
TRAVELLER

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS

THE DEATH OF GRANDFATHER

The Death of Grandfather is the seventh adventure in the *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign. If you are 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 6: Otherworld*, the characters experienced a flashback to the glory days of the Ancient Empire, while Grandfather probed their minds. They awoke from the flashback just in time to see SEVEN arrive. Grandfather activated his weapon...

Adventure Synopsis

The weapon does not work. SEVEN survives and destroys Grandfather. The characters flee through another teleporter, bringing them to the third system in the pocket universe, where there is a small colony of Droyne and humans who have lived in Grandfather's shadow for hundreds of thousands of years.

When exploring the Yaskoti culture, the characters may learn of **Professor Ankor**, a radical Droyne scientist with an interest in space exploration. They are also likely to run afoul of the **Church of Grandfather** or be interrogated and imprisoned by the **Bureau of Security**.

Soon after the characters arrive, SEVEN's minions start arriving through the portal. The long-sheltered colony faces an apocalypse, as the Ancient war begins again. If the characters are imprisoned, they are rescued by another agent of Grandfather. The characters have to escape the devastation and find the only way off the planet – via a primitive space program created illegally by Droyne rebels.

There is a second portal in orbit that returns the characters to the Spinward Marches...

THE YASKOTI

The Yaskoti are a culture of Droyne and Humaniti, settled on this garden world by Grandfather as a control group. In the event that he needs Droyne or Human servants, he can draw from the population of the Yaskoti. He keeps their technology level limited to TL7; advanced enough to be capable of rapidly learning, but

not so advanced that they can trouble his experiments. Anyone who tries to advance the Yaskoti's technology beyond this limit is quietly removed, although social pressure from the Church of Yaskoydray is as effective as secret assassins. The Yaskoti have never travelled into space, and many believe space travel to be impossible.

The Church of Yaskoydray is the dominant religion. Grandfather is portrayed as an all-wise and all-knowing creator deity who protects their world and seeded it with life long ago.

The Yaskoti civilisation is reminiscent of the Droyne Empire in its heyday; a council of Leader-caste Droyne make all important decisions. Humans are almost all worker-caste, but they are permitted to apply to join higher castes, with a large number of Humans considered to be Sports, often acting as go-betweens between the Droyne and humans.

Their civilisation is broadly similar to 20th century Earth in many ways, filtered through the Droyne's collectivist culture.

Referee Advice

This is the scenario when wonder turns to horror. It is a disaster movie, an apocalypse played out across the sheltered colony. SEVEN's agents are deliberately horrible and nightmarish, and the low-tech Droyne civilisation is deliberately reminiscent of modern-day Earth. The characters have just wandered into *War of the Worlds*. The whole setting is about to be wiped away, so you can run the game as a sandbox-style adventure. As long as the characters eventually find clues leading to the secret launch pad in the mountains, then any path to that ending works perfectly well.

Once you reach *Nightmare Breach* (page 8), keep the characters on the run all the time. Whenever they find shelter, take it away from them. Whenever they think they have an advantage, hit them with overwhelming force. Pull no punches – if there is ever a time to eliminate player characters from the campaign, this is it (replacement characters can be picked up in the next adventure, or even from among the Yaskoti).

Grandfather's Host

At this stage, the psionic copy of Grandfather is mostly dormant inside the host's mind. The host may have the occasional strange hallucination or a persistent feeling of being watched, but keep things subtle for the moment – Grandfather will become more active in the next section of the campaign. The exception is if you need a *deus ex machina* to get the characters out of a fix, in which case Grandfather can exert himself. The psionic copy has an effective Intelligence and Education of 15 each (+3DM), a Psionic Strength of 12 (+2), and all relevant skills at 6.

1. A DEATH IN THE HEAVENS

Grandfather's weapon is activated. The whole space station erupts with coruscating energy. Deep within the station, portals open and channel the force of a star into the weapon. A bolt of... something that Humaniti will not even realise exists for another 20,000 years leaps from the station and blasts SEVEN.

Any other target would have been utterly annihilated by the blast. That amount of destructive power could have shattered a world. The energy discharge is of a magnitude more commonly associated with novas.

SEVEN is unaffected. A field of shimmering energy surrounds the living warship, harmlessly shunting Grandfather's barrage into another dimension.

Grandfather reconfigures his weapons systems, but it is too late. A swarm of war-drones detach from SEVEN's underbelly and shoot past the space station to the planet below. It blossoms in a hundred thousand thermonuclear explosions. Smaller drones approach the station; most of these are taken out by the stations' point defences, but there are too many to be stopped.

A robot appears next to the characters; it resembles a huge metal Droyne. 'Come with me' it says, 'evacuation protocols have been activated.' It speaks in perfect Galanglic. If the characters refuse, it grabs them with inhumanly strong hands and drags them towards a shimmering portal, similar to the one they arrived through. All around them is chaos; missiles explode, drones exchange bursts of weapons fire, the station shudders and erupts with excess power. The robot closes metal wings around the characters to protect them from shrapnel and stray shots.

The robot pushes the characters into the portal.

Beyond the robot's bulk, the characters can see the spindly-limbed figure of Grandfather hanging in the air. SEVEN comes closer, blocking out the sun. Like a nightmare made from metal and hatred, it lashes out at Grandfather. It tears the Droyne

apart cell by cell, burning Grandfather to fine ash. The architect of the Ancients, the creator of the Vargr, the maker of minds dies before the characters' eyes.

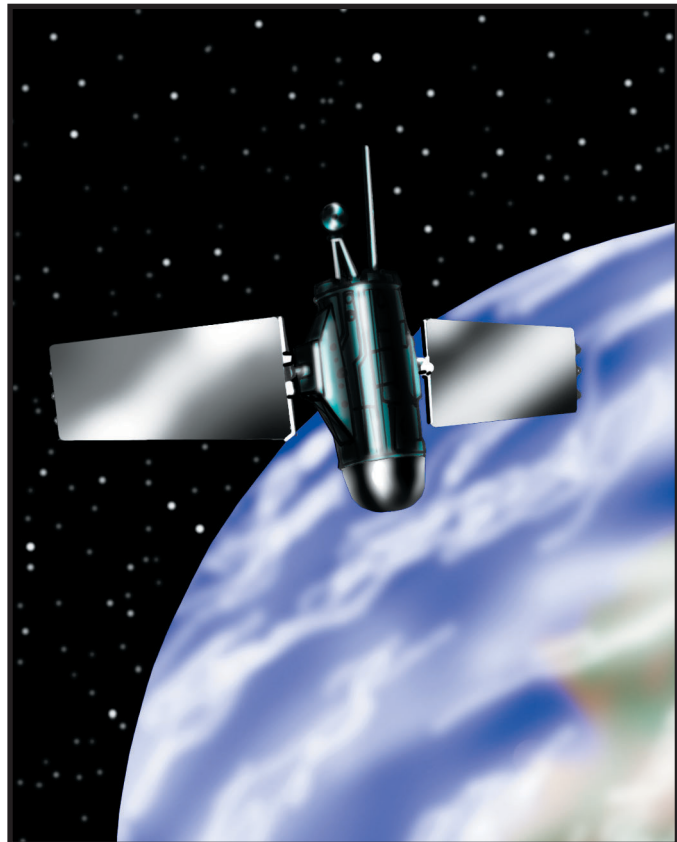
Another hail of fire strikes the station, blowing it asunder. Another swarm of small war-drones swoops towards the characters. They launch a barrage of missiles towards the characters. The robot extends its wings, blocking the missiles and saving the characters. It staggers forward into the portal. There is a flash as the portal activates...

On The Far Side

The characters materialise in a forest at night. The soft glow of infinitely repeated starlight illuminates the sky. Unfamiliar birds rise startled from the strange purplish trees.

The Droyne robot, catastrophically damaged, lies on the ground nearby. The heat from its explosion-scarred body has already started a small brush fire. 'Yaskoydray commanded me to bring you to safety...' it says quietly, the perfection of its synthesised speech a bizarre contrast to the blasted wreck of its form. 'I regret that this may be impossible. There is an exit portal from this pocket universe in orbit...but...I am too badly damaged to bring you there. Yaskoydray had... agent...Ceeeee...' The robot shuts down.

