TRAVELLER
SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS

DESCENT

Descent is the fourth adventure in the *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign. If you're a player, **stop reading now**. If you're a Referee, then you should first read **Section 0: Secrets of Secrets** to get an overview of the campaign. In **Section 3: The Hunt**, the characters fled Alell with Imperial Intelligence in hot pursuit. They made their way across the Regina Subsector to the gas giant of Komesh, in the Boughene system. There, they detected an Ancient ship floating in the upper reaches of Komesh's atmosphere. With the Imperium closing in, the characters flew their ship, the *Star Hunter*, into the gas giant…

Adventure Synopsis

After fighting their way through a sudden hydrogen squall, the characters dock with the alien ship. Exploring the outer sections of the ship, they find ancient starmaps and other clues relating to the Ancient builders of the ship. They must also fight off attacks from the native fauna of the gas giant.

The characters find their way into the internal compartment of the ship, which consists of a series of capsules linked by teleportation portals. Much of the ship was damaged hundreds of thousands of years ago, so they have to work out a safe way to navigate the teleportation grid and reach the ship's bridge.

On the bridge, they reawaken the ship's artificial intelligence. The ship rises out of Komesh's gravity well, where it is challenged by the *Alahir*, the Imperial Intelligence ship that chased the PCs across the sector. Moments later, something far more dangerous arrives in the system…

The Ancient Ship

300,000 years ago, during the wars of the Ancients, the ship was dispatched by Grandfather to retrieve one of his experiments – a human colony, on the world now known as Bilke (0110/Menorial/Trojan Reach) –

before it was wiped out by his rampaging offspring. During its return, the ship was attacked by an enemy vessel, and suffered severe damage. The damage to the hull and the other physical systems was considerable, but its self-repair systems could eventually heal these wounds by siphoning the required matter from the gas giant and assembling new components. The worst damage, though, was inflicted on the ship's mind. It was struck by an information-devouring viral weapon, a vicious attack that injured the ship's sentience directly. The virus worked by consuming the ship's intellect and using its own processing power against the ship – the more of the ship's mind that it ate, the smarter the virus became.

Confused and paralysed, the shattered mind of the ship attempted to do its best for its cargo. The human and droyne passengers were removed from suspended animation, and the ship created an ecosystem on its upper hull while it reconfigured its lower decks to optimise its self-repair. It also shut down its own computing systems, to slow the advance of the virus while it searched for a way to defeat the invading program.

Its limited runtime has been stretched for millennia. The ship's computer awakens only for an instant every few thousand years. It sleeps for aeons, punctuated by brief spasms of awareness like beads strung on an infinitely long cord. Each period of wakefulness brings with it an opportunity to continue self-repair and observation, but soon the virus also awakens. To preserve itself, the ship must shut down as soon as the virus is active.

The passengers died out 299,500 years ago. Their civilisation was quite successful, given their utter lack of resources or living space. They established agriculture to make up for the ship's declining ability to provide for them. More than a dozen generations lived and died on board, before the

last human perished. The ship experimented with nurturing bacteria along an evolutionary path that would eventually produce sentient lifeforms capable of aiding in its repairs, but abandoned this project some 250,000 years ago; the upper deck was sterilised with a burst of radiation.

From the ship's perspective, the Final Wars are a recent memory. Its last period of wakefulness was two thousand years ago, when it realised that its struggle against the invading virus was futile, and that it would never be able to overcome the enemy without outside aid. It dispatched one of its pod-capsules (see capsule 22, page 13) to look for Grandfather. Some of the contents of this pod were found by a merchant ship in the Boughene asteroid belt in 703.

Angels and Demons

There are two artificial intelligence operating on board the Ancient ship – the ship's original AI, and the hostile information-warfare virus that has been attacking for three hundred millennia. Initially, both AIs
are unaware of the presence of the player characters, as the computers are shut down.

Once the characters reach the lower decks of the Ancient ship, the AIs are automatically awoken. The ship's AI immediately recognises the characters as potentially useful pawns – if it brings the characters to the bridge, it can then create a subroutine that obeys their commands without volition of its own. As this subroutine cannot act without external authorisation, it cannot be easily subverted by the virus. However, the subroutine's list of options will be so curtailed as to ensure that the characters do what the ship wants them to do.

The virus, the dark shadow of the ship's mind, also recognises the characters as a threat to it. It will attempt to stop them from getting to the bridge.

In the game, the effects of these two AIs appear as strange events that the Referee should throw in as the players explore the ship. The ship's AI tries to guide the characters towards the bridge; the hostile virus tries to eliminate them. If the players are lost, have the friendly AI aid them; if they are getting too close to the bridge, then the virus can throw a challenge or two in their path.

Ship's AI Actions:
- Activating a teleportal
- Opening an iris hatch
- Providing a needed teleporter address
- Dispatching a servitor robot to help the characters
- Sending subliminal messages to a character who has found one of the Ancient translators

Virus Actions:
- Scrambling a teleportal address so the characters end up teleported to a random direction
- Attacking the characters with interconnectors that break into a capsule and attack
- Detaching a capsule from the ship and letting it drop into the gas giant (as per capsule 51)
- Dispatching a servitor robot to murder the characters
- Adjusting environmental conditions to lethal settings
- Sending subliminal messages to confuse or threaten the characters

1. THE MAELSTROM

The wrecked Ancient ship is floating at an altitude of approximate 35,500 kilometres. That is within the operating range for the characters' ship, but with a pressure in excess of one hundred atmospheres coupled with squalls of hydrogen and high winds, it is very risky to fly down that far into a gas giant. The Ancient ship is moving semi-randomly – most of the time, it is driven by the winds, but it sometimes activates its manoeuvring thrusters to fly against the wind or to move to a different altitude.

Navigating the Gas Giant
- To fly to the wrecked ship, the characters need to make a series of Difficult (-2) Pilot checks.
- Engineering (power plant) and Engineering (m-drive) can be used as a task chain to provide modifiers to the Pilot check.
- The characters need to accumulate a total Effect of 6+2d6 to get close to the wreck.
- Each time the check is failed, the character's ship takes damage, starting at 2d6 damage.
- The DM increases by -2 for each failed check, and the damage increases by 1d6.
- If the negative DM is too high, the characters can abandon the attempt and return to a safe altitude. This resets the DM and the damage from high pressure.

If the characters wait for the Ancient ship to come closer to the surface, then reroll the needed total Effect every six hours. Waiting for the optimum time means hanging in orbit above Komesh, and risking detection by the scout base at the mainworld. Optionally, have the *Alahir* show up to force the characters to brave the gas giant.

Hydrogen Squall

When the characters reach the requisite Effect, they are nearly at the Ancient ship. It is still hidden by clouds of hydrogen and ammonia sleet, but the g-band distortions are growing more pronounced, and at this range even conventional sensors can pick up the presence of thermal and magnetic anomalies. The characters glimpse fragments of the wrecked ship through the pinkish-purple clouds. This far from Komesh's primary star, there is little daylight, so most of the illumination comes from the *Star Hunter*'s own running lights and the crackling of thousand-kilometre lightning bolts deeper in the atmosphere.

As the characters get closer, call for a Hard (-4) Sensors check. If successful, the characters detect small objects, possibly even organic creatures, flitting around the wreck. If the character passed with an Effect of 2 or more, he was able to get a visual image of one of the creatures – it is a gas-bag trailing tentacles behind it. A successful Life Science (xenobiology) roll lets the characters guess that the creature is native to the gas giant, and is not a survivor from the wrecked ship. The characters will not be alone when they board the wreck.

Suddenly, a hydrogen squall hits the characters' ship. The helmsman must make a Hard (-4) Pilot check to ride out the squall. If the check is successful, the characters can keep control of the *Star Hunter* as it flies through the squall. If the check is failed, then the ship takes another 2d6 damage; even if it is still intact, then the helmsman has lost control of the ship. The *Star Hunter* spins end over end through the gas giant before crashing into the Ancient ship. See *Crash Landing*, below.

The Wreck

The *Star Hunter* breaks through the squall clouds and into an area of clear sky, giving the characters their first clear view of the Ancient wreck.

It is the strangest ship imaginable. It looks more like a living creature, or maybe an abstract sculpture inspired by some alien lifeform, than an actual ship. There are no straight lines or symmetries, just curves and spirals. Judging size and distance is difficult, but instruments show the vessel masses more than 5,000 tons.

