

*Gateway Domain
Campaign Adventure 1
Homecoming*

TRAVELLER

HOMECOMING – A CAMPAIGN ADVENTURE FOR *TRAVELLER*

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

BASED ON THE AWARD-WINNING *TRAVELLER* GAME SYSTEM AND UNIVERSE BY MARC MILLER

CREDITS

Lead Scriptwriter and Director

Martin J. Dougherty

Opening Night Leads

Michael Wightman

Nate Zettle

Storyboard Consultant

Shane McLean

Light and Sound

Bryan Gibson

Script Consultants

William Andersen

Michael Taylor

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book presents a complete episodic adventure for *Traveller* set in Gateway Domain of the Third Imperium around the year 993. The episodic adventure concept has its origins in the classic *Traveller* adventure titled 'The *Traveller* Adventure' and is simply a complete story arc made up of linked episodes that can be played in a row or interspersed with other adventures (which may be linked to the main plot or wholly unrelated).

It is possible to think of this adventure as being the key episodes in a season of a TV show. Unrelated episodes can be slipped in between the key ones, but eventually the story will reach the series finale. Of course, there may well be another season of the show, and so other story arcs may follow this one once it is completed by the players.

This adventure, as implied, is set in the Gateway Domain setting described in the *Gateway To Destiny* sourcebook published by QuikLink Interactive. Possession of that sourcebook will be useful but is not necessary for enjoyment of this epic adventure. Indeed, Homecoming could be set in almost any game universe with just a little tweaking.

THE EPISODIC CAMPAIGN

This adventure uses an episodic format to present its component parts. The characters are free to wander about as they please and do whatever seems to make sense at the time in between episodes. Some episodes naturally lead to others, and some cannot happen until another has been completed. However, the overall structure is fairly loose, meaning that the Referee will not have to railroad the players along to the next episode – it will happen in due course, but players do not need to be artificially constrained by the needs of the plotline.

The adventure is presented as eleven episodes (two of which are optional) and an epilogue, with supporting information and background. Within each episode there are one or more scenes. These are not always critical – some only occur if the characters go to a certain place or do a particular thing. An episode could of course include a great many other scenes which are not part of the main adventure. These will be created by the Referee in response to player actions.

CHARACTER TYPES AND SKILLS

It is not the practice of Avenger Enterprises to list the skills a team of travellers will need in order to complete any given adventure (though skills required to get hired for the job might be listed). This is because *Traveller* is an open-ended game, and there are a great many possible paths to success. Almost any group, of any level, with any set of skills, can complete this or any other *Traveller* adventure if they are able to think creatively and maximize their strengths. There are no encounters or challenges in this adventure aimed at any type or class of character. Different characters will use different approaches and may struggle in some circumstances, but adventuring is not about having the right weapons, skills or equipment to meet a challenge; it is about meeting what the universe throws at you with what you have and finding a way to win – or at least survive.

That said, it may assist the Referee to have some idea what sort of skills will be useful, if only to ensure that suitable NPCs are available to cover the gaps. The player-characters in this adventure should be capable of operating a small starship between them. If there are gaps in this skill set, then one or two NPC crewmembers might be hired to assist in running the ship (this incidentally frees PCs from shipboard tasks and might be a good idea from a roleplaying perspective as well).

Characters who have no shipboard skills but are useful in other ways (ranging from liaison and information-gathering skills to wilderness survival and vehicle driving abilities) or who are simply 'good workers' can be hired to help with the mission. Note that although field research on the frontier can be a little rough, the adventure patron is not interested in hiring bodyguards or 'gunbunnies'; characters must be able to carry their weight on the mission and any ability to defend the party from danger is just a bonus.

There is no list of required skills. Any group of Travellers can get through this adventure. The Referee may wish to note that interpersonal skills will be important at times, shipboard skills as noted above, and some measure of combat skill will probably be useful during the final showdown. If at least some of the characters are familiar with Vac suit operations, this will help matters greatly. Beyond these few notes, the adventure is wide open. The characters will just have to cope with what they have.

REFEREES, RULES AND SUPPLEMENTS

Homecoming is intended to be used with any *Traveller* rules set. There are several, and each has its own conventions. Rather than present a gigantic book filled with pages of stats for several different game systems, we have used Classic Traveller (CT) as a baseline. It is not difficult to extrapolate stats for characters that may be encountered; most other data (for example, world data UWPs) are the same across all versions of the game.

The adventure assumes that the Referee is able to set appropriate skill rolls and tasks as the situation requires, and that he/she can interpret results in a suitably dramatic fashion. It is not possible to cover every possible die roll and all of its potential outcomes in the adventure text, so this is left to the Referee – which is, after all, what the Referee is there for. However, it is worth noting that some events must happen if the adventure is to progress. For example, the deep-space asteroid where the Wander artifact is found must be located. Referees should use die rolls to create uncertainty but not to the extent of stalling the adventure.

All manner of *Traveller* supplements may be useful in this adventure, though none are absolutely necessary. Minor adventures, ship encounters, equipment and man kinds of incidental information can be found in additional supplements. Again, use of additional resources is a matter for the Referee. Everyone has their own style.

PART 1: GENERAL OVERVIEW

This Campaign Adventure is set in the Official Traveller Universe (OTU). It can of course be transplanted to any game universe, either a variant of the mainstream *Traveller* setting or a completely different setting.

In the OTU, several civilizations exist within the region known as Charted Space. Habitable worlds and intelligent life are common in this region – and much of that life is human. Major and minor alien races live within Charted Space, and here and there can be found remnants of older high-technology species. Charted Space has been inhabited for a long, long time. But there are still mysteries to uncover, new places to find and new dangers to face.

The dominant human civilization in Charted Space is the Third Imperium, but it has rivals and enemies. Two great human states, the Solomani Confederation and the Zhodani Consulate, have fought wars and engaged in border disputes against the Imperium for centuries. Non-Human states include the Aslan Hierate, the various states of the Vargr Extents, the Hive Federation and the 2000 Worlds. The other major neighbor of the Imperium is the human/Vargr populated Julian Protectorate.

In some cases the Imperium butts directly up against its neighbors; in others a buffer region exists, populated by ‘client states’, independent small interstellar states and individual worlds. Some of these buffer regions are hotbeds of rivalry and intrigue.

This adventure is set in Gateway Domain of the Third Imperium, a region on the very fringe of the Imperium. Across a buffer region the Imperium faces the 2000 Worlds of the K’Kree, militant herbivores sworn to destroy all meat-eaters; the Hive Federation, an alliance of many species dominated by strange, manipulative beings named Hivers by humans; and a little further off but still influential is the Solomani Confederation, original source of many of the independent human colonies that fill the buffer region.

A POTTED HISTORY OF THE IMPERIUM AND THE GATEWAY REGION

Human habitation in the Gateway region began in the distant past, when a race of non-human beings normally referred to as the Ancients transplanted genetically engineered human stock to various worlds throughout what is now known as Charted Space. Their purposes remain unknown, though it is generally accepted that groups of Humans served the Ancients in some capacity. The Ancients vanished long ago, leaving only fleeting traces of their existence, but their transplanted races remain.

It is possible that several human groups were transplanted into the Gateway region. The remnants of these populations may have been absorbed by the expanding empires of successful groups. However, the fate of two such groups is definitely known: The Luriani and Sydites. Both species underwent extensive genetic modification. They can be clearly identified as sub-species of humaniti by their modified characteristics.

The Luriani, seeded on the water world of Daramm and adapted for life there, developed more quickly. On a world whose only land was a few scattered archipelagos, the Luriani rapidly developed long-distance sea travel and eventually colonized all the land masses of their world. Some elements of Luriani culture lived their whole lives at sea, voyaging between the archipelagos as traders.

The Sydites did little more than survive at a fairly primitive level for millennia. By year –10,000 the Sydites had developed a single state that dominated their planet, but they still were only at TL2. At this time, the Vilani, a major group of humans transplanted to the world of Vland were first venturing out into space. They expanded over the centuries and founded the First Imperium, or Ziru Sirka (Grand Empire of Stars).

The Vilani ventured a short way into Ley Sector, and around –7500 they contacted the Luriani, who were at that time around TL6. As the Vilani Imperium reached its peak, a few exploration missions went out beyond the Daramm Cluster to Trailing and Rimward, but the Vilani were no longer so concerned with expansion.

Contact with the Vilani caused a technological explosion among the Luriani people, who quickly learned to build large sublight starships, which colonized the nearby star systems. As with the Voyagers of their ancient past, some elements of Luriani society spent their whole lives aboard these ‘caravan’ or ‘migration’ fleets, linking the star systems with slow trade.

Around –5450, the Luriani received the Jump drive from an unknown race. The Vilani had refused to teach the Luriani people how to make Jump drives, but now the Luriani were able to move between their colonies quickly. This might have led to friction, but the Luriani were far from the center of Vilani activity, and besides the Vilani had just developed the Jump-2 drive. This meant that the Vilani still had a strategic advantage, and they guarded the secret jealously.

For a time all was well. Then, in –5421 a Vilani Jump-2 fleet entered Luriani space. Records from this time are very incomplete, but it is thought that the Vilani demanded to know where the Jump technology used by the Luriani had come from. The Jump-2 fleet left Luriani space after this show of force and over the next few years the remnants of it staggered back into the territory of the First Imperium.

The Vilani then embarked upon what became known as the Consolidation Wars, designed to ensure that no threat ever grew up on the fringes of the Vilani Imperium. Most border states were bullied into accepting treaties that limited their military and jump technology. Those that resisted were ruthlessly crushed.

The hammer fell for the Luriani in –4700. After cleaning up the surrounding area, the Vilani tried to persuade the Luriani to join what was eventually to be Grand Empire of Stars, or Ziru Sirka. The Luriani refused and eventually the Vilani attacked them. It took 35 years for the mighty Vilani Imperium to crush the Luriani. But the outcome was never in any doubt.

Some historians have suggested that the Luriani must have received aid from an unknown source during this war, since the Vilani could not possibly have been held off for so long by a mere 30-world power. Curiously, there is no record of any such assistance in either Luriani or Vilani histories of the time.

As soon as the Ziru Sirka had a firm hold on the Luriani worlds, “investigators” moved in and carried out some kind of “purge”. Exactly what was done is now unknown, suggesting that the purge was a complete success. These events took place in –4546, which is now known as the “Year of Woe”.

Once the Consolidation Wars ended, the Vilani settled into comfortable dominance of their vast empire, which became known



as the Ziru Sirka, or “Grand Empire of Stars”. Minor incidents were easily put down, and expeditions ranged beyond the borders to ensure that no “barbarian” people gained access to Jump-2 drives. For centuries the Vilani were entirely successful, and no threat arose to shake their deepening complacency.

By –4000, exploration by the Vilani had all but ceased. The Ziru Sirka reached its greatest size by –3500. By that time it had already begun to stagnate, though to its members it seemed that they were living in a golden age of peace and prosperity.

The long peace was shattered in –2422, when the Terrans, exploring out from their homeworld in primitive Jump-1 ships, made contact with the Ziru Sirka. Within 15 years, the Terrans were at war with the Ziru Sirka, whose immense size they did not even suspect. This period of conflict is known as the Interstellar Wars. It resulted in the unification of the people of Terra and her colonies, and the creation of the Terran Confederation in –2398.

The Ziru Sirka was at this time complacent, stagnant and beset by internal troubles. It eventually fell to the Terran Confederation, which planted its flag among the wreckage and declared the Second Imperium (also known as the Rule of Man, or the Ramshackle Empire). It was at this time that the Terrans and their cultural descendents began referring to themselves as ‘Solomani’.

The Second Imperium made contact with the Sydites in –2174, and even set up a small trade mission on Sopater (as the Sydites named their homeworld). The Sydites were able to purchase a few examples of Jump-1 technology, and over the next few years established a number of colonies. However, they could not maintain this technology without outside help, and as the Ramshackle Empire disintegrated, the Sydites vanished from the cosmic stage.

In time, the Second Imperium fell victim to the decay that had claimed the First. Interstellar civilization collapsed and a period known as the Long Night began. In what would some day be Gateway Domain, colonies set up by the First and Second Imperium were left to their own devices. Great states rose up as other worlds regressed to barbarism. During the conquest of the First Imperium by the Terrans, many groups sought to escape the rampant militarism and social upheavals that were taking place. Colonist groups set out to find a new home. Many went Rimward, or out to Trailing or Spinward, beyond the great powers of Charted Space. The fates of many are unknown. Some of those that settled in the Gateway region are today among the region’s main powers.

The Luriani took in large numbers of both Luriani and Vilani people during the Long Night, integrating them into their society with surprisingly little resentment of previous actions.

In Ley Sector, refugees from the collapsing Rule of Man created a nation-state based on Shanape, which they named Matarishan. This state, the Matarishan Federation, was founded in –1770. It survived for a time but by –1550 no functional starships remained. Without contact between its members, the Federation effectively dissolved, though some traditions and a feeling of affinity between the member populations survived throughout the Long Night.

The period between the collapse of the Second Imperium and the rise of the Third is generally referred to as the Long Night. During this time, interstellar trade and travel more or less ceased and many worlds slid back into barbarism or died out completely. One world that clung to starflight and remained the center of an interstellar

power was Sylea, and in time the Sylean Federation began to reach out to other states. Unlike others that began to blossom only to fail, the Sylean Federation managed – just barely – to climb onto the interstellar stage. Then, in what became known as Year 0, the Sylean Federation assumed the mantle of leading interstellar state, and became the Third Imperium.

The growth of the Third Imperium was at times troubled. Wars were fought against the Luriani around 93-96 and the Julian Protectorate a century later. This was affected Ley Sector when Julian forces made a deep raid and destroyed the main Imperial naval depot in the sector.

In 604, the Imperium was plunged into civil war, lasting nearly 20 years. The Sydites took advantage of Imperial weakness and conquered large areas of Ley Sector, penetrating even into the Glimmerdrift Reaches

From 640, the Imperium campaigned against the Sydites and eventually crushed them. The Sydymic Empire was destroyed and most of its territory was occupied. However, the Sydites were granted fairly generous peace terms and were permitted to retain autonomy subject to certain treaties. One such created the Khuur League, an economic and mutual defence organization with strictly limited forces.

After the Sydymic War, Ley Sector was at peace for many years. Imperial expansion almost ceased and the region gradually stagnated.

When war broke out between the Imperium and the Solomani Confederation (a large interstellar state with its capital at Terra), elements of the region’s assigned fleet were withdrawn to fight, creating a rise in lawlessness. More significant was an attempt by the Emperor, in a personal visit in 991, to shake up the Domain’s economy.

This visit resulted in the deposition of Archduke Nells and his replacement by Erechs.

Erechs undertook a number of radical reforms, starting by declaring the Imperial Trade Cluster right at the edge of the Imperium and moving the Domain capital there. He smashed the monopolies of the “old guard”, and made many enemies along the way. He poured money from the already impoverished Archducal coffers into investments that others would not even touch. Detractors said he was mad, or perhaps a Solomani sympathizer out to wreck the Domain economy for good.

Two years after his installation, Erechs’ supporters are predicting an upturn in the economy; perhaps even a boom. Meanwhile the political situation is in chaos and with increasing numbers of Navy ships being drawn off to fight the war; piracy (and commerce raiding by long-distance Solomani raiders) is on the rise. Agents and agitators attempt to spark rebellion and insurrection on dozens of worlds.

It is a troubled time in the Imperial Domain of Gateway, and the future is not at all clear.

A TIMELINE FOR LEY SECTOR

Events beyond the region are included for reference

-300,000	Humans seeded throughout Charted Space by Ancients Sydites and Luriani seeded on their homeworlds Vargr transplanted to Lair	-2424 -2422 -2408 -2398 -2347 -2346	Solomani reach Barnard's Star Solomani contact Vilani (Ziru Sirka) First Interstellar War Terran Confederation established Vilani fleets narrowly defeated at Battle of Terra Terran Confederation begins major reforms Terrans begin offensive operations against Ziru Sirka
-250,000	Luriani develop long-range sea travel	-2204	Terran Confederation dissolved Second Imperium (Rule of Man) declared
-290,000	Ancients civilization collapses in Final War	-2174	Second Imperium encounters Sydites Sydites purchase Jump-1 drive
-150,000	Luriani civilizations cover entire homeworld	-1932	Second Imperium recognizes Luriani Cultural Region
-120,000	Sydites reach Iron Age	-1802	First Human/Hiver contact
-100,000	Luriani establish single world state	-1776	Rule of Man collapses Long Night begins
-30,000	Sydites at TL2	-1770	Matarishan Federation Established in Ley Sector
-25,000	Climate change on Sopater (Khuur) forces Sydites to develop technologically Luriani develop agriculture and animal domestication.	-1700	Human explorers enter Gateway Region
-20,000	Ancients warbots on Vland finally run down Vilani civilization begins to arise on Vland	-1550	Matarishan Federation loses last Jump-capable ships
-15,000	Glaciers retreat on Terra. Solomani civilization begins to emerge on Terra	-1522	Long Night deepens
-10,000	Vilani begin space exploration Solomani develop agriculture Sydites establish single world state	-650	Sylean Federation founded
-9400	Vilani begin sublight colony missions	-200	Humans contact K'Kree
-9310	Vilani encounter non-Vilani humans	-198	Gateway Sector named
-9235	Vilani develop Jump drive	-30	Cleon Zhunastu begins unifying Sylean Federation Sylean scout encounters Luriani vessel beyond Luriani space
-7500	Vilani contact Luriani	-29	Second Luriani Protectorate declared
-7450	Luriani launch first spacecraft	-27	Contact made between dissident Syleans and Matarishan Federation
-7400	Luriani exploration of Daramm system begins		
-7200	Luriani launch first sublight "migration ships"		
-6000	Vilani Imperium border enters Ley Sector Over 30 worlds now settled by sublight Luriani ships Luriani become client state of Vilani Imperium	-16 -8 0	Federation begins to re-establish itself Sylean Federation scouts enter Luriani space Grand Duchy of Stoner founded by dissident Syleans Third Imperium Founded Cleon I crowned Emperor
-5450	Luriani encounter unknown race and gain Jump drive technology	73	Imperial vessels begin skirmishing with Sydymic Empire ships in Ley sector
-5435	Vilani Trade & Contact fleet passes through Luriani space	93	Imperial-Luriani war begins
-5430	Vilani develop Jump-2 drive	96	Imperial-Luriani war ends; Second Luriani Protectorate absorbed into Imperium
-5421	Vilani Jump-2 battle fleet passes through Luriani space and into Ley sector	100	Imperial/Sydymic war begins in earnest
-5415	Zhodani discover Jump drive	120	Imperial-Sydymic war ends as Imperials pull back
-5402	Remnants of Vilani Jump-2 fleet reach Vland	191	Julian War begins
-5400	Vilani begin Consolidation Wars	195	Julian War ends in stalemate. Imperial depots at Ley and Fornast sectors destroyed
-4700	Vilani Consolidation Wars reach Ley sector Negotiations between Luriani and Vilani begin	200	Formal absorption of Luriani into Imperium begins with Treaty of Daramm
-4600	Luriani military buildup alarms Vilani	202	Second Luriani Cultural Region declared
-4582	Vilani – Luriani war begins	217	Second Luriani Cultural Region
-4547	Last Luriani worlds surrender to Vilani after a long and bitter war	220	Luriani fully absorbed into Imperium, though with certain guarantees
-4546	The Luriani "Year of Woe" inflicted by Vilani investigators	420	Imperials complete First Survey of the Imperium
-4520	Solomani calendar begins (1 AD)	588	Terra incorporated into the Third Imperium
-4404	Vilani absorb Vega	604	Imperial Civil War begins. Fleet assets withdrawn from Ley Sector
-4045	Vilani Consolidation Wars end Ziru Sirka declared (1VI)		
-4000	(approx)Vilani cease exploration	622	Sydites begin operations against Imperial worlds
-3500	Ziru Sirka reaches its greatest size	624	Imperial Civil War ends
-2559	Solomani space exploration begins	640	Imperial Xboat service established
-2500	Karhyri gain Jump drive	672	Imperial fleets return in force to Ley sector and begin counteroffensive against Sydites
-2460	Solomani establish bases throughout the solar system		Imperial fleets retake lost territory and push into Sydymic systems
-2431	Solomani discover Jump drive	673	Sydites attempt to sue for peace
		675	Imperial forces take Sopater. Sydymic War ends

704	Solomani Autonomous Region established
778	Sydymic Empire remnants form Khuur League
800	Imperials begin PsionicSuppressions
850	Pirates from Gateway Sector begin to raid into Ley sector
871	Solomani Confederation established
950	Solomani Autonomous Region dissolved
990	Solomani Rim War begins (Imperial/Solomani Confederation)
991	Marcus Aaron Erechs installed as Archduke of Gateway
992	Gateway Domain Capital moved to Annapabar
993	The Present

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This adventure takes place in the year 993 since the founding of the Third Imperium. The Imperium is fairly stable at this point in its history, having reached its natural boundaries in most regions. There is still room to expand in the Gateway area, but there is no great urgency about this. The odd world petitions to join the Imperium from time to time; most are eventually accepted and so the border creeps out a parsec or two every 10-20 years.

Imperial influence reaches far out into the neutral region, but this is simply a matter of external trade rather than expansion. The Imperium has pretty much all it needs. However, there is still internal and external tension, as described in later sections.

In the time frame of this campaign, the Imperium has been at war with the Solomani Confederation since 990. The Solomani struck first and made good initial gains but as this adventure begins, their offensives are beginning to run out of steam and the Imperials have started to retake some systems.

The Solomani Rim War is many parsecs from the setting of this adventure. Its presence is felt, however both directly and more subtly.

THE THIRD IMPERIUM

The Third Imperium is more a trade federation than a true Empire. Its worlds govern themselves (with the exception of a few Imperial Preserves and military bases.), contributing funds to support the Imperial Bureaucracy, Nobility and Military.

The Imperium provides for its member worlds a common foreign policy, a means to mediate disputes, and a unified military (particularly the Navy) that can defeat almost any threat. Other than imposing and upholding certain High Laws, the Imperium does not interfere in the affairs of its member worlds unless absolutely necessary.

Thus the Emperor, who rules from Capital in Core sector, does not really rule the 11,000 worlds of his Imperium. What he does is control the space between them and thus all interstellar trade. He is the ultimate arbiter of disputes and protector of his people.

The Emperor's representatives at lower levels are the Imperial nobility. The Imperium is divided into Domains, each the province of an Archduke. Each Domain is made up of four Sectors, each with a Sector Duke, and each Sector has sixteen Subsectors. There is a Subsector Duke associated with Each Subsector.

The courts of Archdukes and Dukes are where ambassadors from states over the border come to negotiate treaties and trade agreements. The great nobility have broad powers in their region. Answering to them are lower levels of nobility – Counts, Marquises and Barons. Some of these nobles are planetary rulers; most are not. What they are is representatives of the planet associated with their title, appointed to the court of a Marquis, Count or Duke to ensure that issues concerning the world are dealt with fairly.

Alongside the Peerage is a different set of nobles – Knights and Baronets. Some of these individuals are also planetary representatives, while others have special duties and others are individuals honored for their achievements.

Nobles do not command the fleets and armies of the Imperium. That function is fulfilled by admirals and generals. What nobles do is provide political direction and advice. The interplay between an Archduke and the admirals commanding the fleets assigned to his domain is a subtle one. Normally the Archduke has the power to commit the fleet to battle or other operations, but this is subject to the admiral's agreement to a great extent. The partnership between political and military leaders is a source of great strength when it functions smoothly, and can cause disasters if it goes awry for any reason.

The Imperial nobility is thus highly influential, especially since many nobles are also generals, admirals or leaders of great commercial enterprises. However, there are other factors at play in the Imperium. The Megacorporations wield massive influence, as do certain political institutions. Individual worlds rarely have the economic muscle to make much difference, but some are important enough to swing an issue one way or another.

GATEWAY DOMAIN

Gateway Domain lies at the Trailing edge of the Imperium, and is squeezed somewhat by the Lesser Rift and the Delphi Rift (also known as the Darksky Gulf). Nominally containing four sectors, in fact the Domain contains only about one sector's worth of Imperial territory. Most of Ley Sector is Imperial territory, with a few worlds in neighboring Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector. Another Imperial enclave exists in the Reaches, but due to communications difficulties caused by the Darksky Gulf this region is administered from Delphi.

Despite this rather small amount of territory, Gateway is a full Domain, with an Archduke and the appropriate bureaucratic apparatus. Gateway is of considerable strategic importance since it provides access to the buffer zone between the Imperium and the 2000 Worlds and the Hive Federation, and thus an avenue through which to influence events in that region. In the event of war with the 2000 Worlds (a distinct possibility, given that the K'Kree of the 2000 Worlds hate meat-eaters, which includes humans, and have some factions sworn to actively exterminate all such 'vermin'), the Gateway region would be the best choke point to halt an assault.

The Domain is currently administered by Archduke Marcus Aaron Erechs, an entrepreneurial commoner elevated to the position by the Emperor in the hope of turning the Domain economy round. The previous Archduke, Marshal Nells, was deposed (though he remains Sector Duke for Ley Sector) for his incompetence and his running of the Domain economy for the benefit of an 'old guard' of entrenched commercial concerns.

The new Archduke has recently moved his capital to Annapabar, a previously trivial iceball world almost on the Imperial border. His

declaration of the surrounding cluster of worlds (now known as the Imperial Trade Cluster), to receive considerable investment and eventually to become the showcase of the sector's economy, has caused a great deal of controversy, particularly among the 'old guard'.

Gateway Domain is defended by the Ley Sector Fleet of the Imperial Navy, plus reserve and local-defence forces. Most Domains have a named fleet for each Sector, but Gateway is really only one sector (Ley) so only has one named fleet plus a collection of extra vessels to cover the possessions in Glimmerdrift. This fleet is thus normally overstrength, but has been reduced by transfers to other fleets heading for the battle areas in the Solomani Rim War. Imperial authority is thus stretched rather thin in Gateway Domain.

LEY SECTOR

Ley Sector is mostly Imperial territory, though it does contain one foreign power (the Khuur League) and several independent worlds. Bounded to Coreward-Trailing and Rimward-Spinward by areas of rift, Ley Sector lies at the very edge of the Imperium and provides a "gateway" into or out of Imperial space (hence the Domain name) towards the Hive Federation and the Two Thousand Worlds.

To Spinward of Ley sector is Fornast Sector and the Imperial Core. Most trade and commerce involving the Imperium comes in from this direction. To Spinward-Coreward and Coreward respectively lie Antares and the Empty Quarter sectors, which also contain Imperial territory. Other than a few worlds in the Glimmerdrift Reaches, to Rimward, the sector has no other borders with Imperial space.

To Trailing is Gateway Sector. This region lies wholly beyond Imperial space and travel there by Jump-2 ships is somewhat difficult. The only Jump-2 route runs through independent space dominated by the powerful world of Phoniwt. Higher-Jump ships have more choice of route, but contact is still rather limited. Gateway contains several fairly large states, mostly populated by humans. Beyond Gateway Sector lies the territory of the K'Kree, the 2000 Worlds.

Directly to Rimward is Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector. Several worlds in this sector belong to the Imperium, and Imperial trade ships move across the sector border with considerable frequency. Beyond the small Imperial enclave, various states exist but the vast majority of worlds are independent. The bulk of the population are human, of distant Solomani origin. The region was largely settled in the last days of the Rule of Man. Many of the colonists were actually fleeing problems 'back home'; others grew well apart during the Long Night. Thus while there is some Solomani sympathy as a result of common origin, the people of Glimmerdrift are mostly independents with a history of their own.

To Rimward-Trailing of Ley Sector is Crucis Margin Sector, which lies beyond Imperial territory. Astrography and complications raised by the Deadspace Phenomenon ensure that a lengthy transit through non-Imperial space is necessary to visit this sector. At its far edge is a world populated by Droyne and the border of the Hive Federation.

The vast majority of people in Ley sector are humans (of various types) with the largest minorities being Vargr in Imperial space. Various minor species are present as part of the Imperium or native to one of the worlds of the region. Many worlds have mixed populations of humans and other species. In some cases the groups live apart (especially in the case where a small human presence exists on the homeworld of a minor and low-tech race. On most true starfaring worlds, however, integration is complete. People (of all species) settle wherever they please.

Ley Sector is vitally important to the Imperium as a "choke point" controlling access to the Imperial core regions, though for many years (and with the Solomani Rim War taking place in the Solomani Rim) an increasing feeling of complacency about the region has crept into official policy and daily life. A small percentage of the population consider themselves to be 'Keepers of the Gate' and remain vigilant, but they are vastly outnumbered by people who think of their region as stable and safe.

In reality, there is no major nearby threat. However, the K'Kree of the Two Thousand Worlds are only a sector away. Relations are always a little strained due to the K'Kree hatred of all omnivore races such as Humaniti. Outright war is unlikely while the Imperium maintains a powerful deterrent force in the region, but incidents are not uncommon.

Ley Sector is divided for administrative purposes into sixteen subsectors. These are, by convention, lettered A-P in a 4X4 grid starting at A in the top left and going across to the right, then E at the left of the second row, and so on to the bottom-left.

The subsectors of Ley Sector are named thus:

- A) Ikhnaton
- B) Nightmare
- C) Noir Deep
- D) Zagrathian
- E) Spearhead
- F) Guadix Drift
- G) Titanstorm
- H) Osiris Deep
- I) Highlord
- J) Matarishan
- K) Frontier Worlds
- L) Sydymic
- M) Satyressia
- N) Outreaumer
- O) Diamond-Prince
- P) Outworld

For astrographic and some administrative purposes, the subsectors are grouped into four Quadrants, each containing four subsectors arranged in a block. The quadrants are names Alpha (top-left, or Coreward-Spinward), Beta (Top-right, or Coreward-Trailing), Gamma (bottom left, or Rimward-Spinward) and Delta (bottom-right, or Rimward-Trailing).

Quadrants are mainly used as a tool to analyse activity (industrial, criminal, military and commercial etc) across a region, and as a guide in deployment of naval assets. In many ways, the quadrants of Ley sector have distinct characteristics; Alpha Quadrant has a large Luriani and Vilani population, Beta Quadrant is mostly Rift space devoid of planets.

The events described in this book take place in the Gamma and Delta quadrants of Ley Sector, so only those are described here.

GAMMA QUADRANT

Gamma Quadrant is composed of Highlord, Matarishan, Satyressia and Outreaumer subsectors. Of these, Satyressia is dominated by the Darksky Gulf and thus contains few worlds. Other major astrographic features include one end of a main named the Serpent Main which links to a large cluster now known as the Imperial Trade Cluster, lying in Delta Quadrant. The Coreward subsectors (Highlord and Matarishan) have several mains and clusters including one end of the critical Reaching Arm, which allows Jump-1 traffic to ply most of the subsectors of the Alpha, Beta and Gamma quadrants. Other clusters include the Shanape Cluster and part of the Shanape Link Worlds, which between them create a Jump-2 'shortcut' off the Reaching Arm into Alpha Quadrant.

A little trade enters the gamma Quadrant through the Spinward edge of Highlord Subsector and more comes into Highlord and Matarishan from the Alpha Quadrant. Most through trade joins the Serpent Main for transit to the Imperial Trade Cluster and thence either Rimward into Glimmerdrift Reaches sector or Trailing into the independent worlds across the border.

However, most trade in the region is local, carried aboard Jump-1 vessels plying the local clusters.

There is some Luriani cultural influence in the Coreward end of the quadrant, and also Vilani influences, but for the most part the local culture is as diverse as, and falls within the limits of, standard Imperial culture.

DELTA QUADRANT

Delta Quadrant is composed of Frontier Worlds, Sydymic, Diamond-Prince and Outworld subsectors, and lies on the very fringe of Imperial space. There are no huge rifts, and worlds are fairly closely grouped, with several clusters, except in the Coreward end of Sydymic subsector, where the Lesser Rift intrudes.

The Trailing half of the Serpent Main crosses Diamond-Prince subsector; the main coils around the Imperial Trade Cluster and allows Jump-2 ships to cross into and out of the ITC, eventually connecting the end of the Reaching Arm to head into the Coreward quadrants. Other clusters include the Khuur Cluster (core territory of the Khuur league) and the Outworld Fringe Cluster.

The Domain capital (but not the sector capital) now lies within Delta Quadrant, at Annapabar in the Imperial Trade Cluster. The ITC is receiving heavy investment and has a burgeoning economy. While the ITC does a lot of internal trade, it is also the marshalling point for cross-border trade into and out of Imperial space. Almost every ship that carries goods into or out of the Imperium passes through the ITC or the worlds of the Serpent Main.

Although the local culture is very diverse, Solomani influences are quite strong on some worlds, and a large minority of citizens identify closely with the Solomani.

Many of the worlds of Delta Quadrant are independent or client states of the Imperium. The largest single non-Imperial power is the Khuur League, which includes several developed worlds in the Khuur and Outworld Fringe clusters. The Khuur League is known to be investing on worlds outside its borders.

The independent world of Phoniwt, long a major market world in the region and a link to Gateway Sector, is also exerting greater economic dominance in recent years, perhaps as a result of the collapse of several major firms based out of rival Askhar.

The Hivers recently established a trade mission on the world of Gashuki. This enclave lies just outside the Imperial border and considerable commercial activity takes place between it and the Imperial Trade Cluster. Why the Hivers suddenly need feel they a trade base on the Imperial border is not known.

THE IMPERIAL SITUATION IN LEY SECTOR

As the main power in Ley Sector, events in the Imperium dominate the daily life of citizens of the worlds of the sector. The two biggest events unfolding in Ley Sector both concern the Imperium. The replacement of the Archduke and subsequent economic upheaval is sending ripples right through the sector. Business affairs are very fluid as new firms take advantage of the opportunities now available. Marketplace jockeying, dirty tricks and the occasional trade war make the business scene a rather volatile one at present.

The other major event is of course the Solomani Rim War. While the war itself is being fought far away, the transfer of navy vessels is stretching the Imperial Navy thin in the sector. Although losses have been to some extent made good with reserve vessels, the reduced Navy presence has resulted in an increase in piracy and smuggling.

The political effect of the war is also considerable. With Imperial attention elsewhere and the economy in flux, several political groups have decided to increase their activities and make what gains they can during the crisis. The Solomani Confederation has offered covert support to some of these groups, though most want nothing to do with foreign powers. Solomani agitation and covert operations are also on the increase throughout the sector, as the Confederation attempts to take advantage of the disruption.

In recent years, Solomani-inspired terrorism and some commerce raiding has become a major problem in the area. Security units of the Imperial Army and large numbers of patrol vessels have been moved into the affected areas to restore stability. This has caused protests from some border states (not all of them sympathetic to the Solomani), who see the increased Imperial military presence as a threat.

POLITICS

As with all Imperial territory, the worlds of Ley Sector are self-governing. Each planet provides for its own defense as best it can, selects its own style of government, and administers its own laws. Agreements between worlds are normally acceptable so long as they do not restrict the free trade of others.

Each world has one or more Imperial Nobles associated with it. These nobles are not usually planetary rulers, and in many cases they are not even native to "their" world. Their function is to represent the world's interests at various levels of Imperial administration; in effect serving as liaison between the planetary government and the Emperor or his Archduke. Depending upon the status of a particular world, its representing noble may be a Knight, a Baronet, a Baron or a Marquis.

Several levels of Imperial representation exist. Groups of 3-4 worlds have a Count associated with them. This powerful individual maintains a court where representatives of the worlds in the group can interact. Local problems are often dealt with at this level; agreements reached or deals thrashed out by nobles representing the local worlds. Nobles from outside the cluster represented by the Count will often come to his (or her) court to represent their interests to the group as a whole.

If a matter cannot be adequately settled at the court of the local Count, it can be taken to a higher court. Each subsector is the responsibility of a Duke, a very powerful individual whose court is responsible for settling matters occurring within the subsector, and is also a place where representatives of worlds outside the subsector can come to deal with cross-subsector issues.

Above the Subsector Dukes is the Sector Duke. At present this is Marshal Nells, who retained this position even though stripped of his Archducal title by the Emperor. Nells has his court at the Sector Capital, Dukh, in the Alpha Quadrant. Dukh was, but is no longer, also the Domain capital. As Sector Duke, Nells is also the political master of the Imperial fleets assigned to the region, though his orders must go through the proper Navy chain of command. This creates some rather interesting politics since the Ley Sector Fleet (answering to Nells) is the only real naval force in the Domain, and as such answers to Archduke Erechs as well.

The Archduke, Marcus Aaron Erechs, has a court at Annapabar where matters which cannot be settled at Sector level are dealt with. The only authority above the Archduke is the Emperor himself.

These increasingly powerful nobles are charged with dealing with internal and external matters within their jurisdiction, subject to guidelines that filter down from higher courts and in accordance with High Law and Imperial precedent.

Many worlds maintain a representative only at the next highest court (that of the Count, usually), though some have a representative noble at each level, right up to the Imperial Court itself. The normal practice is to present a case to the Count, whose own representative takes it to the Duke if needed. The Duke will take it further if necessary. This responsibility to represent lower nobles, even in the case where the Count or Duke disagrees with them over the matter at hand, is one of the fundamentals of the Imperial system.

Note that while the Nobility will represent and act for a world, they do not rule it and can do nothing more than advise the world government of the situation and of the best course of action. Worlds rule themselves; the Imperial government structure exists to facilitate relations between the worlds and ensure that nobody is shooting at the member worlds as they get on with their business. However, worlds that ignore Imperial High Law are corrected using any and all means the Archduke can bring to bear. The Imperial Navy is the usual means by which correction is applied; measures range from economic sanctions enforced by Naval vessels to planetary assault.

Imperial jurisdiction begins 100 diameters out from a world. Beyond that limit, local forces have no legal jurisdiction, though there are special guidelines governing deployed naval forces defending a world. In the 10-100 diameter region, Imperial forces share jurisdiction for most purposes, and within 10 diameters, a world government has complete jurisdiction, with one exception.

Starports are considered to be Imperial territory. They may be owned and operated by the local government, a corporate body, or any other suitable agency, but the port itself is an area of Imperial jurisdiction. This means that law level may be different from that of the host world (Most ports have a standard law level of 3, but this is not carved in stone).

Ports are often (but not always) guarded by a detachment of Imperial Marines, who also protect diplomatic and bureaucratic staff assigned there. Marines do not normally conduct law enforcement however; portside security or Ministry of Justice personnel are assigned to this task.

Note that there is no unified "Imperial Customs Service". Customs inspections and contraband seizure is a task shared by port operators, the Imperial Navy and local naval forces, plus the Ministry of Justice. The Imperial Navy trains personnel from all services in common techniques, but since there are many jurisdictions in Imperial space, the Navy only conducts searches in deep space or upon suspicious vessels. Routine customs work is a matter for local forces.

IMPERIAL MILITARY

While worlds provide for their own defence as they see fit, the Imperium maintains strong Naval and Marine forces, backed up by the Imperial Army, to deter or repel aggressors.

Most of Ley Sector's major naval units are concentrated in the Alpha quadrant of the Sector, around the Dukh naval complex and the depot in the Ugiirkidan system (1420). "Tripwire" forces and local-reaction units composed mainly of fast cruisers are the predominant force in the other regions, backed in some cases by battle units. Colonial squadrons belonging to the more affluent worlds are larger than in many other Imperial regions due to the nature of the possible K'Kree threat.

A new naval base has been opened on Mamikha in the Imperial Trade Cluster, and naval assets are regularly deployed to defend Annapabar. This is seen as a necessity since the Domain capital is very close to non-Imperial space and could conceivably be the target for a surprise assault.

In addition to the regular Imperial military forces, many nobles maintain household forces referred to as 'Huscarles'. Most household forces do not include warships, but Archduke Erechs is known to be constructing a squadron of warships whose crews are personally loyal to him. This is pushing the boundaries of permitted household forces, but so far no comment has been made by the Emperor.

Other private military forces include the security troops deployed by the Megacorporations, various ground and space mercenary units, and the Loyal Sector Guard. The latter is a loyalist organisation which, while technically illegal, does good work in deterring terrorist and commerce raiding attacks. It is composed of mercenaries, Huscarles loyal to various nobles, some planetary forces on loan and some corporate troops. One of the main proponents of the LSG is Duke Nells.

Nells' connection to the LSG may be nothing more than a reaction to Erechs' private fleet, but some observers say there may be more to the situation than meets the eye.

THE IMPERIAL TRADE CLUSTER

The Imperial Trade Cluster consists of 12 worlds in the Diamond-Prince subsector. While some worlds of the cluster are not really suitable for economic development, the ITC as a whole has the potential to become a major economic power in the region and perhaps even right across the Imperium. As with some of Erechs' other concepts, the ITC Charter pushes the outer limits of the

agreements permitted between worlds.

The economic potential of the ITC has prompted some opposition from the established Megacorporations; notably Tukera Lines, which has been investing in routes and ports in the Ley Sector region for some years, and Sharurshid, an old Vilani Megacorporation that sees the rise of new economic powers as a challenge to its supremacy.

As yet the ITC is absorbing more capital than it generates, but the heavy investments will eventually pay off. The real question is whether Archduke Erechs can justify further spending to the Emperor. At present the results are very promising but even a few setbacks might turn the ITC into a money pit rather than a lucrative investment.

Archduke Erechs has a lot riding on his flagship economic project, and there are those who would like to see it fail.

THE IMPERIAL BORDER

The Imperial border is actually a rather complex concept. Vessels entering a system claimed by the Imperium are subject to inspection by the Imperial Navy and all regulations regarding traffic in Imperial systems, but the worlds along the Imperial border each have their own trade policies.

This means that there is no blanket 'border procedure'. Some systems make it very easy to bring goods across the border, others are more restrictive. Some world governments disapprove of or put tariffs on certain types of goods, while others give preferential trade rates on shipments of one type or another for their own reasons. It is generally possible to get people and goods across the border almost anywhere, but the type and amount of paperwork involved varies considerably. Some brokerages and shipping firms specialize in getting goods into and out of the Imperium with minimal hassle and cost. Others do the same but aim to avoid such interference altogether. The authorities unkindly call this 'smuggling' and take a dim view of it.

The Imperium has extradition treaties with some worlds in the border region and maintains a state of vigilance in systems within a few parsecs of the border. Imperial Marshals are stationed on some worlds beyond the border, too. It is not uncommon for a fugitive to slip right through the border zone only to be arrested just after reaching the 'safety' of non-Imperial space.

Thus there is in reality no hard 'Imperial Border'. What does exist is a 'Border Zone' where cargoes, ships and people may be subject to greater scrutiny than deeper into the Imperium. The level of scrutiny of course varies according to local conditions; there are some areas that are gas-tight while others are as impermeable as a birdcage.

THE IMPERIAL MEGACORPORATIONS

The Imperial Megacorporations wield massive power and influence. In many cases their security forces dwarf the armies of entire planets, though of course Megacorps are not set up to fight wars. Most of the Megacorporations are old, with established ties to the Imperial Nobility and vested interests across Imperial space.

Most of the Megacorps have their main interests in the well-developed core regions of the Imperium, with regional and subsidiary offices in the provincial regions. However, their influence

is felt everywhere and their products are available throughout the Imperium and beyond. Some of the Megacorps have more interest in the Ley Sector region than others. Only those with major interests in the region are listed here.

Delgado – Delgado is a collection of huge firms and business interests forming a Business Group. It is not yet rated as a Megacorporation, though Megacorp status seems likely in the next few years. Delgado's interests include military equipment and minerals, plus general trading. The corporation operates a fleet of large freighters and is notorious for its employment policies, which favor a small number of employees at the expense of the majority. Delgado got its start by taking up the slack in the provinces where the other Megacorps' hold was not so tight. This is less important these days but Delgado is still a major player in the economy of Ley Sector.

General Products – General is a manufacturing conglomerate that deals mainly in heavy equipment such as starships and vehicles. General has a few plants in Ley Sector, the largest of which supplies the yards of its subsidiary, General Starships Ley (situated at Dukh), with heavy components such as reactors and hull sections.

Geschichtkreis Sternschiffbau AG – GsbAG is primarily a shipbuilding firm that operates a number of yards throughout Ley Sector. The firm also operates a number of specialized research institutes throughout the sector.

Hortalez et Cie – Hortalez deals in finance, providing capital and financial services to other businesses. Its operations in Gateway Domain are currently based at Dukh, but a move to the new Domain capital, Annapabar, is likely.

Instellarms – Instellarms deals in weaponry and trained mercenary personnel. The firm offers an accreditation and registration service for merc units and individuals, and is renowned for its strictly legal dealings. Instellarms deals mainly with bulk orders. Its subsidiary, Portcullis Defense, manufactures and markets a range of quality weaponry across the Gateway region. Instellarms does occasionally deal outside the Imperial border; Portcullis has a whole chain of sales facilities outside Imperial space.

Ling Standard Products – LSP is active in the fields of mining, vehicles, weaponry and high-technology equipment. The firm not only manufacture equipment but in some cases operates it; LSP has outsystem mining operations in several areas of Gateway.

Naasirka – Naasirka deals mainly in computer equipment and robotics. The firm maintains a major research and development facility in Ley Sector, and has manufacturing plants on several worlds. Naasirka is one of the most active Megacorporations beyond the Imperial border.

Schunemann und Sohn, AG – SuSAG is the market leader in chemicals and pharmaceuticals. The firm's facilities are widespread throughout Gateway Domain, and sponsored medical facilities can be found on many low-tech worlds.

Sharushid – Sharushid is in business to do business. The firm engages in trade rather than manufacturing, and offers a brokerage service at most large starports. Sharushid factors can be encountered anywhere where there is money to be made from business. Several large brokerages in the ITC and surrounding region specialize in cross-border trade.

Tukera Lines – Tukera is the most famous of all shipping lines. Its vessels are encountered on major shipping lanes, conducting regular services rather than speculative trading. Tukera trains its people well and rewards loyalty. Vessels are well protected by their own armament and security personnel. Tukera has invested heavily in facilities and routes in Ley Sector, though interest is mainly centered in the Alpha quadrant.

Zirunkariish – Zirunkariish is an investment firm, which mainly funds the development of mid-tech worlds and starports on major routes. The firm owns and runs several ports in Ley Sector as subsidiaries.

OTHER FORCES IN THE IMPERIUM

A number of political organizations are at work in the Gamma and Delta quadrants of Ley Sector. Some of the more prominent are detailed here.

EQUAL SENTIENTS MOVEMENT

The ESM exists to ensure that all sentient beings within the Imperium receive the equal treatment to which they are entitled. EMS is a quiet, dignified organization that applies pressure against world governments that are apparently not treating their non-human citizens correctly. As might be expected in the human-dominated Imperium, the bulk of ESM's membership is non-human.

Within the ITC region, the ESM has a great deal of contact with the Hiver Trade Mission and the various Wanderer enclaves in Imperial space. The Hiver connection has attracted a certain amount of criticism since Hiver manipulation is a cause for worry to many citizens. The ESM maintains that this is exactly the sort of racist misconception that it exists to challenge.

Interestingly, ESM has no known Ursa members. The Ursa do not discuss why they are not interested in membership, except perhaps among themselves.

THE LOYAL SECTOR GUARD

The Loyal Sector Guard is a powerful but unofficial military organization which exists within the Domain of Gateway. Its stated purpose is to defend the lives and property of Imperial citizens from all threats – i.e. the same as the official Imperial armed forces.

The LSG is formed from assets donated by various members: noble household troops, mercenary units, planetary armed forces, corporate security units and some specially-raised forces. It consists mainly of ground-combat units equipped as mid-tech light infantry (i.e. security forces rather than battlefield units) but does have a number of starships and "real" military units among its ranks.

The LSG has its own rank and pay structure, a uniform, and a strict code of conduct for its members, all of whom take a personal oath of loyalty to "The Imperium, her Citizens, and the Emperor".

The LSG is technically forbidden by Imperial Law. While the law does not prohibit the formation of properly-accountable mercenary forces in the service of a corporation or an individual, the creation of a widespread organisation paralleling the Imperial Armed Forces

is specifically prohibited. Despite this, the LSG has not been shut down. It is led by several powerful figures in the sector, and has some popular support due to its policy of sending forces to protect places the Navy and Army cannot or will not. LSG personnel have met their deaths in the defence of citizens, and (other than by its existence) the LSG remains strictly within the law.

Many LSG members are well-known loyalists and some are Imperial officials whose integrity is beyond reproach. Other members (and quite prominent ones, at that) may be motivated by political considerations. Tension with the official armed forces is considerable, but it is recognised that closing down the LSG would be very unpopular with the citizens they protect. Only time will tell if the LSG manages to establish itself as a power in the region, but already its influence is being felt.

The LSG must have immense funding available; likely this comes from several sources. In addition to large numbers of security troops (equipped to TL8 standards for the most part), the Guard also deploys advisory teams, patrol and escort ships, fighter wings and even regular ground forces. The latter are mainly fairly small, being in the main mercenary units, but it is thought that the LSG could muster an entire Lift Infantry division, with armored support.

The LSG does have significant space forces. Its ships are small; armed traders and small patrol vessels for the most part; capable of dealing with pirates but little use in a real engagement. Rumors do persist that the LSG has purchased and is reactivating a number of obsolete cruiser-class vessels. While still inferior to a regular Navy ship, these vessels would give the LSG a far greater capability.

In addition, the LSG has large numbers of small, cheap fighters and a few larger gunships. These vessels (and supporting technical crews) are deployed in backwater systems, where they enforce local and Imperial law and create a measure of offworld defense.

The Guard also operates a number of manufacturing centres, and is now a player in the sector arms market. Products include smallarms, conversion kits for civilian vehicles, and a line of cheap, easy-to-maintain "people's fighters" intended to allow poor worlds to obtain at least some means of offworld defense.

Within the ITC, the LSG has a relatively minor presence, though a few prominent citizens display their allegiance openly despite the Archduke's disapproval. Several border worlds have recently benefited from the deployment of LSG space and ground forces, and approval is growing steadily among those who don't actually mind who is shooting at the pirates so long as *someone* is.

THE FREE PEOPLES ALLIANCE

The FPA was formed in the 700s as a counter to Imperial expansion and potential aggression. It is part political movement and part guerrilla force. The FPA generally does not oppose Imperial interests directly, but instead provides smallarms, cash and advice to other organizations which are engaged in direct action.