The characters are alone once more, on an alien world.



2. FAR FROM HOME

The woods around the characters are thick and heavily overgrown. There are no signs of roads or paths beyond the occasional animal track. The characters see the occasional familiar species, but most of the flora is of alien origin. Searching around the area where they materialised turns up no conclusive evidence, but there is an odd symmetry to the topography that suggests a buried bowl-shaped structure similar to the teleporter the characters encountered in *Section 5*. A successful Intelligence + Investigate check does turn up some discarded containers in the underbrush, suggesting that someone made camp here once, long ago.

The Droyne robot is non-functional and cannot be repaired. Its weapon systems are built-in and cannot be salvaged; at best, the characters could make crude but unbreakable knives from its shattered armour, if they lack more suitable weapons.

If the characters have a radio, they can pick up distant transmissions. They appear to be civilian radio channels. Bizarrely, although the messages are in the Droyne language, all the characters appear to have gained the ability to speak Oynprith (a side effect of the telepathic flashbacks in the last adventure).

Contact

After some time (or if the characters try transmitting a radio message, or if the characters make their own way out of the woods), the characters see lights approaching through the trees. These are electric lanterns held by a trio of human investigators who saw a strange flash in the forest when the characters teleported in.

The humans are a middle-aged farmer named Lan, his son Thut and his daughter Oro. They are dressed in synthetic tunics and have curious double backpacks that look oddly like folded wings (a common Human affectation in the Droyne-dominated culture). Lan and Oro have ancient hunting rifles, and Thut has a pistol. All the rest of their technology is consistent with their TL7 civilisation.

Playing Lan: Lan's a simple farmer, who has lived all his life on the edge of civilisation. He dislikes the Droyne overlords, but has never known anything other than Droyne rule and so accepts the status quo.

- Do not accept anything at face value; demand that the characters explain everything to you in simple terms.
- Try to stay in charge, even though you are in completely over your head.
- Do not let anything endanger your family.
- If the players convince you that they can help your family's fortunes or the status of humans among the Yaskoti, go along with them reluctantly. Act as a brake on any grand plans.
- Stroke your beard, square your shoulders, talk slowly in a country drawl.

Lan

STR 9 DEX 6 END 8 INT 5 EDU 4 SOC 5

Animals (farming) 2, Survival 1, Persuade 0, Melee (unarmed) 0, Gun Combat (slug rifles) 1, Mechanic 1

Leather jack (1), Antique Rifle (3d6–3)

Playing Thut: Thut is frustrated by his small-town life, and wants to move to a big city. He recently convinced his father to buy a wired uplink for their home computer, giving him access to the Yaskoti equivalent of the internet. Thut is a conspiracy nerd; he believes the government are covering up alien visitors and space travel projects. He immediately identifies the characters as semi-mythical space travellers.

- Be overlyenthusiasticabouteverything!
- Question the characters about space travel, about the Imperium, about Grandfather, about everything!
- Do anything you can to get close to the characters.
- Shift nervously from foot to foot, fidget, play with your gun.

Thut

STR 6 DEX 8 END 7 INT 9 EDU 6 SOC 4

Animals (farming) 0, Computers 0, Survival 0, Investigate 1, Persuade 0, Melee (unarmed) 0, Gun Combat 0, Streetwise 1
Autopistol (3d6–3)

Playing Oro: Oro is a committed believer in the church of Grandfather, the state religion of the Yaskoti. The church teaches that Yaskoydray established the world and shaped it for his people, and that he watches over them still. The church claims that demons dwell in the 'Outer Dark', a lightless region of space. (Remember, the pocket universe has no true darkness, as it is lit by infinitely repeated starlight from the folded space.) Grandfather dwells in the 'lightful heaven' and sometimes dispatches divine messengers to the church.

- Try to work out if the characters are divine messengers or unholy demons.
- If any of the Player Characters are of a race other than Human or Droyne, they are definitely demons.
- See everything through starkly religious terms.
- Stand with your arms folded, do not admit weakness in front of the demons.

Oro

STR 6 DEX 7 END 8 INT 7 EDU 5 SOC 4

Animals (farming) 1, Survival 0, Persuade 1, Gun Combat (slug rifles) 1, Steward 1

Leather jack (1), Antique Rifle (3d6–3)

Lan may take the characters back to his farmstead, which is a domed building surrounded by farmland. He has a groundcar, powered by internal combustion, and a primitive computer system connected to the equally primitive planetary network.

Questioning the trio, or using Computers, turns up some clues about ways off planet:

- The church holds that travelling beyond the atmosphere is an insult to Yaskoydray's plan, but it is rumoured that in the past, angelic messengers arrived in flying ships from space. The church may know more about ways offworld.
- **Professor Ankor** is a fervent pro-human activist among the Droyne. He is a thorn in the side of the government and a rallying point for those who oppose the state and the church – and it is rumoured that he has proposed a space mission. Ankor is a professor in the university at the city of Ushen.

The Guardians

Lan and his children were not the only ones who saw the flash of light. Six hours after the characters arrive, a squad of Droyne paramilitaries arrive in a heli-flyer. These are the local equivalent of the police, and are known as Guardians. They investigate the teleport site in the woods, take the remains of the robot away as evidence and arrest the characters if they find them. The Guardians do not want to kill the characters; they try to take them alive if possible. If the characters fire back with high-tech weapons, the Droyne retreat and call in the far better equipped army. You may wish to skip onto *Nightmare Breach*, page 8, as marshalling an armed force capable of going up against a well-equipped group of player characters takes time.

The leader of the squad is a Droyne named **Fearthay**; she is an experienced Guardian with ties to the cryptic Bureau of Security. If she gets an opportunity to question the characters, she asks them:

- If they came from offworld.
- How they arrived.
- What they intend to do.
- If they intend to destabilise the state.

Playing Fearthay: Think of Fearthay as a Droyne FBI agent; cynical, world-weary, but completely professional.

- Look down on any Human characters; be alarmed by an non-Human, non-Droyne Player Characters.
- Pick holes in the characters' statements; do not believe anything too unbelievable (and given she's a representative of a single-planet, TL7 culture whose development has been deliberately retarded, her criteria for 'unbelievable' is quite restrictive).
- Keep your wings folded, never flap them nervously. If you do not have wings to flap, then keep your posture rigid and your back straight at all times.

Depending on the characters' answers, she either brings them to the Church (if they have presented themselves as emissaries of Yaskoydray) or the Bureau of Security (if she thinks they are a threat).

Fearthay

STR 6 DEX 10 END 8 INT 8 EDU 9 SOC 8

Admin 1, Advocate 1, Computers 0, Deception 1, Flyer (rotor) 0, Gun Combat (slug pistols) 2, Investigate 2, Recon 0, Sensors 1, Streetwise 2

Flak Jacket (2), Autopistol (3d6–3)

Guardian Thug

STR 8 DEX 7 END 10 INT 6 EDU 7 SOC 6

Flyer (rotor) 1, Gun Combat (slug rifle) 2, Melee (unarmed) 1, Investigate 1, Recon 1, Sensors 0, Streetwise 2

Flak Jacket (2), Rifle (3d6)

Getting to Ushen

The nearest big city is Ushen, where there is both a church stronghold and the University of Ushen. If there is a way off planet, the search starts there. Lan can drive the characters there in his groundcar, or they might be brought there in custody by the Guardians. Getting to the city takes six hours by road.

If the characters linger too long at Lan's farmstead, then it might be attacked by SEVEN's invasion force. See *Nightmare Breach*, page 8.

The Yaskoti & Vehicles

One thing the characters notice as they travel to Ushen is the lack of vehicles. The Yaskoti are heavily urbanised, and as the Droyne can glide efficiently, they do not use groundcars in their cities. Personal ground transports are used only for moving bulk goods and travelling in the countryside. The Yaskoti also use small heli-carriers and airships for fast travel; such vehicles are comparatively rare and restricted to the military and government.