The upper half of the ship is a mostly smooth expanse of greenish metal, pock-marked with the occasional strange barnacle-like structure or growth. As the characters fly closer, they see geometric shapes on the hull, reddish squares and rectangles with fuzzy edges. A shimmering, semi-transparent energy field wraps around the upper section.

Towards the prow of the ship, there is a twisted spire like a narwhal's horn mixed with the organic complexity of a banyan grove. The gas clouds part ahead of this spire, suggesting that it is projecting a magnetic field of some sort. Closer examination of the gas clouds suggests that the gas is being sucked into one of the pods in the lower section.

The lower section of the hull is a tangle of silvery cords, wrapped around dozens of greenish-grey spheres. These spheres range in size from three to fifty metres in diameter. Some of them show clear signs of battle damage; there are blackened scars along the hull, shattered hollow spheres, and twisted strands of the greenish hull metal trailing behind the wreck. Every few seconds, there's a stuttering discharge of energy, as the energy field that is wrapped around the upper hull extends to the lower section. The extended field lasts only a fraction of a second before snapping back to its original configuration.

There are no discernable fuel tanks, no thruster plates, no sign of a jump grid inlaid in the hull.

If the characters are in control of their vessel at this point, they can pause to take some close-range sensors scans of the Ancient ship. Their ship takes another 2d6 damage if they hold station long enough to gather sensor data. The sensor operator can make a Sensors check to gather data; this then forms a task chain with the skills listed below. Make only one Sensors check for all the Science checks. If a skill check is passed, the characters get the information noted below.

- **Physical Science (physics):** The energy field surrounding the upper half of the hull seems to be a protective shield of some sort, keeping the atmosphere of the gas giant at bay.

- **Physical Science (chemistry):** Analysing the damaged sections of the hull suggests it is not made out of any known metal, but a complex blend of fibrous organic materials, carbon, titanium and some sort of strange quark matter.
- **Life Science (xenology):** If there are indeed life-forms in this gas giant, the Ancient ship would be an unimaginable rich source of minerals for them. A whole ecosystem may have evolved in the thousands of years that this ship has waited here.
- **Engineering (life support) or Life Science (biology):** Sensor readings suggest that the area within the energy shield is capable of supporting human life. Gravity, pressure, temperature and atmosphere content are all within human norms. There is a pressure difference of more than a hundred atmospheres between the inside and outside of the shield, but it shows no strain whatsoever.
- **Social Science (archaeology):** This is the single most intact Ancient artefact ever discovered – at least, as far as the character knows. The secrets on board that ship could be worth a staggering amount of credits.
- **Astrogration:** The ship is correcting its own course and orbit. It is deliberately holding its position here.
- A character with any ranks in Animals (farming) or Trade (hydroponics) can identify the reddish areas on the upper hull. They look just like farms.

Docking

If the **Star Hunter** approaches the ship under its own power, then the characters can look for a suitable docking port. If they come close to the upper hull, then the energy shield ripples and forms an oval portal just big enough for their ship to pass through – a clear invitation for the characters to land on the upper deck. The **Star Hunter** can pass through the oval portal without difficulty – trying to fly through the rest of the energy shield causes their ship to bounce off, suffering 3d6 damage in the process.

The gasbag lifeforms of the gas giant enter and leave the ship the same way. For these creatures, the low pressure of the upper deck is extremely dangerous – if they spend too long there, they suffer lethal decompression and may even explode. Therefore, they flit in and out of the shield, grabbing what they can in their brief dives.

Alternatively, if the characters search the lower section of the hull, they find a docking port in capsule 52 (see page 15).

Crashing

If the characters failed to maintain control during the hydrogen squall, then the **Star Hunter** comes tumbling across the sky and crashes straight through the energy shield. Fortunately, the ship opens up a portal just before the characters are splattered across the surface of the shield. As the **Star Hunter** passes through the portal, a tractor beam seizes it, slowing it down enough so its crash landing is one the characters can walk away from, as opposed to a lethal impact.

The ship takes another 4d6 damage from the crash landing. The characters survive thanks to the protective tractor beam, even if the ship is reduced to 0 Structure by the crash. However, the **Star Hunter** will never fly again (and this will cause added problems for the characters in Section 7 of **Secrets of the Ancients.**)

2. The Upper Hull

Emerging from their ship, the characters find themselves in a bizarre yet familiar environment. The upper deck is maintained in a state capable of supporting human life – the artificial gravity is around 1g, the air is breathable, and the shimmering energy shield above sheds light and heat similar to a warm spring day on Earth. If you closed your eyes, you could almost be on a garden world.

Contrast this with the visual impression – the ground is a woven mesh of some green substance that feels like metal, but which quivers and pulses as if alive. The sky is a flickering, glowing force screen, and you can see through it to the continent-sized thunderheads and gas clouds of Komesh beyond. This whole world is only a few square kilometres in extent. It is a tiny pocket world.

The Ancient ship consists of two sections – the flat upper hull, protected by the energy shield, and the lower section, composed of a web of interconnector cables attached to dozens of capsules. These pods can be swapped in and out to reconfigure the ship's capabilities. The jump drive and manoeuvre drive is built into the upper hull. Fuel and energy are both provided by teleportation portals linked to a pocket universe, although the ship's connection to its power source was damaged during the Final Wars.

While the characters are exploring the upper hull, they may be attacked by the native flyers. See the **Fauna of Komesh** box text.

The Fauna of Komesh

Komesh is a Jupiter-sized gas giant, a thousand times bigger than the Earth. Gas giants offer poor prospects for life – no solid ground, no warm seas – but in the immensity of the universe, life can find a few places to defy the odds and thrive. Most of the lifeforms on Komesh are single-celled organisms that feed on the magnetic flux between Komesh and its moons, and on heavier gases and elements dredged up from deeper in the atmosphere by the churning storm patterns. These lifeforms are analogous to plankton on Earth's oceans.

Where there are plankton, there are whales. The macroscale creatures of Komesh are all flyers; some float on gas-bags containing pure hydrogen, which gives them a modicum of lift in the hydrogen/helium atmosphere. Others have filmy wings of incredible size to flap against the thin air and catch thermal updrafts. These creatures scoop up millions of 'plankton' each day.

There are predators, too, which feed on the larger flyers. These predators are sky-sharks, and attack by biting or slashing the locomotive limbs of the other creatures; they tear open gas bags and cripple limbs so their prey cannot escape.

Most Komesh natives have the ability to enter a state of protective hiberation when food is scarce – the creatures slow their metabolic rate down to a fraction of normal, and sleep until they drift into a bountiful zone.

By the standards of the life-rich terrestrial planets, Komesh is a barren, empty desert – but Komesh is so vast that even this paltry ecosystem contains vastly more creatures than any Earth-like world. The creatures of Komesh dwell in a world defined by pressure and heat, a world without any elements heavier than sodium. Life clusters in areas where the updrafts and storms bring up heavier, richer gases from lower in the atmosphere.

The Ancient ship acts like an artificial reef in the Komesh ecosystem. The tiny amounts of minerals shed by the ship are an incredible bounty to the Komesh natives. The ship is the single richest oasis of life in the whole gas giant. For the last two thousand years, the ship has provided even more resources. When the ship launched its distress pod, it reconfigured the energy shield protecting the upper deck, allowing smaller craft to pass through the barrier. The Komesh fauna have learned to trick the barrier into letting them through.

Type	Habitat	Str	Dexterity	End	Int	Ins	Pack
Sky-whale							
Filter (Herbivore)	Aerial Flyer	9	3	20	0	7	3
Recon 1, Athletics (Flying) 1, Athletics (Endurance) 2, Survival 1, Melee (tail sweep) 1							
Tail Sweep (2d6). Number Encountered: 1-3							
Whale-sized manta ray like creatures with long tails. Deceptively fragile for their size.							
Sky-Shark							
Chaser (Carnivore)	Aerial Flyer	6	8	6	1	10	5
Stealth 1, Survival 1, Athletics (Dexterity) 1, Recon 0, Melee (teeth) 0							
Teeth (3d6), Leathery Hide (1). Number encountered: 1d6							
Human-sized creature that looks like a fanged mouth with wings. 'Sees' using long cilia on the wingtips. Highly aggressive.							