The extent of the FPA is unknown. It is likely that its core assets are quite small, but connections with various power groups, commercial interests and dissident organizations allow it to wield a great deal of power. The FPA has a number of blockade-runners available (mainly small merchant craft) which it uses to deliver aid to those fighting the Imperium. The actual size and composition of the organization are unknown, but FPA is thought to have links to the Solomani.

It is thought that the FPA is involved in a large proportion of the cross-border smuggling that occurs in Ley Sector. Its hand has also been seen in certain insurrections and other anti-Imperial activities.

LONG NIGHT REMEMBRANCE

A violently anti-Solomani movement, LNR's title refers to the collapse of the First (or Vilani) Imperium into the Long Night, an event that the pro-Vilani members of LNR blame entirely upon the Solomani. LNR was once a noisy but peaceful political movement and as such was tolerated by the Imperial authorities. However, in the past decade its members have carried out a bitter campaign of murder, intimidation and terrorism on several worlds, and the organization is now officially banned within the Imperium.

Numbers and membership of the LNR are of course not known. It is likely that the group has the backing of high-up Imperial nobles of pro-Vilani leanings, but thus far nothing has been proven.

It is thought that some members of the Loyal Sector Guard have ties to LNR and may be using LSG assets to oppose Solomani influence in the region (probably a good thing from the point of view of many Imperial citizens) but also to fight internal anti-Solomani campaigns that have more to do with ancient cultural hatred than the security of the Imperium.

THE KHUUR LEAGUE

The Khuur league is all that remains of the once-powerful Sydytic Empire. The Sydites ruled the Gamma and Delta quadrants of Ley sector for a time, and have small populations on several worlds. Those situated on Imperial worlds are of course either diplomatic/trade missions or else Imperial citizens, and there is little reason to suppose that these Imperial Sydites are any less loyal to the Imperium than a cultural Luriani, Solomani or Vilani citizen.

The League itself is an economic federation with no central political aim, though its charter does define one of its aims as mutual defense of its members. This is accomplished for the most part by joint funding for orbital fortresses, System Defence Boats and similar local defensive measures. The League does not possess a navy as such, though there is a force of patrol vessels and armed merchant cruisers that could put up a fight of sorts against a serious invader and certainly suffices to deal with minor threats like corsairs.

The Khuur league has in recent years begun to expand its economic interests beyond the borders of the league, with investment in non-aligned or even Imperial worlds. This is a new departure for the Sydites, who are not known for their inventiveness or keen interest in commerce. Patrol ships and small warships manufactured in the League, though not used by the League itself, are proving a popular export item since the Sydites build their equipment to be extremely rugged and easy to maintain in less-than-ideal conditions.

The Sydite economic expansion is a cause for concern in some quarters, but it does not seem to be accompanied by any military buildup, so it discounted as a serious threat to Imperial security.

THE HIVER PRESENCE

The Hivers have an almost excessive streak of curiosity. Their ships wander far and wide, and can be encountered even deep in the Imperium. It is not uncommon for Hivers to settle somewhere, either for a time or permanently. However, the presence on Gashuki in Diamond-Prince subsector is a fairly major colony with several

settlements ('nests'), a development that has Imperial experts puzzled.

All kinds of opinions have been advanced. The Hivers claim that their presence is a simple trade mission, and indeed Gashuki is involved in a great deal of trade. Some experts suggest that there is a hidden purpose; perhaps the Hivers of Gashuki are there to observe the Imperials close-up for some purpose. The more paranoid, knowing the Hiver penchant for manipulation, think that the Hivers are there to subtly manipulate events in the region. Certainly their presence has had an effect, but whether there is a plan or not is a matter for conjecture.

Several observers have suggested that the Hivers are simply there to watch the Imperials panic and scramble about trying to work out what they're up to, i.e. that the Gashuki mission is nothing but a big Hiver practical joke. Others contend that this is exactly what the devious Hivers *want* everyone to think...

What is known is that Gashuki is a horrible little iceball world with no atmosphere, where nobody lived and nobody wanted to before the Hivers arrived. Normally they would choose a world with breathable air and wilderness areas for their young. However, they were limited in terms of the worlds available (or perhaps they wanted Gashuki for reasons they have not divulged) and built several small enclosed habitation areas.

Now perhaps 10,000 people – mostly Hivers but also some others, including humans – dwell on Gashuki. Hiver ships come and go regularly, making the long, long haul out from the Hive Federation and back. Imperial ships come to Gashuki to trade, and some non-Imperial vessels also cross into the Imperium to trade with the Hivers.

Gashuki is known to have a small ground defence force manned by Ithklur, and the system is patrolled by Hiver vessels. There is no indication that the Hivers of Gashuki present anything resembling a threat to the Imperial Trade Cluster.

THE WANDERING PEOPLE

The insectoid Wanderers entered the Gateway region around year 320 after crossing the Lesser Rift in their Worldships. The first Worldships are thought to have reached the Gamma and delta quadrants around 700-800, and since then the Wanderers have set up small trading enclaves on several worlds. Humans (and other non-Wanderers) are rarely allowed into these enclaves, though Wanderer representatives are courteous and even friendly when meeting on neutral ground.

It is not known how many Wanderers are present in the Gamma and Delta quadrants since their Worldships never enter star systems but cruise through interstellar space, sending out Jump-capable vessels to visit worlds. The IISS has managed to track at least three Worldships, of varying sizes, in the region. Deep-space tracking of this kind is unreliable however, and there may be others.

Wanderers seem very alien to humans. Their insectoid origins are obvious, and the way their bodies are constructed results in a way of moving that constantly surprises and seems "wrong" to human observers. Their language is also rather difficult to translate. As a result, most Wanderers that interact with humans adopt a common human name like Bob, Alice or Eneri rather than attempting to translate their own.

The Wanderers are a mysterious people, who do not discuss their society or religious beliefs (if any) with outsiders. Thus what is known about them is mainly based upon observation and speculation, and may be inaccurate. It is generally thought that they are peaceable people who will fight ferociously in self-defence but generally prefer to negotiate or withdraw from a threat. Their nomadic lifestyle makes this relatively easy.

Wanderer technology seems to be equivalent to the Imperial TL12, though few devices have been examined by experts, and the Wanderer way of doing things is very different to the approach used by humans and most other sentients.

PART 2: REFEREE'S DATA

This section contains essential information the Referee needs in order to run the Homecoming adventure. Some of this material makes reference to commonly known 'facts' presented in the Library Data or the previous section. The data in this section supercedes such general information. As the players uncover various truths in the course of their adventures the Referee can reveal some or all of the reality behind the 'facts' already known to the players, which may lead to further misconceptions. The universe is, after all, a complex place!

SYSTEM AND SUBSECTOR DATA

Data on the local worlds is presented here, much of it in UWP format only. The referee can use this data to develop other star systems if the players decide to visit them. A few worlds are presented in more detail in the relevant Acts of this adventure.

UWP DATA:

World Name	Hex	UWP	Bases	Codes	Zone	PBG	Allegiance	Star Data
Shangri La	0933	A000655-C		As		803	I	M1 V M6 D
Ethan's Rest	0938	C957583-7		Ag Ni		113	I	K9 V A2 D
Gash	1033	A635879-A				203	I	M8 V A2 D
Great Ocean	1039	C96A377-8		Wa		904	I	G4 V M2 D
New Kurdistan	1134	B140464-A		De Ni Po		703	I	F7 V A9 D
Lirshe	1231	C202647-9		Ic Na Ni Va		203	I	G0 V
Kiikkedia	1235	B868A8A-B				115	I	K8 V
Kiliinemi	1237	C52368C-5		Na Ni Po		604	I	M2 V A0 D
Hadaskilid	1332	D774620-5		Ag Ni		422	I	K4 V M6 D
Baakh	1334	A488758-D		Ni		805	I	F6 V
Umu Harat	1339	C684523-9		Ni		624	I	G1 V F6 D A9 D
Marda	1434	B000241-B		As		100	I	K7 V
Ohasset	1435	A510998-D		In		502	I	G4 V G6 D
Khinakhi	1436	E657503-6				204	I	K7 V
Gulem Kilar	1437	D679564-6		Ni		623	I	F3 V M3 D
Gidikurda	1534	B200000-C		Va		203	I	M0 V M5 V
Initiate	1538	C000540-7		As		703	I	K1 V G7 D
Khiskami	1540	B529831-B		N		404	I	F2 V M2 D
Guarda	1633	D000566-8		As		414	I	G3 V A6 D
Sikali	1636	D324437-5		Ni		703	I	K2 V
Dalgarar	1637	A400534-B		Ni Va		814	I	G0 V
Shusknuu	1638	D440110-7	S	Po Ni De		300	I	F4 V M2 D
750-857	1732	E9A5446-4		Ni		613	I	G0 V
New Konigsberg	1733	X200735-4		Na Va		322	I	K1 V
Lepanto	1735	C555565-9		Ag Ni	A	724	I	G0 V A8 D
Egran	1832	C256555-8		Ag Ni	600	I	K3 V	
Dadegadi	1836	A443745-C		Po		104	I	F3 V
Glen Murdoch	1837	A54A742-B		Wa		102	I	K9 V
Jutland	1838	A336744-A		Ni		703	I	K1 V
Kishimaa	1933	D785779-4		Ag Ri		903	I	F5 V
Annapabar	1936	A4367A9-D	B	Ag		210	I	K3 V
Ur	1937	A652678-9		Po Ni		200	I	G1 V
Igikur	1938	E37358A-7		Ni	R	413	I	F3 V G4 D
Niin	1939	D332465-7		Ni Po	A	503	I	K3 V
Landing	2032	B560400-8		De		102	I	G4 V K1 D K6 D
Udeshasdiin	2033	C564422-9				322	I	G7 V K1 D
Kam	2034	C354301-A				210	I	G1 V G4 D
Saanshakase	2036	E550589-4		De Ni Po	R	514	I	G9 V
Angel	2037	C201643-8		Ic Ni Va		301	I	M3 V K0 D
Sik	2131	C896422-4		Ni		623	I	F9 V
Shamuus	2133	C453758-9		Po		303	I	F3 V
Zuge	2137	B676533-A		Ag Ni		524	I	G7 V A4 D
470-092	2140	E8A6854-8				502	X	F1 V
Gashuki	2232	A401431-F		Ic Ni Va		105	Hc	M2 V
Karsim	2234	D776866-3		Ag Ni	A	100	C	K0 V
Dikam	2236	C466765-7		Ni		202	I	G1 V M4 D
Mamikha	2237	E84897A-6		In	R	602	I	G2 V A9 D A4 D
Lirguu	2239	D786644-5		Ni		310	X	F0 V
Makkidaan	2332	C553430-7		Po		212	X	M0 V K2 D O1 D

Rukirligi	2435 C243678-4	N	Ni Po	213	I	G7 V
Gis	2438 B778224-8			213	X	F3 V K2 D
Aam	2439 C334800-7		Ni	110	X	G7 V F7 D

IMPORTANT WORLDS IN THE REGION

This section contains notes on some of the more important and influential worlds in the region. Full UWP stats are not really necessary; these notes are mainly so that the Referee can quickly determine a port of origin for a starship, destination for a cargo, or other piece of background color.

Each world is thumbnailed here with certain critical facts: Its allegiance, location (sector and subsector), distance from Annapabar, Whether it can be reached (from Annapabar and the Imperial Trade Cluster) by Jump-1, and an indication of time taken at an average of Jump-2 to get there from Annapabar by the shortest route, taking into account mains and rifts that may require a roundabout route. Note that transit times re best-case. They assume that only a few hours are spent in any given system. Passengers on a major route can achieve this if a suitable connection can be made. Courier ships regularly manage such speeds, and some have a higher jump number of course. For a commercial ship trading and taking on passengers at ports along the way, increase this time by 50-100%.

A brief description of the world then follows.

025-841

Allegiance: Imperial

Location: Thorstone Subsector, Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector

10 Parsecs Spinward-Rimward from Annapabar. Not reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 5 weeks

025-841 is a TL-10 world with a corrosive atmosphere which is nevertheless home to almost 10 million Imperial citizens. This is mainly due to the importance of the world as a link in the Express Boat link from the Rimwardmost Imperial possessions in Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector. It is the Rimwardmost Imperial naval base, and in truth is little more than a well-defended system with a small base from which to operate a flotilla of patrol ships and a handful of destroyers. It is rare that 025-841 is host to a larger vessel than a light carrier or light cruiser unless a major alert is underway in the region.

025-841 is used as a registry point for non-Imperial vessels wishing to re-register under an Imperial 'Flag of Convenience' to streamline their passage through Imperial space. Numerous Free Traders and the occasional freighter out of the Grand Duchy of Stoner give their port of origin as 025-841.

ANNAPABAR

Allegiance: Imperial (Domain Capital)

Location: Diamond-Prince Subsector, Ley Sector

Annapabar is the Domain capital and seat of Archduke Erechs. Its large and capable Class A starport is still under construction, so traffic can be a little chaotic. The system has both a Naval base and a Scout Service Way Station, and is of course the hub of the Imperial Trade Cluster. Many starships are registered under the ITC flag out of Annapabar, and the system sees a great deal of trade as it is the main port for trade into and out of the Imperium across the border to Trailing and to Rimward.

DADEGADI

Allegiance: Imperial

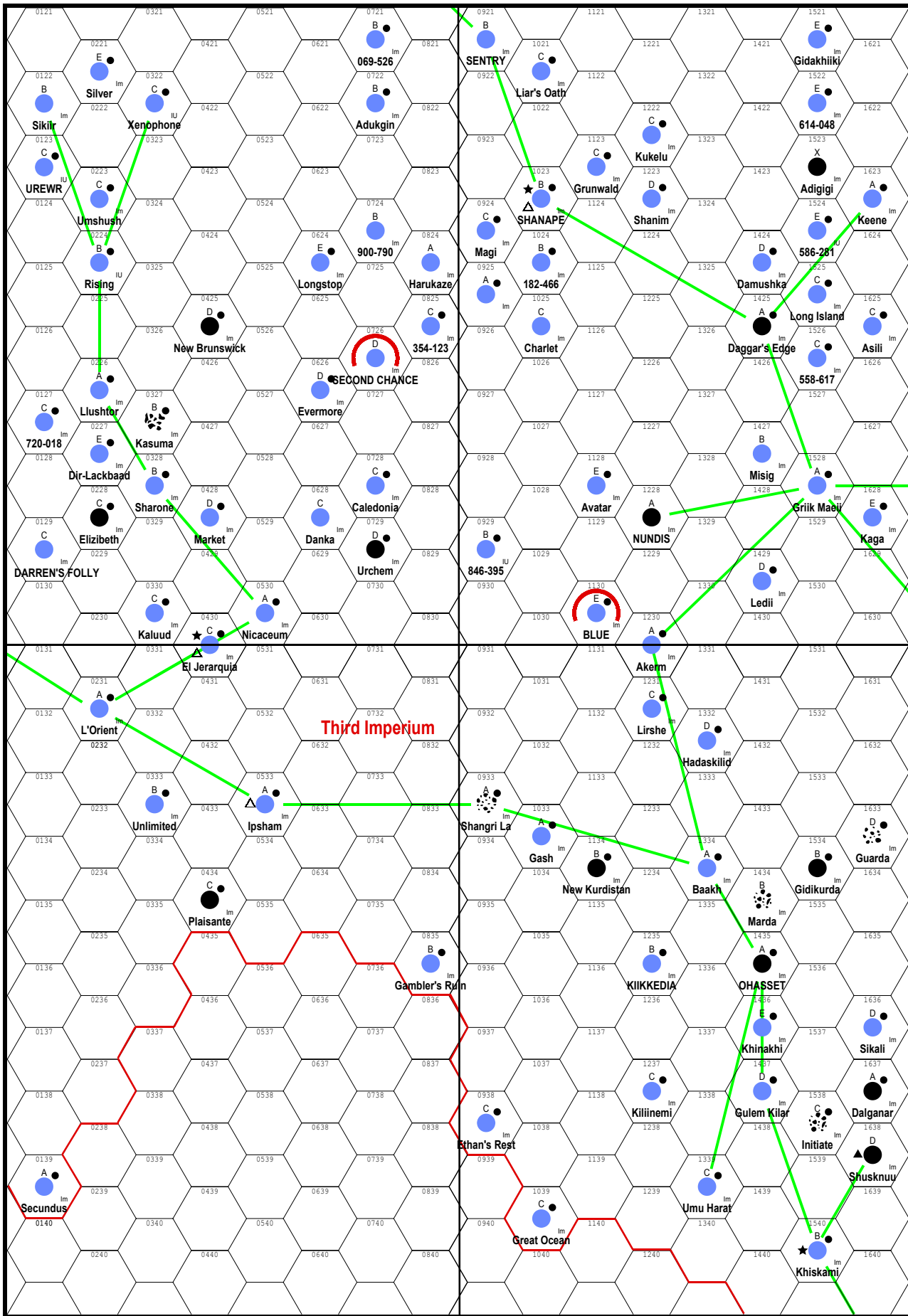
Location: Diamond-Prince Subsector, Ley Sector

1 Parsec Spinward-Rimward from Annapabar. Reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 1 week

Dadegadi is one of the major worlds of the Imperial Trade Cluster, and is the main port for vessels transiting out of the Custer to Spinward with the intent of joining the Serpent Main. A dry world with a thin, tainted atmosphere, with about 10 million inhabitants who elect a representative democratic government to rule them. The world has a TL12 base, which allows for construction of starships at the fine starport.

Dadegadi is known for its cultural loyalty to the Imperium and is receiving considerable investment as part of the ITC. A naval presence is maintained in the form of a heavy cruiser or a light task force, backed up by the world's own not inconsiderable system defence force.

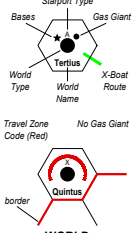


Alpha		Beta	
I	J	Delta	
M	N		

QUADRANTS OF A SECTOR

- SUBSECTORS**
- A Ikhnaton
 - B Nightmare
 - C Noir Deep
 - D Zaggrathan
 - E Spearhead
 - F Guatix Drift
 - G Trianstorm
 - H Osiris Deep
 - I Highlord
 - J Materislan
 - K Frontier Worlds
 - L Sydnic
 - M Satyressia
 - N Outraumer
 - O Diamond-Prince
 - P Outworld

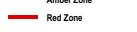
MAP LEGEND



WORLD CHARACTERISTICS

- No Water Present
 - Water Present
 - ☼ Asteroid Belt
- BASES**
- ★ Naval Base
 - ▲ Scout Base
 - Naval Depot
 - △ Way Station
 - P Prison Camp

TRAVEL ZONES



POPULATION

- Secundus under one billion
- PRIMUS over one billion

Year 993 Imperial

Ley Sector Gamma Quadrant

GASHUKI

Allegiance: Hiver

Location: Diamond-Prince Subsector, Ley Sector

5 Parsecs Coreward-Trailing from Annapabar. Not reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 3 weeks

Gashuki was until recently an unwanted iceball of a world. It is now home to about a thousand Hivers and associated races of the Hive Federation, who now maintain their embassy at Gashuki rather than at Dukh. Although the world has an excellent starport, it is not a manufacturing center. Imperial and non-Imperial vessels visit Gashuki for diplomatic and trade purposes on a frequent and, in some cases, regular basis. Hiver goods sometimes come in aboard long-distance freighters out of the Hive Federation, to find a small but lucrative market in the worlds of the ITC.

GLEN MURDOCH

Allegiance: Imperial

Location: Diamond-Prince Subsector, Ley Sector

2 Parsecs Spinward-Rimward from Annapabar. Reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 1 weeks

A water world with very little land above sea level, Glen Murdoch is home to about 10 million Imperial citizens whose TL-11 cities are ruled by a rather elitist democratic government. The Imperial Army maintains a training facility on-planet and rotates maritime and deep-water units through the facility on a regular basis. The University of Glen Murdoch is a prodigious institute specializing in underwater operations. As might be expected, exports include submarines and underwater equipment. GSBaG and General Products both have facilities on-planet.

Although not on the Express Boat route, Glen Murdoch sees a lot of through trade between the Serpent Main and the Imperial Trade Cluster. It is the main port for trade bound to Rimward, into Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector.

JUTLAND

Allegiance: Imperial

Location: Diamond-Prince Subsector, Ley Sector

3 Parsecs Rimward from Annapabar. Reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 2 weeks

Jutland is a cold, ice-sheathed world with a very thin atmosphere, which may once have been warmer and could have supported its own ecosystem. Now it is home to 70 million TL-10 citizens descended from a collection of slaves brought to the world long ago to work its mines. A slaves' revolt placed them in charge of the world and its not inconsiderable industry. Today Jutland is ruled by a 'democracy' that more resembles a fraternity of organised crime groups. The world is reasonably safe for visitors most of the time, but violence can spill outside the 'families' when there is something to be gained.

Despite its rather unpleasant political system, Jutland is a powerful economic force in the cluster.

KHISKAMI

Allegiance: Imperial

Location: Outreaumer Subsector, Ley Sector

6 Parsecs Spinward-Rimward from Annapabar. Not reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 3 weeks

Khiskami is a wet world with a very thin, tainted atmosphere, home to some 400 million Imperial citizens. Its TL11 economy is an important one in the region, and industrial output is quite considerable. Government is by elected officers, but only high-ranking representatives of major industry are permitted to stand for election.

Khiskami is a critically important system to the Imperium. Not only is it a branch link on the Express Boat network but it is also virtually the only Jump-2 link into Glimmerdrift Reaches sector, and as such sees a great deal of traffic. To protect this traffic, an Imperial Naval Base is present. The base is quite modest, supporting a force of patrol ships, escorts and a handful of cruisers, though system defences (supplied by the Imperial Navy and also the world government) are formidable.

KHUUR

Allegiance: Khuur League

Location: Sydymic Subsector, Ley Sector

15 Parsecs Coreward-Trailing from Annapabar. Not reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 9 weeks (requires deep-space refuelling)

Khuur, homeworld of the Sydites, is a wet world with a thin atmosphere situated almost at the extreme edge of Ley Sector. Home to some 5 billion people, the majority of the planet is at the low end of mid-technology and therefore of little economic importance. Visiting it requires a Jump-3 or better ship, or access to a deep-space refuelling point. However, the world is the capital of the Khuur league, which does have significant economic muscle. It is also the spiritual home of the Sydite people. Most Sydite vessels are registered out of their actual homeworld. One displaying Khuur registry will normally be a diplomatic ship or else will have preferential or favored status in the League for one of a variety of reasons.

PHONIWT

Allegiance: Independent

Location: Outworld Subsector, Ley Sector

12 Parsecs Coreward-Trailing from Annapabar. Not reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 10 weeks due to astrographic conditions.

Phoniwt is a small world with little atmosphere, but its population of 60 billion and TL 11 makes it one of the most important economies in the region. Phoniwt also occupies an important position with regard to trade into and out of Gateway Sector due to astrographic conditions which channel Jump-2 ships through its area of influence.

Large numbers of trading ships carrying goods from Gateway sector and Phoniwt itself ply the spacelanes, and many of them fly the Phoniwt flag. Trade into the ITC is steadily increasing.

OHASSET

Allegiance: Imperial

Location: Outreaumer Subsector, Ley Sector

5 Parsecs Spinward from Annapabar. Not reachable by Jump-1 vessels

TRANSIT TIME AT JUMP-2: 3 WEEKS

Ohasset is an important hub on the Express Boat network and a major port on the Serpent Main. Ships headed for many destinations pass through the bustling Class A starport. The world itself is a rockball with just a trace of atmosphere. The 5 billion population, governed by a rather distant bureaucratic apparatus that has its origins in the starport administration, are mainly high-tech (TL13) industrial workers who enjoy a high standard of living and a rather humdrum existence.

Ohasset is a major commercial port and handles refits, annual maintenance and upgrades for many starship classes. Its industrial goods are trade across the sector and beyond, and the world was recently awarded status as a Preferred Trading Partner by the Imperial Trade Cluster Authority.

RUKIRLIGI

Allegiance: Imperial

Location: Diamond-Prince Subsector, Ley Sector

5 Parsecs Trailing from Annapabar. Not reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 3 weeks

Rukirligi, lying right on the Trailing border of the Imperium, is primarily important for the naval base recently constructed there. The base is in fact unfinished, but has reached a basically serviceable status and stayed like that. It is not a popular posting. The naval base is mainly home to light forces: patrol ships, escorts and the occasional light cruiser, tasked with policing the entry into Imperial space and the odd patrol beyond. Heavier units from Annapabar are on call if necessary.

Rukirligi itself is a rather nondescript little planet whose thin atmosphere carries an unpleasant taint and whose 2 million inhabitants are subdivided into several Balkanized states. Local tech level is low (TL4), and large areas of the planet are little more than wilderness.

STONER

Allegiance: Grand Duchy of Stoner

Location: Kraxin Subsector, Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector

21 Parsecs Spinward-Rimward from Annapabar. Not reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 13 weeks

Stoner is an airless rockball world at the center of a cluster on the edge of the Delphi Rift. Its importance is as the seat of the Grand Duchy of Stoner, a small but influential state in Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector. The 80 billion inhabitants of this heavily industrialized TL14 world produce vast amounts of high-tech goods which are traded across the sector and into the Imperium, often via the ITC. Stoner is cordial towards the Imperium, but could not be said to be friendly. Its navy is powerful for a small state, and its trade fleet ranges widely.

UR

Allegiance: Imperial

Location: Diamond-Prince Subsector, Ley Sector

1 parsec Rimward of Annapabar. Reachable by Jump-1 vessels

Transit Time at Jump-2: 1 week

Ur, which shares its name with a world in the Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector, is a habitable world for humans, and is home to some 2 million people dwelling in independently-governed settlements across the planet which cooperate fairly well and for the most part specialize in one area or another, such as light industry or pharmaceuticals. Some settlements have been more successful than others in attracting ITC investment, and competition is increasing. Ur's impressive starport was recently constructed using ITC funding, and work is not yet complete.

CURRENT EVENTS

The following sections present additional information on events affecting the region during the time frame of this adventure. The explanations and forward-looking information here do not represent a cast-in-stone full explanation of the situation, but will allow the Referee to work these concepts and events into a *Traveller* campaign from a more informed viewpoint.

THE SOLOMANI RIM WAR: 990 - PRESENT

Empress Margaret I created the Solomani Autonomous Region (also known as the Solomani Sphere) in 704, allowing Terra and a region of space some 500 parsecs in every direction from it to become self-governing. Imperial attention was elsewhere for many decades, and during this time the SAR implemented several unacceptable policies. Its worlds drifted further and further from the Imperial standard, and in various places the idea of true independence was considered.

In 871, the SAR declared itself to be the Solomani Confederation, claiming lineage from the old Terran Confederation in much the same way the Third Imperium drew legitimacy from the First and Second. The Imperium did not move to curb this movement, even though it took the Solomani Sphere further towards full independence.

By 940, the Imperium could no longer ignore the activities of the Solomani Confederation and revoked its charter of self-governance. Officially the reason was the oppression of non-humans within Solomani Space but belated concern over secession certainly played a part in this move. A period of vigorous negotiation ensued, in which the Solomani attempted to secure their independence or at least regain autonomy. At this time the Solomani Confederation was officially a territory of the Imperium but was considered to be foreign space by almost all citizens of the Imperium. Citizens of the Confederation certainly thought of themselves as independent of the Imperium.

The Solomani Rim War has its origins in these increasing tensions between the Imperium and the Solomani Confederation. The war was not started by any single crisis but was a calculated move on the part of the Solomani to regain territory considered to be 'theirs'. The distraction generated by the Third Frontier War of 989 and the subsequent abdication of Emperor Styryx presented an unmissable opportunity, and the Solomani took it.

The Solomani annexed the region they had long claimed, deploying fleets to back up the claim and hoping to present the Imperium with a *fait accompli*. However, the Imperials reacted vigorously, declaring in 990 not merely that the annexed territory would be retaken, but that the entire Solomani Sphere would be reabsorbed into the Imperium – forcibly if that proved necessary.

The Solomani decided to fight, and immediately launched an offensive on several axes into Imperial space. The Imperial border fleets and local defenses were no match for the massed Confederation forces, even though the Imperials had a slight technological advantage, and the Solomani made considerable gains in the first months of the war.

Fleets across the Imperium sent squadrons to reinforce the embattled naval forces in the Solomani Rim, but these required time to organize and transit to the war zone. The initiative remained with the Solomani, who drove deep into Imperial space. As 993 begins, the Solomani offensive is still making gains, but as the fleets push into the Old Expanses sector, Imperial resistance begins to firm up and the Solomani supply lines are getting longer. It is likely that the war will enter a period of stalemate before this year is over unless one side or the other can regain the initiative.

One method used by the Solomani to gain an advantage is to distract Imperial attention by fostering insurrection and rebellion within the Imperium, often far behind the battle lines. Agents can travel relatively freely across the Imperium once they have crossed the battle zone, and a gift of credits, small arms or just the promise of support may be sufficient to trigger a rebellion that will tie down Imperial forces and distract attention from the war front. Agents and covert-operations groups can also strike directly at important targets.

More directly, Solomani commerce raiders are active wherever they can find targets. Some such vessels are second-line naval ships, obsolescent but quite capable of destroying merchant vessels and any light escorts they may have. Hunting down a single such raider absorbs the attention of many more ships.

Some commerce raiders are simply armed merchant ships. These can operate innocently on the shipping lanes until a suitable target is available, then strike and relocate to another system. Such covert raiders are hard to track down as they blend into legitimate shipping.

Solomani commerce raiding has reached the sectors of Gateway Domain. Transiting around the battle areas, Confederation ships can enter the relatively 'soft' frontiers of Glimmerdrift Reaches and Ley Sectors, which have of course lost some of their naval strength in reinforcements to the battle region. Raiders can then strike at commerce in the target sectors, or even push deeper into Imperial space.

A successful raid is a drain on the Imperial economy, and may force the Navy to retain ships in these sectors that could otherwise be influencing the outcome of the war in the main theater. Raids are also propaganda tools that may inspire anti-Imperial groups or even random crazies to take on the Imperial forces while they are distracted.

Imperial Naval Intelligence is fairly sure that the Solomani have one or more bases in the Glimmerdrift Reaches sector, and may be trying to set up a raid in force with more than just obsolete

destroyers and cruisers. Such a raid would have consequences far beyond the material damage it caused.

KHUUR BUSINESS EXPANSION

The Sydites are well known for their unimaginative and rather brutal nature. Everyone knows that they solve problems by direct action, usually involving force. In fact, this image is not quite accurate.

The Sydite species was genetically engineered by the Ancients as workers and technicians, and was not a total success. The workers proved useful, and the technicians were capable of doing intricate work so long as it required relatively little creativity. However, the Ancients bred a talent into the Sydites that they had not intended. The Sydites are heavily influenced by the people they interact with. This is normal for any species, but the Sydites take it further than most. Thus for much of their history they have been what the Ancients intended – dumb laborers. But as they interact with other species, the Sydites are experiencing a more radical form of cultural drift than might be expected.

For centuries now, the Sydites have been close neighbors of the Imperium, which is in all but name a trade federation. The Sydites have witnessed the Imperial obsession with free trade and have reached an understanding on an almost instinctive level of the benefits of commerce. As a result, they are changing into a race of traders, and in time may develop some of the attributes of a successful businessperson almost as genetic traits. Just as once the Sydites were a race of stubborn, stoic and unimaginative workers content to labor incessantly, now they are becoming sharper and more exploitative of opportunities.

This change is measurable. The Sydites of today have a slightly higher intelligence quotient and grasp new concepts quicker than those of a century ago. Their ability to work for extended periods without becoming bored is becoming a tendency to a long attention span and the facility to concentrate for hours. Individuals who have these traits to a significant degree are as yet rare among Sydites, and many are still the stereotypical brute laborer, but the drift is well underway. If these changes continue, the Imperials may find themselves with an economic competitor on their border.

The shift in emphasis from raw power measurable in terms of ships and planets to an interest in financial muscle and influence has led the Sydites to begin unconsciously building a commercial empire. Its extent is unknown, since it is the result of activity on a small scale by many Sydite firms and individuals. However, there are those who have greater ambitions than merely becoming rich. Money, these Sydites have noted, equates to power. And power has its uses.

This is not to say that the Khuur League is on the road to deliberate commercial domination of the sector. Rather, the Khuur League is unconsciously emulating the Imperium in terms of building a powerful economy. Of course, the Imperium has never been squeamish about using the force paid for by its economy to remove obstacles.

Some Sydites thus have developed a rather twisted worldview that money is power and power is best used to remove obstacles to the accumulation of greater wealth. These individuals may in time become more dangerous than those who cling to the vision of a renewed Sydymic Empire – whether commercial or military, or both, in nature.

Thus there is no single truth about the Sydite business expansion, but there are some significant implications for the region.

HIVERS IN IMPERIAL SPACE

The Hivers are fascinated by just about everything, but particularly the psychology and motivations of sentient species. Hivers have a deep-seated fear of violence, and this translates to a need to understand their neighbors so that the Hive Federation can be prepared for an attack or other conflict. Many Hiver Manipulations are based around gaining an idea of what a given species will do in this or that situation.

The recent upsets in the Domain of Gateway are a magnet for Hiver researchers, who are both frightened of what might happen and fascinated to see what will result when one human leader is deposed in favor of another. Some Hivers may in fact be trying to manipulate the outcome of the struggle between the two Archducal factions, whether to obtain a favorable outcome or just to see if a Manipulation on such a grand scale can be done.

However, this is a secondary aim; one that has become possible due to circumstances. The real reason the Hivers came to Gashuki is twofold. First, they wish to study the Sydites. It would seem that the Sydites are ideal targets for Manipulation, given their susceptibility to influence. Perhaps they can be made into allies for the Hive Federation, or puppets for the Federation, carrying out instructions given from a safe distance. The Hivers' intentions towards the Sydites are as yet unclear, and it is likely that they vary from Hiver to Hiver. What is clear is that the interest is there, though naturally the Hivers of Gashuki are not making this interest very obvious.

The other great interest for the Hivers is related to the K'Kree, or more specifically, the Lords of Thunder. The Hive Federation is concerned about

The Lords of Thunder and their possible expansion. They have shown an interest in Crucis Margin Sector, where at least one human state has assumed a submissive stance towards them. This frightens the Hivers, who foresee the day when the Lords of Thunder begin to encroach on Hiver space and perhaps even to redress the defeat inflicted upon them long ago by the Hivers.

The most effective way to counter a threat like the Lords of Thunder, the Hivers know, is by influence from afar. Ideally, the Hivers can work through third or even fourth parties, persuading others to recognize the threat posed by the K'Kree expansions and to bolster the will and the defences of the threatened human states in Gateway and Crucis Margin Sectors. Even if this merely distracts the K'Kree for a few decades, it is a good thing, especially if it creates resentment among the Lords of Thunder. K'Kree who are angry with humans are less likely to attack Hivers.

Thus the Hivers are in Human space for several reasons. They are of course also interested in trade and in studying humans and others just because Hivers like to do that. The Hivers have short-term goals in the form of creating a counterbalance to the K'Kree (or maybe just creating a mindset among humans that the K'Kree are a big threat, such that the Imperium will be predisposed to help the Hivers if they are attacked by the lords of Thunder at some time in the future) and studying the Sydites.

The Hivers are also interested in studying human politics and perhaps trying to manipulate them, partly for desirable outcomes

now and partly as an experiment in case it becomes necessary to perform Manipulations in the future to ensure that the Imperium does not become a threat to the Hive Federation. And of course the Hivers are happy to fiddle with, meddle in, and generally stick their sensory appendages into anything else that may be going on the region.

DEADSPACE

Deadspace is in fact a label applied to several phenomena, which may or may not in fact be related. The 'epicenter' of Deadspace phenomena lies in Osterman and Outrun Subsectors in Crucis Margin Sector, but the type of phenomena associated with Deadspace have been observed occasionally throughout Charted Space.

As far afield as Spinward Marches Sector, there is a region known as the Lanth Abyss, where a far higher proportion of ships than is normal go missing in Jump. A similar region, known as the Daibeig Gamble, was recorded in the early days of the Third Imperium but now seems safe. Aslan legends speak of a 'Dark System' that it was impossible to Jump into for many centuries, then abruptly became safe – at least usually.

Wild tales of radio messages received in Jump have been recorded in the Marches and also in the Solomani Rim, Massalia and Antares Sectors. 'Misjump-Graveyards', mysterious destinations that seem to attract Misjumped starships (sometimes emerging years after entering Jump) have been located in the Spinward Marches, in Crucis Margin and in Ileish Sectors.

Records from the early years of the Third Imperium also refer to Jumpspace phenomena. One oft-repeated tale speaks of a scout vessel that somehow managed to Jump eighty parsecs from what is now Core sector to the far end of Gushemege, and (amazingly) back again.

There are also many more mundane tales related to Misjumps, which concern vessels emerging with a distorted sense of how much time had elapsed. The discrepancy is usually small – a ship Misjumps and spends what the crew think is a week in Jumpspace but emerges a couple of days (to an outside observer) early or late. Cases have been recorded where a vessel has emerged on time (from the point of view of the rest of the universe) but internal indications suggest that a century or more has passed on board. The opposite is also thought to have happened from time to time.

Deadspace is largely associated with Jumpspace weirdness, and any region where there has been a higher-than-normal incidence of Jumpspace related problems is inevitably tarred with the 'Deadspace' brush. The term was originally associated with a strange phenomenon whereby sometimes a Jump drive would activate normally but fail to propel the ship into Jump, or would simply remain inert no matter what the crew did. Currently the 'Deadspace' label is associated with any region where any of the following occur:

- Jump drive does not work at all
- Misjumps more common than usual
- Jumps are 'different' to usual, e.g. signals are received in Jump or semi-substantial 'things' are sighted in Jump
- Vessels entering Jump experience distorted perception of time relative to the outside universe
- Jumps occur normally, but the vessel emerges at the point of entry rather than the intended destination

- Vessels are propelled suddenly into Jumpspace without intending to activate the drive.
- Vessels in normal space experience strange time-distortion effects
- Normal physical laws go wrong (e.g., force no longer = mass X acceleration)

There is one region (the 'epicenter' mentioned above) where most of the above have been observed within a radius of a few parsecs, and with relative frequency. Other regions have had some of these phenomena from time to time, though data is unreliable.

Deadspace is attracting a certain amount of interest from Imperial scientists, and most spacers have heard some wild tales (through how much credence they receive depends upon the individual). The average citizen will only have heard the word once or twice and will have no real idea what it means. The Referee is encouraged to use the occasional rumor about Deadspace or some aspect of it as an incident or adventure hook. Jumpspace is still a highly mysterious concept in Charted Space, and useful as it is, it is not really understood at all. The Referee can thus indulge in as much weirdness as he or she pleases without fear of contradiction.

PERSONALITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Some details of personalities in the region are included here allow the Referee use these characters and organizations in the *Homecoming* adventure. Note that some of these people have more secrets than are presented here. Future *Traveller* publications will reveal more about their motivations and true background.

THE LOYAL SECTOR GUARD

The LSG is a large organization – larger in fact than the authorities suspect. Although on the surface it seems to be fairly homogenous, in fact the Guard is made up of so many factions, loaned forces and mercenary groups that there IS no central truth about it. To a great extent the LSG is what an army becomes when central leadership and authority is lost – a whole lot of people wearing the same clothes. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the LSG is manipulated by some of its leaders and some outside interests (such as the corporations that supply its weapons and equipment), meaning that various different agendas are supported by its members.

On the whole, the typical LSG member will be one of three things: a somewhat overzealous loyalist who genuinely believes he or she is making a difference by defending the people of the Sector (and that it needs to be done); a professional who follows his or her leaders because that's the job they signed up to do; or a self-serving individual pursuing a personal agenda.

The latter category includes many members of the LSG who have joined for the uniform and the social status they imagine comes with it, ex-mercenaries or Imperial forces members to whom the Guard offers a second career with very good promotion prospects, thugs and criminals who have joined up for reasons that suit them, and certain leaders who see the Guard as either a political lever or a private army.

The great majority of LSG personnel are more or less competent at their jobs, dedicated to their sworn duty, and willing to fight for the people of the Sector. However, within the ranks there are several examples various types of clique. LSG personnel and even units can be labeled according to the following general types:

- **Social Climbers:** With little or no military skill, these deadweights are using the Guard as a social tool, and remain involved mainly because of the funding they bring in.
- **Amateurs:** An organization like the LSG will inevitably attract personnel who sign up for the wrong reasons and just play at being soldiers or half-heartedly go through the motions.
- **Monitors:** A few LSG units and personnel are overt or covert agents placed in the organization to monitor it on behalf of another (legitimate or otherwise) organization.
- **Profiteers:** Whether corporate profiteers making a killing by providing arms and equipment under the counter or recruiting and training personnel, or simply crooked individuals making a fast buck out of the supply chain, the LSG has more than its fair share of profiteers.
- **Zealots:** Members of various cultural, political or even religious groups are trying to convert the LSG to their way of thinking, or hiding within its ranks while they carry out their own agendas, which in some cases includes intimidation or even terrorism.
- **Heroes:** Patriots who just can't wait to get stuck into the enemies of the Imperium. Heroes are often gung-ho and contemptuous of the regular armed forces. They are sincere, though.
- **Professionals:** Professional fighters doing what they're paid for.
- **Followers:** Some units and many individual personnel are loyal not to the LSG but to a single leader or prominent figure within it. Followers include units of planetary armed forces or noble Huscarles who fight for the LSG but retain primary loyalty to the government, noble or corporation that raised the unit. In addition, some personnel revere a figure (e.g. the Archduke, the Emperor, or a famous fighter pilot); their actions will be influenced by this personal admiration.
- **Players:** Some of the leaders of the LSG are 'players' in the politics of the Domain, using the LSG as a private army or the threat of its use as a bargaining tool. The most prominent of these is Duke Nells, but there are several others.

The LSG is basically made up of two kinds of forces: Donated Forces and Raised Forces.

Donated Forces refers to units that are assigned to LSG command but raised and trained elsewhere. They include mercenary units, huscarles and so forth hired by or assigned to the Guard by their owner (who may or may not be a member of the Guard). Donated units vary considerably, ranging from the armed yacht captained and owned by Sir Richard haut-Forcelli to the 163rd Lift Infantry Company loaned by the world of Keene or the Sharpshooter Platoon loaned by the TL-6 world of Garakhu. Donated forces generally wear the uniform of the LSG and answer to its commanders, but retain loyalty to their raising government or owner.

Raised Forces are those created especially for the Guard, and are becoming more prevalent. Some Raised Forces are in fact

amalgamations of various donated units, or built around them, but most are raised and trained specially. Raised Forces are generally of five types: Security Detachments, Marine Detachments, COACC Detachments, Fighter Detachments and Combat Forces. Security, Marine, Fighter and COACC Detachments are provided to individuals, installations and organizations that require protection that the Imperial armed forces cannot (or will not) offer and which cannot provide for their own defense. A token fee is paid for the detachment, but since some requests are turned down it seems more likely that the deployments are political rather than profit-making in nature.

LSG Security Detachments are equipped to a fairly cheap TL-8 standard with assault rifles, body armor and light support weapons. They are deployed in units ranging from personal bodyguards of 4-8 personnel through squad and platoon units, with a few full companies here and there. There are many backwater starports and small towns to whom a platoon of TL-8 light infantry represents a significant military force.

Marine Detachments are equipped to TL-10 or 12, depending upon their origin. Personnel are equipped with vac suits and laser rifles or carbines. They are assigned in squad or platoon strength to assist local customs forces or to guard spaceports and outsystem installations.

COACC Detachments are relatively few but increasing in number. They include a few light infantry as security but mainly consist of a tech crew operating tracking gear and semi-mobile PAD (Planetary Aerospace Defence) missile launchers. The launchers are deployed by cargo vessels and can be moved around by heavy ground transporters if they are available, but take some time to set up. Officially, no LSG COACC unit has access to nuclear warheads for its missiles, but it is possible that some have been illegally obtained.

Fighter Detachments consist of one or more small fighter craft (and a pilot) backed up by a technical and security team. Generally deployed in pairs, with 2-4 pairs making a squadron and forces as large as a Fighter Wing (3 squadrons) deployed in some cases, LSG fighters are cheap and just plain not very good. Pilots are of very mixed origin and many are inexperienced; overall standard is not high. However, the presence of even a single armed craft can make a difference to an otherwise defenseless installation or world.

Combat Forces are as yet few in number. Most are brigade-sized light infantry forces with a few vehicles, equipped to TL-8 standard. However, the LSG is known to have several brigades equipped to TL12 as Lift Infantry or Grav Cavalry. A single Light Armored Battalion is currently training. Combat Forces are deployed to some 'threatened' worlds but for the most part are kept out of the way and in constant training against the day that they must be deployed.

In addition to these forces, the LSG has an enforcement arm, which is not exactly secret but which is generally forgotten about since its members operate out of the public eye and are few in number. The Enforcement Arm acts as military police among other units and also conducts an aggressive campaign to reduce crime on the spaceways. LSG Enforcers have no legal powers but operate in the same manner as other civilian bounty hunters, skip tracers or vigilantes. The Enforcement Arm has in some areas assumed the duties of a police force in small settlements, and as such usually has official sanction from the local authorities. The Enforcers also

carry out some 'internal corrections' of LSG members whose loyalty is suspect and in some cases may be used as covert operatives against political enemies of the Guard.

The LSG provides advisors to organizations wishing to raise or train forces to defend their territory. Advisors are also offered to some political organizations that have a paramilitary arm, which borders on illegal support of terrorism. This activity is thus kept quiet and conducted through fake mercenary units.

The Guard also maintains what is grandly termed 'The Fleet'. This consists of a few mercenary patrol and escort vessels, some armed merchant ships and yachts capable of acting as escorts and some ingenious conversions of commercial ships, mainly as Q-ships (seemingly innocent traders which in fact mount heavy armament to destroy raiders) and carriers for the LSG fighter. A number of combat vessels belonging to various worlds were also pledged to the LSG but since the Colonial Fleet was called up at the beginning of the Solomani Rim War, these ships currently belong to the Imperial Navy. Some crews wear LSG uniform anyway, and others are suspected of LSG sympathies.

The LSG 'Fleet' is a rather unimpressive force, and though it is capable of putting a dent in the activities of pirates and commerce raiders, it is considered a bit laughable to refer to it as a fleet or a naval force. The much-publicized rebuilding of the obsolete heavy cruiser *Zurakaanish* as the *LSGS Guardian*, beset as it is with delays and other incompetence, just serves to underline the poverty of LSG naval forces and their inability to challenge the Imperial Navy.

This is entirely acceptable to the LSG, which is quietly building a number of modern escort and even destroyer class vessels in private yards well away from the attention drawn by the bungled *Guardian* project. These vessels will be no match for a Navy cruiser, let alone a capital ship, but will give the LSG a credible naval force.

The LSG is also heavily involved in the arms industry. Products are mainly cheap but good TL-8 smallarms and light infantry equipment (body armor, radios and so forth) of a sort affordable by almost any client. Heavy subsidies are given to 'needy' buyers, which translates as those that the LSG feels it can influence or wishes to gain favor with. The Guard's sponsor companies also manufacture a cheap 'People's Fighter', which is rugged and very simple to operate. Identical to the one used by LSG fighter detachments, this craft is offered for sale on the open market and has been bought widely by governments seeking a cheap deterrent. Subsidies are offered to needy clients, as mentioned above.

Overall, the LSG is basically what it appears to be – a heavily factionalized organization which contributes to the defense of the sector by improving security in vulnerable areas. However, internal politics is rife and rather vigorous, with various leaders trying to bend the Guard to their purposes. While the typical LSG detachment or individual would certainly fight gallantly (and in some cases, very competently) to defend the Emperor's citizens, and would instantly declare allegiance to the Emperor if questioned, there are elements within the Guard that are pursuing their own agendas, of whom Former Archduke Nells is the most prominent. Exactly how much of the Guard would follow Nells if he were to do something radical, like openly oppose the current Archduke, is not known – not even by Nells himself.

ARCHDUKE ERECHS

Marcus Aaron Erechs is a self-made businessman. Starting out with a single starship, he created the massively successful MAE Lines shipping firm. Although nowhere near the size of a Megacorporation, MAE Lines now operates across the whole of Ley Sector. It owns more than thirty vessels outright, ranging from couriers to large freighters, and leases at least as many on a semi-permanent basis.

A long-time enemy of (then) Archduke Nells, Erechs became so frustrated with the way Nells and his 'Old Guard' had a virtual monopoly in several industries. His frustration led Erechs to become a champion of the smaller firms trying to get a foothold or just make a living in the straitjacketed Gateway Domain economy.

Always a morally courageous man, Erechs eventually resorted to gambling with his life to get something done. Invoking an old custom whereby a petitioner could demand an audience with the Archduke within days, on pain of death if the matter proved to be unworthy, Erechs put his case before Nells and in so doing allowed his old enemy to legally have him killed. However, Erechs had planned well, and the audience intrigued the visiting Emperor Gavin, who was deeply concerned about the state of the Gateway economy. When Nells gleefully sentenced Erechs to death, the Emperor interceded and commuted the sentence, declaring that Erechs was to be punished for his temerity by having to take over the now-vacant Archdukedom of Gateway (Nells was stripped of his title more or less in the same speech), with a direct order from the Emperor to fix the economic situation or face dire consequences.

Erechs has thus succeeded beyond his wildest expectations, by being placed where he can do all the things he said should be done. However, he has also succeeded beyond his planning, and so the past couple of years have been a scramble to implement programs that were little more than vague ideas when Erechs was a mere shipping magnate.

Erechs comes over as a calm, wise individual who always knows what to do, but the truth is that he is riding a rollercoaster and making what he can of opportunities that crop up while fending off crises. He is gradually formulating a long-term plan, but at present things are very fluid. However, this is not all bad. While Erechs has discovered that there were good reasons why some of the things he said had to be changed could not be, he has managed to break the monopolies and create a culture of opportunity for those who have the wit to grab it.

Always willing to gamble, Erechs has a gift for calculating, then stacking, the odds as best he can, and he is willing to play the cards he gets. Some of his programs have failed or run into difficulties, but overall it seems that Erechs is ultimately going to be successful.