Present this to the players as an interesting cultural quirk, and as a way to show how the humans are second-class citizens in Yaskoti society. The true purpose of this is to make it harder for the characters to escape the city after *Nightmare Breach* (page 8).

3. As Gods

Ushen is the regional capital of the Yaskoti closest to where the characters arrived. It is a city of some eight million citizens (roughly six million Droyne and two million Humans), a city of skyscrapers linked by huge industrial updrafts so flyers can soar between buildings, a city of golden spires and curious minarets. The Human population live underground for the most part, while the Droyne live in eyries far above the ground.

If the characters enter the city openly, proclaiming their status as offworlders and not hiding their high-tech gear, they will either be picked up by the Bureau of Security or by the Church. If they conceal themselves using Deception, they can pass for ordinary humans and move around the city freely; Thut's online contacts can provide the characters with fake identity cards that will pass a cursory inspection.

Unless the characters reveal themselves as offworlders or use advanced technology, getting things done in the city takes time. Random strangers from off the street cannot gain access to Professor Ankor or other important dignitaries; the characters may have to spend several days building up contacts and exploring Ushen before they are in a position to learn about the secret space program.

Encounters in the City

Drop in any of these encounters as the characters explore the city.

- **Security Patrol:** The characters are questioned by 1d6+1 Droyne Guardians, who are looking for human criminals and dissidents who oppose the Bureau of Security. If the characters are disguised as ordinary citizens, they have to bluff their way through the interrogation. If they have not bothered to hide their true identities, they are taken into custody.
- **Public Demonstration:** A crowd of several hundred people, both Human and Droyne (mostly scholars and sports) demanding greater investment in science. Their chants call for the Church of Grandfather to have less influence over the direction of scientific research. Questioning any of the demonstrations points the characters towards **Professor Ankor** in the University.
- **Human Casting:** A trio of humans are undergoing a casting ceremony in a public park. They are being inducted into the Technician caste; as part of this ceremony, they are permitted to eat food normally restricted to the Technician caste and have their fingers surgically altered to be more dextrous. The procedure is painful, but it must be endured to qualify for the caste.

- **Grandfather's Cloak:** As milky night falls across Ushen, the characters hear the songs of the priests of Grandfather singing a hymn of thanks for another day under the heavenly protection of God. If the characters investigate, they meet an old Droyne priest who tells them his favourite parable, the story of how the Yaskoti were once evil and misguided, and how Grandfather washed them away in a great gamma-ray burst and then remade them. Characters who know about the Cloning Machines (see *Section 5: Otherworld*) recognise the root of this myth.
- **Security Forces:** The Droyne security forces conduct a drill at the edge of the city. The characters see armed Droyne flying overhead, escorting an armoured zeppelin crammed with artillery weapons.
- **The Changing Skies:** Over the course of the scenario, the endlessly repeated light from the three stars of the pocket universe turns bluer and bluer. The stars themselves are unchanged, but the milky whiteness of the night sky turns blue. This is because the light is being blueshifted – as the pocket universe contracts, the 'source' of the folded light approaches the planet at an increasing speed. In the early stages of the scenario, the blueshift is almost undetectable; later on, scientists like Professor Ankor notice it and realise its horrific implication – the universe is contracting!

You may also wish to raise the tension by running events from *Nightmare Breach* (page 8).

The University

The University is Ushen's pre-eminent academic institution. It is one of the older structures in Ushen, and resembles a cross between an old college (all ivy-covered Victorian architecture and tree-lined walks) and a Droyne building (lots of low steps and high drops for gliders). The university is on the cutting edge of TL7; within those ivy-covered walls, they are experimenting with quantum encryption, laser-ignited fusion and the first equations that will lead to gravity manipulation.

Professor Ankor is the university's star researcher; she is a Scientist-caste Dronyne, but her radical views about both space travel and human rights have made her suspect in the eyes of the Bureau of Security. Ankor believes that the Yaskoti must move off their homeworld and explore the universe (of course, the best Yaskoti science proves that the universe is only three parsecs across, contains exactly three stars, and came into being 200,000 years ago, which is a lot younger than the stars themselves. Creationism is alive, well and quite correct among the Yaskoti).

If the characters enter the University secretly, they can either question Ankor themselves or break into her office, but they find no evidence of her secret space program – she is already under observation by the Bureau of Security, who spot the characters if they act suspiciously around the University. There are signs Ankor has performed experiments related to space travel, such as calculations about escape velocity, estimates of rocket fuel efficiency and oxygen consumption, as well as models of a putative rocket capable of reaching orbit, but no proof she is actually working on a full-scale version.

Among these files, the characters also find observations of objects in orbit, one of which matches the configuration of the hyperspace portal.

If the characters visit the University openly, they will be brought to speak to Professor Ankor. She is overjoyed to meet offworlders, and questions the characters enthusiastically about everything. She asks for their help with her rocket program (this is an excellent time to start *Nightmare Breach*, page 8).

Playing Ankor: The Professor is a Droyne genius. Grandfather permitted her to continue her work, despite the danger she poses to his little bottle society, because she remind him of him in his younger days. Another scientist might have been removed by one of his agents (see *The Agent of Grandfather*, page 10)

- Speak quickly but precisely.
- Take notes of everything the characters say.
- Rub your hands together in excitement.

Professor Ankor

STR 4 DEX 6 END 6 INT 14 EDU 13 SOC 10

Admin 2, Advocate 1, Computers 3, Diplomat 1, Engineer (drive) 3*, Engineer (power plant) 2, Jack of all Trades 2, Leadership 1, Space Science (planetology) 3, Physical Science (physics) 4, Pilot (rocket) 2*, Vacc Suit 2

Church of Grandfather

The Yaskoti civilisation exists at Grandfather's whim. They know they are literally a chosen people, that their God really did reach down and create them to serve his divine plan. The Church of Yaskoydray is the single most powerful force in Yaskoti society.

Most Droyne worship Grandfather in a distant way, and do not believe he or his agents actually intercede directly. The senior members of the church know the truth – Grandfather is not a metaphor or a myth, but a real entity. Grandfather himself never visits the Yaskoti, but his cybernetically-enhanced or robotic agents do visit the church on occasion.

The largest cathedral in Ushen is located in the heart of the city. It is a huge edifice of glass and concrete; at the apex is a statue of Grandfather looking down protectively at his creation.

**Ankor's skills refer to the rocket ship she has been secretly building and are of limited use when dealing with more advanced spaceships of any type.*

The leader of the church is a Leader-caste Droyne named **Atos**, whose official title is the **Coyn-Keeper**. Atos pretends to be a religious fanatic to keep the church's faithful enthused and loyal; in truth, he regards the church as nothing but a useful instrument of social control for carrying out Grandfather's wishes. He is not one of Grandfather's augmented agents, but his human aide **Caol** is an augmented creation of Yaskoydray. When the characters arrive in Ushen, Caol is off on 'a secret mission', leaving Atos to deal with the characters himself. Caol returns during *The Agent of Grandfather* (page 10).

If the characters secretly infiltrate the church, they learn about its beliefs – Grandfather created this world for the Yaskoti and that it is a sin to leave its confines without permission. Only Grandfather and his emissaries may travel 'beyond the sky'. The characters' questions draw the attention of the Bureau of Security.

If the characters contact the church authorities, then they are brought before Atos, who interrogates them to see if they are emissaries from Grandfather or merely delusional. If they tell him about an attack on Grandfather, he assumes they are delusional and has them imprisoned by the Bureau of Security.

If the characters present themselves as offworlders to the church's faithful, and demonstrate their high technology, then they are assumed to be emissaries of Grandfather. Huge crowds gather to praise the characters and ask for their blessings. The characters are treated as living gods; with his grip on the church threatened, Atos humbly asks to meet with the characters so they can discuss the will of Yaskoydray. Once the Droyne priest has private access to the characters, he questions them about their dealings with Grandfather and may hand them over to the Bureau of Security if he believes they are a danger to the Yaskoti.

Playing Atos: Atos understands that the survival of his powerful position in Yaskoti society and, indeed, the survival of society in general is entirely dependent on pleasing Grandfather. Without his adviser Caol, he has to guess what Grandfather wants. Play him as using bluster to cover up in lack of understanding.