Darter

Trapper (carnivore)	Aerial Flyer	4	10	6	1	7	12

Stealth 1, Survival 1, Athletics (Dexterity) 1, Recon 0, Melee (spike) 3, Melee (brawl) 1

Spike (2d6). Number encountered: 2d6

These creatures consist of five gasbags concealing a long sharp spike. They attack by ramming their spike into their prey, shooting forward using jets of gas like an octopus. A darter gets only one attack – if it misses, it must spend several 3d6 rounds reinflating its gas bags.

If a darter hits with its attack, it continues to inflict 1d6 damage per round until removed with a successful Melee (brawl) check.

Wreck-Darter

Trapper (carnivore)	Aerial Flyer	4	10	6	1	7	12

Stealth 3, Survival 2, Athletics (Dexterity) 2, Recon 0, Melee (spike) 3

Spike (2d6). Number encountered: 2d6

A sub-species of darter, wreck darters have adapted to life on the wreck and are adept at hiding among the remains of the alien ship.

Exploring the Surface

There are several visible structures dotted around the upper deck. The *Star Hunter* landed near the farms, while the sensor antennae and map room are located towards the forward spire. The weapons systems and self-repair units are amidships on the upper deck, while the characters can observe the interconnectors and find the entrance to the teleport system towards the rear.

As the characters explore the upper section, roll on the Upper Deck Encounter table whenever they move from one location to another.

The Farms

Over 50% of the surface of the upper deck is covered with a layer of reddish dirt, which was obviously cultivated earth at some point in the distant past. Examining this dirt with Life Science (biology) reveals that it was irradiated to annihilate any microorganisms; the dirt is now completely sterile and mildly radioactive. The radiation burst, which must have been extremely intense, means that any organic material left in the soil was preserved. Digging around in the dirt reveals plant seeds and roots that the characters can identify as being native to Bilke. The characters also find some bones – the remains of a human skeleton.

A close examination of the dirt under a microscope notes that it is chemically very simple – it has very

Upper deck encounters table

Roll (2d6)	Encounter
2	A Darter flock passes through the energy shield. The characters have a short time to get under cover; if they are still in the open after 2 rounds have passed, they are attacked by 2d6 darters.
3	1d6 Sky-Sharks pass through the energy shield and hunt the characters.
4	A single Darter passes through the energy shield overhead and makes an attack on a randomly chosen character.
5-8	No encounter
9	Water source. The characters come across a small pool of water in a depression on the hull. If they remove any of the water, it refills. The water appears to be condensing out of the solid hull material – there are no visible pipes or nozzles.
10	The characters find a damaged section of hull. If the characters try to take a sample of the hull material, they can do so.
11	Non-functional Ancient gadget, possibly of value to a collector.
12	The characters find an Ancient artefact salvaged from the lower decks. See the *Ancient Gadgets* section.

few trace minerals. The granules are oddly regular, leading the characters to speculate that it could be synthetic. The environment on the upper deck is suitable for agriculture. It is patently obvious that whoever farmed here has been gone for thousands of years. The farmers were unlikely to be the same race who built the ship – this is primitive agriculture, using the most basic tools.

The Sensor Antennae

Near the spire at the prow of the ship is another strange structure. This is one of the Ancient ship's sensor antennae. It rises from the green hull like a bizarre crystal frond, and is approximately ten metres tall. That 'approximately' comes from the fact that the frond's branches all bifurcate over and over again. The root of the frond is three metres in diameter, but the upper branches are so thin and tiny that they are only a few dozen nanometers thick. Invisible but impenetrable force screens protect the frond from being damaged by air currents or inquisitive travellers.

The Map Room

The map room is a domed chamber with a single entrance. In the middle of the chamber is two-meter tall pillar or plinth, while along the walls are a dozen square panels.

Touching a panel causes it to display a map. Experimenting with the controls at the edge of the panel allows the character to scroll the map, zoom in or out, or switch the planet displayed. Another control causes features on the map to shift, but the display becomes increasingly fuzzy and confused when this control is used. A character with Space Science (planetology) realises that the map is attempting to predict erosion and continental drift patterns – this control is designed to extrapolate the past and future geography of the target planet. Whoever designed these maps took an extremely long view.

Currently, all the panels are set to display extremely detailed maps of the planets in the Boughene system. Examination of the panel corresponding to the mainworld shows no signs of human habitation. If the characters continue to toy with these display panels, they will eventually happen across a world they recognise, and realise that these maps are some 300,000 years out of date.

Some of these maps, when the 'time' control is set to 300,000 years ago, show the locations of Ancient bases. These worlds in this sector with Ancient bases

include Yori, Beck's World, Efate, Pixie, Knorbes and Shinothy.

If the central spire is touched, the room darkens. The doorway to the outside is suddenly blocked by a grey surface (this is actually just an opaque cloud of vapour, which the characters can just walk through, but paranoid PCs may assume they have just been trapped). The central spire then displays a three-dimensional holographic star-chart showing the Regina subsector and some surrounding stars, as any character with Astrogation will recognise. The Boughene system is highlighted in the centre of the display.

Unlike the display panels, which show maps from 300,000 years ago, the star-map has compensated for stellar drift and shows the current configuration of the subsector. There are, however, several differences between the Ancient map and Imperial charts. Firstly, the Shinothy system has a planet in place of the current asteroid belt, lending support to those who believe that a world was shattered there during some apocalyptic final war. Secondly, and more impressive, there are three solar systems that do not appear in current charts, but are present in the Ancient map. This trio of systems occupied hexes 0507, 0606 and 0707 in the subsector map. The characters may assume that these systems suffered the same fate as Shinothy; in fact, they were taken into Grandfather's pocket universe.

Examining the controls on both the spire and the display panels shows that they are faintly reminiscent of Dronye glyphs.

The Weapons System

The weapons system consists of a free-floating sphere of metal that seems to be made of a hair-thin coil that has been wrapped around itself millions of times, like a giant ball of twine. The sphere is two meters wide, and hovers three metres off the deck. Three pillars surround the metal sphere; these pillars each have a control console. If a character stands close to the sphere, he hears a low humming noise and feels the presence of a strong static electric field.

At the base of the sphere is a hexagonal white panel. This panel is icy cold to the touch, and any character touching it takes 2d6x10 rads.

Experimenting with the control panels reveals that one console lets the character activate and deactivate

the magnetic field supporting the sphere, and activate some other device whose purpose is not immediately apparent (a successful Engineering check lets the character realise that this second control seems to connect the sphere to an unknown subsystem within the ship, possibly a power distribution grid.

The second console lets the operator rotate the sphere in all three dimensions; there are some controls that seem to be designed to fly the sphere as a remote-control drone, but these controls are offline.

The third console is non-functional unless the first console is used to activate the secondary device, and the second console is used to rotate the sphere so the white panel is no longer pointing directly at the ship's hull. After all, it would be a stupid design if the firing console was activated when the turret weapon was not armed, or was pointed towards your own ship...

Activating the third console when it is functional causes a pulse of violet energy to leap out of the deck and vanish into the sphere. The characters see the pulse of energy race around the coiled cable of the sphere, growing brighter and more powerful as it travels. If the characters do not stop the firing sequence, the weapon discharges.

The beam punches through the ship's energy shield, breaching it and causing it to start collapsing. High-pressure hydrogen gas pours into the upper deck. The characters immediately start drowning (suffering 1d6 damage in the first minute, and 1d6 every round thereafter). Their only hope is to run to one of the open compartments, such as the map room or the teleport chamber at the rear, or to the *Star Hunter* if it is still intact.

The shield re-establishes itself after 3d6 minutes, and the ship's life support systems restore a breathable oxy-nitro atmosphere within an hour after that.

If the characters work out how to operate this weapon, they can use it against SEVEN in the climax of this section.

Autorepair
The Ancient ship took damage as it fled a pursuer, so the visible scars of battle damage are concentrated towards the aft section. Here, the characters find several sections of the decking that are scorched and melted. Analysis of the battle damage suggests the use of some sort of disintegrator-based technology as the primary weapon. The scars are covered with a very thin fuzz of metallic strands.

While examining this area, the characters spot a small piece of metal from the *Star Hunter*'s hull that fell off during the landing. Tendrils have emerged from the Ancient ship to wrap around this piece of metal; they are feeding on it to obtain more resources to repair the rest of the ship. If the characters watch the autorepair system in action, they see the metallic strands grow infinitesimally to cover more of the battle damage.

