looking for. The travelers are free to come and go from the gray monolith several times, returning to whatever accommodations they've made for themselves elsewhere on the station, giving them new opportunities for other encounters there and further exploration of their stalk and level.

★ **Level 500 (page 58):** Run this Savage Tale as the spacers explore Stalk 37's top level.

### THE STARSHIP NURSERY

After a few days of trying, the Professor finally sees something he recognizes as progress. This single image turns him from a hunched, defeated figure into a wide-eyed personification of confidence and success:

*The image settles on a small white-and-gray world peeking out from behind vast swaths of dust and asteroids being pulled into its gravity well. The view eases closer, confirming the dust fields as nothing more than tumbling stones and sand. But at the point where it should annihilate screaming through the planet's atmosphere, it*

*is instead collected into three concentric rings in a strange, unnatural orbit. At first, the rings appear like a necklace, like grains of rice on a string. Closer still and each grain seems much larger and itself swarmed over by ants. On final resolution, it's clear that each grain is a huge, unfinished spacecraft, each one in a different state of completion, following one upon the next in three world-spanning chains. Construction vehicles collect the incoming swirl of space debris and hurry it to an unfinished craft that needs precisely those missing elements. Each spacecraft seems to grow, slowly and organically, until it is clipped free from the chain, finished and flawless, to take flight on its own.*

While this isn't precisely what Professor Kerastus seeks—this is not the starship cache—it is a point in the Ancient Empire's history that may lead him to it. These are the sort of starships he seeks, as large as any modern dreadnaught, enormously powerful, with exotic designs and technologies. Kerastus announces with some certainty,

*"This is an ancient starship construction yard. Somewhere among the ships or on the planet below lies the clue to finding a cache of many of these ships somewhere in the modern galaxy."*

### FINE-TUNING THE EXPERIENCE

Fine-tuning the gray monolith changes the time and location settings on the black wall. Several hours of this yield some basic information:

- The starship nursery is primarily an automated facility in orbit above the world.
- The construction vehicles collect raw materials, fabricate starship components, and add them to the ships in progress.
- A humanoid race supervises the activities from a few small orbital surveillance stations.
- There is a million-humanoid presence on the world below.

Kerastus is not sure where he can find the information he seeks to locate the present day starship cache. Three different locations appear promising:

*Each orbital surveillance station appears to be the size of an average merchant vessel (far smaller than the starships in the nursery). It has 50 humanoid personnel who interact with a large biomechanical computer device. It appears they can interrupt the activities of any of the construction vehicles and specifically control its otherwise completely autonomous functions.*



An excursion through the Experience Chamber into one of these orbital surveillance stations may be eye-opening with regard to the humanoid race operating it and the enormity of the overall starship creating operation, but yields no actionable evidence. The humanoids are a bit smaller than humans, hairless and seemingly sexless. Their technology is advanced, but on the station it is limited to communications and robot interface devices.

*Close examination of a construction vehicle reveals that each one is a sophisticated materials processor and component fabricator. The vehicle is a flying wing with four retractable, manipulating arms. Its streamlining suggests it can visit the planet's surface easily, perhaps to gather raw materials. It uses a powerful magnetic field to sweep local space of minute materials that it retrieves, processes into its raw elements, and stores. Once full, it moves to the closest unfinished starship and fabricates precise components to further its construction: electronics, hull, engines, whatever it needs. Exhausted of raw materials, it returns to the debris field to collect and process more in an endless cycle.*

These automated devices are impressive but offer no clues to the location of the present-day starship cache. However, the vehicles themselves are incredibly useful and valuable. It can be established that they are universally capable. On examination of any ship it can affect necessary repairs autonomously. The travelers may be tempted to return with one to the real world, a difficult but not impossible task, but one that surely warrants a visit from the displeased Librarians.

*Surveys of the world's surface indicate that few of its inhabitants are directly involved in the orbital starship nursery. Most simply live there in the comfortable environs of its equatorial cities. Their technology and lifestyles are difficult to grasp. Their existence could be one of complete leisure or intensive productivity through easily manipulated tools and industries. Tapping into their direct communications reveals one central complex, though, that interacts frequently with the starship nursery's orbital surveillance stations. Its campus of buildings lies at the foot of a gigantic black mountain.*

*The 10-building complex holds roughly 1,000 individual humanoids and a series of biomechanical computers. They coordinate the nursery's production. It is common knowledge*

*that the starships are being built and cached in secret locations around the galaxy as a precaution against some as-yet undetermined threat. The process is a long one, though: It takes about 50 years to complete one super fleet of just over 100,000 starships. When that is finished, the entire superfleet is removed to a secret location and a single homing device—the only clue to that location—is produced and given to the Empire's Fleet Command. The next occurrence of that event, however, is still 40 years in the future.*

Some of this information can be gleaned from simple observation through the Experience Chamber's black wall display, but to get it all the travelers must at least venture to the planet's surface in safe, Virtual Reality mode (as observers, taking the role of employees, etc.). Of course, this vindicates the Professor. The starships are real, they are cached in places around the galaxy, and there is a means to locate one of them: the homing device. Of course, since that device is a physical thing and not just some information, removing it invites the ire of two capable adversaries concurrently: the Experience Chamber and then the Librarians.

The trick to securing the next homing device is manipulating the Experience Chamber's time element. The travelers should have figured out by now how to manipulate the time view and make the next 40 years slip right by. Then they must enter the Experience Chamber in unsafe, Semi-Reality mode to secure the homing device and remove it to the present reality. The heroes should know by now about the dissipating nature of items taken from the Experience Chambers—but it looks like a simple enough device to duplicate if they get it back to their ship.

If they secure the next homing device created, they have the means to find not just any starship cache, but the cache with these very starships being made right "now."

It is important that the characters feel comfortable using the Experience Chamber to get all this information. Virtual Reality mode makes it all look like an easy proposition to get the homing device and return with it: Security at the starship nursery management complex is fairly lax. The device is easily found and carried. This is all a set up for the Semi-Reality venture into the past, in which the Experience Chamber presents a rapidly deteriorating situation that turns out to be far more than the travelers bargained for.

They can use the Experience Chamber to enter the base posing as military personnel, civilians, contractors, or whatever they choose and do so any number of times in Virtual Reality mode to get the feel of things. However, when they go for the prize—attempt to extract the computing device back to the real world—they must do so in Semi-Reality mode, when all the dangers become lethal. Imagine their surprise, too, when the Experience Chamber introduces a whole new squad of guards that were not there during the Virtual Reality dry runs...

## THE IMMUNE TRAVELER'S SECOND VISION

Should the JumpCorp team or the Immune Traveler in particular reach a difficult spot in their quest for the homing device—a tough firefight or the loss of a fellow adventurer—the Librarians send a second vision. Like the first one, it is strange and difficult to conceive the sender's alienness, but the message itself is clear enough:

*"You are on the right track."*

Extend the message at a point where the team may be considering turning back or abandoning the search. It may not be necessary to extend this second message at all.

## THE BEST LAID PLANS...

The travelers' only way to find the starship cache is to bring the homing device back with them into the real world. And there is only one way to do that: Enter the Experience Chamber in Semi-Reality mode. Once they do that, the situation turns completely on its ear. Despite the Librarians' and Scientorium's strong unspoken desire to rid the galaxy of the starship cache, they are powerless to alter the Semi-Reality mode's insanity.

*The starship nursery's once-peaceful administrative campus lies half-destroyed beneath smoke-blackened skies. Whole buildings are scorched ruins. Explosions from far-off weapons toss dirt and flames into the air. Security forces scurry between spots of cover, while the wounded cry out for the limited emergency responders on the scene. You and your companions have been through the Experience Chamber many times and never seen anything to suggest such destruction was even possible. Now you, too, wear security guard uniforms, and the black wall leading back to the ancient library is nowhere to be seen.*

The Experience Chamber has advanced time to a point when an ambitious rebel faction sought the very same goal the travelers seek: the homing device. The rebels have launched an assault on the administrative campus to steal it. The Experience Chamber has put the characters into the role of security guards and moved the return black wall to the far side of the campus.

Other security guards recognize one of the characters as an officer, and the rest as rank-and-file guards within their ranks. They welcome and fully expect the characters to actively participate in fighting off the rebels. All of the travelers are now humanoid security guards. They are fighting against rebels who landed in three troop carriers on the far side of the mountain. The rebels have three medium walkers, as well.

The travelers emerge onto the scene under fire. They have entered the Experience Chamber in Semi-Reality mode, so injuries are real (manifested as wounds on their real persons back inside the library) and death is permanent.

They must deal with three primary complications to retrieve the homing device amidst all this open combat: The technicians have hidden the homing device in a safe place, the rebels are close to finding that safe place already, and the black wall is not easily found.

- **Security (2 per hero):** Use the Law Enforcement profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## REBEL SOLDIERS (2 PER HERO)

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Piloting d8, Repair d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Taunt d8

**Cha:** -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

**Hindrances:** Greedy, Mean, Wanted

**Edges:** Ace, Block, Combat Reflexes

**Gear:** Spacesuit (+1), molecular knife (Str+d4, AP 2), laser pistol (Range 15/30/60, Damage 2d6, RoF 1, AP 2).

## MEDIUM MECHS (3)

**Medium Walker:** Size 8, Strength d12+6, Toughness 25 (6), Pace 26 (2d6 Run), Cost: \$4.89M, Remaining Mods 6

**Notes:** AMCM, Sensor Suite, Shields, 2× Pace

**Weapons:**

- Dual Heavy Auto-Cannons
- Missile Launcher with 16 Light Missiles, 8 Heavy Missiles
- Dual Miniguns

## HIDDEN AWAY

On all previous investigations, the homing device is fabricated and stored in a secure locker in Building 15. Naturally, the characters head there first to steal it for themselves. The intervening grounds swarm with rebels and other security guards, so they have to fight their way there.

Once inside, Building 15 has already been largely overrun by rebels, and those rebels already know that the homing device is not where it should be. The travelers can pick up clues from their chatter:

*"The prize is not here! Search levels five and six! We'll head upstairs!"*

*"The prize is not secure! I say again, the prize is not secure!"*

The few remaining security guards in the building, holding a last-ditch defense, also know that the homing device is no longer in Building 15, but they don't know where it is either.

A quick-thinking technician put the homing device into a briefcase and hid it in his office on the fifth floor of Building Eight, which as of this time is still largely undamaged. The JumpCorp team must make a successful Notice roll at -4 to overhear a coworker mention it. If they fail, within 20 minutes they hear rebel chatter to that effect, but that costs them valuable time.

*"The prize is in Building Eight! I repeat, Building Eight, fifth floor!"*

## BUILDING EIGHT

Building Eight is a basic office building for its time and technologies. Each of its seven floors has a ring of smart-plexiglass enclosed work spaces with tough-mutable furnishings and a constant connection to the biomechanical computer system. The center section of each floor encloses an open laboratory space, used for indecipherable purposes, but the ones on floors two and three may directly affect the conflict (see map). Simple stairs at each corner connect all the levels.

To reach Building Eight, the JumpCorp team must deal with just one eight-man squad of rebel soldiers, but by the time they arrive they find that one of their walkers arrives on the scene to fire directly into the building. Inside are two other squads with reinforcements arriving in sufficient numbers to keep the firefight interesting.

## SECOND-FLOOR LABORATORY

*The lab is dark and quiet, lit only by distant battlefield fires coming through the clear walls. An open, circular vat holds a deep blue substance permeated with softly sparkling metallic flecks and fist-sized bubbles.*

The starship nursery administrators have been experimenting with an upgraded biomechanical computer in this lab, one that is more independent and self-aware for future ships. The substance in the vat is alive, curious, and semi-mobile. It slowly reaches out tendrils to any and all computer or computer-aided devices, including any advanced weapons. The five-centimeter-diameter tendrils grow out at about a half meter per second. Cutting a tendril is as easy as chopping it softly with any solid object (no roll necessary), and makes it stop growing for five seconds while it repairs itself in mid-air, then continues on its path. When it touches a computer it quickly examines it, consequently reprogramming it to its base level of functionality. For most items that renders it dysfunctional for the remainder of this encounter, or at least until its owner reboots it (1d6 rounds on average). Avoiding a reaching tentacle simply requires an Agility roll.

## THIRD-FLOOR LABORATORY

*Four brightly lit, large plexiglass cylinders stand in different portions of the lab, each one seemingly swarming with big flying insects. One was damaged by a proximate explosion. It teeters and falls to smash open when the room is otherwise occupied.*

Nursery scientists experimented with orbital construction vehicle miniaturization here. These are not insects; they are one-centimeter micro-versions of sophisticated element-devouring, starship component fabrication vehicles, and they are hungry for raw materials. Each cylinder contains 50. One is broken open when the encounter begins, but the others are fragile. The "insects" are delicate and easily smashed. However, wherever they light they devour a one-centimeter sphere of physical material, reduced to component elements and stored. After three rounds the tiny vehicles fly back to their broken cylinder, where they wait indefinitely for other, incomplete systems. Fortunately for unsuspecting explorers, the swarm is as interested in the lab area's materials as they are in humanoids. Subsequent damage includes equipment holed and ruined, and organisms left bleeding.

## MICRO FABRICATION VEHICLE (SWARM)

**Attributes:** Agility d10, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d10

**Skills:** Notice d6

**Pace:** 10; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7

### Special Abilities:

- **Bite or Sting:** Swarms inflict hundreds of tiny bites every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in a Medium Burst Template. Damage is applied to the least armored location (victims in completely sealed suits are immune).
- **Split:** Some swarms are clever enough to split into two smaller swarms (Small Burst Templates) should their foes split up. The Toughness of these smaller swarms is lowered by -2 (to 5 each).
- **Swarm:** Parry +2; because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally, and a character can stomp to inflict his damage in Strength each round. The swarm is foiled by jumping in water.

## FIFTH-FLOOR OFFICE

The travelers reach the fifth floor office only after a significant firefight. The rebels know where to find the homing device, as well. Once there, the desk must be touched to open it, revealing the homing device in its comp pad-sized carrying case. This is the most likely time for the rebel walker to open fire, since the heroes are easily visible through the clear walls. Pursuing rebels realize when the device has been secured by others and is on the move. They alert their fellows immediately.

## ESCAPE

Sufficient squads of rebels present themselves to make escape from Building Eight difficult. And escape to where? At this point the travelers must not only get away from the angry rebels who want to steal the homing device for themselves, but they must find the wayward black wall that lets them step back through the Experience Chamber to relative safety.

This is an ideal time for a classic science fiction trope. If the team has added the professor's daughter, Anastasia (see page 95), the rebels capture her and want to make a swap.

## NURSERY COMPLEX



In its inimical fashion, the Experience Chamber has challenged the travelers' Semi-Reality visit by putting the return black wall on the opposite side of the campus. It can be found along the foothills of the black mountain, just behind Building Seven. Even then, it is not immediately obvious, blending into the basalt rock (especially in the dark) and behind decorative trees and shrubs. Once found, though, there is no barrier to leaping through back to the seeming safety of the real world.

## PART SEVEN: ESCAPE FROM THE LIBRARY

The heroes' troubles are not over just because they've returned to present-day Scientorium. Since they've taken things back with them from the Semi-Reality visit to the starship nursery, they face the wrath of the Librarians, their response in kind, security robots, and the betrayal of one of their own.

### RESPONSE IN KIND

*The travelers appear back in the Experience Chamber in exactly the same condition as when they escaped from Building Eight. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief, but the relaxing moment of euphoria passes quickly. The black wall from where they just emerged shimmers oddly and in the wink of an eye a squad of rebels emerges through it and into the library, weapons held at the ready.*

The Librarians instinctively object to the theft of items from their Semi-Reality presentations back into the real world, and despite their conscious desire that the starship cache eventually be neutralized, the station won't allow them to overcome their instincts and simply allow the Immune Traveler and companions to escape.

They are displeased because the travelers have returned with the homing device, and potentially other items (the miniaturized construction vehicles, rebel weapons or armor, etc.). Rather than get directly involved, the Librarians prefer their standard policy of "response in kind," temporarily drawing forth denizens from the very experience where the items were originally stolen, in this case rebel soldiers. This may be a shock to the heroes if they've not experimented with Semi-Reality before.

One eight-rebel squad at a time emerges from the Experience Chamber that the characters

used (and from no others). Another squad comes through every time the previous squad is reduced to three or fewer effective fighters. The rebels pursue the travelers anywhere in the library, even out onto the spaceport platform and, if possible, inside their ships.

If the battle goes especially badly for the rebels (quite possible, since the JumpCorp team has all its equipment at hand back here in reality), the Librarians may have no choice but to get directly involved. This could be their first encounter with an actual Librarian, at least confrontationally. From that point forward they use their extensive personal powers and engage the station's Selective Magnetism System to fullest advantage.

Remember, the Librarians' objective is not to kill the travelers, but to prevent them leaving the station with anything they have stolen.

- **Librarians (1 per hero):** See page 87.

### SECURITY ROBOTS

Security Robots appear as damage is done to the station during the rebel firefight. Their motivation is simply to subdue and incarcerate the offenders. The security robots are indifferent to the travelers' escape from Scientorium, or what they may take with them when they leave. Apply all the standard malfunctions rules to those robots that appear. They should present more of a nuisance than an actual barrier to escape.

- **Autonomous Security Robots (1 per hero):** See page 93.

## PART EIGHT: ACROSS UNKNOWN SPACE

Free from the clutches of Scientorium's jealous Librarians, with the homing device in hand, the travelers embark on the final leg of their quest for the starship cache...a trip that proves to be the most dangerous yet.

*Professor Kerastus sets the case holding the homing device on the common room table and strokes his long beard in quiet contemplation and awe. More cautious, Jeromm Hychus is less impressed, and sweeps a broad-spectrum scanner over the thing looking for traps and hidden dangers. The case opens when the Professor lays his hand across its surface, almost melting away to reveal the fist-sized gray device within. He presses its only button, bringing suddenly into existence a room-filling hologram of the galaxy.*

*Everyone is awash in the lights of billions of tiny stars. Toward one edge is a red line segment the breadth of a single hand.*

*"The line between the only two points the device knows," Kerastus says triumphantly. "Where it is, and where the starships are."*

*The navigators and pilots sigh. At that scale, a line segment with any visible length means a very long trip, indeed.*

The galaxy hologram is easily correlated with the *New Pequod's* navigational charts. It is at least as far as they have already come, and farther into the stellar wilderness. But the homing device is consistent. Its beacon light blinks with seeming certainty, saying that at the end of that journey is a fleet of starships that dwarfs the navies of all Known Space. The crew must execute a blind jump, as there is no astronav beacon at their destination.

Professor Kerastus and Jeromm Hychus are completely in favor of making the journey. Cassretoo and the bounty hunter are content to follow their bosses. Anastasia is reluctant, externally wanting nothing more than to keep her father safe, but secretly watching out for the Collectors' interests. Her androids follow her unquestioningly.

There are no recognizable humanoid colonies or outposts along the FTL path. Progress is made with no hope of port or repair, with frontier provisioning and refueling only. Any number of short, planetary adventures may ensue during the long trip. However, the bulk of the trek is across wind rider space.

Like all items taken out of the Experience Chambers, the homing device suffers dissolution beginning 2–12 days after its removal. Once it fails, it no longer traces the exact course to the cache. The heroes have a vague idea of the destination, but without the navigational data to direct the jump the journey must be continued by jumping blind (see **Jumping Blind**, in *The Last Parsec Primer*).

Before the homing device suffers from dissolution, the Immune Traveler is inexplicably drawn to it. The device melds with the character for a moment, leaving a strange mark on his palm. This has no ill effect but plays a vital role when the starship cache is found.

## THE IMMUNE TRAVELER'S DEPARTING VISION

The Librarians are glad to see the team escape to deal with the starship cache, despite their purely instinctive measures to stop them. They send a final message to the Immune Traveler that only explains their attitudes and hopes in the broadest terms:

*"Do this thing that must be done. Then you are forever welcome to return here. Farewell."*

Again, it is not completely clear if the message is for the Immune Traveler alone (it is not—any companions are also welcome). This enigmatic message sets the stage for the team to return to Scientorium in the future, though after this adventure its Semi-Reality mode falls into disrepair.

## PART NINE: THE STARSHIP CACHE

The culmination of the adventure is at hand. The cache is located and the master ship to which all the others are slaved must be found. Meanwhile, everyone starts to position themselves in the best place to put their plans into action.