- Demand that the Player Characters respect your authority and social position. Shout them down if they argue with you.
- Call your staff via intercom every few minutes and demand they find Caol as soon as possible
- Hold your head high, puff out your chest, toy with a handful of coins.

Atos

STR 4 DEX 7 END 6 INT 10 EDU 12 SOC 13

Admin 3, Advocate 2, Diplomat 4, Leadership 2, Persuade 3, Social Science (psychology, history) 4, Steward 3

Atos & The Space Program: The priest is aware of the existence of an illegal space program and believes it to be located somewhere west of Ushen. If the characters claim to be emissaries from Grandfather, he asks them if they condone the program, assuming that they must know more about it than he does.

Bureau of Security

This shadowy government department is dedicated to preserving the status quo in Yaskoti society. Deviants are purged or exiled, disruptive technologies are sabotaged or removed, and political dissent is stifled. The Bureau has spies everywhere. For many years, the Bureau's chief purpose was to keep the Humans in their 'proper' place; recently, its remit has expanded to include Droyne who are deemed a threat to society.

While the Bureau has connections to the Church of Grandfather, it is a secular organisation. The Church's goals and those of the Bureau do not always align; the Bureau is not wholly opposed to new technologies and beliefs, so long as their introduction is carefully managed to as not to disrupt Yaskoti culture.

The Bureau's centre of operations in Ushen is an underground facility beneath the city centre. From here, Bureau agents monitor communications, spy on seditious gatherings and dispatch agents to deal with 'problems'.

Under the Watchful Eyes: Unless the player characters manage to conceal their presence in Ushen, they will be identified and shadowed by the Bureau of Security. Teams of black-suited Droyne stalk them wherever they go; their communications are tapped (if possible) and anyone they talk to is subsequently detained and interviewed by the Bureau. Staying ahead of the Bureau requires a Hard (-4) Streetwise or Deception test, possibly modified if the players were careful to conceal their activities in Ushen.

Arrested: If the characters give themselves away, the Bureau moves in to arrest them. Initially, this arrest comes in the shape of a group of Bureau agents (two per player character, although if the Player Characters are separated, the Bureau will pick the Player Characters off individually). If the characters resist and fight back, throw more Bureau agents at them; if the characters start blasting away with high-tech weapons and demonstrating why it is a really bad idea to attack someone from a civilisation that is five or more Technology Levels above your own, then the Bureau sends in the marines, in the form of heavily armed soldiers and air gunships.

If the characters keep fighting, then skip onto *Nightmare Breach* (see page 8). If they are arrested, they are imprisoned in the Bureau's dungeon. They will be dragged back out and questioned by the head of the Bureau, Administrator Uate, as soon as *Nightmare Breach* begins.

Bureau Files: The characters may choose to investigate or break into the Bureau to learn about the illegal space program. The Bureau is monitoring suspicious activity in the western mountains; there are long-range photos of a structure the characters will recognise as a launch gantry and a large hangar.

Playing Administrator Uate: The bloodless administrator is the guardian of state security in the Yaskoti. He has no time for wild tales about aliens and dimensional pockets – he just wants to keep the humans in line and ensure the safety of the general population. He is utterly emotionless and inscrutable. He smokes the Droyne equivalent of cigarettes, a sort of pocket-sized hookah that hangs from the wing.

- Do not draw out the interrogation of the characters; they will be arrested and questioned again in the next section of the adventure, so avoid making the game repetitive. If you do end up interviewing them as Uate, either cut the interview short or have *Nightmare Breach* (see page 8) show up during the interview.
- Speak in a bored monotone. Never raise your voice.
- Show through your body language that you loathe any human player characters.
- Ignore the characters when they talk about Grandfather or alien races. Show interest only in Professor Ankor's criminal activities and the characters' actions among the Yaskoti.

Administrator Uate

STR 6 DEX 6 END 7 INT 12 EDU 10 SOC 10

Admin 4, Advocate 3, Computer 3, Diplomat 4, Gun Combat (slug pistol) 0, Investigate 4, Streetwise 3

Body Pistol (3d6-3)



4. NIGHTMARE BREACH

The characters were not the only ones to come through the teleporter from Grandfather's space station. Servants (or shards, depending on your perspective) of SEVEN followed the characters to the world of the Yaskoti. Their mission is to search the planet for Grandfather's Family Archive, his method of cheating death through resurrection. The player characters have been designated secondary targets.

With only a limited teleport ability, SEVEN's invasion force consists of three 'easily portable' elements.

Neural Hijack Plague: A combination of organic and cybernetic virus, this weapon infects the Droyne and subverts their brains. The virus strips the host's body for iron and other metals to assemble tiny radio transmitters within the brain. A side effect of this process is that the host is reduced to a near-vegetative state, effectively killing the brain. The virus takes control of the host's body, boosting the Droyne equivalent of adrenaline and triggering the hormone response normally associated with casteing into the Soldier caste. It spreads by touch – or, more often, by bite or claw wound.

In short, it is a Droyne zombie virus that turns its victims into mutated monsters. The microscopic radio transmitters allow the drones to communicate wirelessly with each other, turning each pack of zombies into a local network. Anything one zombie sees, they all see. The primary purpose of the zombie plague is to turn the population of the world into an information gathering device for SEVEN's agents. Once infected, the zombies try to spread the plague; once the zombie population hits a critical threshold, they will disperse out over the surface of the planet and look for Grandfather's Family Archive.

Those infected by the virus show clear signs of illness; the subverted Droyne suffer from a fever, with blackened eyes. As the plague progresses, the victim grows larger and stronger, just like a Soldier-caste Droyne, but the added muscle and bone mass is unevenly distributed and cancerous.

While these creatures are effectively zombies, they are not undead or supernatural – they are hijacked Droyne, compelled to obey the virus. They have no special resistance to damage. They are not brain-eating monsters, and are not especially carnivorous. A single bite to transfer the plague, then move on.

Droyne Zombie

STR 8 DEX 4 END 10 INT 1 EDU 1 SOC 1

Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1

Claw (1d6)

Droyne Player Characters

If your group includes any Droyne Player Characters, they are vulnerable to infection. Droyne characters who are bitten must make a Hard (-4) Endurance test to avoid infection; a successful Difficult (-2) Medic test made within 60 seconds of the bite allows the victim to make a second Average (+0) Endurance test to avoid infection. An infected character is doomed (unless the infected character is also Grandfather's host, in which case he is mysteriously immune.) The virus usually takes only a few minutes to subvert the host's brain, but the onset time can be delayed with medication.

Drone Non-Player Characters

Similarly, if the characters are accompanied by a Droyne Non-Player Characters, such as Professor Ankor, then their companion may fall prey to the virus.

Assassin Drones: These are second-line war machines, designed to deal with 'problems' that might impede the spread of the zombies. They are small flying drones, each about the size of a human, but equipped with disintegrators and other high-TL personal weapons. A single one of these absurdly powerful drones could wipe out most of the Yaskoti military on its own. If the zombies spot the characters, then an Assassin Drone is dispatched to eliminate the characters, arriving within 2d6 minutes. The standard offensive protocol for an Assassin Drone is to level everything nearby with disintegrator fire and then have the zombies pick through the debris.

Assassin Drone

STR 12 DEX 12 Hull 4 Structure 4

INT 9 EDU 9

Gun Combat (disintegrator) 3, Recon 3, Sensors 3

Traits: Armour 15, Grav Floater, Disintegrator

Weapons: Improved Matter Disintegrator (Damage 3d6, Ignores Armour)

Assemblers: Assemblers are large robots, barely big enough to fit through the teleportation portal. They resemble skinned horses made out of metal. As soon as they emerge, they start harvesting resources from the surrounding area and constructing another, larger teleportation device in situ.

This second, bigger teleporter is designed to allow the second wave of SEVEN's invasion force to arrive.