Based on the rate of repair, the characters can work out that the major restriction on the Ancient vessel's self-repair capability is the lack of resources; the atmosphere of Komesh simply lacks many of the necessary elements needed to complete repairs.

The ship's ability to feed on external resources may also explain what happened to the remains of the farmers.

Interconnectors
At the aft section of the upper deck, the surface of the ship's hull slopes smoothly downwards into an oval depression. This depression actually tunnels through the entire upper hull down to the tangle of cables that make up the lower decks. These cables are called interconnectors. The interconnectors provide power and data to the independent pods that make up the lower deck. Interconnectors can move, expand and contract to fulfill different tasks – a hair-thin data line can swell to become a pressurised gangway, or extend out to be a towing cable.

From the lip of the depression, the characters can see a braided, tangled mess of silvery cables. If the characters search through the cables, roll 2d6. On an 8+, they manage to move aside some cables and find the top of a buried spherical pod. This is the roof of Chamber 46 (see page 15). The pod is marked with strange glyphs, but with some experimentation, the characters can cause the pod hatch to open. A roughly circular section of the pod just melts away, the metal running like liquid to form an opening that the characters can climb through. The hatch closes again once all the characters have passed through.

On a 7-, the characters inadvertently detach one of the interconnectors. The silver cable rises out of the tangle like a metallic serpent and swings its 'head'

from side to side, looking for the proper place to reconnect. It then darts towards a connector port. Unfortunately, a randomly chosen player character is in the way of the cable. That character must make a Difficult (-2) Dexterity check to dodge out of the way. If the character fails, he takes damage.

Failed by	Damage
Effect -1 to -2	1d6
Effect -3 to -5	2d6
Effect -6+	Character is impaled by the cable; all Endurance is lost, Strength and Dexterity halved; character needs immediate surgery

Teleport Chamber

At the stern of the upper deck is a four-level stepped ziggurat. The steps are three metres tall, making it difficult for a human to climb from step to step (but a flying Droyne could easily flap from level to level). At each level, the walls are decorated with strange and untranslatable symbols.

At the top of the ziggurat is a solid cube of metal, three metres to a side. This cube is also decorated with symbols. Experimentation with these symbols allows the characters to open doors in three of the walls of the cube. The aft face of the cube has no door. These doors just melt open, but an opaque haze lingers so the characters cannot see inside the cube. Stepping through the harmless haze lets the characters enter the cube.

Inside the cube, the characters find a dull grey panel, like a door or full-length mirror, attached to the rear wall. Next to the panel is a circular control, composed of five small buttons, one large one, and a trio of medium-sized stones. Pressing the large button causes some of the smaller ones to light up, and for the grey panel to flicker and turn silvery. There is a distinct change in air pressure in the cube when this happens – the silver panel has become a teleporter, linked to a random capsule in the lower deck. The teleporter continues to cycle through destinations until the characters pass through it or start experimenting with the controls.

3. The Lower Deck

Ship designs vary from species to species, but ultimately each ship is built to fulfill a particular function, and form follows function. The Ancient ship was built at a technological base of TL25, and uses principles and technologies that the Imperium's scientists will not even suspect exist for another ten thousand years, but its function was to serve as a carrier, and so analogies can be drawn between its design and a more conventional carrier. The upper hull section is the frame of the ship, which is unchanged from mission to mission. The lower section, made up of interconnectors and pods, can be reconfigured for different purposes. The pods are, in effect, independent small craft that are carried by the larger ship.

The pods are physically connected to the Ancient ship by interconnectors, but internally, they are linked by a network of teleportation portals. To navigate the ship, the characters must work out how to operate these portals.

Getting to the Bridge

The characters' goal is to get to the bride of the ship (capsule A). To do so, they must learn to operate the teleporters, and then find a way to get past the damaged section around capsule 14.

Removing Portals

It is possible to remove a portal from the wall it is attached to by brute force and the application of a laser or other drill. The portals continue to work even after being removed. The characters need to find a portable teleport control before they can use a stolen portal.

Portals have a maximum range of 30 light minutes (540,000,000 km). As long as two or more portals are within range of one another, they automatically form a portal network.

Manipulating the Teleportals

All the teleporter panels have a common control mechanism – a ring of five buttons that light up when pressed, coupled with a central on/off switch. There are three secondary buttons below the ring, which allow the operator to alter the settings of the portal. The five buttons form a binary sequence that is the address of the target portal. For example, pressing the second, third and fifth buttons is a binary code of 01101, which on the table on the following page equates to capsule 31.

The buttons are numbered anticlockwise starting from the bottom. Close examination of the console shows that there is space for more than five buttons in the ring – the console is scalable, and can work with a larger teleport network than is present on this spaceship.

If the central button is pressed without entering a code, the portal connects to a random capsule.

A capsule can connect to only one other capsule at a time. When two capsules are connected, characters can step through from one to the other, but there is a barrier that prevents the atmospheres of the two capsules from mixing. The characters can easily push through this barrier.

Random capsules: To determine a random capsule, roll d66 on the Master Teleport Table. A result of 61-66 brings the characters back to the ziggurat on the upper deck.

Getting back to the ziggurat: A destination code of 11111 brings the characters back to the ziggurat on the upper deck.

Connecting to destroyed capsules: If the characters try to connect to one of the destroyed capsules, then the portal refuses to open.The portal flashes up a warning message across its surface, then switches itself off.

Connecting to partially destroyed capsules: If a portal is ordered to connect to a capsule with a radically different environment, including all those marked as 'partially destroyed', then all the second controls reset to the neutral position, and the user must confirm his selection by pressing the central button again.

Secondary Controls: The three secondary controls allow the user to control the appearance and functionality of the portals. Each secondary control has three settings, and can be pushed in or pulled out. All the secondary controls start pushed in on all consoles.

Navigating the ship: The Master Teleport Table, below, shows the arrangement of capsules and their portal addresses. Each capsule has only one portal. The 'type' column notes what is contained in the capsule – see the individual capsule descriptions on pages 12 to 16.

Note that room 56 is *only* accessible from the teleport network, while rooms A, B, C and D can only be reached via the nexus capsules.

Capsules without teleporters: There are four more capsules, lettered A, B, C and D, which do not have teleporters. The characters can only reach these chambers from an adjacent nexus.

Control	Pushed In	Neutral	Pulled Out
1 (Appearance)	Opaque portal	Portal displays incomprehensible information about destination	Transparent portal
2 (Duration)	Portal remains open until central button is pressed or another portal connects	Portal remains open for one traversal only	Portal remains open indefinitely, blocking other connections
3 (Privacy)	No privacy	Incoming portal sounds a warning chime; operator must approve connection	No connections permitted.

Master Teleport Table

Capsules	Binary Code	Type	Capsule	Binary Code	Type
A	00000	Bridge	34	10000	Nexus (4)
11	00001	Partially Destroyed*	35	10001	Droyne Corpse
12	00010	Destroyed	36	10010	Weapons System
13	00011	Partially Destroyed*	41	10011	Destroyed
14	00100	Nexus (1), Partially Destroyed*	42	10100	Nexus (5)
15	00101	Partially Destroyed*	43	10101	Armoury*
16	00110	Teleport Controls	44	10110	Destroyed
21	00111	Harvester	45	10111	Shield Array**
22	01000	Nexus (2)	46	11000	Nexus (6)*
23	01001	Repair System*	51	11001	Fallen
24	01010	Psionic Mirror	52	11010	Dock*
25	01011	Destroyed	53	11011	Storeroom*
26	01100	Nexus (3)	54	11100	Nexus (7)*
31	01101	Alien Habitat	55	11101	Communications System
32	01110	Partially Destroyed*	56	11110	Generator Portal*
33	01111	Servitors	--	11111	Back to the ziggurat

*: Random encounter when the characters enter this portal.
**: This capsule cannot be accessed by teleporter.

Capsules General Traits

Each capsule is spherical, but the size of the capsule varies considerable. The smallest capsules are three metres in diameter; the largest is 150 metres across. All the capsules are made out of the same greenish substance. The interior of the capsules is marked with strange glyphs, which appear to be decorative. In fact, these are intelligent control interfaces for different purposes.