Erechs has a great deal of support from small and mid-sized businesses and from the governments of the ITC. However, he needs to build a stable powerbase as quickly as possible, and to this end he has taken pains to be seen as approachable. He will not put up money for no-hope projects but he is willing to gamble on a good payoff. He has deliberately taken an interest in quarters not traditionally the province of the Archduke, such as universities and corporate colleges. Erechs has even planned a lecture tour, where he describes his methods in building up MAE Lines from a single ship to its present size. Erechs' need for allies and supporters makes him receptive to the Wanderers' plight in this adventure.

Erechs now has a large force of Huscarles to serve him. The original personnel were drawn from MAE Lines' security arm, but recruitment is now open and is proving a popular career for young people. The Huscarles are constantly expanding their numbers at a moderate rate. The force contains minimal ground-combat units, since it is mainly a bodyguard unit, but does have a well-equipped striking force similar to the Imperial Marine Corps. However, Erechs is mainly concerned with creating a private fleet. This is not a common step, since an Archduke can rely on naval protection. Most great nobles have a handful of escort vessels crewed by their household, but Erechs is investing much of his personal fortune in creating a flotilla of escorts and patrol ships capable of undertaking naval operations. These forces cannot be drawn away by the needs of the Navy, so most citizens of the Rimward end of Ley Sector think this is a good thing.

Opinion is more divided about 'Erechs' Folly', a gigantic Superdreadnought being built at Annapabar to serve as Erechs' mobile command post. Crewed by Huscarle and Naval personnel, this vast ship will supposedly be able to take on and beat any 2-3 Dreadnoughts. Seen by some as a massive waste of money, the project had gained favor with others, who see it as a symbol of Erechs' willingness to act as a personal shield against enemies of his people.

Anyone meeting Erechs finds him gracious and occasionally irreverent, not taking himself too seriously. He is willing to listen but can be an absolute terror to anyone who disobeys him. Even in mid-crisis, he will be silent until he has something decisive to say, and his orders come out crisp and clear. It is a rare individual who can spot the fact that Erechs is not nearly so certain as he appears; in fact he is a little overwhelmed by his position and will sometimes gamble on the old axiom that it is better to be doing something now than the perfect thing too late. So far, he has succeeded more often than not, but the size of some of the gambles frightens him, and it is possible that at some point Erechs will lose his nerve.

DUKE MARSHAL NELLS

Marshal Nells hails from an old and powerful family, descended from Solomani naval crews taken in by the Luriani at the fall of the Rule of Man. Born to power, he is often arrogant and abrasive with underlings, but can be very charming when he wants something or feels at a disadvantage.

Nells has lost some of the support he enjoyed when he safeguarded the interests of the commercial 'Old Guard', though he has retained the position of Duke of Ley Sector and is still able to influence matters on behalf of his supporters.

Nells was never very popular with the Megacorporations, though he had a reasonable working relationship with most. He has cultivated this relationship in recent months, seeking to gain support on the back of a policy of opposing Erechs' 'irresponsible' reforms. The Megacorps have been cautious about this change in attitude for the most part, though Tukera Lines, which dislikes the threat to its investments posed by an Archduke with his own shipping firm, has begun to back Nells in minor matters – and always discreetly.

Nells feels betrayed by Emperor Gavin, who publicly humiliated him and gave his family's most noble title to his enemy. Though on the face of it, Nells seems to have accepted his demotion with no more resentment than would be normal, in fact Nells harbors a hatred for Emperor Gavin that borders upon the murderous. This side of his character is rarely seen, though his anger is occasionally

displaced upon some hapless underling that brings bad news or fails in an important task.

Nells still has a considerable powerbase in terms of support from the Luriani (who are not happy at the way 'their' Archduke's title was given to another, the various large business groups that have remained loyal to him, and of course his massive personal fortune, as well as his position as Sector Duke. This is not enough for Nells, who is trying to build an even bigger powerbase wherever he can find it. He will occasionally use his own funds to 'rescue' a small firm from financial disaster, and makes much of the fact in his endless tirades against Erechs' reforms, posing as the voice of reason and a philanthropist who lends a hand to those ruined by the Archduke's insane gambles.

Nells' quest for allies has led him to hold talks with the Khuur League and the Hivers of Gashuki. The latter does not seem to have achieved much as yet, but the League is interested in investing in Imperial space, and Nells is the man to make it happen.

Nells' most important tool is of course the Loyal Sector Guard. Many people think he founded it, though this was not the case. What Nells did was inject funds, broker arms supplies deals, and by his public sponsorship give what was until then a borderline-crazy, illegal organization some acceptability in mainstream Imperial society.

Today, Nells and his close supporters provide many of the Donated Forces units used by the LSG, and more importantly, provide much of the funds for training and equipment for the Raised Forces. Nells' personal sponsorship of officers through training institutions (some of which he personally set up) and into command or staff slots in the LSG, is gradually giving him a core of reliable and personally loyal personnel within the Guard, which in time will allow him to take almost total control of its activities.

Nells' ultimate plan is as yet unclear, but indications are that he intends to oppose Erechs at every step. Perhaps he will even try to topple the new Archduke in some kind of coup. This would be a very serious act and would probably be viewed as Treason by the Emperor. Perhaps Nells' hatred is sufficient that he would act anyway, or perhaps he has some other aim in mind.

PRINCE GARLAN

Once described by the maverick scientist Alexander Von Smit as 'a fatter, shorter and even less agreeable version of his uncle' (the then Emperor Styryx), Prince Garlan is in fact a gracious and friendly individual currently touring Ley Sector aboard his large and well-protected yacht. He is a minor cousin of the abdicated Emperor and thus while a member of the Imperial Household, is a rather unimportant 'celebrity' noble rather than a key figure in the Imperial court. Indeed, Prince Garlan seems to have relatively little history, having spent most of his life as an academic on Capital, and other than a few papers on Planetological and Historical topics, he has made little mark on the universe.

Garlan is making one of his rare trips beyond the Imperial Core, and seems intent on visiting whatever takes his fancy, sometimes upsetting his official schedule to make a side trip to some interesting planetoid or to see a world's scenery with his own eyes. Highly approachable for a great noble, Prince Garlan seems less impressed with noble titles than with life achievements. He likes to meet businesspersons, scientists, decorated military personnel, writers, musicians and artists, and seems more at home with a

room full of mid-level creatives or decorated enlisted personnel – the people, he says, who make the Imperium truly great – than with Counts and Dukes.

Prince Garlan has been known to personally intervene where his authority as a cousin of the Emperor can do some good, and has at times shown an interest in the activities of Cleon II, who spent much of his life after abdicating in favor of his more competent advisor acting as an Imperial 'fire brigade' along the frontiers. Some observers suggest that this inoffensive little man seeks to emulate the heroic Cleon, though the idea is laughable to many.

The reality of the situation is that Prince Garlan never left his rooms at Capital. He was born with a rare hereditary disease that caused his body to weaken rapidly in his late teens. Over the years the tragic prince became bedridden and he eventually slipped into a coma. He occasionally wakes and is lucid for a few days before his body, exhausted by the effort of consciousness, slips back into sleep. During one of his moments of lucidity, Prince Garlan performed a great service to the Imperium – he gave his identity to another.

Thus the Prince Garlan touring Ley Sector, the recluse-turned-socialite, is emulating Cleon II in more than one way. He is, in fact, the abdicated Emperor Styryx, who has come to the Domain of Gateway to observe the changes the new Archduke is making and to ensure that what is done is in the best interests of the Imperium, her Emperor, and most importantly (to Styryx), her people. Much of Styryx' history as Garlan is fictional, created after the fact to fit with the persona of an amateur planetologist (which Styryx really is), and there are those who might identify him. People who knew Styryx are few and far between in Ley Sector. In his guise as Prince Garlan he avoids the great nobility but even they are more likely to see what is presented to them than a vanished Emperor. There are some who knew Garlan in his youth, and those who might recognise the recently-released papers by 'Garlan' as having been written by others. However, so long as Garlan plays his part, his identity should remain secret unless and until he chooses to reveal it.

Prince Garlan might be approached for help or encountered at a social function during the *Homecoming* adventure. Titled or highly-decorated characters (e.g. SEH recipients) who will have been presented to the Emperor might be struck by the resemblance he bears to his uncle, but he is adept at deflecting attention from his identity with a fund of gracious small talk and the occasional boring diatribe about some obscure aspect of planetological science.

TUKERA LINES

Tukera lines, and its various subsidiary companies, represent a major force in the shipping sector of Gateway Domain. Tukera's main area of interest is the Alpha Sector and the Reaching Arm. It also maintains a fast (Jump-4) service into the Coreward half of the Gamma Quadrant of Ley Sector, supported by a major refit base in the Shanape Link Worlds. Tukera has invested heavily in several major ports and some of the local shipyards in this region.

Tukera itself has always been less concerned with operations in the backwaters, and so has a fairly minor presence beyond the end of the reaching Arm. However, its subsidiaries Karuur Shipping LIC and FrontierSecure Couriers have been active in the border area (i.e. the Rimward end of Ley Sector and into Glimmerdrift Reaches) for decades.

In recent years Karuur and FrontierSecure have suffered a downturn in their fortunes as MAE Lines have gradually nibbled at their market share in the frontier regions. This was of little consequence to Tukera until Marcus Aaron Erechs was appointed Archduke, and the expansion of MAE Lines increased in tempo. Now Tukera sees Erechs as a potential nuisance, and is taking quiet steps (with suitable deniability) to limit the expansion of his power.

The most important of these measures is the improved relationship with Archduke Nells, which includes the secret lease of several FrontierSecure couriers to the Loyal Sector Guard as couriers and VIP transports. Tukera is determined to maintain distance from any clashes that may occur and to keep its hands clean, and to this end will only work through mercenaries and catspaws, though it is quite willing to lend support to the operations of others, since it can claim that the ships were leased under false pretenses and Tukera thus had no idea what they were to be used for. Tukera has also provided a tremendous injection of cash into the coffers of the Loyal Sector Guard through Erechs. This funding comes through a complex series of transactions that make it virtually untraceable.

As an additional counter to Erechs' power, Tukera's secret enforcement agency, the Vemene, is working to create an alliance or federation of small shipping firms and lone vessel operators opposed to the 'new monopoly' by Erechs' own shipping line. The Vemene are spreading a rumor that Erechs intends to sew up the Rimward end of Ley Sector as the private preserve of his own shipping firm. As yet, the story has not gained much of a hold, though a few magnates and captains have protested or even gone so far as to harass MAE Lines personnel in port.

Tukera wields a tremendous influence in Imperial politics, though it has interests everywhere and Ley Sector is a fairly trivial concern. Tukera's influence on events in Gateway is mainly felt from afar, in terms of investment to counter Erechs' moves, influence at the Imperial court and similar measures. The Megacorporation can afford to take the long view and are content to limit Erechs' power or to force him to over-exert himself financially rather than take him on head-on.

Note that although Tukera is jealous of its position in Imperial politics, the Megacorp is not willing to act in a manner that can be construed as threatening the security of the Imperium, which may eventually force some difficult choices.

THE SHARUSHID MEGACORPORATION

Sharushid is a very, very old organization. In fact it was one of the Bureaus of the Ziru Sirka, the Vilani Grand Empire of Stars. The various Bureaux were each responsible for a region of the Grand Empire, and Sharushid was the Bureau responsible for what is now Ley Sector.

Sharushid has many skeletons in its closet, like any organization of great age and power. Many of these secrets are now fairly harmless, and were they to be uncovered would have little effect on the firm or public perception of it. However, Sharushid is a commercial organization and remains very concerned as to what might happen if some of its darker secrets were to become public. For this region it maintains, within its security forces, a highly secret organization named *Zulii Aana Korameshh* (Keepers of Dark Secrets), whose sole purpose is to ensure that certain facts remain buried forever. This has led the personnel of ZAK to undertake campaigns of intimidation and even assassination, thus perpetuating the need to guard their secrets and the measures taken to keep them hidden.

In a Solomani organization, it might be suggested that ZAK had become self-serving and was covering up secrets to ensure that it still had secrets to cover up – secrets that would quietly die if they were just left alone. But the Vilani are very traditional people, and it is more likely that ZAK carries on its duties because they are traditional.

Sharushid has many secrets, but potentially the most damaging in the Gateway region is the fact that 6000 years ago they virtually exterminated a peaceful race whose very name is unknown. This in itself is not too bad; the Ziru Sirka was in the habit of suppressing threats on its borders and over-zealousness was not uncommon. What is so damaging is that not only was it wholly unnecessary but they bungled to job spectacularly, then launched a campaign of such massive overkill that several worlds in the region were permanently damaged. After that, Sharushid set out to expunge these events from memory, and fell upon other cultures, whose only crime was to have taken in the shocked survivors of the Sharushid onslaught.

One example of this massive campaign was the 'Year of Woe' still remembered by the Luriani of Ley Sector, who do not know what secret the Vilani 'Investigators' suppressed as they moved through Luriani society; only that a great many people disappeared or were summarily murdered. The Luriani still remember the events, though not the cause, and they still harbor resentment.

This is what Sharushid fears; a backlash of resentment from the people they caused so much collateral damage to, and those harmed in the keeping of the secret since. Sharushid stands to lose a great deal of public goodwill, and as a commercial organization they cannot afford to take the risk.

The secret might have remained buried forever, but for the reappearance of the race so long thought exterminated. The Wandering People claim that their home lies beyond the Lesser Rift, but Sharushid and its Keepers of Dark Secrets know different. The Wanderers may have fled there, but their home was in Ley Sector. Sharushid destroyed it, and now the Wanderers have returned. Their real motives are unknown, and Sharushid is becoming increasingly nervous and paranoid.

This is the focus of this Grand Adventure: the homecoming of the Wanderers, and the efforts of the Sharushid Megacorporation to ensure that their secret remains buried forever.

ZULII AANA KORAMESHH (KEEPERS OF DARK SECRETS)

A secret branch of the Sharushid Megacorporation's Security branch, ZAK's existence is unknown to 99% of the firm's employees and even managers. Its personnel all have cover jobs as managers, workers and contractors, and most do not know what secrets they keep. They simply stand ready for the day when they are ordered to intimidate or even kill someone. They never ask why, and many believe that all they are doing is preserving the security of the Megacorp (some are actually recruited under the pretense that they are deep-cover Imperial agents, and believe that they are acting on orders from the highest Imperial authorities).

ZAK does not keep records of the secrets it guards, though some personnel have gleaned some of the facts and senior coordinators have access to the truth in order to direct their operations more effectively. No regional ZAK office knows about matters protected by other regional branches.

The biggest (but not the only) secret guarded is the near-extermination of the race now known as the Wanderers, and since these beings have returned to Imperial Space, ZAK has been highly active in both monitoring them and ensuring that others do not stumble upon the secret.

The Ley Sector office of ZAK maintains a close watch on scientists. Journalists and the occasional Ancients Hunter poking around the region in search of artifacts or 'lost history'. The Wanderers' worlds were pretty much scrubbed by the Sharushid fleet, but artifacts do turn up from time to time which might prove that they were resident in the region long ago.

One response to such activity is to deflect it, offering funding to search a world known to be a dead-end, or to buy up artifacts and quietly make them disappear. If this fails, coercion, intimidation and murder may become necessary, and ZAK has access to deniable assets in the form of mercenaries, 'corsair' ships and assassins as well as its own covert-operations personnel. The Keepers will always try to use 'soft' options before resorting to radical action that might cause further investigation.

Since the Rimward end of Ley Sector is a potential time bomb for Sharushid, ZAK maintains a presence on many worlds. In some regions this is paid informants (who don't know who they report to) or a lone agent, but the organization can bring in major assets in an impressively short time period, and given the importance of the secret they guard, they are willing to take extreme and even desperate measures if necessary.

Zulii Aana Korameshh is the main villain of this adventure, though they do have other secrets to guard and may feature elsewhere.

THE WANDERING PEOPLE

The Wanderers are a race of interstellar traders and nomads that live in their 'Worldships' between the starsystems and send Jump-capable vessels into inhabited systems to interact with the people there. Their origin is unknown, though what little they have said about themselves suggests that they have crossed the Lesser Rift, coasting through deep space for centuries before entering Ley Sector and possibly other regions. The Wanderers appeared in the Gateway region in 322 and have become more common since.

Descended from omnivorous insectoid hunters, Wanderers are hexapedal with a segmented body structure. The upper limbs of most individuals are residual wing nubs. The middle limbs are adapted for tool use, with opposable digits, but can be used as a second pair of 'legs' for faster and more agile movement. The lower limbs are used strictly for ground locomotion. Their eyes are large, multifaceted, and set on either side of the head allowing Wanderers quite a range of vision. It is nearly impossible to sneak up on a conscious Wanderer.

The way Wanderers' bodies are constructed results in a way of moving that constantly surprises and seems "wrong" to human observers. Their language is also rather difficult to translate. As a result, most Wanderers that interact with humans adopt a common human name like Bob, Alice or Eneri rather than attempting to translate their own. It may also be that they prefer to maintain the language barrier between the Wandering People and outsiders and any attempt to create a translation is discouraged.

Wanderers are egg-layers. Typically a single egg, but occasionally

more, develops within the parent for roughly 4 weeks, at which time the eggs are 'laid'. They will continue to develop for another 8-10 weeks after which they will hatch a newborn Wanderer 'chick'.

Wanderer young are born with 'juvenile wings', an ancestral throwback allowing a flight defense mechanism for younglings from threats from the ground. By the time a Wanderer reaches sexual maturity at the age of 10 years, these wings will usually fall off, leaving only the typical Wanderer residual wing nubs. In about 1 in 10,000 cases, a Wanderer's wings will not fall off. Such individuals will retain the ability of flight on worlds with a dense atmosphere or a low gravity.

Compared to Humans, Wanderers are a long-lived race with a life expectancy of 200-250 years. Because of their lifespan the Wanderers tend to be a bit more methodical in their approach to things, preferring to get a task right rather than do it quickly. They take a longer-term view of things and will usually not act until a well-conceived plan has been presented, though this does not mean that they are necessarily slow to react. When needed, any Wanderer is capable of immediate and impulsive action, they just prefer to avoid such situations where possible.

For the most part, the Wanderers have carved a life for themselves among the worlds of the region as traders, content with their lives on their ships, and among their families and the stars. However, there is a very small minority of Wanderers known as the 'Crazies' who have, for their own reasons, decided to leave Wanderer society and live among the outsiders. While other Wanderers know them as 'Crazies', they are also highly respected and when they speak of matters relating to outsiders, the Wanderers listen. These are usually social outcasts, unable to fit in 'normal' Wanderer society, or individuals that are 'orphaned' and have no family.

Wanderer society is built around the family and clan. Immediate families are usually found on smaller ships, while larger ships may be home to more extended families. These ships use a unique modular design that allows individual Wanderer ships to dock with one another to and form a perfectly integrated larger and more powerful single ship. When docked with one another, all ship systems are interconnected, adding redundancy and reliability, while increasing overall performance. Unless blocked by another ship, any 'component' ship may undock and move free under its own power at almost a moment's notice.

A Clan is a group of family ships typically allied through ties of blood, business, loyalty, and friendship. Larger clans form the industrial base of the Wanderers, their 'combined' ship acting as an arcology in space. Three such clan ships have actually grown so large as to qualify as small planets. These world-ships no longer use Jump drives to move from location to location, rather they follow a predetermined flight path across normal space, staying well clear of any populated star systems. Because the Wanderers know the course and speed of the world-ships, they are able to Jump to nearby space and rendezvous with them at any time. Without the knowledge of their course and speed, trying to locate one of these world-ships would be like trying to find a needle in a gas giant-sized haystack! Space is big... and even a Wanderer world-ship is very small in comparison.

Wanderer technology seems to be equivalent to the Imperial TL12, though few devices have been examined by experts, and the Wanderer way of doing things is very different to the approach used by humans and most other sentients.

Wanderers do not seem to have a caste system as such, but how tasks are assigned or advancement is largely unknown to humans. It is known that Wanderers fill most of the roles that an interstellar society requires – leaders, pilots, workers, scientists, warriors and so on. A ‘priest’ caste is also known to exist. These individuals have some sort of guidance and ceremonial role, though whether there is an organized religion or their function is very different remains unknown.

The ‘priests’ seem to be an impoverished caste, and wear the barest minimum of clothing, always of the roughest and most worn materials. Where a worker or leader Wanderer will be dressed in synthetic clothes (mainly in the form of draped layers of strips of brightly-colored cloth) and will have various technological devices about its person on a harness of highly durable material, a ‘priest’ will be dressed in less layers, duller colors and its clothing will generally be falling to pieces. Harnesses are minimal, old, and often entirely absent as the priests do not seem to carry technological items. They have no headdress, no staff of office or anything to distinguish them from a beggar. Their only decoration is a pouch worn around the neck, sealed with an intricate metal buckle/clasp. This pouch is clearly significant but in must either contain something very small or nothing at all, though it is large enough to hold an object the size of a baseball or a little larger. Wanderer ‘Priests’ will die rather than allow anyone to open their pouch, and other Wanderers nearby will fight fanatically to assist the Priest.

There are rumors of splendidly-dressed Wanderers who carry long rods of office, wear a brightly colored headdress and a cape of iridescent material of fabulous beauty. They, too, carry the ‘sacred pouch’, but theirs seem to have a baseball-sized object within it. They are never seen with the ‘impoverished priests’ and will also die to defend the contents of the pouch.

The increase in Wanderer activity in the Ley Sector region over the past 600 years or so is a cause for concern among some Imperial authorities, especially since the Worldships could be used as a base for a sudden surprise attack. However, the Wanderers have always shown themselves to be a peaceable people who will fight in self-defence but more normally respond to threats with negotiation and/or a withdrawal. When they do fight, their warriors are ferocious, and not deterred by casualties.

This adventure presents a clearer picture of the Wanderers, and reveals a little more about them.

WANDERER CHARACTERS

Wanderers are not really suitable as player-characters in *Traveller*, since to play one believably it would be necessary to know more about them than is current knowledge among *Traveller* players. The following data is included to allow the Referee to create Wanderer NPCs for use in this adventure or in other encounters.

WANDERERS

Humanoid insectoids, very occasionally with wings, the Wanderers are very alien beings who can be encountered throughout Ley sector and in some regions beyond. They can run on four of their limbs at a higher speed than on just two, but are normally bipedal. They are lighter built than humans and physically weaker, but are dextrous and quite resilient. Attributes are determined as for humans but modified as follows: +1 DEX, +1 END, -2 STR.

Wanderer eyesight is about equivalent to human sight, but the eye position gives better all-round vision. Wanderers can sense electromagnetic fields to some extent. This is one factor that makes their devices very different to those of humans. Wanderers have a hard, lightweight exoskeleton of chitin-like material and a light body frame under it, making them difficult to damage. They are treated as having Mesh armor. Most Wanderers speak Galanglic in addition to their own language.

Personality: See notes above

Physical Description: See noted above

Status: Minor Race (but see below)

Homeworld: Unknown (but see below)

Languages: Wanderers speak their own language among themselves, but most know Galanglic and other languages spoken in local space such as Irilitok.

Adventurers: Most Wanderers are not suited to the life of an adventurer, but Wanderer ‘Crazies’ are, in some cases.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WANDERING PEOPLE

Many of the ‘facts’ known about the Wandering People, or ‘Wanderers’ are wrong. The Wanderers are native to Ley Sector, having originated on Lirguu in Diamond-Prince subsector and been driven from their ancient home. They are also a Major Race, having developed their own version of the Jump Drive independently – a fact that is connected to the reason for their long absence from the region.

The Wanderers – their name for themselves at the time is lost and unknown even to Wanderers – emerged as a sentient species on the world of Lirguu in what is now Diamond-Prince subsector in the distant past. For millennia they gradually developed their culture and technology, until eventually they ventured into space. The original exploration ships were probably sublight vessels much like the current Worldships, though on a much less grand scale. Sublight exploration was eventually replaced by Jump, though the Wanderers used the technique of sending out a sublight ‘base ship’ decades before they intended to explore a given region, then Jumping to it in small exploration craft and using it as a base while they explored.

Some colonies were set up in a similar manner. The colonists were sent out sublight aboard a large vessel packed with equipment and low berths, which would eventually arrive near the target system to be met by Jump-capable transports. These then shuttled the colonists to their new homes before moving on to meet another sublight seeder ship. By this means (and some conventional colonization) the wanderers spread out across several systems, where they created a stable and peaceful civilization. They also contacted some other species (including the Luriani) and traded knowledge, including that of the Jump Drive, to them. The Wanderers are the ‘Unknown Race’ from whom the Luriani obtained Jump technology.

Around –5400, contact with the Vilani shattered the Wanderers’ peaceful existence. The Ziru Sirka had recently developed the Jump-2 drive and were now a little less worried about neighboring powers that might possess Jump-capable ships since Jump-2 represented a vast advantage in terms of strategic mobility. However, to their horror Vilani scientists realised that not only did the Wanderers possess Jump-2 ships that could match the best the Vilani had but that the Wanderers possessed knowledge that

might allow them to build ships with previously undreamed-of Jump numbers: 3, or even (the wildest claims stated) 5!

The commander of the Sharushid Trade & Contact fleet that encountered the Wanderers panicked and in a situation of escalating tension, initiated hostilities that escalated until an entire Wanderer colony had been bombarded into slag with nuclear weapons.

The Wanderers were a peaceful people, but they possessed some weapons and were determined to fight what they saw as murdering aliens. The Trade & Contact fleet was overwhelmed with few survivors and not long afterward, the one and only Jump-2 capable battlefleet possessed by the Ziru Sirka passed through Luriani space on its way to annihilate the Wanderers' military capability.

Receiving some warning about the Vilani fleet from their people trading among the Luriani, and some useful military intelligence from the Luriani themselves, the Wanderers were able to ambush the Ziru Sirka fleet and shatter it, although their own warships were improvised and only marginally effective.

The destruction of their best fleet terrified the leaders of the Ziru Sirka, and although the defeat was kept fairly quiet (and later expunged from the history books), it was decided that these powerful, advanced and warlike aliens could not be permitted to threaten the Grand Empire of Stars. A massive fleet was assembled and began the methodical reduction of the Wanderers. The Vilani were determined to do it right, and build forward bases in what had been unexplored territory. One by one the Wanderer worlds were bombarded into rubble, though none surrendered.

For their part, the Wanderers put up fanatical resistance and rapidly became quite proficient at space combat. Having seen the fate of their first colony, they saw no point in surrendering to the murderous Vilani, so each outpost was defended to the last. But still the forces ranged against the Wanderers just kept on increasing as the Vilani, amazed at the tenacity of their foes and dismayed that they could not be induced to surrender like sane people, fed more and more ships into the maelstrom.

It became obvious to the Wanderers that they were about to be exterminated, so a desperate plan was formulated. Sublight colony ships were hastily built and sent out, taking as much of the surviving Wanderer population with them as possible. These ships were joined by the few Jump-capable vessels that could be spared. Most of these vessels headed to Coreward-Trailing, though some scattered in other directions.

Some of the Wanderer vessels were lost en route. It may be that some reached distant safety only to fade and die in alien surroundings, while others may fly ever onward, loaded with dead colonists aboard failed low berths. But some reached sanctuary, and for a time they built up their population, reconstructed their technological base, and created new Worldships. As the Long Night settled in, the Wanderers hid from a Ziru Sirka that had fallen long ago.

But sanctuary was not home. Many of the escape ships lost some of their records, and the Wanderers were unsure of the location of their ancient home. They had a vague idea where it might be found, and eventually, some of the Wandering People set out to return to their old domains. They found the Grand Empire of Stars gone, replaced by a Third Imperium that seemed saner and more friendly.

But the Wandering People had been almost wiped out by humans, for no reason that they could understand. They were not willing to risk annihilation a second time. They would keep their mission secret, gathering information thorough trade and commerce. They would never reveal the locations of their Worldships in the region or those still plying the spaceways of their new home. But they would find their ancestral home, if it still existed. And then they would reclaim it.

WANDERER RELIGION

The Wandering People do not reveal much about their religious or spiritual beliefs to outsiders. Human 'experts' are aware that they fact that the Wanderers consider all sentient life to possess a spirit or soul, and that upon death this spirit is "led home" by an empowered religious object. What they do not know is that Wanderers believe that if their souls are not led home, they linger, suffering, and bring bad luck upon those still living.

The 'empowered religious object' in this case is a piece of rock, ceremonially inscribed, from the homeworld of the Wanderers. This is the object that should reside in the 'sacred pouch' carried by priests. However, almost all Wanderer communities have lost their Homestone (as it is known), and are thus surrounded by the unquiet spirits of thousands of years, which remain, tormented, to bring bad luck to their living descendents.

There are in fact two factions within Wanderer religion. One group refers to itself as the 'Seeking People'; using a word that translates roughly as "those who remain true to the wandering generations". They have no Homestones and are served by a caste of Impoverished Priests, whose sacred pouches are empty but for an inscribing device used to make a piece of homeworld rock holy.

The other communities do have Homestones, but these are not from the original homeworld. They are either from a colony in Ley sector or one of the worlds the wanderers fled to in ages past. Their priests wear their full regalia and carry a properly inscribed Homestone, but they are referred to by the Seeking People as 'They Who Became Lost' – the Seeking People believe that the false Homestones lead the souls of the dead to a hell or similar bad place. A member of the Seeking People would be terrified at being anywhere near such a false priest since upon death he would be taken to the wrong place.

Both groups need to find the homeworld, to obtain true Homestones or to reconsecrate the ones they have so that the dead can go to the right place (if the Seekers are right, which the Lost do not accept) and more importantly so that both halves of the Wanderer religion can be reconciled. Those Who Became Lost do not recognise the difference between the two factions, and refer to both as 'The Wandering People' (or sometimes 'The Displaced People'). Wanderers do not discuss their religion or the importance of their spiritual home with anyone.

The Wanderers known as 'Crazies' are considered to be 'Holy Seekers' by the mainstream of Wanderer society. Their numbers are increasing as the centuries go by, a sure sign that there is something badly wrong with the souls of the Wandering People. Crazies are respected but not entirely trusted, since holy madmen are still madmen. They have many goals but like all wanderers, they long for the day when the souls of the dead can be led home into the stones of their homeworld to join the ancestors, and all

the Crazies become sane. At that time they will have redeemed their species and can take their reward – they will be able to rejoin Wanderer society as normal people and enjoy the community of their race.



PART 3: RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Homecoming stands alone as an epic **Traveller** adventure but the events of the adventure do not occur in isolation. There is a great deal happening in Gateway Domain in 993, and even in the immediate region covered by this adventure, there are several plots afoot that might be stumbled upon by the travellers. The Referee is encouraged to provide the players with asides, red herrings and blind alleys, as well as incidental encounters and perhaps even compete adventures, making the game experience a deeper and richer one for all concerned.

RUMORS

Anywhere where people meet and talk, rumors will be heard. Some are wild tales, some malicious gossip. Some are legends or outright fabrications and some have been doing the rounds since the First Imperium. However, among the apocryphal and downright absurd there may be a kernel of truth. The rumors presented here are a mix of types. Some may lead to new adventures the Referee has created, or give hints about future events in the Gateway region.

Rumors that crop up more than once should be altered, embellished or presented as 'I heard this from a spacer while I was in port on...'. The Referee is free to change any rumor he or she pleases, to add in details or substitute some piece information the players need to have. People who go chasing off into deep space after overhearing a rumor in a starport bar do so at their own risk...

Note that some rumors may seem oddly familiar. It may be that adventurers' tales to not change much over the centuries, and for every real clue to great treasure there are a dozen similar tales that will lead only to despair and death.

RUMOR TYPES

Rumors are subdivided into various types (with no regard to veracity or plausibility), because different social groups talk about different things. Rumors are defined by their nature as:

- Political
- Commercial
- Military/Mercenary
- Spacers' Tales
- General Rumors
- Person/Organization Rumor
- Local Events

DETERMINING RUMOR TYPE

Roll 1d6 twice, applying modifiers as described below. Cross-reference the two rolls to indicate what type of rumor is overheard, or pick one that seems appropriate.

FIRST DIE MODIFIERS:

Character has military background (Army, COACC, Marine, Mercenary): -1

Character has mercantile background (Merchant experience or shipowner): +1

SECOND DIE MODIFIERS:

Character has low SOC (4 or less): -1

Character has high SOC (9 or more) +1

First Die gives Column, Second is Row:

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	M	M	S	U	U	C	S	O
1	S	M	L	L	S	O	C	C
2	M	U	O	U	G	C	U	L
3	G	M	S	S	S	O	P	P
4	M	G	P	M	L	S	L	G
5	L	M	P	G	P	G	C	O
6	G	G	S	O	L	C	P	C
7	M	P	O	G	O	L	C	P

Key:

C = Commercial Rumor

G = General Rumor

L = Local Event Rumor

M = Military Rumor

O = Organization or Personality Rumor

P = Political Rumor

S = Spacer's Tale

U = Underworld or Criminal Rumor

COMMERCIAL RUMORS

These rumors concern the state of the economy, money-making schemes and events in the commercial sector.

- The Navy is looking for suppliers of starship parts as part of a crash-acquisition program intended to cover the shortage of escorts and auxiliaries in the region.
- Starship insurance prices have recently been hiked by another few percentage points. Ships flying the ITC flag are able to get a better rate so long as they only operate in the ITC.
- Some small firms have recently been bailed out of financial trouble by the "Old Guard", which is odd given the resentment among Old Guard firms for the newcomers.
- Jump-1 tramp trading up the Reaching Arm isn't as lucrative as it used to be. Several big Megacorp freighters have moved onto the lines. Tukera and Delgado are competing for cargoes, placing a squeeze on the smaller operators.
- Ship construction is undergoing something of a boom. Some of the newer market entrants are cheap, but very shoddy.
- Starmercs operating escort vessels are raising their prices; there are just so many routes wanting additional protection these days that they can pick and choose.
- After many years of steady decline, Sharushid is finally investing money in the Rimward end of the Sector again. They've lost a lot of ground to Tukera and the ITC though.
- Instellarms recently suffered a sharp dip in share prices for reasons unknown.
- Kursis Mail LIC is in trouble. Their armed couriers have all been called up by the Navy, and the ships they've hired to cover the routes aren't coming up to scratch. The various

Kursis contracts might be up to tender soon.

- Sabotage and go-slows are becoming more common across Diamond-Prince Subsector. It seems that all the investment in the world can't make up for bad working conditions and failure to meet workers' needs.

GENERAL RUMORS

General rumors are exactly that. They concern odd bits of information that don't fit into other categories.

- A new round of colonial expansion, pushing the border out to Rimward, has been curtailed by the war. Prospective colonists are cooling their heels and equipment is just lying around.
- There's a steady stream of vessels coming into the new Hiver colony at Gashuki. They're crossing two sectors to get here. They can't be up to any good!
- They should just let the Sollies go. They've been autonomous for centuries; forcibly reintegrating them is going to cost money and lives and for what? So we can have a few hundred star systems full of unruly subjects just dying to cause trouble? And you KNOW who'll be paying to rebuild their economy when we smash it while we're retaking their worlds. Terra is pretty, though...
- A Sydite trader I met the other day used the word 'Counter-intuitive' and seemed to know what he meant by it. In fact, I got a bit lost in all the big words he was using. I thought those guys were dumb shmucks that need both sets of hands to count to 20?
- There's a lot of talk about a new era of prosperity in Gateway but you can bet nothing will actually change. All this money getting spent is just going into the pockets of big corps and the odd noble.
- This region was mainly settled by Solomani, so you'd expect there to be more sympathy for the Sollies over in the Rim. Opinion polls are showing very low support for the Sollies, but there have been some increases recently.
- The megacorps never had much of a hold in this region. Local, and generally smaller, firms make up much of the market. Even in Nells' day there were ways to make a few credits as a minor player. Now Erechs is in charge he seems to be trying to create his own Megacorp and the others are moving in too. Could be there'll be a trade war or something pretty soon.
- The Imperial Navy is looking into creating a class of small escort-sized "peacekeeper ships" to take up the burden of patrol work. Contractors and designers are queuing up, but there's so much politics involved that you can bet the end result will be a turkey.
- Since the Domain capital moved to the border, it's obvious that there is going to be a sudden lurch outwards; a rush of colonial operations and perhaps the annexation of a couple of systems seems likely.
- Property prices across the ITC and nearby systems are suddenly rising. Seems like someone's quietly buying up real estate. Perhaps they've heard there's going to be another round of ITC investment.

LOCAL EVENT RUMORS

Local Events are mainly bits of local chit-chat associated with the star system the characters are in. These rumors are deliberately vague to allow the Referee to tailor them to local conditions.

- Big fuss last week; Ministry of Justice agents everywhere. Apparently some big-shot terrorist or criminal or something tried to go to ground near here and got herself cornered. Quite a bloodbath when they stormed the place, too.
- The Port Authority is trying to recruit crews for its rescue boats. Anyone competent tends to be lured away on a better contract pretty soon. Right now, just don't get into trouble in space!
- Someone took a shot at a government official recently. No actual harm done but the culprit escaped.
- There's a small but determined pro-Solomani activist group round here. They're strictly legal but keep lobbying for Solomani Independence and peace. Idiots!
- Well, what a surprise. Planned investment in social programs has been postponed again! It's not hard to build a new naval base or bring in some more guards for the starport, but educating people is too expensive these days!
- Some Belters were in port the other day, staking a claim on some rock in the Oort cloud. They've found Lanthanum or Iridium or Unobtanium or the secret home of the Ancients or something.
- My cousin has just signed up as a pilot in the LSG! She got her shuttle license years ago working at the port, but she's not flown for months! Apparently they're going to make her a Pilot Officer and post her to some frontier rockball to keep the Sollies or the K'Kree or someone at bay. Gods help us all...
- I was out of town a few days ago – did someone dig a money mine while I was gone? Suddenly half the people I know are flashing wads of credits around and won't say where the money came from.
- We're getting a new leisure complex funded by the ITC! Apparently this will improve the local economy in some way. Well, who cares whether it works or not, we're getting something for nothing...
- Someone I work with did something very odd the other day. He was the settled, career type. He got a call, quit at a minute's notice and took the next ship out. No idea what happened; he didn't hang around long enough to say.

MILITARY RUMORS

Military rumors concern military, mercenary and naval matters.

- Business is booming in the merc trade. More for the shipboard security types and of course the warship operators, but security is the business to be in right now.
- Naval personnel are getting cranky, what with postponed refits and cancelled leave. Effectiveness is going to drop soon enough.
- The Navy has a number of testbed" ships in the sector, undergoing trials with cutting-edge electronics systems. They're so short of vessels that these ships are being deployed as patrol and escort ships.
- It seems like everyone is raising private security forces at present; you can bet some of them are nothing more than armed bands. And some of the leaders probably have political ambitions. Let's hope the two coincide.
- There was a bit of a purge in the local Sector Guard ranks. They seem to have got rid of a whole bunch of amateurs and wannabees, which suggests that they might be planning to become actually competent at some point in the future.

- There's another round of Naval transfers planned this year; probably some of the capital units. They've already called up the Colonial Fleet. So who's going to take up the slack? There's been steady transfers of ships outsector too. Just one or two a month, but it's a drain.
- Another Sollie raider got away! How can you slip a light cruiser across the border zone, shoot up a dozen ships and a starport, and get away scot-free? Never mind investing in the cluster economy, let's have some warships!
- Looks like something is going on down in Glimmerdrift. They've sent a dozen destroyers and a couple of light carrier task groups over the border. Maybe they found a corsair base or something.
- I saw an *Azhanti High Lightning* class Fleet Intruder close up a few weeks ago. Those things are *ugly!*
- The Navy is in a flap right now. Apparently they've managed to 'misplace' another cruiser. Nobody's talking but it seems pretty serious.

- Former Archduke Nells is said to be highly embarrassed by some public comments he made just after the Emperor deposed him. Every time someone brings up the subject, his people find something else to talk about. He's probably going to have to make a public retraction at some point though. Accusing the new Emperor of favoritism and incompetence in public probably wasn't a very good idea.
- They say that the recent upsurge in activity by pro-Solomani militias is all part of some masterplan. More likely it's the result of the Archduke's shakeup and all that troublemaking by Long Night Remembrance.

ORGANIZATION OR PERSONALITY RUMORS

This group of rumors concerns people and groups in the Gateway region.

- This LSG nonsense is finally about to come to an end. The Emperor has sent a delegation to Ley Sector armed with an Imperial Warrant. They are going to transfer LSG assets and personnel to trusted local commanders, disbanding the units affiliated with more politically suspect leaders.
- Sternmetal Horizons, always interested in mining methods and techniques, is looking to cut a deal with the Wanderers. Something to do with deep-space asteroid mining.
- Prince Garlan has managed to annoy several major nobles in the region by declining invitations to meet personally with them. He seems to prefer hanging out with his academic cronies or to visit unimportant backwater systems.
- The maverick scientist Alexander von Smit – yes, the guy who's obsessed with Deadspace – is very unhappy about not winning that big research-funding prize the Archduke set up. He's headed off into Crucis Margin sector, after vowing to bring back proof of how important the issue is. Good luck to him...
- Long Night Remembrance has been gaining popularity in the Rimward end of the sector as the Solomani raids become more frequent. LNR militia have clashed with government law enforcers on several worlds after anti-Sollie demonstrations were crushed.
- The Archduke is planning a grand tour of the sector starting in a few months. He's hoping to use that Superdreadnought of his as a mobile command post so he won't lose touch with what's going on – and incidentally remind everyone who's got the power in the sector now.
- Ling Standard Products, an Imperial Megacorporation, is looking to open a major production works somewhere in the ITC. This will be a big boost to the local economy and represents the sort of Megacorp involvement that Erechs really needs.
- Delgado got themselves dragged through the courts again. Yet another sentient's rights group is trying to bring a case against the Megacorp for discrimination against Vargr employees. Of course, just because it's a fair case doesn't mean they have a chance. Delgado can just stall them in the courts until they run out of money.

POLITICAL RUMORS

Political rumors concern events in the Gateway region, or how factions interact with one another.

- It's obvious that the new Archduke isn't too popular with the Glimmerdrift Trade Consortium. Several big GTC-owned vessels have recently bypassed ITC space to head Coreward on their trading voyages.
- A delegation from the Grand Duchy of Stoner recently visited Annapabar, but some of their ships moved on and made a 'goodwill tour' of the region. Stoner is basically friendly to the Imperium but they shouldn't be allowed to just wander about like that. Some of their ships went a long way Coreward on their 'tour'.
- The Luriani are not happy that Nells got deposed. He's not a Luriani by genetics of course, but his family are descended from Solomani naval personnel taken in by the Luriani and the Luries are mad at losing 'their' Archduke. They're taking it as a snub and sending a delegation to the Emperor himself to protest about it.
- A rather unofficial delegation arrived at Annapabar a while ago, from the Matarishan Freedom Movement. Apparently they've decided to try putting their case for autonomy or even independence before the new Archduke. Somehow, it seems unlikely that Erechs will support a bid for independence by one of the sector's main economic clusters.
- Imperial Navy ships have been very active in the Outworld Subsector of late. Mostly just patrol units. Could be an antipiracy sweep or just a bit of flag-showing, but some folks think the Navy were out looking for something.
- Commerce raiding and privateering are both on the up. It's only to be expected with the Navy so distracted, but it's not good. The shipping corps are making a big fuss and the Archduke doesn't seem to have anything to offer them.
- The Sharushid Megacorporation has offered to fund a mercenary force of starships to escort traffic in dangerous areas.
- There seems to be a split in the ranks of the Loyal Sector Guard. Certain of the more rabidly pro-Vilani figures associated with the Guard have been edged out. It's probably something to do with the activities of Long Night Remembrance; LSG wants recognition of legitimacy and links to a terrorist organization, however distant, are not going to help.
- With the war going on and all the upheavals in the region, it seems like the perfect time for Stoner or the Khuur League to make a landgrab. We know Stoner has already annexed one system in recent history; others may follow.

- Archduke Erechs would dearly like to have more support from the Megacorporations, but so far he's failed to convince any of them that investing heavily in the ITC would be a good idea. If he can achieve some notable successes, that might entice the big money into the cluster. But only if Erechs can guarantee the safety of any investment, and with all this raiding and unrest that's not going to be easy.
- I saw the oddest ship in port the other day. It looked like someone had taken a Vargr tradeboat and cut it in half, rammed a Subsidized Merchant in between the halves and welded it all back together, then bolted on a bunch of spare parts at random. The first mate told me she flew, and fast – he even claimed they had a handbuilt Droyne jump drive. And there was an Aslan among the crew, too. All the way across the Imperium from the Hierate. Very strange. The whole thing probably fell apart on takeoff.

SPACER'S TALES

Spacers' tales can be heard in starport bars anywhere. They deal mostly with life on the spacelanes and the occasional rumor of strange things seen by a friend of a friend.

- Despite what the conspiracy theorists have to say on the subject, there probably is no link between the loss of the Missile Cruiser *Vigilant Peltast* and the mysterious disappearance of the armored cruiser INS *Melkani* some years ago. Fragments of the hull of an unidentified *Ishkami* class cruiser have turned up two or three times in the past seven years, but in truth nobody knows what happened to INS *Melkani*.
- Somebody should set up emergency shelters on the less hospitable worlds of the sector. That way it's actually worth having lifeboats aboard because you can survive when you hit planetside. It's been done in other regions. Why not here?
- There's a mercenary naval unit flying around in what should be a museum piece, and it seems to be in working order. The crew say they found the ship – a genuine Sylean Federation patrol gunship – in deep space when they were out on a contract in Crucis Margin Sector. Even in deep space, a ship that old shouldn't be in working order.
- A whole lot of Scout ships were transferred to Coreward-Trailing recently. On the quiet, so nobody knows just how many.
- There's a crank scientist up in the Beta Quadrant working on an alternative to Jump technology. He's getting funding from somewhere, so maybe he's onto something.
- A crewman I served with once told me how one of his old buddies once saw a vac-suited figure come through the wall of his stateroom while the ship was in Jump. The figure turned and looked back behind him, then raised a weapon to fire. He vanished just after that. (Sometimes this tale is embellished with the spacer being pursued by something with tentacles).
- The Archduke is quietly funding the construction of a fleet of Q-ships to destroy pirates. Of course, a Q-ship is also an excellent commerce raider.
- It's well known that during a war, ships go missing and some are never found. It looks like some of the salvage companies are using that axiom to make a killing. Instead of filing a salvage claim they're towing wrecks to out-of-the-way locations, then bringing in techs to make them Jump-capable. Nobody knows who's buying, but a few military vessels have gone that way.
- What this sector really needs is a class of multipurpose escorts with some troops aboard; you know, cheap enough to mass-produce and big enough to kill raiders. Then we need to build loads of them and fill the spacelanes with them. It's about time the navy stopped buying ships to carry out naval missions and started getting some that can protect us spacers!

UNDERWORLD OR CRIMINAL RUMOR

Underworld rumors deal with criminal figures, illegal dealings and a range of illegal activities.

- Business is good for the arms dealers. The militias and the terrorists are buying up anything and everything.
- Cross-border smuggling isn't just a matter of slipping across the demarcation line. The smart runners go several jumps past the notional border, to where security isn't so tight.
- You can get military-grade weapons on the black market if you know where to look. They're becoming scarce, though, and the prices are even more extortionate than usual.
- Aalen Vadir, a notorious arms runner, is in the delightful position of being wanted by the Imperials, and having a price on his head from both Long Night Remembrance and one of the pro-Solomani militias. Whatever he did this time, he seems to have upset everyone.
- Some genius managed to swipe a part shipment of Instellarms ship-to-ship missiles bound for the Navy – nuclear warheads and all. Thing is, some of them are defective in some manner that Instellarms isn't making public.
- Ja Fur, a Sydite ganglord, got taken out by the Ministry of Justice not long ago. There's some nasty infighting going on in what was his territory.
- There's plenty of work for hired guns right now, but steer clear of the LSG. Some units will take anyone, but they keep having these quiet purges, where shady characters get 'reassigned to other units'. Thing is, most of them are never seen again.
- The big money to be made right now is in white-collar crime. Set up a company, get an ITC contract, and skim off a profit. There's so much money being thrown around that it's almost impossible for the authorities to keep track of it all.
- There's an unusually large number of Sydite crime gangs operating in Imperial and cross-border space. Time was when Sydites were gunmen and robbers. Now they're getting into racketeering and technology smuggling.
- A lot of long-time crime groups in the region are suffering these days. It's too easy to cross a political group or get accidentally targeted by agents looking for terrorists. These are tough times.

THE FLOW OF THE ADVENTURE

Like any adventure, it is the Referee that will make this one work – or not. The information presented here is just a beginning and the Referee is encouraged to indulge his/her own creative whims in whatever way seems appropriate. Note that it is up to the Referee to decide on what skill rolls need to be made and at what difficulty level. With several versions of *Traveller* available it is not feasible to list every possible rules use (and might be considered a bit insulting to Referees). Where rules mechanics are mentioned they refer to Classic Traveller (CT) and can easily be interpreted for other versions of the game.

ASIDES AND RED HERRINGS

There are three optional episodes in this adventure, which are asides in the storyline and can be played out at any time (or even after the main adventure is completed). However, the Referee can add in a range of additional asides to delay, distract and confuse the players. Many *Traveller* groups are prone to going off at tangents entirely of their own accord, which will generate asides.

Sometimes the actions of the travellers will dictate how an aside will work out. Insistence on hunting down an NPC and beating information out of him in public, for example, will lead to encounters with local law enforcement officials. On the other hand, the Referee may decide to use a short adventure outline of the 'Amber Zone' or 'Patron Encounter type to guide the adventure. Special Supplement 3: Patron Encounters from Avenger Enterprises is a good place to find suitable adventures.

SETTING UP THE STORY ARC

The story arc contained in this adventure is actually fairly straightforward. However, once players get involved things have a tendency to become more complex. It is always possible to 'railroad' the adventure along with the use of immovable barriers and insistent NPCs, but this is really not the best way to do things.

It is best to set up events before they occur, so that the storyline becomes more believable and every now and then the characters will wonder why they didn't see *that* coming. A certain amount of setting up is possible before each of the episodes, especially the later ones. For example, the encounter in the Kishimaa system in episode 2 should make the characters realise that someone is very interested in what they are looking for, and may be willing to use considerable force in pursuing their aims. When the characters realize that the Vilani smashed the Wanderers' worlds into radioactive rubble, this should confirm their suspicions that they are involved in something highly dangerous. Thus hopefully the violent finale to this adventure will not come as a total surprise.