*Space is big. If you want to hide something, even something enormous, space can swallow it up easily. Given enough space, you can hide a hundred thousand massive starships in the inky blackness where no one will ever find them. The ancient admirals stashing their ships took one extra precaution, as well: sprinkling the ships in a deep system asteroid belt.*

The team has arrived at the double star system that was denoted by the homing device's data before it was lost. But where in the system are the ships? There are planetary systems around each star: eight rocky worlds and a gas giant (with accompanying moons) around the larger A-class star, and six rocky worlds and three gas giants around the smaller K-class star. A thorough examination of both systems reveals nothing. That's because the asteroid belt is in the outer system, a narrow belt orbiting the dual-stars' center of gravity some 110 AU, or approximately 10 billion miles out. The belt is detectable from the inner system, and as other possible locations for the starship cache are eliminated one by one, it remains alone as the final possibility.

A trip that far out into the nothingness of space is unusual. It's a distance that takes many days



using standard maneuvering, taxing any ship's fuel reserves to reach it, slow down, and retain enough reaction mass to return safely to the inner system. It can also be reached using a ship's faster-than-light drives, but those are not terribly accurate for such relatively short distances. A jump to the outer system requires a long sub-light journey to make up the difference.

Once that far out away from the main stars, finding the ships is still difficult. The belt is relatively thin out there. It is roughly 650 billion miles in circumference, so the 100,000 ships are spaced out evenly about 6.5 million miles between them. In that space there are thousands of other starship-size asteroidal objects, and tens of thousands of smaller ones, so it is difficult to scan. But they are evenly spaced. So, once the travelers reach that conclusion, finding others becomes quite a bit easier.

### THE LONELY NOTHINGNESS

*The ship's landing lights illuminate a hull that has known nothing but utter darkness for many millions of years. It takes hours to fully examine its exterior. The design is sleek and organic, a finished example of those warships underway in the starship nursery. It waits here, dormant, to be awakened for duty.*

The travelers must find ingress into the spacecraft, discover how to turn it on and interpret its data. Only then do they learn that this vessel is slaved to a single master ship elsewhere in the belt. The travelers must locate and enter that ship to take control of them all.

### INGRESS

There are no obvious hatches to gain entry into the starship, primarily because they are automated vessels that require no permanent crew (something that becomes painfully obvious once they get inside). There are just two maintenance access hatches, one among the drive exhaust nozzles and a second along the dorsal spine. These are invisible to the naked eye but reveal themselves under direct scans.

Opening them is a puzzle. The homing device was the key, but it is now gone. If the Immune Traveler approaches the ship, the mark on his hand starts to tingle. Pressing his palm against the hull of the ship causes the maintenance access hatch to open immediately.

Beyond is a narrow corridor that allows just one human-sized person to float through at a time (there is no artificial gravity here). There is a breathable atmosphere, however. The corridor leads deep into the ship, branching often, leading into narrow access areas, into the engines, and around the ship's strange inner workings. None of these are important except for the biomechanical brain at the vessel's exact center.

The ship's bio-computer is much like those in use throughout the starship nursery: Green gelatin flows through vats and tubes lined with microelectronics. Tiny streams of it reach throughout the ship, but the preponderance of it is here at the central hub. Access around the tubes and vats is difficult. There is barely enough room for an unsuited humanoid to crawl into the recesses here and there. Much of the group is unable to enter at all, held up in a single-file line moving through the narrow access tube.

Their progress with this control center is encouraging, at least at first. They have no problem getting it to turn on lights throughout the ship, change the air temperature and circulation, even fire up the massive engines. But the travelers reach a figurative brick wall when they ask the ship to do anything meaningful, like actually move or fire its exotic weapons. The reason for this isn't immediately clear. Someone must make a Knowledge (Computer) roll to figure out the problem: This ship is one of the slave vessels. It only responds to signals from the master vessel, somewhere else among the 99,999 other ships in the deep belt.

Figuring out which one is not easy. This is a final safeguard set up by the cache's creators. Anyone getting to them would know how to identify the master ship. The slave ship does not want to betray that information. To get it, the travelers must make a remarkable computer communication effort. The heroes must Hack the computer system, treated as a Dramatic Task. Each check represents a day's work. If the attempt is failed, the only remaining option is to rely on the menagerie's Omega Child (assuming it has survived the trip thus far).

*Cassretoo emerges from the Menagerie's cramped hold, lovingly carrying the Omega Child's tiny jar in the crook of his elbow. He whispers to it softly, and the strange, seemingly dead embryonic creature inside stirs, jerking as if unaccustomed to its own movements. Its bearer strokes the jar reassuringly and says, "The Omega Child is ready to assist."*

Only Cassretoo understands how to communicate with the Omega Child, which Professor Kerastus begrudgingly admits is a highly intelligent creature in his care. He believes it to be a truly ancient being, one with strange and exotic powers of the mind that he does not fully understand. With Cassretoo's encouragement, the Omega Child asks the slave ship to identify its master and gets the exact answer.

If neither of those methods are successful, the travelers are free to "brute force" their search. The 6.5 million mile (35 light second) trip takes a couple of hours, as does the easy ingress into each successive starship along the line. The group can probably visit six starships per day if they take shifts. There is a roughly 0.001% chance per ship that they have found the master. Searching through half of them takes more than 1,000 years.

## TIPPING HIS HAND

Jeromm is convinced this is his opportunity to make off with the starship cache on his own to satisfy his benefactors, the Collectors. Like the others, he's unaware that this ship is a slave, so even if he succeeds he's in a strange position.

He and Rixian rely on nonlethal area-denial devices to accomplish their goals. Jeromm doesn't want to harm anyone. Their objective is to trap the other travelers in a corridor using "Insta-Web" plugs. They stash a lozenge in a long corridor, then when the rest of the group has passed it, deposit a second and electronically set them off, trapping the others between. Each Insta-Web lozenge blocks a standard-size corridor with webbing (Toughness 10).

Jeromm and Rixian need to get in front of the group, or one ahead and one behind. Observant JumpCorp members may notice this jockeying.

Regardless of successfully trapping the others, Jeromm cannot complete his mission now because they are only on a slave ship. Negotiations begin. He could leave the characters trapped, end up trying (and failing) to use the Omega Child on his own, leave the travelers behind to search for the master on his own, or cripple their ships to slow down their pursuit. Remember, his objective is to steal away the cache for the Collectors.

## ANASTASIA KERASTUS' BETRAYAL

If the team adds Anastasia to the group (in the Savage Tale **The Pursuer**, page 71), she maintains she wants nothing more than to keep her father safe, but secretly tends to the Collectors' interests.

Anastasia and her entourage keep a close eye on Jeromm and the heroes. Anastasia aids the team if Hychus hijacks the cache.

If at any point Anastasia feels she is in danger of losing the cache, she takes matters into her own capable hands. She might try to steal the homing device from Scientorium to deliver to the Collectors—getting a nice fat bonus! Or she might steal the Omega Child for herself!



## ABOARD THE MASTER STARSHIP

Once located, the master starship is visibly no different from any of its sister ships, just a silent, dark hulk orbiting quietly on the edge of interstellar space. It can be entered and explored in the exact same manner. Upon reaching the biomechanical computer center, though, the master ship has one additional feature:

*The vats and tubes of green gelatin here are arranged a bit differently than on the slave ship. Here they are shoved outward, against the outer walls of the limited space wherever possible, to make room for a black-cushioned command chair suitable for a single humanoid occupant. The right arm rest has a recessed palm print that vaguely appears to be human...*

If anyone other than the Immune Traveler puts his hand on the palm print nothing happens. Should the Immune Traveler do so, the ship immediately recognizes him as its commander, and therefore, commander of the entire cache fleet. This information is mentally relayed to the character in a session of mental images. The hero is now in total mental control of the vessel and fleet whenever sitting in the command chair.

### THOUGHT CONTROL

The master ship conveys a complete, comfortable mental image of itself and all its slave ships directly into the commander's mind. The entire assemblage of ships and every detail of their control and operation are pleasant, easily managed extensions of his consciousness. The commander can order their movements as easily as he can wave his hand. Most actions have a simple confirmation user interface: When the controlling hero makes a mental instruction, he gets an accurate mental picture of how

that instruction plays out (emphasizing any potentially dangerous or undesirable outcomes), and is then asked for a mental confirmation before proceeding (often suggesting slight variations to the order to make the operation unfold smoothly).

On his first sitting, the Immune Traveler is welcomed as sole leader of what translates as "Fleet Task Force 27-J." The commander gets a vivid, multifaceted view of the fleet while in the command chair. He sees them in totality, their relative locations, formation, vectors, everything. While this would seem overly taxing to a single humanoid mind, the master ship's biomechanical computer lends its mental energies to the equation, making it seem effortless.

Additionally, the commander gets an image of 220 star systems clustered along the thicker portion of this galactic arm, collectively labeled as the Primary Objective. On close examination, those systems are along the edge of the existing Known Worlds. Navigational data shows that many of them are unpopulated, but about a hundred of them have sentient life in abundance, with billions of total inhabitants.

### FLEET MANEUVERS

The travelers control of a fleet of starships.

- 225,000 displacement
- Roughly cylindrical, 500 meters long and 175 meters in diameter at its thickest.

**Leviathan Starship:** Size 32, Acc/TS 5/50, Climb -4, Toughness 55 (20), Crew 1

**Notes:** AI, Planetary Sensor Suite, Shields, Trans-dimensional inductive power plant, Reactionless 15g maneuver drive, Space fabric reduction FTL drive, 250,000-mile selective energy dampening field, Plasma flux primary weaponry (all beyond known technology)



The fleet can assemble from deep orbital disbursement into standard spherical formation in a few hours. The Jupiter-sized formation is mostly hollow, with two tiers of vessels in complimentary firing and support positions a few thousand miles apart on the perimeter.

The tiny ships the JumpCorp team has brought with them are easily tucked away into a forgotten corner of any one starship's cargo hold.

None of the fleet's technologies are familiar, bordering on magical. The power plant draws virtually infinite energy from other dimensions. The maneuver drive defies physics. The faster-than-light drive is ten times faster than the fastest jump-capable ships. The energy dampening field absorbs incoming energy attacks, selectively shuts down incoming missiles or other ships, even turning off select systems. One starship in orbit around a world can essentially "turn it off" as well. The primary weapon fires an expanding mini-star that can obliterate any ship or lay waste to a whole continent.

At these speeds, the fleet can return across the intervening space toward Known Space in just a matter of three weeks. The ships need not stop for fuel or provisions. The master ship is designed to accommodate its single living commander, and can be ordered to provide sufficient sustenance and atmosphere for the commander's companions. With a few simple instructions, the master ship can turn a small portion of its cargo hold into suitable living space for the group, spartan but livable.

## PART TEN: THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

The fleet's Primary Objective, the 220 worlds it freely shows on its galactic display, is in peril. While the fleet accepts activation and nominal tactical control from its captain, its functions are largely automated and doctrinal. Fleet Task Force 27-J was built to defend the Ancient Empire against a possible threat coming from outside the galaxy. Now that it has been activated, it is going to its Primary Objective worlds to investigate and respond. When it doesn't find the Ancient Empire still in charge there, it unleashes its weapons upon those worlds mercilessly.

## CLUES

The fleet's ultimate intentions are not immediately clear, but present these clues during the trip:

**Countdown to Primary Objective:** The fleet keeps a to-the-second timer going with regard to reaching the closest of the 220 star systems. It's clear the master ship's biomechanical computer thinks the fleet is headed for that system, even if the ship's captain and the rest of the travelers have another ultimate destination in mind.

**Weapons Diagnostics and Tactical Maneuvers:** The master ship coordinates a series of battle-preparatory maneuvers and activities along the journey. It assures the commander that these are routine and necessary. The fleet is definitely preparing for war.

**Questions and Defies Course Deviation:** These ships can actually change destination in mid-jump. So long as the commander selects a course headed generally toward the Primary Objective worlds, the master ship follows it. The fleet can return to Known Space in a blind jump that takes 2d6x3 days. But as the fleet approaches Known Space, it may notice that the commander's flight path is directed toward some other world. The biomechanical computer begins to question the route when about two days away, then actively argue against it when just one day away. The master ship always obeys the commander, but...

**Changes the Commander's Thinking:** The master ship's biomechanical computer realizes that the ship's captain does not necessarily share its doctrinal obligation. This initiates a preauthorized mind control alteration to bring the commander's view in line with its own. Each day the character makes a Spirit roll (-2) as the ship alters his thoughts. On a failure, he comes under the sway of the ship's programing and accepts its directive: Investigate the Primary Objective worlds and exterminate any invaders.

Once in league with the fleet, the commander presents his change of heart subtly to the other travelers, making recommendations in such a way as to seem reasonable and mutually beneficial. "If the fleet wants to go to these worlds, we should go along and find out what it's looking for." However, as the days pass, he becomes increasingly isolated, to the point where he physically shuts the others out of the tiny control center (with the master ship's many resources along to back him up, though).

It's clear at this point, too, that the master ship would have no compunction eliminating the other passengers, overridden only by the commander's humanity. First the master ship segregates non-humanoid travelers from the others and recommends the Immune Traveler imprison or eliminate these undesirables. If this is refused:

- The master ship initiates a routine purge of atmosphere. Success on a Repair or Knowledge (Engineering) roll prevents it.
- The master ship initiates a transfer of the JumpCorp team's ships to the recycling equipment to break them down into useful component parts. Success on a Repair or Knowledge (Engineering) roll at -2 stops it.

The heroes and Cassretoo can reach out to the affected character and the master ship's biomechanical computer with the menagerie's creatures: the brain bugs and Omega Child. The brain bugs' psionic flux field grants a +2 bonus to resist if on the Commander's person, plus a new roll to break free if already affected. The Omega Child contacts the ship to discover its method and goals, then suggests the ship is changing the Commander's thinking as Scientorium does—a clue that the brain bugs can help.

## PRIMARY OBJECTIVE SYSTEM ONE

The travelers reach the thrilling conclusion of their adventure at an unsuspecting star system on the fringes of the Known Worlds. Can they thwart the powerful squadron they have awakened in time to spare the millions of innocents it is bent upon destroying?

*The ancient squadron slips below the speed of light within just a few hundred planetary diameters of this system's primary world, which is standard tactics for a quick strike against an enemy planet. Half the fleet disperses quickly to the star system's other worlds to evaluate and deal with assets there—in its belts, around its gas giants. The main planet is Dresco's World, a tiny mid-terraformed place with a couple of million residents who have no idea they are about to be evaluated in earnest. When they are discovered not to be direct descendants of the Ancient Empire, a squadron they know nothing about will incinerate them in an instant.*

The heroes must find a way to stop the fleet from carrying out its order and time is not on their side. Once they reach the space around the

planet, the master ship's biomechanical computer takes position around Dresco's World with a few hundred of the slave ships within one hour, finishes its scans and finds no trace of the Ancient Empire in another hour, and then immediately lays waste to the planet's surface with plasma flux blasts. Dresco's World has no way to detect the shielded starships, nor any planetary defenses to protect itself.

The key to stopping the fleet is the Immune Traveler and convincing him to stop the ship. Unfortunately getting through to him is going to take more than a couple of hours. The JumpCorp team needs to delay the master ship.

## DELAYING TACTICS

The travelers can increase their time to reach an ultimate solution.

**Confuse the Fleet's Scanners:** All the fleet's ships are sending their data directly to the master ship for evaluation. A character can try to disrupt the data feed and delay the final evaluation. The hero may make a Knowledge (Electronics) roll at -2 once every 10 minutes to scramble the incoming scan data. For each success and raise, the master ship is delayed by 10 minutes. With a critical failure the time to destruction is reduced by 10 minutes.

**Fool the Master Starship:** If the master ship's brain can somehow be convinced there is evidence of the Ancient Empire on Dresco's World, it may hold off its ferocious attack. If the JumpCorp team did not record and save the minute details of their visit to the starship nursery in the library's Experience Chamber, then Jeromm Hychus certainly did. He's got scanning devices aplenty filled with their military chatter, samples of the language, broadcasts from around that ancient alien world, and more.

Armed with that data, there are three ways to get it into the master ship's computer to confuse its data: directly interface with the computer, use one of their ships to broadcast the data, or actually go to Dresco's World to broadcast it from there.

A JumpCorp team member may attempt to directly interface with the computer and supply it the false information. This requires that the hero connect, though due to the obscure nature of the ship's design, he does not gain the standard +4 bonus to his skill rolls. Once connected, the hero must hack the system as a Dramatic Task, with each roll representing five minutes of time. A failure during a complication causes the



character to suffer 3d6 damage, which bypasses armor, as the ship's computer lashes out with lethal damage. From this point on the character is locked out of the computer.

The travelers have access to their ship or ships at all times, and even to leave the hold to fly freely away, unless they have taken some action to anger the master ship's computer. Provided they can get to their ships, their communications equipment can be tuned to the proper frequencies with a successful Knowledge (Electronics) roll. Broadcasting the message requires a successful Knowledge (Computers) roll. Should the JumpCorp team try the broadcast from inside the master ship, the roll is made at -4.

The most believable broadcasts of all are directly from Dresco's World. To do this takes a fairly involved approach: Reach and convince a government official of the danger and use their (limited) military communications channels. Find and take over a commercial broadcaster and adjust their signals. Or coopt a personal communications system and insert the new data into its feed. Any of these is difficult in just the hour or so available, but if accomplished

is successful barring a catastrophic failure of some kind (see **Hacking** in the *Science Fiction Companion*).

If heroes are successful in communicating the false data about the existence of the Ancient Empire on Dresco's world, the master ship halts the countdown and starts to process and reevaluate the data it has. Each hour, the ship may make a Smarts (d8) roll, at -2 if the data was broadcast from the surface of the planet. On a success it figures out the trickery and puts safeguards in place against more of it. It then resumes its previous course of action.

**Befuddle the Commander:** By now the traveler who has become the master ship's Commander has had his mind altered sufficiently to be in complete agreement with the fleet's destructive mission. In a sense, because of his unique relationship with the master ship's biomechanical computer, the Commander is a means to reach it, communicate with it, and perhaps confuse it further. Delaying the fleet's actions through the Commander is a matter of making a Persuasion roll with a gradually increasing modifier to achieve 15 minutes of delay. The first such roll has

no modifier, the next has a -1 to difficulty, the next a -2, and so on. With a failed roll the Commander completely shuts out his companions, and the master ship reinforces that by taking physical actions to isolate him from their influence.

Similarly, drugging the Commander or somehow isolating him from the ship can gain the travelers some time, but not much. Within 30 minutes the master ship assumes personal control of the fleet's mission and carries out its objectives.

## PART ELEVEN: NEUTRALIZING THE FLEET

Delays give the JumpCorp team more time to find the ultimate solution: neutralizing the ancient fleet. If they cannot find a means to stop it, the fleet eventually destroys everything in this system and then moves on to the 219 others along its path. There is no way to effect an evacuation in time. The fleet must be stopped.

The only way to do so at this point is to bring the ship's Commander back to the other travelers'

point of view, either through some mind control or effective roleplaying and Persuasion rolls designed to remind him of his connection to humanity and Known Space (provide a +2 bonus for bringing up loved ones and purely emotional connections). Employing the brain bugs to revive the Commander's memory is immediately effective, too.

**Reprogramming the Objective:** It is possible to either change the programmed Primary Objective or eliminate it from the master ship's programming entirely. The only means for this is for the ship's Commander to convince the master ship of a new objective.

To change the Primary Objective the master ship's Commander must convince it of a new objective. This is handled as a Social Conflict and requires the hero to obtain at least five successes. The hero should receive a bonus to his Persuasion roll based on valid arguments to why the new objective is more important. The other JumpCorp team members may make cooperative rolls with the Immune Traveler, but are at -2 to their rolls due to the alien nature of the ship.



The team must be careful when changing the Primary Objective. They have a moral obligation to not simply make the ancient fleet someone else's problem. They might consider a definitely unpopulated part of the galaxy, or some point in deep intergalactic space. If they accidentally imperil some other place in space, it's "on them" to eventually make a correction.

**Initiate Self-Destruction:** The Commander is glad to tell curious companions the conditions under which the fleet self-destructs: one, if it is in imminent danger of capture to be used against its original purpose or, two, if in destruction it can eliminate some far greater threat. Once back in the right frame of mind, the Commander can issue the order.

The self-destruct sequence takes just one minute to initiate then gives a one minute countdown. The Commander must remain behind. It's a selfless suicide mission.

**More Exotic Possibilities:** Defeating the ancient fleet's plans might inspire some unique thinking. Maybe the travelers can convince it to fly through a star or black hole. They might convince the master ship's biomechanical brain that the objective has been destroyed when it actually remains intact. Perhaps they can convince half of the fleet that the other half has gone rogue, so that it effectively annihilates itself.

## FURTHER COMPLICATIONS

Three important nonplayer characters may further complicate the final resolution of the adventure. Regardless of their other motivations, though, none of them are monsters, so none of them sacrifices the people of Dresco's World to further their ends.