Assembler Robot

STR 15 DEX 8 Hull 8 Structure 8

INT 9 EDU 9

Engineer (all) 4, Mechanic 4, Trade 6

Traits: Armour 20, Integral Construction Tools

Weapons: Construction Tool (4d6)

Scourge Machines: These are much bigger, much nastier versions of the drones. Each scourge machine is the size of a large aircraft, and has the sort of firepower more commonly associated with capital ships, including relativity weapons and antimatter cannons. The purpose of the scourge machines is to annihilate Grandfather's Family Archive as soon as it is located, so they need the sort of firepower and shielding that allows them to battle through the Ancient's innermost defences. While waiting for the scouts to locate the Archive, the Scourge Machines put their firepower to use in wiping out the Yaskoti.

Scourge Machine

STR 20 DEX 12 Hull 12 Structure 12

INT 15 EDU 10

Traits: Armour 30, Grav Floater, Exotic Weapons

Gun Combat (disintegrator) 3, Recon 3, Sensors 3

Weapons: Ancient Matter Disintegrator (6d6, Ignores Armour), Antimatter Cannon (36d6)

Invasion Timeline

The attack by SEVEN's forces do not happen according to a set timeline; instead, it is left open to the Games Master as to what transpires. The most likely scenario is that the first zombies

The Missing Archive

Killing Yaskoydray may be satisfying (if 'satisfaction' is an emotion that can be ascribed to a quarter-million year old living warship), but it is an empty gesture unless SEVEN can also annihilate Grandfather's Family Archive. All of the Ancients had facilities in place to enable them to cheat death in one form or another, a way of resurrecting themselves. Grandfather, for example, favours cloned bodies. If his current form is mortally wounded, he psionically jumps his consciousness to another clone body.

It is an unwritten law that each Ancient has only a single 'active' version of himself at any time. All the Sons were made from Grandfather, and they share in his ego. Each of them believes himself to be the supreme intellect in the cosmos and the last rival they could tolerate is another version of themselves.

During the Final Wars, the Family Archives were the primary target for all the warring Ancients. This is why the Final Wars were so destructive – often, the only way to be sure of eliminating a rival was to utterly destroy every planet where he might have concealed his Archive. SEVEN intends to tear Grandfather's pocket universe apart until he finds the Archive.

What SEVEN does not know and could never guess is that Grandfather has already moved his Archive out of the pocket universe...

start showing up when the characters are exploring Ushen, but do not attack directly. Instead, the characters spot some dark-eyed Droyne acting strangely, but the players assume it is just another harmless example of local weirdness, not the precursor to a zombie plague. Start with the attack proper at a suitably dramatic moment.

The events leading up to the invasion take place in roughly the following order:

- The characters arrive through the teleportation portal.
- A short time later, a half-dozen assassin drones arrive through the portal. One drone locates the nearest population centre (the village closest to Lan's farmstead) and travels there. The other five fly high into the atmosphere and locate the largest cities. They then drop capsules containing the zombie plague. The infection begins.
- The assembler robots come through the portal.
- The zombie plague spreads. The Bureau of Security becomes aware something is wrong.
- The first attack by an assassin drone occurs when Bureau of Security forces attack zombies on the outskirts of Ushen.
- The assemblers begin work on the new portal.
- The zombie plague becomes an epidemic.
- More attacks by assassin drones occur.
- The zombie population reaches a critical threshold, causing the zombies to disperse over the surface of the planet, looking for the Family Archive. If the characters were about to be overcome by a zombie horde, this gives them a temporary respite, but it does mean that wherever they go, they will encounter zombies.
- The assemblers complete the teleportation portal.
- Scourge machines and more assassin drones begin to arrive.
- Scourge machines attack the Yaskoti.
- Yaskoti resistance crumbles; the Scourge Machines kill millions every hour.
- The Yaskoti are wiped out.

SEVEN projects the entire invasion should take less than a week.

Rumours of a Threat

Depending on where the characters are, they hear rumours of strange events. If they are 'guests' of the Bureau, they may be brought before Administrator Utae and asked to explain the video images of zombie Droyne and drone attacks. If they are on the streets, or in the university, they see television news reports that start with rumours about a mystery illness, and as the invasion continues expand to report on strange sightings, explosions and a curfew put in place by the Bureau of Security.

The characters may be followed by zombies at this point, but they will not be attacked unless they provoke the creatures.

Possible encounters during this stage of the invasion include:

- **Public Curfew:** The characters are prevented from reaching their destination by a barricade erected by Bureau of Security forces. All the Droyne in the area are told to return to their homes. If questioned, the Bureau forces insist that 'human dissidents' are causing violence on the streets and a curfew has been imposed for reasons of public safety.
- **Sick Droyne:** The characters encounter a young Droyne who is obviously very ill; he is feverish, weak and increasingly delirious. He has been infected by SEVEN's plague. A successful Difficult (-2) Medic check confirms that the Droyne is affected by some sort of virus; analysing the Droyne's blood or brain tissue in a properly-equipped laboratory (say, at the University) shows the presence of something bizarre and obviously artificial in the victim's body.
- **Fortean Events:** A crowd has gathered around some strange objects that fell from the sky. The objects are small spheres of an unknown material that fell out of a cloudless sky. The spheres caused minimal property damage or injuries. Some Droyne suggest they are blessings from Grandfather; others mutter about the secret and heretical space program. In fact, these are the capsules dropped by the Assassin Drones to spread the plague; soon, all the Droyne in the crowd start showing symptoms of the virus.
- **Lights in the Sky:** The characters spot a pattern of five lights moving in the sky, impossibly fast. No TL7 flying machine could move with such speed and agility – whatever is up there has to be using grav plates or some other high-tech drive. The characters have in fact spotted the assassin drones as they catch the rays of Yaskot's primary star. Point out the increasing blueshift of the night sky, too.
- **Wild Rumours:** The characters overhear a bizarre rumour about mass hysteria and rioting in outlying settlements. Such behaviour is unthinkable for the orderly, cohesive Droyne race. The only Droyne who commonly defy the status quo are the rare Sport-caste, and there are unlikely to be enough Sports in a community to band together to create the disturbances described by the rumours.

- **Military Build-Up:** The characters see a flotilla of airships pass overhead, escorted by a huge flock of Droyne soldiers. They are heading towards the outskirts of the city.

The Agent of Grandfather

Caol is an agent of Grandfather, just like Vlen Backett is an agent of SEVEN. He appears to be a dark-skinned human male of Vilani descent in his mid-thirties, with a blandly pleasant face, a muscular build and distinctive yellowish eyes. In fact, he is old enough to remember the birth of the First Imperium and his body is crammed with cybernetic augmentation and Ancient technology. (If the characters chose to go with Grandfather at the end of the recorded memories in *The Secret*, then Caol may actually know the real-world versions of Emyakoy, Urd and the other pregenerated Player Characters.)

For the last 30 years, Caol has been the advisor to the head of the Church of Grandfather. This is a simple assignment, the Ancient equivalent of babysitting. A month ago, he decided to amuse himself by taking a fishing holiday. After all, what could happen in a few weeks?

Then Grandfather died. Caol does not know about SEVEN's attack on the pocket universe or the failure of Yaskoydray's superweapon, but he knows something terrible has happened. Using skills honed over millennia in service to the Ancients, he tracked the characters down.

Caol contacts the characters, no matter where they are – he has the authority to go anywhere in the Church or city, and can break into the Bureau's most secure prison with ease. If the characters are lost or imprisoned, he can find them and get them back on the path of the adventure.

Once he finds the characters, he introduces himself (Vlen's Inheritor Player Characters instantly notices that Caol reminds him of his late uncle) and demands the characters tell him what happened.

Playing Caol: You are the ultimate secret agent. Grandfather's death may be the most shocking revelation imaginable to you but it still will not faze you. The mission must be completed.