Flying Capsules: Notably, one set of controls allows a capsule to be detached from the interconnectors and flown as an independent spacecraft. Figuring out how to operate the capsules in this fashion requires an Engineering or Mechanic skill check.

Learning to fly a capsule: *Engineering (M-Drive) or Mechanic + Intelligence, Hard (-4), 1d6 Days*
Flying a capsule: *Pilot (small craft) + Dexterity, Hard (-4), 1d6 Seconds*

The capsules have an acceleration of 6g and have between 2 and 10 Hull and Structure points each. All mechanisms and subsystems are contained inside the capsule walls and cannot be accessed by the player characters.

Capsule Environments: Most of the capsules have the same environmental conditions – a breathable atmosphere, 0.8g gravity, and a warm but pleasant temperature. Some of the capsules have been breached; in this capsules, the atmosphere is unbreathable and the air pressure is lethal (2d6 damage per round of exposure without a spacesuit). Note that 'down' is always towards the outside of the capsule, so the characters can walk around the capsule normally, and there is a zero-gravity point in the exact centre of each sphere.

Capsule Interiors: Unless otherwise noted, the capsules are devoid of internal furnishings. The capsule walls are mostly smooth apart from the glyphs; larger capsules have two parallel 'benches' running around the capsule walls at the midsection. Control systems allow the capsule interiors to be reshaped.

Entrances and Exits: Most capsules have a single teleportal. Some capsules, called nexuses, have iris hatches to neighbouring capsules, allowing characters to move from capsule to capsule without braving the teleport network. The iris hatches are clearly visible on the nexus capsule side, but finding the hatch on the far side is extremely difficult unless the characters already know it is there (throw 11+ to find a working iris hatch by random chance, or a Difficult (-2) Social Science (archaeology) check).

Some of the nexus capsules have capsules adjacent to them without teleportals. The characters cannot explore the entire ship without using both the teleport system and the nexuses.

Random Encounters

Some of the capsules in the Master Teleport Table are marked with asterisks (*), indicating a random encounter. Roll on the table below to see what the characters discover.

Roll (2d6)	Encounter
2-3	2d6 Wreck Darters, lurking in the shadows
4-5	The ship shudders as another hydrogen squall strikes it. Roll 1d6 1-2: The lights go out. 3-4: The artificial gravity in the capsule switches off for 2d6 rounds 5-6: The capsule is cracked and the high-pressure atmosphere of outside starts to push in. The capsule repairs itself in 1d6 minutes.
6-7	A lone Wreck Darter
8-9	The characters find a single Ancient gadget
10-11	The characters find a cache of three Ancient gadgets
12	cA treasure trove of 2d6 Ancient gadgets

Nexus Capsules

The seven nexus capsules are the ship's equivalent of common areas – in addition to the usual teleport portal, each nexus has physical iris hatches leading to adjacent capsules. The table below lists which capsules are accessible from each nexus.

Nexus Chamber	Adjacent Capsules
1	A, 11, 12, 13
2	B, 15, 16, 21
3	23, 24, 34
4	26, 31, 33
5	C, 35, 36
6	D, 43, 45
7	52, 53, 55

Partially Destroyed Capsules

11,13,14,15 and 32 are partially destroyed. These capsules were breached during the attack on the ship 300,000 years ago and were never repaired. They are open to the atmosphere of the gas giant. A character entering one of these capsules without a HEV suit or similar protective gear suffers 2d6 damage per round, and must make a Hard (-4) Strength checks to move. Armour other than a HEV suit or battle dress provides no protection against the intense pressure.

14 – Nexus 1

This capsule is partially destroyed. Iris hatches lead to capsules A, 11, 12 &13. The iris hatch leading to Capsule A, the bridge is marked with an impressive glyph that the characters have not seen anywhere else on the ship – clearly, whatever is behind that door is very important.

16 – Teleport Controls

This sphere contains a stack of unattached teleport portals without associated control consoles. There is also a device floating in the centre of the sphere that resembles a metal starfish that projects a constellation of lights. There are 29 lights surrounding the starfish, corresponding to the 29 functioning portals on the ship. Four of the lights have small data tags associated with them – these correspond to the locked Bridge Portal (Capsule A), the locked Shield Array Portal (45), the active Generator Portal (56), and the master Ziggurat Portal. Furthermore, if the characters make a portal connection, it is displayed on this map.

Experimenting with the device lets the characters activate or shut down any portal on the ship, other than the Generator Portal and the Bridge Portal. They can also bring up a directory of portal addresses – they cannot translate the meanings of the glyphs, but they can work out that the binary codes are destinations and that there are 26 valid code combinations available to them.

If the players are completely stuck, a kind Referee might allow them to reactivate the Bridge portal from here.

21 – Harvester

This capsule echoes with an alarming grinding noise. The available space in this sphere is only a fraction of its full volume, as most of the capsule is walled away. On the far side of the impenetrable wall, the starship is sucking in gases from Komesh and reprocessing them into material for repairs. At random intervals, there is a loud report from inside the machinery, and the teleporter in this room flickers on and off for an instant, as a nugget of refined material is transferred to capsule 23.

22 – Nexus 2

Iris hatches lead to capsules B, 15, 16 & 21. The iris hatch to Capsule B is scratched. None of the characters' weapons or tools can make any mark on the green material, so how this damage was inflicted is a mystery.

23 – Repair System

The upper half of this capsule is taken up by the ship's self-repair system, a complex web of micro-assembles and atomic transmuters. Millennia ago, the self-repair system was hijacked by the intruding virus, and partially disabled. Now, instead of building the components the ship needs to regenerate itself, more than half of the self-repair system is locked in a pointless loop where it produces and then destroys blocks of a highly complex heavy alloy. Examining the machinery, the characters can see a spinneret in the ceiling weaving strands of a black material that hangs from the ceiling. This black material looks to be as thin and delicate as gauze, but a cubic centimeter of it weighs a hundred tons. Another device reels in this black gauze, a millimeter at a time, and annihilates it with a distintegrator beam.

A successful Hard (-4) Engineering (power plant), Trade (polymers) or Mechanic roll lets the characters work out that the machinery is stuck in a loop, and that disabling the spinneret or the disintegrator would free up more of the ship's resources. If the characters find a way to disable the locked systems, the self-repair system can turn its attention to actual damage and repair the partially damaged capsules, opening the way to the bridge.

24 – Psionic Mirror

Lying discarded in this capsule is a broken device, consisting of a multi-faceted meter-tall crystal, inset into a hexapodal stand. Three of the stand's legs are broken, and appear to have been cut with some sort of laser. The crystal device is a potent psionic mirror.

If a character with a Psionic Strength score looks into the crystal, he suddenly feels a presence manifest within the device. The mirror has created a psionic duplicate of the character. The duplicate starts with a psionic strength of 2d6, and engages the character in a mental duel. The character must roll Telepathy + Psi against the duplicate's Psi. If the character wins, his Psionic Strength permanently increases by 1-3 (duplicate's Psi 8-: +1 Psi, 9-11: +2 Psi, 12: +3 Psi). If the character loses, his Psionic Strength permanently decreases by 1 and the crystal is suddenly occupied by a little visible holographic duplicate of the character. This psionic homunculus cannot leave the crystal, nor can it communicate with those outside. However, it appears to be alive within its crystal prison – it moves around, gestures, and seems to react to events outside the crystal.

If a character without Psionic Strength looks into the crystal, test that character's Psionic Strength potential as per the normal rules. If the character is discovered to have latent psionic ability, then he risks creating a duplicate as per the above paragraph.

26 – Nexus 3

Iris hatches lead to capsules 23, 24 & 34. The iris hatch to Nexus 4 (34) is open and cannot be shut, making the two capsules into one large chamber.

31 – Alien Habitat

This chamber counts as being a dangerous environment, so both the iris hatch and the teleporter require user confirmation before opening into this capsule. Inside, the air is a reddish mix of gases, including a high sulphur content; this poisonous atmosphere inflicts 1d6 damage per round on any characters without protective gear. The ambient temperature is thirty degrees K higher than in the rest of the ship. Looking around, the characters find that the sphere walls are dusty – this is the only dust the characters have encountered so far on the Ancient ship, other than the synthetic dirt on the upper deck. Dust implies decayed organic material.