Additional clues as to what is going on can be dropped in as the storyline progresses. A news story about a Megacorp losing public opinion points because of ties to dubious political groups might be tied into the knowledge that Sharushid has major trade links with the Luriani people. Would the Megacorp be affected by the revelation that its agents perpetrated the Year of Woe? Perhaps. Can Sharushid afford to take the risk? Probably not.

THE OPPOSITION

The main opposition to the players in this adventure is a fanatical (and deniable) Vilani covert-ops unit named *Zulii Aana Korameshh* (Keepers of Dark Secrets), with sufficient money to hire freelancers and bribe officials. ZAK watches for any sign that someone may suspect the truth, and acts to quietly discourage them. If they persist, stronger measures are taken.

ZAK are well aware that even at this vast distance in time, the repercussions for Vilani businesses and interests might be immense if the public learned of the terrible "crime" that took place in this region 6000 years ago. They truly believe that containing the information (by any means) is in the best interests of the Vilani people. Some take this a stage further and are members of another organization, Ziru Aamakuu Sirka, which is working towards a resurgent Vilani Imperium. Their hirelings are not so fanatical, and are not trusted with any real information.

ASSISTANCE

Help is thin on the ground at first, but in time the characters' actions will come to the notice of the Wanderer people, who assign a team (mainly made up of humans friendly to the Wanderers) to watch the group and see what they are really up to. If they seem to have honorable intentions, then the Wanderers will try to protect them.

The primary agent in this case is Captain Miles Powalski, commander of a small mercenary security team. They are not fanatics and are merely hired guards, trying to watch over the team without being spotted. If the need arises, the Wanderers have a "Suicide Squad" of Priests who will do whatever they have to, in order to keep the characters alive. If they can create a debt of honor into the bargain, better yet.

DISTRACTIONS

The economic and political shaking this region has recently suffered will create many distractions, and in addition there is the Solomani Rim War and its fallout to deal with. The characters are thus adventuring in a troubled region beset by real instability. Riots, piracy, powerplays and paranoia should all conspire to make the characters' lives more difficult than they need to be.

REFEREE'S SCRIPT

The overall plotline of the *Homecoming* Grand Adventure is as follows:

PRELUDE: HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

The characters have found a patron in the form of a fringe scientist, Dr Josef Markia, who needs a crew for the laboratory ship he has been assigned for the next year.

EPISODE 1: SHAKEDOWN AT ANNAPABAR

The characters meet and briefly train together. A terrorist attack forces the travellers to make use of their starship's advanced systems rather earlier than expected.

EPISODE 2: INTERLUDES AND DEPARTURES

An agent of ZAK tries to misdirect the group and to ensure that their Activities are monitored if they do proceed with the mission.

EPISODE 3: DELIVERY TO KAM

The travellers proceed to the world of Kam where in the course of interactions with the locals Dr Markia comes across a lead he cannot pass up.

EPISODE 4: THE BELT AT KISHIMAA

The lead takes the travellers to Kishimaa, where they discover that others are also interested in the system. The travellers find a mysterious artifact but are attacked and forced to flee.

INTERLUDE: A MYSTERIOUS OBJECT

The artifact is clearly alien, and the travellers manage to figure out that it is a data storage device of some kind. However decoding it is beyond their abilities. They do know that the original finder of the artifacts sold some to Dr Ernest Livaaki, who is known to be on Dadejadi.

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EPISODE 5: MUSEUMS, DECISIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

Attempting to make contact with Dr Livaaki, the discover that he has moved on. ZAK agents further interfere with the mission as the travellers search for Dr Livaaki.

EPISODE 6: A BREAKTHROUGH!

Finally locating Dr Livaaki on Shamuus, the travellers are forced to pursue him through a worsening situation and just manage to catch up with him as he boards a (seagoing) ship ahead of an angry mob. Gaining passage aboard the ship, the characters are finally able to show the expert the artifact, and he attempts to decipher the information stored on it.

Dr Livaaki eventually manages to find a scrap of imaging that shows the world of Kishimaa being bombarded by a Vilani fleet

about 6000 years ago. The Vilani are 'known' never to have come this far out, and this piece of information contradicts the accepted version of history. It also suggests that the Vilani did something terrible here.

EPISODE 7: FULL CIRCLE

Returning to Kishimaa, the travellers are able to locate an area that was not bombed to slag or built over by colonists. They find a Wanderer settlement and inside, the body of a priest. He has a Homestone, something no human has ever heard of. The characters are again forced to flee by agents following them. Securing a meeting with an enclave of Wanderers, the travellers are told the truth about the Extermination and the Homestones, and are told how the Wanderers could locate their homeworld using this stone. To locate the Wanderer homeworld it is necessary to get the Homestone analyzed and the data from it compared to a significant Planetological database. The characters are asked to do this by the Wanderers, then to go to the place indicated and verify that it really is the Homeworld.

EPISODE 8: FINDING MY WAY BACK HOME

The opposition step up their attempts to impede the characters as they search for information that will lead to their goal.

EPISODE 9: THE RACE

The travellers do not have much time; the ZAK (Keepers of Dark Secrets) will be after them quickly if they think the characters know the location of the Wanderer homeworld and, worse, can prove it to the Archduke. The characters race to Lirguu and search for proof, which they find just before the first ZAK team arrives on the scene.

EPISODE 10: THE SIEGE

The characters are caught on the ground as the ZAK team and their mercenaries arrive. After an offer to surrender and a sharp skirmish, the ZAG agents resolve to use extreme measures to conceal the secret forever – they will plant nuclear demolition charges in the ruins the characters have found. The only thing to stop them is the travellers.

EPISODE 11: HOMECOMING

As the noose tightens and the ZAK troopers force their way into the rubble, the characters are in deep trouble. The agents intend to shoot them if they surrender or blow them up in the ruins. There is little chance of escape. However, the Wanderers took out a little insurance in the form of an assault squad. As the final battle begins, Wanderer ground troops begin landing in the ruins to defend them.

EPILOGUE: A PLACE AMONG THE STARS

After the ZAK team and the mercs are beaten off, the Wanderers receive the characters as cultural heroes. The Archduke agrees to recognize and support the Wanderers' claim to their world, and they in turn pledge to support Erechs. Sharushid's dark secret is revealed and the Megacorp's standing suffers, creating a new enemy for the Archduke.

The general plotline is summarized as follows:

- Find the Artifact at Kishimaa
- Try to discern its meaning
- Discover its meaning

- Return to Kishimaa, find the Homestone
- Visit the Enclave and discover the truth about the Wanderers
- Locate the Homeworld
- Race to the Homeworld and obtain evidence
- Defend the ruins
- Welcome the Wandering People home

A Vilani merchant.



PART 4: HOMECOMING

PRELUDE: HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

In this Prelude, the characters meet and begin their mission. They discover that there is trouble afoot in the Domain of Gateway.

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

This episode takes place in the Annapabar system. Details of the world and its star system are presented in Part 5: Guide to Locations.

SETUP

One of the new Archduke's programs is a sponsorship of the sciences. Several small prizes in the form of research grants are awarded every year after a process of competitive bids in which scientists are encouraged to present their work and show how it would benefit from additional funding. The larger prizes are each unique, tailored to the needs of a given project; for example refurbishment of a laboratory complex, a set of deep-water exploration equipment or the use of a laboratory ship for a year.

One of the prizes this year was won by Dr Josef Markia, a scientist noted for his work in 'lost histories'. By carefully comparing the official Imperial records with local oral or written traditions, architecture, cultural traits, linguistic similarities and archeological evidence, Dr Markia has managed to find several gaps or inaccuracies in the accepted version of the history of Ley Sector. He has managed to piece together several mysteries, occasionally to the embarrassment of prominent figures. For example, the rabidly pro-Solomani Barin Thomas haut-Tarrisker's family claimed unbroken lineage from the leaders of a Solomani colonial expedition to the region. What Dr Markia discovered was that the colonists had in fact died out a few years before the Sylean Federation contacted their world. The Baron is in fact descended from a mixed-race colonial expedition out of Sylea. This revelation did not endear the good doctor to the Baron.

For his work to be truly effective, Dr Markia needs access to a starship; one with extensive computer equipment. The Archduke judged his work to be of sufficient merit that such a starship was made available for the period of one year. Further, Erechs granted Markia a fund to pay for fuel and basic life support expenses, plus salaries for the crew.

Thus Dr Markia has one year to poke around the region and investigate anything he likes. If his findings are interesting enough, the Archduke may extend the prize for a second year. At present the doctor has some interesting ideas but nothing concrete to follow up. He has come to Annapabar to claim his prize, assemble a crew, and begin searching for the little clues that will in time reveal some mystery – and the key to unlocking it.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

There is more than one way to introduce the characters to this Grand Adventure. The recommended method is listed below, with some suggested alternatives.

Late last year, Dr Josef Markia was named as one of the winners of an Archducal sponsorship package, for his work in uncovering

the lost histories of Ley Sector. This prize included a well-equipped laboratory ship (actually a converted Far Trader) and a support package allowing Dr Markia to operate the ship for a year.

After due thought, the doctor decided he would undertake one of the projects that he had always wanted to try but had lacked the means to attempt. He would simply wander the local worlds collecting – 'sponging up' as he calls it – every scrap of folklore, every local legend, every event in local history not recorded in the University archives. He will add to this video footage of architecture, linguistic and cultural habits, clothing fashions, manufacturing methods and every other piece of probably-irrelevant information he can.

During the long weeks in Jump, Dr Markia and the team he plans to assemble will collate the information, looking for correlations and discrepancies. He does not know what will crop up, but in his past work similarities in local legends or even industrial processes have led him to make connections between worlds several parsecs apart. Perhaps he will uncover the true pattern of Rule of Man settlement in the region. Perhaps he will make some great revelation about architectural influences in the region. Or perhaps – and he chuckles about this one even though he secretly hopes it happens – he will find some overlooked site containing relics of the Ancients, and learn a little more about these mysterious but highly influential beings.

Unfortunately, Dr Markia's attempts to hire a crew and some eminent research associates have failed. Several old colleagues or respected frontier ship crews have expressed an interest, only to pull out later after being offered an unmissable opportunity elsewhere. Others have refused to discuss their reasons or even become quite hostile, suddenly declaring that they have no interest in crackpot meanderings around the frontier. One old friend went so far as to warn the doctor not to pursue this mission. She would not say why, but strongly suggested that he go Coreward and find something safer to do with his ship, like mineralogical surveys for one of the mining corps.

Dr Markia is now more determined than ever to undertake his mission – he has a broad stubborn streak. And so, several rounds of advertising and numerous dropouts later, he has managed to pin down a mission team and a crew for his ship. Tonight they meet for the first time. Dr Markia had managed to convince himself that the recruiting problems were just bad luck, until a scrambled comm message arrived with a blunt warning to leave the region if he valued his safety. Now sure that someone is jealous of his prize and trying to wreck his mission out of spite, the doctor has decided not to mention the problems to his new crew. Not just yet, anyway.

The crew are to meet in a conference room of the prestigious Star Bowl Hotel at Gateway City, over Annapabar. Dr Markia will present the mission details, get the paperwork signed, and finally be able to begin his mission.

This meeting is where the characters (including any NPCs the Referee wants included in the mission group) come together. Some of them may have met or worked together before. Others may be known by reputation. Whatever the situation, the characters have a chance to meet and mingle and get to know one another a little. It is best to introduce characters only by a physical description, the job they are doing on the mission (along with mission-relevant skills perhaps) and any background data the other characters may know. Having a little mystery about the characters as they begin their task will improve roleplaying possibilities and also create some areas of

doubt about one another that might be useful in developing the plot (or misleading the characters).

As an alternative, an existing group of characters with a ship might be chartered by the Archduke and assigned the job of crew for Dr Markia. Or Dr Markia might be given out as a player-character.

As an alternative, the characters might stumble upon rumors that lead them to the belt at Kishimaa and the object found there- or one of the PCs could inherit the object from a relative or old friend, and decide to investigate. In this case, the meeting at the Star Bowl will probably not occur.

SCENE 1: A VAST BOWL FILLED WITH STARLIGHT

In this scene the characters are meeting for the first time in some cases. The referee should let them become familiar with one another for as long as is necessary, and spell out the mission brief, which is, in short: To collect and collate data for a new research work dealing with the Lost History of Gateway Sector. This will be done by collecting firsthand data in the form of folk tales, old books, legends and local histories, and collated by the ship's computer. Characters will be spending a lot of time scanning books and downloading internet data, as well as meeting the locals and interviewing them.

THE STAR BOWL HOTEL

The Star Bowl Hotel is a very expensive facility, one of the very best that Gateway City has to offer. Each of the characters has arrived at the hotel to find a room booked and every convenience taken care of. After changing clothes and any other minor preparations that may be necessary, the characters can make their way to one of the hotel's conference suites.

There, soft music plays and human as well as robotic waiters stand ready to serve the characters from an exquisite buffet, with wines and other drinks from across the sector. Almost the entire floor is a vast, panel of clear armored ceramic which is curved on the outside to give an even more spectacular view of the stars.

Out of the 'Star Bowl' can be seen a slice of the iceball world of Annapabar, and at the other side part of the Imperial Naval Yards dominate the view. Gantries surround a handful of small vessels under construction and the gargantuan Superdreadnought that will eventually be the Archduke's personal flagship. Port utility craft buzz about, and patrolling gunships and fighters can be seen shepherding the endless stream of traffic coming in to dock or heading out to Jump.

GREETINGS AND INTRODUCTIONS

Dr Markia greets his new associates and directs them to the best of the spirits on offer (if they're interested). He has met them all individually but this may be the first time the whole team is assembled. The characters are given a few minutes to chat and generally get to know one another a bit, then Dr Markia signals for attention.

He says it is time to spell out the mission the characters will be signing up for. They should already know, in general terms, what they are going to be doing, but the short version is as follows:

Dr Markia has use of the ship for one year. Basic life support and fuel are paid for during that time on an expense account drawn on Archducal funds. However, the vouchers are only good at Class A, B or C starports, and additional stores (such as luxury foods, wine and clothing) are not covered.

The ship, the doctor says, is a Type L Laboratory ship named the *Light of Truth*. She is capable of Jump-2 and 1-g acceleration, and has a small cargo hold. The remainder of the hull tonnage is taken up with mission stores, labs, data processing equipment and some utility areas that will either be filled with scientific equipment or used by the crew. The ship carries a wheeled ATV for ground operations rather than the standard air/raft, and has been armed with two turrets. One contains a dual laser mount, the other a missile launcher and a sandcaster. The doctor expects to use the missile launcher mainly to deploy satellites and probes, of which he has several. However, he assures the characters that the vessel is capable of defending herself so long as someone aboard can actually operate the weapons systems.

The deal also includes salaries for the mission team, on the following scale:

- All Ship Crew: Cr 3000 per month
- Chief Engineer: + Cr 1000 per month
- Astrogration Officer: + Cr 2000 per month
- Captain: + Cr3000 per month
- Research Assistant (i.e. any non-crew team member): Cr 2000 per month

All vessels are required by Interstellar Law to have a designated Master (or Captain) and a Chief Engineer (these are sometimes the same person). The Captain is legally liable for the safety of the ship and her crew, passengers, cargo and surroundings – it's a very responsible job with big penalties for negligence *whether the crew takes any notice of the captain or not*. Chief Engineers and Astrograting Officers are highly accountable within their own area of expertise. How the characters actually organize themselves is their business, but these slots must be filled, and carry with them pay increases to reflect the enhanced responsibility. Note that the pay scales on offer are not the standard ones for ship crew, but the characters can get ahead in other ways.

There is some provision in the ship's funds for bonuses, and Dr Markia intends to award a small percentage of any discoveries or royalties to the characters who played a part in them. In addition, he says, he is willing to allow the crew to invest in freighting or speculative trading, using the spare space aboard the ship. Indeed, he is willing to provide Cr 50,000 from the ship's contingency funds as a starting stake. However, trade must not slow or otherwise impede the mission, and there is one other stipulation. 50% of the profits of every deal must go to the ship's funds, to be available to the doctor for fuel at backwater ports, additional mission equipment or to buy luxuries along the way. Since he is investing the ship's emergency fund, he needs a return on it to avoid running out of money. Excess left over after the mission may be divided among the crew at the end of the year.

Characters will probably realise that even with a reduced cargo hold and only 50% of the profit on their investment, they still stand to make a fair bit of money on the side, since the Archduke is picking up the tab for daily living expenses.

The actual mission, Dr Markia says, is to take him where he wants to go and help with his research. He expects that characters will be

spending a lot of time scanning local books into the computer, visiting museums and historical sites, obtaining footage of architecture and clothing, and collating all this data while the ship is in Jump. On the plus side, the characters will also be expected to help obtain stories and linguistic samples from locals and spacers, which probably means hanging around in bars to collect spacers' tales, or attending lectures at local educational establishments and perhaps angling for an invite to the local historical society's next lunch meeting. There will also be some field work, possibly involving excavation.

Overall, the characters can expect to have to do some boring reading and collation work, but also to visit interesting places and dig up artifacts. Simply talking to people and being sociable will be one of their jobs, which can hardly be considered 'work'. And for this they're getting a salary.

Dr Markia will answer sensible questions about the mission, but it is clear that he does not have a concrete itinerary in mind just yet. He does plan to pay a visit to Igikur if he can, because the legends of that world have always intrigued him. Similarly, if he can get a permit to visit Saanshakase, he'd like to go there.

As the party/meeting winds down, Dr Markia informs the characters that he has booked a launch slot for the following morning. He intends to take the ship out for a couple of days to shake down both the refitted systems and the crew, and to gain some practice at using the advanced sensor systems. All characters will receive one month's pay at the completion of shakedown as a hiring bonus, and the mission will then begin.

Whether the characters sensibly go off to bed or decide to party all night is their problem, but the ship launches at 10:00 hours in the morning, and anybody not aboard by then is fired...

EPISODE 1: SHAKEDOWN AT ANNAPABAR

A 3-day shakedown is undertaken: The ship's systems work well but for a few fixable bugs. However, as the crew head back in to the port, a system wide alert (no reason given but almost certainly a pirate or commerce-raider situation) is given. A Solomani terrorist or covert-ops team has launched a shuttle packed with nuclear explosives into the traffic stream from an innocent-seeming Subsidized Merchant. The shuttle is intercepted and the subbie is being pursued; hence the lockdown.

SCENE 1: SHAKEDOWN

The *Light of Truth* was refitted at the Annapabar Naval Yards; there is every reason for it to be in excellent working order. No sane crew would take a ship out without testing that for themselves, however, and the next three days are all about running tests on various systems.

The pattern is the same in all cases: a round of minimal-power or 'soft load' tests on all systems, then a routine conditions test. Finally the vessel's systems will be taken to their limits one by one, culminating in a full-power or 'hard load' test with everything running flat out. If these tests do not throw up any problems, the ship is probably fine. Although, of course, the Jump drive cannot be tested without activating it and entering Jump.

There is nothing seriously wrong with the ship, but there are a few post-refit niggles. Characters should make skill rolls as they carry out the tests, which may make them suspicious of the vessel's condition. All skill checks to test out shipboard systems are routine (8+ with a DM equal to skill level). One check on each of the tests listed below should be made. Failure indicates that a fault was not found, which the Referee should note for future reference. There may, of course, be no actual fault, or nothing more than a slight glitch that will be annoying but have no real effect.

Test	Crewmember(s)	Skills
Maneuver Test	Pilot	Pilot
Bridge Systems Test	Any Bridge	Communications, Sensors
Navigation Exercise	Astrogator	Astrogation
Avionics Test	Any	Computer
General Ship Systems	Engineer or tech	Electronics and Mechanical
Power Systems Test	Engineer	Engineering
Weapons Test	Gunner	Gunnery, Sensors
High-G Stress Test	Pilot, Engineer	Pilot, Engineering or Gravitics
Final Full-Load Test	All	Relevant skill to job (e.g. Pilot, Engineering)

For those areas where a skill roll was failed, the Referee should secretly roll 2d6 and consult the following chart:

Roll	Effect
2-5	No fault exists
6-7	Glitch; annoying but fairly harmless.
8-9	Flaw or fault. System malfunctions on a 2d6 roll of 9+ any time it is used
10-11	Serious flaw or fault. System fails on a 2d6 roll of 11+ any time it is used.

- 12 Potential disaster!: System catastrophically fails on a 2d6 roll of 12 any time it is used.

It is up to the Referee whether there are signs of a fault or not. It may manifest as a glitch or remain hidden until real problems occur. A malfunctioning system imposes a -2 DM on all skill rolls using it. A system which fails goes offline and cannot be used until rebooted. This requires the appropriate technical skills (Electronics, Engineering or Computer) and takes 5 minutes. A failed system can be crash-rebooted in 1 minute but is treated as malfunctioning until properly reset.

Repairing a glitched, malfunctioning or failed system takes 1d6 days divided by the number of people working on it. A suitable technical skill roll (whichever specific skill is appropriate) must be made by the project leader.

- Repairing a glitched system requires 1d3 X 1000 credits worth of components.
- Repairing a malfunctioning system requires 2d6 X 1000 credits worth of components.
- Repairing a failed system requires 3d6 X 1000 credits worth of components.
- A system that catastrophically fails is treated as destroyed. It can be jury-rigged for a while, but must be properly repaired at some point. As a quick rule, component cost will be Cr 5000 X 3d6, trebled if the Jump drive is involved.

General Ship Systems is everything from lighting and artificial gravity to freshers and water recycling. Glitches with the toilets and showers will probably not endanger the crew, but may drive them nuts...

Once the basic ship tests are over, which takes three days, Dr Markia decides that it is time to head back to the port. He requests a full sensor systems test as the vessel heads back in, trying out the enhanced passive and active sensor suite recently installed.

SCENE 2: SENSOR TEST

Unfurling the big passive sensor array is a delicate business and the vessel must be held steady while this is done (not usually a problem in deep space). Dr Markia also wants to launch a sensor drone, which could be mistaken for a missile launch. Even though the *Light of Truth* is well off the main shipping lanes, it would be wise to notify nearby vessels of the test in case of misunderstandings.

The deployment goes well enough, and sensor data begins to trickle in. The active sensors are quite good, but the passive ones (which have the advantage of not giving anything away) are really excellent. The crew can plot positions of dozens of vessels moving to and from the starport. Vessels close in are constantly being 'pinged' by remote beacons near the port, and most have their transponders set to Active anyway. Those further out are running in Normal mode, which means that they are not active but will respond to a 'ping' or 'squawk' from another vessel. This allows ships operating in dubious regions to 'run silent' to avoid detection. It is illegal to own a transponder that can be programmed to ignore squawks from other ships, though many smugglers and corsairs do. The Navy uses such devices as a matter of course, but most Naval vessels run in Normal or Active mode near a port, and only go Silent when on deployment.

The sensor picture is quite impressive. It is as if there is an invisible globe around the planet and the starport. Vessels moving into

the globe suddenly go Active as the port's beacons start to ping them. Ships moving out become ghosts, disappearing from the active display but tracked on passives for a while before fading out completely.

Here and there are the indistinct shapes of Navy and System Defence vessels running Silent, lurking unsuspected off the shipping lanes or heading out to deep patrol zones. As the characters watch, a wayward Free Trader wanders out of the designated lane, almost on an intercept course with a system defense boat lying doggo. The SDB's signature increases ever so slightly as she slides out of the way and activates her weapons, just in case. Then, probably in response to a sharp signal from Traffic Control, the Trader's drive flares on the passive display and she veers back into the lane, passing the silent guardian and never suspecting its presence.

The characters should realize that they can see things that most crews never do, but also that even their impressive systems cannot see everything. The sensor array is working properly, however, so it is time to furl it, recover the sensor drone, and head home. Recovering the drone is a tricky process requiring that characters go outside in Vac suits. Ship and drone must be maneuvered close together and then the drone is manhandled into the cargo bay for maintenance. More affluent vessels regard drones as expendable, but there is no budget for replacement of the 6 the *Light of Truth* carries so recovery is important.

However, there is not an unlimited amount of time. 6 minutes after the probe recovery begins, a Priority One signal comes in...

SCENE 3: PRORITY MESSAGE ALL VESSELS

The Priority Message alarm sounds, indicating that the signal coming in cannot wait. The message is from the Starport Authority. Its text reads:

PRIORITY ONE MESSAGE, ALL VESSELS
ANNAPABAR SYSTEM
SUBJECT: SECURITY ALERT
SPECIAL: DO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE
INSTRUCTIONS:
ALL VESSELS COMMENCE MAXIMUM
EMCON POSTURE IMMEDIATELY
PORT BEACONS WILL DEACTIVATE IMMEDIATELY
MAINTAIN CURRENT VECTOR AND
AWAIT DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS
MESSAGE ENDS.

Even as the characters take in the content of the message, which suggests that something serious is happening, the port beacons go offline and cease squawking. Hundreds of vessels vanish from the scope, turning off their active sensors and transponders to minimize their emissions (EMCON means Emission CONtrol and is intended to make vessels difficult for hostiles to locate and identify.) Of course, coasting on a known vector, the vessels in the system would be easy to find.

Seconds after the first transmission, a series of tight-beam communications go out to individual vessels, instructing them to make low-power vector changes and directing them to holding areas. Light of Truth receives such a transmission after a few minutes:

PRIORITY MESSAGE, LABORATORY SHIP *LIGHT OF TRUTH*
SUBJECT: DIRECTED COURSE CHANGE
SPECIAL: DO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE
COMPLIANCE MANDATORY LETHAL RESPONSE LIKELY
INSTRUCTIONS: MAINTAIN MAXIMUM EMCON
PROCEED VIA DESIGNATED VECTOR CHANGES TO
SECURE HOLDING AREA
MAINTAIN STATION AT HOLDING AREA UNTIL CLEARANCE
GRANTED
BE ADVISED OTHER VESSELS EN ROUTE SAME AREA
NAVAL ESCORT EN ROUTE
BE ADVISED VESSELS NOT IN HOLDING AREA WILL BE
FIRED UPON WITHOUT WARNING

MESSAGE ENDS.

The series of vector changes is easy to make, and conducted at low power so that the *Light of Truth* would be very hard to track. Traffic Control knows roughly where she is and her vector, but unless she was tracked right through her course changes she would be virtually impossible to find.

Within minutes of reaching the holding area, a large freighter hoves into passive sensor range and decelerates to rest relative to the characters' ship. This is the 5000-ton Imperial Trade Cluster Authority freighter *Panaethera*. Shipping logs show her as registered out of Annapabar and captained by one William Uriallia. She does not immediately communicate.

Moments later, a small freighter (in fact the Subsidized Merchant *Legendary Ledger*) comes into range, escorted by a System Defence Boat. The latter drops a communication laser (virtually impossible to intercept or even spot) onto each ship and sends a brief message:

SYSTEM DEFENCE BOAT ANNAPABAR G-109, LEIUTENANT
ALICE JAKAI COMMANDING
COMPLIMENTS OF THE SYSTEM DEFENCE FLEET
THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMPLIANCE.
SECURITY ALERT IN PROGRESS.
NO DETAILS AVAILABLE
MAINTAIN EMCON AND HOLD STATION
INTERSHIP TIGHT-BEAM COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERED
SAFE.
MESSAGE ENDS.

Almost instantly, the *Legendary Ledger* activates her own laser comms and starts chattering. Her master, one Kaille Suulig, turns out to be a self-important, over-dressed loudmouth who repeatedly demands an explanation as to why his time-sensitive cargo is being delayed this way, and tries to get the SDB captain to agree to a priority docking clearance. She actually does not know the answer to the question and cannot grant the request, but that does not stop Suulig from badgering her about it. He tries to get the other captains on his side, but gets little from Uriallia of the ITC ship beyond a polite suggestion that even tightbeam comms is not totally secure, and perhaps emission silence would be a better idea.

Lieutenant Jakai is as much in the dark as the characters about the alert, though she does know that something serious must be going on, such as a raid or major incident at the port. She is ordered to protect the ships at this rendezvous point and ensure they do not go wandering around; explanations will come later. If offered help

(such as a feed from the big passive array, Jakai will accept politely, and will be better disposed towards the PCs than towards idiots like Suulig.

If the characters deploy their sensor array, they can pick up a few ghosts where ships are gently maneuvering under EMCON, and some fairly distinct traces near the port. There are several major warships (including *Kokirrak*-class dreadnoughts) maneuvering to defend the station, just in case, while small vessels are involved in two incidents. One group is scrambling to intercept a small trace – apparently a shuttle – which is making for the starport. As the characters watch, an SDB closes in and cripples it with laser fire, then two fighters rake it with their weapons. The shuttle's drive fails, but the onslaught continues. The hull is broken up with missiles, then the bits are intercepted by more fighters and gunships. Finally a system defence monitor places herself broadside-on and apparently allows much of the debris to smash into her hull.

As the characters ponder this immense piece of overkill, the second drama plays out. A small merchant ship (probably a Subsidized Merchant by her drive and acceleration characteristics) is running for the Jump limit, pursued by a horde of SDBs and fighters. A monitor is racing in from the outsystem under maximum emergency power, trying for an intercept.

The Subbie looks for a while like she might reach the Jump limit, but starts taking fire from her pursuers. Trailing debris, she fires back then her signature changes as her Jumpgrid becomes live. Sensors spike as the merchant takes a hit, then enters Jump. Anyone who cares to do so can predict a very high probability of a Misjump, and a fair to good chance that the vessel was destroyed as she entered Jump.

Twenty minutes after the drama ceases, a message comes in from Port Traffic Control:

GENERAL MESSAGE, ALL VESSELS ANNAPABAR
SYSTEM
SUBJECT: SECURITY ALERT STAND-DOWN
INSTRUCTIONS:
ALL VESSELS RESUME NORMAL OPERATIONS
EMCON NO LONGER REQUIRED
VESSELS APPROACHING OR DEPARTING STARPORT
MAINTAIN CURRENT VECTOR AND AWAIT UPDATED
TRAFFIC INSTRUCTIONS
MESSAGE ENDS.

The long job of sorting out the traffic lanes begins, and it is obvious that ITC ships are getting priority treatment. Gossip starts flying around the comms channels, the gist of which is that pro-Solomani agents penetrated the traffic lanes in an innocent-seeming subsidized merchant, intending to attack the highport with a remote-controlled shuttle packed with nuclear explosives. Their plan was discovered by customs officers who boarded the ship, so the Solomani murdered them and launched their attack early before fleeing. The shuttle was just intercepted and the merchant is presumed destroyed. The port traffic is now in a huge mess thanks to the setpiece emergency plan that went into force once the alert was sounded, but at least everyone (except the customs officers) is safe.

Just as Suulig starts yelling at all and sundry about his time-sensitive cargo, another message comes in:

URGENT MESSAGE, LABORATORY VESSEL *LIGHT OF TRUTH*
SUBJECT: ASSISTANCE REQUESTED
ADVISORY: COMPLIANCE REQUIRED UNDER
INTERSTELLAR LAW
INFORMATION:
SUBLIGHT ORE CARRIER *SHURLIGIKAN*, EN ROUTE
FROM OUTSYSTEM MINING OPERATION, HAS
SUFFERED AN ACCIDENT DURING EMCON PERIOD.
POWER LOSS TO GRAVITIC COMPENSATORY SYSTEMS
RESULTING IN COLLISION WITH TOWED ORE
BOULDERS.
VESSEL IS IN YOUR LOCALITY.
SYSTEMDEFENCE VESSEL *ANNAPABARG-109* ASSIGNED
TO ASSIST ORE CARRIER *SHURLIGIKAN*.
TRAFFIC CONTROL ADVISED THAT YOUR VESSEL
POSSESSES ADVANCED PASSIVE SENSOR ARRAY
INSTRUCTIONS:
CONFIRM PASSIVE ARRAY AVAILABILITY. MOST URGENT

MESSAGE ENDS.

The characters could lie, of course, in which case they will be eventually directed in to the port and the ship impounded. The captain will lose his or her license and suffer a large fine at the very least. On the other hand, if the characters confirm that they have a good sensor system, they get a direct video feed from a harassed-looking port traffic control officer.

The traffic controller introduces himself as Supervisor Iaio Sukarno, and apologizes for the huge mess. As he's talking, he winces suddenly then shrugs, explaining that a stray bit of shuttle just clipped the main traffic control office. Anyway, he says, the problem is that the ore boulder that collided with the *Shurligikan* has bounced off at a tangent. The ship is crippled but frankly got off lightly. The boulder is a huge lump of nickel-iron, moving quite fast on an unknown trajectory. As Sukarno explains, that is not something you want wandering around the shipping lanes. What he requests the characters do is search for the boulder with their passive array before the search area widens any more, match course with it and ideally attach a beacon (such as a probe head).

Traffic Control can provide a rough idea of the search area based on data from the collision, but the cone of possible locations is getting bigger all the time and finding the boulder again will be very difficult if it's left too long. The characters will be out here for some time, Sukano says. Are they willing to help the port authority out while they're stuck?

While compliance with port authority instructions in an emergency is mandatory, the characters are not required to place themselves in danger. They cannot be directly punished for refusing to do this, but it is at the outer edge of what the port can legally order them to do. Sukano is not in a position to bargain with the characters. Either they'll help or they'll refuse.

If the characters refuse they will be spending a long time cooling their heels before being allowed to dock again. They will be subject to petty harassment in every port of the ITC, and will ALWAYS be boarded and searched incredibly thoroughly. If the characters agree, Sukano thanks them and transmits the data, then gets back to trying to deal with a hundred shouting Suuligs and their irreplaceable urgent cargoes...

SCENE 4: ANOTHER SENSOR TEST

As the System Defence Boat accelerates away to find and assist the stricken ore carrier, the big ITC freighter drops a pair of cargo shuttles that follow in case they can be any help. *Legendary Ledger* does nothing, of course.

The passive sensor array and sensor drones aboard the travellers' ship will give them a chance to track and find the boulder, which is of course a lump of dull metal ore in deep space with no emissions whatsoever – not the easiest of things to find. Active radar would give a good return but the rock is clearly not within range.

Light of Truth has the sensor equipment to find the boulder using long-range passive search, but it will take some time. Searching for the boulder is a tricky job that can be made easier by some smart use of resources. Using sensors alone will take a very long time and there will come a point where the range is so great that finding the target is impossible. If a mathematically-inclined character (e.g. the ship's astrogator) were to plot a likely course pattern for the loose ore boulder, this would help. The odds can be improved by launching a spread of probes to eliminate some possible drift vectors. This is only possible in the first four hours. Clever ideas such as requesting an active sensor sweep by nearby ships will eliminate some regions from the search and speed things up.

The Referee should call for difficult skill rolls and reward clever ideas such as those mentioned above with bonuses. It is likely that the characters will manage to find the boulder sooner or later. If they fail, the search will be called off by traffic control after 8 hours and the characters will be reimbursed for expensed and thanked for their efforts. The boulder may eventually drift into a shipping lane and may cause problems, but the characters are not to blame. Assuming the ore boulder is found, proceed to 'Rock-Hopping', below.

SCENE 5: ROCK-HOPPING

Once the boulder is found, the crew can play safe and simply make a visual ID, then transmit the rock's course and speed to Traffic Control so that someone can come out and fit a navigation beacon sooner or later. However, being adventurers, they may decide to go the whole hog and fix a beacon themselves. A beacon can be jury-rigged from some spare navigational and communication components on one of the probe heads. This is a fairly simple task for anyone with electronics or sensors skill.

Planting the beacon is rather more tricky. The boulder is over 1000dt, and rotating slowly. A probe will not stick, so manual attachment is necessary. This requires someone to go over, catch the probe head, and plant it. The travellers will need to match course and speed with the boulder and then someone will have to go over. This means jumping across in a vac suit. The boulder's rotation means that a line cannot be attached to it from the ship, and characters will have to jettison their own safety line to the ship when they land (but can attach a line to a projection on the boulder to prevent them from falling off).

Jumping the gap is not too hard. Landing without bouncing back or being swatted by the rotating, irregular boulder is a good bit more tricky. The Referee should ask for suitable skill rolls. A character who makes the check lands safely and can attach a line for others to come across. Failure by a small margin means the character bounces off and has to be hauled back in (nobody would make such a jump without a safety line, now would they?) but suffers no damage except to pride. Failure by a considerable margin or more means that the character has clipped a projection and taken

damage. In CT terms, 1D of damage is likely except in the case of a catastrophic failure, in which case the Referee should be as sadistic as he/she thinks suitable. The character may also have a suit breach to contend with.

Once on the rock, it should be a simple matter to maneuver the beacon in close and grab it, then attach it to the rock with lines and pitons. Jumping back to the ship is no more difficult than getting there, but characters who forget to leave a lot of slack on their line could end up orbiting the rock on the end of a long cable as its rotation drags them off target. A character who must be hauled back to the rock runs the risk of hitting a projection, too.

Eventually, the characters will reclaim their rock-hopping comrades and report success. The beacon begins transmitting and the characters receive a priority docking clearance at one of the reserved bays normally used by diplomatic couriers.

SCENE 6: RETURN TO GATEWAY CITY

Anyone who cares to check the monitors on the way in can identify the *Legendary Ledger* still in a holding area off the high starboard quarter as the characters' ship approaches the highport. An irate and slightly incoherent signal from Suulig demands to know why they are stealing his berth, and after a good harangue (if anyone is still listening) offers Cr5,000 to allow him to use the berth instead.

In port, the characters are met by an officer in the light gray uniform of the Port Authority, though with different shoulder tabs to the traffic control personnel previously dealt with. He is clearly 'unofficial', in that his tunic is unbuttoned and he is not wearing his hat. The officer introduces himself as Petyr Orlane of the ITC Trade Authority. Petyr works as a senior coordinator and would not normally be meeting small ships as they arrive in port.

He explains The ITC does not want to be seen to be rewarding personnel for tasks that are borderline mandatory, but on the other hand the Port Authority and the ITCTA is grateful for the assistance and aware that the characters did go beyond the level of compliance with instructions required by Interstellar Law. By way of compensation, Petyr offers the travellers reimbursement for reasonable fees and equipment expended plus a fee equal to 2 days' charter of their ship (Cr25000 with hazard premium), replacement of consumables, and an ITC transponder tag good for 6 months. The latter simply informs receivers that the ship has worked for the ITC previously and proved satisfactory. It might or might not get them preferential treatment in docking and customs within the cluster, but it certainly can't hurt.

In addition, Petyr does have a small cargo that needs shipping. This is 3 tons of paperwork; hard copies to follow the usual facsimiles. He'll pay normal freight rates – Cr 1000 per ton – for shipment to Kam. Dr Markia has no specific destination in mind, and Kam is well known as a haven for eccentrics. Perhaps some of them have a story to tell? He decides to accept the commission, and suggests that the characters try to find some additional cargo for Kam. The trip might as well make a profit...

EPISODE 2: INTERLUDES AND DEPARTURES

Just before the characters leave, they are contacted by Helene Wallis, a business owner and a minor beneficiary of the University of Gateway. She has a history of minor donations and the purchase of information/reports from the university, though never at great cost.

SCENE 1: A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME...?

While making preparations for the trip to Kam, one of the characters receives a comm call from one Helene Wallis. The name is vaguely familiar, and a moment's research reveals that she heads a firm here in Gateway City that makes specialist shipping equipment – pallets, hazardous materials containers, secure cargo safes and such like. While not a factor or a broker, she knows a lot about the shipping trade. Helene would like one of the characters to drop by her office if they have a moment.

At the office, Helene takes a few moments to chat with the characters. She's noticed they've signed on with Dr Markia – Mad Joe Markia as some of his colleagues like to call him, after a period where a series of his more dubious theories were proven completely wrong in rapid succession. Anyway, she's heard of the prize and the mission he was planning to undertake, and she's got a proposal.

Helene is a regular contributor to the University of Daramm's Xeno-Anthropology Institute. Indeed, her degree is in the subject, with a major in Ursa Society. She was about to make this year's donation and has decided that Dr Markia needed the funds more than the Institute, and he's just plain more fun, especially when he makes a new revelation and causes trouble on all the chat shows.

The long and short of it is, Helene would like to give the characters a credit chip worth Cr 10,000 to help with the mission expenses. It was to be this year's donation, but direct support of this mission seemed more interesting. There's no obligation, she says, but she'd like (and would pay extra for) first refusal of any Ursa artifacts the team might turn up along the way, or anything else of interest. She's well known for her interest in the Ursa people and has quite a collection of artifacts, though nothing spectacular. She also hints that other alien stuff that the characters might turn up would be of interest – she's plugged into the collector market and can help them find a buyer for anything she doesn't want herself.

There is absolutely nothing illegal about the private sale of artifacts, except those connected with the Ancients. Some collectors will buy Ancients stuff 'under the counter' if it was on offer, but it's not what she's interested in and she isn't going to pay huge prices for things she's not after. But that doesn't mean she doesn't know people who might, she adds...

Helene offers her good wishes on the mission and suggests that there are some ports where she has contacts. Using her name might help the team get through customs quicker or find cargo on slow days.

Referee: Helene really is a shipping-container manufacturer, really does have a degree in Xeno-Anthropology and really does collect Ursa artifacts. (And some academics really do call Dr Markia Mad Joe). But what she did not reveal is that she is an agent of the ZAK

organization. Her harmless interest in 'Ursa Stuff' is a cover to allow her to monitor the artifact market and make sure when Wanderer artifacts appear, they are bought up by people who can make them disappear, and the source is traced and obliterated. This quiet watch has resulted in several Wanderer sites being 'sanitized' over the years, and is an important part in the plan to ensure that no trace of the extermination is ever found.

SCENE 2: LIFE INSURANCE

A character (preferably one not involved in the meeting with Helene) receives a comm call. It is scrambled and re-routed, making the source virtually impossible to trace. It reads:

DR MARKIA IS UNSTABLE – TAKE OUT SOME INSURANCE BY HITTING 'RECEIVE FILE TRANSFER' AND FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS IN FILE.

If the character does so, a small viral computer program is downloaded to his or her comm, with instructions on how to insert it into the ship's computer system. A README file explains that the program will allow the character to lock one or more individuals out of the ship's critical functions upon command, and suggests that Dr Markia has a habit of taking stupid risks. He will even abandon comrades who refuse to comply with his irrational demands.

Referee: The program actually does what it says it will. A thorough investigation by someone with Computer skill will determine this. It may also reveal the program's hidden function, which is to cause a log dump of the ship's computers upon remote command. The command and the dump are concealed in normal comm traffic and would be very difficult to detect. The lockout feature could also be remote-triggered in this manner.

The program will allow Keeper agents to have complete access to the logs of the characters' ship, a way of checking on their progress without direct intervention. If a character is willing to install it, the Referee should take into account that Keeper agents know everything the characters do, and their responses will be more effective as a result. In addition, the lockout feature may be used during The Siege rather than bombarding the travellers' vessel.

SCENE 3: DEPARTING GATEWAY CITY

Since the *Light of Truth* is berthed in a diplomatic bay, Traffic Control gives her a priority lane for departure, and assigns a pair of fighters as courtesy escort all the way out to the Jump point. The incongruity is not lost on Dr Markia, who chuckles to himself from time to time.

This is the first use of the Jump drive since the refit, so Jump entry may be a little more tense than usual. However, there is nothing wrong with the drive. With course plotted and Jump parameters laid in, it's time to get going so, leaving behind her escort, *Light of Truth* activates her drive and departs the Annapabar system. The characters now have a week in Jumpspace to conduct routine jobs and pretty much do as they please. Little personal differences that might not matter in a larger environment can become serious issues among the crew of a small ship in Jump, so it might be that these will be testing times.

EPISODE 3: DELIVERY TO KAM

The characters make planetfall on Kam and deliver their charter cargo. There, they find a rumor that will lead them to adventure!

SCENE 1: PLANETFALL

After about a week in Jump, *Light of Truth* emerges into the Kam system and shapes course for the mainworld, a dryish little planet home to about 5000 people. Sensors show a couple of vessels in the outsystem, probably Belters, and a beacon in orbit over the Mainworld. There is no other traffic.

Contacting the Downport takes longer than expected, but eventually gets a crisp response: "This is Kam Downport. There's nobody here to give you clearance, but if you wait for the Director you'll probably run out of air. You'd better come in and land. There's plenty of pad; just pick a spot."

The speaker is a very bored Imperial Marine private who happened to be passing the office while the characters were trying to make contact. She is one of the few garrison members not neglecting the duties of the Marine detachment, and has a lot to do (though little enthusiasm for it). She has to get back to her other jobs and won't stay to chat with the travellers.

As the characters make their landing approach, the dreadful state of Kam Downport is apparent. The port is little more than a large rectangle of weed-cracked concrete surrounded by a rusted, broken chain-link fence. A set of dilapidated prefabricated buildings sprouting a few forlorn antennae serves as control center and barracks for the Marine detachment. Rusting vehicles and the cannibalized remains of a ship's boat lie around the perimeter of the field. Local animals use some of them as lairs.

Just after the characters touch down, they will spot two Imperial Marines walking unhurriedly across the apron towards their ship. The Marines wear flak jackets and carry snub pistols, but clearly are not expecting trouble. Their uniform is full but sloppy, and their attitude is one of bored indifference. As they reach the ship, another figure, a civilian in an off-white suit and red shirt, comes storming across the apron from the so-called control center. From his unsteady gait it is clear that he is half-cut even though it is only midmorning, local time.

The Marines wait politely at the base of the characters' ramp, make the most cursory possible examination of the ship's documents and manifest, and give the characters the once-over. They aren't empowered to accept cargo, but gesture at the approaching drunk, saying, 'He is, though. Good luck with that'.

The Marines are keen to make themselves scarce before the civilian arrives. They do however discharge their duties as guardians of the port, saying, "Welcome to Kam Downport, and you are indeed welcome to it. The area inside the wire is subject to Imperial Law enforced by the Corps. Outside the wire is officially an anarchy with virtually no laws. Cause too much trouble and someone will probably shoot you. Otherwise, anything goes. Enjoy your stay..."

The Marines withdraw tactfully just before the civilian storms up. He is Morgan Lakarnis, Port Authority Director (of sorts) and he is, indeed, drunk. Morgan is also very annoyed. He demands to

know who gave the characters clearance, where the comms tech was, and why they chose to land where they did. He doesn't know and doesn't care about paper records, he wants to know why the characters think they can just dump their rustbucket on his landing apron. He makes a close inspection of the ship's papers (mainly because he is having trouble focusing) and raises a whole series of pointless nitpicks about interstellar shipping safety regulations that he clearly does not understand.

Morgan is a self-important fool who runs a small business supplying life support requirements to passing ships. He is pretty much the only source of replacement air filters, grav-plate field intensity regulators and such like on Kam. That, and the fact that he has appointed himself to the job of Port Director (which nobody else wants), gives him a level of personal power in the port that is almost as great as it is illusory.

Morgan will argue and quibble until his annoyance subsides and his desire for another drink replaces it. He will grudgingly sign for the records, authorize payment, and airily say he'll send someone over to unload the crates. He then weaves off, leaving the characters free to do as they please. Starport customs does not really exist. There are a handful of Marines around, dispiritedly going through the motions of guarding the port and maintaining their equipment. They will deal with any real trouble in a broadly competent manner, but they have seriously lost their edge.

SCENE 2: KAM DOWNPORT

The characters should be able to find their way around the town of Kam Downport quickly enough. It is a small place with about 5000 inhabitants. Some are farmers or providers of essential services like plumbing maintenance. The rest are writers, artists and political thinkers who like the world's laid-back atmosphere.

Dr Markia wants to interview as many people as possible, hoping to collect some obscure snippets of data that may give a new perspective on something else. The characters are expected to help with this task, but since it consists mainly of drinking beer or coffee and chatting to the locals, it can hardly be considered onerous.

The characters will turn up some malicious local gossip, a few rumors (determine randomly or choose from the Rumors section), and two important pieces of information.

SCENE 3: THE JOURNALIST

A retired journalist, Briana Stalling, talks about how hazardous research can be. She was looking into some shipping-company discrepancies about 15 years ago as part of a spaceways-scandal type expose for *State of the Gate*, a now-defunct news and reportage periodical. Her editor was threatened, then beaten up on three occasions. Later she was attacked in her hotel room. Anonymous messages on her comm. told her to drop the investigation, which she eventually did. She regrets that now. The investigation was quite broad – she doesn't know exactly what she got close to, but her main thread was funds-misappropriation in the interface and independent lines.

If the characters can get access to a decent data library (any Class A or B port will have one), they can look up back issues on *State of the Gate*. It was an investigative, some would say intrusive, publication with a tendency to cause trouble by reporting things that big business wanted swept under the carpet. See Library Data for more information about *State of the Gate*.

Briana is pretty much retired, though she is working on a novel and writes the odd piece for various magazines across the sector. She steers clear of contentious subjects these days. If pressed, Briana can give the travellers a list of contact names of old colleagues on State of the Gate, though she does not know their whereabouts.

- Alexander Evro (Reporter)
- Tanya Patrice-Rovams (Reporter)
- Shana Te (Reporter)
- Armas deBrennis (Editor)

Briana is friendly and likes to chat; she gets inspiration for her fiction from visiting spacers and their tales, so she is keen to swap stories. She can tell the characters that Karse Vaali, owner of the belting ship that just arrived, has a rather interesting tale to tell.

SCENE 4: THE BELTER

There are few places to see in town, and by the time the characters have seen them all, they will become aware of another ship approaching the port. It is a Type J Seeker, whose angle of approach suggests it is in severe distress. However, the locals just shrug and say that's how Karse always approaches the port, and sure enough the Seeker manages to decelerate enough to make a dramatic, sliding landing near the characters' ship.

The vessel is owned and operated by a middle-aged Belter named Karse Vaali, his 19-year-old niece Myla and a white-haired man of venerable years who just goes by 'Granddad'. Karse is working the outsystem at present and is calling at the port to pick up a shipment of overpriced spares from 'that crook Lakamis'. He will be in town for a few days, during which time he drinks heavily, talks to everyone he meets, and impugns the character and parentage of Morgan Lakamis at every turn.

Granddad and Myla fiddle with the ship for a while then spend the time looking up friends at the port. They are friendly enough, though Myla deals with outsiders in a guarded way and would prefer to be left alone. She is very wary of non-Belters, having been brought up among self-reliant people and taught to give trust only grudgingly. Karse, on the other hand, is in port to party, meet people, and pick a fight with one of the Marines. This is now almost a tradition, and the insults are becoming habitual. The punches are quite real, however.