- Adopt a comfortable posture and stick to it. Try and fail to act human.
- You are the pinnacle of humanity. You are a cybernetic demigod with powerful psionic abilities and a thousand lifetimes of experience. Exude confidence.
- Never show surprise or uncertainty. At most, defer a problem or question to be dealt with later.
- Swivel your head every so often, as if you can hear a noise that the characters cannot detect

Caol

STR 15 DEX 15 END 15 INT 12 EDU 14 SOC 9

Admin 2, Advocate 2, Astrogation 3, Battle Dress 3, Broker 2, Carouse 2, Comms 5, Computers 5, Deception 6, Diplomat 2, Engineer (jump) 3, Flyer 0, Gambler 2, Gun Combat (energy pistol) 2, Gunner (turret) 3, Investigate 3, Jack of all Trades 3, Mechanic 3, Medic 2, Melee (unarmed) 2, Persuade 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 3, Recon 2, Sensors 2, Space Science (all) 3, Stealth 5, Steward 3, Streetwise 4, Survival 3
Subdermal Armour 4, Fusion Pistol-22 (8d6+8)

Caol's Sacrifice: Caol is much, much more experienced than the Player Characters. He works out (through subtle psionic probes if nothing else) that Grandfather's consciousness is hidden in one of the Player Characters. Protecting that Player Character becomes Caol's primary mission. Caol leads the characters out of their current predicament, if any, to a safe area of the city. He then detects an incoming assassin drone. He evaluates the situation, then speaks quickly.

'I must engage the enemy to cover your retreat. Here is a weapon. Use it sparingly, it will draw their attention. Find a way to escape this planet. If you can make it there, there is a supply cache in the village of Galor, under the church. Good luck.'

He hands the weapon to a Player Characters *other* than Grandfather's host, then removes his jacket and peels off a section of his skin, revealing a small compartment in his chest. He removes another weapon and sprints off, inhumanly quickly. A few moments later, the characters see him fire at a fast-moving dot in the sky – an Assassin Drone. The Drone's counter-attack destroys the buildings around Caol, and the characters lose sight of him. He has bought them time to escape.

Caol's Weapon

Caol is armed with a TL22 Fusion Pistol

TL: 22	Range: Pistol	Required Skill: Gun Combat (Energy Pistol)
Damage: 8d6+8	Auto: No	Recoil: -1



5. THE FALL OF THE YASKOTI

By this point in the scenario, the players should know the only way into orbit is via the rumoured secret space program in the western mountains. If they have not worked this out, then they can either find references to the space program in the ruins of the University/Bureau of Security or be told where to go by Caol before he dies.

Unfortunately, between them and their goal is the end of the world.

Battlefield Ushen

The city is overrun. Millions of Droyne have become networked zombies, the eyes and ears of the invasion force; whenever the zombies run into resistance or spot something interesting, assassin drones arrive to support them.

Keep throwing dangers and threats at the player characters. They have no chance of taking down an assassin drone unless they use Caol's weapon, so most encounters with assassin drones revolve around the characters finding ways to evade the hostile machines. Herd the characters towards the human tunnels under the city if they do not think of taking refuge there themselves.

- **Lone Zombie:** The characters run into a single Droyne zombie. The creature is trapped inside a small space (locked room, corridor, groundcar, tunnel) and is executing a futile search pattern to find an exit. It moves in circles, looking for fresh victims or something interesting to look at. The zombie will not attack the characters (unless there are Droyne in the group), but instead watches them and transmits a message back to the rest of the zombies. Unless the characters deal with the lone zombie immediately, it summons a larger pack of the creatures to the area.
- **Zombie Pack:** The characters encounter a large mob (4d6+4) of Droyne zombies. This encounter can take place almost anywhere in the city, in any area where crowds might gather (shopping arcades, main streets, public venues). If the zombies get close enough to recognise the characters as the travellers who were on Grandfather's space station, they attempt to capture and restrain the characters. The characters need to either blast their way through the zombie pack, or else find a way to escape the pack.
- **Desperate Survivors:** The characters encounter a band of 1d6+1 Droyne survivors, who are still uninfected. The Droyne beg the characters to help them; they suggest finding a vehicle and fleeing the city. See *Escaping the City*, below.
- **Flying Zombies:** Droyne can fly; so can the plague-controlled zombies. This encounter takes place in any open area (main street, parkland, atop a building). Zombies circle overhead in a distinctive search pattern, like a swarm of police drones. The characters need to dart from cover to cover to avoid being seen.
- **Drone Hunter:** The characters see a single Assassin Drone flying overhead. The drone does not detect the characters – but if they run into any zombies while the drone is nearby, it doubles back to attack, demonstrating to the characters that the zombies are connected to the drone weapons. If the characters are attacked by the drone, they need to make Hard (-4) Dexterity + Athletics checks to avoid being blasted by its weapons; those who fail take 1d6 damage per point of negative Effect.
- **Rally The Troops:** The bulk of the Yaskoti military gets wiped out within hours of engaging SEVEN's forces. The Droyne officers are overcome by the virus, but the humans who make up the bulk of the infantry are immune. They suffer casualties from zombie attacks, and are incinerated by the hundred by drones, but still are much more likely to survive than the Droyne. The characters encounter a band of a dozen human soldiers who have lost their Droyne leaders. The humans need leadership, or they will turn to looting and violence against the Droyne. The human spokesman is a veteran soldier named Arod; he believes this plague is Grandfather's judgement and that the end of the world is at hand. If the characters can convince Arod to rally his troops and cover their retreat, they can avoid the *zombie searchers* encounter.
- **Zombie Searchers:** A huge swarm of zombies approaches the characters. The zombies are dispersing, moving away from each other. The characters need to find a place to hide where the zombies cannot follow.
- **Drone Assault:** A squadron of Assassin Drones flies low over the city, firing indiscriminately at the buildings, humans and uninfected Droyne. The drones have determined that Grandfather's Family Archive is not in Ushen, but it might be *beneath* it. Therefore, the drone begin to wipe out the city, to clear the surface for the Scourge Machines following behind.
- **Into the Human Tunnels:** With the drones blasting anything on the surface, the safest place to take refuge is in the tunnel network under the city.



Take To The Sky

Instead of heading into the underground tunnels and leaving the city by groundcar, the characters may attempt to steal a faster flying machine and escape the city by air. There are two sorts of flying machine in common use in Ushen – large, slow hydrogen airships and small helicopters. Trying to escape the city in an airship is suicide, as the blimps are easy prey for Assassin Drones. The characters might be able to take a helicARRIER, although the only ones available are in the military bases on the outskirts of the city or in the Bureau of Security.

The Tunnels

The tunnels are a warren of concrete-lined tunnels, linked to huge vertical shafts lined with apartments. Some of main tunnels are lined with shops and facilities for the human population. Light is provided by electric lanterns in the ceiling. There are fast subway trains in the larger tunnels; these trains are used for transporting both people and cargo, and link to the vehicle hangars at the edge of the city.

As the human population are immune to the bizarre plague, the tunnels rapidly fill with humans and Droyne fleeing the chaos of the surface. The entrances to several of the tunnels have been blocked with crude barricades but if the characters search they can find an alternative way down, or clamber over or blast through a barrier.

There are few surviving zombies in the tunnels; those who do make it down here are beaten to death by humans defending their homes. However, as soon as the drone and Scourge Machine attacks start in earnest, the main danger the characters face is the tunnels collapsing on top of them.

Navigating the tunnel network without a guide is difficult and time-consuming; call for Difficult (-2) Intelligence + Navigation rolls to find a way through. If this check fails, roll on the Tunnel Hazard table. Alternatively, the characters can recruit a human guide with an Intelligence + Diplomat or Streetwise check.

Roll	Hazard
1	Zombies: The characters run into another pack of 1d6+2 zombies. Unless they put these unfortunate creatures down swiftly (within 2d6 rounds), their location is transmitted to an Assassin Drone, who blasts the tunnel from above causing a Major Collapse (see below)
2	Human Looters: A gang of 1d6+1 human survivors are moving through the tunnels, looting anything they can salvage. The characters can either bluff or intimidate their way past, or else fight the looters.
3	Gas Leak: This tunnel is filling with toxic gas from a broken pipe. If the characters do not have protective equipment, they take 1d6 damage. Any weapons fire risks causing an explosion (4d6 damage to anyone in the tunnel).
4	Minor Collapse: Pick a random character; the roof above that character creaks, then gives way. The character may make a Difficult (-2) Athletics check to dodge away; if he fails, he suffers 2d6 damage.
5	Road Hog: A panicked human drives a groundcar down the narrow tunnel. The characters are right in his path. They can dodge or else try to take control of the vehicle for themselves.
6	Major Collapse: The whole tunnel segment begins to collapse. The characters need to either find a way to prevent the collapse, or else run to the next section of tunnel. This is an Average Dexterity + Athletics (co-ordination) test; those who fail suffer 1d6 damage for each point of negative Effect.