300,000 years ago, the ship kept a specimen of an exotic alien race here. The specimen perished aeons ago, but the ship kept samples. If the characters search through the dust, they find a metallic container shaped roughly like an egg. There are genetic samples and biological information encoded into this object that would allow a sufficiently skilled scientist with a well-equipped laboratory to clone the specimen. The creature's race was wiped out entirely during the Final Wars; the characters have the only survivor of a dead race. (The nature of the alien is up to the Referee – it could be nothing more than a curiosity, but it could equally be an intelligent creature, or an engineered killing machine).

33 – Servitors

This room contains four small winged humanoids, floating at the zero-g point in the middle of the

sphere. The humanoids are silvery in colour, and are made out of metal. They are in fact robots, built to resemble the Droyne who created them. These servitor robots were sent into hibernation by the ship's AI to protect them from the virus. Touching the robots reawakens them.

If the characters have found Ancient translator devices, they can talk to the servitors. The servitors explain that the ship was attacked by a 'Usurper' who infected the vessel with a hostile virus. They are under instructions to escort the characters to the bridge immediately to help effect repairs.

If the characters do not have a translator device, then the servitors attempt to nonverbally coerce them to accompany the robots.

The servitors attempt to bring the characters via the teleporter to Nexus 1 (Capsule 14), but discover that capsule is partially damaged. They inform the characters that they must obtain protective equipment – and then the virus subverts the robot's minds. One of the robots lunges forward to attack the characters; the other three robots grab it and dismember it. During the fight, a second robot is subverted, and it destroys a third machine as it is torn apart. Finally, there is only one damaged robot left – and it is then taken over by the virus. It turns on the characters and tries to murder them.

34 – Nexus 4
Iris hatches lead to capsules 26, 31 and 33. The hatch to 26 is welded open.

35 – Droyne Corpse
This capsule is lined with objects that look eerily similar to low berths. There are thirty-six sarcophagi, all but one of which is humming quietly. One of the sarcophagi appears to have shut down; examining the silent sarcophagus reveals that the lid can be prised open. Inside, there is a thin layer of dust on a few cryptic pieces of metal and plastic. Searching through the debris, the characters find an Ancient translator and one random artefact.

No matter what the characters do, they are unable to open the other sarcophagi.

36 – Weapons System
This capsule contained a weapon system identical to the one on the upper deck – a trio of pillars surrounding a floating ball that can fire an absurdly powerful death ray. There is an iris hatch in the wall opposite the hidden hatch leading to capsule 42. The intent is that when the weapon is activated, the operators launch the ball out the external hatch into space, then begin firing at the target.

42 – Nexus 5
Iris hatches lead to capsules D, 43 and 45. This capsule is only lightly tethered to the rest of the ship, and as the characters walk along it, it shakes alarmingly. Any violent movement causes it to detach from the ship and fall into the gas giant's atmosphere.

43 – Armoury
The inside of this sphere is damaged, suggesting an Ancient firefight took place here millennia ago. Most of the room is filled with destroyed equipment of cryptic purpose, but there are two items of interest here. Firstly, on the floor of the room is a perfectly spherical field of utter blackness – this is an active Black Globe generator that was switched on hundreds of thousands of years ago, and it still running. There is no way for the characters to deactivate the globe.

Secondly, there are 1d3 disintegrator pistols in a rack. These weapons are still functioning, although they only have a few shots left in them.

45 – Shield Array
This capsule is the only surviving force shield generator on the lower decks. The ship has one working generator on the upper deck, which keeps the atmosphere out, but the other generators were destroyed. The Ancients used force shields for a variety of purposes; on starships, their primary roles were as a secondary hull or a method of containing breaches. Force shields were outmoded as defensive technology – white globe and black globe technology made ships virtually invulnerable.

To the primitive player characters, the shield array looks like a floating cylinder made up of spheres linked by rigid rods. The cylindrical array rotates in front of the teleportation portal in this capsule. Examining the teleportation portal reveals that the third secondary control is pushed all the way in, setting this teleporter to 'privacy' mode. External connections cannot be established to this teleporter.

If this shield array were functioning, then it would wrap a shield around the lower decks and pump out

the toxic atmosphere of the breached capsules. The characters could walk freely to the ship's bridge. However, the shield array needs power to function. Under normal operations, it would draw energy through the teleportation portal from the generator capsule (56). If the characters reset the portal in this capsule, the cylinder of spheres starts to spin, and a force shield flickers into existence around the lower deck.

46 – Nexus 6
Iris hatches lead to D, 43 and 45.

51 – Fallen
This capsule is not actually attached to the ship at all. It was dislodged by the impact of the characters' landing on the wreck, and is currently falling into the gas giant's atmosphere. The pressure on the outside of the capsule is rising rapidly (even as its fall is lowed by the mounting viscosity of the atmosphere), and the temperature inside is also climbing. From inside the capsule, the characters can feel vibrations and hear the howl of the winds outside.

Obviously, the only way in or out of this capsule is via the teleporter. If the characters do not leave promptly, the capsule approaches crush depth. They hear a warning chime, and then the walls start buckling. This knocks the teleportation portal off the wall; to escape, the characters must immediately prop the teleport panel up, dial a safe address, and jump through.

Note that the crush depth for the portal is greater than that of the capsule. If the characters dial back to this portal, they will be warned that conditions on the far side are dangerous, but they can still commit suicide by teleporter if they work at it.

52 – Dock
This capsule serves as a docking port for conventional spacecraft. It is the largest capsule that the characters have encountered so far, with a radius of 75 metres. The wall of the sphere can open like a clamshell to take smaller ships on board. If the characters approach the lower decks with the *Star Hunter*, then this capsule opens to welcome them. Once the capsule seals itself again, it pumps the gas giant's atmosphere out again and replaces it with a breathable oxygen atmosphere.

There are no other vessels in this spacedock.

53 – Storeroom
The ancient ship had microfabricators that could create items on demand; the items in this storeroom are spare parts and tools that were computationally or energetically demanding, so it was easier to make them in bulk and store them instead of building them individually when needed. This capsule is crammed with Ancient storage containers. These containers are cubes of a blue substance that looks like ice, but is not especially cold or slippery to the touch. The cubes have a range of sizes, from small enough to fit on a character's hand to two metres in height.

If the characters stand next to a cube, or leave an object near a cube, then the blue ice starts to grow towards the object. Left unchecked, the blue ice grows to cover the object (or even a resolutely unmoving player character) and forms itself into a cube that contains the object. Anything left near a storage cube is assumed to be destined for storage. If a foreign object is removed before it is encased, the ice retreats back to its default cubical state.

If the characters search around, they find a gun-like object. If pressed to a cube and triggered, this device causes the cube to melt (or, more accurately, sublime – the blue ice boils away into a gas that adheres to the surface of other blue cubes), revealing whatever equipment is kept within. Most of the equipment in these containers is unidentifiable machine parts, but if the characters open all the cubes, roll three times on the Ancient Gadget table.

Note that there is a random encounter in this room – if you roll a creature, then that creature is a native of Komesh that entered hibernation in this room, and got encased by a blue cube. If the PCs conscientiously open all the cubes, they release the creature.

54 – Nexus 7
Iris hatches lead to capsules 53, 54 and 55.

55 – Communications System
This capsule houses the ship's communications system. In the centre of the capsule's floor is a raised dais. Around the walls are blocky machines, including one with a control console. If a character stands on the dais, this console lights up and can be interacted with. The console resembles the ones used to control the teleporters – it has a set of smaller buttons to generate a binary address, a larger on/off button, and a set of secondary controls used to

manipulate various aspects of the transmission. There is also another dial associated with the address buttons. This dial lets the operator select various pre-set communications channels, such as 'all ships in the local area', 'report back to base' and so on.

The Ancients used several different communications methods. Even for Grandfather, the speed of light represented an insurmountable barrier for conventional communications. The Ancients had methods of sending energy through jumpspace without needing a ship – the teleport portals use this principle – but this proved ineffective for two-way communication. Over short ranges, the Ancients used mesons, radio and laser comms; for faster-than-light, they relied on quantum entangled ancibles (highly effective, but limited by the number of entangled bits) and psionic telepathy.