Professor Kerastus' original objective was achieved when the starship cache was discovered. His plans after that were fairly vague. He thinks he might possibly sell off the starships to some league, empire, or world that can afford them. Of course, he had no idea the cache would be quite so large. Still, because of this he may not want to see the fleet destroyed or damaged and intervene against it, delaying the JumpCorp team at some critical juncture for dramatic effect.

Also, Kerastus insists on saving his menagerie, regardless of how time-consuming or difficult that might be. Getting all its animals quickly onto the ships for departure could be a comical backdrop to the final scenes, with a flustered Cassretoo barely managing to keep control.

Jeromm Hychus and Anastasia Kerastus are essentially working for the same group—the mysterious Collectors—and eventually figure that out. They are reluctant to destroy the fleet, but would be satisfied to retrieve the Immune Traveler as he seems to have some connection to the ships. That would satisfy their employers, they feel. Their allies—his bodyguard Rixian and her android companions—follow their leads.

## POST-ADVENTURE

The adventure concludes on the far fringes of Known Space, but certainly a lot closer to home than they were at the starship cache. It is a relatively short trip to get back among friendly stars, reconnect with JumpCorp, and continue with new adventures.

Professor Kerastus assures his daughter Anastasia that he is now ready to retire. He trains Cassretoo, showing him how to book and manage the traveling Menagerie show in a limited number of systems close to Anastasia's home planet. Of course, when a new opportunity presents itself, he's ready to slip the chain and wander back into the galaxy's seedier underbelly.

Jeromm and Anastasia team up professionally, and also romantically unless one of the heroes has taken that role.

But it is the library that holds the most promise for new adventures. It contains secrets to unlock vast treasures, unimaginable technology, and true power. The starship cache is just one example of where Scientorium might lead. Of course, the library does not want to be found by just anyone, and soon after this adventure concludes its memory begins to fade from the JumpCorp team's collective consciousness, except for the Immune Traveler. The library has that living being firmly in mind now, and the Librarians consider that person and any companions as potential agents for future missions. They are welcome back to Scientorium any time. In fact, the Librarians may beckon the Immune Traveler with some future vision across the light years.

If the Immune Traveler should come to harm, though, or be separated from the rest of the team, Scientorium indeed fades from their thoughts. How they came to find the starship cache in the first place vanishes dreamlike. However, if they think to buy from Professor Kerastus even one brain bug...



# CHAPTER FIVE: SAVAGE TALES

## STALK 37

Run this adventure when the spacers' ship approaches Scientorium's Stalk 37.

Visitors to Stalk 37 observe it to be identical to all the others with a single exception: there is a ship already landed there.

Exploring the abandoned starship exposes the players to the Ancient Empire's exotic citizenry and technologies, as well as the library's automated systems and their present state of repair. They might also take away items that may help them figure out the Experience Chamber controls later on.

A generic spaceport platform is fully described in Chapter Two, **A Galactic Wonder**.

### ALIEN SHIP

Preliminary sensor and visual scans reveal some pertinent information about the unidentified ship.

- It is on a nondescript landing pad appropriate for its size and shape roughly halfway between the platform's center and edge. The pad is fully lit, fully illuminating the ship from below.
- It is a streamlined craft (an aerodynamic shape capable of atmospheric flight).
- It displaces approximately 300 tons.
- The ship's surface is perfectly smooth, with no obvious hatches or portholes.
- There are no energy systems or living creatures detectable, meaning either it is a dead ship or the hull masks those readings.
- The design is totally alien and unknown.

The alien ship does not respond to any communications. It remains silent and unmoving if approached. Ultimately, it responds to the touch of a living creature (not through a glove or other barrier, however). A single touch draws the outlines of the primary hatches beneath (near the forward landing stanchion), atop, and to port and starboard. A second touch to any of

them "opens" the hatch—it fades from view as if turned to vapor.

Inside the alien ship are wide corridors connecting three main sections: the bridge, the galley, and the cargo hold.

**Bridge:** Two strange acceleration couches in a forward interior space suggest a bridge area, though there are no immediately visible controls or viewing ports. The seats are large, with separate spaces for what appear to be four large legs, and a tail to slip out behind. The space allowed for each suggests these are for large creatures, probably two-and-a-half meters tall and powerfully built. Touching the hull immediately in front of the side-by-side seats brings a variety of flat controls into view, but these are all dark. The ship appears to have no power. Their images fade back to a blank wall after a moment.

**Galley:** A larger open space in the center of the ship has four more chairs designed for large, tailed, four-legged passengers. Four such creatures could move about comfortably in this space (more than enough for a dozen humanoids). Like in the Bridge area, touching the walls brings various dark displays and controls into temporary view.

**Cargo Hold:** The bulk of the ship's aft section is a single open space that suggests cargo storage. It is empty now, but touching the walls here generates crates and packaging that emerge directly from the hull. Trace a one-meter circle and a circular "crate" emerges in place. Put something in it and the crate remains in place. Otherwise the crate re-merges with the hull from disuse. Any number of them can be created. The ship's materials technology is particularly advanced.

**Black Cones:** There are four black cones discarded on the alien ship's floors. They are not hidden and easily found. They are made of a strange glass or onyx material, emanate no energy, and do not apparently "fit" into any of the exposed ship control systems.



These are long-inoperable personal communication devices used by the alien ship owners. They cannot be repaired or used, but touching them to an Experience Chamber's control panel brings up the library's entire catalog of materials about their race, culture, technology, etc. (see **The D'ruul**, below).

From the characters' point of view, the rest of the ship is a mystery. There are no obvious engines or power sources, so its means of propulsion or interstellar flight (if any) are anyone's guess. There are no staterooms, meaning the occupants did not require them due to either their physiology or because their ship traveled so quickly across the Ancient Empire that none were necessary.

Regardless, the ship seems eerily quiet and dark. There is a fine layer of dust on everything containing tiny trace elements of long-dead organic materials. Computer analysis can carbon date these to a quarter-million years. But even without technological aid, the ship feels like it's been sitting here for a long, long time.

Disturbing the ship's silence (opening hatches, engaging displays) alerts Scientorium's automated ship servicing systems and brings them back to life.

**Automated Servicing Systems:** Without warning, a series of servicing umbilicals emerge from the spaceport platform's surface and mate up with the alien ship at points around its exterior. The snaking tubes and wires move on their own and might be considered threatening. Any attack damages them, eliciting sparks or a loose-fire hose spray of water or atmosphere before it retracts into the platform surface. The automated servicing systems function in vain, however. The alien ship's ancient systems are beyond dormant. They're dead and irreparable.

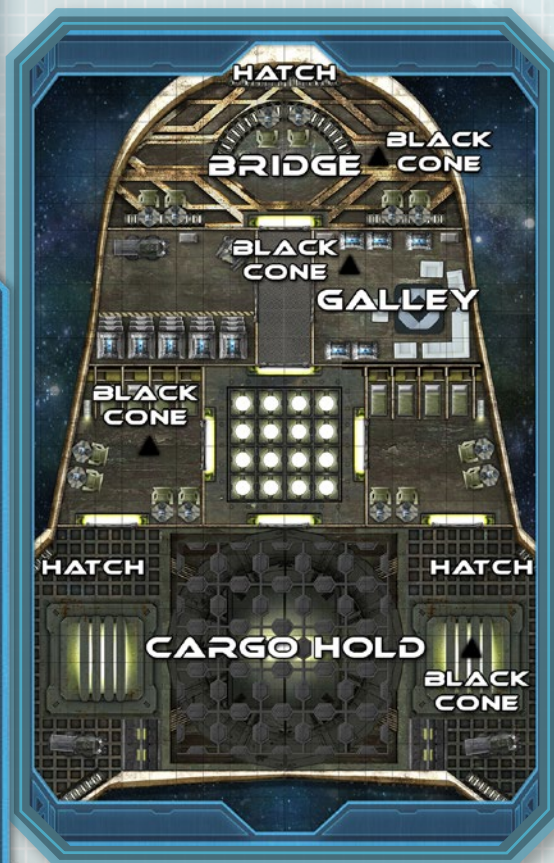
The aliens who visited Scientorium using this ship are long gone and there is no trace of them anywhere. But the characters may well be cautious of them, and that's a fine way for them to proceed.

## THE D'RUUL

Visitors may be curious about the aliens whose ship they discovered long-abandoned on the stalk's starport platform. Since they know virtually nothing about those aliens, it is pretty much impossible to navigate through an Experience Chamber's settings and discover them in its vast archives. However, if the visitors took the black cones from the ship and have them within a few meters of any Experience Chamber's gray monolith, it brings up the d'ruul race and homeworld for immediate observation.

*The black wall brings a slowly spinning blue-and-black world into view, as well as a narrow-faced, semi-humanoid avian creature rotating beside it. The creature has one large black eye and one smaller blue eye on either side of its head. A bony ridge runs from its spine to its forehead where it divides into two, the tips of each coming to a point inside a wide mouth with delicate beak-like lips. The creature has no arms and only narrow, bony legs. Its wings seem vestigial, prominent but far too tiny to lift such a heavy creature into the air on a standard world. The text on the screen is in an indecipherable script of the Ancient Empire, but its most prominent characters form a pronounceable word: d'ruul.*

Manipulating the gray monolith's controls allows the visitors to examine every aspect of these creatures' world, civilization, and history. It is quickly apparent by their body size, architecture, and vast materials technology that they are the race that made the ship standing forgotten now on the spaceport platform.



The d'ruul civilization was a prominent participant in the Ancient Empire, a leader in technology and culture. They did not mix well with other races, though, and preferred to keep close within their own family groups. Individual d'ruul did not enter the Ancient Empire's navies, for instance. Instead the d'ruul contributed entire ships manned exclusively by their own kind. They lived in enclaves on many Ancient Empire worlds.

The d'ruul evolved from flying creatures, but could not fly themselves after attaining intelligence. However, they kept their wings as an important cooling mechanism. Their intricate bone-and-beak mouths served them as manipulative appendages, combined with their three-toed feet which can easily reach their faces, especially when sitting.

D'ruul materials technology was second to none. Most of their structures and devices are smooth and featureless. They respond to touch to become doors or windows, or even specific devices. On touch, a single component can become a specific tool or weapon, responding to its user's desires.

Visitors can enter through an Experience Chamber into any facet of the d'ruul's history. Their lives are exotic and difficult to interpret, but the wonders of their civilization are appealing and numerous. One can learn of their strong family bonds, see the wonders of their advanced technology, amazing art and music, and the vistas of cities and space stations across the galaxy. They are creatures of peace and beauty, worthy of a lifetime of study.

What a visitor never learns, though, until it is too late, is of the dark, unspoken pledge to never use their mind control powers, a pledge once obliterated from their history, but one no longer binding for a d'ruul brought forward into the present day.

## THE UNSPOKEN PACT

Visitors do not learn of this until it is betrayed by a d'ruul who has been brought back to Scientorium (either through a mind probe or when the suddenly arrogant d'ruul brags about it to his mind-controlled victims).

Long ago, the humanoids of the early Ancient Empire came upon the d'ruul homeworld. That encounter nearly extinguished them. The d'ruul exhibited a pathological desire to use their mind control abilities (to that point

useful only for capturing and controlling prey) against the humanoids. In a matter of years the d'ruul commandeered whole fleets and worlds, reaching back through humanoid space until they were finally defeated at great cost on the doorstep of the Ancient Empire's capital. For centuries, the remaining d'ruul were quarantined to their home system, isolated and guarded. Eventually, anthropologists established that the d'ruul's compulsion to obey family instructions outweighed their compulsion to control humanoid minds. The Ancient Empire forced the surviving d'ruul into a pact swearing never to use their mind control against humanoids ever again. That pact was sworn, and then expunged from historical record. All d'ruul knew it and obeyed it, but none spoke of it openly.

Any d'ruul brought through an Experience Chamber is psychologically freed from that pact. The passage of time frees them from that responsibility. It reverts to a savage superiority that knows no bounds. A single d'ruul unleashed in humanoid space can quickly conquer entire worlds, though it succumbs to dissolution just as any physical thing taken out of an Experience Chamber.

✦ **D'ruul:** Use Spy stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*. The d'ruul has a single power—*puppet*—and uses its Spirit die as the Arcane die. The power lasts until the d'ruul releases the subject or is slain. Targets are allowed a roll to break free if commanded to attack friends or commit suicide.

**Takeaways:** The d'ruul black cones are seemingly magical devices. Simply put, a black cone becomes any tool or device just by touching it. It can only become something the toucher is familiar with. The black cone connotes no special skill in the device's use (the toucher could make the cone into a rapier, for instance, but still not know how to use one). Once changed, the black cone reverts to its original form after two hours. It can become anything short of a device that makes more of itself.

The four black cones left on the d'ruul ship are of no concern to the Librarians. Visitors can take these and use them however they wish. However, any black cones brought back through the Experience Chambers incur their wrath.

Besides the black cones, any portion of the d'ruul's material technology is fairly advanced, more so than on most modern worlds. Knowledge of it or samples would fetch a good price.

## LEVEL 500



Additionally, a d'ruul itself might be a valuable asset in the real world. If the visitors fail to reach that conclusion on their own, the d'ruul themselves may go out of their way to illuminate the possibility...

**Semi-Reality Trickery:** Facing a d'ruul unfettered by its ancient pact might be catastrophic. Toward that end, the Experience Chamber subtly manipulates the situation to make bringing one of them into the real world seem desirable. It might make one particular d'ruul seem especially helpful, or it may make the visitors think that a d'ruul would be useful learning how to manipulate the black cones. The Experience Chamber might suggest, through the d'ruul, that they have valuable caches of materials that only they can find. One way or another, the visitors get the notion that bringing a d'ruul back through the black wall is a good idea...

**Response in Kind:** The Librarians know of the mind control pact and have no desire to bring d'ruul into the real world, even if only for a short time. Should they want to intervene, they draw upon that race's sophisticated security mechs.

## ★ D'RUUL SECURITY MECH

**Heavy Walker:** Size 10, Strength d12+8, Toughness 38 (16), Pace 12 (2d6 Run), Remaining Mods 2, Cost C\$7.77M

**Notes:** AMCM, 6× Armor, Deflector Screens, EM Shielding, Sensor Suite, Shields, Targeting System

### Weapons:

- Dual Linked Heavy Autocannon
- Missile Launcher (16× Light Missiles, 8× Heavy Missiles)
- 2× Miniguns

## LEVEL 500

Run this Savage Tale when the spacers explore Stalk 37's top level.

Level 500 is the highest level on Stalk 37, but regardless is of standard design and functionality. There are four distinct Experience Chambers with their associated grounds, as well as four separate hotel and stateroom areas. All are interconnected by access corridors to the centrally located stalk transport pad and the means to descend to the stalk's lower levels. Any food or water sources have limited duration, as best suits your campaign.

## EXPERIENCE CHAMBER 1: THE HANGING GARDENS

The grounds are walled off from the rest of the stalk level by fairly mundane, high shrubs. They are full and lush, well-manicured, smell of sweet yellow flowers, but betray nothing of the marvels within...

*A thousand pleasant fragrances mingle in the air to welcome visitors through sandstone arches into the parks and plazas within. Multicolored flowers dazzle the eye from all directions, some hugging the ground in tight bunches, others hanging heavy from small trees and bushes. Arches and trellises support lush vegetation—all strangely alien in its detail but delightfully familiar when taken as a whole—so that one feels engulfed in its splendor. Tiny flying creatures, all bird and bug analogs, flit here and there, their buzzing and calls mingled with the trickling of fountains and slender streams upon the ground. Among them are tiny floaters, as well, as delicate as soap bubbles floating on the air, but they are, in fact, delicate alien insects.*

A visitor could spend many days comfortably perusing this Experience Chamber's grounds, examining all its creatures and vegetation.

Comfortable sitting areas are hidden away here and there, secluded for one or two people, or more open for larger groups.

One centrally located open space is dedicated to an enormous double-star sundial built upon the ground. The station creates a super-realistic simulation of two artificial suns—one yellow, the other more reddish—that shine down and appear to move independently across the sky. Another open space is dedicated completely to exotic fruits and vegetables. Every bit of it is edible and nourishing, but none of it is familiar.

## FIRST SETTING

The Hanging Gardens' Experience Chamber is a little hard to find, seemingly overgrown with vines and lush vegetation. The black wall is made to look like a cave in a low hill. The gray monolith stands before it, tangled in growth. All of this is by design, lending to the Experience Chamber the adventure of "discovering" it in the wilderness.

Touching the gray monolith brings up this default setting, the setting left by the last visitor to the Hanging Gardens:

*The black wall brings up a red-tinged desert landscape beneath a bright yellow sky. Jagged black and red mountains stand in the distance. A city of earthen buildings lies in the distance, teeming with activity. Smoke rises from many fires, and large flying creatures circle the city.*

Further toggling of the gray monolith's controls reveal that this is a planet in a star system in a faraway galactic arm, around the middle of the Ancient Empire's reign, many millennia past.

This planet, Regutha, is an arid world with a thin, ammonia-heavy atmosphere (non-natives must use breathing apparatus to survive here). Reguthans, the indigenous intelligent species, dominate the planet, having achieved a primitive technology of early metallurgy and stone architecture. They are fur-covered quadrupeds whose heads recess into a bony body cavity when not actively engaged in sensory activities. Otherwise unremarkable, Reguthans are empathically psionic, imparting their own emotions to each other, as well as to other nearby creatures.

They are suspicious and insular, organized into warring city-states. This city, Thuuk, is ruled by a powerful overlord, Chusk, who employs bodyguards of semi-intelligent pterodactyl-like avians to enforce his will, called Tayons. There

is an organized resistance to his rule, calling themselves the Union, who must suppress their natural empathic communication to avoid discovery. They accomplish this by means of a meditation technique that closes off their emotions that they call the Way.

Visitors approaching Thuuk draw quite a bit of fearful attention. The Reguthans' fear projects itself so the visitors can sense it easily. Chusk orders his Tayon bodyguards to capture or kill any intruders, and he is difficult to reason with. Overt displays of technology drive the fearful citizens away, though they eventually muster strength in numbers to fight back. Reguthans cannot easily sneak up on the visitors, though, because their emotions precede them.

**Takeaways:** Being a primitive culture, the Reguthans have few material possessions that visitors might find valuable. Their treasury is filled with gemstones, and they commonly use precious metals like gold and silver for everyday items (they attach no particular greater value to these than they do to other metals like tin and iron). They have a variety of exotic art styles that might be valuable to collectors.

The Reguthans themselves are valuable empathic projectors. One can send a powerful



emotional signal—fear, loathing, joy, sexual desire, anger—to a distance of 500 meters just by will. A carefully managed Reguthan ally could be an enormous asset back in the real world, though it fades from reality after a time.

Not as obvious a takeaway is the Way. Friendly Reguthans could teach a visitor the rudiments of the Way in only a few days, a means to mask their innermost thoughts from detection, even against technological probing. The technique redirects emotions into different mental energies, as if the mind does not have those emotions in the first place, so there is nothing to detect. Since the Way is not a material thing, the Librarians have no problem with visitors learning it and leaving Scientorium with that knowledge. This is not psionics, but a mind clearing technique that is effective against all manner of thought detection and grants a +2 to rolls to resist it.

**Semi-Reality Trickery:** The Experience Chamber introduces a few complications against Semi-Reality visitors. The Union mistakes one of the visitors for their leader, and they launch an irresistible emotional barrage against him until he acts the part. Agents from another city-state kidnap one or more visitors, assuming they are powerful new allies of their hated rival, Chusk. The Experience Chamber exit rests to the far side of the mountains, forcing the visitors to traverse the hostile Tayon native homeland.

**Response in Kind:** The Librarians draw Tayons into Scientorium to pursue thieving visitors. They have difficulty managing the smaller corridors, but can generally fly above each level and squeeze between them through the stairwells. Tayons who reach the spaceport platform are especially effective since they have plenty of maneuver room.

If the Tayons are ineffective, the Librarians call upon Chusk, himself, and any number of spear-armed Reguthan soldiers. Assuming their primitive weapons are no match for the unruly visitors, the Librarians direct them to use their emotional projections, instead. They impart crippling fear upon one visitor, and terrible rage upon another, disrupting their efforts to escape. Chusk is an especially strong emotional presence, and his focused efforts are difficult to resist. The Reguthan soldiers pursue and harass the visitors until they either give up their stolen items or escape the station.

✦ **Chusk:** Use Pirate Captain stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*, but he is armed with an axe (Str+d6) and has the Strong Willed Edge instead of the Gravitic Acclimation Edge.

• **Reguthans:** Use Citizen stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

• **Tayons:** Use Thug stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*, adding Flight (Pace 6, Climb 0).

## EXPERIENCE CHAMBER 2: ALIEN CITY

These grounds are surrounded by a delicate lattice of thin, black fibers bridged by palm-sized mirrors. The lattice seems delicate, but it is as strong as a steel barrier. There are no apparent entrances. Instead, any living being can pass through the barrier (material possessions intact) simply by imagining himself on the other side.