Escaping the City

Once the characters have made their way through the human tunnels, they arrive in a large vehicle hangar. There are several different types of vehicle here, ranging from small groundcars and minibuses to larger cargo haulers and earthmovers. All the vehicles are powered by internal combustion engines.

If the characters are travelling alone, they can all fit into one or two fast groundcars; if, as is possible, they have picked up an entourage of survivors, then they can either take a minibus or form a convoy of vehicles. The roads out of the city are clogged with the blasted remains of other vehicles – the Assassin Drones passed over this area earlier, blasting anything that moved. However, the drones are now levelling the city and so the characters have an opportunity to escape.

Apocalypse Zone

Looking back at the city, the characters can see the Scourge Machines moving in. These horrors are the size of passenger aircraft; as they move soundlessly through the sky, their beam weapons sear the landscape. Their blasts vaporise billions of tons of rock in seconds, carving a deep crater where the city once stood. They stalk through the seething black clouds, searching for some clue to Grandfather's Archive. In their wake, no life survives. The city of Ushen is utterly destroyed.

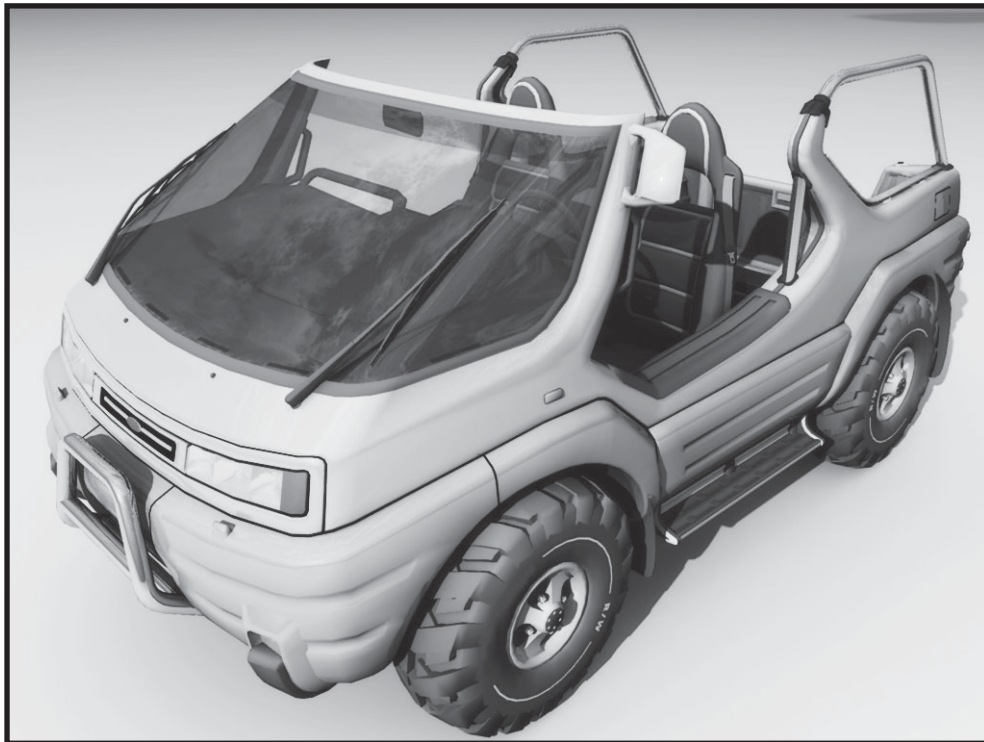
The same fate awaits every other part of this doomed world.

Caol's Supply Cache

The characters may take a short detour to the small village of Galor, some 50 kilometres north of Ushen, to retrieve the supply cache mentioned by Caol. The village is empty – all the inhabitants were Droyne, and their plague-infested bodies are currently radiating out from the village in a spiral search pattern, transmitting topological data back to the Scourge Machines as they search for the Archive.

The supply cache is located beneath the small village church. It reminds the characters of Uncle Vlen's hunting lodge on Alell (see *Section 2: Homecoming*); the cellar room is crowded with keepsakes and curiosities from a hundred cultures. There is a framed letter of commendation from a Vilani noble from the First Imperium, the robes of a Zhodani Consul, a set of holographs showing Caol with bureaucrats and adventurers from the Second Imperium, strange alien relics, an Aslan dewclaw in a case, and piles of other items; old books, different sets of clothes, spare parts and high-tech gadgets. Useful items include:

- Another TL22 Fusion Pistol, similar to the weapon he gave the characters earlier.
- A TL15 Grav Belt.
- A densitometer.
- A small and highly portable thermonuclear weapon.



6. DRIVING HARD

The characters drive or fly out of Ushen and (presumably) travel west, towards Ankor's secret launch facility. Across the landscape, they see fires and devastation as the Scourge Machines continue their search. The characters encounter the occasional Droyne zombie, but these unfortunate creatures are now dying off – a side effect of the plague's reconfiguration of the victim's brain tissue is that it causes lesions and death within 72 hours of infection.

The western mountains are 10 hour's drive away from Ushen under normal circumstances; the journey actually takes the characters 16 hours, as they have to backtrack around dangerous zones and find alternate routes. As night falls, they see a fierce glow on the horizon. The burning continues through the night; the air grows hot and acrid. As the characters get closer, they can see a swarm of Scourge Machines digging a vast trench across the landscape.

The Great Crater

The Scourge Machines have found something – not the Family Archive they seek, but an Ancient structure buried deep beneath the surface. This is an old experiment of Grandfather's, abandoned for thousands of years. It is a terraforming machine, used to alter the atmosphere and gravity of the planet. The Scourge Machines have blasted their way down to the machine, creating a two-kilometre wide trench right across the characters' path.

Through the smoke and the burning rock, the characters can spot some sort of alien structure at the bottom of the trench, but it is utterly inaccessible – the temperature at the bottom is in excess of 2,300° K.

Checking maps, the characters discover that there is no easy way to drive around the trench; one end runs into a bay, and the other goes into a spur of the western mountains and is virtually impassable. The characters need to find a way of flying over the trench. The players may be able to come up with a solution; if they look for resources, they find an abandoned Yaskoti military base nearby.

The Damaged Airship

The military base is a small one, used for refuelling and refitting the army's aerial artillery pieces. The plague wiped out the staff here, leaving the place undefended. A brief search of the military base finds a single semi-functional airship anchored in a hangar. The airship's control surfaces are damaged, but can be repaired with an Average (+0) Mechanic check taking 1D6 hours. Alternatively, the characters can find some other way to control the airship (say, by using the grav belt from Caol's cache).

Once the airship is airborne once again, the characters can proceed across the trench to the mountains. The thick smoke provides cover from the Scourge Machines and Assassin Drones for most of the journey...

Hunters

... but as the characters approach the mountains, they spot an Assassin Drone approaching them. The drone locks weapons on the airship, and it is clear that it is about to make a close inspection pass of the airship and then may attack. The airship has little chance of defeating a TL25+ drone on its own, but the characters may have Caol's guns, or be able to distract the drone.

If the characters are unable to take the drone down before it completes its inspection pass, then the drone spins around and fires a single shot through the airship, destroying it. The airship burns and crashes; unless the characters bail out and parachute down to the surface, they are killed.

7. THE MOUNTAINS OF GRANDFATHER'S WINGS

The western mountains are known as the Mountains of Grandfather's Wings; the Yaskoti believe they symbolise the protective aspect of their distant god. The mountains are towering pinnacles of granite, with few inhabitants. The nearest town – back when there was a nearest town, as opposed to a glassy crater – is several hours away. This is the middle of nowhere.