If the travellers give him any excuse, Karse chats with them for hours and tells wild tales of his near-death experiences across the 'bottom end' of Ley Sector. At some point he mentions finding some artifacts about 30 years ago in what looked like a really old survival shelter on an asteroid in the outsystem of – oh, some system or other, he can't remember. It might have been Kishimaa or Sik. The artifacts weren't human, that was for sure. There was no sign of ship wreckage or the occupants. He sold most of them, but kept a smooth, rounded metal object with a hole at one end and some sort of writing on it as a keepsake. He won't sell it, but will show it to the characters. Karse adds that he sold some of the artifacts to "a museum guy" from Dadegadi (Ley Sector 1836).

SCENE 5: TRADING ON KAM

There is not much of a manufacturing base on Kam, and little in the way of exotic material to purchase. The only offworld trader is the Port Director, Morgan Lakamis, and he has little for export right now. Enterprising characters might try to buy up some local art and

suchlike direct from the artists, but there is no actual cargo. Kam is a class C port (just) and should accept the Archduke's expenses voucher. Browbeating Morgan into this will be a challenge, however.

SCENE 6: ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Light of Truth is the only ship in port when the characters arrive, but after a couple of days an Imperial Navy destroyer, the *Midu Sargharma* under Lt-commander Ulrich Malliew, arrives in-system and a few personnel come down for liberty. Mere hours later a Naval courier arrives in-system and all personnel are recalled. The destroyer then jumps out. The courier refuels and does likewise.

The Marines react to the recall with a brief period of alert; even their officer makes an appearance. However, after a day or two they begin to slip back into their old habits. The alert was a response to the Solomani attack on Annapabar; the courier was a bit slow in getting to such a backwater system. The destroyer has been redeployed to search for signs of the subsidized merchant used in the attack, on the offchance that it survived after all.

SCENE 7: HEADING ONWARD

Dr Markia eventually decides to head out for another system. This artifact of Karse's intrigues him. But where to go – Sik or Kishimaa? The characters will have to decide which seems the most promising. They may have many adventures all around the region before finally reaching the next episode of this adventure.

EPISODE 4: THE BELT AT KISHIMAA

The travellers visit the troubled world of Kishimaa and find a clue that leads them to a cache of alien artifacts – and new danger.

SCENE 1: PLANETFALL AT KISHIMAA

Emerging from Jump and heading for the rather chilly but otherwise fairly earthlike mainworld of the Kishimaa system, the travellers receive an advisory signal from the starport, or rather from the Imperial Marine force assigned to guard the Starport. The message simply says that there is considerable fighting in the region around the Starport, and while the port itself is currently safe, the rest of the planet should be considered to be extremely dangerous to offworlders. Landing anywhere but the port is forbidden, and the Marine force will not rescue anyone stupid enough to ignore the injunction.

The port is nothing more than a set of prefabricated buildings alongside what used to be an airbase for biplane fighters. However, a sizable Startown surrounds the port. Part of the Startown is walled off and is clearly home to the Marine force – which seems a lot more competent than the one at Kam.

Several small starships (mainly Seekers) are parked around the landing area alongside several crude biplanes painted garish colors and bearing the insignia of the Port Alliance. The port is primitive, but it is guarded by a PAD missile battery which tracks the characters' ship all the way in. Just moments after landing a party from the Port Alliance Customs Force, backed by two smart and efficient Marine troopers, arrives in an electric cart and requests permission to come aboard for a search.

The search is fairly cursory but entirely adequate, and during it the customs commander, a Vargr who goes by the name of Ferris, answers questions as best he can. The port is in a high state of alert, since another war has just broken out and the fighting is getting close to the Starport. Security is fairly tight even within the port, though as much as possible it's business as usual. Ferris discounts the possibility that the startown might be in any danger; there are Marine grav sleds ready to chase off attackers if the local biplane-and-rifle armed forces cannot manage it. The Marines are not actually empowered to fight for the Port Alliance, since that would constitute interfering in local affairs, but give them a clear threat to the port and they'll be out there putting boot to butt in seconds...

Ferris is friendly towards any ex-army types he encounters and suggests a drink once he gets off work. He is just as efficient in his duties whether he likes a crew or not, but he is more likely to be helpful to other ex-groundpounders.

SCENE 2: IN PORT ON KISHIMAA

There are several bars and hostelrys on Kishimaa catering to the needs of passing spacers. Things are fairly quiet right now, other than a handful of Belters in port, so accommodation is not a problem.

Anyone talking to the Belters will hear about the *Brindan Prime*, a commercial mining ship using strongarm tactics to keep other Belters out of some of the best regions of the planetoid clusters. This is illegal of course, but nobody cares enough to send a ship to enforce the law out there...

Asking about Belters with strange tales of alien relics will result in dozens of repeated stories, most of which are clearly tosh. However, some of the older port staff will remember a Belter making a strange find in the Trailing Trojans of Promija. He showed a bunch of artifacts around the port then lit off to find a university to buy them.

A friendly approach will get the characters a little more information: the Belter (Karse Vaali) who made the find once – and only once, while very drunk – went into some detail about where he made his find. He'd made a really stupid navigational error and left the Trojan cluster's very trailing tip, headed almost directly out from the star in the ecliptic. He'd traveled for an entire sleep period before turning around, and found a single cold asteroid just after he did so. The only reason anyone remembers the story at all is the fact that you'd probably never find a rock in space outside a major cluster, unless you knew it was there, except by a fluke like that.

Referee: The rock could be found again, using the base vector and a cone-shaped search. Most ships could not do it. *Light Of Truth* can, but it will not be easy. And the *Brindan Prime* is operating in the region.

SCENE 3: TRADING ON KISHIMAA

Kishimaa is a link on the Serpent Main. There is a little passing trade, so cargo or freight should be rolled for normally. If the characters are going rock hunting, passengers might not be a good idea.

SCENE 4: THE TRAILING TROJANS OF PROMIJA (KEY SCENE)

Like many giant planets, Promija has gathered a cluster of planetoids at its leading and trailing Trojan points (60° ahead of and behind it in its orbit), and these offer the chance of a decent find for Belters. However, the Trailing Trojan cluster is unofficially claimed by Brindan Extraction LIC. This claim is illegal, of course, but there is little law enforcement out here, and BE is able to deflect what legal interest there is by claiming that it is only protecting its workers.

Brindan Extraction, LIC is operating its sole asset, the extraction ship *Brindan Prime*, in the region. The ship acts as a mobile processing works, sending prospecting and extraction crews down to several planetoids at once using cutters, and chasing independent vessels off with a handful of fighters. Vessels approaching openly are warned off by the BE operation, and will be fired on by fighters if they persist. The players should already know this from the Belters or the Port staff. A covert approach will yield better results, and it may even be possible to track and monitor the extraction operation in the main cluster. One thing that is immediately apparent is that while a couple of the cutters do seem to be serving a mining op, the rest are quartering as if doing survey flybys, which is not a good way to find minerals. At least one fighter is on patrol at all times.

The rogue asteroid found by Karse Vaali can be found by employing similar techniques as the characters used at Annabar. They have a rough idea of the search area based upon the performance of a standard Seeker and Karse's tale. The search will still take some time, however, and require a diligent sensor watch.

The characters will eventually locate the asteroid. As described, it is a lone rock floating in deep space, dark against the blackness of the void. It is highly unlikely that anyone has been here since Karse Vaali, nearly 30 years ago. The rock is quite large; big enough to have a useful surface gravity and to require a detailed surface

search to find anything. After a while, something is picked up on the screens aboard the *Light of Truth*.

At the end of a deep scar (probably volcanic), what appears to be a survival shelter can be located. It is metallic, though instruments cannot determine its precise composition. It lies under an overhanging ledge, presumably to give additional protection from meteorites. On the ledge is another metallic trace, of type unknown.

SCENE 6: BETWEEN A ROCK AND HARD VACUUM

The only place to land anywhere near the shelter is to edge the ship down in the scar itself, and walk along the bottom of the rift. This is a tricky and somewhat hazardous business, requiring careful progress to avoid falling or snagging a suit on something. It takes about 30 minutes of struggling through the narrow, jagged rift to reach the shelter, and upon arrival certain things become clear:

1. *The shelter is composed of a thin shell of very resilient metal, with tubular braces. While this is a common means to build such structures, the style is definitely not that of any known spacefaring race. There is an airlock protrusion with a manual wheel to operate it, but it was not designed for humans and requires a rather awkward posture.*
2. *The metal shell is coated with meteoric dust, but although scraped and dented here and there by micrometeorites, it is not punctured at any point. The metal does not reflect light well, making the shelter hard to spot except from close up. The metal is faintly iridescent despite its low reflectivity*
3. *The shelter is more than a survival unit. It appears to be a semi-permanent base unit, of the sort prospectors might use if they were expecting their parent ship to be away for, say, a couple of weeks.*
4. *The shelter is fused to the rock below, making it rather permanent.*

Inside the shelter, things are equally odd. There is an airlock and equipment locker, what appears to be a control center and two of what might be living chambers, plus a sealed power unit (which is a fusion unit, but long dead). Almost everything has been stripped out of the shelter, but a detailed search will turn up another of the odd-shaped discs, plus that most universal of tools, a spanner. The latter turns out to have been dropped from a toolkit by the human who found the place 30 years ago. The monitors or whatever display units were here are have also been stripped out.

Scrambling up onto the ledge behind the shelter is tricky but once there characters can investigate the other metallic object. This turns out to be a shallow bowl carved out of the rock and lined with a thin film of metal, creating a dish receiver/transmitter of some kind. There is no central transmitter/receiver unit at the focus of the bowl, but there is a raised lip around the whole circumference, suggesting that the device was steered using electromagnetic 'bending' of the beam rather than physical movement of the bowl. There is a gap in the lip where something has been removed; perhaps a control or retransmitter device.

The place has the look of a covert listening post or tracking station, but poses more questions than it answers. However, before the debate can really get going, the ship's sensor alarm goes off.

SCENE 7: FLIGHT AND PURSUIT

Sensors aboard the *Light of Truth* have picked up three small vessels incoming. They are coasting on a low-signature approach, and are only a few minutes out. The ship's computer pegs them as an ore cutter and two fighters from the *Brindan Prime*. Several sensor ghosts further back suggest a larger force inbound.

Scrambling back down the rift at speed will be a dangerous option. The only other way to get out quickly would be to lift the ship, hover over the rift and drop cables for the characters, which carries the risk of swinging into the sides of the canyon. Whichever option is chosen, the characters do not have long to get moving.

Once the intruders detect that the travellers' ship is taking off, they light their drives and accelerate for an intercept. Orders to heave to are broadcast.

Whether or not the characters are still on the ground, the ore cutter lands vacsuited troops to secure the shelter (and destroy it.) These troops are not elite covert-ops personnel but are experienced and armed with snub pistols and laser carbines (see *Dramatis Personae*). They invite the characters to surrender but will shoot to kill; they work for ZAK and know what they have to do.

The fighters will pursue the characters' ship, shooting as soon as they are in range. Even if the characters are able to fight off a pair of fighters, there are at least 4 more inbound, along with several armed ore shuttles. This is not a fight they can win. There is nowhere to hide this far out from the Trojans, and no chance of outrunning the fighters.

Clearing the planetoid's 100-diameter limit and engaging Jump will necessitate a few rounds of space combat. Exactly how long is up to the Referee; the characters should take a beating but escape more or less intact.

HOSTILES:

Brindan Extraction Fighters (2 or more)

Brindan Extraction Cutters (1 or more)

Brindan Extraction Pilots (1 per fighter, 2 per cutter)

Brindan Extraction Vac Troopers (4-8 per cutter, half with Snub pistol, half with laser carbine)

INTERLUDE: A MYSTERIOUS OBJECT

The characters try to figure out what the object they picked up in the Kishimaa system is, and what to do with it.

ANALYZING THE ARTIFACT

The crew of *Light of Truth* have access to a good materials lab and equipment aboard ship. Analyzing the object suggests that it is similar to the one found by Karse Vaali. It is ovoid, flattened on one axis (like an egg that has been compressed in a vice) with a slight depression in the wider part at top and bottom. It is made of a resilient lightweight alloy which defies analysis but seems to contain several non-ferrous metals and some ceramics. Within this matrix are several rectangles of superdense material, similar to that used in high-tech starship armor.

Dr Markia theorizes that this is a data storage device, with information somehow encoded on the superdense layers. It is like nothing he has seen before. Certainly it was made by some alien race capable of high-tech materials manipulation and space flight. It might even be an Ancients artifact (he chuckles at that one – it's such a cliché in his line of work). If the characters could figure out who made the object, they could maybe build a reader (or buy one?) to find out if there is information on it.

After a certain amount of fiddling about, it is apparent that the characters need a new lead. Perhaps that 'museum guy' on Dadejadi might be able to help – if he's still around.

TAKING IT TO AN EXPERT

If the characters show the object to an expert on alien artifacts, they will certainly get an interested reaction, but likely no concrete information. The technology is highly unusual, and does not match known species' artifacts. It will thus be possible to rule out the possibility that the object was constructed by any of the common races of this region – humans, Vargr, Sydites, and so on. There is a vague similarity to some Hiver devices, and most experts will not rule out the possibility that it is Hiver in origin.

There is a tendency to assume that anything that cannot be easily identified was made by the Ancients, though most reputable experts prefer not to leap to the hackneyed Ancients conclusion. Someone with real experience of Ancients artifacts (such people are quite rare) will suggest that it is unlikely this device was built by them.

There are numerous alien races in the region. The most likely theory is that this device was made by a species that died out or lost its technology, or perhaps it was left behind by visitors from a considerable distance away, such as the Kahyri of Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector, whose technology is not familiar to most scientists in Ley Sector.

SHOWING IT TO A WANDERER

It is actually quite unlikely that the characters will encounter Wanderers at any given port, and they probably will not show the artifact to those they do meet. Even if they do, the average Wanderer will not recognize the device as being theirs. Their technology has changed considerably in the past 6000 years, and the great majority of ordinary Wanderers are not aware that this region was their ancient home. They have no reason to make the

connection, and while they may feel that the device is vaguely similar to the data storage devices in current use, they are unlikely to comment on it. After all, the device also resembles an ashtray or novelty paperweight.

More senior Wanderer personnel, who *are* aware of the discreet search going on, are more likely to make the connection between this ancient object and modern Wanderer technology. They will be quite excited, but the stakes are so high that they will show no reaction and probably will not comment on the similarity. The Wanderers may decide to press the characters for more information or make an offer to purchase the item as a novelty.

A meeting with a senior Wanderer merchant or official thus yields the following information:

"This looks a lot like something of ours, but very different. It is extremely old. Possible that one of our Worldships voyaged this space centuries ago. We do not know how many there are, nor the fate of all of them. Perhaps there was an exchange of technology; our people taught and learned; others copied our way of storing data. We trade in many places. We do not know of this thing, we have no records. But it is possible all the same. Interesting to us. We would make payment for further information and for this object, if you will sell?"

The Wanderers will not push the matter but will certainly watch the characters closely afterward, and may even be able to discreetly help the characters if this looks like a worthwhile undertaking.

EPISODE 5: MUSEUMS, DECISIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

The characters search for the 'museum guy', but the Keepers get there first.

SCENE 1: DADEGADI

Dadegadi is an important world in the Imperial Trade Cluster. Its A class starport is the main Xboat link out of the ITC to Ohasset, and Jump-2 traffic entering the cluster comes mainly in through the port, too. It is thus a rather busy place, so planetfall takes a while. Customs inspections are fairly thorough at present, especially after what happened in the Annapabar system just a few weeks ago. The delays can be put to good use in searching the local database for back issues of *State of the Gate*, or trying to find out if there is a museum with an alien artifacts section on planet. Dadegadi has a moderate law level (5; ownership of all firearms except shotguns for vermin control purposes is forbidden), which is being carefully enforced at the starport entry and egress points.

The starport has been improved lately, and many of the facilities are brand new. However, the volume of traffic does take its toll and the sheer numbers of people passing through can make the port something of a sensory overload.

Characters doing a quick data search will discover that there is a small private museum – the Boroais Collection – that specializes in offworld artifacts. It is situated in the city of Novotocca, about 600 miles from the capital. Commercial speeder flights or maglev trains are available quite cheaply, so reaching the city will be cheap and simple.

The starport and travel to the city of Novotocca provide an opportunity for the characters to wind down after their recent stressful episode, and perhaps to interact with some fellow travellers. Damage to the ship can be repaired in Dadegadi's yards, though there will be paperwork to fill in explaining how the damage occurred.

It might be possible to charge the repairs to the expenses fund; this is a matter for some good roleplaying and P/Admin checks. The Referee should make it as hard as he feels is appropriate.

SCENE 2: THE MUSEUM GUY

Novotocca is a fairly large city situated at the top edge of the northern temperate zone. As such it is rather cold, though much of the TL-A city is enclosed in transit tubes or large building complexes so there is little need to go outside.

The Boroais Collection, whose curator is one Dr Avner Miracru, is situated in a quiet corner of a suburban zone, away from the main transitways. It takes a little time to get there, but even as the characters approach, they can tell something is wrong. There is a police cordon around the block; rescue and medical crews are attending to injured people being dug out of the wreckage of the surrounding houses.

What little is left of the museum (which was a modest, library-like place) is ablaze. Clearly there has been an explosion of some kind.

The fires are being fought by fire officers and robotic units, which are still bringing the dead out. So far, three of the six museum staff have been found, all of them dead. Dr Miracru is among them.

New reporters are broadcasting all that is known; that an explosion suddenly gutted the place. Some witnesses claim that there were two, three or even four separate blasts, and one obvious crank is claiming that the place was a secret Ancients research institute and that the disaster was caused by an artifact being experimented with.

The police aren't saying much, but they think the explosion was suspicious. What they have no idea about is why terrorists or political activists might want to destroy such a minor institution. Best theories suggest that the neighborhood is mainly populated by professionals of Solomani descent and Long Night Remembrance wants to scare them. The countervailing theory is that Pro-Solomani activists blew the place up because as everyone knows the Sollies are a bunch of racists who want to destroy everything non-human (and better yet, non-Solomani). Neither theory holds water.

Referee: The Keepers got here first – just. They were aware of the collection and the fact that it had Wanderer artifacts in it. Rather than act directly, they have quietly tried to close down and buy out the collection, which they were close to doing. They know the story of Karse Vaali and how he found the artifacts in Kishimaa, but never found the asteroid. The *Brindan Prime* was searching for it, though in the wrong location. They also knew who Karse sold the artifacts to, and figured out where the characters were headed. Up to now, they have preferred to act quietly to avoid attention, but more drastic measures have become necessary. Characters who think about this may realize that Karse Vaali is now in danger.

Doing a little data mining turns up one interesting fact. The Dr Miracru was not the 'museum guy' that Karse sold the artifacts to, or more accurately, he was not the curator 30 years ago when Karse visited. That individual was Dr Ernest Livaaki, who suddenly retired 9 months ago without giving an explanation, handed over the collection to his assistant (Miracru) and left on 'family business'.

It is not known where he went, but his first destination was Lepanto, according to the Starport booking office.

SCENE 2: THE MUSEUM AFTERMATH

The morning after the explosion, news broadcasts confirm the Boroais Collection was destroyed by a deliberate explosion – a bomb or bombs planted by a man seen leaving the building in something of a hurry. Police are searching for him, but even though he may have been injured in the explosion (suggesting that this was a rush job), he has effectively disappeared.

The characters are probably still involved in data mining when they are sent a very direct warning to back off. They will be attacked by a group of street thugs (who have been hired through a third party; they don't really know anything) shortly afterward. The thugs have orders to hurt but not kill the group (which they may or may not obey), and will withdraw if seriously threatened. There are six Fighters and two Watchers (who have concealed firearms and will cover their comrades' retreat or engage armed characters).

Self-defense is entirely legal on Dadegadi, and using melee weapons is acceptable so long as 'the quality of mercy is maintained', i.e. downed assailants are not attacked once they

are no longer a threat, and attackers are given every chance to withdraw. If someone is killed, or if an illegal weapon is used, the local police will become involved and will investigate thoroughly.

See Dramatis Personae for attacker stats.

Hostiles:

6 Dadegadi Thugs

2 Dadegadi Watchers

SCENE 3: JOB OFFER

Either before or after the Aftermath (Scene 2), the travellers have a message waiting when they return to the starport. It is the offer of a job for their ship and crew. A local shipping firm, Far End Freightling LIC, offers three months' contract freightling work, running supplies out to the belting community at 25% over Charter rates, plus crew salaries paid. The offer is from the office of a well-respected Broker, Jahmir Guldi, who has made such an offer on behalf of Far End Freightling client before. The job is quite real, and has come up because one of the regular ships has been called up for Naval Auxiliary service.

Referee: The job is real, the broker and the freightling firm are legitimate, and the previous ship, *August in Samarkand*, is really transferring to naval service. However it is obviously a 'loophole' created by the Keepers, to give the characters an honorable way to abandon their search after the warning they have recently received.

Research shows that the same job offer has been made to, and taken by some of, a number of vessels and their crews over the past 4 years. These include:

Subsidized Merchant: Aurora Constans (Master: Aareon Parrio)

Free Trader: Missingbit (Master: Lewis Irgaansuu)

Free Trader: Usarch of Dukh (Master: Sir Marglay Vornia-Taressay)

Far Trader: Skipshop (Master: Elayne Young)

Scout/Courier: Surplus to Requirements (Master: Axe Harvine)

Scout/Courier: A102G6 (Master: Ereni Asaanai)

Scout/Courier: Bill's Ship (Master: William Pottermann)

All of these ships have undertaken several runs over a period of weeks or months; some of them have done several stints. The job is quite legitimate, though the payment is higher than is usual for simple charter-haulage work. Much of the cargo actually hauled is fresh produce and spares for the Belting operations.

SCENE 4: DECISIONS, DIRECTIONS AND DETECTIVE WORK

The characters should by now be very sure that they are onto something, but they are suffering from a distinct lack of clues. The artifact they picked up along the way seems significant, but they are either going to have to track Dr Livaaki or find another expert to look it over for them. Helene Wallis, or another expert from the Annapabar end, might be possibilities, or they may go on to Lepanto.

Dadegadi is a massive trade port, and is subject to normal trade considerations.

SCENE 5: LEPANTO

Lepanto is currently under Naval jurisdiction after an Imperial intervention to curb pro-Solomani activity. The Imperial presence is mainly confined to the capital, which adjoins the starport region, though there are small regional forces based in the many, widely-spaced, small towns that make up much of the world's urban population.

There is little need for the travellers to leave the Starport region, though the unstable situation may present some interesting opportunities.

A mix of data mining and old-fashioned talking to people will reveal that Dr Livaaki did indeed come through Lepanto Starport a few months ago. He stayed for a period of about 3 weeks, then left on a Far Trader, the *Skipshop*, which was bound for Annapabar. He traveled under the imaginative pseudonym of Mr Ernest Li.

SCENE 6: ANNAPABAR

Returning to Annapabar, the characters can attempt to trace Dr Livaaki. A quick search of port records shows that two passengers (a female Vargr and her infant daughter) got off the *Skipshop* at Gateway City, but no human male did. Either Dr Livaaki was not ever on the ship or he stayed aboard for the whole 6-day port period and went on to the ship's next destination. The *Skipshop* filed a flight plan for Kam when she left.

Not long after the characters arrive in Gateway City, Helene Wallis contacts them with an offer to meet for lunch.

If the characters agree, Helene chats about their mission in general, delicately not bringing up the subject of alien artifacts, but dropping hints that remind the characters about her interest in 'Ursa stuff' and maybe other alien artifacts.

If the characters show her the Kishimaa artifact, she recognizes it but conceals the fact. She makes a casual offer to buy on behalf of a fellow collector who she thinks will like it, for Cr1,000, suggesting that it's probably an artifact of the old Shaanshakase civilization. She'll allow herself to be bargained up to Cr 10,000, and if the characters seem doubtful she'll make a couple of calls and later intrude her friend Jarijk Irisansi, who she says is an expert and a collector. Jarijk is of course a ZAK agent, and can pass for an expert. He will positively ID the device as Shaanshakase and offer Cr7,500 for it to add to his collection.

If these ploys fail, Wallis will not push the issue here in Gateway City, but will suggest that an old university friend of hers, Dr Ared Vialli. He is currently working a dig on Zuge, might be able to help out. She will of course also inform her superiors among the Keepers that the characters fall into the 'most dangerous' category, and recommend extreme measures to remove them before their investigation can go any further.

The characters may at this point jump to Zuge, in which case there is a little surprise waiting for them (see Optional Act A: Ambush on Zuge) or follow their lead to Kam.

SCENE 7: KAM

Kam has not changed much during the past few weeks, except for one tragedy. Karse Vaali, Myla and Granddad are missing, presumed dead after an accident with their drive. According to their

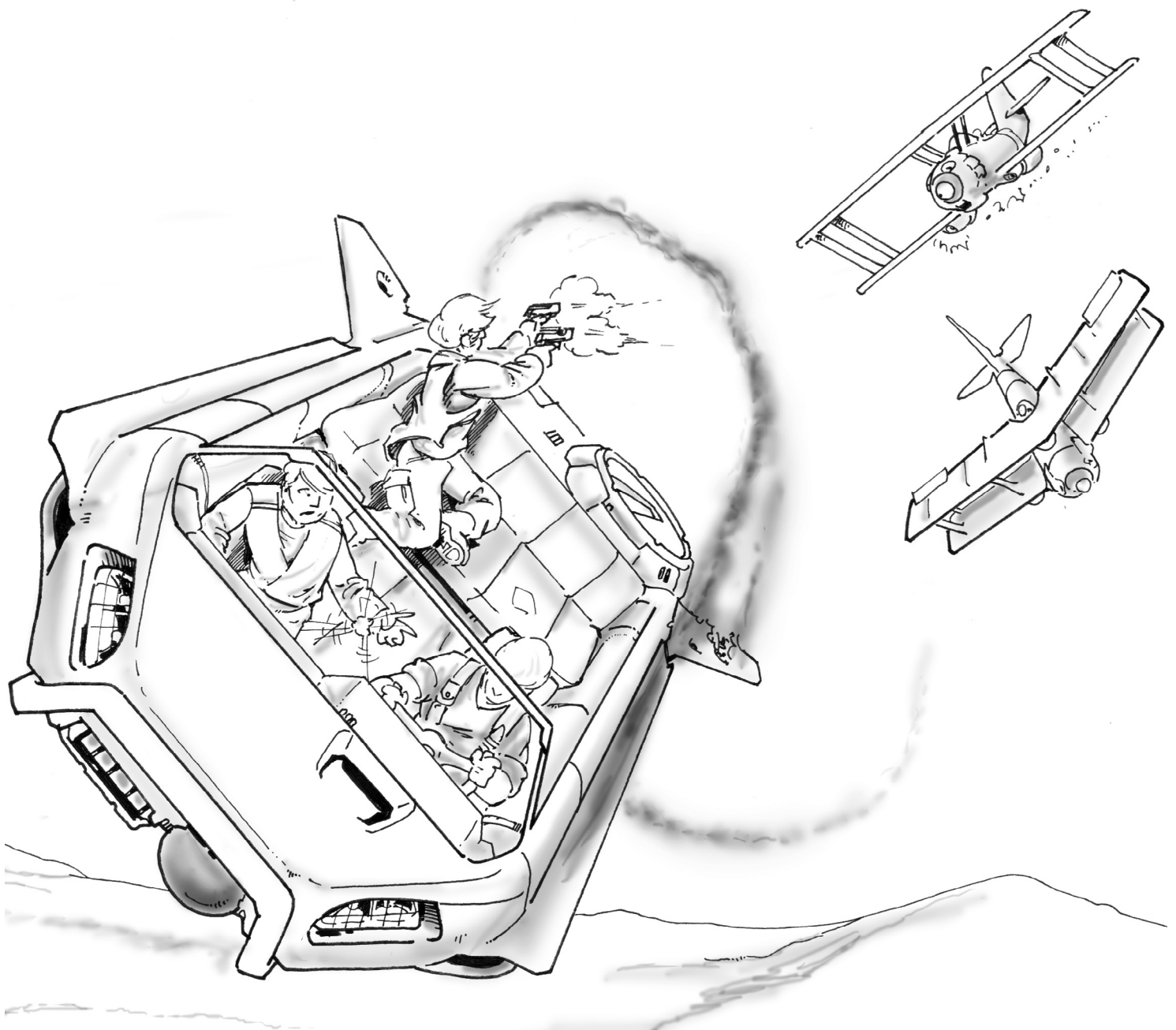
last transmission, they were making a typically breakneck approach to a promising planetoid when the maneuver drive cut out. Their Seeker crashed into the rock moments later. Another Belter ship surveyed the wreckage but there was little left.

The Belter community is shocked, particularly at the death of Granddad, who was something of a legend among them.

Questions asked around the port turn up a little information. The *Skiphop* spaced out for Landing after 4 days and three bar fights with the Marines, and a nervous man answering the description

of Dr Livaaki, who had a fair amount of baggage but little actual clothing, hung around the port for a fortnight making a neurotic nuisance of himself before shipping out on a Seeker relocating to Shamuus.

Livaaki apparently considered staying on Kam, and made some friends there. In the end, he decided to look for a job in one of the university towns of Shamuus. Kaanachi was the one he mentioned most often; apparently he had old colleagues there.



EPISODE 6: A BREAKTHROUGH!

The characters catch up with Dr Livaaki and make an historic discovery.

SCENE 1: THE LAST LAP?

Shamuus is a Feudal Technocracy, ruled by a chain of universities. Travellers arriving at the starport are warned that there is some pro-Solomani unrest on planet at present, and to take care when outside the immediate Starport region. There are a lot of Civic Guard personnel on the streets to deal with disturbances, and they are mostly very young people out with weapons in an unstable situation. They are apparently coming down very hard on anyone caught with weapons.

The city of Kaanachi is about 1000 kilometers from the starport and there is no air link. Air travel is uncommon on Shamuus, and grav vehicles are only for the technocrats. Starships and offworld vehicles are not allowed beyond the port perimeter. There is a good rail link though, by fusion-powered express train. Return tickets cost Cr 150.

It is likely that the characters will travel by rail, a journey of several hours on the fast, comfortable railway system. The highlight of the trip is crossing the Tagrye Straits on the Great Tagrye Bridge, which is truly a masterpiece of large-scale engineering. Alternatives such as passage to a nearby port by sea and then overland are possible, but most vehicles on Shamuus are short-range urban fuel-cell powered vehicles, and intercity roads are not good even if a vehicle with the range to use them can be found. This limited intercity movement is useful to the Technocrats, not least to isolate the various universities and their regions of interest.

Arriving in Kaanachi it will be apparent that all is not well. Where the Port region was a little tense, here the situation is openly violent. Fights are not uncommon in the street, between Sollie-haters and their victims (most of whom are innocent, but who have banded together for protection.) Strict controls make firearms difficult to get, but the encounters are bloody all the same.

Referee: Matters are made worse by the fact that a real Pro-Solomani organization has been conducting a campaign of sabotage and terrorism in the city. This group has no more than 200 members, but is now passing out guns to the persecuted minority that the locals' overboard reaction has created. A vicious street war is brewing between the many anti-Sollie groups such as:

Kaanachi Loyalists
Shamuus Volunteer Force
Long Night Remembrance

The Civic Guard is backed up by troops from the citizen-soldiers of the University communities (which form the bulk of the world's armed forces). These are organized into companies such as:

Life Science Rifles (Kaanachi Company)
Second Planetological Pioneer Company
Integrated Social Studies Grav Cavalry Battalion (Kaanachi Campus contingent)

These groups are almost as partisan as the gangs. The characters can expect to be stopped, harassed or threatened by various groups. As a rule, the Civic Guard will generally retain at least the veneer of professionalism, though if the characters are unfortunate enough to encounter a zealot and his followers they can expect real trouble. The unofficial groups may be just trying to protect themselves, but most are actively looking for someone to hurt. Fast talking and perhaps the occasional judicious withdrawal might be in order.

SCENE 2: SEARCHING FOR DR LIVAAKI

Given the tense situation, the characters will have a difficult job to find Dr Livaaki. Determined questioning and use of public information suggests a possible location – a corner of Kaanachi University campus used by senior research fellows, teaching staff and so on. This is the equivalent of a quiet neighborhood populated by the well-off and their families.

However, while the travellers are searching, rioting erupts. Apparently the Sollies have managed to take out the main railway junction just outside town, and have even blown a support of the Great Tagrye Bridge. The bridge, a symbol of the technocrats' learning and power, is as important as a cultural icon as a transport link. While the bridge is still standing, it is closed to rail traffic while it is repaired. Anger and resentment over this outrage leads to new clashes on the streets, the guns come out, and within hours Kaanachi is in a state of civil war without even clear-cut lines or divisions.

When the characters somehow manage to reach Dr Livaaki's home, they are met by his frightened housekeeper who seems to be under the misapprehension that she should be expecting them. Dr Livaaki isn't here, but just before he left he said his friends might call to pick up some items he left for them.

These 'items' turn out to be two flight cases packed with data chips and hard copy of Dr Livaaki's research. If anyone takes the time to pick through it all, there is nothing concerning the devices bought from Karse Vaali, or any other sensitive information. It is mainly anthropological data dealing with cultural drift in the region since the colonization during the Rule of Man.

It turns out that Dr Livaaki left town two days ago, guessing that trouble was coming. He took the best of his stuff; three cases of artifacts and such like. He said he was going offworld, to Annapabar, but since he was expecting trouble (and hates rail travel for some reason) he didn't take the direct route.

If gently questioned, the housekeeper says that Dr Livaaki took a riverbarge to the port of Karell, to meet a ship for Trayse, a major city on the east coast of this continent. His ship will get him to the Starport in a few days (it hops down the coast a couple more stops, then crosses the Dividing Sea before putting in at Pargrave's Landing, the Starport/Capital city.

It should be possible to catch up with the ship at Trayse, but since the rail link is out that means using a ground vehicle (there are quite a few, though they are normally used for local travel only). Trayse is 450 miles south over fairly poor roads, or it might be possible to catch a train from Carnaff, an industrial town 100 km SE of Kaanachi.

The travellers are finally almost within sight of their quarry, but to catch up they will have to escape from the warring city and make a mad dash overland to intercept the ship.

SCENE 3: GETTING OUT OF DODGE

By now the trouble is spreading beyond the city and into other regions. The Solomani covert-action cells and their local allies are widening their area of operation, and the resulting violence is beginning to overwhelm local resources. In the middle of this chaos, a ZAK covert-ops team, assigned to 'take care' of Dr Livaaki if he ever looked like causing trouble, decides that although he managed to elude them, they can at least earn some brownie points by taking out the travellers.

This is an off-the-cuff operation in the middle of a crisis, and could not be said to be planned to any degree. The team is simply a pair of "sleeper" agents and not well prepared. They are armed with a handgun and a carbine. Both wear concealed flak jackets and have access to a ground car. If a drive-by fails, they may elect to pursue. Their actions may trigger a general free-for-all exchange of fire, since there are so many tense, armed people around.

By now, Civic Guard troops are prone to fire on anything that looks remotely threatening, and this includes vehicles that do not stop immediately when signalled to do so. However, with all the chaos it is possible to slip out of town while attention is diverted elsewhere. The military will not pursue, even if vehicles shot their way through a checkpoint— they have too much to do in the city to bother with people who have taken themselves out of the equation. During the run for the city limits, the travellers may be attacked by various factions, possibly in the mistaken belief that they are the enemy. Firefights or street battles may also erupt rather suddenly, making the trip rather more interesting than it should be.

Traveling overland beyond the city is tricky, since the fuel-cells used by ground vehicles are very short-ranged (120km or so) has a range of about 120 miles, and charge stations may not be safe places at present, but it should be possible to intercept the ship that way or to race for the train at Carmaff.

Whatever means the characters use, they should arrive in Treyse just as the ship is putting hurriedly to sea – which seems the safest place to be right at the moment.

SCENE 4: ONE FINAL HURDLE

The situation in Treyse is better than at Kaanachi, but all the same things are very confused. Some areas are quiet, others are seething with rioters and nervous soldiers. The mood is one of general hysteria, amid which the Civic Guard struggles to maintain order, put fires out and rescue casualties. Just about everyone not in the Civic Guard is out on the streets throwing rocks, or at home barricading the doors.

In this maelstrom of violence, there is no way the captain of the maritime freightliner *Broad and Deep* is going to let anyone aboard. The ship is loading supplies in a hurried but orderly fashion when the characters arrive on the docks, with the work parties covered by baton-armed crewmen (and despite the arms limitations on planet a couple of shotguns have appeared from somewhere and are now carried by petty officers guarding the boarding ramps). The crew are determined to keep back anyone wanting passage or anything else (there are people here just to loot, vandalize property etc). After a few moments' fruitless argument with First Officer Janine Tilsenn, the characters hear what can only be a mob storming down onto the docks some distance away. Tilsenn orders the work crews aboard immediately, but one party is in a warehouse at the

far end of the docks. As they race the mob, it becomes obvious that they are not going to make it.

The mob seems to think that the ship is evacuating Solmie sympathizers, and they are brutally intent on storming aboard. Anyone in a ship's uniform just became a victim, and anyone else nearby is likely to become a collateral casualty. Tilsenn does not hesitate, saying to the characters: "You think you're a bit handy, right? Well, you've got passage if you get my people aboard!"

There are six fleeing sailors with about fifty rock-throwing rioters in pursuit, and others racing to cut them off. The characters might use a vehicle, battle through the fringe of the mob, or whatever, but they must not get caught or it's all over. They will probably be literally chased up the gangplank as the ship pulls out of harbour.

While they are at sea, headed for the capital, things are calmed by the authorities, though Kaanachi remains a hotspot. For the characters, the most important thing is that they finally get to talk to Dr Livaaki.

SCENE 5: ALL AT SEA WITH THE EXPERT

As soon as the characters produce the artifact, Livaaki recognizes it for what it is – a data storage device. And he has a reader. Not an original, but a translation device capable of taking all kinds of media, and pulling some information from them. The reader is a bulky object obviously put together from all kinds of components. It is a big improvement on the original, which was as big as a room, but it's certainly not built by Ling Standard Products...

Decoding the artifact will take some time – days, most likely. Meantime, Dr Livaaki tells the characters what the object actually is.

"It's a data storage unit, and it's old; centuries, possibly even several millennia. The design is similar to some stuff I've seen before. Never did find out for sure who made it, but the general techniques are similar to Wanderer tech. Materials, arrangement and so forth are all very different from the Wanderer stuff I've seen, though. I wonder if the Wanderers made contact with whoever built this... traded some technology maybe? They're great traders and even if there are no records of them in this region before, what does Wanderer mean anyway? I'd be willing to believe some of them got down this way centuries ago. Can't help much more than that until the computer breaks into the data – if there's anything left of it after all this time – maybe we... you... could talk to one of their trade enclaves? Maybe they can give me... I mean you... a lead on who made this? Maybe I could come along?"

Livaaki is obviously excited, though when the data comes through it is somewhat disappointing. Most of the contents are undecipherable. What can be made out is:

- A partial starchart of the region, apparently showing the Matarishan subsector.
- Some hopelessly corrupted text
- Some video images from a transmission.

The video images are badly distorted and intermittent but seem to be from a flyby by a ship or more likely a spy drone. The surviving images show an orbital starport or similar installation with warships alongside. The base is obviously a temporary fuelling station, but the world below is unmistakably Kishimaa. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of ships including escorts, major warships

and a vessel that is obviously the grandfather of the current *Lamii Sikauu* class Bombardment Cruiser. The design has evolved in the past centuries, but the lines are the same.

This is a Vilani fleet, based at Kishimaa.

The images also include thermal and electronic/radiation data. There is a lot of interference, but there seems to be a large number of high radiation areas on-planet. Patterns are typical of an orbital bombardment. The fleet that went to Kishimaa, went there to fight. It would be possible to determine an approximate date for the recording by visiting Kishimaa and attempting a stellar drift correlation, essentially mapping the stars visible now onto their positions in the recording, then using known drift speeds to calculate a time period for when this great naval operation took place.

The strange thing is, the Ziru Sirka never in any of its histories recorded any mission, outpost or military action this far beyond the borders. Whatever this fleet did here, it was expunged from the history books.

EPISODE 7: FULL CIRCLE

The travellers return to Kishimaa to investigate further.

SCENE 1: RETURN TO KISHIMAA

It is obvious that Kishimaa might reward further investigation, this time on-planet. The local political situation is pretty volatile, so caution would be wise. But with the advanced sensors aboard *Light of Truth*, it might be possible to search for ruins on-planet (in the areas that were not nuked down to the bedrock) and to obtain an approximate date on the images by using stellar drift comparison.

Determining a date is relatively easy; it requires only a few days cruising about the system taking constellation images, then some processing time. A rough estimate comes out at about –5300 to –5700.

Surveying the planet is more difficult. The radiation hotspots have gone cold, to the point where they have just a little more background radiation than other areas. Many are now inhabited. There is no point searching in those regions since anything that is likely to be found there, will already have been.

However, by extrapolating the hotspot pattern, it might be possible to find regions that escaped the scouring. This will be a painstaking business, but eventually a possible site in the Yarkin Mountains, in the far north, will be found. The area has water and arable land – though not much – and is sheltered. Perhaps something remains?

The Marines at the Starport will not grant permission to land anywhere other than at the port, but make it clear that they are not going to bother stopping anyone who does so – and neither will they answer distress calls from people who have been adequately warned.

SCENE 2: THE RUINS

There are few settlements on the plateaux of the Yarkin mountains. The region is borderline habitable now, though there is some evidence that in times gone by it may have been warmer and more fertile. The few human villages are just farming or herding hamlets, and are widely spaced. The inhabitants are suspicious of offworlders, and are best avoided.

By some clever deductive work, the search area can be narrowed and an airborne survey will eventually reveal what might be structures buried under the surface at the edge of one of the plateaux.

The region is heavily forested and generally steep. Setting down a spacecraft will be a tricky business, and the choice of possible landing sites is limited. Once down, vehicles are of limited use so the characters can expect to be yomping about with packs and instruments, clambering up rock faces and into gulleys. Patient searching, perhaps with the assistance of densitometers, will eventually reveal some sort of chamber below ground, buried under centuries of soil and the occasional rockslide. A nearby gully offers the possibility of digging a tunnel/shaft in from the side.

If the characters can manage to make an entry, they can enter a series of linked chambers which were once buildings and are now covered by rubble and soil. Some areas have collapsed, but enough remains that the characters can see that they are in what was once

a small town built from high-strength, lightweight materials; a sort of extruded concrete. Only one race builds like that; it is a technology they never lost.

This is proof positive – 6000 years ago, Wanderers lived on Kishimaa.

There is little to find in the wreckage; twisted and corroded metal, collapsed walls, and a desiccated husk, now nothing more than dried chitin. It lies crumpled in a corner, near to a number of similar bodies, but these wrapped in some form of silvery cloth that seems reminiscent of a burial shroud. The single body is partially wrapped in a similar garment or own shroud, and the chitin fragments the group the show signs of hand-to-hand fighting and firearms injuries. There are young among the wreckage, and they have similar injuries. Some also have crushed regions, as if they were finished off with rifle butts or other blunt instruments.

The lone Wanderer died clutching handful of carved ellipsoids, marked with incomprehensible symbols. They are presumably of some religious significance. Some of the symbols are repeated. Also with his body, in a pouch worn around his neck, is an irregular lump of igneous rock carved with some of the same symbols.

Referee: Analysis of this stone shows that it is not from this world; magnetic resonance patterns are different, as is chemical composition.

It might be possible to determine which world this rock came from. Chemical, radiation and magnetic traces are unique to worlds and even regions. There are few databases that contain such information from a range of worlds. The best chance would be a Scout Base, an Imperial University with a Planetological or Mining department, or the Imperial records Archive at Dukh or Annapabar.

Little is known of Wanderer religion, though a detailed databank will contain the Library Data entry – which is not totally accurate.

SCENE 3: ROCKS AND REVELATIONS

The travellers now have access to certain facts. They know that Wanderers were active in this region 6000 years ago, and that in at least one case they built a settlement of some kind. This does not conclusively prove that they were native to the region or even permanent residents, however.

The characters also know that the Vilani Imperium sent a large force out to this region and bombarded at least one world (Kishimaa); there is evidence of orbital bombardment of others in the region if the characters consult appropriate references or visit these worlds. The fact that the Wanderer settlement on Kishimaa had been stormed and the inhabitants killed at about the same time as the rest of the planet was being bombarded from orbit strongly suggests a connection. It is reasonable to assume that the Vilani slaughtered a population of Wanderers here at Kishimaa.

There is, as yet, no indication as to why they did this, nor why they expunged the event from their histories. The Ziru Sirka bombarded many worlds and even annihilated several cultures during its pacification campaigns. One more would not make much difference. So there must be something more to this...

The characters now have in their possession some Wanderer artifacts that may be of religious significance. Those who have

seen Wanderer priests will know that their contents are kept very secret from outsiders, and that some priests have obviously empty pouches. Apparently, this lump of rock is what they carry about with them. But why?

This information is available from only one source – a Wanderer enclave. There are several in the region, situated at the ports where Wanderers trade. The enclaves are not permanent. They move from time to time, and seem to favour mid-sized starports – they do not seem to like large ports and very small ones are probably not worth visiting. A group of wanderers is about 10% likely to be present at a Class A or E starport, 25% likely to be found at a B or D class, and 50% likely to be at a C class port. An enclave will be on planet for anything between 1 and 12 months, then will move on to set up somewhere else.

SCENE 4: CONTACTING AN ENCLAVE

Contacting the Wanderers is easy enough. It is simply a matter of visiting starports until a Wanderer ship or trade enclave is discovered. The Wanderers mix freely enough with others while conducting their business, but always retire to a secluded area afterwards. The normal practice is to lease an area including several buildings and seal it off with walls made up of light extruded-concrete-like panels (like those in the Wanderer settlement on Kishimaa), leaving only a single accessway. Outsiders will be stopped at the entry to such an area and refused access.

All enclaves have some sort of reception area where guests can be met and business can be conducted inside the enclave but without allowing outsiders to wander about the place. If the characters are persistent, or they start displaying Wanderer artifacts at the entryway, they will be invited into the reception area without any real sign of urgency, served appropriate refreshments and made comfortable by whichever Wanderer is on duty at the time.

Observant characters may notice that the Wanderers they have shown the artifacts to (especially the large stone) are trying to act normal but are either upset or agitated in some way. Noticing this requires a DC20 Sense Motive check; DC drops to 15 if the character has had significant interaction with Wanderers or possesses the skill Knowledge/Xeno-Anthropology (Wanderer).

Note: 'Artifacts' in this case refers to the items found on Kishimaa. The data storage device is unlikely to be recognized by modern Wanderers; certainly the sort of low-level personnel who guard and handle visitors at the gates of an enclave will not recognize it as Wanderer technology, though it is similar enough to modern units as to evoke some offhand curiosity. Many, perhaps most, ordinary Wanderers genuinely do not know that this is their home region.

THE LEADER AND THE PRIEST

After a few minutes' wait, a senior official enters the reception chamber, followed by a priest-penitent, a half-starved, rag-clad Wanderer who stands silently in the doorway. Wanderer guards will quietly assemble out of sight, outside the reception area. If the characters try to leave without surrendering the stone, the Priest will bar their way. He cannot fight effectively, but will struggle, wrestle, and clutch at characters to prevent their leaving. His function here is simple – he is to ensure that the characters cannot leave without killing him, or better, to show them that they cannot do so. The Wanderers do not want to hurt the characters, but they MUST

have that stone, and they dare not risk characters walking off with it. They believe that decent people would stop short of killing a basically harmless Priest, making this both a test of character and a way to control the actions of the visitors if they do turn out to be decent people.

The guards outside will kill characters who murder one of their priests, of course, in which case the stone will stay with the Wanderers anyway. They are desperate to have it, but if there is any way to get it short of hurting people, they will take it, even if it means revealing some of their deeper secrets.

The Wanderer official will be polite, despite the severity of the situation. Asked about the priest in the doorway, he simply says, I will explain.

And so, he does:

Please address me as Andrew, for as you know, the language of the Wandering People was created solely to torment the vocal apparatus of others, and attempting to pronounce my true name would surely cause you grave injury, a thing not desirable to any here.

I am pleased that you have come to me with this thing, and hope that mutual profit will result.

What you have found is precious to the Wandering People. A holy thing. We know you did not harm our people to take it, for it has been lost for millennia. We thank you for bringing it to us, and would pay well in goods or credits for the objects as well as knowledge of where they were found.

I am prepared to offer you one million credits in cash, or twice that in goods, for what you have brought here.

Travellers being what they are, the characters will almost certainly not be able to resist asking why the stone is so important. If they somehow manage to curb their curiosity, proceed to Scene 5, 'A challenge', below.

IF THE TRAVELLERS ARE NOT RECEPTIVE

If the characters want more money, the Wanderers will go through the motions of bargaining but will pay almost any price up to 10 million credits for the stone. The enclave simply cannot raise any more cash than this, and anything more than about 3 million will require calling in other groups and result in the ruin of the enclave – something that they will do without hesitation if it means they can obtain the stone without violence.

However, if the characters decide to leave with the stone, Andrew makes a negative gesture and the Priest (who has no name as a penitent) blocks the doorway. Andrew makes a final appeal:

This thing is precious to us. We must have it! For the sake of our ancestors we will kill you if we must. Only that the stone remains here, we do what we must. I urge you – give us our treasure and profit from the matter, or face the consequences. Know that you must kill every Wanderer here to escape, and even if you destroy us, terrible fates will befall you. For your sake and ours, give us our treasure...

Andrew is quite sincere. Every Wanderer in the enclave will fight to keep the stone. Those that cannot fight will bar the exit with their bodies. Even the young will fling themselves at the characters; such is the fervor of the Wanderers religion. Andrew himself is expendable. Taking him hostage is pointless; he will die to allow his people to regain the stone.

It is possible that the travellers will manage to battle free, but they will leave behind a trail of corpses including the old, the weak, children and babies. Eventually the Imperial Ministry of Justice or even the Marines will catch up with them and they'll be killed resisting arrest or tried and executed for their crime. The adventure is over.