Inside is an alien city of strange, primarily spherical architecture. It is a pedestrian city, with no vehicles or roads. Instead, walkways propel occupants along effortlessly without obvious mechanical means. Most surfaces are highly reflective, so it is difficult to find one's



way around. Touching the walls turns them momentarily clear. Light seems to follow the visitors around, though its source is not readily apparent. The city is three-dimensional with non-specific gravity. Visitors can walk inside enormous curved structures and find themselves completely upside down from where they started.

The accommodations are for very slender, tall beings. Doorways and passages are sometimes no wider than a half meter. Chairs are narrow and mostly unusable by standard humanoids. Slim fibers hanging from the ceilings activate different alien entertainments, which are primarily short-lived light and sound displays. Most tables are food replicators responsive to touch and thought. Touch the surface, think of water or a meal, and it miraculously rises out of the surface, ready to eat.

## FIRST SETTING

The alien city's Experience Chamber is inside a large black sphere at its center. Access is gained from a 10-meter hole at its top (one can simply walk up the side of the sphere and down again along its inside surface). The black wall is flat against the floor (so one must "jump in"), distinguished only by a brightly lit white outline. The gray monolith is flush against one edge.

Touching the gray monolith brings up this default setting, the setting left by the last visitor to the alien city:

*A derelict spacecraft floats in deep space. Its design is jagged and asymmetrical. Half of its exterior is covered with an oily residue radiating a dim, green glow. The ship has no running lights and is apparently powerless.*

Further toggling indicates that this is in a system about 1,000 light years coreward from Scientorium's location, where there is a high population world with a large naval base. This incident happened in an early epoch of the Ancient Empire.

This is a replay of an important historical episode. In that reality, a squadron of ships was dispatched to investigate this alien ship, and in doing so contracted a deadly disease that they took back with them, unintentionally wiping out billions of citizens. The visitors know none of this, and can now observe or participate in this historical episode, potentially putting themselves in great danger.

First, the visitors get an opportunity to investigate the derelict spacecraft. It is lifeless,

unpowered, and alien but not terribly exotic. An airlock is open, so there is no atmosphere within. Inside, they find its tiny humanoid crew all horribly disfigured and dead, preserved in vacuum. The green-glowing residue is a living organism. Traces of it can be found throughout the ship, and it infects visitors who take no safeguards against it. The pathogen is deadly, bloating and destroying living tissues after a short incubation period.

Second, a squadron of warships arrives a few hours after the visitors, led by Commander Cehl Wherrus. Cehl's squadron has 20 large starships. Her instructions are to examine the derelict craft that has entered their star system unannounced. She has no idea the derelict carries a deadly pathogen.

✦ **Commander Cehl Wherrus:** Use the Starship Crew (Captain) profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

**Giant Starship:** Size 20, Acc/TS 25/250, Climb -1, Toughness 62 (23), Crew 1000, Cost C\$2.6B, Remaining Mods 0

**Notes:** AI, AMCM, 6×Armor, Deflector Screens, FTL Drive, Galactic Sensors, Shields, Speed Reduction, Targeting System

### Weapons:

- Mass Driver 10 (Fixed)
- 2× Dual Linked Mass Driver 6
- 4× Dual Linked Light Lasers
- Bomb Bay with 2 City Busters, 4 Block Busters, 12 Large Bombs
- 4× Missile Launchers with 16 Heavy Missiles
- 2× Torpedo Tubes (Fixed) with 20 Heavy Torpedoes

If the visitors choose to simply observe, they watch the squadron arrive and investigate the ship remotely using sensors. Commander Wherrus personally leads an EVA team onto the derelict and takes samples of the toxic residue (a fatal mistake), and then takes the derelict in tow back to their naval base.

**Takeaways:** There are two primary takeaways from this experience: the toxic residue and the derelict spacecraft's super-high-tech star drive.

The toxic residue is especially dangerous. It leaches through the molecular structure of anything it touches, so it can get through any barrier, even steel or a spaceship hull if it has enough time (10 minutes per Armor point). Contact with living flesh is quickly fatal.

Turned loose inside a ship, it must roll once on the Starship Critical Hits table per hour until neutralized. A person must roll on the Injury table once per five minutes until neutralized.

One needs a magnetic bottle or some similar container to convey the residue safely. Any military corporation would pay good credits for the residue. Weaponized, it would be formidable.

The derelict's star drive is unlike anything the Ancient Empire knew of at the time of contact, and is far superior to any the visitors know in their time, as well. It uses space-folding technology dependent upon existing high gravity sources. To activate it, the ship must accelerate toward a large planet or star, building up a compression against the gravity waves. A ship so driven appears to dive right into the star and disappear, but in fact space is folded so the ship emerges from some other distant gravity source in the galaxy.

The derelict drive itself is massive, weighing roughly six tons. It could be disassembled for retrieval. Studying the drive could reveal its secrets, but in this case extended proximity to the deadly toxin would probably prove fatal.

**Semi-Reality Trickery:** The experience chamber changes things to maximize visitor exposure to the deadly toxin. It makes them part of the away team that must gather samples, or part of the team that must prepare the derelict's exterior for towing back to the naval base.

The visitors' point of reentry back through the Experience Chamber is near the derelict. To keep them away from it they get assigned to one of the squadron's most distant ships, one on point guard or otherwise removed from the derelict. In effect, it forces them to go AWOL to get back to the derelict and return to reality.

**Response in Kind:** The Librarians call upon the squadron's star marines to chase the visitors back into reality should that prove necessary:

### STAR MARINES (2 PER HERO)

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6

**Cha:** —; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 14 (8)

**Hindrances:** Loyal

**Edges:** Steady Hands

**Gear:** Hard armor (+8), laser rifle (Range 30/60/120, Damage 3d6, RoF 3, AP 2), molecular knife (Str+d4, AP 2).

## EXPERIENCE CHAMBER 3: GAS GIANT BALCONY

Curved metal walls isolate this Experience Chamber's grounds from the rest of the stalk level, smooth to the touch, dotted with occasional blinking red navigational hazard lights. Four airlock entrances placed along the exterior allow easy ingress and egress.

Inside, the entire space is made to look like a luxurious open balcony on a floating station deep within the swirling, colorful atmosphere of a blue-orange gas giant. A strong wind blows freely through the space, among the comfortable chairs and tables. Along the railing one can look out upon the wondrous scene:

*Mammoth clouds and storm systems stretch as far as the eye can see in all directions, lighter toward the shrouded sunlight, dark and ominous further below toward the gas giant's core. Balloon-like whales soar in enormous schools in the distance, while more exotic flying creatures streak past the balcony on occasion.*

Accommodations are set up so that every chair and table affords a terrific view. A variety of simple telescopes and binoculars are positioned around the balcony's edge for extended, close-up viewing of clouds and creatures. The station itself appears to be enormous, roughly spherical, stretching far away above and below the balcony where as many as a hundred people can sit and observe the magnificent beauty of this gas giant's interior.

### FIRST SETTING

This Experience Chamber's black wall is actually on the far wall opposite the balcony view, between two comfortable bar areas, its gray monolith prominently displayed upon a raised platform.

Touching the gray monolith brings up this default setting, the setting left by the last visitor to the gas giant balcony:

*A huge agricultural station orbits high above a blackened, crater-pocked world. The enormous spinning wheel, many kilometers across, is lushly green and yellow along its interior, sterile gray on its exterior. The light of a distant sun shines down upon the station, positioned to let its warmth nourish the crops in a daily cycle. Tiny ships come and go from the wheel's edges and its spherical hub, dashing back and forth to the seemingly lifeless planetary surface below.*

The setting is a distant world many hundreds of light years spinward from Scientorium, in a later epoch of the Ancient Empire.

The world is Ephorus, a cold, lifeless planet in an unremarkable star system. The place would have remained uninhabited except for the discovery of easily surface-mined deposits of high quality iron and bauxite. Easy profits brought miners, who in turn brought other wealth seekers, until the population soared on a world that could not feed them. Hence this agricultural station and many more like it.

Although they don't realize it at first, the visitors arrive on the scene just prior to the worst orbital station disaster ever recorded. Agricultural Station 16's main supports and structure have already begun to crack under the strain of spin. An evacuation is underway, but there is little hope of getting all the station's hundred-thousand inhabitants off before the station loses integrity and essentially rips itself apart.

One effort to save Agricultural Station 16 is of particular interest. A consortium of grain-hauling freighter captains that purchased the doomed station as a salvage opportunity are attaching their ships to the station's exterior in hopes of slowing the station's spin, reduce the strain on its structure, and keep it from further destroying itself. There are numerous problems with this plan, though. Attachment to the station is ad hoc, at best, and an engineering investigation suggests slowing the station may in fact make the situation worse. Also, this effort is taking valuable ships away from the evacuation effort, and desperate station citizens are taking matters into their own hands.

The visitors find themselves among these angry citizens who have determined to seize one such freighter, disconnect it from the station, and use it to evacuate their families. Their plan is to descend over the side of the station, trek along its exterior to the freighter, board it and take it over.

The trek across the surface is slow going, more than a kilometer along the exterior of the spinning station. They should achieve surprise. The freighter is largely automated, with just eight humanoid crew members, but it does have several War Droids in its arsenal.

**Semi-Reality Trickery:** The Experience Chamber accelerates the station's destruction, creating enormous fractures, even cliffs and valleys that the citizens must traverse to get

to their prize. If that isn't enough, the freighter crew completes its attachment to the station and engages its engines during the assault, creating an earthquake-like environment for the battle to take control of the vessel. If the visitors manage to succeed with their citizen army in taking the freighter, the station is doomed to break apart. The portion with their return portal through the Experience Chamber flies off into space and must be tracked down. Worse still, that portion may fall to Ephorus' surface, forcing the visitors to find it and repair it on the harsh, frozen vacuum plains.

**Response in Kind:** The Librarians call upon the freighter's war droids to engage against undesirable visitors.

### WAR DROIDS (2 PER HERO)

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d8

**Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9(2)

**Gear:** Mingun (Range 24/48/96, Damage 2d8+4, RoF 4, AP 3, HW)

**Special Abilities:**





- **Advanced Sensors:** War droids have the Optics Package, allowing them to see across most spectrums.
- **Armor +2:** Reinforced body.
- **Hardy:** A second Shaken result does not cause a wound.
- **Minigun:** War droids mount rapid-firing slugthrowers when fighting enemy infantry or other soft targets. They're given heavier weapons if expected to fight vehicles or foes in power armor.

## EXPERIENCE CHAMBER 4: THE STAR CHAMBER

This Experience Chamber's grounds are separated from the rest of the stalk level by a one-meter-thick wall of absolute darkness, reaching from floor to ceiling. Light cannot penetrate the wall in either direction, and anyone whose eyes are inside it cannot perceive any light at all. In all other ways, though, the barrier is vaporous, and anyone can pass through it easily.

*Beyond the darkness barrier you seemingly step directly into deep space, surrounded by millions of untwinkling stars. The experience defies explanation. It is as if floating in vacuum,*

*yet comfortably surrounded by warm atmosphere and without weightless disorientation. Stranger still is the scene ahead, a colossal spiral of variably lit matter careening slowly into a pentagonal lattice of lightning and titanic constructs. Within each mammoth polygon in the lattice resides a star of different size, age, and maturity, hundreds of them in every imaginable color. It is as if an enormous singularity were turned inside out, revealing within a logic-defying clockwork star chamber.*

It is impossible to calculate the distance from the vantage point to the star-nurturing lattice, but it must be some hundreds of astronomical units. The vast swirl of matter dances slowly toward the center, somehow absorbed, processed, and doled out throughout the star nursery. Several dozen stars can be seen in the distance, far off but probably within a single light year, raw materials yet to be pulverized by unimaginable energies and technologies to feed the star-generating machine.

Someone has figured out how to make their own stars, and the visitors are witness to that achievement.

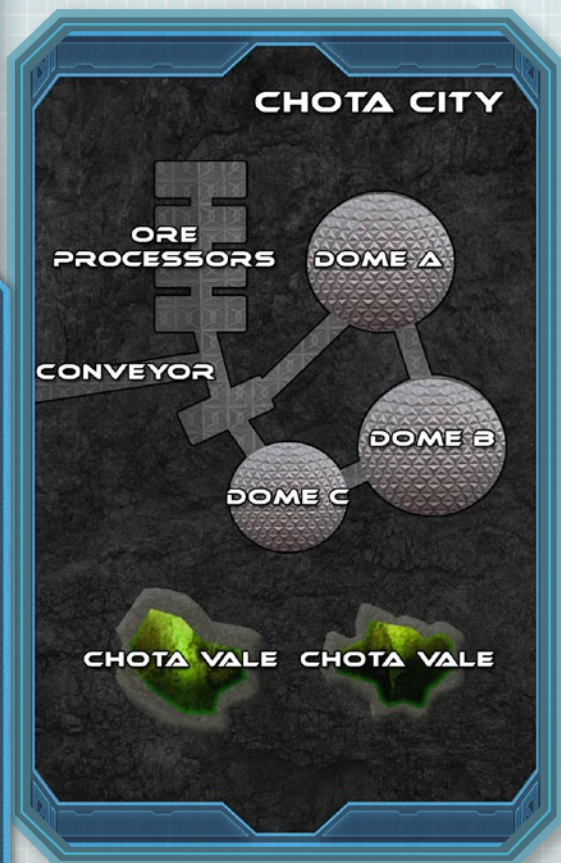
## FIRST SETTING

This Experience Chamber's black wall is not immediately apparent. By facing directly away from the Star Chamber, visitors can "walk" toward deep space, where they find the black wall roughly 100 meters away from their starting point. The gray monolith is unlit and effectively invisible upon approach, unless they somehow illuminate it.

Touching the gray monolith brings up this default setting, the setting left by the last visitor to the star chamber:

*An enormous industrial city sprawls along the floor of a vast subterranean canyon. The very ground rumbles with activity. Factories, refineries, and mines churn incessantly, plundering this planet's vast mineral resources and processing them into profitable products for export to the Empire's consumer worlds. Acetylene and burnt carbon assault the nostrils, beyond the atmosphere scrubbers' capacities to eliminate. This is a corporate city, a grimy boomtown beneath a rock sky, perpetually lit by harsh arc lights strapped to the stalactites above.*

Chota City is a frontier mining and manufacturing town teeming with workers. Few families live here. It is a million-worker city of



long shifts and big profits. Citizens come from all over to make money, plain and simple. There is no government and no law other than what corporate security provides.

The place is named for the rock-dissolving aliens imported here from their distant home world. Ten thousand chota are invaluable mining assistants, semi-intelligent diggers who ferret out the most valuable deposits and point the way for the big mining concerns to maximize their efforts. But the chota are not here voluntarily, and they are not paid. The chota are essentially beasts of burden, and if they were any smarter they would be considered slaves. Moreover, the chota are getting smarter.

Over the years the miners have taught the chota how to read and to count. They've become curious and increasingly self-aware. Now, with the assistance of a band of sympathetic human miners, the chota have gone on strike, demanding better working conditions. The corporations have retaliated, killing some chota, imprisoning others. The stage is set for the Chota Rebellion.

Visitors enter the beginning stages of a bloody rebellion that pits humans against chota and, in turn, different corporate interests against each other seeking competitive advantage. Historically, this rebellion left Chota City destroyed and most of its inhabitants dead after the chota finally exposed its underground chamber to the vacuum of space.

**Takeaways:** The chota are a distinct and valuable species. Getting a mating pair of them back to the real world might be desirable, if they could be cloned before dissolution. Visitors so inclined must either capture or side with the chota and convince some to come along.

## CHOTA

**Attributes:** Agility d4, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Knowledge (Mining) d6, Notice d6, Stealth d8

**Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

**Special Abilities:**

- **Bite:** Str+2.
- **Burrow (2"): Chota can move through dirt and rock.**
- **Rock Dweller:** +4 to Vigor rolls to resist the effects of heat or pressure.

**Semi-Reality Trickery:** Visitors find themselves betrayed by a corporation, accused of assisting the chota and hunted. When their security access

cards are switched off they can no longer reach the return black wall and must break into a heavily guarded factory to do so.

Further, the visitors find that the chota are a lot smarter than anyone had previously given them credit, and they have organized numerous traps to capture or kill unsuspecting humanoid workers. Most of these are fairly simple, either pits or collapsing corridors to capture or even suffocate. The visitors find themselves beset by these traps and put in harm's way. They also find the chota especially resistant to negotiations.

**Response in Kind:** The Librarians call upon Chota City's typical citizens and miners to pursue visitors back inside Scientorium.

- **Citizens (3 per hero):** See the *Science Fiction Companion*.
- **Miners (3 per hero):** See the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## HOTEL 1: HUMAN BEACH RESORT

The smell of salty sea air greets visitors approaching these accommodations, soon accompanied by the sound of lapping waves and gentle, warm breezes. The lobbies, all abandoned now, are fashioned from native trees and leaves, strangely alien but not at all threatening. If anything, the flora has further overgrown the lobbies, making them a bit difficult to traverse. Beyond are brilliant blue waters beneath clear skies dotted with wispy white clouds. Tiny islands dot the waters, each with a handful of tiny structures.

When fully operational, this hotel served humanoid visitors with a luxurious oceanside ambiance. Guests occupied the island hovels that on first glance seem primitive but are actually technologically advanced. They could enjoy a relaxing setting and take part in a variety of amusements as they visited Scientorium and utilized its Experience Chambers over a lengthy stay.

**Hovels:** Robotic versions of enormous turtle-like creatures still dutifully present themselves as transport between the lobby and the hovel islands. Each one can easily carry as many as 10 visitors and their luggage on its back as it slowly swims between destinations.

Each hovel is its own building with a suite of a half-dozen rooms. They are made of wood with grass roofs and carpeted floors, and are mainly open to let the ocean breezes blow through. The

surrounding vegetation offers tasty, edible fruits and vegetables that replenish overnight.

In fact, the hovels are precision-made accommodations with unseen facilities for comfort and security. The occupants are monitored so temperature and lighting are continuously adjusted for their comfort. Security monitors the hovels and any intruder is locked inside as the hovel “locks down” to prevent theft or unwanted intrusion.

There are hundreds of hovel islands, stretching away toward the horizon in all directions. Curious visitors can take a turtle creature to the outer edges, though, and find the water’s edge against the exterior of the stalk.

**Activities:** A large central island illuminates each evening with blazing bonfires and torches, as turtle creatures present themselves for easy access. When fully occupied, the hotel coordinates exotic beach parties here, with music and dancing, food and drink, games and contests, all in the island theme. Now the fires light themselves but are eerily quiet without guests to entertain.

Odd jellyfish-like creatures congregate at the shore when the beach is occupied. They beach themselves and flatten against the sand invitingly. Should the visitors figure it out, they can walk out onto the creatures and stand or sit comfortably on their softness. Then the creatures slowly fill themselves with gas and float up into the air, tethered by a living line no more than 20 meters into the air. Guests bob in the breeze on these natural balloons for as long as they like, enjoying the view and the ocean winds.

**A Relatively Recent Visitor:** If the visitors explore the different hovels they discover evidence of recent habitation. They might also stumble upon this evidence by accident (a tethered floater might break free and deposit a visitor at the correct hovel, for instance).

One hovel island has remnants of a primitive defense. Stakes fashioned from the local trees were sharpened and dug into the ground, pointing outward in a thick ring all around the island, even up to 20 meters out into the water. Most of these are rotten and fragile now. Behind these is the remains of an earthen and sandy mound that is only one meter high now but may have been twice that before steady erosion took its toll.

The hovel’s doors and windows are still blocked off with wood and earth. Inside are a number of

additional sharpened stakes, suggesting that the defending occupants had no more sophisticated weapons. A couple of fire pits are still charred black at the bottom, mostly filled deep with discarded fish bones, suggesting whoever was here remained for many weeks or months.

Chemical analysis of the biological remains indicates this occupation took place roughly 100 years ago. Those visitors are long gone, but their presence serves as a warning that there is danger lurking in the waters.

These eels race through the shallow waters surrounding each island and lunge as much as 20 meters onto shore to battle briefly before retreating to the sea, possibly dragging victims along with them. As many as half a dozen may attack at any one time. Once they are alerted to the presence of new visitors, they attack relentlessly.

## EEL, GIANT

These massive eel-like creatures have teeth as long as human forearms. The first was a pet that someone else left many years before the recent visitor. As a guest, it has been well fed and provided for...but fresh meat is what it craves!