Building a secret launch facility here took years of effort. Professor Ankor could not have succeeded without sympathisers within the Bureau of Security, but there are – or, more accurately, were – many Yaskoti who chafed under the restrictive tenets of the church, and wanted to see their species make the leap into space. The launch facility was disguised as a mine, and rocket parts and suppliers were shipped out disguised as 'mining equipment.'

The Secret Base

The base's isolation has been its salvation. The plague has not reached the base yet, and the 300 Droyne present are uninfected. The leader of the base is Professor Ankor's assistant, a young Droyne technician named Koksayar. He has been monitoring radio traffic from Ushen, and is aware that an apocalypse has befallen the entire Yaskoti civilisation. To rally morale, he has had the Droyne staff prepare the rocket for launch. He knows this is a futile gesture, as the rocket has only enough range to reach orbit, but the gesture kept his crew sane while their world ended.

If the characters have Professor Ankor with them, she can explain the existence of the Ancient portal in orbit. Otherwise, they need to make the case to Koksayar themselves.

Playing Koksayar: The technician is on the edge of a breakdown. He was pushing himself almost to the limit just to get the rocket completed before the Bureau of Security found them; now, his entire world has been invaded and destroyed. He has not slept in days, and it is a miracle he is still even slightly sane. The rocket has become his obsession and his salvation. All he wants is to get it into orbit.

- You are exhausted; show this by slumping, yawning, or losing the thread of the conversation.
- If the characters reveal they are offworlders, question them about space travel. Beg them to help you with the rocket launch.
- Never say die, even in the face of armageddon.

Last Goodbye

If the characters check the base's astronomical observations, they find that there is an object in orbit that matches the size and configuration of the portal back to the original universe. (If the players do not think to check, then Koksayar can point this out.) The Droyne refer to it as *Traissthurdusa*, 'little lonely Sport with a bright eye'. An easy (+2) Astrogation or Pilot check lets the characters work out that *Traissthurdusa* will be within reach of the rocket if they leave soon. The launch window is only another three hours.

The Droyne rocket is roughly equivalent to an Atlas-class rocket, and can carry a payload of 20 tons to orbit. The Droyne offer the characters spaces on the rocket (Grandfather psionically manipulates the Droyne to ensure his chosen agents escape). The rocket can hold a crew of up to 10 if the scientific payload and other supplies are discarded; it is up to the characters who they wish to rescue from this dying world. If the characters have no preferences, then Koksayar has his technicians and staff draw lots to determine who gets to go.

The rocket consists of four booster stages; the crew capsule has limited thruster capability, but is able to change orbit to reach the portal.

Yaskonauts Away!

With all preparations made, the characters strap into the rocket. This is space travel at its most primitive – the characters are going into orbit by sitting atop a big explosion of burning chemicals. The Droyne handle most of the controls, so all the characters need to do is fly the capsule when they reach orbit.

10.

Countdowns are endemic to all space travellers.

9.

Despite the impending destruction of their civilisation, the Yaskoti technicians remain focussed and excited. This is their moment, the culmination of years of work.

8.

Tons of pressurised rocket fuel pours into the engines.

7.

An Assassin Drone detects the hidden base, and moves to investigate

6.

The main engine starts.

5.

The Yaskoti crew chitter farewell to their compatriots.

4.

The assassin drone swoops over the launch facility, scanning it. It determines that there is no sign of the Family Archive, but that it is a target of opportunity. It loops around, charging its weapons systems.

3.

Of course, all this is pointless. There is no Family Archive on this world, or anywhere in the pocket universe. It is all a trap for SEVEN.

2.

Once the characters are through the portal, it will shut behind them, and never open again. The pocket universe will collapse, destroying Grandfather's wayward Son. All Grandfather needs to do is ensure that SEVEN stays dead.

And that means taking risks, like transferring his consciousness into a host so he can set in motion a chain of events that will eliminate SEVEN's Family Archive.

1.

The rocket launches. The drone strafes the launch facility, blasting it to pieces, but the characters are already climbing into the sky on a pillar of fire. The acceleration slams the characters back in their seats and rattles their bones.

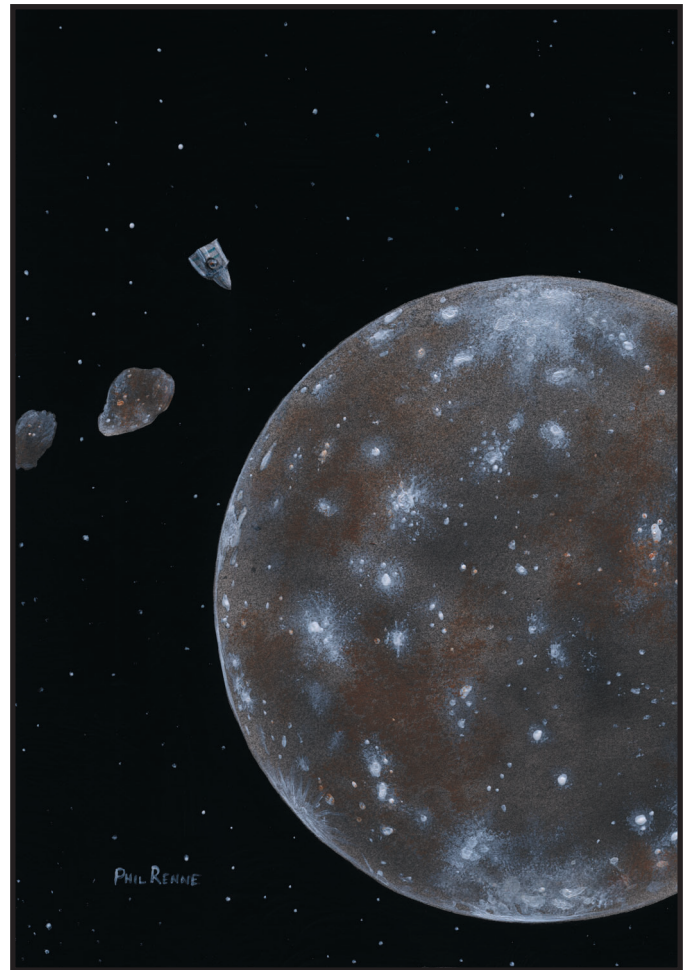
One by one, the booster stages drop away, until only the capsule is left, floating serenely in space. The Traissthurdusa is 6,000 kilometres away and approaching quickly.

8. INTO ORBIT

In orbit, beyond the veil of the atmosphere, the contraction of the pocket universe is clearly visible. The whole sky has turned blue as the walls collapse in on themselves. The shift is accelerating, and will soon exceed the speed of light – the whole pocket universe will be destroyed in a matter of weeks, perhaps sooner.

As Grandfather's servants promised, there is a portal in orbit. It looks identical to the one the characters arrived through on board the Ancient ship, back in *Section 4: Descent*. As the portal approaches the capsule, it responds to their presence. The dull, meteorite-pocked surface of the portal shimmers, then folds in on itself in a way the characters cannot quite follow, revealing a glowing silvery gateway. It is a route back to the Spinward Marches.

The capsule approaches the portal, but as it does so, it begins to rattle. The magnetic flux from the active portal causes havoc on board the Yaskoti capsule. Consoles spark, lights flicker, instruments go dead. The engines fail, and the capsule enters the portal at a slewed angle. A flash of light knocks the characters unconscious...



Yaskoti Vehicles

Vehicle	TL	Skill	Agility	Speed	Crew & Passengers	Armour	Hull	Weapons
Ground Car	7	Drive (auto)	+0	150 kph	1 driver, 3 passengers	6	4	None
Heli-Flyer	7	Flyer	+1	220 kph	1 driver, 3 passengers	6	3	None
Minibus	7	Drive (tracked)	-1	120 kph	1 driver, 15 passengers	6	8	None
Cargo Hauler	7	Drive (tracked)	-2	80 kph	1 driver, 9 passengers	8	12	None
Airship	7	Flyer	-3	50 kph	2 pilots, 60 passengers	12	10	150mm Howitzer (12d6) x2 Machine guns (3d6) x 6