The dais is a telepathic transceiver. A character standing on the dais when the communications machine is activated feels a strange pressure in his temples. The characters have no chance of dialling up a valid communications address by trial and error (there are millions of possible combinations), but if they experiment with the dial of pre-set options, they can establish psionic communications with six extant Ancient bases. Roll 1d6 when a character moves the dial and consult the table below. The character(s) standing on the dais experience their minds being wrenched and stretched across dozens of light-years. From the point of view of an observer on the far end, the character appears to be a ghostly projection, more like a memory than an actual vision.

56 – Generator Portal

This capsule contains two teleportation portals – the standard one attached to the wall, and a free-floating one in the middle of the chamber. The free-floating portal is surrounded by silvery tendrils and metallic spheres of unclear purpose. There is also a control panel attached to it.

The Ancient ship does not use anything as primitive as a fusion reactor or antimatter to power itself. Instead, it contains a portal to a pocket universe, one that contains nothing but a single star. In effect, the ship has all the energy wealth of a Dyson sphere. All the energy that the ship can ever need is drawn through a portal in this capsule.

Roll	Destination
1	A ruined structure on a grassy savannah, under a sky of orange clouds. The ruined structure is the only sign of life in the whole area. There is no way to identify which planet this is.
2	An empty cavern, deep underground. The character is surrounded by breath-taking stalactites and stalagmites, which have grown to cover the Ancient ruins.
3	The character finds himself standing in the desert on the planet of Yori. A surprised Imperial archaeologist spots the psionic projection and tentatively extends a sensor probe. The electromagnetic interference from the probe is too much for the damaged receiver on Yori, and the connection fails.
4	The character materialises in utter darkness. He cannot tell, but this Ancient base was flooded hundreds of thousands of years ago; his psionic avatar is four kilometers below the surface.
5	The character finds himself floating in deep space. Looking around, there is nothing except a free-floating teleportation portal. It is impossible to determine scale without a point of reference, but the character gets the impression that the portal is much, much bigger than the ones on the ship. A successful Hard (-4) Astrogation check lets the character work out from the stars that he is floating in Hex 0606 of the Regina subsector.
6	The character establishes communication with SEVEN's ship. The character finds himself (or, rather, his avatar) standing on a dais identical to the one on the Ancient ship. Everything beyond the dais is in complete darkness. A moment later, a voice speaks from the darkness, introducing itself as Vlen Backett. Vlen tries to persuade the character that they are in danger on board the Ancient ship, and that their only chance is to get to the bridge, take the ship out of the atmosphere, and then wait for retrieval by his 'allies'.

The standard portal in this capsule flickers on and off every few seconds, when it needs to transmit power from the generator portal to another part of the ship.

Fortunately for the player characters, there is no way to override the ship's safety protocols and fully open the portal (doing so would effectively put the player characters and the ship on the surface of a star, instantly vapourising them). Fiddling with the controls lets the characters bring up a holographic display of the fuel star.

A — Bridge
Reaching the ship's bridge triggers the endgame of this section.

B — Locker
This capsule contains a set of Ancient encounter suits, one per player character.

C — Shuttle
While all the capsules can be flown as independent space craft, this one was left with 'the engine running' – the flight controls are already active. It looks like just another small capsule, apart from the glowing glyphs on one wall. Touching a glyph causes the shuttle to detach from the ship and fall into the gas giant. The characters have about twenty minutes of free-fall before the external pressure becomes dangerous.

Normally, it would take days to work out how to fly a capsule, but as the flight controls are already active, the characters are dealing with a much smaller problem space.

Learning to fly a capsule: *Engineering (M-Drive) or Mechanic + Intelligence, Hard (-4), 1d6 Minutes*
Flying a capsule: *Pilot (small craft) + Dexterity, Hard (-4), 1d6 Seconds*

If the characters have an Ancient translator device, they get a +2DM to attempts to decipher the controls.

When (or if) the characters gain control of the capsule, they can fly back to the ship and dock with the interconnectors adjacent to the bridge.

D — Storeroom
This room is identical to Capsule 53.

4. Awakening
By trial and error, the characters find their way onto the ship's bridge. Read the following to the players:
Unlike the other capsules you've visited, the walls of this one are covered in thousands of glowing symbols that scroll and shift around. In the centre of the capsule is a sort of chair or perch, and a holographic field of ripping colours hangs over the chair.

The hologram changes to project a geometric symbol in the air over your heads. A voice speaks in a strange language.

If the characters have an Ancient translator, they can translate the message from the ship's computer. Otherwise, they need to search around the bridge; they find a translator device tucked into the captain's chair.

'*Severe damage has been sustained to all systems. My self-repair units are unable to fully rectify the damage. My shipmind has been compromised by a hostile intelligence. As per emergency protocols, I am ceding command to the surviving crew. You are requested to guide the ship to Home. Please select from the following options – maintain position, or move to a higher orbit.*'

When the characters tell the ship to move to a higher orbit, it obeys. The vast Ancient vessel drags itself out of Komesh's gravity well, where it detects another ship in orbit. The holographic screen displays an image of that ship – it is the *Alahir.*

The Ancient vessel lists more options for the characters – open fire, initiate evasive action, initiate jump. If they pick 'open fire', the ship responds that the weapons are offline (the characters can manually fire the weapons from the upper deck, if they know how). If they initiate evasive action, their ship starts weaving and dancing rings around the *Alahir*, its 10,000-ton bulk manoeuvring with unbelievable agility. If they select jump, then the jump engines start charging up, but do not activate until *Decision Point*, below.

The Alahir
Captain Gand Holcess hails the Ancient ship. He pretends to be confident, but the characters can hear a note of terror and wonder in his voice.

'*This is the Imperial vessel* Alahir, *and you are in violation of our space. Identify yourselves immediately.*'

If the characters respond, he recognises their voices, and asks them what they are doing on board an Ancient ship. Holcess knows that the characters have the upper hand at this point – the *Alahir* is obviously completely outclassed by the Ancient ship, even considering the damage suffered by the older vessel. The captain is therefore conciliatory, asking the characters to turn the ship over to the Imperium in exchange for a complete pardon and a handsome reward.

This is a pivotal scene – up until now, Imperial Intelligence has been the main antagonist in the *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign. You are about to introduce the real villain, so you need to make Holcess sympathetic. Have him explain why he suspected Vlen Backett of being in league with criminal syndicates or strange cults; have him praise the characters' discovery of an alien ship. He points out that Ancient technology could de-stabilise the delicate balance of power between the Imperium and other great powers – if the Zhodani got their hands on an Ancient superweapon, the Spinward Marches would swiftly be conquered. Holcess holds out an offer of forgiveness and understanding – if the characters will work with him in plumbing the secrets of the Ancients, they will have every honour the Emperor can bestow upon them.

He Comes

Another ship jumps in, well within the hundred-diameter jump limit of the gas giant.

It is a design that none of the characters have seen before, although they detected its presence over Alell.

The Droyne of Beck's World glimpsed it, moments before it annihilated their colony.

It is SEVEN, one of the treacherous Sons of Grandfather.

The ship is a pearly white cone, like a narwhal's horn. At it approaches, it spins, and long tendrils unfurl. Spikes sprout from along the ship's flanks. White spots – mobile white globes – orbit around the ship, waxing and waning in response to perceived threats.

The *Alahir* turns towards this new threat, but a single pulse from a weapons turret utterly destroys the Imperial ship. The cone turns towards the characters' ship.

Reunion

'Hostile vessel! Tactical guidance required!' shrieks the ship. A moment later, it announces *'Incoming audio transmission'*, and a familiar voice fills the air.

SEVEN made a copy of Vlen's mindstate from the corpse on Alell and followed the characters here, but Vlen will not explain that unless pressed on the matter. He addresses himself to his relative, the Inheritor PC.

'Listen, it's Uncle Vlen. Don't mind how, you've got to trust me. I need you to disable the computer system on that 300,000 year old rustbucket you're flying. If you've got a weapon that can damage it, then just blow a chunk out of the wall. Otherwise, see if you can turn it off or order it to stand down, before it drags you off somewhere.'

Backett's mission is to capture the Ancient ship intact if possible. He tries to convince the characters to destroy their ship's computer with a disintegrator blast, although if they tell him that the ship's computer seems to be deferring to them, then he tells them to give it no orders. If the characters ask him how he survived, he tries to dodge the question, but then admits the truth.

'The Ancients are still around – some of them, anyway. I've worked for SEVEN for a very long time. They don't want to interfere with Humaniti, but they want to keep an eye on us, so they use human agents. When I... when the previous version of me died, they were able to copy my memories into a new cloned body. I'm still your Uncle Vlen. It's still me.'