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+10, Vigor d12

**Skills:** Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d10, Stealth d6, Swimming d10

**Pace:** —; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 20

**Special Abilities:**

- **Bite:** Str+d8.
- **Aquatic:** Pace 10.
- **Gargantuan:** Heavy Armor. Attacks against a giant eel by man-size creatures are made at +4. Attacks are Heavy Weapons. Add Size to damage when stomping (only possible for this beast if it manages to reach up and onto a vessel).
- **Size (+12):** Giant eels can reach lengths of over 100 feet.

## HOTEL 2: HUMANOID ALIEN SENSORY PALACE

A shimmering wall of electrostatically charged air separates the visitors from a luxury hotel designed for a race with distinctly different sensibilities. Some features seem familiar and safe, while others seem anything but. Beyond the startling but otherwise harmless wall visitors find the lobby: a brightly lit room with six white glowing hexagons on the floor.



This hotel was made for a particular subset of humanoid citizens of the Ancient Empire who sought sensory stimulation as their primary means of relaxation. This hotel served those needs—and very few others—and still functions today.

The lobby is set up to guide visitors to sensory tube sections (see below) attuned to favor one of the six senses: vision, hearing, touch, taste, smell, and a sixth sense based on psionic stimulation of favorite memories. The six floor hexagons are not marked, but point in a consistent direction. Stand on the “vision” hexagon and a pattern of moving lights appears on the floor that guides the visitor to the vision sensory tubes.

Each section of sensory tubes is separated from the others (i.e., vision separate from touch, etc.). Physically, each section is a wide circular hallway around a honeycombed central shaft that is 10 meters in diameter. There are 200 one-meter hexagons on the central shaft’s exterior wall in each sensory section. Touching any one of these causes the sensory tube to deploy. It hums softly and extends outward, exposing the comfortable foam bed within. Those higher than floor level also deploy a convenient step ladder for easy

access. Once occupied, the tube closes back into place, closing the occupant off from other sensory stimuli other than what the tube provides.

An already occupied tube does not open upon touch. There are a handful of occupied sensory tubes (see below).

**Sensory Overload:** Once one is ensconced in a sensory tube, it creates a complex, pleasing sensory pastiche based upon the occupant’s pre-programmed preferences. Since new visitors have no means to share those preferences in advance, the tube goes through an exploratory sequence that may be quite alarming.

All sensory stimuli are accomplished through sophisticated technology only. No physical harm (or aid) is actually inflicted inside a sensory tube. An occupant may feel frozen, skewered, blinded, etc., but upon release no damage is done.

First, the tube goes through a rapid sequence of stimuli based upon the sensory preference of this section (that is, a tube in the “touch” section goes through various touch stimuli first). Other senses are rendered completely neutral, which in itself is quite alarming. Sensory deprivation is achieved on all five other senses (including memory, which

basically shuts off, leaving the occupant aware of the here and now inside the tube only).

Second, after the first sense is completely satisfied, the tube goes through the same sequence with all the other five senses simultaneously. For someone not expecting it, that can feel like a concussive assault. In fact, the physically weak might suffer a heart attack or other shock, while the mentally weak might suffer a loss of sanity or lingering anxiety. It is not for the faint of heart!

Sense by sense, the tube begins at a random setting and quickly monitors the occupant's response. It then quickly changes to another setting it deems more appropriate (usually in the direction of greater pleasure, but sometimes it gets that wrong and makes things a bit worse), continuing until it eventually arrives upon a setting the occupant feels is comfortable, even desirable and finally viscerally gratifying.

An occupant in the touch section may experience something like this:

*The door seals silently until you are lying in the dark, like floating on a still sea in complete darkness and silence. You notice you are warm, a little too warm, and the skin everywhere on your body feels like it is being poked gently with tiny fingers. That changes quickly. It becomes cooler, and the poking changes to gentle massaging, becoming stronger and more satisfying in exactly the places you desire until it becomes deep and relaxing. Without warning, sharp screeches alarm you, you taste and smell something foul, and you cannot escape a seemingly mundane childhood memory. You convulse and begin to panic. Lavender and vanilla, you suddenly smell some of your favorite scents. A youthful romance. Pleasant musical tones. The massage continues with still more soothing textures, and you give in utterly to an uncontestable series of pleasing sensations that disperse all other awareness.*

**Egress:** The tube opens upon achievement of total relaxation. At that point the tube opens and the occupant is free to leave. Short of that, the sensory tube must be dismantled, which is not impossible but is a difficult process that draws the attention of the Librarians and security robots.

**Occupied Sensory Tubes:** There are several tubes occupied by mind fungus and expired humanoids in every section. There a living occupant, the Immortal, in the vision section (or another if that suits your adventure better). These occupied tubes have a blue light around

their hexagonal openings. They won't open with a single touch, as an unoccupied tube does, but opens on a sustained touch of 10 seconds or more.

**Mind Fungus:** Once a deadly pathogen, mind fungus leeches onto the brains of sentient beings and slowly takes them over. It must be ingested to activate. Once affecting a sentient being's mind, it manifests extreme hunger. The victim eats constantly, and tries to influence others in its social group to eat, as well. Spores emerge in the victim's breath and sweat, which contaminate the food and spread the mind fungus to others. Eventually, the victim eats itself to death, but not before being spread to others.

However, the mind fungus in the sensory tubes is rendered dormant, a victim of its own odd pleasures. On opening the tube, explorers find a grossly undernourished alien, who expires immediately. The strange yellow fungus lies seemingly dormant on the foam mattress, clearly alive but inert. It remains dormant for several hours, rendered temporarily useless by its exposure to the sensory tube.

**Expired Humanoids:** A number of tubes have the long-dead remains of humanoid occupants, now nothing but bones or dust. These serve as a warning: giving totally in to the sensory tube's pleasures can be dangerous. The humanoids are of all shapes and sizes, demonstrating the diversity of the Ancient Empire.

An extensive search of these humanoid-occupied tubes turns up a variety of delicate trinkets, but also these two potentially useful items:

**Amulet:** An opalescent amulet graces the crystalline skeleton of a millennia-old pleasure seeker. Otherwise unremarkable, it radiates energy in the infrared. It is, in fact, a highly efficient energy collector and storage device, fully charged. Hook it up to a fusion plant for a while or bring it near a star and it can hold enough of a charge to propel a starship.

**Mask:** An odd mask sits upon the skull of a humanoid occupant who apparently wished to remain anonymous. Black, white, and gold, its visage is difficult to interpret, seeming both pleased and angry. The mask utilizes nanotechnology to grant the wearer complete anonymity. He simply cannot be recognized,

even by close acquaintances, even by electronic means. Treat as the Face Changer cyberware (though it does not incur any Strain) found in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

**The Immortal:** One humanoid occupant remains alive after uncounted centuries. She is one of a race who had conquered mortality, but for whatever reason locked herself into a sensory tube to experience its pleasures indefinitely. Visitors revive her at their own risk.

The occupant is a desiccated but otherwise living humanoid, bald and fragile. She remains unconscious unless revived medically. If nourished she grows back to health with remarkable speed. However, she has no interest in the visitors, and wants nothing more than to return to her sensory tube. She fights to regain her position, but has no particular strength or combat abilities. The Immortal cannot be reasoned with, as she is insane, left with nothing but single-minded determination to continue her artificially pleasing existence.

The Immortal's tissues hold the secrets of her remarkable longevity and regenerative powers. Samples are extremely valuable. Used directly or synthesized in a lab, they introduce life-lengthening and recuperative benefits to other humanoids.

**Destroyed Sensory Tubes:** A handful of wrecked tubes can be found, dismantled long ago either from without or within. These serve as a demonstration of how to get characters out of the tubes, and also to remind visitors that the station's self-repairing aspects have fallen into disarray.

### HOTEL 3: THE TEMPLE OF AN ELECTRIC GOD

Visitors coming to these accommodations might think that they've reached the edge of the station, perhaps even the edge of reality. Scientorium gradually disappears into an increasingly blinding white light that shines relentlessly from unseen sources, washing out all color, leaving nothing but a floor to walk on out into brilliant oblivion. The air is cool. Sound seems muffled with nothing to bounce off of. Space here seems infinite. Of course, this is all an illusion created for the benefit of this place's principle occupants during the height of the Ancient Empire—a strange cult of perfection-seeking cyborgs who called themselves the Darpan.

*The sensory desert extends inexhaustibly in all directions, reaching farther than the confines of the stalk's exterior walls would allow. Just a few dozen steps from the edge of the library's reality one cannot be certain of exactly which direction leads back to it. Pressing forward there are no sounds, no clues that progress is being made or that some destination even exists in this whitewashed wasteland. Only when exhaustion and panic's tendrils creep out is there any respite from the monotony, as a barely audible, subsonic thrum reaches the ears. Its source is not immediately apparent, but trial and error identifies the rough direction. Another thousand paces and it rumbles the toes. A thousand more and a dark object appears in the distance.*

*On a mammoth throne sits an image of perfection, a goddess of chrome. There cannot exist a more exact representation of physical beauty than this enormous construct, sitting shoulder straight, back arched, arms crossed, looking resolutely with coal-black eyes into the distance. On close inspection, her smooth skin is etched everywhere with the traces of a complex circuit board grid.*

The eight-meter-tall statue is just that, a representation of the Darpan cyborgs that once visited Scientorium by the thousands (though they were of more typical humanoid size). The throne is of simple design, a high-backed chair with wide arms that seems to simply disappear into the white floor.

### THE VAULTS

In its day, this was not only a place for the Darpan to stay while visiting the library. It was also a point of contact where they could share their experiences and share further refinements toward the perfection of the hybrid living/electronic being. Toward that end, the Darpan entered the vaults below the statue and throne, plugged themselves in, and acculturated.

The vaults, along with their stores of knowledge and acculturating mechanisms, still exist. The throne's base opens, revealing simple walkways to reach them if touched by any cybernetic device. Failing that, the entrance protocols can be reached and reasoned with fairly simply by any computing device. The device is interpreted to be a new bit of technology for study and adoption or dismissal.

The vaults are a tightly packed array of upright, hinged, two-part enclosures. There are thousands of them lined up along grated corridors that go

in every direction, seemingly at random with no discernible pattern. Each upright enclosure has two distinct body-shaped cavities, the recessed space for a body's front and the recessed space for its back, like some kind of simple molds. The enclosures are form-fitting and precise, and also anatomically unmistakable, arranged in an unerring pattern of male, female, male, female.

Each vault is made for a Darpan's perfect form. Less "perfect" humanoids can fit, though many body types simply cannot manage it. As intended, Darpanes enter the Vaults to share their electronic data, their "synthetic DNA," if you will, the first of a two-part mating ritual. After imparting their electronic reproductive data here, the Darpanes paired off and retreated to the odd privacy of the whitespace region to copulate biologically. The union completed, the visiting Darpanes were free to investigate the library for their own ends.

A visitor who enters and allows a vault to close around him remains inside for just a moment or so before being released, seemingly without consequence. The visitor must choose a sex-matching vault. It does not close otherwise. However, the visitor has been exposed to the complex Darpan mechanisms and "seeded" with three distinct afflictions that manifest themselves differently over time: romantic disinterest, perfection obsession, and, most sinister of all, cybernetic acculturation.

## DARPANS

Darpanes are a bipedal humanoid species sharing several features with humans. The average Darpan stands roughly six to eight inches taller than a human male, and has a slightly elongated head with a strong forehead. Darpanes' distinctive ears taper to a point.

**Agile (+2):** Darpanes are blessed with dexterous digits and start with a *dó* in Agility.

**Outsider (-1):** Reclusive and introverted Darpanes have a hard time socially interacting with other species.

**Sleep Reduction (+1):** Darpa III has a shorter night cycle than most planets. Darpanes only require half the normal amount of sleep of a human.

## ROMANTIC DISINTEREST

The Darpan habitat here on Scientorium is unashamedly devoted to reproduction. Darpanes gathered here to strengthen and refine their race. Visitors dabbling with their facilities are confused and numbed to their own natural pair-bonding instincts.

Simply put, the visitor's romantic and pair-bonding interests virtually disappear and the character gains the Quirk (Romantic Disinterest) Hindrance. The character avoids romantic companionship, even in instances where it would otherwise have been sought due to profound physical or intellectual attraction. Interest in any pre-existing romantic relationship is lost. The affected character is unaware of any change, but their behavior is unmistakably altered from the point of view of their companions. The effects wear off after several months, but in that time irreparable damage may be done to existing relationships.

## PERFECTION OBSESSION

The visitor becomes a self-improvement junkie. The Darpan drive for racial perfection subtly works on the visitor's psyche, manifesting itself in subtle ways. At first the effects are subtle, and then become more pronounced with time until they are seemingly fanatical after two or three months.

Physically, they seek a more perfect body image. They eat healthier foods and exercise. They pay more attention to style and wear more fashionable attire, regardless of expense. Soon they seek artificial means to attain a more perfect form, including drugs and surgery.

Mentally, they seek knowledge, specifically technical data on genetics, cybernetics, etc. They read articles, watch seminars, download studies and text books, and even attend classes if available. They want to know everything and understand it as well as any experts in the field.

Encourage roleplaying here. The affected character's obsession is completely introverted. They are only concerned with their own condition, never with anyone else's. Part of this is a complete, even religious acceptance of cybernetics as a completely natural process.

## CYBERNETIC ACCULTURATION

Tampering with the Darpan vaults exposes a visitor to subtle genetic distortion that begins a long-term but almost irreversible mutation. Cell



division adopts certain machine-like properties that in some ways improves but also dehumanizes the subject. By the time the visitor notices the circuit pattern on his skin (perhaps at first just on a leg or finger, but spreading fast), the effect has already dominated his organs and tissues.

In game terms, the character is not significantly changed. A subtle shift away from human interaction and toward machine interaction takes place. After a year the character suffers a -2 to Charisma, but gains a +2 to all Knowledge rolls dealing with computers and other electronics. After two years the values double (-4/+4).

For roleplaying purposes, the character slowly loses some interest in social aspects of life. Study and technical manuals become more appealing. These changes are not absolute, just tendencies that should change the character's everyday attitudes. They don't dislike human interaction, but seldom initiate it.

The acculturation effect spreads not only to their offspring, but also to closely held personal items. Electronic devices that are in frequent physical contact (such as a wrist-comp or ear-phone) undergo a cybernetic conversion, as well. Their electronics are gradually shifted to include a biological element. Eventually they become part of the visitor's person, so much so that they even grow to become part of the body and can only be removed surgically, with great pain.

### CURES

Reversing a visitor's cybernetic distortion entails an adventure in itself. There is no modern-day cure. Radical surgeries may be suggested, or invasive nano-bots to seek and destroy, but these may be more dangerous than the disease.

The knowledge required exists inside the Experience Chambers, however. A careful search can uncover the Darpan in the Ancient Empire's lexicon. Characters can learn much of their technology and strange religious obsessions. They have surgical techniques that can be learned and brought back into the real world. Alternately, those surgeries could be accomplished within the Experience Chamber using Semi-Reality Mode. Trickery might include a time-travel implant, allowing the Darpan surgeons to advance to the present day to "check up" on their patient, or a realization that the visitor is so close to perfection that they kidnap her for eventual deification. The Librarians see a returning "repaired" visitor as reality-neutral and do not interfere.

In the final analysis, the character is changed, but not turned into a Darpan. In some ways it leaves her capable of "mind melding" with most electronic devices, which may be an acceptable trade-off for losing some kinship with humanity.

### THE PURSUER

Run this tale during the journey to Scientorium, to add Professor Kerastus' daughter Anastasia as a romantic interest for a party member.

Anastasia is following her father across the galaxy. Ostensibly, her only motivation is her great love for him, to get him to give up his dangerous pursuits and live a comfortable, settled life for his final years. Although that's true, she's also unknowingly working for the Collectors. When she catches up to the travelers, Anastasia joins the expedition in order to protect her father, becoming both a romantic interest and, in the adventure's culmination, a potent adversary.



## ONE DEVIL DOG SHORT

At one point on the long journey Cassretoo announces that one of the menagerie's devil dogs is missing from its cramped cage. A thorough search of the *New Pequod* turns up nothing, and it's determined that the beast was not consumed by its fellows or by other menagerie denizens. Professor Kerastus is adamant that they return to their last point of departure and secure the wayward devil dog.

The exact circumstances of the missing animal are unimportant. It can be easily tracked and retrieved, having caused some comical amount of havoc among the locals it inadvertently terrorized. What is important is the travelers' discovery that someone was recently asking a lot of questions about them.

With success on a Streetwise roll, witnesses describe the curious parties as a tall, blonde human woman and her five identical female bodyguards. They are described as being well groomed and stylishly dressed. The bodyguards may have been clones. The group arrived and asked questions about the professor, the menagerie, and their traveling companions. The women were thorough, inquiring at every spot where the professor set foot on that planet.

A raise on the roll reveals that they arrived in and later left the star port in a sleek, silver streamlined yacht named the *Sure Hawk*—but

a check of the ship's registry comes back as "unidentified."

Kerastus feigns having no knowledge of who might be seeking him, though he knows full well it is his daughter Anastasia. He dismisses the pursuit as unimportant or easily avoided, even suggesting that whoever it is seeks the characters or Hychus and not him.

A sweep of the *New Pequod* checks out: There are no tracking devices on the ship. Without one, it's reasonable to assume the pursuers cannot follow them accurately as they jump from star system to star system. What the travelers don't know is that Anastasia has some brain bugs of her own that always know where their fellows are, even across many light years.

## A FAMILIAL CONFRONTATION

A few jumps later, the *New Pequod* arrives at a starport where a silver yacht is conspicuously already docked.

The exact nature of the encounter can take any number of forms, depending on how you would like the encounter to go. If you prefer a space chase, both ships can immediately depart toward the outer system and the exchange take place by vidcomm link between them. For a personal combat scenario, there can be a brief exchange of fire between the travelers and Anastasia's android companions at the spaceport. If you prefer espionage, the JumpCorp team can take advantage of Jeromm Hychus' perpetual electronic surveillance equipment to get the drop on their pursuers at their accommodations. Regardless, the Professor's daughter reveals herself and her intentions.

- She is Anastasia Kerastus, the Professor's daughter and Cassretoo's half-sister.
- She loves her father very much and is only interested in his safety and happiness.



BRYAN  
SYME

- Her companions are androids in her employ.

Professor Kerastus reluctantly confirms their relationship and accepts his daughter's concern, but refuses to give up on this quest. After considerable argument, he assures Anastasia that he will return to live with her after this last pursuit. It's clear she does not entirely believe him, and insists on accompanying him for the journey's duration to stay by his side.

## ROMANTIC REVELATIONS

Commencing here is an opportunity for one of the characters to become romantically involved with Anastasia Kerastus. The *Sure Hawk* accompanies the *New Pequod* (and whatever ship or ships the heroes have) on their mission toward the library. Considerable time passes, and opportunities for relationship building are many.

Through that romance, or perhaps via Jeromm Hychus' many surveillance instruments, Anastasia's darkest secret may be revealed: She, too, is a cyborg, though even she doesn't realize it. Even her father doesn't know this. She is a subtly altered person, programmatically devoted to the same group who employs Jeromm Hychus, which he calls the Collectors. She is assigned to eventually steal Kerastus' prize from Hychus, though for now that's buried deep in her programming.

One other clue to her strangeness: Cassretoo dislikes her intensely.

- ◆ **Anastasia Kerastus:** See page 95.
- **Android Bodyguards (5):** See page 95.

## SURE HAWK

Anastasia Kerastus' ship is the *Sure Hawk*, a small but powerful vessel.

**Small Starship:** Size 6, Acc/TS 50/700, Climb 3, Toughness 22 (7), Crew 9, Cost \$16.07M, Remaining Mods 1

**Notes:** AI, AMCM, Armor, Atmospheric, 2x Crew Space, Deflector Screens, FTL Drive, Planetary Sensor Suite, Shields, Targeting System

### Weapons:

- Dual Linked Medium Lasers (Fixed)
- Dual Linked Light Lasers

## YELITO, SMUGGLER'S HAVEN

Use this Savage Tale sometime after playing through the Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest*.

The world of Yelito is a heavily terraformed planet with widespread agriculture, ample manufacturing, and reasonably high technology. It is a prosperous world with a reasonable government and bureaucracy. But for a modest business in luxury imports and exports, Yelito is entirely self-sufficient. Yet inexplicably, it has one of the busiest orbital starports in the sector...

Yelito is on the edge of known space generally in the direction of Scientorium's hidden star system. Yelito has no particular association with the library except that, as a smuggler's waystation, it has attracted the interest of the Collectors. Since hearing of the JumpCorp team's visit to Scientorium, they have been desperate to find their way to it, and have employed some locals to help them do it.

## BURGOYNE ANTIQUITIES

In their search for Scientorium, Burgoyne Antiquities family members are always on the lookout for anyone from the JumpCorp team. They have passive surveillance all around this region of space in case the travelers ever walk by a camera. A neural stimulator might work on one of them...