If the characters fight and even kill the Wanderer guards, Priest etc but are overpowered or balk at a massacre, the Wanderers are still willing to deal with them fairly. The matter is so important to them that the deaths of some of their people will be put aside for now. The Wanderers will use the fight as a lever, however, suggesting that the characters could be arrested and imprisoned for attacking the Wanderer enclave. However, if they are willing to undertake a task, Andrew and his followers will write off the blood debt in return.

EXPLANATIONS

If the travellers are at all reasonable, Andrew will explain what all this is about. These secrets have never been revealed to non-Wanderers before, but these are exceptional times.

We were not always The Wandering People. We do not know what we called ourselves, in those days before the Great Massacre, when the Ruthless Enemy attacked us without warning and drove the tiny remnant of our people from our worlds.

In those days we were native to this region of space. Our sublight ships explored nearby space, and then we discovered what you call the Jump Drive. We explored further and refined the drive, increasing its power. We met and made friends with humans; the water-dwellers of Daramm. They were like us; sublight voyagers. We traded them the Jump Drive and they were glad.

Then came the others. The Luriani told us of them; a great empire of stars ruled by humans who were not like our friends. They were jealous. We made contact with them, and they feared us. The Luriani said that the other humans did not want to see the Jump Drive in the hands of others. They had warred on those who possessed it.

Foolishly, we thought that peaceful negotiation would divert the threat. We thought they were like our friends.

They were not.

Our scouts contacted their fleet. It bore the banner of their regional leaders, the bureau Sharushid. We invited them to one of our border worlds, to see for themselves how peaceful we were. How harmless. They sent not a handful of diplomatic ships but a fleet to awe us. Then, without warning, they attacked and smashed our world down to the bedrock.

We are peaceful folk, but we are prudent also. We possessed weapons and we fought back with what we had. The Sharushid fleet was driven off, and our vessels hid along its route of retreat, ambushing vessels and harassing the major groups. The Sharushid world-killers felt our vengeance and they fled. Few escaped our justice.

But we had not saved ourselves by this demonstration of violence. We had doomed our people. For the Sharushid came back, in greater force, and despite our desperate preparations they were too powerful for us. Our people fought to the last on every world, praying to the alien gods of these murderers that they might see reason and halt the extermination, but they did not. They bombed world after world until it was obvious that we could no longer hope to resist.

We chose a few to escape, and they were taken to regions the Sharushid had not yet entered. From there, in secrecy, they were placed aboard vast sublight starships and hurled out into unknown space, in the hope that they might some day find a new home away from the wreckage of our civilization.

Some were taken in by our friends the Luriani, who suffered terribly at the hands of the murderers when their charity was discovered. Thousands of Luriani and all our people were killed.

Some fled to unknown places, or died in the long transit.

Some finally reached a safe place where they could build a civilization. Among them, the fear of pursuit was so great that many kept going, voyaging forever into uncharted space, away from the terror that lay behind. But others stayed, and slowly our numbers grew. We spread to other worlds, became strong once again. We knew nothing of the Long Night that fell behind us, or the collapse of the Ruthless Enemy's great Empire of Stars. We struggled only to survive.

In time, survival turned to a limited prosperity. Our technology surpassed what we had once known. Yet as a people we were diminished, lost. A people with no center, no home. And worse.

The function of our Priests is to lead the dead home. The spirits of our people must be guided into the deep places of our homeworld. For those voyaging offworld, this was accomplished by the use of a Homestone, such as that you have brought here. Without such guidance, our ancestors are doomed to remain between this world and their final rest, following the living and bringing bad luck to their descendents.

Some of our people have found a False Way, and have made new Homestones from the rocks of alien worlds. These Priests now lead their dead to a lonely, bitter place of exile, to remain imprisoned in torment forever. They do not bear the burden of thousands of years of bad luck as we do, but at the price of damnation. We call these followers of the false way 'Those who are Lost', while we who shoulder the burden in the hope of redeeming our ancestors term ourselves 'Those who seek'. To outsiders, we are all simply the Wandering People, but few if any know why we have come to this place.

It is not to resettle – we have grown accustomed to our wanderings and while a few would wish to resettle the homeworld, we do not plan to return to our ancient home in force. Rather, we seek to reclaim it, to build temples and create new Homestones, and to lead the spirits of our ancestors home.

What you have brought us is a treasure beyond compare. A Homestone from the world of our creation. Even if we never find the Homeworld, this stone can bring peace to some of our people. Six thousand years of torment can end.

Can you see why it is that we must have this thing?

HANDING OVER THE HOMESTONE

If the characters agree to give (or sell; the Wanderers really do not care) the Homestone to Andrew and his Priest, they will be treated like heroes – like saviors – among this enclave. It will probably become embarrassing to have Wanderer young running up to touch their clothing, or to see armed guards abandon their positions to salute them as they pass. Some Wanderers actually prostrate themselves. The characters will always have friends and allies here. But there is more that may be asked of them yet.

The Wanderers would like to try to read the data on the device from Kishimaa. They will succeed little better than Dr Livaaki, and their equipment is clearly not compatible with such ancient technology. However, the images do present clear evidence of Vilani vessels attacking a civilization in the region where the Wanderers claim they made their home. Such things can be faked, of course, so the Wanderers cannot realistically hope to use the images as evidence in an appeal to the Archduke for help. But finally, they know they have found the right region. They have obtained one stone from the Homeworld, alleviating their millennia-old suffering for at least some of their people. This is more than they could have hoped for.

Andrew will arrange a ceremony to lay his enclave's spirits to rest, then send the stone to the nearest Worldship under guard. He does this without fanfare or any sign of self-service. It is his duty as a leader of the Wandering People, and he does it without fuss.

SCENE 5: A CHALLENGE

Andrew does have a challenge for the characters, if they are willing.

He says that there are reasons why the Wandering People cannot search openly for their home. He believes that the ancient Sharushid bureau, now the Sharushid Megacorporation, would want this information buried in the mists of time. Sharushid might suffer a public-relations disaster if it became known that their agents were responsible for the Year of Woe among the Luriani and the extermination of the Wanderers. Among Vilani, their credibility might be damaged if it became known to the general population that Sharushid was so badly hammered by the Wanderers – perhaps defeats like this one were one of the things that encouraged upstarts like the Terrans to chance their arm, and thus brought about the downfall of the Ziru Sirka? (In the case of the Terrans this is not the case, but the Vilani defeat might have encouraged other groups). Andrew knows that Sharushid agents have been harassing his people and those they befriend for many years. Perhaps there are enough skeletons in the Megacorp's closet to cause a serious PR disaster. If so, the corporation will certainly act to protect its interests.

That means that they will move to ensure that the Wanderers do not find their homeworld, or are not allowed to claim the right to build on it. This is a crucial matter; the fate of the Wanderer species depends upon what happens next.

So Andrew asks the characters to undertake a task for him. He asks them to quietly find the Wanderer homeworld and get some definite proof that it was once inhabited by Andrew's ancestors. He will then petition the Archduke to intervene and grant his people the right to return home. This must be done quietly, of course, or Sharushid will bring massive influence to bear on the matter and the bid will fail.

This matter is so important that Andrew thinks Wanderers cannot take part. He is willing to gamble everything on the travellers. His people will send expeditions to distant areas to try to draw Sharushid attention while the travellers gain the proof they need.

The homeworld can be located by comparing the physical characteristics of the Homestone (magnetic and radioactive resonance, chemical composition and so on) to those of rock samples from known worlds. This can be done by taking a recording of these characteristics to a database of rock characteristics. Any major university with a Planetological department could do this, or the archives of a prospector's Claim Registry Office (these are run by the Trade and Commerce Office, and can be found at Class A starports) could be used.

Getting access to such a facility, especially without revealing why, might be a challenge for the travellers.

After that, Andrew wants the characters to go to the world where the Homestone came from, find evidence that Wanderers once lived there, and bring it to the Enclave. The Wanderers will then organize an audience with the Archduke so that the evidence can be presented. If this comes as a surprise, the Vilani interests can be blindsided and will not be able to block the attempt. With evidence that this is their homeworld in front of him, the Archduke surely must permit them to take ownership.

The Enclave here is small, but the travellers' service to the Wandering People will likely make them culture heroes among Wanderers everywhere. They will be welcome anywhere, and will never be without a friend, a ship component or a good trade deal. In more concrete terms, the Wanderers willing to give each character whatever he wants within their power; estates on the new homeworld, a roomful of cash, a small starship and a crew... and they really mean these offers. Material goods are trivial beside what the Wanderers could get out of this "deal".

Andrew finishes by telling the characters to be on their guard. Sharushid will surely try to stop them. He will try to quietly assist them where he can, but this will be difficult without attracting attention.

Referee: Paranoid characters might want some help in obtaining weapons or equipment to give them an 'edge'. The Wanderers do not have the resources to upgrade starships or obtain powerful military-grade weapons in large quantities, but they could provide a couple of 'equalizers' such as military flex armor (not combat armor or battle dress), and Advanced Combat Rifles (but not plasma and fusion guns, missiles etc). These items would be illegal, obtained through back channels or the black market, and only a couple are likely to be available.

In short, if the Wanderers can help the characters out with weapons and equipment, they will do so, but their resources are very limited.

EPISODE 8: FINDING MY WAY BACK HOME

The characters need to get access to a suitable research database. However, since the Keepers are suspicious (or sure, depending upon what the characters have been doing) of what they are looking for, then they will try to stop them from getting there. This will start as harassment and the fostering of non-cooperation, but will escalate to murder if necessary.

SCENE 1: POSSIBILITIES

The characters are going to have to find a suitable institution. The University of Gateway (Annapabar Campus) will have the necessary facilities when it is completed, but at present the faculty is still moving in and setting up, and the database is not available.

A Claims Registry Office can be found at almost any Class A starport (there is not one at Gashuki since the Hivers there do not have the legal right to register prospecting claims in the Imperial data system. The most likely candidates would be Annapabar, Dadejadi, Ur, Glen Murdoch or Jutland.

All of these systems have Claims Registry Offices with extensive databases of mineral characteristics drawn from a vast number of worlds, asteroids, planetoids, moons, ring systems and even dust clouds. A Scout Base or Way Station will have similar records, but these are not available except to Scout Service personnel (current or detached). There is a Way Station at Annapabar.

There is of course no guarantee of a match in any given database, though in most cases a non-match would enable the characters to eliminate several systems for each database searched. The Travellers may get lucky straight away or may have to visit several sites to run down the data they need.

There seems to be nothing for it but to make a list of possible information sources and visit them in turn until a match is found.

CLAIMS REGISTRY OFFICES IN THE ITC

- Annapabar
- Dadejadi
- Ur
- Glen Murdoch
- Jutland

CLAIMS REGISTRY OFFICES WITHIN 6 PARSECS OF THE ITC

- Dalganar
- Ohasset
- Baakh
- 025-841 (Glimmerdrift Reaches)
- Isda Kaille (Glimmerdrift Reaches)

SCOUT WAY STATIONS

- Annapabar
- Shushknuu

OTHER INSTITUTIONS

- Imperial Planetological Society database
- Non-Imperial claims registry offices

The IPS database is available to IPS members only. It is a vast thing, and requires a fair amount of data storage capability to contain it. As a result it is not available at most starports. Prince Garlan has a copy aboard his yacht, and IPS survey ships carry it. There are only a handful of such vessels in Gateway Domain, so the chances are rather low that one will be present in any given system. The Referee should make a straight check at DC19 to determine if an IPS vessel is present. Access to the database will automatically be granted to any character who is a member of the IPS (see Library Data for membership details). Non-members might be able to talk or bribe their way into gaining access. See 'Gaining Access' below.

SCENE 2: GAINING ACCESS

Gaining access to any given database is not 100% certain, and the travellers may have to repeat the process more than once. There are three likely approaches: the characters might ask permission, bribe or fast talk their way in, or use covert methods such as remote hacking and intrusion techniques.

ASKING PERMISSION

Theoretically, Claims Registry databases are available to anyone, IPS data to full IPS members, and Scout Service data to all Scouts. However, even if the Keepers have not managed to interfere, staff are busy and databases are not always accessible. The characters may have to talk their way in, or bribe someone. As a general rule, Belters will have an easier time getting into Claims Registry, Full or Associate members of the Imperial Planetological Society will be able to get access to IPS data, and Scout Service information will be difficult to obtain for anyone who was not at some point a Scout.

BLUFFING, BRIBING AND BLAGGING AN ENTRY

Characters may choose to make a less honest approach to access the databases. This requires that they obtain the cooperation of an official in some way. Bribery and Intimidation are the most likely approaches. A suitable bribe would be Cr150-200, Doubling that amount will make the task easier but more than doubling it may make the official suspicious that there is more to this enquiry than meets the eye. Access may still be granted, but the authorities may be called in to investigate the characters while they are using the database.

Intimidation is more risky. Success indicates that the characters have gained access to the database, but the intimidated official is 50% likely to call the authorities as soon as the characters' attention is elsewhere. The Referee should reward for good roleplaying rather than just die-rolls. At the very least a positive DM should be awarded for any decent attempt to roleplay the data search and interaction with academics or other officials. Particularly good roleplaying should gain them cooperation from an official with no die rolls needed.

HACKING AND COVERT ENTRY

Databases of this sort are often maintained on separate computer networks, so hacking is difficult even though IPS and Claims Registry have little in the way of anti-intrusion software. The Scout Service is

a more difficult matter, since it maintains a high-quality anti-intrusion capability. Unless the hacker succeeds by a considerable margin he or she will trigger alarms that will bring local law enforcers or Scout Service security personnel to the hackers' location as quickly as the anti-intrusion software can locate them.

Covert entry may be a scenario all to itself. The Referee should tailor the difficulty to the sort of institution being infiltrated – getting into an IPS or Claims Registry office should be a simple matter of misdirection and slipping past a couple of bored security guards. Getting into a Scout Service installation is rather more of a challenge, however. Covert entry may result in local law enforcement becoming involved either during or after the event, which can add a whole new layer of complications.

ZAK INTERFERENCE

Initially, the Keepers of Dark Secrets are unlikely to realise what the characters are up to, and will not interfere with the first attempt to obtain Planetological data. Since the location of the Wanderer homeworld is one of the 'dark secrets' they keep, they do maintain a low level of interest in Planetological enquiries and so on, but there is so much activity in that field that the chances of interference are, at least at first, negligible.

However, as the characters move from one source of information to another, the ZAK network will be spreading the word about them; their description, field of interest and so on. Local agents will interfere in whatever manner they think appropriate. Usually, this will take the form of bribing, intimidating or otherwise giving local officials a reason not to allow the characters access to the data they want, perhaps by suggesting that they are claim-jumpers or even Solomani agents.

This approach is indirect, and will result in reluctance to help rather than outright opposition, so the travellers may not initially realize that they are being impeded. However, if they are persistent, the Keepers will take more direct measures. By now they are sure that the travellers are a serious threat; they have received a warning (see Episode 5) in the form of an attack by thugs and were not deterred. It is time to eliminate them.

The Keepers would prefer to do something deniable, such as trigger a malfunction aboard the characters' vessel, but a straight attempt to kill them is acceptable in a situation with stakes this high. Two such attempts will be made.

THE FIRST HIT

The first hit is by local agents of relatively low caliber. They will attempt to plant a bomb (probably in a briefcase or travel bag) in an area the characters will stop in or pass through. The attempt is a little hasty, and may be detected by a passer by. The Referee should roll 2d6; on 11+ some alert person spots an abandoned bag and either reports it or tries to give it back to the 'owner'. If the attempt is not foiled by mischance, the ZAK agent will place a bagful of explosives near the characters' route, hoping to detonate it as they pass. Characters should be given a chance to notice that something is amiss, with the following modifiers, with positive modifiers for ex-military personnel or individuals actively looking for threats.

If the bomb is spotted, more than likely the characters will simply become aware of a suspicious bag. Characters who are moving through an area have two chances to spot the bomb; once at some

distance as above, and a second at the last second as they get close to it. If everyone fails to spot the bomb, the characters will be close to it when it goes off, and the effects will be very serious. More likely they will spot the bomb on the first check, in which case detonation distance is Long or the second one, in which case detonation is at Short distance.

Since the bomb is command detonated by an observing ZAK agent, it will go off as soon as the agent thinks the characters have spotted it. If the group is scattered, the agent will attempt to catch as many of them that he can. Clever travellers might act nonchalant as they warn the others, then all make a break for it all together. More self-serving characters may use their realization that danger threatens in some other way, such as to lag behind the others and be away from the bomb when it goes off.

If the bomb has not been spotted, all characters have a final chance to spot the ZAK agent hit the detonator. If anyone makes this check, they are allowed a single split-second action. Shouting a warning is pointless and wastes the action. Asking for more information from the Referee may waste the action as the character looks around. The only really useful things to do are to dive to the ground or behind something, Drag someone else down, or to either dive onto the bomb to protect the others, or callously push someone else onto it.

The effects of the bomb depend upon where the characters are in relation to it. It is a fairly small explosive device designed to throw fragmentation in the form of ceramic shards out from the blast area. The fragments are small, with little penetration, but there are a lot of them. Damage depends upon the character's location when the detonation occurs, and is subject to modifiers for what they are doing. Distances are somewhat vague in the table below, because this is a roleplaying situation, not a wargame.

<i>Range</i>	<i>Base Damage</i>	<i>Condition</i>
Contact*	8D (8d6)	Touching the bag
Very Close	6D (6d6)	Within a meter or two
Short	4D (4d6)	Within about 5m
Long	2D (2d6)	Within about 10m

*Contact range only occurs if a character has picked up the bag, or a person is covering the bomb with his or her body (voluntarily or otherwise!). If someone is in contact with the bag, everyone else in the area suffers 1 die less damage than they otherwise would. Someone who is actually lying on the bag reduces the damage taken by everyone else by 4D.

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Modifier</i>
On the Ground	-1 point of damage per die
Behind Light Cover	-1 die of damage
Behind Solid Cover	-2 dice of damage
Shielded by Someone	Treat as Solid Cover
Wearing Body Armor*	Halve damage

* The fragments are small enough that most ballistic armor will stop them, but there are so many that some will find exposed areas, especially in the case of torso-only armor. Jack, Mesh and Reflex do not prevent damage in this way.

Assuming the characters survive, they may choose to pursue the agent, but between the chaos of the bomb detonation and the fact that they were in the middle of it, their response will probably not be quick enough.

THE SECOND HIT

The second hit is a more carefully prepared attempt, made by a covert-action team. It should not occur until after the first, and probably not on the same world. The Referee may decide that the hit will be made as the characters begin The Race (see Episode 9).

The Second hit is a determined attempt to kill the characters using close-range weapons. Four ZAK agents will close in on the group as covertly as possible, disguised as passers-by, businesspeople, waiters or whatever will throw the characters off guard. Their intent is for two of their number to get close to the characters in a fairly restricted space (maglev station, restaurant etc), while the others cover likely exits. The technique is simple – riddle the characters with bullets at point-blank range then drop a grenade on the twitching remains.

Alert Travellers may spot the assassins' approach. The Referee may allow a positive DM if the character has worked as a bodyguard or law enforcer, or in personal security, or if the character is actively watching for threats. Success will alert the travellers that there is something amiss. They will likely 'clock' the pair assigned to carry out the hit rather than the two backstops, but if a character thinks to ask, they may be given a chance to identify the other two assassins.

If the characters are aware of the assassins as they move into position, there will be time for whispered warnings, covert preparations etc. Characters who look around, startled, or obviously draw weapons will in turn alert the assassins that they have been spotted. They will attack immediately from wherever they are.

If the travellers fail to realize something is happening, they should be given a final chance as the assassins approach to realize that they have weapons handy. Any character who makes this check is able to act as the assassins draw or uncover their weapons. This may create an opportunity to take cover, or a fast-draw situation, depending upon the characters' response. A close-in firefight like this one is likely to be rather deadly.

See Dramatis Personae for assassin stats. Hitman 1 and 2 approach the group to make the hit, while Backstop 1 and 2 are further back, near likely exits. Their job is to cover the escape of their comrades, to nail anyone making a run for it, or to add firepower to a firefight if needed. In the case of a firefight, the backstops may not join in immediately but are likely to try to maneuver for a clear shot by surprise.

INFORMATION GAINED

The travellers' efforts will not be fruitless. Each database they gain access to will allow them to eliminate at least some worlds from their search, and some information is gained automatically.

Any and each database will give the following facts automatically on a search:

- The rock sample comes from a world in the life zone of a star. Such planets are normally mainworlds of a system.

- Traces of Osmium and Iridium, plus other fairly rare heavy elements, in the rock are mainly due to Supernova activity in the past. Levels are quite distinctive, but from this small sample it is impossible to tell precisely which system. However, a rough region can be established from the level, knowing what activity took place in the distant past, and some worlds in this region can be eliminated due to known higher levels of these elements resulting from local stellar activity.

The upshot of this is that the travellers can be 95% certain that their rock sample comes from the mainworld of one of the following systems:

In Ley Sector:

470-092
502-740
750-857
Aam
Annapabar
Gashuki
Glen Murdoch
Holloway
Igikur
Ishga
Kam
Lepanto
Lirguu
Mamikha
Revelation
Rukilirgi
Shaanshakase
Sik

In Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector

Independence
Lunber

ELIMINATING SYSTEMS USING THE DATABASE

It is possible to eliminate some of these 20 systems by visiting them one by one, taking a wide range of rock samples from different regions, and comparing them to those in the ship's records. This will take an unbelievably long time; time that the travellers simply do not have. However, each database visited will eliminate some of the systems as a definite non-match. These non-matches are fairly conclusive, for example a world might be found to definitely have larger amounts of Osmium than that of the sample, or may have an unusual trace element component in its rocks that would show up in the sample.

Each time the travellers visit a database, they may roll 1d6 for the number of systems eliminated. If any character has Research skill at any level they may add +1 to the roll.

To determine which systems the database contains information on, roll 1d 20 on the chart below:

1d20 Roll	System Eliminated
1	470-092
2	502-740
3	750-857
4	Aam
5	Annapabar
6	Gashuki
7	Glen Murdoch
8	Holloway
9	Igikur
10	Independence
11	Ishga
12	Kam
13	Lepanto
14	Lunber
15	Mamikha
16	Revelation
17	Rukilirgi
18	Shaanshakase
19	Sik
20	Additional 1d3 systems

In the case of duplication, roll again. Multiple rolls of 20 add 3 systems each time.

DETERMINING THE HOMEWORLD OF THE WANDERERS

If the characters keep at it, they will eventually be able to cross 19 off their list of 20 possible systems, which will reveal their target. Alternatively, the characters may come up with other ways to narrow the search. One possibility is to plot the listed systems on a map of the region and try to establish a midpoint. Most likely, this will involve lines drawn from the most Coreward to the most Spinward worlds (Sik to either Independence or Lunber), and Spinward-Trailing (Lepanto to either Revelation or Holloway). This method seems to indicate Annapabar, Shaanshakase or Mamikha, depending upon the method. This method has no relevance, but may lead the characters into new adventures as they pursue this false lead.

More effective methods involve eliminating worlds with a high population or ones that are highly dissimilar to Kishimaa, or even looking for one that is closely similar to that planet. If the Wanderers settled on Kishimaa, it follows that similar conditions may have existed on their homeworld. Such a line of reasoning will lead to Revelation or Sik as good candidates and Lirguu as an almost identical match for Size, Atmosphere and Hydrographics. A moment's search in the astrographic database every ship carries indicates that Lirguu has very similar climate to Kishimaa, which further strengthens this theory.

There is no reason not to gamble on this theory and head straight to Lirguu. As events will show, someone else already has.

If the characters do not make the closest-match connection, they can still eliminate very dissimilar worlds from their list on the assumption that Wanderers would probably settle worlds like their home. This would normally be a rather shaky theory; for example humans have settled a vast range of world types. However, the travellers are not looking for a colony, they are seeking the world upon which the Wanderers evolved. Such a world would need a breathable atmosphere, adequate water and a reasonable gravity range. Kishimaa seems very suitable to modern Wanderers and it

is known that ancient ones settled there. Therefore, they probably did not evolve on a world very different from Kishimaa.

The following worlds can be eliminated by this method:

- Glen Murdoch is almost entirely water-covered
- Shaanshakase is a vast desert. Holloway is also extremely dry
- Igikur, Kam, Independence, Lunber, Aam and Rukilirgi are small worlds with much lighter gravity than Kishimaa
- Lunber, Ishga and Mamikha have fairly high populations; traces of an older civilization would perhaps already have been found
- Ishga and Barely Planet are both rockballs with a trace of atmosphere at best. It is highly improbable that beings like Wanderers would have evolved there
- Annapabar has a very thin atmosphere. Attractive as the idea is of the Domain Capital turning out to be the lost homeworld of the Wandering People, this seems highly unlikely.
- Igikur has an indigenous race. The chances of two evolving on the same world are low. On the other hand, the Igikur do have legends of the Wanderers and their destruction

Elimination by this method leaves a 'shortlist' of four candidates which have the right geological properties to match the Homestone and a climate at least vaguely similar to that of Kishimaa. These worlds, all lying in Ley Sector are:

Lepanto	1735 C555565-9	Ag Ni	A	724 I G0 V A8 D
Sik	2131 C896422-4	Ni		623 I F9 V
Lirguu	2239 D786644-5	Ni		310 X F0 V
Revelation	2736 C897453-8	Ag Ni		904 C G3 V

Of these, Lirguu is the closest match, and indeed, Lirguu is the lost homeworld of the Wandering People. Whether the characters discover this by patient use of the Planetological databases, deduction, intuition, comparison of world characteristics or some arcane method involving string and marbles, they will eventually come to the conclusion that Lirguu is the best candidate. Having determined that, the next stage of their mission is to go there and obtain proof to take to the Archduke.

Referee: The players might need a hint or two to help them along in their deductions. Characters with an academic background can make an 'idea' check from time to time (based on INT) to come up with one of the bulleted logic pieces above. This kind of spoon-feeding can make players dependent upon the Referee to reveal what they need to do next, however, so should be used only as a hint to help out a frustrated, stalled group who are not having any fun, rather than to point a group who just cannot be bothered to think to the next encounter.

EPISODE 9: THE RACE

The characters now know the location of the Homeworld. Now they must go there, find suitable evidence, and get off-planet again, back to the Enclave in time to deliver it to the proper authorities.

SCENE 1: SIX THOUSAND YEARS OF DUST

The travellers are now almost certain that the world of Lirguu, in Diamond-Prince subsector, is the lost homeworld of the Wanderers. Lirguu is outside the Imperium and is rarely visited except for cross-border patrols. The TL-5 local human population is mainly confined to the southern continents and has left large regions of the world unexplored.

An orbital survey shows a number of slight radioactive hotspots and bowl-shaped depressions, sometimes interlocking, where at some time in the past the world took a battering from meteorites or deadfall ordnance and nuclear weapons. The patterns are not conclusive enough to be certain that the world was deliberately bombarded, and would likely be missed by anyone not actively seeking such evidence. However, the fact that the damaged regions coincide with prime city-building areas adds weight to the theory that someone fought a war here in the distant past.

The survey also shows the landing and crash sites of a number of Solomani and Mamihkan colony ships over the centuries. These are scattered all across the planet, some in very remote regions. Some of them are surrounded by what was obviously for a time a settlement, now starkly ruined or buried under vegetation. Apparently, several settlements were created and later abandoned or failed.

The pattern of colonization on Lirguu makes searching for traces of the Wanderers a rather difficult task. The characters have a vast array of sensors at their disposal, and having seen the Wanderer ruins on Kishimaa, they know what to look for. This gives them a slight edge, and eventually the characters will spot a likely site. It is in the southern hemisphere, though not close to any human habitation. This is because the site lies in a rocky region with little water. There is a hotspot fairly close, but it appears that the site was partially sheltered by the surrounding rock formations and hills. Of course, this was six thousand years ago, so chances are little remains above ground now.

The site lies in a valley among a major range of hills. It was once a small town of a few thousand souls, possibly a regional manufacturing or religious centre. The region is very dry, with a region of desert on the far side of the hills. The valley itself is watered by a few trickles coming down from the hills; enough for some hardy, creeping vegetation to spread among the twisted rock spires and dust-worn hillsides.

The terrain is scattered with large boulders. Taken in addition to the spires and the steep hillsides, this makes landing tricky. It will be necessary to land short of the site and walk or take a vehicle in.

As the characters enter the sheltered zone, they walk among dust-etched rock pinnacles, some tumbled by the ancient nuclear blast and some wound around by spiny creepers. There is little wildlife. Dust lies everywhere; six thousand years of it, stirred by wind eddies among the rocks. As they clamber over tumbled boulders and slash their way through the creepers, the travellers will eventually realize that some of the rock walls around them are regular; too straight

or too evenly curved to be natural. Such remnants are infrequent and rather small, but the characters should be able to discern some pattern of building. There are few roads or streets as such, just narrow walkways between stone-built homes.

The characters may come to realize that this was no manufacturing center or major settlement; it was a small country town of no importance. And yet it was nuked like everywhere else. The thoroughness of the destruction of the Wanderer civilization is horribly apparent.

Digging around in the wreckage will not reveal much in the way of artifacts – those are buried too deep in the soil, or too shattered by the blast – unless the characters take a little time to excavate a proper trench, or find a way to get into the lower levels of the buildings, which are more intact as they have been buried for a long time. Indeed, it seems that the Wanderers of this town built their homes partially underground.

It is possible to wriggle into the lower areas of some of the ruins, and there some artifacts may be found. Digging in a basement (once one can be found) is a risky business; the walls are not the familiar extruded concrete but slabs of shaped stone, which may be out of position and under considerable load. Rockfalls and complete collapse are real dangers.

However, if the characters are persistent, their efforts will be rewarded. The basement of what they thought was just another home turns out to be part of a much larger structure; a religious complex of some kind perhaps. It is largely underground and requires some digging to get inside. Indeed, it is almost as if someone deliberately walled themselves up in the ruins. There is a reason for that.

They did.

SCENE 2: PROOF POSITIVE

After some hazardous digging, the travellers break through into a large underground chamber. The roof has collapsed in some areas, but in others it is still held up by impressive stone columns. A rampway leads up into another area but it is blocked by thousands of tons of rubble. However, there is no longer any doubt as to who built this temple or whatever it was. The columns and the walls are carved with what are obviously images of Wanderers and script that looks like their language.

The underground area was probably some kind of crypt at one time. It seems that part of the floor was torn up at some point, and the flags pushed aside. Closer inspection shows six Wanderer corpses (dried husks as before) near the hole, each one wrapped in an iridescent sheet; a burial shroud. Around them are improvised tools used to push dirt back into the torn-up area. It has the look of a mass grave.

Around the six Wanderer corpses are an assortment of items including tools as already noted but also recording devices like the one the characters found in the Kishimaa system and a collection of inscribed stones. While at least two of the dead Wanderers are priests (fragments of their regalia remain), there is no sign of a Homestone or a Sacred Pouch. This is perhaps the most definite proof possible to someone who understands the Wanderers. These needed no Homestone because they were in contact with the stone of their homeworld.

The travellers have found the proof they need.

REFEREE'S NOTES:

If the travellers think to check, the Homestone they analyzed is not merely from this planet, it is from this region. This settlement is one of several that were maintained even after climate change made this region rather difficult for the Wanderers to live in, because it was significant to their religion. It may indeed be here that their species first built its settlements as it made its slow climb to civilization. Only time and archeology will tell.

The Wanderers of this region were doomed by the nuclear blast that narrowly missed them. In fact it was targeted on a city complex out on the plains, in a region that is now desert. Fallout from the bomb poisoned the locals and their food supply, and collapsed many of their dwellings. The doomed survivors could do nothing but record their last days (on the device found near the bodies) and bury their dead in the ground of the homeworld. The last members of the burial party covered their brethren and when they found they were becoming too weak to do more, they wrapped themselves in their shrouds and waited to die.

The last of them left an inscription, scratched into the surface of a metal plate used as an ersatz shovel. It reads, in an archaic language related to that used by modern Wanderers:

Stranger, have mercy.

We did what we could.

We beg you:

Commit us to the stone

And let us rest.

THE RECORDING

Like the Kishimaa recording, the device here is badly decayed, but it contains fragmentary images that can be read by Dr Livaaki's player or a Wanderer device. Fragments show a city of tall extruded-concrete buildings, grav vehicles slashing overhead and missiles rising into the sky. There are mushroom clouds on the horizon. Strangely-clad Wanderer troops dig through rubble of collapsed buildings. There seems to be an evacuation going on, and the recorder, whoever that ancient Wanderer was, is bundled into a vehicle and leaves the city, heading for what is unmistakably this region.

On the way, some of the vehicles divert to the site of a crash. The downed vessel is some kind of gunship – Naval experts can recognize it as the distant ancestor of a Vilani-designed *Turuu Kaaniaii*-class strike boat. Some Wanderers enter the wreck and bring out a lone human survivor, placing him aboard their vehicle. He seems very badly wounded.

Later, the vehicles reach the town the characters are in and the evacuees take what cover they can as a mushroom cloud rises where the city was. Blast tumbles the town and nearby rock pinnacles, and afterwards the grim work of digging out the survivors, only to find that they are dying of radiation poisoning, begins.

The final scenes show a pit in the floor of this building, and the dying Wanderers placing the bodies of their people in it.

THE MASS GRAVE

If the pit is ever disinterred, several hundred Wanderer corpses (or what little remains of them) are found. Many are wrapped in shared

shrouds, or lack them entirely. There is a single human body in the mass grave, buried without distinction among the people he fought to exterminate. There can now be little doubt that this place was a Wanderer colony and there should be sufficient proof to satisfy the Archduke that this was indeed their homeworld.

However, before the characters can do more than make a vid recording of some of their finds, more visitors arrive and the adventure moves on towards its climax.

EPISODE 10: THE SEIGE

Trapped in the ruins of the homeworld, with demolition parties closing in, the characters are forced to defend the last vestiges of the Wanderers against Vilani mercenaries.

SCENE 1: A SKIRMISH

While the characters are investigating the Mass Grave and the Wanderer Temple, a ship coasts into orbit over Lirguu. This is one of the direct-action vessels maintained by the Keepers and its mission is both simple and critical – to destroy whatever traces of the Wanderers have been found by the travellers.

The vessel, which claims to be the 1000-ton freightliner *Ardent Conveyor*, carries a well-armed strike team and a respectable armament. Mere moments after the *Ardent Conveyor* is detected, she opens fire with lasers and missiles on the characters' ship, which is probably stationary on the ground and an easy target. At this range, the *Conveyor* cannot miss, and will rapidly chew up the *Light of Truth*.

Even assuming enough of the characters could get on board their vessel to fly her (which would mean running through starship-grade laser fire, which is not conducive to long life and good health), bringing up the powerplant and lifting off will take a few minutes. Anyone with starship experience will know that even after takeoff the ship will not be able to maneuver enough to make much difference. In short, the *Light of Truth* is a sitting duck and the only hope for survival is to grab what the characters can and take cover in the rocks as she is shot to pieces.

After disabling or destroying the *Light of Truth*, the *Ardent Conveyor* sets down a reasonable distance from the ruins and begins disgorging a ground combat team. Sniping at them is not a great idea – the starship's lasers will return fire – but characters observing will probably not be noticed.

After a few moments, the 6-person team advances on foot towards the rocks and starts searching.

The team are simply scouts for a much larger force carried aboard the freightliner. Their mission is to find out what (if anything) lies within the rocky area and to report back. They are armed and will of course defend themselves, but their mission is reconnaissance, not combat. If the characters oppose the recon team, they will fight as three pairs, advancing under cover of fire and trying to outflank the characters. However, in the face of serious opposition they will instead withdraw under cover of fire and smoke grenades.

The characters should be able to fight off the recon team after a sharp skirmish. A total ambush is unlikely to be possible since the recon team advance cautiously, leapfrogging from cover to cover by pairs. However, they are searching for whatever the characters have found as well as looking for opposition, so their attention is not 100% on spotting trouble. It should be possible to catch at least one pair unawares.

Of course, beating off the recon team is only a prelude to a much more serious fight as the main combat elements will be sent in soon after.

Hostiles:
ZAK Recon Team

FIGHTING IN THE ROCKS AND RUINS

The steep slopes and rock pinnacles, some of which are covered in creeping plants, create a maze in which visibility is not good and sound tends to echo strangely, making it difficult to determine where shots are coming from. Combat favors whoever has a good position, and if both sides are moving it becomes a very deadly game of hide & seek.

The characters should be able to fend off fairly large numbers of enemies for some time in this environment.

To simulate the effects of this difficult terrain, the following special rules are used:

To Determine the Direction of a Sound

A Perception or INT check (depending on the rules version in use) is necessary to correctly determine the direction of a sound (movement, gunshots or whatever else). Failure by a considerable margin means that the character is sure she has the direction nailed down, but is in fact completely wrong.

To Locate an Enemy

Even without camouflage or a prepared concealed position, it is not easy to locate a foe who is not moving, or is moving slowly under cover. To locate an enemy who is firing, make a Perception or INT check every round in which the foe fires from his concealed position while the character is trying to locate him. Failure by a considerable margin on any such check means that the character thinks he has spotted the enemy but is wrong. This may be a shadow confusing the eye or a different target at the Referee's option.

Note that the ZAK combat teams make extensive use of a suppressing technique whereby they try to smother an attacker's approximate position with automatic fire. Even a failed check to locate an enemy allows this technique to be used, so long as the margin is small (Referee's discretion). Those who fail by a greater margin may end up determinedly hosing a bush or rock to keep its head down...

Checking Targets

In a fluid combat situation it is sometimes difficult to be sure who is a friend and who is not. Characters who sight others for the first time may fire immediately (i.e. in the first round of combat) at figures who appear suddenly, but run the risk of engaging allies. To identify a target, a Perception or INT check must be made. A large bonus is in order if there is something very distinctive about the target (e.g. it's a Vargr and there are none on your side, or it's armed with an axe and your people have rifles). A smaller bonus applies if there is something slightly distinctive about the target (Your people are in desert camouflage uniforms and the target is wearing a dark gray coverall).

This check can also be made to identify specific targets in a group, e.g. the leader, the laser carbine gunner etc.

Running About

The terrain is rugged, rocky and uneven. Characters who move at normal speed suffer no penalties but anyone who wants to run or otherwise move fast risks suffering an accident. A DEX roll is in order to avoid problems; the character may trip, turn an ankle or otherwise inconvenience themselves, and on a spectacular failure may even manage to fall in a ravine, become jammed between boulders or otherwise suffer a major hazard.

Diving to the ground to avoid enemy fire is a risk since there are so many jagged rocks about. Anyone may carefully go prone without undue risk, but a character who dives into cover must make a DEX roll or land on something hard, suffering one die (1d6) of damage..

Cover and Concealment

There is considerable cover and concealment available. The difference is that cover will stop bullets (e.g. rocks) while concealment merely prevents observation (e.g. vegetation). A character caught in the open may find a position of partial cover instantly if he or she makes an INT check with bonuses for Recon or Combat Rifleman skill. There is an equal chance that the position offers either cover or concealment. Diving into it may present a hazard as above, however.

Prepared Positions

It is possible to prepare a position by scraping a shallow trench, building a sangar out of rocks, etc, and/or to conceal a firing position. These are simple tasks and require no skill checks, just a little time. It takes 1d6 minutes to create a good concealed position and 2d6 minutes to create a good position of cover. Doing both requires the time for both tasks, added together. A character with a prepared position of concealment gains a significant advantage in that all checks to find him/her (see To Locate an Enemy, above) are more difficult.

A prepared position of cover allows the user to duck completely out of sight while reloading.

SCENE 2: AN ULTIMATUM

After the recon party is beaten off, the commander of the strike force offers the characters a chance to surrender. To persuade them, she sends over both Air/Rafts from the *Ardent Conveyor*. Both 'Rafts remain a hundred meters or so up, and while they will conduct a reconnaissance, their main mission is to broadcast the following message to the characters:

"You are cut off and surrounded. Your ship is disabled and there are no settlements nearby. Surrender immediately. You will be well treated; your safety is guaranteed. We offer safe conduct offworld and ten thousand credits to anyone who lays down his or her weapon. We will pay well for information about this place. You have fifteen minutes to come out, unarmed, and surrender. After this time we will storm the area. Surrender immediately."

The Air/Rafts will not return fire if the characters attack them but will evade and continue to broadcast from a new location. After 15 minutes, the message changes:

"Surrender immediately. Over one hundred troops stand ready to assault your position. Any resistance will be met with overwhelming force."

Characters looking out from the rocks can see some troops by the ship. There are a couple of dozen at least, and some are going in and out of the ship so there may be a lot more, but a hundred looks like an exaggeration. There are enough of them to spoil the characters' whole day, however.

If The Characters Surrender

Surprisingly, the Keepers are willing to honor their promise. Anyone who surrenders will be disarmed, searched for weapons and other equipment, then locked in a makeshift brig aboard the *Ardent*

Conveyor. They will be interrogated (somewhat aggressively but without physical violence) by an officer aboard the ship.

The Keepers want to know:

- How many defenders remain in the rocks and what armament they have
- What (if anything) the characters found among the rocks

If a character can be persuaded to go back into the rocks to lead the others out (or to guide Keeper troops to either the defenders or the site the characters found), he or she will be promised a reward of Cr10,000 per defender brought out and Cr50,000 for the site, plus passage to a different world to the others. This character will not be allowed the run of the ship but will be given a cabin rather than the brig until he is released.

Now that the characters know about ZAK and the Wanderers, they must be silenced. However, the Keepers do not really wish to kill the characters if they need not. Instead, they will offer a deal. They may join the ranks of ZAK's agents on a very good salary, and help keep the secret they have so cleverly discovered. They will do this by going about their normal 'adventuring' business but seeking clues to obliterate and individuals to deflect from their purpose. Of course, if the secret is ever revealed they will be terminated by ZAK assassins, whether it was their fault or not – but the Keepers would actually rather make an asset out of the characters than kill them.

Those who simply surrender are told that if the Wanderers' secret is ever revealed they will be killed (as above), but the bargain will be kept. They will be delivered to an offworld starport after a month or so in the brig. By then, the Wanderer site on Lirguu will be gone forever, destroyed by nuclear demolition charges in an underground burst that leaves no trace of the site.

If The Characters Do Not Surrender

The Keepers attack. Go to Scene 3 and have no mercy...

SCENE 3: TO THE KNIFE

If the characters do not surrender, the ZAK commander prepares to do it the hard way. She sends her assault teams into the rocky area to seek out and kill the defenders, clearing a path for what remains of the recon team to search for the site. Her Air/Rafts will be used for reconnaissance and fire support, and also for mobility, allowing small units to be dropped behind the defenders or in clear areas.

A deadly game of cat-and-mouse is about to begin, with no quarter asked or given.

After a couple of minutes, the first assault forces begin to move towards the characters' location. At least a platoon of ground troops are moving forward. The initial advance is covered by the ship's guns, so sniping at the assault force is not a survivable activity, at least not until they get into the rubble. The characters can see both Air/Rafts flitting about, perhaps dropping off other forces.

KEEPER FORCES

The *Ardent Conveyor* needs to pose as a commercial vessel, and is searched by customs from time to time, so it cannot carry very powerful weapons. The strike force is registered as a mercenary unit that has contracted the vessel as its transport, and has permits for some fairly impressive equipment.

In addition to crew and normal shipboard security equipment, the ZAK force has available a considerable ground force. The main combat asset comprises 2 Rifle Platoons, each consisting of 3 8-man squads and a command detachment. Each squad is divided into two fire teams. First Fire Team (also referred to as the Rifle Team) contains the squad sub-leader and three riflemen, all wearing Cloth armor and helmets, and armed with TL-10 Advanced Combat Rifles. Second Fire Team (or Support Team) is led by the squad leader and contains a support gunner armed with support version of the ACR (similar performance but fed from a 100-round box magazine and rather bulky as a result), the 'loader' who carries extra ammunition for the support gun and an additional rifleman.

The command detachment contains the platoon commander, a medic and two riflemen. The medic carries an autopistol, the others have ACRs, plus Cloth armor and helmets.

Normal tactics at the squad level require that the Support Team lay down suppressing fire while the Rifle Team advance or move to a flank to get a better fire position or to make a close assault. At the Platoon level, normally one squad is sent forward to engage the enemy while a second tries to get a flanking position and the third remains in reserve. The command detachment acts as a final reserve if necessary, though the two riflemen may be sent to assist wherever needed.

To give support to the two rifle platoons, the ZAK force has two Air/Rafts, each with a pilot and a gunner. Pilots have pistols only; gunners carry a pistol but would normally use the light machinegun mounted on a pintle on the 'raft. This weapon can be dismounted for use on the ground. The 'Rafts are also used to transport the force's two laser rifle armed snipers into position.

There is also a 6-man recon team, equipped with ACRs but no support weapons, two snipers equipped with laser rifles, and a demolitions/engineering team comprising six combat engineers armed with SMGs, satchel charges and (for demolitions, not combat situations) two small nuclear demolitions charges. The latter are heavy and are carried as a large backpack.

The ZAK commander can also call on a dozen or so shipboard security personnel armed with snub pistols and a couple of snub SMGs, but this would be a last resort. She has a personal bodyguard unit comprising one ACR-armed rifleman and two heavy gunners equipped with 20mm Light Assault Guns.

THE PLAN

The Keeper commander intends to clear the defenders out of the rocks using her forces. She does not perceive a major threat, but remains cautious. As one platoon makes a frontal advance, she hopes to leapfrog the laser-armed snipers onto high points using her air/rafts and nail the defenders as they are flushed out. The second platoon will be held in reserve and used to flank the defenders' position if possible.

The difficult terrain makes a coherent plan difficult, so to a great extent the plan is fluid; the ground forces will search for the defenders, engage them to determine their position and numbers, then bring overwhelming force to bear on them.

If it looks feasible, whatever is left of the recon team will find a way through to whatever the defenders have found and report their findings. However, this is not a priority at this point as there is no

reason to suppose that time is limited.

HOSTILES

ZAK Recon Team

2 ZAK Rifle Platoons

2 Air/Rafts with LMG

2 Snipers

See 'Keeper Forces' for organization

EPISODE 11: HOMECOMING

As the defense fails, the first Wanderer troops arrive, joining the characters in a last-ditch defence which becomes a triumphant homecoming.

SCENE 1: THE ASSAULT BEGINS

The characters are in big trouble. ZAK ground troops are advancing to attack them and there seems to be no way out. The attackers are not in a hurry, and will take cover rather than casualties. They are content to pin defenders with suppressive fire and move other forces up. It should be clear to the travellers that while they are not facing an elite force, their enemies are competent and will eventually succeed.

The travellers will probably be able to inflict considerable losses on the enemy during this phase of the action, especially if they are inventive in their use of booby-traps and other 'dirty tricks'. Injured ZAK troopers will retreat (unless the injury is truly trivial) rather than fight to the death. However, the travellers will be steadily driven from one position after another. After a while, things will get very confused, mainly due to the terrain. Keeper fire teams may become split up and groups may find themselves wandering around lost, creating the risk of blue-on-blue incidents or sudden encounters at point blank range.

This phase of the battle should be as confused and messy as the Referee can make it, with characters racing from one position to another, scrambling over rocks and through vegetation to avoid sniper fire or attacks by Air/Rafts, and having to reverse direction frequently to avoid enemy groups in their rear. The enemy is in a similarly confused position, of course...

Referee: Note that certain types of player will not be familiar with (or may think they are immune from) the deadliness of modern combat, and may refuse to abandon a fire position despite being flanked and taking fire from above. This is unfortunate, but **Traveller** (or indeed any game which portrays the reality of firearms combat with any degree of authenticity) does not lend itself to the 'lone hero holds the bridge' style of play. Characters who stubbornly refuse to change position or retreat to a less exposed position (or think they can get away with charging about firing from the hip) will be subject to increasingly heavy fire until they are disabled or killed. This is not the Referee being vindictive, it is a realistic consequence of the character's actions. And besides, since doing these things is so deadly, it makes anyone trying it a real hero – assuming they somehow manage to survive.

SCENE 2: THE LAST STAND

Things are very bad indeed. The main assault force has pulled back to regroup, but there are several enemy soldiers and small groups scattered about the area, who pose a real hazard to the surviving travellers. It is obvious that a second push is being contemplated.

Then, suddenly, everything changes. Beyond the rocky area the *Ardent Conveyor* begins firing her lasers and missile battery into the sky, then lifts hurriedly off. As she does so, she starts taking fire from above. She slews rapidly sideways, firing furiously but taking savage hits. She crosses above the characters' position, clips a pinnacle, then begins to climb. She disappears over the hills but from the laser salvos slashing across the sky it is obvious that she is still involved in a furious battle with an unknown assailant.

At this point, the Keeper ground forces begin moving up. Their earlier caution is gone; they advance almost recklessly. Exactly who takes part in this hasty assault is up to the Referee. If the Keepers have taken heavy casualties they may include security troopers from the ship. Their aim has now changed. They mean to punch through to the center of the rocky area and place nuclear demolition charges in the region where they think the characters have found something significant. The demo teams have chosen not to use the Air/Rafts in case they are targeted by starship lasers.

What the travellers are facing is a final, desperate assault with the simple aim of breaking through and blasting the site into atoms. The majority of the assault force think they have 'take and hold' orders and will be withdrawn before the detonation, but there is a core of fanatical ZAK agents who are quite willing to pull the triggers on the charges manually. Fortunately, the assault commander knows she only has one chance to do this, and between the sheltering rocks and the probability that the site is underground, she wants to place the charges close to the site. This means that if the travellers can keep the demo parties out of the temple area they will not trigger their bombs.

This final assault will be a deadly affair. The Keeper ground troops will not abandon fire & maneuver or other smart tactics, but they will push forward regardless of casualties and expend ammunition prodigiously. Several small parties will try to work their way through to the temple area or get behind the defenders.

Amid the chaos, the two demo parties (carrying one charge each) take different routes to the temple, with a few troopers running interference. These parties aim to get the charge through at any cost. They will bypass defenders if they can, or waste several troopers in a suicidal assault to eliminate a position if necessary.