If the characters ask Vlen to transmit a visual image, he complies. The sight is a hideous one – slabs of freshly cloned flesh over a synthetic skeleton that is still growing. Every part of the body, even the exposed brain, is laced with alien circuitry. The horrific sight should be enough to convince doubters that trusting 'Uncle Vlen' would not be a good idea.

Decision Point

If the characters obey Vlen, then by rights the campaign ends here. SEVEN consumes the smaller ship and wipes out all life on board. The player characters are utterly irrelevant to its aims. If they are very lucky, then it scans their brains and creates virtual copies of their personalities for future reference, but the player characters themselves are very, very dead. A merciful Referee could have Vlen have a change of heart or a moment of free will, and urge the characters to jump away.

If the characters do not obey, or else argue for too long, then the ship's jump engines trigger, and the Ancient ship leaps into jumpspace.

Especially brave characters might try turning their weapons on SEVEN; this surprise attack buys them a few seconds before jumping, but there is no chance for the Ancient ship to defeat the other Ancient vessel. One is a severely damaged merchantman; the other is an actual Ancient in a robotic body that has been honed as a weapon for 300,000 years. In a open firefight, SEVEN could destroy the Ancient ship with as much ease as it swatted the *Alahir*.

Jump!

The Ancient ship travels through jumpspace for a week. The characters can salvage food from the *Star Hunter*, and the Ancient ship can provide water. After a week in jump, it arrives in deep space, far from any planets or stars. The characters are in the empty hex 0606 of the Regina subsector.

The light of the ship illuminates an object floating dead ahead. It is another teleportation portal, identical to the ones on the ship in all respects other than size – this one is 128 times larger.

The Ancient ship approaches the portal...

Ancient Gadgets

The Ancient supercivilisation endured for thousands of years. They built their machines to last, but the gulf of millennia that separates them from the present day is unimaginable long. Five hundred years is enough time to remove most evidence of a civilisation; ten thousand years leaves nothing but a few buried pieces of archaeology and the traces of vanished ruins. Even the Ancients fell prey to the ravages of time.

The Ancient ship in this section is an anomaly – its position in the gas giant protected it from looters and other disasters, and being on board a ship sheltered its contents from erosion and environmental damage. There are numerous intact artefacts on board.

Most of these artefacts are incomprehensible to the player characters. They are spare parts for machines that have been dust for three thousand centuries, components of vanished technologies, or tools to perform functions that Humaniti will not even dream about for thousands of years. The characters are primitives picking the bones of an older, vastly more advanced civilisation.

If the characters do find a working artefact, they still need to learn how to operate it. This requires a combination of experimentation, research and knowledge of the field most closely related to the artefact. For example, understanding an Ancient repair tool might be

> *Mechanic + Education, Hard (-4), 1-6 weeks.*
> *+1 DM if the character has Trade (any appropriate)   2+*

A success on this roll means that the character has worked out the function of most of the controls on the device, and possibly even has a vague idea of the principles behind its operation, even if he cannot understand how the device actually utilises those principles ('***it somehow knows what's wrong with a machine… maybe it's got an incredibly small but accurate densitometer that scans the target from the outside and identifies problems'***).

Many artefacts can be used without understanding them. The disintegrator pistols, for instance, are highly complex devices, but can be fired just by pressing the control stud. A character might not be able to adjust the beam, reload the weapon, tell that it needs to be reloaded, or repair it if it gets damaged, but he knows that pressing the red button makes things explode. Similarly, a character might be able to work out how to use the metal-bonding function of the repair tool even if he does not understand all the subtleties of the tool. Working out the basics of a device might requires a roll like:

> ***Mechanic + Intelligence, Hard (-4), 10-60 seconds***

Devices on the Ship: If the characters find an Ancient device on the ship, roll 3d6 on the table below to determine what they find.

3-4	Damaged Device
5-6	Junk
7-10	Incomprehensible Relic
11-12	Pressure Suit
13-14	Translator device
15	Disintegrator pistol
16	Psionic resonator
17	Repair Tool
18	Portable Teleport Control

Damaged Device: Roll again to determine what gadget they actually found. This gadget is damaged and cannot be repaired, but the character gains a +1DM to figuring out the purpose of similar gadgets.

Junk: Spare parts, broken bits of metal.

Incomprehensible Relic: It's a…thing. It might be worth something to a collector.

Pressure Suit: This is an Ancient spacesuit. It consists of a silver disk that adheres to the skin of a living being. If pressed, the disk flows over the wearer's body and becomes a form-fitting spacesuit. It will cover clothing, but is not compatible with armour other than cloth armour or high-TL spacesuits. The suit provides 9 points of armour, and protects against pressure, radiation and temperature extremes like a HEV suit. The suit contains 12 hours of oxygen and has an integral rebreather.

Operating the suit: Vacc Suit + Intelligence, Difficult (-2), 1-6 minutes.
Understanding the suit: Vacc Suit + Education, Hard (-4), 1-6 weeks

Translator Device: The translator devices is a small ovoid that can be held in the palm of one's hand, or pressed onto a surface to which it will automatically adhere. To activate the translator, you must hold it to

your forehead (for the clearest signal) and press the control stud. The translator then scans the language centre of the brain and provides a translation for any speech or text it has in its databanks. It provides the translation via ultra-low-frequency subliminal sonic beams or light beams, so the user is initially unaware of the source of the translation. The translator only works on species whose brain configuration was studied by the Ancients, so only humans, Droyne and Vargr can use the device.

If the user does not hold the translator to his forehead when activating it, the machine can still function, but it does not get a clear scan of the user's language centre. Therefore, the translation it provides is incomplete or disjointed.
Operating the translator: Social Science (linguistics) + Intelligence, Difficult (-2), 1-6 minutes.
Understanding the translator: Life Science (biology) + Education, Hard (-4), 1-6 months

Disintegrator Pistol: This matter disintegrator is more advanced than the TL18 version described in the ***Central Supply Catalogue***, page 102. It is a short black rod, small enough to be carried on one hand. There is no barrel; the disintegrator effect is emitted from a crystal panel at one end. The effect is invisible by default, but secondary controls allow the user to add a visible light beam to aid with targeting. The disintegrator is capable of auto-targeting enemies, attacking with an effective DM of +3, but characters can only use this function if they fully understand the weapon's controls. The disintegrator has a magazine of 1d6 shots when found and cannot be easily recharged by the PCs.

Operating the pistol:Gun Combat (pistol) + Intelligence, Difficult (-2), 1-6 minutes.
Understanding the pistol: Physical Science (physics) + Education, Very Hard (-6), 1-6 months

Psionic Resonator: This device is of use only to characters with Psionic abilities. The resonator is

a belt or bandolier studded with small greenish rectangular objects. These crystals absorb the wearer's psionic power and feed it back to him when he needs it. When the belt is worn, the user is drained of one Psionic Strength Point each hour until all of the green crystals are charged (the average belt contains 1d6+2 crystals). The user's Psionic Strength recharges normally when the belt is full. If the belt is removed, the crystals instantly discharges their energy harmlessly.

A character wearing a charged belt can draw Psionic Strength Points from the crystals as needed.

Operating the belt:Automatic
Understanding the belt: Life Science (psionicology) + Education, Very Hard (-6), 1-6 months

Repair Tool: The repair tool is a curved blade, like a hand-held sickle. There are controls on the inner curve of the device as well as on the handle. Adjusting the controls lets the device produce all sort of effects, from microscopic manipulation to testing circuits and creating holographic images of the inside of objects. The basic function that the characters can access, however, is the cutting and welding function which lets them cut and repair holes in the green matter of the capsule walls on board the Ancient ship. The repair tool has a limited battery and cannot be easily recharged.

Operating the repair tool:Mechanic + Intelligence, Difficult (-2), 10-60 minutes.
Understanding the repair tool: Physical Science (physics) + Education, Very Hard (-6), 1-6 months

Portable Teleport Control: A portable version of the standard teleport console.
Operating the control: Automatic if the players have figured out how to use the other controls; Social Science (archaeology) + Intelligence, Difficult (-4), 10-60 minutes otherwise.
Understanding the control: Physical Science (physics) + Education, Impossible (-8), 1-6 months