## KIDNAPPING

Since it's reasonable to assume no one listens to a cockamamie story about a mysterious ancient library, the Burgoynes simply kidnap one of the characters. Ideally, they'll go after a pilot or navigator, someone they think has direct knowledge of Scientorium's system's exact location. Unless the JumpCorp team has been especially careless with the information, the Burgoynes have no notion that there is an Immune Traveler, who that is, or that such a being is even possible. The kidnapping should be pretty straightforward, but they don't ask for ransom. They question the subject, attach the (otherwise harmless) neural stimulator, and take off in a fast smuggler ship for parts unknown.

If the travelers are quick, they can catch up with the Burgoynes before they depart. By now the run-of-the-mill travelers have forgotten all about the library, but reminders let them recall

its existence, at least temporarily. The kidnapers have their subject locked up in a back room at one of their antiquities warehouses for questioning.

If they don't catch up with them there, the travelers must pursue the unregistered smuggler ship. It's fast, but if their missing member has any kind of homing beacon they should be able to catch up with it, initiating a deep-space standoff.

Ultimately, the travelers and Burgoynes come to an understanding. They need the travelers' suppressed memories to get to the library. Once there, the thieves are happy to cooperate with the JumpCorp team or take off on their own. Provided they are free to steal precious gems and jewels through the Experience Chambers, they are content to cooperate. Of course, unbeknownst to them the station's Semi-Reality mode no longer functions correctly, so their journey won't be as directly profitable as they hope.

They are by nature thieves, though, and are as likely to double-cross the travelers as anything else. Should the JumpCorp team emerge from an Experience Chamber with something truly valuable, the Burgoynes attempt to pilfer it. They are classic jewel thieves, with lots of electronic gadgetry to assist them, but they're not murderers. They strand or delay the team if they can, so they are the sole benefactors of any information that leads to uncovering hidden wealth somewhere in the galaxy.

◆ **Burgoyne Fixer (1):** See page 94.

- **The Fixer's Gang (1 per hero):** Use the Thug profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.
- **Burgoyne Family Member:** Use the Citizen profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## MISJUMP

Use this Savage Tale either before or after the Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest*.

Space travel is hazardous. One does not always end up where one intended to go. And starships are most vulnerable to faster-than-light navigational hazards when forced to make a jump in haste: cutting in the star drive to avoid an incoming missile, revenue cutter, or pirates.

Mishaps can also occur when navigational data is incomplete, star charts are inaccurate, making a blind jump, or when intervening gravity wells or objects disturb the departure from or return to normal space. Whenever any of these instances occur is an ideal time to insert the **Misjump** Savage Tale into your campaign.

In this case, the travelers end up in an area of space far distant from where they originally intended. So, for the time being, their present plans and objectives are put on hold until they can correct things. They also stumble across a cached fleet of ancient starships, quite by chance.

## DEEPEST SPACE

When faster-than-light travel goes awry, there are no guarantees. The ship emerges back into real space anywhere, and given how sparsely space is sprinkled with stars, more often than not the misjumped ship ends up light years from any stars or planets. There it eventually runs out of power, never to be heard from again.

In this case, the travelers' ship has emerged 0.2 light years away from the closest star system. With no means to re-engage faster-than-light travel (the drive is irreparable without a spaceport), they must put their ship to the test of traversing that distance using its maneuver drives only.

Were a ship capable of constant one-gravity acceleration, turning at the halfway point to slow back down, such a trip would pass quickly, just six months or so. Unfortunately, since the ship has limited fuel and reaction mass, constant acceleration cannot be maintained, so the 0.2 light year journey takes 18 months.

Assuming the ship's electrical systems can last that long, the travelers must concern themselves primarily with consumables—mainly food, water, and atmosphere. This adventure is meant to demonstrate the rigors of space travel, not for the JumpCorp heroes to expire in deep space. They are forced to ration everything and turn to more specialized means to preserve their limited supplies: Some characters can go into hibernation in low-passage canisters (if any are available) or slow their metabolisms medically. For the latter, their perception of time's passage might be slowed down by a factor of 24, so each perceived hour is actually an entire day, with their need for consumables cut accordingly.

Further, the travelers must make plans to deal with a one-and-a-half year absence from their current adventure. They cannot get back to their affairs until they reach a star system, refuel, and re-engage the faster-than-light drives to travel back to known space (which may also be many weeks of travel away).

But first, the JumpCorp team picks up some strange signals in the region of the unknown star system's Oort cloud...

## FLEET TASK FORCE 17-D

The hundred-thousand starships of Fleet Task Force 17-D lie waiting for instructions among the Oort cloud objects orbiting in deep space on the star system's fringe. The travelers pass through the Oort cloud region only because of their misjump. No other starships are likely to venture this far out into the icy wilderness. The ships hidden here would likely go unnoticed forever.

The ships are arranged in a single-file distant orbit, just like those in **The Starship Cache** chapter of the *Palimpsest* Plot Point Campaign. One of them is detected as an anomalous regular object amidst the tiny irregular ice balls. From a sensor operator's point of view, it sticks out like a sore thumb.

Slowing to investigate the object adds another two months to the JumpCorp team's travel time back into the star systems core to refuel and move on. Some of them may object to the delay, depending on their previous objectives. Certainly, if they pass the opportunity by and want to come back to investigate at some future date, the ship is still there, unmolested.

Exploring and controlling this starship cache is further complicated by circumstances. Since the travelers are not coming from the library, they have no idea of these ships' origins, and they don't have a homing device with them. The first ship they find is not the master vessel, so it must be located (assuming the travelers discover there is more than just the single ship they found). Gaining entry into the ship is far more involved, requiring advanced mining tools, scaffolds and work lights, skilled men, and many days. Entry requires a successful Knowledge (Engineering) roll at +2 and several days of work. Once inside, the biomechanical computer is indifferent to the interlopers, forcing the heroes to rely on other means to communicate with it, such as psionics or other alien biology or technology. Treat this as a Dramatic Task, or a single roll if time is a factor.

However, since Scientorium and its Librarians are concerned with the powerful starship cache and its destructive potential, and because they have detected the **Immune Traveler** (see sidebar on page 33), this coincidental occurrence catches their attention.

If an Immune Traveler has not already been determined, do so now. That character receives a vision from the Librarians, one of strange tentacle creatures of complex and enormous intellect, saying,

*"Come to us. We await you."*

The Immune Traveler now instinctively knows the exact location of Scientorium and can help navigate any ship there. The Librarians would help neutralize this fleet of ships in much the same way as in the *Palimpsest* Plot Point Campaign, should the JumpCorp team seek their guidance.

## SALVAGE

Use this Savage Tale either before, during, or after the Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest*. It could take place while the JumpCorp team is traveling with Professor Kerastus toward Scientorium in the *Palimpsest* Plot Point Campaign, putting the group back on their original mission if they have somehow strayed. The encounter occurs wherever the travelers are now.

Spacefaring hardware is expensive. Indeed, piracy is a complex profession since few cargos outvalue the merchant ships that carry them. Even the hulk of a ship, almost regardless of age, retains value since it can readily be used as the basis of some new vessel. Every populated system has salvage yards with eager crews ready to claim any wreck for their own. Sometimes, even the JumpCorp team gets the word in time to make a good profit.

*"Subsidized Freighter Heighliner, K14-876WW, inbound from Thurl to Kekkee Prime reports an unidentified hulk in declining Delta-V 23.027 degrees. Subject hulk is powered down and not under thrust. Flotsam and jetsam protocols apply. Salvage notification 213-44 issued this date. Interested parties submit Claim Certificates via subspace channel 17 on contact."*

Whoever gets to the hulk first claims it by sending a simple message to the system's Port and Navigational Authority. More unscrupulous salvagers, though, are not above jamming signals and even cutting a few throats to get what they want.

## APPROACH

The hulk is tumbling between worlds in this star's inner system, so it is not too far away. The JumpCorp team's ship is, coincidentally, relatively close by, so there's every reason to expect they can arrive there before any other

interested parties to claim the prize. In fact, it's reasonable to assume at this point that, once they announce their intentions to seek it out over general communications frequencies, professional salvagers simply don't bother.

The hulk is only a few hours off the team's present course. It turns out to be a standard configuration system freighter, tumbling slowly through space, dark and unpowered. On closer inspection the ship has legible identification markings and also laser battle damage along its dorsal aft section.

Before the travelers can investigate further, though, or even make their salvage claim, they are hailed by a ship from Salvage Plus, a local company.

*"Stand down! That hulk is legally ours!"*

At the same instant, the Salvage Plus ship initiates a powerful communications jam against the JumpCorp team's vessel. No ship should have been close enough to beat the travelers to this hulk, so something's up.

The Salvage Plus ship with its 20 thugs are part of a scheme among some nearby systems—they attack helpless merchant ships and then jump the hulks to another star system where their fellows retrieve them. They are not particularly intelligent, but present an obstacle that the travelers must deal with before they can explore the hulk.

## DEAD HULK

This ship, the *Sobriet*, is designed to haul freight from one planet to another in-system. Use the **Freighter, System** stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## SALVAGE PLUS CRUISER

The "Plus" in Salvage Plus isn't just a marketing slogan—it also refers to the company's vessels being equipped for hit and run attacks on other ships. Use the **Cutter** stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

- ◆ **Salvage Plus Team Leader (1):** Use the Pirate Captain stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.
- **Salvage Plus Crew (19):** Use Pirate stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## A MADMAN'S COMPUTER COLLECTION

The hulk is a common registry vessel, the *Sobriet*, licensed to a freight company that

regularly rents ships for local service. But the *Sobriet* is very far from home, nearly 1,000 light years. The travelers find the slain renter inside, one Alistair Makauley, dead from the explosive damage to the ship's drives delivered by the pirates. There are no other occupants.

It appears Mr. Makauley was a computer collector. The ship is literally filled with computer equipment. The entire hold is stacked with them, as are all the corridors, the staterooms, and all around the bridge. On closer examination, no two computers are exactly alike, and they are all powered up and functioning. The place is a sea of strange power connections and adapters running from engineering and all through the ship.

Alistair Makauley somehow came across the exact location of Scientorium, and he also came to realize that he could not retain that information naturally. So, he came up with an ingenious plan to keep from losing the data: he put all of the navigational data into a small computer and linked it to a second one, then set them to sharing the information back and forth as quickly as possible. The scheme thwarted the library's efforts to expunge knowledge of its own existence, but not completely. Makauley detected some inexplicable data loss. So, he extended his experiment to the Nth degree. All of these computers aboard the *Sobriet*—from handheld devices to ancient mainframes—are constantly sharing that data at top speed. So far, it's working.

The travelers can get that navigational data, but quickly lose it if they stop the rapid computer sharing. If the Immune Traveler is exposed to its existence, he or she retains the information. There is no information as to where the data leads, just some seemingly unremarkable star system far beyond known space...

## PROJECT X

This Savage Tale is suitable for use in just about any *The Last Parsec* campaign.

Like most travelers, the heroes have occasion to interrogate people for any number of reasons. Sometimes, an interrogation turns up completely unexpected information. Insert this library-related encounter whenever the travelers have a subject under the hot lights.

*"Listen, man! I'll tell you anything you want to know! Is this about Project X? I swear, I have no idea what they're up to out there. I just know a guy, you know? He's the guy you want to talk to, not me!"*

The subject alerts them to the existence of a secret project at a remote mountain base on the far side of a low-population world. He leads the team to a second subject who can pinpoint the base's exact location, has just enough security information to help the travelers get inside, and shares his vague suspicions of what's going on inside—some kind of time travel experiments.

### MOUNTAIN BASE

The project is far bigger than the interrogation subjects let on. The base is essentially a 10,000-person city of scientists and engineers with its own small spaceport. The surrounding area for many miles is patrolled by foot guards, grav vehicles and helicopters, and also scanned from orbit, so no one gets close without being confronted and turned away. In fact, the best way the travelers can get inside is to get themselves captured and jailed inside the community.

Once jailed, the JumpCorp team can effect some sort of escape to move around the community. They need to disguise themselves, steal badges and such. This is a perfect setup for a **Dramatic Task** (see *Savage Worlds*) as they move around the compound, through lab buildings, in and around residences, and so on. Each round, the leader rolls Notice at -2, aided by her comrades as usual. Complications include a slipped disguise, expired badge, or a few surprised engineers. When the spacers accumulate five successes, they discover the operation's crown jewel.

### AD-HOC EXPERIENCE CHAMBER

The Project X team has somehow obtained and reassembled a single Experience Chamber in a nondescript warehouse-sized building. Where they got it from is privileged information. No one working on the project here knows the answer

(it may be from Scientorium, or perhaps from another library elsewhere in the galaxy).

The team studies it intensely. Its black wall and gray monolith show signs of having been literally ripped out of their original location. Now they are set up beneath floodlights, surrounded with scanners and surveillance devices, hooked to cables strung everywhere. Lab-coated techs observe its functionality from a dozen monitors and holographic displays.

So far, they have managed to power the Experience Chamber up and experiment with its controls and send trained specialists through it in Virtual Reality mode. They do not at present even know that there is a Semi-Reality mode setting.

### PRIOR VISITORS?

This Savage Tale turns on whether the travelers have yet been to Scientorium. If they have, and can demonstrate knowledge of the Experience Chamber, they suddenly become the most valuable people on the base. Wealth is promised for cooperation, but the Project X leaders are not above forcing complicity, even drugging or mind-scanning the characters to learn what they know. They also draw the ire and jealousy of the project's lead scientists, who have been stumped for many months now. Attempts are made to discredit the travelers, or even dispose of them.

If the heroes have not been to Scientorium, then the project appears to them a one-way time travel experiment. Teams travel "back in time" to witness events in the Ancient Empire, and return to report on them. A successful Streetwise roll reveals rumors among the scientists that the device was obtained at great cost from an ancient site where there are many more identical artifacts. They could potentially masquerade as



an authorized team and enter the Experience Chamber themselves, to safely witness any number of exotic things. Their own meddling might unlock the Semi-Reality mode, as well, unleashing deadly dangers from the black wall.

Project X is top secret, so anyone who sees the Experience Chamber is subject to highest scrutiny. Should the travelers run afoul of team leaders, they find themselves imprisoned without trial. At that point, troublesome outsiders are subject to lethal force. Agents from other powers are also curious about the super-secret Project X, and may pay handsomely for any information firsthand witnesses might provide.

## KERASTUS PRELUDE

Use this Savage Tale before the Plot Point. Professor Kerastus is a key character in *Palimpsest*. The library, however, is just one focus of his many curiosities. The travelers may run into him on a completely different matter somewhat before their encounter with Scientorium. Introduce them when the JumpCorp team arrives at a new starport.

### A REVERSE THEFT

The team receives a simple, handwritten note casually taped to a door. It reads:

*"Please meet me at the Quasar Cantina to discuss a mutually beneficial proposition."*

When the travelers arrive at the cantina, Kerastus and his assistant Cassretoo are already there waiting at a table. The professor introduces himself and quickly gets to his point, being universally intolerant of small talk. He produces a small box with what appears to be a skull-sized orange stone inside. Kerastus says,

*"There is a luxury liner in port, the Empress Neburia. Luxury Stateroom 12 has a sculpture with several similar stones at the base."*

*"Enter the stateroom and switch this for any one of the stones there. That's the job. For payment, I offer you the replaced orange stone, a K Orb. You're free to have this one appraised—it's worth millions."*

He offers no explanation of why he wants the stones switched, but his story checks out. The ship is in spacedock, and there is a Luxury Stateroom 12, presently occupied by an anonymous passenger. The K Orb appraises for two million credits.

✦ **Professor Kerastus:** See page 95.

✦ **Cassretoo:** See page 94.

## THE RESONANT COLLECTIVE

To make the switch, the travelers must board the Empress Neburia, gain access to the protected luxury section, and break into the guarded stateroom. Inside they find the sculpture: a collection of a dozen K Orbs stacked near an observation balcony. On closer inspection, the stacked orbs animate, turn, and begin banging against each other loudly!

The K Orbs are the current physical form of a resonant, a race of creatures who exist primarily in other dimensions. In ours, they manifest as material vibrations that must occur within a solid medium—in this case, a collection of valuable stones. The Resonant Collective is a little-known race that seeks further connection with living creatures in this galaxy. This individual is an ambassador traveling across known space.

Professor Kerastus' interest in the resonant is purely curious. The replacement orb he asks the JumpCorp team to substitute has a subtle molecular message embedded within it. The Professor hopes to present himself as the key ambassador for our three dimensions among the entire Resonant Collective.

Once the alarm is raised, the resonant's human bodyguards appear to thwart the team's plans. They have no official capacity, but they are glad to rough up the travelers and send them packing, turning them over to the authorities if they are particularly troublesome. It's up to the team to extricate themselves from any legal troubles that ensue.

### BODYGUARDS (1 PER HERO)

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Shooting d6

**Cha:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 9 (4)

**Hindrances:** Loyal

**Edges:** Combat Reflexes

**Gear:** Body armor (+4), commlink, heavy pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, RoF 1, AP 4), stun baton (Str+d4, stun).

## THE RESONANT'S OFFER

The resonant may opt to hire the spacers as replacement bodyguards for the duration of its stay on the luxury liner. It communicates through a simple computer device that it needs to hire new bodyguards and transportation for the next leg of its journey. It has no desire to assist Professor Kerastus' crass attempt to speak for this universe, but holds no grudge—the professor's part in this brief adventure is now at an end.

Most of all, the resonant wants to keep a low profile. Curious governments and scientists only annoy it. It has plans to visit a handful of races in this galaxy, and humans are not on the list.

## THE MINISTRY OF CROSS-DIMENSIONAL AFFAIRS

Soon after, though, an ambitious bureaucrat learns of the resonant's existence and feels compelled to detain and examine it. Minister Hobbs of Cross-Dimensional Affairs has very little actual authority, but an enormous budget. A veritable armada of field agents and bounty hunters are hot on the resonant's trail, something the heroes realize soon after becoming its bodyguards. Minister Hobbs' forces are ruthless and implacable.

The resonant needs conveyance to the edge of known space, where he can be passed off to exotic aliens who are expecting him. For the most part, this is simply a transport mission. The resonant has difficulty relating to living creatures, so basically stays to itself. It can, if pressed, induce a tremendous vibration, causing a virtual earthquake that would shake a ship or station to pieces. This is a thrilling culmination to an early encounter with Hobbs' bounty hunters. Once at its destination, the aliens offer ample reward for the resonant's safe delivery: its entire cohort of K Orbs, which it no longer requires.

◆ **Lead Hunter:** Use Bounty Hunter stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

• **Bounty Hunters (3):** See the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## COLLECTORS CALLING

Run this tale either before or after the *Palimpsest* Plot Point Campaign. If it takes place after *Palimpsest*, then the Librarians' connection with the Immune Traveler comes into play.

The mysterious agency that hired Jeromm Hychus stretches its fingers into many matters. This Savage Tale introduces them more directly to the travelers. They may get some insight into the Collectors' ultimate motives.

## MYSTERIOUS BENEFACTORS

The Librarians are aware of the Collectors and at least monitor their activities, and they do not want the Collectors to ever reach Scientorium to glean its considerable information.

*A plastic viz-seal envelope inexplicably sits on the nightstand. How did someone get in to deliver it?*

*Inside is an odd-looking bank card, a holographic photo, and a handwritten message to you: "Steal this man's greatest treasure."*

The man in the photo is Mayor Hreto Anoray, the well-known de facto ruler of the nearby world Mirishii. Technically, Anoray is the mayor of Mirishii's largest city, Krankor, but is undisputedly the planet's most powerful man, controlling the world government—and he's reputedly a criminal kingpin.

The bank card is of a make no traveler has seen before, but it works everywhere. It appears to have an unlimited balance. So long as the travelers use it in the Collectors' service, seeking Anoray's "greatest treasure," it dispenses all the funds they require. They can even adopt a fairly luxurious lifestyle while on the mission and the bank card makes no objection.

A simple interweb search reveals that Hreto Anoray is an avid collector of art and ancient objects. He has a well-protected personal museum in his equally well-protected mansion estate on the outskirts of Krankor. Publicly, he lives under the protection of the mayoral office's secret service personnel. Privately, he is known to have an extensive array of intimidating bodyguards. He has a reputation for being a shrewd character with a loyal cadre of lieutenants.

**The Immune Traveler's Vision:** If the Immune Traveler has been to Scientorium, that character receives a vision that quite simply announces the Librarians awareness of the matter. It says,

*"Proceed cautiously."*

## A MAN'S GREATEST TREASURE

Most citizens and the local news media tell the travelers that Mayor Anoray's greatest treasure is his wife, Danoria, arguably the most





beautiful woman in the sector. She is a media darling, accompanying her husband at all official functions, otherwise jet-setting around the planet with an extensive entourage. For purposes of this adventure, though, she is merely a red herring and not the object that the Collectors seek.