The reason for this desperation is simple. After the characters left Andrew and the Wanderer enclave, he sent word to the nearest worldship. Its commander sent out what resources he could muster, taking a best-guess based on similarity of conditions on various planets to Kishimaa. This was a rather long shot, and there are several Wanderer ships quietly sitting over various other worlds in the region. This vessel, however, is in the right place. After hiding, powered-down, in a distant orbit she is now streaking in to assist the travellers secure the site. Crammed aboard her boats (which she launched as soon as battle with the *Ardent Conveyor* was joined) are a handful of Wanderer soldiers and a far larger number of armed and determined but totally inexperienced Wanderer volunteers.

Any character with a working comm receives a signal in clear, unscrambled:

Assistance inbound.

For the sake of our souls, hold your ground.

We are coming home.

The boats are coming in very hot; recklessly descending through the atmosphere at great speed. One or more may be destroyed due to control problems or impact with the ground, but the rest will arrive in minutes. If the temple still exists at that time, the Wanderers will form a cordon and defend it to the last. But whether it is there or not depends very much upon a band of outgunned and weary heroes...

Referee: This final scene of the battle should be very hard-fought indeed. The characters may suffer casualties as they are pushed back right into the temple mouth. The demo team will only detonate their charges if they can get into the temple itself – they have to be sure – and they intend to set timers and withdraw. Only a small number of ZAK personnel are fanatical enough to manually detonate the bombs. Thus it might be possible to disarm the charges after they are set. They will, however, be booby-trapped with grenades (which would not set them off but will prevent interference).

A suitable ending to the fight has the characters engaged in a close-range firefight (at times hand-to-hand) at the temple entrance or even inside it as the *Ardent Conveyor*, shot to a wreck, crashes atop the nearby hills and the Wanderer ship – what little remains of it – staggers into orbit. The boats crash down and a horde of Wanderers spill out. Some are soldiers equipped with laser carbines and light body armor equivalent to Cloth. The majority are ordinary Wanderers with little combat experience, armed with an assortment of weapons including snub pistols and carbines. A handful of Priests are also present. They do not use weapons but are suicidally courageous in drawing enemy fire, rescuing wounded and otherwise contributing to the battle.

It may be that the horde of Wanderers pouring into the rear of the combat area will drive some of the Keepers to make a last, desperate charge at the travellers. Those who know the secret of the Wanderers expect no mercy and will fight to the last. Most, however, will seek to escape and if cornered will put up a token resistance then surrender.

HOSTILES

ZAK Recon Team
2 ZAK Rifle Platoons
2 Air/Rafts with LMG
2 Snipers
Demolition Team
Shipboard Security Personnel
Commander and Personal Bodyguard

ALLIES

Wanderer Ground Troops
Armed Wanderers

SCENE 3: HOMECOMING

Finally, the surviving Keeper troops are rounded up and disarmed. They are not, of course, slaughtered out of hand. The Wanderers are not a forgiving people but neither are they barbarians. A party, including some Priests, enters the temple while others confer with the travellers. Ordinary Wanderers are reluctant to approach the characters, such is their awe of what has been done here.

A Wanderer leader, who goes by the name Gerhard, approaches and after fishing about for some suitable words, manages:

There are no words in any language for what has been done here. You have led our people home. Do you have needs?

It is obvious that the Wanderers are in a pretty sorry state, but they will take care of the travellers as best they can. The Wanderer ship remains on guard in orbit (with only one remaining turret it is not much, but there is nothing else available) while work parties toil to create a better entrance to the temple. Other buildings are

unearthed as the teams work.

Of course, things are rather less than perfect. There are a lot more weapons than water bottles, and food is in short supply. The characters' ship is wrecked and they are stuck in a rocky desert on a backwater world with a bunch of aliens who think they are some sort of saints. Having Wanderers abase themselves or scuttle backwards out of the characters' path might be an ego trip for a while, but it will eventually become tiresome.

And so a couple of days pass. There is no traffic at the starport during this time, and of course the TL-5 locals are going to be little help. The only thing for it seems to be to cobble together a Jump capable ship from the Wanderer vessel (whose Jump drive was destroyed in the orbital combat), the travellers ship and whatever may remain of *Ardent Conveyor*. This vessel could then be sent for help if nothing comes through the port in the meantime. However, before much work can be done, a group of starships emerge from Jump and approach the world at speed. The lone Wanderer ship stands out to meet them, but there is no exchange of fire.

The visitors are the 2000-ton Jump-3 liner *Ohasset Star*, registered to MAE Lines, escorted by three Patrol Cruisers (400t) and an Escort Destroyer (1000t). The warships are all operating under the banner of the Archduke's Huscarles.

The liner drops a force of Huscarle infantry at the starport before sending another group down in cutters to the temple site. This is an impressive force, equipped with gauss rifles and combat armor. It is here as an escort for a small party of scientists and an Archducal Envoy. Having received word from a Wanderer ship that significant events were about to occur on Lirguu, the Archduke has dispatched this force to contain the situation.

The warships set up a blockade of the world immediately upon their arrival, while the envoy, Sir Andrea Tyler, talks to the travellers and their Wanderer friends. Sir Andrea bears a message from the Archduke himself, which the Wanderers invite the travellers to hear.

The message is fairly simple:

"Lirguu is not an Imperial world. The Imperial Navy has no jurisdiction here, and will not intervene if the Wanderers choose to seize the world by force, nor even if they attempt to oppress or exterminate the human population. However, the Archduke instructs me to inform you that his Huscarles will protect the human population of this world against any and all aggression. He wishes me to express the earnest hope that this situation can be resolved by negotiation in good faith between all parties, and I am further commanded to offer my services as a mediator. As of this moment, the world of Lirguu is under blockade. No ships of any origin will be permitted to land without inspection and permission from patrolling Huscarle vessels. This is for the protection of all parties."

Sir Andrea actually does not know the full situation, and will proceed cautiously at first, hoping to limit the possibilities of escalation while she figures out what is going on. She will insist that prisoners be handed over to her and will interview them as well as talking to the travellers and the Wanderers.

After a couple of days of this, Sir Andrea meets with the characters again. She has a better picture of what is going on now, and can proceed to the second stage of her orders. She invites the travellers to return with her aboard the *Ohasset Star* along with a

Wanderer delegation and the scientists, to meet with the Archduke. A representative of the people of Lirguu will also be taken.

This is what the Wanderers want – a chance to present proof that Lirguu is their lost homeworld. It may feel like something of a shallow victory after the hard fight of the past few days, but although the outcome is by no means certain, it is possible that the Wanderers may yet achieve their aims. And so, as more Huscarle patrol ships enter orbit to blockade Lirguu – preventing more Wanderers from landing and further attacks on their sites – the travellers board the liner *Ohasset Star* for their return to Annapabar.

EPILOGUE: A PLACE AMONG THE STARS

The characters present their evidence, and the Archduke decides their fate.

SCENE 1: MEETING THE ARCHDUKE

After a trip of just over 2 weeks, *Ohasset Star* enters a berth at the Government Spire of Gateway City, and the characters are shown to a diplomatic suite where they can prepare for a meeting with the Archduke the next day. Any needs are taken care of; suitable clothing and a crash-course in etiquette are provided, after which the characters are kept under close guard (for their own safety) by polite but no-nonsense Huscarle troopers.

The meeting is scheduled for midmorning the next day, and at the appointed hour the characters are escorted to a modest conference chamber rather than the Archducal Throne Hall. There, with two Huscarle sentries outside the door, the characters meet Archduke Marcus Aaron Erechs. Erechs is physically unimpressive; a slightly overweight man of around 50, with unruly dark brown hair and a tendency to bite his nails. He wears business attire rather than regalia; a light gray suit of the Solomani style: tunic and trousers with a long jacket over the top. Erechs' tunic is half undone and his manner is very informal. He invites the characters to sit – not at the conference table but in a side room where comfortable chairs are arranged in an intimate circle. Soft drinks, fruits and nibbles are arrayed on side tables. Erechs disapproves of alcohol and 'recreational pharmaceuticals', and does not allow them in his presence, but otherwise tries to set the characters at their ease.

This informality is, in part, a ploy to coax more information out of the travellers. Erechs has already spoken to the Wanderers and the Lirguu representative, and spent half the night viewing the evidence provided by the wanderers (plus any visual record the characters may have made).

Now, he sits back and asks the characters to tell their story, in as much detail as they like. For the most part, Erechs listens intently but says nothing. However, once in a while he will sit forward and ask a question. This may relate to whatever the characters are telling him about, or may refer back to something said earlier in the hope of finding chinks in a prepared story by throwing the characters a curveball.

Erechs' questions include:

- Are you sure Lirguu was the Wanderer homeworld. How can you know?
- And this fleet... you say they belonged to the Sharushid bureau?
- So, Sharushid maintains a secret force dedicated to keeping its skeletons in the closet?
- And you're sure that what you found was a Wanderer artifact?
- You're asking me to believe that the Sharushid bureau sent a fleet over the border, far beyond Ziru Sirka space, annihilated a peaceful species, and then expunged the incident from history – so thoroughly that there are no records *anywhere*?
- But the Vilani took out several starfaring species. Why hide the facts about this one?

- You claim there were several attempts on your life – all by Sharushid agents?
- And the museum bomb on Dadejadi? That was perpetrated by Sharushid agents too?
- There are humans on Lirguu. It is their home now. What happens when millions of Wanderers arrive and demand their planet back?
- Tell me again why I should believe you...?

Erechs already has reasonable proof of the important details. He cannot act against Sharushid, though he can commission an investigation into their involvement in various murders and other incidents in recent history. He does have an impressive problem on his hands, however, and after listening to the characters' tale; he retires to think about it. The characters are escorted back to their suite and informed that a formal audience will be held the following day.

SCENE 2: A VISITOR

As the characters sit about, cooling their heels, one of the stewards assigned to ensure their comfort informs them that a visitor has arrived. If they are willing to see him, he is ushered in.

The visitor is a Vargr male of about 35, who walks with a slight limp and has some discolored fur on his muzzle as a result of burns. Grav-racing fans will be puzzled to realize that this is 'Lifters' Loursegh, three times Ley Sector Prix Imperial champion, and now banned from all racing events after a dramatic incident in which he assaulted another pilot for causing a fatal crash. 'Lifters' wears a suit and tie that might be seen on a senior bureaucrat or merchant factor, and his presence here is a mystery. Over a drink or two he explains a little.

Yeah, yeah, I'm him. I was the best ever; the ban should be repealed, blah blah... (airy wave)... heard it all. Now I work for His Grace. And no, I'm not his chauffeur. I'm here because you seem like people who'll try to do what's right, and I'm making this contact in person because I'm never wrong about who's the good guys and who's... not.

There's stuff going on, Gentles. Bad stuff. 3D action-vid bad. And not just this lovely can of snakes or eels or whatever it is you've opened with Sharushid and the Wanderers. And so I'll ask you a question in a minute. If you say no, the Archduke will be very nice to you. You'll get a mention on the Domain Roll of Honor. Maybe get put forward for a knighthood. You'll probably get another ship to make more trouble in. Plus a stipend for the next few years. Good things. Worth having.

And if you say yes, you'll get nothing.

His Grace will damn you with faint praise and send you on your way. Anyone who hears about it will – quite rightly – say you don't deserve a thing anyway since all you did was cause a whole lot of trouble and sleeping hogs should be left lying about, or whatever it is they say. I mean it – if you say yes, you'll get nothing. Not a thing. And here we are, the big question. Don't answer straight away:

When the time comes, will you be the only one?

I'll explain that. When the Domain is threatened, will you respond as if you were the only one who could save it? When the news must be carried, will you leave it to others, or will you make the journey as

if you were the only one? When the odds are impossible, when you ARE the only one, will you fight on alone to save what is precious? When His Grace asks of you the impossible, when you are the only one he can trust, will you be faithful?

Lifters allows the characters to think about it for a while, then takes anyone who says 'yes' aside and goes on. His speech pattern changes slightly, becoming more formal.

Bad times are coming. We can't know what the future holds. We can only hope that as each crisis looms there will be someone to bring warning; someone to stand in the breach until help arrives. In quiet places where no-one will hear of you, you will guard the Domain as I do. And you will not be alone.

You will be given a set of emergency codes. These will identify you as members of an organization answering to the Archduke. They will not enable you to commandeer navy ships or such, because they are known only to a small number of individuals. But if you send an authentic code and another agent receives it, then he or she will help as best they can. You are, of course, expected to answer the call if you receive it.

There is no chain of command. Each of us answers to the Archduke alone. There is no support structure and no salary. Upon your retirement you will be well looked after, but until then you must rely on your own resources. This asks a lot and gives little, but we are not hiring mercenaries, we are creating a secret siblinghood composed only of the best people; those who will do right when the time comes as if they were the only one.

And you already know exactly how many members this organization has, don't you?

Lifters waits for an answer. What he is looking for is "There is always only one", or "just me".

There is no ceremony or such; Lifters shakes hands, wishes the characters luck, and leaves. Perhaps the call will never come, or perhaps the door to new adventures has just opened. Only time will tell.

Those who hedged or said 'no' cannot be publicly rewarded if others said yes, but Lifters will tell them that the Archduke will arrange for them to receive a suitable reward in return for their silence about Lifters' proposal. They will be required to sign a rather scary legal document that lists grave penalties for 'betrayal of a state confidence'. With that, he leaves.

Referee: Saying 'yes' at this point may be of profound importance in the future; it gives the Referee an interesting hook to hang future adventures on.

SCENE 3: AN AUDIENCE WITH THE ARCHDUKE

The formal audience is a totally different matter from the original meeting. The characters are conveyed to the Archduke's vast throne hall by an honor guard of 8 Huscarles and an officer, all with swords and sidearms. There, they are announced at the gates ('door' is a puny word for such a magnificent portal) and begin the long walk towards the throne.

The entire ceiling of the thonehall is one vast dome of armored ceramic, creating the image that the Archduke sits among the stars. Guards line the walls; some with dress-swords and some with gauss rifles. The Wanderer delegation and the Lirguu representative have already been presented. On a raised dais the Archduke waits on his throne. No longer the friendly businessman, Marcus Aaron Erechs is dressed in ceremonial robes and wearing an iridium circlet. He holds a scepter of office that probably weighs several kilos.

After the characters' party are introduced, Erechs stands to pronounce his judgment of the situation. The travellers are here as a courtesy more than anything else. Erechs makes a statement:

The world of Lirguu is not part of the Third Imperium, and was never part of the Second or First so far as can be determined. Thus no pretext exists for Imperial intervention in this matter. However, the human settlers who landed on Lirguu found an empty world and made it their own. The Imperium has always recognized their government as the legitimate planetary governing body of Lirguu. This situation has not changed.

Proof has now been presented that Lirguu was the world of origin of the Wanderer species, and that it was their center of government. Their claim to the world has much merit. It is also an accepted, though unspoken, fact that interstellar law is in many cases nothing more than a polite recognition of a government's willingness to enforce its will by force of arms within a reasonable territory, and thus is a means of avoiding conflict by defining areas of control.

It is obvious that the mid-tech world of Lirguu cannot even maintain an armed presence in orbit or over much of the planetary surface, let alone actually defend its territory from a starfaring force. This creates room for a possible legal claim that the Lirguu government is not the legitimate authority on their world. Within the Third Imperium, such claims are disallowed and sovereignty is guaranteed by Imperial Charter. This situation does not exist beyond the border.

Thus, it is my judgment that the Imperial authorities have no jurisdiction in this matter, and intervention by my Huscarles will cease accordingly. The Imperium can not legitimately become involved in this matter, even if the Wanderers seize territory by force of arms and begin to oppress or subjugate the human population, unless the world of Lirguu requests assistance. Such a request has not been made, though the option remains.

The Imperium can act as a mediator, and will now propose a compromise solution. Three decades ago, it was planned to create a forward scout base on Lirguu, in a region of wild land on the main northern continent. Funding for the base was reallocated, but for the past 25 years a small indemnity has been paid for this region to the people of Lirguu. Thus the Third Imperium holds lease on a large area of wilderness in a region with very little human habitation. The Imperium proposes that this region be given now and in perpetuity to the Wandering People, as a site for settlement and colonization, subject to the following terms:

The Imperium, in the form of the Domain of Gateway, shall pay the indemnity until such time, if ever, that the Wandering People choose to make alternative arrangements. Further, the Imperium shall recognize the Wanderer presence on Lirguu as legitimate, and will offer protection if asked, in exactly the same manner as it would protect the humans of that world.

The Wanderers shall confine their activities to the region so leased, and negotiate in good faith with the human population regarding further settlement and sharing of resources. An Imperial diplomatic mission will be created to serve as an intermediary.

The humans of Lirguu shall allow a small settlement of not more than ten thousand Wanderers at the holy site on the southern continent, and will grant access to pilgrims and other visitors provided they do not disturb the humans of the region.

After a few moments, the human delegation agrees to these terms, and the Wanderers readily accept them. The Wanderer delegate has something to add:

There is no need to fear conflict over land on Lirguu. There will be no mass colonization by millions of Wanderers. We are not the people who evolved, who lived, on the world now named Lirguu. The very name of our homeworld is lost to us now. The homeworld remains our center, and the place of rest for our spirits, but it is not our home. Some of the Wandering People will settle here to tend the lands of our ancestors and to ensure that the dead are properly honored, but this is not our place.

Humans almost destroyed our race, but at last they have redeemed us. Thus we will gladly live in harmony with the humans of Lirguu, and also we will give you the thing that so frightened the Ruthless Enemy. For now we know that they were keeping the secret of the 2-Parsec Jump to themselves and even in those days of long ago, we had knowledge that could unlock deeper secrets of Jump technology. Our ancient writings contain science almost meaningless to us now, and there you may find the secret the Vilani so feared – a ship that can cross not two or four or even five Parsecs, as your best couriers can, but six. Six parsecs in a single Jump. Imagine the terror of a race that so jealously guarded Jump-2 as a strategic advantage, to discover a power that might build Jump-6 ships?

That is what they feared; that is why they destroyed us, and now we will give the secret up to you. This is in part a return for your kindness and for the actions of those who had nothing to gain for themselves. And partly because it is a fitting gift for those who gave us back our home. For when we fled, we ceased to be the People of Lirguu. First out of necessity, and then because it fitted us, we became the Wandering People. We will voyage on, sure now that our souls are safe. We are freed to face whatever future we choose.

Humans almost annihilated us, but in so doing they gave us the universe. We will send a few to settle Lirguu, but now and forever, we are the Wandering People.

And our place is among the stars.

And so the audience ends, with a compromise drawn up and a conflict averted. As the Wanderer and Lirguu delegates leave, the travellers are called forward. What happens next depends upon what they said to Lifters.

IF ALL THE TRAVELERS SAID 'NO' TO LIFTERS

The travellers are showered with honors:

- They receive the personal thanks of the Archduke
- Their names will be inscribed on the Domain Roll of

Honor

- They receive the use of another ship for a year. This may be a lab ship or a yacht at their option.
- Each character is awarded a Cr5000 per year stipend until the end of year 999.
- Each receives a letter of introduction from the Archduke's equerry, which makes getting plumb jobs within the ITC much easier.
- The characters are put forward for next year's Order of Gateway knighthood list (they may not be selected however).

IF ALL THE TRAVELLERS SAID 'YES' TO LIFTERS

The travellers receive lukewarm thanks 'in recognition of their acts, taken in good conscience'. No-one is left in any doubt that the Archduke is displeased at being handed such a can of worms as the Wanderers homecoming right on his doorstep, possible conflict with Sharushid and all manner of other problems.

As Lifters said, they are quietly given a set of codes as they leave the spire, and the door to other adventures opens. It is up to the Referee to decide what help is available (if any) when the characters use their codes, and who calls for their help. Serving the Archduke in this manner is not a 'get out of jail free' card; the characters are still bound by law and cannot be helped if they do something seriously criminal, but they now have some backup and the knowledge that when they retire from active adventuring, they will be set up comfortably. So long, of course, as Erechs is still in power.

IF RESPONSE WAS MIXED

Thanks are lukewarm as above, and the characters leave more or less empty-handed. Those who said yes get the codes and go on their way. However, within a few days the travellers (mainly the ones that said no to Lifters' offer) start to receive offers of up to Cr100,000 for their story from vid-news stations, or offers of jobs with prestigious firms, as part of various universities' field research operations, and (most oddly) as field reporters for the soon-to-relaunch *State of the Gate* periodical. Whether these jobs are taken or not, the characters will occasionally find that they have friends in high places. They may be offered work (mundane or adventuring), or baled out of a financial problem by a merchant factor. This is the oblique thank-you that Lifters referred to.

SCENE 4: A PLACE AMONG THE STARS

After the audience, the Wanderer delegation will be traveling back to Lirguu on board the *Ohasset Star*. They invite the characters to come with them. If they do so, they arrive at Lirguu to find a couple more Wanderer ships in orbit and the Archduke's Huscarles getting ready to depart. The travellers are invited to stay for a few days as the Wanderers' guests as they begin to set up their north-continent colony and send the word out to their Worldships.

Dr Markia (if he is still alive) decides that he wants to remain with the Wanderers for a time and see what he can learn about them. Even if they never allow him to publish, it is his aim to create the definitive history of the great exodus and subsequent time of exile. After a couple of days, the Wanderers ask the travellers if they will accompany them to the holy site in the south. There, they find a number of human workers helping the Wanderers excavate their city, and getting along quite amicably. There is also work going on on some of the pinnacles of rock, with scaffolding around them

and sections being blasted away. The Wanderers are not making the region safer by bringing down unstable rock though; they are creating 20-meter statues of the travellers, which will probably cause some embarrassment.

And while they are looking over the statues, a ship lands in a very flashy style near the travellers. It is a yacht, and from it descends Lifters Loursegh, who'd be grinning from ear to ear if he was a human. He gestures at the yacht and hands a startled character a set of ship's papers. "Yours," Lifters says. "Not from His Grace, of course. Officially this vessel is yours, courtesy of the Wandering People and a bit of a refit at Annapabar naval shipyard. There's a fund drawn on the account of the Wanderer enclave here at Lirguu that'll cover fuel and maintenance. You'll have to find money for life support and goodies, but I'm sure you'll come up with something. Meantime, I guess the stars are your lobster or whatever the saying is. Oh, and can I hitch a ride to Angel? I've got something to take care of."

Subsequent events are, as always, up to the Referee...

OPTIONAL EPISODE 1: INTERLUDE ON ZUGE

This Act only occurs if the characters travel to Zuge seeking assistance with the artifact they have found.

SCENE 1: AN OFFER OF ASSISTANCE

The characters have been referred to Dr Ared Vialli, an expert on minor races and alien artifacts. This information probably came from Helene Wallis, but it is possible that someone else the characters talk to might come up with the idea of consulting Dr Vialli. He is doing field research on Zuge at present but with a suitable letter of introduction or professional credentials he would be pleased to help the characters...

Upon arriving on Zuge, the characters discover that Dr Vialli is working with a team at an archaeological site on a large, jungle-covered peninsula about 120km from the Starport. His team (about 50 scientists and support workers) has been on-planet for a couple of years, and has negotiated a deal whereby ships can come in directly to their landing strip (equivalent to an E class starport) if cleared to do so by planetary traffic control. However, this deal applies only to a couple of ships on a regular run to the dig. Everyone else (including the characters) must travel to the dig site overland or by air/raft.

Upon their arrival, Dr Vialli will greet them cordially. He and his team are very busy, so conversations tend to be conducted while hurrying from excavation trench to the preservation lab or the computer database. The travellers are likely to be unceremoniously handed tools, instruments or even artifacts dug up by the archeologists if they have a hand free at the right moment.

Overall, Dr Vialli is the very picture of a busy archeologist, mainly because he is exactly what he seems to be. However, he is also an agent for the Keepers and behind his façade of good-natured but offhand helpfulness, he is keen to discover what the characters know and if they pose a threat.

If the characters come over as convincingly clueless about what they have found, they may be allowed to go unmolested. If so, Dr Vialli tells them that the object is probably an art piece from the Karameshi people, who had a brief starfaring period during the Long Night before collapsing under internal stress to their present TL8 existence. If he's right, he says, the piece is a long way from home (The Karameshi originated in Delphi Sector) but stranger things have been known. He guesses a value of about Cr 15,000 at auction, and offers to write up an authentication document in case they want to sell.

All of this is plausible but, sadly, not true.

SCENE 2: AN UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT

If the characters are suspicious or pushy, Dr Vialli has a plan to deal with them. He says he's willing to give the piece a thorough looking-at (he has a pretty good lab), right down to the molecular level. That'll take a day or two, which is of course time away from his own work. In return, he asks that the characters help him out. He has a relay/uplink set up on a big rock outcrop out in the jungle – reception is pretty lousy without it. It's been playing up and probably needs recalibrating. Any comms or electronics tech could do it, but his dig team is short on those and needs its tech people

at the dig working on the instruments and the computer equipment. If the team could fly out and take a look at the relay, Dr Vialli would consider that a fair trade.

All the necessary electronics gear is in the Tech Support Sled (an oversized air/raft); just add a pilot and someone with Electronics or Communications skill and the job will be simple.

Of course, this is a ploy to get rid of the characters and make it look like an accident. Dr Vialli would sacrifice one or more of his own people to get rid of the characters that way. The Tech Raft is set up to receive a one-time shutdown code, which will cause a crash in the jungle. Even if the whole team is not willing to go in the tech raft, the others can always be shot. A few bodies at the crash site should convince any investigation that the crash was real; others could be dumped elsewhere.

If the characters take the job, everything goes well until they are over the jungle and climbing towards an outcrop jutting up between the trees. A cluster of antennae and dishes can be seen atop the cliffs. However, the Tech Support Sled suddenly malfunctions, losing power to its main, auxiliary and emergency lifters all at once. This is virtually unheard-of; air/rafts are designed with multiple backups and a total systems failure is highly improbable.

But it's happening.

The Tech Support Sled has even worse glide characteristics than a typical Air/Raft – i.e. it will not even crash predictably. A skilled pilot might be able to make use of the residual contragrav eddies in the lifters to control the crash (somewhat). Failing that, it will be a matter of blind luck whether the characters survive or not.

Although the lifters are unpowered, their contragrav field does not completely die the moment power is cut off. It is possible to use this last, fading energy to give a chance at survival. There are two possible options – lunge for the outcrop or drop as gently as possible into the jungle canopy.

ONTO THE OUTCROP

Trying to reach the outcrop requires instantly expending all the remaining contragravity energy in the lifters in a desperate burst of power. This will necessitate a tough piloting roll. If this is made, the Tech Support Sled crashes onto the top of the outcrop, skidding on its side for a while and slamming into the antennae before almost going over the other side. This is a Mild Crash (see below for effects). Making the check by a large margin means that the Air/Raft coasts over the lip and skids gently to a stop without coming to harm.

Failing the check by a large margin means that the Air/Raft clams into the side of the outcrop and suffers the effects of a Severe Crash (see below), then tumbles to the canopy, through it and finally to the jungle floor, suffering further effects as from a Moderate Crash. Failing the pilot check only a small margin results in a Moderate Crash as the Air/Raft hits the very lip and bounces onto the top of the outcrop. It wobbles on the edge for a while and will skid off and fall to the jungle canopy below sooner or later. If this occurs, it is treated as entering the canopy (below).

The Air/Raft has a 1 in 6 chance each round of toppling off the edge of the outcrop. This chance is increased by +1 for every character who jumps out or moves about in the wreck (for example, grabbing equipment) each round. If the chance goes above 5 in 6, the vehicle

automatically goes off the edge. Characters still inside the 'Raft' may be able to counterbalance the movements of others, reducing the chance of going off the edge. It is not possible to do anything else while balancing the vehicle.

The outcrop is shaped like a letter 'D', with the curved side being sheer cliffs and the straight side being a more gradual rocky slope that will allow the characters to enter the jungle on foot.

ENTERING THE CANOPY

The jungle canopy will slow the Air/Raft's fall, but it will pose a severe hazard if the open-topped craft goes in at any angle other than belly-down. To decelerate as much as possible and then hit the canopy the right way up requires a Piloting skill check. If this is successful then the characters gain the benefits of passing through the branches without suffering severe harm. If the check is failed, there is a 2 in 6 chance the vehicle retains its alignment and automatically enters the canopy belly-first.

If the 'Raft enters the jungle canopy after a failed Pilot check or after falling from the outcrop, its angle of entry is totally random. Place 1d6 on the table to represent the Air/Raft. The '1' should be on the bottom and represents the belly of the vehicle. Decide which face is the front and roll another 1d6. This number determined which edge of the 'Raft takes the brunt of the crash.

Hitting the canopy belly-down is treated as a Mild Crash (see below) in terms of effects on the Air/Raft occupants. Hitting at any other angle results in damage to the occupants from whipping branches and broken 'Raft fittings. Roll 1d6 for each character: On a 1, the character is miraculously unscathed. 2-5 results in 2D (2d6) damage and a 6 means that the character is slashed or impaled by something for 4D (4d6) damage.

Having gone through the canopy, the Air/Raft then falls to the ground, additionally suffering the effects of a Moderate Crash.

CRASH EFFECTS ON THE AIR/RAFT AND PASSENGERS

There are three possible types of crash: Mild, Moderate and Severe.

Mild Crash

The Air/Raft suffers no real structural damage. Passengers suffer 2D (2d6) damage. This figure is halved if a character is securely strapped into a seat.

Moderate Crash

The Air/Raft is badly damaged but could be salvaged in a workshop. There is a 10% chance that any given piece of equipment belonging to a character or in the 'Raft's stowage compartments is damaged beyond usability. All characters aboard the 'Raft suffer 2D (2d6) damage, and in addition anyone not strapped into a seat suffers an extra die of damage.

Severe Crash

The Air/Raft is completely wrecked. There is a 2 in 6 chance that any given piece of equipment belonging to a character or in the 'Raft's stowage compartments is damaged beyond usability. All characters aboard the 'Raft suffer 4D (4d6) damage and in addition anyone not strapped into a seat suffers an extra 2D (2d6) damage.

ON THE GROUND

As the characters take stock of the situation, a second Air/Raft comes into view. This is Dr Vialli's clean-up crew of thugs, come to finish off any survivors. The 'Raft will contain a pilot plus at least two thugs armed with a mix of shotguns, handguns and submachine-guns. Up to six thugs (plus the pilot) can fit into the Air/Raft; the Referee should tailor the actual number to the armament and numbers of characters still able to act.

Ideally, the clean-up crew do not want bullet holes around the crash site and corpses with gunshot wounds. They would prefer to find the travellers dead (or spot bodies around the crashed 'Raft). If there are some survivors the clean-up crew will try to get the drop on them and order them to surrender. However, if necessary the thugs will not hesitate to shoot up the characters from the air (if they are on the outcrop) or land to attack on foot if they are difficult to see in the jungle. The travelers will either have to hide in the jungle, shoot it out with the attackers, or deceive them into thinking there were no survivors.

AFTERMATH

The travellers are stuck in the jungle with limited supplies and equipment, and the nearest habitation is held by hostiles. Their position is not looking good. An overland trek or an attempt to steal a 'Raft from the dig site seem likely solutions, but travellers make their living by finding novel ways out of awkward situations. Subsequent events must be resolved by the Referee. (See Fight or Flight, below).

SCENE 3: FIGHT OR FLIGHT

When the disablement signal is sent to the Air/Raft, anyone still at the dig site will be rounded up at gunpoint by Dr Vialli's goons. This will also be attempted if the characters are not willing to make the flight, or if they seem too threatening during Vialli's interview with them. At this point, or if the characters attempt to sneak back into the camp to grab a 'Raft and/or supplies for the trek back to the starport, a combat may ensue between the travellers and Vialli's men.

Of the 50 personnel at the dig, slightly more than half are innocent workers or technicians. The rest are either hired security (some of whom are little more than thugs) or low-level ZAK agents who do not even know what they are protecting. This means that Vialli (who is armed but not really much of a combatant) has at his disposal about 10 assorted gunmen plus 4 above-average ZAK agents, all armed with an assortment of handguns, shotguns and a carbines, with a couple of SMGs.

The remainder of the dig staff are research assistants, students on a project year and academics, who have no clue what is happening. Some will wisely find cover while others will run about in a panic, confusing the issue further. It is possible that some of these non-combatants might also try to fight against the characters if it seems they are gratuitously attacking the dig. This may raise some difficult questions if the characters have to fire on them.

Characters who are captured by Vialli's men will not be killed out of hand; they will be held until they can be handed over to superiors for interrogation. This may create an opportunity for rescue or escape.

OPTIONAL EPISODE 2: INTERLUDE ON SIK

Sik is a red herring in this adventure. However, there are things to do here and adventures to be had, which may be of importance in the future.

SCENE 1: THE BELTERS

Sik has two groups of offworlders associated with it; a large community of Belters and a training base manned by Loyal Sector Guard personnel. The latter are polite enough to starship crews who come in to visit, but maintain a fair amount of distance. The travellers may encounter LSG personnel on or off duty, but they will not be able to visit the LSG compound or their training areas unless they are members themselves (which is unlikely).

The Belters, on the other hand, are much more willing to mingle with outsystem ship crews, swapping tall tales over drinks and pressing for news of activities in other systems. Sik is pretty isolated, so new faces are a welcome change. It is obvious that the Belters are not deeply impressed with the LSG presence on-planet, though in reality it affects them very little. They do not have much (good or bad) to say about the LSG but harbor a vague resentment for anyone in a uniform. Belters are not known for their love of order and officialdom.

It should be possible for the travellers to chat to various Belters, picking up some rumors and generally shooting the breeze. It becomes apparent to anyone that mentions him that 'Granddad' is something of a legend in Belter circles, and used to prospect in the Sik system many years ago (he was old even then, they claim. In fact, he may have always been old...)

Among the general chat and wild tales, one or two older Belters manage to recall Karse Vaali. He worked the system some years ago, which was how he joined forces with Granddad. Never found anything worth selling on, though, so he moved on. Certainly nobody remembers him talking about a hoard of alien artifacts. That doesn't mean he never found anything, of course, but Karse was never one to keep his mouth shut if he had something to boast about...

One Belter does have something more to add. She is Jeanenne Ikariia, owner of the Seeker *Fastbuck*, and something of an unofficial spokesperson for the Belter community. She says she might be able to dig up some more information on Karse Vaali's activities in the system all that time ago, but it will take a couple of weeks. In the meantime, she had an idea for something the characters might be able to help with.

According to Ikariia, the vast majority of the Belting operations that go on in the system are conducted in the two planetoid belts, as might be expected. However, there are other clusters of planetoids in the system, and these are occasionally picked over by hopeful prospectors. One such prospector, Eric Mellhew of the oddly-named Seeker *Meow*, went to have a look at one of those clusters some months ago. He is very, very much overdue now, even by the standards of lone Belters. Another Seeker, the *Golden Strike!*, crewed by the Corelli family, Jumped out to the cluster a couple of weeks ago to look for him. They have not returned, either.

Ikariia explains that Belters operate on a shoestring, and cannot afford to go wandering about the system in search of a couple of their number who may well have found something, taken samples and Jumped out to register their claim. However, if the characters would be willing to visit the cluster and conduct a search for either or both ships, she would be grateful. It's probably too late for rescue now, and surely distress signals would have been picked up if there was a need to send them, but all the same she'd like the characters to make sure.

If the travellers agree, Ikariia offers to cover their mission costs and promises to find out all she can for them.

SCENE 2: A MOST CURIOUS ASTEROID

The planetoid cluster is in a very distant orbit, requiring 5 days transit in normal space or a week in Jump to get there. Initial sensor sweeps show that rather than a tight 'cluster', what the characters are approaching is a loose gaggle of about a dozen largish planetoids with several smaller ones between them. The 'cluster' is in fact quite widely dispersed, and it will take some several days to make even a fairly cursory search.

After a couple of boring days in transit between planetoids, punctuated by scarcely more exciting flybys and surface scans, the characters' ship approaches one of the smaller bodies, which is about 5km in diameter. Its rotation is extremely slow despite its irregular shape, making surface landings fairly easy. No prospector would be able to resist such an easy mark for a surface survey; if the missing ships came to the cluster, they almost certainly landed here.

Standoff scanning indicates that the planetoid is relatively dense, though only in places. It is possible that it contains deposits of metals like iron, copper or nickel, and possibly small quantities of heavier materials. Landing is slightly tricky, requiring a Pilot skill check to avoid skidding off the rotating surface. A detailed surface survey, good enough to show up deposits of metals and other mineable minerals, would normally take a couple of days. However, the initial cursory overview-survey will turn up something that demands further investigation.

One area of the planetoid contains several hollow spaces, like miniature caverns in the rock. These would not normally be remarkable but for the fact that they are covered by camouflaged metal doors. There is absolutely no way this could have been an accident or some prospector's supply cache; the doors are made of military-grade materials, complete with camouflage coatings that make them appear to radar to be just another expanse of rock.

The doors of five of the six caverns are sealed. The sixth is slightly open; wide enough for a human to squeeze inside. It is obvious that this is a 'cold cache', since there is no power source. The doors are supplied with power by a feed from a landed ship, via a concealed cable terminal near one of the caches.

Inside, the caverns are obviously natural spaces improved upon by using plasma cutting gear to smooth off the surfaces. They are nothing more than holding areas for many tons of supplies. Four of the sealed caverns are very large. They contain more or less full fuel tanks, with refuelling hoses and other gear necessary to refuel starships quickly. There is enough liquid hydrogen stored here to refuel a cruiser two or three times from each tank.

The other caverns are smaller, and intended to hold dry stores or perhaps cargo. Both have several side caverns and a rather irregular shape. One is completely empty, while the open one contains a few items. These are almost lost in the vast space, and will take some searching with handlamps to find. For each hour spent searching the cavern, each character may make a perception or INT check. Success indicates that something has been found. Select from the list below for each item:

1. A tool: ratchet, screwdriver etc, bearing the logo of Ling Standard Products
2. Several empty equipment cases. These contained equipment used in the construction, such as hydraulic ceiling props, plasma cutter power cells and so on. The boxes have no identifying marks – they are generic cargo containers.
3. Spent ammunition cases from a snub handgun or SMG. These are marked with the logo of Independence Arms, a Solomani weapons company
4. The body of a man, still wearing his vac suit. He has been shot several times in the back, at close range. His ID etc is gone, but it should be possible to identify him from pictures as the missing Belter Eric Mellhew
5. Crates containing a complete pressurized shelter base, which could be assembled into a complex large enough to accommodate 20 or so people. It includes a non-standard 'brig module' which could be used to house prisoners

It seems obvious that this is some sort of refuelling base for illicit vessels. It is all a bit large-scale for smugglers, so the builders are more likely to be an organized group such as pirates, commerce raiders or a political group such as the Loyal Sector Guard.

Referee: The place is one of several forward bases set up to support Solomani commerce raider vessels. It was found by Eric Mellhew, who was murdered for his pains. A Solomani agent is now posing as Mellhew and piloting the *Meow* around the region gaining intelligence.

The base is not yet stocked or fully set up. Within a few weeks, a Solomani raider support vessel posing as a merchant vessel will Jump into the cluster and stock the base with missiles, ship spares and tools, and additional base modules to create a holding area for prisoners taken from captured ships. If the characters have reported their find, the merchant may be intercepted by the authorities and the operation compromised.

SCENE 3: A DISTURBING FIND

Having searched the planetoid as thoroughly as possible, the characters have found out what happened to Eric Mellhew but not his ship. The other vessel remains missing, but shortly after takeoff the mystery is solved. Passive sensors pick up an object passing between the characters' ship and a planetoid dimly lit by the distant star. Closing with it, they discover that it is a powered-down space vessel of some kind.

The vessel is the shattered hulk of the Seeker *Golden Strike!*, which approached the planetoid searching for Eric and was ambushed. The unarmed Seeker attempted to escape but was severely damaged. Losing power and control, her wild evasion became a death-tumble as her systems went down one by one. Unable to call for help, the Seeker died quietly in deep space.

But not entirely.

The Seeker has been savaged by laser fire at close range. It has severe structural and powerplant damage, and is not salvageable for anything but spare parts. The bodies of father and adolescent son are still on the wrecked bridge. The mother's vac-suited corpse still clings with a death-grip to the sole functional low berth, in which two children – a boy and a girl of age 3 and 5 respectively, remain just barely alive. If they can be brought to a decent medical facility, they can be revived safely.

Searching the ship shows that the emergency reserve atmosphere has been deliberately vented.

Referee: The Corelli family, which crewed the vessel, consisted of the parents, an adolescent child and two young children. With the adolescent and the father dead, Mrs Sarah Corelli did the only thing she could think of to save her young children. Jamming them both into the only functional emergency low berth, she activated it then deliberately vented the ship's remaining air supply in order to change its vector slightly. The silent Seeker then drifted off the screens of her attackers, who were too busy to pursue at that time. Later, they had lost the ship and decided it was not worth searching for the wreck.

SCENE 4: THE BELTERS AGAIN

The Belter community will quickly come to the conclusion that their colleagues were murdered, probably by pirates. They are grateful that the characters tried to find out what happened, especially if they saved the Corelli children. The kids will be looked after by foster parents now; the Belting community looks after its own. It also looks after its friends, which are sadly few and far between. The characters have earned that distinction and can count on help from the Sik Belters if at all possible. This won't improve relations with Belters anywhere else unless some of the Sik community have moved on, but at least the travellers have friends here. The Belters also assure the characters that they will watch for any more activity in the system and inform the authorities via messages sent on passing trade vessels.

The LSG personnel stationed on Sik cannot do much about activity in the outsystem; their handful of fighters cannot operate that far out. However, they promise to report the incident to their superiors (if it is brought to their attention), who may be able to shake a vessel loose from another deployment in order to protect the Belters or wait in ambush for anyone trying to visit the cache.

The LSG officer in charge of the base also suggests to the travellers that LSG needs to hear about this kind of thing, so that they can stamp it out. The Navy clearly has better things to do than protect the citizens, after all. So, if the characters come across information that the LSG can act upon, they'll be sure to make it known to the nearest LSG representative, won't they? There is a small financial incentive available to citizens who join the fight in this way.

Alternatively, he suggests, perhaps the travellers might even consider associating themselves with the Loyal Sector Guard more closely? They're the sort of smart, conscientious and resourceful individuals the LSG is always looking out for...

Referee: The Referee may wish to work news of further events in the Sik system into the game. Perhaps a newsfax mentions a Navy destroyer ambushing a commerce raider in the Sik system, or an attack on the Sik Belters beaten off by an armed merchant ship

flying LSG colors, deployed to protect them. An incident where both LSG and regular Navy forces attempted to intercept a raider in the system might showcase the tensions between the Guard and the regular armed forces.

If the LSG manages to defeat a raider as a result of information given by the travellers, the Guard will be very pleased with them but officials of the Domain administration will not. On the other hand, a tip-off to the Navy that leads to a successful interception will win the travellers some friends in naval circles.

FINAL NOTES

Homecoming is an adventure on a big scale, and it has the potential for far-reaching effects. The players have participated in events that change the Traveller universe. In the grand scale of things, the changes are fairly small, but they will influence events in the region for a long time to come. There is also the fact that the Wanderers have been discovered to be a Major Race; i.e. a species that developed Jump drive rather than obtaining it from another source.

The Wanderer settlement of Lirguu will never be particularly large, though a few million may eventually settle on the northern continent and build a starport of their own. They are genuinely well disposed towards their human co-habitants, and sources of friction will be rare as well as minor.

The travellers will find that they are now cultural heroes among the Wandering People. There is no cash award or skills bonus for this; it is merely a fact of the adventurers' lives. They will be able to call upon Wanderer enclaves for shelter or protection, and for information. This does not go too far. The Wanderers know that the characters are just people who did something special rather than heroic demigods, but most Wanderers are willing to put themselves out to help if they can. A handful may take it further, such that a visit to an enclave includes the occasional embarrassing piece of hero-worship, hem-touching or even the request for a blessing.

Traveller does not include official rules for karma or any such thing, but since the travellers have taken great risks to help a bunch of strangers; aliens even, when they could have quietly profited from not doing anything, the Referee may decide that they deserve a lucky break or two. Suggestions include:

If the characters are in real trouble, they might be rescued by a group of Wanderers obsessed with them and prepared to die to help their heroes out of trouble. Young people of all species have a depressing tendency towards this kind of behaviour, and characters rescued this way may end up with a truckload of guilt to deal with. It all makes the roleplaying experience more interesting.

Characters short of cash may find a Wanderer merchant willing to extend them a loan on extremely generous terms and without guarantees. If this is used for a scheme that goes wrong, the characters may end up feeling obligated to the merchant even as he writes off their debt. Again, there are possibilities for roleplaying and future adventures here if the players are inclined to become involved in the game world in this way.

Traveller does not routinely deal with the supernatural, but psionics exist and can parallel supernatural phenomena. If the Referee so wishes, the fact that the travellers have ended 6000 years of torment for the souls of the Wandering People and bad luck for the living might earn them some good luck. Perhaps the characters may gain the protection of a Wanderer 'Guardian Angel', which manifests itself as the occasional unexplained success despite the dice result, or a piece of blinding luck such as a Scoutship coming out of Jump off course and right next to the travellers' stranded vessel, just when they've given up all hope of rescue. A character who was definitely killed might be found in the rubble, dazed but unhurt, after the fight. Or a lethal wound may inexplicably stabilize. These sort of events should happen once or twice only to any given character and may be accompanied by strange sensations or visions. Note that the

Official **Traveller** Universe is not a mystical or supernatural place, and it is not recommended that 'magical' events become a regular part of any game.

On the political front the Archduke has gained a powerful ally. The Wanderers, by definition, can be found almost anywhere and will begin to feed the Archduke information from time to time. They do not become his loyal servants, but the Wanderers are an honorable people who acknowledge their debts and try to help those who have assisted them whenever they can.

Archduke Erechs will also be able to present his Emperor with Wanderer science that will bring closer the jump to Tech Level 15 and the possibility of Jump-6 starships. This is an enormous benefit and will increase the Emperor's faith in his subordinate. This may have major implications in the future.

Of course, not everything is made better by the Wanderers' homecoming. The Sharushid corporation will have a major PR disaster on its hands if the truth leaks out, and may suffer financially. Its displeasure with the Wanderers, the characters and the Archduke may be slow in manifesting, but it will. Sharushid will begin to increasingly back Archduke Erechs' rival, Nells, and will cause trouble for the characters wherever possible. ZAK agents may occasionally try to punish the characters, wishing to make an example of them to deter others who might go raking for skeletons in the Megacorporation's cupboards.

PART 5: GUIDE TO LOCATIONS

Since characters may visit the worlds in this adventure more than once, detailed world data and maps are grouped here rather in the episodes where the characters visit the places in question.

If a location has something unknown or secret about it, that information is contained within the relevant part of this adventure. Thus there is nothing sensitive about the information in these overviews. They can be presented to the players wholesale if the Referee wishes, though it is recommended that information be slowly revealed as a result of in-character inquiry and investigation rather than handed out in this dry form.

ANNAPABAR

1936 Annapabar A4367A9-D Imperial 210 I K3 V
Subsector and Domain Capital

Annapabar, an unremarkable iceball world, is a demonstration of what the Imperium is capable of when the need is perceived. Before 991, the world was almost entirely uninhabited. Now it is home to 20 million sentients and the entire bureaucratic apparatus of the Domain, Subsector and Trade Cluster governments.

The Annapabar system orbits a fairly typical reddish-orange main sequence star, and consists of several rockball and iceball worlds plus a single planetoid belt which occupies the 8th orbit. There are no gas giant worlds in the system.

Annapabar itself occupies the 6th orbit, right at the outer limit of the life zone. This results in a very low surface temperature. This and the very thin atmosphere means that most of Annapabar's surface water is in fact ice. The great majority of the planetary surface is glacier or bare, lifeless, rock. Only in the depths of the oceans is there much life. This is generally of a hardy, cold-resistant and primitive nature.

Despite its unappealing nature, Annapabar is the capital of the Imperial Domain of Gateway. Archduke Marcus Erechs ordered the domain capital to be moved to Annapabar within weeks of his accession to the Archducal throne. His plan was to place his centre of authority close to the most troubled region of the domain. Coupled with the formation of the Imperial Trade Cluster, this move was intended to offset Solomani Confederation and other non-Imperial influences in the region.

The effort required to carry out this undertaking was monumental, as was the cost. A fleet of transport vessels was required to carry the Domain governmental records alone. However, the work is close to completion and despite a year of working out of a temporary headquarters aboard various starships, the administration has remained remarkably efficient.

New construction is impressive. Not only has a fine orbital Starport been constructed, a Downport and associated city (Gateway City; Population 10 Million), several smaller cities and a naval base have all been built, plus an impressive array of planetary defences including deep-site meson guns and small outsystem bases for system defence craft.

The population of Gateway City and the other planetary settlements is growing steadily as industrial and business concerns open offices and set up factories in the new capital. Immigration Control handles over 5000 immigrants every week, and there is no sign that the flood is likely to abate. There is plenty of housing and work for these new citizens, however.

Government of the world is directly from the Archduke's office, through a Chamber of Executives. The government (i.e. the Archduke) is very popular among the citizens of the clean, new cities with their high wages and high-technology lifestyles. Security is fairly tight, and order is maintained by the Archduke's Huscarles (household troops) who also protect the government and man the system defence squadron. The smartly uniformed, efficient Huscarles are popular among the citizens despite their paramilitary approach to law enforcement, and competition to impress the recruiters is high. Many young people travel several parsecs to apply.

Annapabar is also the site of a naval base. This is shared between the Archduke's Huscarles, the Navy and a rapid-reaction force of Marines. There is considerable rivalry between the services, but the overall relationship is amicable everywhere except in liberty bars.

Naval presence in the system is mainly limited to light cruisers and similar craft suited to the rapid-reaction and peacekeeping roles. A BatRon of *Kokirrak* class dreadnoughts provides heavy backup for these forces at need. One *Kokirrak* is permanently assigned to serve as the Archduke's mobile command post in time of crisis, though this role will be taken over by another vessel in due course.

The vulnerability of the Archducal seat, lying as it does so close to the border, is recognised. The heavy defences and naval squadrons are one answer. Construction is underway on a huge (750,000 ton) Superdreadnought, which will be crewed by an elite force drawn from the Huscarles and Navy. This vessel, built to a special one-off design that remains a closely-guarded secret, is expected to be a match for even a small squadron of enemy dreadnoughts. Many see it as a source of great pride, but there is a growing feeling elsewhere in the Domain that the vessel is an expensive folly.