Mayor Anoray has a secret room in his personal museum, and it contains a single object. The travelers could learn of this by spreading some money around, buying information from former employees, contractors who have worked on the estate grounds, or by engaging various surveillance equipment (though the latter is complicated by extensive electronic countermeasures). Too much curiosity brings an unpleasant visit from the Mayor's personal bodyguards, who have no compunction about breaking a few legs.

Regardless, only the Mayor knows what that lone object is. It is the secret behind his political success.

- **The Mayor's Goons (2 per hero):** Use Thug stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## THE TRUTH SEER

The object is physically unimpressive: a simple steel bowl with a few etched flowers for decoration. But it is an ancient artifact the Mayor purchased through agents from a distant dealer. By drinking water from it, he gains a temporary ability to know absolutely the veracity of anything said to him. The effect lasts for just a few hours, and afterwards he becomes terribly fatigued for a day or more. He uses the truth seer before important conferences, appearances, and meetings (a quick check of the record shows how the mayor is often absent from his duties for a day or two after such events, which the media pass off as just colorful). Anoray has used the truth seer to best effect, consolidating his power, thwarting rivals, and assembling a core team of people he knows are absolutely loyal.

To steal the truth seer, the travelers must bypass all its protections, both known and unknown. They can research the presence of armed security guards, the estate's physical layout and gates, and all the electronic measures on the building and personal museum, including monitored cameras, laser barriers, motion sensors, and lock-down

blast barriers. The JumpCorp team must have a plan to deal with each of these.

Additionally, the private museum holding the truth seer is behind a secret, hidden door, and the object is locked in a powerful magnetic vice and virtually impossible to move. Both of these must be dealt with on the spot to secure the bowl. For effect, the travelers could come upon the Mayor while he is drinking from the bowl, giving them some idea of how it functions.

If captured in the attempt, Mayor Anoray assumes the travelers are in the employ of some rival. Even if he hears the truth, he can't let his secret get out. He tells his lieutenants to "entertain" his guests and then dispose of them in a remote forest area.

Once secured, the travelers have just 24 hours before the Collectors steal the truth seer away from them. If they figure out how to use it, that could be a beneficial day.

**The Immune Traveler's Second Vision:** Should they secure the truth seer, the Librarians send a second vision, one in which they insist,

*"Return the object to us so it does no further harm."*

The Librarians subtly tip their hand here, revealing that they do not trust the Collectors to morally handle powerful objects like this one. The JumpCorp team is not obliged to return the truth seer for safekeeping, nor do they receive a reward for doing so.

## THE DIG

Use this Savage Tale either before or after the Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest*.

JumpCorp funds all manner of expeditions. One is an archaeological dig on a remote world where the travelers may learn of the Ancient Empire and the possibility that libraries cataloging its entirety may still exist.

## NEW ORDERS

Two problems working for JumpCorp: one, they sometimes insist you actually follow orders, and two, they rarely tell you everything you need to know. But orders are orders.

*Report to Director Kathree Phillips at the archaeological dig on Lestus 3. Take corporate transport as soon as possible. Threat level high, repeat, high.*

Lestus 3 is a water-rich, swampy world just a few dozen light years away. Other than a few sportsmen hunting the local super-lizards there is nothing there but a company artifact dig. It's got about 20 scientists and an equal number of company security and overseers. The latter all report to Director Phillips. The scientists answer to Dr. Erren Carsten, a venerable old archaeologist.

The dig itself is in the remote wilderness, in the deepest jungle swamp. The region is crawling with the local equivalent of bugs, snakes, and disease. Equipment quickly gets fouled with fungus and mold. Personnel are often sickened. Fully half are in the infirmary at any time. It's a dismal place, made worse because Phillips and Carsten hate each other. Phillips is in a hurry and Carsten ignores her.

## TRASUS, AN ANCIENT CITY

Dr. Carsten and her team have unearthed a truly ancient city, buried almost a mile beneath the swamps. With insufficient funds to go further, she reluctantly partnered with JumpCorp to dig deeper. They've dubbed the city Trusus, and it's yielding considerable data.

They cannot revive any of the ancient devices they have found, because they are simply too decayed. However, the artwork suggests several things:

- This world was once heavily populated.
- The technology was high and unlike modern tech.
- There was an extensive empire here millions of years ago.
- They kept extensive records and built enormous public works including libraries.

## THREAT LEVEL: HIGH

Something is down there. A handful of security guards and scientists have been killed, chewed to pieces. A couple more are missing, presumed dead. Director Phillips wants the threat identified and eliminated.

There's an entire ecosystem down here, evolved entirely in the darkness amid the ancient ruins. They are almost exclusively dirt and mud dwellers. The most evolved predator of the bunch is a bone-white worm.

## LOCATE AND EXTERMINATE

The JumpCorp team should be able to identify the threat easily enough and even slay a trusus worm or two to show Director Phillips and Dr.

Carsten. But the simple truth of the matter is there are probably thousands of them down among the ruins, plus thousands of less-deadly but still troublesome creatures. The ecology among the ruins is complex.

Phillips wants to exterminate them all, and, as expected, Dr. Carsten objects. Phillips attempts to carry out extermination by importing barrels of gaseous poison. Dr. Carsten appeals to the travelers' better nature to block that plan. A confrontation may ensue between the team and their corporate superior.

Dr. Carsten wants to find a way to communicate with the worms and other lifeforms and cooperate with them. Being of animal intelligence, though, the best they can hope for is to mark themselves as non-threatening so the natives leave the archaeologists alone.

A Knowledge (Biology) roll reveals a couple of possibilities. First, the worms are attracted to vibrations in the surrounding mud. An effective concoction can be made to reduce their sensitivity to those motions with a Knowledge (Chemistry) roll. Second, the worms identify each other by tasting each other's secretions in the mud. These can be synthesized easily and solve the problem entirely so the dig can continue. However, the latter solution initiates a new, unseen problem that manifests itself in six months when the worm mating season begins...

### TRASUS WORM

**Attributes:** Agility d4, Smarts d8 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Stealth d10

**Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7

#### Special Abilities:

- **Bite:** Str+d6.
- **Burrow:** Moves through mud and dirt at full Pace. When bursting out of mud or dirt to attack, it makes an opposed Stealth roll versus the target's Notice. If the worm wins, it gains +2 to attack and damage that round, or +4 if it gets a raise. If the victim wins and was on Hold, he may try to interrupt the attack as usual.
- **Swamp Dweller:** +2 to Vigor rolls to resist swamp diseases.
- **Size +2:** Trusus worms measure 8 feet in length and are 1 foot in diameter.

## TIME SMUGGLERS

Use this Savage Tale either before or after the Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest*.

Not everyone who finds an Experience Chamber wants to passively observe the past. Some want desperately to change it.

*Bolumbia has always had rebels. The military government deposed the democratically elected government 60 years ago, and shows no signs of relinquishing power. Few natives remember a time without rebellion. Brave and determined, the rebels have little chance of victory, though, over the well-funded military that controls extensive munitions factories.*

—Interweb Travel Data

"Men are cheaper than guns," is a common saying among the Bolumbian rebels. They seek mercenaries to aid their cause. JumpCorp allows idle corporate operatives considerable leeway. Off-world agents offer considerable money to the travelers to lend their military expertise to the rebel cause. More than money, they make a persuasive argument by showing evidence of atrocities carried out by the military regime. The rebels are definitely on the side of right.

### A WARM BOLUMBIAN WELCOME

The rebels occupy rugged, cratered savannahs. The porous rock gives them a variety of sub-surface hiding places for forts and rapid escape. The rebel army is half natives and half mercenaries. If anything, their army has too many qualified officers who can organize and train the troops. United behind a just cause, there is little strife.

On first blush, the travelers notice that the camps are surprisingly well-supplied with food and basic ammunition. Have them roll Notice. With success, they see that much of the raw vegetables and meats being cooked up are not native to Bolumbia. A second success notes that the ammunition is remarkably well-manufactured, new, and lacks common markings one finds on bullets and energy packs. With a raise on a Notice test, a hero sees the discarded packaging is also unmarked and molecularly strange, unlike anything they have ever seen before.

The travelers are welcomed, and they meet many rebels and mercenaries and their leaders. At first, they are assigned to routine guard duties, then eventually to minor, and finally leading roles in ambushes and sabotage missions. The missions

are dangerous, but the well-equipped JumpCorp team is more than a match for the government troops. In time, they gain the confidence of the rebel leadership, ultimately the Colonel Maryo Atraytes.

## A DESCENDANT OF FAILURE

Eventually, Colonel Atraytes takes the travelers into his confidence and escorts them to a secret warren deep in the savannah craters. He and his most-trusted men sit and wait in an unremarkable cave for several minutes, sharing knowing glances and grins at the uninformed travelers' expense.

At the appointed time they rise, just as the cave wall turns magically from rock to black nothingness. Ragged men—more ragged than the worst of the rebels—emerge through the blackness to hand clean bundles of food and munitions to their fellows in the cave. One emerges from the wall, an old man who embraces Colonel Atraytes heartily. Atraytes explains,

*"This is my great, great grandson, Yarturus! Yes, he is from the future. We rebels here on Bolumbia lose this struggle. In Yarturus' reality, we are crushed! But his reality is now—different. Yarturus has found a way to travel back through time and arm us, as you can see. How he does this, I don't ask too many questions. But the food and ammunition, they are welcome no matter what magic he employs!"*

Yarturus has found a library and uses an Experience Chamber to ferry much-needed supplies to his ancestors in their struggle. Will they be sufficient to tip the struggle against the military dictatorship? None can say, but this reality is definitely different.

- ◆ **Colonel Atraytes:** Use Soldier (Officer) stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.
- ◆ **Yarturus:** Use the Soldier (Grunt) stats in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## BETRAYAL

The travelers are now among those trusted with this secret. They make several supervised supply runs to the Experience Chamber's black wall, and eventually manage those trips without other supervision. Unfortunately, the military rulers have spies everywhere, and they eventually learn of the new supply source. They make a plan to deal with it in their characteristic, unobtrusive fashion—they send a bomb.



The JumpCorp team must deal with this threat. One nondescript rebel who accompanies them on a trip to the black wall carries a small but deadly explosive device. He is not a suicide bomber. His intention is to plant the bomb near the black wall during a supply transfer, then get to a safe distance for himself before setting it off.

If the travelers don't identify the threat beforehand—using their electronic surveillance equipment—they have to notice the traitor leaving the area after he's planted the armed bomb by making a Notice roll. The bomb is hidden in the nearby weeds, set to go off in just 30 seconds, with sufficient force to kill everyone nearby and destroy the Experience Chamber and its controlling gray monolith on the future side.

- ◆ **Bomber (1):** Use the Spy profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.
- ◆ **Rebel Team (2 per hero):** Use the Soldier (Grunt) profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## D'RUULEAN DREAMS

Run this Savage Tale during the Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest*, as the travelers make their way to Scientorium.

Scientorium's powers of isolation are formidable. Who knows? One hero may have been there before...

Select one of the JumpCorp team members who has an incomplete past, either as part of their roleplaying or simply because the player never established many details. This adventure presupposes that traveler was part of an expedition to Scientorium many years ago, an expedition soon forgotten.

But the contact made with the enigmatic d'ruul race there left a subconscious impression that's manifesting itself as troubling dreams. The dreams become a catalyst for seeking it all over again:

*You awaken violently, shaking and covered in sweat. This is the third night in a row, and the images get more detailed each time. The demon, the wicked, black winged demon haunts your dreams. It knows your name, your secrets, and definitely your fears. You're afraid to close your eyes for the first time since you were a child.*

Inform the traveler of ever-deepening dreams. Begin with dreams of the black-winged creatures. Later include a strange ship, standing alone on a lonely platform. Eventually nightmares of frightening mind control awaken the traveler regularly, affecting his mood and performance. The afflicted soul must roll Spirit each morning, and on a failure suffers a level of Fatigue until she sleeps again.

Investigation is difficult: Neither the d'ruul nor Scientorium appear anywhere in modern data banks. Any facts uncovered only come after considerable, specific effort.

For further details, consult **Stalk 37** on page 55—the affected hero recognizes it immediately upon arrival at Scientorium.

## CHILD'S PLAY

Run this Savage Tale during the Plot Point Campaign.

Yasmine Malvin was a normal little girl, born to a normal family in a normal town. Then her psionic mutation brought worlds to their knees.

Fundamentally, Yasmine's psionic mutation is a newly evolved survival trait. She unwittingly bent everyone's will to focus solely upon her protection. It's simple, really, no more surprising than the parental instinct to guard their young because of the look of their young eyes or their infantile cries. How was Yasmine to know that her unique psionic ability—amplified by modern media—would set planet against planet in insane wars to obtain and protect her?

Ten years ago, Yasmine's unintentional psionic powers did just that, starting localized interstellar wars that cost many thousands of lives. Those worlds and peoples are only now getting their civilizations back online. They owe their further existence to quick-thinking scientists who dampened her psionic imperative and also broadcast effective countermeasures to stem its resultant insanity. Indeed, those wars may have easily spread throughout known space.

Understandably, Yasmine, a pre-teenager now, is closely guarded on a low-population world. The Child Wars, as they have come to be known, were not her fault, and the weary worlds who fought them have forgiven her. But she and her family must deal with the associated guilt, and she has effectively been an experimental scientific subject her entire life.

## GIRL UNDER GUARD

JumpCorp is heavily involved in Yasmine's study, funding the research for (presumably) peaceful purposes. Older now, and completely trained to control her "protection imperative" signals, she is occasionally allowed to travel. One such trip to visit her grandparents on a nearby war-recovering world is coming up soon, and the JumpCorp team is charged with her security for the trip.

The group travels via commercial transport. A handful of staterooms are booked on the liner *Merichuss* to accommodate Yasmine, her weary parents, a couple of scientists, and the JumpCorp team.

Yasmine is mostly withdrawn, not surprising given her strange circumstances. Beneath that she's a fairly normal 12-year-old girl. Her parents are protective but allow some contact.

Despite the best efforts to keep her identity secret, word gets out on the ship that Yasmine is aboard. None of the passengers wish her ill, though, and at most the travelers must keep back

well-wishing citizens who offer only reassurances and best wishes to the troubled child.

Except for one small team of hired kidnapers.

## WEAPONIZED ANGST

Alyusium Tek is a JumpCorp rival primarily concentrated in a cluster of known space systems many hundreds of light years away. Still, they recognize the enormous military potential of Yasmine's unique gift—indeed, without aid it spawned enormous, world-spanning conflicts—and they want to “study” it for themselves.

The kidnapers are sophisticated and well prepared with electronic gadgetry, including experimental psionic dampening caps. These are effective against Yasmine's “protective imperative,” which she engages reflexively at the first sign of genuine trouble, profoundly affecting everyone else on the ship.

Everyone, including the JumpCorp team, becomes utterly self-sacrificing in her defense. The kidnapers, formidable as they may be, are quickly overcome, though probably with some civilian casualties in their wake. In game terms, anyone who spends more than a few minutes in Yasmine's presence gains the Vow (Protect Yasmine) Hindrance.

- ◆ **Yasmine:** Use the Citizen Profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*, but add Arcane Background (Psionics). She has 10 Power Points and the *confusion*, *healing*, and *puppet* powers.
- ◆ **Lead Kidnapper (1):** Use the Bounty Hunter profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.
- **Kidnapers (2 per hero):** Use the Thug profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.
- **Citizens (4 per hero):** See the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## DRIVEN TO MURDER

The trouble is, once her psionic powers are engaged, Yasmine has no ability to countermand them. The scientists, assuming they survive, need several hours to dampen her psionic influence. In that time, everyone left within her influence factionalize and continue fighting. Even JumpCorp team members may turn on each other in defense of young Yasmine—it takes a Spirit test at -2 to resist the compulsion.

After the psionically initiated conflicts have subsided and everyone has regained personal control over their actions, more trouble ensues.

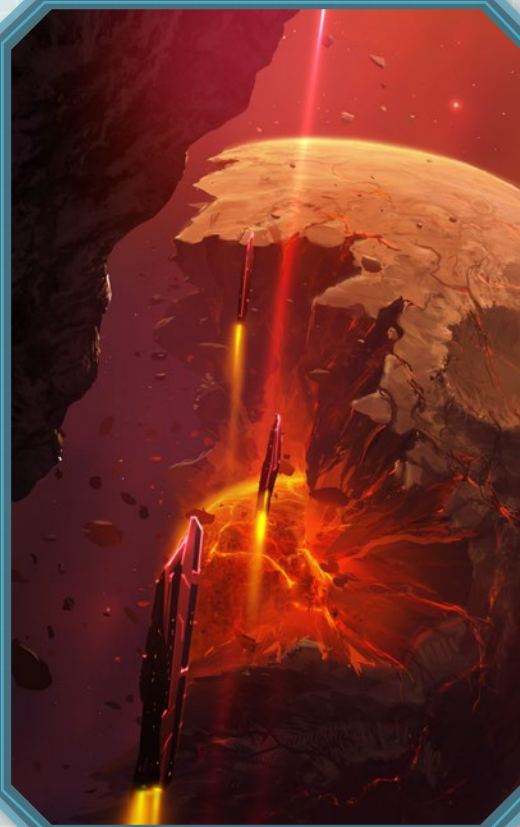
A committee of citizens—some of whom have hurt or slain loved ones on the ship now—take it upon themselves to murder Yasmine for the public good. This lynch mob presents itself and the JumpCorp team must deal with them. Further still, they have signaled ahead to their destination world where the team finds a “welcoming committee” mob waiting for them at the starport. Here, at least, the local authorities eventually intervene and restore order, but the travelers may have their hands full at first.

- **Angry Mob (4 per hero):** Use the Citizen profile in the *Science Fiction Companion*.

## LASTING EFFECTS

What of poor Yasmine? She's a sympathetic character who genuinely deserves aid and protection. Her parents could be killed in the shipboard conflict...

An aftereffect of Yasmine's exotic influence is a long period of psionic fortitude. Even the library's powers cannot overcome it. A Yasmine-influenced seeker gains +4 to Smarts rolls to resist Scientorium's **Library Reclusiveness** effect (see page 14) for 1d6+1 months.





# CHAPTER SIX: BESTIARY

Visits to Scientorium's Experience Chambers put the player characters in contact with all sorts of alien species, both intelligent and animalistic. All the information necessary to run them is provided in the adventures in which they appear.

Here we detail a few strange beings the travelers must deal with consistently during their visit to Scientorium, along with the major characters appearing in the Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest*.

## XENOS

### ✦ LIBRARIAN

Like the strange library that they serve, today's Librarians are the oddly transformed descendants of an alien race appointed by the Ancient Empire to watch over their prized bastions of knowledge.

**Evolution:** Technically, the Librarians are all of the race *notitia vivere*, known around the Ancient Empire by the pejorative "stringer," owing to their odd net-like physiology. Stringers evolved quite by accident on a corporate-owned moon the Ancient Empire had transformed by nanotechnology into an enormous, unified data storage device. The data moon served its purpose for only a century before its storage technology deteriorated, after which it was abandoned to its own devices, along with bacteria left behind by careless service technicians.

Those bacteria drew energy from the gravitationally induced heat at its surface, vented from the data moon's core, and also by feeding on the very material of the data storage medium. Initial mutation occurred digitally, rather than genetically, as the thriving bacteria chose selectively to consume data storage elements hosting specific types of data.

Genetic mutation followed, when bacteria developed a means to reproduce not only themselves but also that preferred string of data, creating a nutritious soup of data/genetic variant lifeforms. Natural selection favored more complex lifeforms that could best combine different data sets—drawn from the data moon's vast reserves

of diverse corporate information—with genetic reproductive string sequences. Stringers are the most successful lifeforms to emerge from that data moon's biosphere.

**Physiology:** Stringers can assume a variety of shapes. Their bodies consist of thousands of linear cell structures that resemble white webs, strings, or cables. These loop back on one another and reconnect in ever-changing combinations (essentially making and breaking circuits as they change) depending upon the stringer's physical or mental requirements at the moment. Every portion of a stringer—its strings or knotted clusters of many strings—is at once part of its physical structure and part of its mind. A stringer is a large, free-moving, thinking device.

The stringer's physical body changes shape at will, but retains its basic mass of 100 kilograms, somewhat heavier than an average human. Because its body encompasses quite a bit of empty space between its many string structures, its density is lower but the space it occupies is much larger. For example, a stringer in Librarian robes (assuming a roughly humanoid shape) stands almost three meters tall, but if one were to try to push it over it would seem comparatively light for its size.

A stringer's mental capacity is a direct function of the close connections among its many strings. Generally, the more compact its physical structure, drawn in upon itself to form the maximum number of touching circuits in what is essentially one big ball, the smarter it is. Conversely, a stringer that is stretched out, reaching its strings out to connect with its brethren or other devices or to accomplish some physical task such as moving or manipulating a device, sacrifices some of its intellect in the process. When a stringer needs to concentrate, it draws its strings together into a tight, interconnected ball. A stringer assumes several basic shapes to accomplish different tasks.

Stringers need oxygen but only "breathe" on a molecular level. Normally, sufficient atmosphere



permeates their bodies for this purpose. They eat from vats of biological slime (rich in silicon and metal fragments) carefully farmed for their needs. They maintain several of these in Scientorium. An isolated stringer doesn't starve to death for many weeks.

Stringers see in a broad spectrum extending into the infrared and ultraviolet. They can hear in frequencies far higher and lower than a human ear. They do not, however, have any sense of smell to pick up on particulate matter in the air. Individual strings are quite maneuverable and delicate, so a cluster of them can perform intricate tasks easily.

To reproduce, stringers combine new data/genetic strings whenever they make contact with other stringers or even with other inanimate computer devices. These mingle, combining and recombining in an enclosed string chamber protected at the creature's core. To ensure data/genetic diversity, stringers seek new, untapped information for reproductive purposes (see below). Every hundred standard days or so, a stringer reproduces asexually, sacrificing many of its own strings to create an infant. A well-nourished infant grows to full size in a matter of days. Even in infancy, it has full stringer intelligence. Older stringers, after reaching 1,000 standard years, sacrifice themselves to the biological slime vats to keep the balance within their community.

Stringers communicate with one another via touch (an instantaneous transfer of information), but can "speak" by vibrating selected strings to make a musical, often subsonic voice. Stringers in physical contact create more circuit loops among their strings, thus temporarily improving each one's intelligence. Stringers commonly form dense spheres and touch each other in groups when trying to solve a difficult problem.

Stringers have a natural affinity for electronic devices. Their bodies conduct electricity and are especially resistant to electrical damage.

**Psychology:** Stringers evolved in a unique environment, and their intellects and thinking grew to match. Stringers had no predators on the data moon. Evolutionary success depended solely upon data/genetic diversity and reproductive success, and the stringers were the winners over all other lifeforms. As such, they have no fight-or-flight response. Stringers approach all other creatures with curiosity and have no adverse reaction to apparent ferocity. Bared teeth, loud

noises, and other aggressive posturing are lost upon them. Leveling a gun at a stringer elicits no immediate response—the stringer is intellectually aware that the weapon is dangerous, but it has no gut instinct to avoid or "fear" it.

**Varying Intelligence Bias:** Stringers are creatures of varying intelligence. They are used to their own physiology where different postures and activities naturally enhance or inhibit the individual's ability to think. Stringers do not ask each other complex questions when they are engaged in locomotion, for instance, because they are aware of each other's reduced intellectual capacity. They are also used to touching each other to create additional circuit loops and improve the group intellect.

This affects how stringers interpret the actions of other intelligent beings. A human just standing there cannot be thinking too hard, or so a stringer thinks. One might be surprised to learn that a human is running and forming an intricate plan at the same time. Were a stringer to observe two pair-bonded humans holding hands, it would assume they were trying to combine intellects.

**The Quest for Data/Genetic Diversity:** On Scientorium, the stringer Librarians have two fundamental interests in any new visitors. First, as Librarians, the core compels them to intervene when visitors attempt to steal from or damage the facility. Second, visitors bring new data sets that the stringers long for. A stringer's desire to touch and connect with never-before-seen data sets equates to human lust. Their passion for that contact is visceral and, like humans, they occasionally do foolish things to achieve it. Indeed, a newcomer's first contact with the Librarians may seem strange, even threatening, as the stringers bargain to examine their computer devices. It may be necessary to their data/genetic diversity, but on first blush it appears threatening, even creepy.

**Stringers as Computer Interfaces:** One area of physiological expertise that stringers and visitors may find mutually beneficial is their ability to "translate" between electronic devices. A stringer naturally acts as a conduit between incompatible, even alien computers. Visitors find that they cannot easily link their devices to anything in the library—its auto-defense systems, the Experience Chambers, etc. Cooperation with stringer Librarians may be beneficial.

**Stringers as Librarians:** Stringers found themselves scattered widely around the Ancient



Empire, doing all sorts of tasks for which their unique physiology suited them. But, like the empire, those stringers are long gone. They remain on Scientorium as the Librarians.

On a macro level, the Librarians are perpetually “plugged in” to the station’s vast informational resources. They monitor the historical data and playback content of all the Experience Chambers, tweaking them, checking for data flaws, and correcting them. They even introduce new data into the programs pulled from any new stimulus. In the good old days, fleets of robot craft came from all around the Empire to deposit newfound data, but today these have ceased to operate and the library is limited to gleaning data from its few visitors. That’s right—every visitor gets probed and their data inserted into the library’s stores (come back a second time and a visitor can re-experience that visit over and over again...).

The Librarians typically do not present themselves directly to contact with visitors, but instead project near-perfect holoivid images anywhere in or around Scientorium. The holoivid projections are partially derived from their magnetic mastery, and for all intents and purposes are indistinguishable from their

actual presence in any situation. However, these projections are impervious to harm and can be presented and shut down by them at any time.

Librarians wear dark gray or white robes and present themselves in their erect, somewhat humanoid form most of the time. They wander the library but are seldom seen unless they are drawn out for some specific purpose, presenting only holoivid images for their own protection. Librarians in groups are usually touching strings in some manner. They are curious and extend strings toward visitors and their electronic devices, which can be misinterpreted as an aggressive act.

**Typical Librarian Encounters:** The Librarians monitor all visitors, even peaceful ones, through the station’s innate and ever-present sensors. So long as they cause no particular problems, the Librarians are content to let visitors come and go without ever confronting them directly. Indeed, a visitor might easily arrive and leave again without ever knowing there are Librarians here, at all. They are content to simply scan visitors and their equipment to glean the data they crave.



However, visitors who block those sensors by any means or otherwise disguise their activities draw direct observation. Librarians present themselves immediately, sending one of their representatives for every troublesome visitor in holoivid form. Made active only to directly watch the visitors, these Librarians adopt a purely observational posture, keeping in direct visual contact at all times. If allowed, the Librarians reach out with strings to interact directly with any electronic computing devices the visitors bring with them. They attempt that direct contact persistently. The visitors are still free to move around the station, with these Librarians in tow. If they relent and allow indirect observation via the station's sensors, these Librarians leave.

**Response in Kind:** The next most likely reason for the Librarians to present themselves as holoivids is in response to bringing objects back to the real world through an Experience Chamber in Semi-Reality mode. The core cannot allow such objects to be removed and moves decisively to retrieve them, both personally and by using stringers in a method they call response in kind. Simply put, the Librarians unleash denizens of the stolen item's era to retrieve it. For instance, if visitors enter an Experience Chamber to study the Dogman Pirates and steal their treasured Nebular Emerald, the Librarians let the Dogman Pirates emerge into the station to steal it back.

**Fighting With Librarians:** The Librarians have no desire to kill anyone, even disruptive visitors. To protect themselves, they appear only in holoivid form. To discourage violence, they attempt to disarm their opponents. For electronic weapons, the Librarians can simply render them useless with a single touch, reprogramming them to be dysfunctional. For any metallic weapons, they grab them away using the station's powerful selective magnetism system (see page 18), which essentially snags any metallic object and pins it against the nearest station component (the floor, the ceiling, the wall) with unbreakable force.

To keep things from being stolen from the library, the Librarians can use their electronic reprogramming and selective magnetism system assets, but their preferred method is resolution in kind, drawing upon the Experience Chambers for effective aid.

Regardless, the stringer Librarians do not simply allow themselves to be slain by intruders and eventually turn to lethal force to achieve their ends. On a first offense, they are prone to err on

the side of peaceful resolution. However, once a visitor has killed to achieve its objectives, the Librarians respond in kind.

**Librarians and the Immune Traveler:** The Librarians are intrigued by the existence of the Immune Traveler, a living being that cannot be thwarted by their galaxy-spanning deterrents. They want the Immune Traveler to reach Scientorium and help them bring about the destruction of the starship cache (as in the Plot Point Campaign *Palimpsest*). After that, they see the Immune Traveler as an agent they can call on for other services, someone who is always welcome to explore the vast library for years to come.

**Librarians and the Collectors:** The enigmatic Collectors seek ancient artifacts for reasons unknown, unknown even to the Librarians. The Collectors may be beneficent and harmless, but the Librarians are not prepared to take that chance. When they learn of items the Collectors seek or have already secured, they try to retrieve them for safekeeping. Their newfound agent, the Immune Traveler, is key to such future efforts.

**Attributes:** Agility d10, Smarts d12, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d4, Knowledge (Scientorium) d12+2, Knowledge (Specialty) d12, Notice d8, Stealth d8

**Pace:** 4; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Quirk (No sense of smell)

**Edges:** Scholar (Scientorium, one specialty)

**Special Abilities:**

- **Condensed Form:** The stringer draws itself into a tight sphere to create the maximum number of looping circuits and think most effectively. It's shape becomes a tight sphere 1.75 meters in diameter. Commonly, a concentrating stringer reaches out individual strings to make connection with other stringers or with computer interfaces, sparing a minimum number of strings for this purpose. To an outside observer, a Librarian stringer that suddenly collapses upon itself to concentrate appears to shrink down to half height with its robes floating down more slowly on top of it. While in this form the stringer gains +2 Smarts die types, plus an additional die type per additional, linked stringer.
- **Flattened Form:** In gravity, a stringer moves by using strings as tiny legs and feet, much like a centipede. Assuming it has ample space, it pancakes to a flat disk—just a quarter-meter thick and three-and-a-half meters in

diameter—to get the greatest number of its tiny legs against the ground. A stringer that cannot assume this ideal posture, because of special restrictions, for instance, cannot move at its maximum speed. A stringer elongates to get through tinier spaces, but cannot squeeze any portion of itself smaller than 25 millimeters—it simply cannot bundle any portion of its many cable-like strings any more tightly than that. When wearing Librarian robes, the robes collapse over the stringer when it flattens out for locomotion. While in this form the stringer gains +1 Vigor die type, and has a Pace of 10.

- **Heightened Senses:** A stringer receives +4 on any Notice roll that doesn't depend on smell.
- **Holographic Projection:** A stringer can broadcast a holovid image of itself into any area of Scientorium. Only a Notice roll at -4 distinguishes the image from the real thing.
- **Immunity (Electricity):** A stringer takes no damage from electricity or electrical attacks.
- **Scan:** By touching a visitor with its strings for 1d6 rounds, a stringer absorbs all that person's DNA information and accumulated life data.
- **Selective Magnetic System:** By utilizing the selective magnetic system (see page 18), stringers can manipulate most metallic objects.
- **Splayed Form:** A stringer's main vulnerability is disconnection. Strings cut away from its body cannot be reconnected, and they are slow to regrow. To minimize damage, a stringer sensing danger splays itself out in all directions as far as it can reach. Fully splayed, a stringer becomes a five-meter diameter ball of extended strings reaching out like tree branches. The strings remain most dense at its core and, in gravity, along a cylinder from its core down to the ground to support itself. A

splayed stringer sacrifices both mobility and intellect to protect its strings from damage. A splayed stringer can still move slowly via normal locomotion. Further, reduced to its minimum number of looped circuits, a splayed stringer descends to animalistic intelligence levels, retaining just enough intellect to assess danger, move away from it, and re-condense after the danger has passed. In Librarian robes, a stringer splays out through holes in the garb so it becomes almost lost within the thousands of extended strings. While in this form a stringer gains Vigor d12+2 and Toughness 9, but has Smarts d4 (A).

- **Upright Form:** For everyday activities, a stringer adopts a somewhat humanoid shape. While "standing" on the bulk of its strings, it extends one bundle of strings to each side while clustering a number of strings at its top to adopt sensory gathering roles. Cloaked beneath Librarian robes, it appears quite humanoid with tentacle-like arms and a "head" shrouded in darkness. While in this form the stringer gains +2 Strength die types.

## AUTONOMOUS SECURITY ROBOT

The library's security robots are autonomous crowd control devices left over from days when hundreds of visitors utilized each stalk at all times. In those times, the robots policed the facility, directed visitors around obstacles, directed queues as necessary, and intervened in disputes between visitors. Today, they are in disrepair but still attempt to carry out their primary functions.

These are spherical robots bristling with sensor knobs and armed with two integral laser SMGs. All its sensors and weapon ports are surface



mounted. At its peak is a bright warning light that it activates when warning visitors to avoid an obstacle. When functioning properly, each one is linked to the library's entire sensor system (and contributes to it with its own sensory data). It can emit warning lights and sirens, as well as give specific instructions in a variety of Ancient Empire languages (none in use today).

Security robots are activated whenever there is damage to the facility (intentional or unintentional) or when visitors harm each other. If an Experience Chamber is damaged or an escalator breaks down, a handful of security robots arrive to keep visitors away. In case of inter-visitor violence, security robots arrive on the scene and employ their nonlethal weapons. Subdued offenders are hauled off and deposited in the Detention Level (see page 12).

Unlike the Librarians, security robots have no interest in whether or not something is being stolen from the Experience Chambers.

**Cost:** C\$26K; **Remaining Mods:** 5

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d4

**Skills:** Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d6

**Pace:** —; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 6 (4)

**Gear:** The robot has two laser SMGs (Range 15/30/60, Damage 2d6, RoF 4) rather than arms.

**Special Abilities:**

- **Armor +4:** Additional plating.
- **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; does not breathe; immune to poison and disease; ignores one level of wound penalties.
- **Environmental Weakness (Electricity):** Robots suffer +4 damage from electrical attacks.
- **Flight:** Pace 6", Climb 1.
- **Immobile:** Sentry bots cannot move except when using their Flight ability.
- **Malfunction:** Only half of the remaining Security Robots are in perfect working order. The rest are starting to malfunction at random times. When a group of security robots draws a Club for initiative a random robot suffers from malfunction (see the **Robot Malfunctions** sidebar on page 92).
- **Sensor Suite:** +4 to Notice sound, motion, chemicals, radiation, and electrical fields up to 500 meters distant.
- **Size -2:** Sentry robots are basketball-sized.
- **Stun Burst:** All targets in a Cone Template must make a Vigor roll or fall prone and Incapacitated for 1d6 rounds.

## ROBOT MALFUNCTIONS

**Malfunction:** Only half of the remaining Security Robots are in perfect working order (determined randomly upon encounter).

The rest manifest some error in function during the encounter:

1d6	Result
1	Electrical Discharge
2	Explosion
3	General Weapon Failure
4–5	Locomotion Failure
6	Mistaken Identity

**Electrical Discharge:** A battery flaw grounds violently between the robot and the surrounding station, causing 1d6 electrical damage to any living creature within a Medium Burst Template. Electrical equipment may be damaged.

**Explosion:** The robot explodes, throwing shrapnel in all directions. Anyone within a Large Burst Template centered on the robot suffers 2d6 damage.

**General Weapon Failure:** The robot loses the use of one of its SMGs.

**Locomotion Failure:** The robot's float controls seize up and it can no longer move.

**Mistaken Identity:** The robot misidentifies the visitors as broken station components, so lights up to warn others away, largely ignoring the heroes.

## SENTIENTS

Here are some of the Plot Point Campaign's recurring characters, gathered for your convenience.

### ★ BURGOPYNE FIXER

Burgoyne Antiquities are dealers in historical art and sundries with showrooms on a dozen worlds. While successful, the business is one among many, sound and reputable, but fairly unremarkable.

But the family business is actually theft, not retail sales. Their antiquities business gives them a front to fence stolen goods. Like Jeromm Hychus, they have done work for the mysterious Collectors. Armed with Hychus' electronic surveillance data, the Collectors now seek the library for direct contact, but are as subject to its elusiveness as anyone else.

Helen Burgoyne, the matriarch, actually managed to find Scientorium once, using Hychus' data and a neural stimulator to help her retain her memories. She and her daughters, nieces, and



nephews entered an Experience Chamber and returned with valuable knowledge. But the library adapted so the neural stimulator no longer works on any of them, and the Burgoynes are as addled about its location as they can be.

Burgoyne dealers, family members, and most agents are just extras, but their special agents are skilled fixers.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d8, Taunt d6

**Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 9 (4)

**Hindrances:** Enemy (Minor, Rival Faction), Greedy

**Edges:** Connections, Jack-of-all-Trades, Level Headed, Strong Willed

**Gear:** Body Armor (+4), laser pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+2, RoF 1, AP 2).

### ★ CASSRETOO

Cassretoo is Professor Kerastus' son, though Kerastus never treats him as such. He shouts at the dwarf, berates him exasperatedly, and gives him no accommodations but a blanket on the floor. But his assistant is Johnny on the spot, fetching whatever Kerastus needs, assisting him unerringly on his stage performances, and keeping an eye on the entire menagerie's creatures and curiosities.

Cassretoo is as demure and unseen as his master is flamboyant, wearing a simple, brown jacket and trousers, his bowl-cut black hair hanging just down to his tiny eyes.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Notice d10, Repair d6, Survival d6

**Cha:** -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Loyal, Ugly

**Edges:** Luck, Scavenger

**Gear:** Commlink, laser pistol (Range 15/30/60, Damage 2d6, RoF 1, AP 2).

**BRYAN  
SYME**

## ✦ JEROMM HYCHUS

Jeromm Hychus is a well-groomed native of Egaut IV who wears expensive tailored suits. He comports himself as a man of infinite confidence, time, and resources.

Jeromm has no idea what the professor seeks or where he is headed. His plan is to tell the ancient Kerastus that he is a wealthy recluse (not far from the truth) content to ferry him wherever he needs to go. He'll deal with the unfolding adventure as it comes, content to live luxuriously along the way thanks to the Collectors' bank card.

**Attributes:** Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Driving d6, Fighting d6, Knowledge (Electronics) d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Piloting d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8

**Cha:** -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Cautious, Outsider

**Edges:** Connections, Thief

**Gear:** Laser pistol (Range 15/30/60, Damage 2d6, RoF 1, AP 2), molecular knife (Str+d4, AP 2), *New Pequod*

## ✦ ANASTASIA KERASTUS

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Knowledge (Astrogation) d6, Notice d10, Persuasion d6, Piloting d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6

**Cha:** +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Curious, Quirk (extreme devotion to father)

**Edges:** Ace, Very Attractive

**Gear:** Commlink, bodyguards, Cyberware (Attribute Increase, Strength), *Sure Hawk*

## ANDROID BODYGUARD

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Knowledge (Electronics) d8, Notice d8, Piloting d6, Repair d6, Shooting d8

**Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 9(4)

**Hindrances:** Loyal (Anastasia)

**Edges:** Martial Artist

**Gear:** Body armor (+4), medium pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6, RoF 1, AP 3, SA), commlink.

**Special Abilities:**

- **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; does not breathe; immune to poison and disease; ignores one level of wound penalties.

- **Environmental Weakness (Electricity):** Androids suffer +4 damage from electrical attacks.

- **Human Appearance:** These androids closely resemble Anastasia. It requires a Notice roll at -4 (or at -2 once they've known her for a while) to tell the difference.

- **Protector:** An android bodyguard within 3' of Anastasia can interpose herself to intercept an incoming attack, even if she has acted in the round. The android suffers the damage instead of Anastasia.

## ✦ PROFESSOR KERASTUS

The wily professor carries the weight of his many years in his humped shoulders and the deep-etched lines around his wide eyes and nose, yet defies his age with a surprising optimism and a defiant zest for life. Bushy eyebrows shadow his face, along with a thick, gray beard and unkempt mop of long hair falling halfway down his back, beset with twigs and tiny vermin who dart about its dense warrens. Professor Kerastus wears a silk-thin cloak that changes colors anti-chameleonlike, adopting whatever colors and patterns that distinguish it most gaudily from those around it. He is a showman, with a booming voice and theatrical movements practiced over many lifetimes. To get him on stage or into an animated conversation is to know the professor's true nature most fully. He commands attention, and once he has it, never fails to deliver.

The professor is no ancient wizard or magical being, though he has many trinkets, alien friends, and mannerisms that might make one think otherwise. He is a wanderer, an adventurer who has been from one end of the galaxy to the other, seen a million sights, and loved a million loves. He has undergone a dozen alien and exotic procedures to lengthen his life, so many he's lost track of them and of his true age.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d4, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d4, Knowledge (Animal Handling) d10, Knowledge (History) d12, Knowledge (Xenobiology) d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Shooting d4, Survival d6, Streetwise d8

**Cha:** +2; **Pace:** 4; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Curious, Lame, Quirk (Obsessed with locating Sciencetorium)

**Edges:** Charismatic, Connections, Linguist, Scholar (Animal Handling, Xenobiology), Rich

**Gear:** Exotic menagerie



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