The Highport sees a great deal of traffic. Some of it comes in under the ITCA (Imperial Trade Cluster Authority) flag but much of it is independent ships or those belonging to small lines. A few Sharushid or Delgado Megacorporate vessels come through, but they are in the minority.

As a huge Highport and city, Gateway City will eventually be very diverse. At present however, there are only two kinds of area – newly built and immaculate, or still under construction. There is little petty crime in Gateway City as a result of effective law enforcement and a fairly complex set of controls on who can immigrate. Organized crime can get a foothold anywhere, of course, so there is some smuggling and other illegal activity. However, the crime groups are very discreet, as they must be when they are operating under the nose of the Archduke in the middle of a well-policed flagship project.

The majority of the population of Gateway City are humans, but Hivers, Ithklur, Virushi, Vargr, Sydites and even the occasional group of Droyne use the port. The shops and brokerages along the Main Trade Way sell all manner of high-tech and imported goods, some of them from very distant locations. Characters should be able to find almost anything they want in Gateway City.

Accommodation in the port ranges from the magnificent to the merely functional. The grandest of the hotels, such as the Gateway City Tilston or the unique Star Bowl Hotel, cater to rich dignitaries, but even the humblest visitor can find a comfortable bed and a good meal at one of the many licensed hostelryes.

The Highport is also the main defense nexus for the world below, which of course is the Domain capital. It is thus guarded by an impressive force of security troops and weapons systems. Some areas of Gateway City are off-limits to civilians. These are the Huscarle and Marine barracks, the naval docking bays and the areas around the Highport's powerful weapons array. Annapabar Highport has, like many important installations, a powerful armament of missile bays backed by laser and fusion turrets for close-in defense. However, few installations back up their missile armament with dreadnought-grade particle accelerators as Gateway City does. The city would suffer horrific losses from an attack by a cruiser or a capital ship, but even a dreadnought would pay for coming into particle accelerator range of the main port.

Standoff defense of the port is conducted by patrols of system defense boats and monitors, backed up by the Naval squadron if necessary. Closer in, fighters crewed by Marines, Huscarles and Navy officers support the many customs inspection cutters that endlessly shepherd the lines of commercial traffic into and out of the port. Inspections are as quick as possible, but very thorough. Vessels carrying an Imperial Trade Cluster Authority rider on their transponder code are subject to a shorter and more cursory inspection, a reason for some annoyance among the more self-important non-ITCA captains.

Overall, Annapabar Highport and Gateway City are bustling, but clean and efficient. They are well defended in a polite, no-nonsense manner. Incidents are dealt with rapidly and firmly, while good citizens enjoy a very high standard of amenities.

GATEWAY CITY

Gateway City is largely still under construction. It was designed as an orbital habitat capable of supporting a million permanent residents plus a naval base, Highport and facilities for the thousands of transients passing through it.

The city is constructed as a thick annulus, with the main Highport jutting out over both edges like the gemstone in a finger ring. The annulus is quite deep, with the central hollow area being only a little further across than the distance from inner to outer edge.

The naval base and System Defence Squadron base are situated 60 and 120 degrees around the ring. Between these points are districts of the city, each with residential areas, business centers, civic amenities and services such as power, life support and hydroponic gardens. Each district is self-sufficient in terms of life support and power, and is subdivided into smaller, equally self-sufficient sub-districts so as to minimize the effects of a disaster. Within and between the districts and sub-districts are various restricted areas used for security, maintenance and other official purposes. There are also 'military districts' where Marine, Navy and Huscarle personnel are quartered, with their families, and where security barracks and police stations are situated.

The annulus is aligned with its 'bottom' face towards the planet, giving a 'down' direction, occasionally referred to as rockwards. 'Up' (away from the planet) is sometimes known as 'starwards'. Other

directions are 'inward' (towards the hollow center) and 'outward' (away from it) and 'spinward' or 'trailing' aligned with the city's slow rotation.

The 'starward' and 'rockward' faces of Gateway City are dotted with small craft landing areas for utility ships and emergency services. These areas are not usually accessible from the public districts, though some businesses and manufacturing centers have their own commercial access. Between the access points are antennae for a range of sensors and the city's defensive armament.

The mainstay of the defenses is several massive missile batteries made up of huge weapons bays situated under armored sections of the city's skin. The whole surface is 'armored' in that it is heavily built and very robust, but the weapons stations have an extra layer of armor; thicker in some cases than a Dreadnought's hull. Armored 'citadels' also protect some of the station's emergency power and life support installations, and cover personnel shelters for use if the city comes under attack.

Backing up the missile batteries are several battleship-grade particle accelerator mounts and a host of laser and sandcaster turrets for final defense. Naval fusion gun turrets cover critical areas such as the Highport docking area. The city also boasts meson screens, repulsors and a powerful electronic countermeasures suite. However, the armament is intended for last-ditch defense; raiders would be engaged at maximum distance by the system defense flotilla or the city's fighter screen if at all possible.

In the hollow at the center of the annulus, connected by three slender struts, is the 'government spire', seat of the Gateway Domain administrative apparatus. The spire is about five times as long as the annulus is thick, and ends in landing areas used only by naval and Archducal ships on Domain business. Several high-jump couriers are always at the spire on 10-minute launch alert, along with armed VIP transports for various officials. Vessels approaching without clearance are chased off by Huscarle-crewed fighters or fired on by the spire's fusion gun batteries.

At present, Gateway City is operational but incomplete. The main structure is complete, and for balance the inhabited areas are distributed around the whole of the annulus. However, as yet some areas are open to space or lacking in power. Others are complete but barren, inhabited by hundreds of construction workers who live in prefabricated shelters as they build the splendid city around them.

Even half-completed, Gateway City is home to about 300,000 individuals, with perhaps 70,000 living in or passing through the Highport at any given time. This number does not include naval personnel and their dependents, or the workers at the Annapabar Naval Yard which orbits ahead of Gateway City. At present the yard workers dwell in temporary accommodation attached to the yard framework, but within the year they will be moved into permanent quarters in the city. The yards themselves are functional, but are still being extended and will not reach full capacity until 996, assuming the project remains on schedule. Gateway City should be fully complete on the same date.

THE STAR BOWL HOTEL

One of the best hotels in the Gateway City Highport, the Star Bowl is famous for two things: the quality of its suites and the distinctive 'star bowl' conference and dining facilities it offers. These have a

floor or wall constructed of armored ceramic, allowing a clear view of the stars. The hotel serves the very finest food and drink, and caters to non-humans as a matter of course.

A single night in an ordinary suite at the Star Bowl costs Cr200, plus dinner starting at Cr50 for the most basic menu. The best suites or unusual environments can cost up to five times as much, and the price of a convention is astronomical. However, characters staying at the Star Bowl are likely to run into all manner of high-powered or famous individuals. The hotel is favored by corporate officials, sports stars and media celebrities. Minor nobles who do not wish or are not able to secure accommodation in the 'noble quarter' at the spire often use the Star Bowl.

As might be expected, security is very tight. The Star Bowl maintains a strict 'no weapons' policy, though officers and nobles are permitted to retain dress-swords. Even bodyguards must check their weapons at the lobby, and scanners are very good. The hotel maintains a discreet armed security presence and even has a hostage-rescue squad formed of ex Imperial Armed Forces elite troopers.

Normally the exquisitely comfortable and peaceful atmosphere of the hotel is enough to ensure that visitors behave themselves. However, the staff are highly skilled at distracting, controlling or isolating those who have been partying a little too hard, and has more robust methods of dealing with boors who have more money than manners and want to spoil someone else's enjoyment of the Star Bowl.

Characters staying longer than overnight have access to the extensive leisure facilities at the hotel, which includes gyms, swimming and leisure pools and sport facilities with resident professionals at sports ranging from nullball (a very energetic zero-gravity racket sport) and fencing to golfing on the variable-gravity range. The latter is so popular that there are rumors of a major tournament to be played there at some point in the future.

The fact that it includes a golf course might give some idea of the sheer scale of this hotel. Such an impression is wholly understated.

KAM

Kam 2034 C354301-A 510

G1D M1D

Kam is a very minor port on the Serpent Main. A small, dryish world with a thin atmosphere, the world has one settlement, Kam Downport. There is no Highport, merely a beacon in orbit. The port sees little traffic since Jump-1 ships plying the Serpent Main have a choice of three worlds to transit through and there is little at Kam to attract them.

The world's 5,000 inhabitants live in a state of anarchy – indeed, the world's full title is the Anarchical Collective of Kam. Although there is very little law outside the port area, society is for the most part good-natured. About half the locals work in support industries for the many small Belting operations throughout the system (there is no major belt but several far-flung clusters do exist in the main system and its binary twin) while the remainder are mainly artists, writers and intellectuals drawn to the ideal of an anarchy.

As might be expected, different areas of town have their own

character. Some are friendly and easy-going, most are politely uncaring and some are very rough indeed. Troublemakers have a tendency to provoke mob justice, so violence remains within the limits of fistfights and the (very) occasional shooting for the most part. A handful of self-appointed 'white hat' streetfighters act as protectors of society, which basically means they get to indulge their darker natures and their liking for violence and intimidation without hurting anyone innocent.

The Downport is 'guarded' by a platoon of Imperial Marines who have been stationed on Kam for far too long. Personnel rotations ceased months ago and repeated messages to headquarters have either come back as orders to wait for the situation to be resolved or else have elicited no reply at all. As a result, many of the Marines have gone to seed. Most still go through the motions of carrying out their duties, though less than half remain properly efficient. The remainder goof off and hang around the town or spend their time drinking in the Maroon Bar, which is run by the Marines themselves.

The commander of the detachment is a notorious incompetent who has more or less gone native. The platoon sergeant was rotated out and never replaced, leaving day-to-day command in the hands of a corporal who lacks the experience to maintain any sort of readiness or proper discipline, despite her best efforts.

The Kam Port Authority is, as might be expected, just as bad as the worst of the Marines. The handful of port technical staff are mainly offworlders, but the Port Governor is a local man and, given that Kam is an Anarchy, it was only to be expected that he cannot be bothered to do his job – but his self-importance is such that he will not let anyone else do it for him.

Kam Downport is thus a rather frustrating place if visitors actually want to get anything done, though it is a wonderful stopover for crews with an interest in the arts. Some of the artists and writers living quietly in the small town are in fact quite famous and are now either retired or working on their next piece away from the glare of publicity. The locals (even the famous ones) are very hospitable, and while there are a few guest houses around town, many visitors end up staying with one of the locals, exchanging news and gossip about the wider world for a bed and a meal.

Overall, Kam Downport is an island of cheerful, easy-going anarchy amid an entire planet of barren wilderness. Even the Marine garrison is as run-down as the port itself. It is not a place where things happen, and the locals like it that way.

THE KAM DETACHMENT, IMPERIAL MARINE CORPS

The Marine platoon stationed on Kam was placed there in 989, and has been on-planet for nearly four years at the present date. Originally deployed to counter the threat of a raid, the platoon was left in situ when its parent formation was assigned to combat duties in the Solomani Rim. Personnel rotations ceased shortly thereafter and the unit commander's repeated efforts to get noticed by headquarters failed – there was just too much to do in those early months of the Solomani Rim War.

As a result, the Marine platoon has been on Kam for years with no offworld leave, no rotations and no mustering-out orders. Several members of the platoon are over their time, but permission to depart has not been forthcoming. The commanding officer, Lieutenant

Jarvis Singo, has more or less abdicated his position and now lives with a local woman at the other end of town. A handful of the Marines under Corporal Raya Haskii try to carry out their duties but they are dispirited and short-handed. The rest of the platoon hangs out in the Maroon Bar and finds ever more extravagant ways to waste time. Some (including the platoon sergeant) have actually deserted, taking passage on a tramp starship in search of pastures new.

Supplies do come in for the unit from time to time, but never any orders nor answers to Corporal Haskii's occasional reports to HQ. As a result her command exists on what amounts to charity from the locals.

It is likely that eventually some of the Marines will become a threat to the local populace, but at present they are living the life of armed bums and lack the imagination to do much harm. The handful that cling to their duty are gradually growing apart from the others, though there is little tension between the groups as yet.

THE MAROON BAR

The name of this bar, eatery and general hangout is a fairly poor pun. Maroon is the color of the Imperial Marines' dress uniform, and many of the Marines stationed on Kam have the feeling that they are marooned there.

The Maroon Bar is a short walk from the Starport gate (but then so is the rest of the town), and is situated in what used to be a large house. The upstairs and the adjacent buildings serve as accommodation for the Marines. Any visitors to Kam who cannot find somewhere else to stay can find a basic room next door to the bar. Lodgings are cheap, though many say that the musical pretensions of Private Kelsey's Experimental Electro-Jazz Ensemble are a high enough price to pay for a place to sleep.

The bar itself is open to offworlders and visitors, who get their first drink free but afterward end up paying high prices for homebrewed beer and spirits that could not safely be used to strip paint. The Bar also serves a range of relatively tasty grilled and fried dishes, and the occasional experiments of a bored platoon chef with delusions of grandeur.

The latest scheme dreamed up to waste the Marines' time is the Kam Combat. A fighting pit has been excavated behind the bar (close to the stills and the micro-brewery), where some of the Marines work on their unarmed combat techniques and train visitors in self-defense for a small fee. The Marines have come up with a scheme to host a bare-knuckle fighting contest. Minor events (involving the Marines and a handful of locals) have been staged, but the hope is that someday some real offworld talent can be brought to Kam for an evening of mayhem and bloodshed.

Characters are likely to be asked to take publicity materials offworld when they leave, and may even be invited to take part in the weekly brawl.

KISHIMAA

Kishimaa 1933 D785779-4 Ag Ri 903 1 F5 VI

Kishimaa is an average-sized world with a dense atmosphere and a reasonable amount of surface water. Although a little chilly since

the world orbits at the outer edge of the life zone, Kishimaa qualifies for a 'Rich' trade classification and should be a prosperous world. However, it is not.

The extensive plains of Kishimaa were ideal for early colonization during the Rule of Man, and a large agricultural colony was set up on-planet to feed later expeditions. Kishimaa also acted as a staging point for second-stage colonization missions, and was for a time an administrative capital.

However, everything about the setup on Kishimaa was temporary, and centered on supporting the new waves of colonists arriving from Rimward. When the colonists stopped coming, Kishimaa continued to support the local worlds until it was no longer needed. Various organizations pulled out and headed off to more developed colonies, leaving a large population of colonist-farmers dependent upon imports that were no longer coming in. Technological level fell rapidly, and the various regions became self-governing out of necessity. This was the origin of the highly fragmented planetary society that exists to this day.

Kishimaa now has a population of around 90 million, divided into an ever-shifting web of city-states, alliances, emergent nations and breakaway states. The overall tech level is 4, with a few enclaves touching on 5 and some backwoods areas a 3 or even 2.

The region around the small and rather primitive Starport is fairly safe, since it is garrisoned by a peacekeeping force of Imperial Marines. The port is owned and operated by an alliance of five small states which bicker and occasionally fight, but are generally stable and are considered to be well on their way to becoming a single state or at least a formal federation. Some of the less stable states occasionally try to gain control of the starport, but are usually discouraged by the intervention of a handful of Imperial Marines backing up the Port Alliance's own forces.

Away from the port region, almost anything goes. Alliances form and break up constantly, and Imperial workers offered contracts away from the port have sometimes had to drop everything and flee for safety as war broke out around them (for an example, see 'Kishimaa Downport – or bust!' in the Travellers' Handbook).

Kishimaa has narrowly avoided being Amber Zoned several times; it is purely due to the presence of a 'safe zone' around the port that it has not. Anyone leaving the port area does so only after dire warnings and the blunt statement that the Marines are not there to rescue people stupid enough to blunder around hostile countryside with no regard for their own safety.

The Kishimaa system has no planetoid belts as such, but its three gas giants have moonlet rings and Trojan asteroid clusters that are picked over by a small community of itinerant Belters. Most of the Belting activity is in the rings of Promija, the innermost and smallest of the three gas giants. Most operations are scattered Seekers, but a mobile processing ship (which operates a dozen prospecting and extraction shuttles) is in operation in Promija's Trailing Trojan area. This vessel, a converted 5000t freighter, is registered under the name of Brindan Prime. She is owned and operated (and is the sole asset of) by Brindan Extraction LIC.

BE is a legitimate firm, though with a history of dubious practice and claim bullying. In addition to her cutters she has bays for 8 10-ton small craft. These were originally armed ore boats but are now People's Fighters obtained from the LSG. The fighters are deployed

to enforce a “claim area”, though officially of course they are simply for protection. The Prime unit has a handful of weapons turrets for self-defence. She has operated in the system intermittently for some years, jumping out to market when her holds are full and leaving behind balls of processed slag.

The other Belters are independents, and bitterly resent the BE operation. Many have tales of bullying or threats. Some have been chased off their claims by fighters firing across their bows, or so they claim. The Belters come to Kishimaa Downport to buy supplies, take a little R&R, and to trade for their cargo with passing merchant ships. They get along well enough with the Downport community, and some of the Belters have settled there or at least started families with local partners.

KISHIMAA BELTING COMMUNITY

Kishimaa’s belting community is fairly small, numbering about 20 ships at any given time. Although there are no actual planetoid belts, the assortment of clusters and rogues in the system, plus deep-space rocks in the Oort cloud (the very outer reaches of the outsystem) in most systems is sufficient to keep a small number of prospectors busy, and Kishimaa is no exception.

The Belters are scattered across the entire system, though naturally a higher proportion can be found in the thicker clusters such as those in the gas giant Trojans. Few can be encountered in port at any one time – more than one ship on the ground on the same day is a remarkable occurrence.

The Belters favor the Rock Bottom Saloon, a bar & grill run by an elderly ex-Belter named James Aru. James actually knew Karse Vaali when he worked the Promija Cluster decades ago, and helped him with some maintenance from time to time. Indeed, he helped Karse doctor his ship’s logs to conceal the location of the asteroid where he found the artifacts, and might be able to help someone else find it if the task is made worth his while. James is short of cash but would value a good reason to help as much as a fat bribe. If the characters can talk him into it, he can supply data that will help the travellers to find the rock. It might be that he will be the source of the tale of how Karse found it in the first place.

James Aru, like most of the Belters in the system, harbors a real dislike of the *Brindan Prime*. He was claim-jumped in his time, and bitterly resents anyone even suspected of it. He also has a sneaking suspicion that Brindan Extraction LIC is not just searching for exploitable mineral deposits. His long experience allows him to spot the fact that the vessel is not behaving as a prospecting/mining ship should. And then there is the fact that it is searching the area where Karse Vaali doctored his logs to show he was at the time he found the artifact...

The travellers may find this information very useful, but they can only get it by interacting with the Belters in a friendly fashion. Asking questions like a police detachment is not going to get them very far.

THE YARKIN MOUNTAINS

The Yarkin Mountains are located in the far north of Kishimaa’s ‘temperate’ zone. Always cold, they are now almost arctic in their conditions, though the high sheltered valleys are capable of supporting small communities of hardy farmers and hunters. Perhaps because of their forbidding climate, the Yarkins are one of the more peaceable areas of Kishimaa; the locals are too busy

surviving to fight one another.

However, the Yarkin mountain folk are a humorless, insular bunch who dislike outsiders and have been known to band together to drive off prospecting parties from more developed regions. There is little they could do to a starship but they could make life uncomfortable for the crew by sniping at them from concealment and generally interfering with that they are doing.

The mountain folk will only do this if severely offended; more likely they will observe intruders covertly and avoid them as much as possible; visitors usually find the climate and the local wildlife enough to make them seek more hospitable climes. Thus while the likelihood of interacting meaningfully with the locals is slight, the most serious threat the travellers face in the Yarkins will be the cold and possibly the local wildlife, if the Referee feels that a combat challenge is in order.

DADEGADI

1836 Dadegadi A443745-C Po (Imperial)

Part of the Imperial Trade Cluster, Dadegadi is a TL 12 world with a population of just over 10 million. The population are mainly Solomani in culture, but are loyal Imperial citizens for the most part. Government is by Representative Democracy, where representatives are drawn from senior personnel in the industry and service sectors, plus People’s Representatives who, despite the sinister historical connotations of their titles, are mostly dedicated individuals who safeguard the rights and privileges of the general populace from the interests of commerce and industry. The result is a rather over-balanced system that tends to hamstring itself into moderation to the detriment of progress.

Never rich in resources, the world has been steadily mined since it was colonized during the Rule of Man, but careful management and recycling, plus a major outsystem mining operation, has kept the world’s modest industries self-sufficient.

Outsystem operations generally do not deal directly with the planetary Starport. Instead, personnel and equipment are marshaled at Hadley Commercial Port on Dadegadi’s single moon. From there, large and small transports transit to the various mining camps and support works scattered throughout the rockball worlds of the outsystem and the moons of the gas giant Kreseik.

The outsystem mining operations are modest in size and owned by local companies, which employ offworld contractors, rather than Megacorporate operations. No sufficiently rich deposits have been found in the system to justify a major operation. Some raw materials are exported but the majority goes into local factories.

Like many worlds in the subsector, Dadegadi seems like a good prospect for Solomani agitation, but so far the populace have shown themselves to be very loyal to the Imperium, even to the point of turning in suspected agents. While the security forces are on alert, the main effort against Solomani influences is directed at preserving and increasing the sense of loyalty that the citizens of Dadegadi feel, and showing them that it is appreciated by the Imperial authorities. The new Archduke has made one personal visit already, and another is planned.

On-planet, large areas remain undeveloped due to a lack of water and the generally cold climate. Large bands of tundra and dry desert

exist, and are sometimes used by the Scout Service for hostile-environment survival training. They remain otherwise undisturbed but for the occasional mining or prospecting station.

As befits a developed world at the edge of the Imperium, Dagedadi has a strong system defence force, supplemented by a standing deployment from the naval base at Annapabar. This is usually a heavy cruiser or a squadron of smaller vessels. Naval ships sweep the outsystem from time to time in case the Solomani decide to raid the mining fleet. Some of the transports are armed, and rumors that some ore transporters are in fact heavily armed Q-ships surface from time to time. This is unlikely to be true.

NOVOTUCCA

The city of Novotucca is situated in rather dreary flatlands swept by chilly winds, which bring regular snow and hailstorms. As such, it might be an unappealing place to live, were it not for the wonders of modern technology. The great majority of the city is enclosed in large building complexes linked by sealed transit tubes. These complexes make up small districts, and between them are found parks and farmland covered by domes that allow a wide range of climates to be created.

Novotucca has a number of temperate parks, a jungle, a semi-desert and even a coastal resort (with pretty decent surf created by grav generators), which are enjoyed by the populace for free. The farming areas are normally off-limits, though permission to visit can be obtained. Recently, it has become popular for stressed workers and managers to take time off to go hand-picking fruit, potatoes and *baracailli*, a tasty vegetable but one that is quite awkward to harvest with machines. Whether this is a fad or it has some useful therapeutic value is unknown, but at present locals and even offworld visitors are paying for the privilege of picking their own produce, then attending a class on how to cook with the results.

Novotucca's main industry is not farming, though the city can more or less support itself this way. There is a fair amount of light engineering, mainly components manufacturers serving the outsystem mining industry and some naval contractors. Telecommunications and software are also major industries.

Life in Novotucca is fast-paced and busy (other than on the fruit and vegetable farms), and the locals are energetic and motivated. This is obvious in the local nightlife and music scene as much as anywhere else. Almost every building complex has a music bar or a nightclub of some sort, with styles ranging from nightclub-jazz to gospel, rock and hard electro-dance. Novotucca also boasts an impressive opera house with a rather good resident company.

SHAMUUS

Shamuus 2133 C453758-8 Po 403 I F3 V

Shamuus is a small, dryish world with a thin atmosphere, home to about 40 million people who are ruled by a chain of universities (of which the University of Shamuus is very much the 'first among equals') whose graduates fill all government and technological posts on-planet, and thus control all technology. The local TL is 8, though some higher-tech items are available at the Starport.

Although it is a link on the Serpent Main, Shamuus was until very recently of little importance, since only two worlds lay beyond it.

However, one of those worlds is Gashuki, now a Hiver colony and the residence of the Hiver Ambassador. Ships plying the Serpent Main sometimes extend their routes to trade with the Hivers. Where previously vessels turned around at Landing, now many go right on to Makkidan at the 'Serpent's Tail'.

As previously noted, Shamuus is controlled by feudal technocrats in the form of universities whose graduates maintain and build all technology and therefore control society. The regime, if a little condescending to less-educated individuals and therefore to the 'masses', is genuinely concerned with the welfare and opinions of the people. Society is contented for the most part, though currently there is some public disorder as a result of the Solomani Rim War.

Something of a lynch-mob mentality has resulted from the actions of pro-Solomani saboteurs, and those suspected of being Solomani may encounter prejudice or even violence. Extra Civic Guard (the Guard is Fire/Police/Paramedic service, all in one) personnel are on the streets, and the lid is firmly on, while vid channels attempt to smooth the situation over and quietly calm it down.

Starships are required to land at the central Starport; only local travel is permitted on-planet. All higher-than-TL-8 vehicles need special licensing that can be difficult to obtain; not to mention expensive. Most transport needs are met by rail and sea travel, with a few grav vehicles for the elite and the very prosperous. Conventional air travel is rare, due to the thin atmosphere.

This difficulty in moving between cities suits the world's ruling intellectual elite, who control technology in their own geographical areas of influence. The various universities can thus maintain firm control within their regions without unduly influencing one another, and can easily control the spread of external or unlicensed technology.

Although the world is a little dry, much of the pattern of settlement follows coasts and great waterways. There are thus large areas of undeveloped wilderness crossed by electric-powered trains. The technocrats have imported a number of small fusion reactors to power the larger trains, though smaller ones use locally-constructed fission reactors.

Offworlders are quite common around the starport area, but are far less common in other regions. They are not unwelcome despite the troubled times, though the authorities discourage the spreading of notions like 'education for all', since control of knowledge is their means of staying in power.

PARGRAVE'S LANDING

Pargrave's Landing is the rather modest Startown/Capital of Shamuus. With a population of little over 1 million, the city dates back several centuries and while it has been rebuilt and modernized over time, the result is a rather cramped mess of different building styles built mostly at TL8 but with the occasional edifice of imported technology. Grav vehicle landing areas are fairly uncommon, and are mainly found on official buildings. However, there is a reasonably good overhead-monorail system which is used by a large segment of the population.

Although it is the planetary capital, Pargrave's Landing has no university of its own, only a small campus operated by the University of Shamuus. In addition, there is a large admin complex which houses the governmental apparatus required to administer the capital and the port and to provide a meeting place for

representatives of the various regions. The University of Shamuus is by far the most powerful of the world's ruling universities. Its main campus is in the city of Orphine, some 200km northwest of Pargrave's Landing.

The universities each issue technology licenses for their own area of geographical interest, so while the University of Shamuus controls the flow of technology through the port (and thus dominates the world's political scene), it can do no more than influence events in the other regions. This feudal arrangement prevents any real efficiency of effort and makes technological advancement rather slow – but this suits the elite just fine. They are more concerned with maintaining a stable society than pushing the technological envelope.

Pargrave's Landing is situated on the coast, like many important towns on Shamuus. In addition to sea links it is the hub of a rail network running inland and along the coast. However, the city has relatively little industry and is primarily an administrative and commercial centre rather than a manufacturing site.

KAANACHI

Situated across the Tagrye Straits from the capital and well inland, Kaanachi is a typical university city of Shamuus. The campus is rather grand, and situated in the prosperous end of the city, while the administrative apparatus is located in the central district of town. The primary focus of Kaanachi's university is social science, though all disciplines are taught within the campus.

Offworlders are relatively infrequent in Kaanachi, though there is no hint of xenophobia.

TREYSE

Treyse is a port city whose main economic activity is shipbuilding and supporting heavy industries such as steelmaking. Maritime trade is important in the city, which is one of the main entry points to the entire continent. There is more coastal shipping than long-range commerce, but Treyse is notable as a main port of registry for the huge submarine freighters that serve the city of Holden, situated on an island in the ice southern ocean. Submarines are regularly docked in Treyse for repair or overhaul.

CARMAFF

Carmaff is an industrial town near to Kaanachi but governed by the University of Saiellen, a neighboring city. Unusually for Shamuus it has a fair sized offworld community (no more than a few hundred individuals, but a couple of dozen are Ursa, which is unusual anywhere). The population of Saiellen and its subject towns is more cosmopolitan than many other regions of Shamuus, and the university is currently in dispute with some of the others over its relatively lax system of granting tech-licenses.

LEPANTO (AMBER ZONE)

Lepanto 1735 C555565-9 Ag Ni A 724 I G0 V A8 D

Lepanto is a mid-sized world with a thin atmosphere and moderate expanses of water, which was colonized during the Rule of Man. Never a large colony, the remaining population was tripled by the arrival of Imperial colonists in 720 who integrated among the existing population with surprisingly little friction.

However, since shortly before the outbreak of the Solomani Rim War, pro-Solomani agitation has spilled over into acts of violence against non-Solomani Imperial citizens on the planet. A “softly-softly” approach failed to secure any useful results and as the violence increased, steadily firmer measures were taken.

Full intervention took place in 992 after the Solomani blockade runner *Liberty* was intercepted (by the destroyer *INS Urskii Gla*) with a cargo hold full of weaponry intended for Solomani sympathizers. Investigations proved that several such cargoes had already been delivered and Solomani “advisors” were on-planet training guerrillas and terrorists to use the weapons.

The Intervention was welcomed by frightened Imperial loyalists, and was a success despite stubborn resistance from the hopelessly outgunned rebels. Martial law has been in force since mid 992. A Navy Governor has complete authority to deal with the situation. Imperial Army forces are still fighting a low-intensity war against the last few rebels, but the situation seems to be more or less under control.

However, it would take little to cause a flare-up of the problem. A reduction in Imperial troop strength (such as is mooted due to the demands of the Solomani Rim War) or high-profile Solomani successes elsewhere may bring the cowed rebels out in force and set the stage for more bloodshed.

Loyalists have called for the formation of a militia, or the legalization of a paramilitary force calling itself the Citizens' Watch. This organisation claims to have the patronage of the Loyal Sector Guard and seems to have access to considerable quantities of arms and ammunition. All ships entering the system are thoroughly searched for arms intended for one side or the other, but it is only a matter of time before something gets through.

Another consequence of the troubles besetting Lepanto is a reduction in the agricultural output that is the basis of the world economy. Two main industries dominate. Fish-farming and seabed vegetation cultivation provide about 75% of the world's income, with the result that most major settlements are coastal. Attacks on farm subs and transports taking the produce to the port have greatly reduced the world's output.

The remainder of the agricultural output comes from large, highly-automated farms growing vegetable crops. Non-Solomani farmers have been attacked while in most cases damage has been limited settlements have been completely exterminated. Outraged that these settlements were defenseless due to compliance with local weapons laws, many farmers have tried to obtain weaponry through smugglers.

LIRGUU

Lirguu 2239 D786644-5 Ni 310 X F0 V

Mainworld of a rather barren star system, Lirguu is a fairly habitable world for humans, with moderate gravity, a dense atmosphere and plenty of water. The world is fairly warm, but within tolerable limits. There are two small moons and a third moonlet, which is little more than a captured rock fragment.

About 3 million humans live on Lirguu, mainly in the southern temperate and sub-arctic zones. They are mainly descendents of Rule of Man-era colonists who subsist, peaceably on the whole, in

SIK (OPTIONAL ACT 2)

small towns ruled by democratic councils that rarely get anything done at the town level. Major projects involving two or more settlements are undertaken only in conditions of most urgent need. The people of Lirguu are too disorganized to create a rail network or much in the way of infrastructure. Inter-settlement communication is generally by boat or ship, or using large rigid airships. The latter are quite common, as the dense atmosphere grants them more lift than on more earthlike worlds.

The northern continents are scarcely settled by humans. A few small ports exist on the coasts, and where resources are particularly rich. The interiors are little explored. There are rumors of 'sickly regions' in the north where radiation levels are unusually high and conditions are rather unhealthy for settlers.

The human inhabitants of Lirguu arrived in at least three waves during the Long Night, and were added to by a small contingent from Mamihka in the last six centuries. The early colonies were very short of equipment and it is not known how many settlements were constructed, abandoned and built over by later arrivals until the situation finally stabilized.

Referee: Lirguu was the homeworld of the Wanderers, millennia ago. They dwelt mainly in the north, and it was here that the Vilani assaults were fiercest. All traces of the Wanderer civilization that could be found were wiped out by cleanup teams. These areas can be traced by slight increases in background radiation and strange rock formations beneath the ground, where nuclear bombardment or demolition charges were used. Minor settlements were allowed to erode over time and are long buried under thousands of years of forest, hill and riverbed.

ZUGE

Zuge: 2137 B676533-A Ag Ni (Imperial)

Zuge is a moderate sized world with a standard, tainted atmosphere. Like many worlds in the region, Zuge was settled by the Solomani during the Rule of Man era. The dominant group among the early settlers were cattle ranchers from a Terran region called Texas, and their influence remains strong to this day. The mainstay of the Zuge economy is beef and leather, though other agricultural products (notably grain and a number of distilled liquors sold under the banner of 'bourbon') are important.

Zuge is sparsely populated. The 200,000 inhabitants mainly reside in one of the five cities found on the continent of Karguz, with ranches and steads scattered across the rest of the planet. The ruling elite of the cities is hereditary, with rigid class barriers (though acceptance of this is fairly universal). Law level is low – military weapons are forbidden, but little else – and there is little enforcement away from the cities.

The population are hardy and self-reliant, and not always welcoming to strangers. Conflict among the ranchers is rare, since there is simply so much land for the taking, but disputes tend to drag on far longer than necessary. Some of the more famous feuds are now into their sixth or seventh generation, and while they mostly take the form of bickering, public snubs and the occasional fistfight, the ranchers' feuds have the potential to be quite bloody.

SIK 2131 C896422-4 NI 623 I F9 D

Lying 2 parsecs off the Serpent Main and far off the best route to anywhere, Sik is an undeveloped world with a very dense, tainted atmosphere. It is a fairly unpleasant place to visit though the locals, despite or because of their low technological level, have adapted well enough. The 60 thousand inhabitants are concentrated in the area around the starport, which receives only a low volume of Jump-2 traffic. The main offworld contact is the steady stream of Belters that come and go, trying their luck in the Outsystem. The locals have a pretty fair Startown industry, despite their low tech base. There are usually several Belting ships in the outsystem at any one time, and maybe one or even two in port enjoying a rest break. Most are typical Type J seekers but larger craft are not uncommon.

Sik is a typical backwater world, settled long ago and now forgotten by the Imperial administration. The low-tech population cannot create nor can they afford to hire useful defenses, and so are easy prey to raiders. While this kind of raiding amounts to little more than 'poultry theft' in the eyes of the Archduke, people die in the raids and given how easy it is, there is no reason for certain kinds of ship crew to pay for their supplies or 'recreation'.

After the first few raids, and not having seen a Navy patrol ship for a year, the People's Council (the world's government; a participatory democracy) appealed to the Loyal Sector Guard for assistance. In return for an agreement to allow LSG personnel to train and create a firing range, the world of Sik was assigned two pairs of fighters, a COACC detachment and some security troops for both. Currently about 3-400 Loyal Sector Guard ground-combat personnel are barracked in a special compound near the starport. About 15% of these are regular troops assigned as instructors, the rest being recruits rotated through for training before going off to their units. The ground combat force is thus an understrength and very inexperienced TL-8 light infantry battalion with very little in the way of heavy weapons but a few vehicles including air/rafts and ATVs.

The SG deployment is far more than the locals expected, but so far relations are very good; the LSG troops are friendly and well-behaved, and make the Sik locals feel far more secure. And at the same time they spend their pay in the bars and restaurants of Sik Downport, contributing to the local economy.

Most of the locals say that the LSG deployment was the best thing that ever happened to Sik. The Belters are less impressed; since free spirits like them tend not to be so enamored of a port full of uniforms and armed guards. But so far, everything is going very well indeed.

PART 6: DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Several prominent figures are mentioned in the background section of this book. Some of the NPCs listed here are important to the adventure and may require die rolls, so are presented in full format. Others are described for the Referee's convenience but will probably not require full stats. In addition, various characters who may be encountered are included, such as guards, soldiers and agents of the opposition. Finally, starship descriptions (and in some cases, full data) for the vessels encountered in the adventure are also located here, for ease of reference since ships may appear in more than one Act.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

DR JOSEF MARKIA

Scientist 6759C9 Age 46 7 terms
Archeology-3, History-3, Anthropology-2, Computer-2, Research-2, Planetology-1, Vac Suit-0, Foil-0

Cash and Equipment:

Cash: Cr25,000
Expenses Fund: Basic starship expenses only
Laboratory Ship
Foil
Field First Aid Kit
Field Instrument/Tool Kit
Inertial Locator
Hand Computer
Personal Comm
Vac Suit (TL14)

Notes:

Dr Markia, while an expert in his own field (the history of the Imperium, and of Gateway Domain in particular) is very much a generalist. Indeed, his best work has been created by integrating fragments of knowledge to gain a new insight on accepted data. This means that the doctor is good at collecting data from various sources and by varied methods. He has picked up a wide range of knowledge and practical skills, and can function as an anthropologist (and a xenanthropologist), an archeologist and even a planetologist as well as a purely academic expert.

Dr Markia is not a classroom academic. He has led or worked on a great many field expeditions in varied conditions. He is fairly proficient in the field and has experience of working in hard vacuum. His approach to field work is generally calm and methodical, with the occasional burst of energy as he makes a sudden connection and redirects the efforts of everyone around him. However, the doctor does not make stupid mistakes, either through over-excitement or absent-mindedness.

Dr Markia is a very learned and erudite individual, but he is not the stereotypical obsessive, pipe-smoking academic. He dresses practically in the field (usually Scout Service surplus coveralls, because they are rugged and practical) and casual-smartly out of it (usually a dark gray or blue suit without a tie). He also has interests outside his academic field. These include vids of an animated comedy series popular a decade ago called *Tangled Webs*,

featuring the misadventures of the family of an Imperial diplomat on the frontier – Dr Markia makes obscure references to the show in normal conversation and occasionally imitates the characters, to the confusion of all around. He is also a connoisseur of spirits and hard liquor, and has an impressive stash of both high-quality distillates and last-resort rotgut. While not an alcoholic, the doctor likes to drink. His other interest is fencing. While he is really not very good, he likes to train and carries a foil for self-defence, though he has never used it for that purpose.

Dr Markia likes to watch people who are good at something do their jobs, whatever they might be. This leads to a habit of staring at companions as they work, which many find unnerving. Once someone has demonstrated their competence, Dr Markia will respect them. He is just as impressed with the ability to scratch-build lifting equipment from spare girders or to cook the perfect omelet as he is with academic degrees.

Overall, the doctor is friendly and easy to get along with, despite his occasional diatribes about how pre-Long Night Vargr architecture in the Beta Quadrant of Ley sector was heavily influenced by the Rule of Man and such like. He is short-tempered with incompetence, and he does not tolerate anyone letting him down. He will keep his word to his companion and expects that others will do likewise.

DR ERNEST LIVAANKI

Scientist 564ADA Age 58 10 terms
History-5, Archeology-3, Computer-2, Electronics-2, Instructicon-2, Research-2, Grav Vehicle-0

Equipment:

Electronics tool Kit with additional specialist tools
Wanderer artifact reader
Assorted odd components of alien artifacts
Case of hard-copy papers
Hand Computer
Personal Comm

Notes:

Dr Livaanki is a fairly typical academic in that he has spent many years in an ivory tower (as the saying goes), insulated from the real world by research assistants, housekeepers and academic boards. He is actually a pretty good lecturer and teacher as well as an expert in his own field, but relates better to a room full of students in a lecture environment than to individuals.

The doctor is an authority on alien artifacts (especially technological items) in the Gateway region, and is a genius at assembling devices to investigate items others have found. However, he has no real idea how the world works and cannot be trusted not to get himself into trouble. His sense of priorities is badly skewed by the fact that for the past 40 years getting the necessities of life (from food, clothing and a home to respect and next year's research grant) has been all about delivering the lecture, writing the paper or figuring out the artifact rather than anything practical. He tends to focus obsessively on the academic aspects of the job at hand and assume that everything else will just happen when he needs it to.

Dr Livaanki dresses in 'academic' style, right down to the cardigan with leather elbow patches. He generally wears very battered carpet slippers rather than shoes. As might be expected, Dr Livaanki is a real liability in a fight and even in a diplomatic situation he has no capability to do much except supply information in a nit-pickingly precise manner. He can be abrasive if he does not get

his own way, but is easily intimidated by anyone who resists his 'indignant schoolmaster' persona. Although he holds a grav vehicle pilot's license and is minimally qualified he does not own one. He does have a ground car on Shamuus, which he has never learned to drive. This does not stop him from making the occasional attempt when frustration with something prompts him to head off to confront the academic board RIGHT NOW regardless of circumstances.

MINOR CHARACTERS AND OPPONENTS

DR VIALLI

Rogue 787AB9 Age 38 5 terms
Archeology-3, History-3, Streetwise-2, Computer-1, Shotgun-0

Equipment:

Personal Comm
Hand Computer
Archeological tools
Flak Jacket
Shotgun

Notes:

Dr Vialli is an agent of the Keepers of Dark Secrets in the service of the Sharushid Megacorporation. As an expert in the artifacts trade, he is ideally placed to ensure that potentially revealing discoveries are quietly bought up and made to disappear. Failing that, he can at least determine who has made a given find and where, and organize 'cleanup and containment' measures.

Outwardly an affable, brisk-but-friendly field scientist with a host of amusing tales to tell of his misadventures as a frontier xeno-archeologist, Dr Livaaki is also a ruthless senior agent who prefers to have others do the dirty work but is quite willing to use lethal measures himself if necessary. Ideally, he would prefer to buy off or misdirect opponents, or have them quietly disappear, meet an accident etc. He will take lethal measures without hesitation if it seems necessary, and deal with the consequences as they arise.

HELENE WALLIS

Merchant 696788 Age 42 6 terms
Archeology-2, Broker-2, Carousing-2, History-2, Handgun-1, Streetwise-1

Equipment:

Handcomp
Personal Comm
Body pistol

Notes:

Helene Wallis is the owner of a small firm that makes specialty shipping containers. As a result she has many contacts among the Ley Sector shipping companies. She is also an agent of the Keepers of Dark Secrets, using her genuine interest in Ursa artifacts as a cover.

Wallis is an attractive, athletic woman in her early 40s, who plays a number of sports vigorously (though not particularly well in most cases) and approaches her work with similar energy and far greater skill. She dresses in a Solomani-professional style, always taking care to have the most fashionable suit, shoes or sportswear for any

occasion.

Wallis will not act directly against anyone threatening to expose the secrets she keeps. Instead she passes along information to her contacts, who will employ their agents or hired muscle. This way she ensures that her position as an information conduit is not compromised.

OPPONENTS, ALLIES AND NEUTRALS

During the course of their travels, the players will encounter and interact with a wide range of individuals. Combat or other interactions requiring skill rolls may occur with some of these. Stats are included in this volume for characters and groups with whom there is a reasonable likelihood of conflict. If stats are needed for others, examples are available from various sources, or they can be quickly drawn up. All references below are to the Classic Traveller Supplement 4, Citizens of the Imperium.

INCIDENTAL ENCOUNTERS:

Stats will probably not be needed for these characters. If they are, use the guidelines below:

BAR PATRONS AND PASSERS-BY

Random people encountered can be considered to have a basic set of stats (777777) and Brawling-0. Spacer crews can be considered to be Scouts or Merchants, and are more likely to have some weapon skills due to their more adventuresome lives. It is unlikely that these individuals will be carrying weapons illegal at the local law level, and if weapons are legal they will be armed with handguns and/or blades that can be carried comfortably. People rarely lug heavy weapons around in their daily lives unless there is a clearly perceived need.

BARFIGHTERS AND BOUNCERS

People of a sort likely to actually brawl (rather than fleeing from an incident) are likely to be fairly experienced: UPP 888777, Brawling-2 or Small Blade-2 or Handgun-1. Toughguys can be considered to be Rogues while professional security personnel such as bouncers or door supervisors may be ex-military. In most establishments, the security staff are officially unarmed but able to grab an implement very similar to a baton that 'just happened to be there'. Some low-law worlds may have armed bouncers on the door (pistols) and heavier weaponry available at need.

BELTERS

Belters encountered in the course of this adventure will be members of the Belter profession. They will have vac suits and probably snub pistols for self-defense, though additional weapons may be available to some.

GUARDS AND CUSTOMS OFFICIALS

Guards and customs personnel at various starports, and indeed many law enforcement officials, can be considered to be army soldiers. They are normally equipped with a flak jacket and a sidearm (autopistols or snub pistols are common) and a baton. Most guards have access to heavier firepower (shotguns, SMGs or rifles) if necessary.

IMPERIAL MARINES

Marines such as those at Kam, whether or not they have kept up their standards, will be equipped with combat armor and armed with cutlass and gauss rifle on-planet. For shipboard duty Marines

routinely wear only a flak jacket except those guarding sensitive areas such as the bridge. Ship's troops carry snub pistols and cutlasses unless there is an alert, in which case they will be armed with snub SMGs and wearing their combat armor. If a fight turns nasty, Marines will break out their gauss rifles regardless of the potential to breach bulkheads.

SHIP CREWMEMBERS

The crew of a merchant or navy ship can be considered to be members of the Merchant or Navy classes. They will normally carry snub pistols. Ship's troops or security personnel aboard merchant vessels will be Marines or Mercenaries, and may be armed with snub SMGs or heavier weapons.

ASSISTANCE: WANDERERS

Unless the characters do something badly wrong, they will not fight themselves fighting the Wanderers, but will receive assistance from them in the final episode.

WANDERER GUARD

Wanderer Guards defend the enclave and will form the core of the force sent to assist the travellers in their fight to defend the temple in the final episode of this adventure.

WANDERER VETERAN GUARD 699777

Laser Carbine-2
Cloth Armor, Laser Carbine

WANDERER VOLUNTEER

A mob of ordinary Wanderers, hastily armed and with little combat skill, lands with the Wanderer Guards to help the travellers. They include Priests who carry no weapons at all.

WANDERER VOLUNTEER 577777

Carbine-0, Dagger-0
Carbine, Dagger, equivalent of Mesh armor.

OPPONENTS

The travellers will definitely face the following adversaries. Combat is one way to deal with them, though a clever party may find other methods to get past the threat.

BRINDAN EXTRACTION LIC PILOTS (Fighters and Cutters)

Ship crews aboard the fighters and cutters operating from the *Brindan Prime* in the Kishimaa system are unlikely to become engaged in close-quarter combat with the travellers.

SHIP CREW 777888

Snub Pistol-1
Snub Pistol, Vac Suit

BRINDAN EXTRACTION LIC VAC TROOPER

Cutters from the *Brindan Prime* carry personnel trained for combat in space. While not up to the training and equipment standards of the Imperial Marine Corps, these individuals are highly skilled in low-g combat.

VAC TROOPER 777888

Snub Pistol-2, Accelerator Rifle-1, Vac Suit-1
Accelerator Rifle, Snub Pistol, Combat Armor, Personal Medkit, Communicator

DADEGADI THUGS

Six thugs are sent to attack the characters on Dadeyadi. They have orders to hurt but not kill the characters and will break off if getting pounded.

ROGUE 888777

Brawling-2, Cudgel-2
Cudgels

DADEGADI WATCHERS

Two more experienced thugs are sent to observe the incident and cover the retreat of their fellows. They will not become involved in fighting unless attacked, and will not shoot unless they have to in order to escape.

ROGUE 999888

Dagger-2, Handgun-2, SMG-1,
Autopistol, Dagger, Jack Armor

ZAK COVERT OPERATIVES

The Keepers of Dark Secrets attempt to kill the travellers. These four individuals attempt a close-range hit. Two approach to attack at close range while the others stay back to cover the escape or deal with survivors.

ZAK HITMEN 999888

Handgun-2, SMG-2, Brawling-1
Equipment: All: Concealed flak jacket
Hitman 1: Autopistol
Hitman 2: Sawed-off shotgun (Handgun skill applies)
Backstop 1: Autopistol
Backstop 2: SMG

ZAK COMBAT UNIT

The ground combat unit sent against the travellers during the climax of the adventure consists of professional mercenary troops, possibly backed by some shipboard security personnel whose effectiveness is far lower.

ZAK COMMANDER 9A9A88

Tactics-3, Combat Rifleman-2, Handgun-2, Brawling-1
Advance Combat Rifle, Gauss Pistol, Combat Armor

COMMANDER'S BODYGUARDS 999A88

Combat Rifleman-2, Handgun-2, Heavy Weapons-2, Brawling-1
Advanced Combat Rifle or Light Assault Gun, Combat Armor

RECON TEAM TROOPERS 898977

Combat Rifleman-2, Recon-2
ACR, 2 Fragmentation Grenades, Flak Jacket

DEMOLITION TEAM TROOPERS 879877

Demolitions-2, SMG-1
Cloth Armor, SMG, Demo packs

LASER SNIPERS 787777

Laser Rifle-3, Recon-1
Laser Rifle, Flak Jacket

AIR/RAFT PILOTS AND GUNNERS 777777

Air/Raft-2, Heavy Weapons-2, Handgun-1
Each Air/Raft has a pilot and a gunner, who mans an LMG: Flak jacket, auto-pistol. Plus LMG for gunner.

SHIP CREW

777777

Carbine-1, Handgun-1

The ZAK commander will press shipboard security personnel into service if she becomes desperate.

Flak jacket, carbine or snub pistol, communicator.

ZUGE AIR/RAFT THUGS

888777

Brawling-1, Rifle-1, Small Blade-1

Dagger plus rifle or assault rifle, jack armor

ZUGE DIG NONCOMBATANTS

666777

Brawling-0, Cudgel-0, Small Blade-0

Dagger or improvised club

ZUGE DIG GUNMEN

888777

Handgun-1, Carbine-1, Cudgel-1, Shotgun-1

Flak jacket, auto-pistol, improvised club. Possibly shotgun or carbine

ZUGE DIG ZAK AGENTS

999777

Handgun-2, SMG-2, Brawling-1

Flak jacket, autopistol, SMG

INDIVIDUALS

The following individuals are named in the adventure text but are unlikely to require stats.

JAMES ARU

An ex-Belter now running a bar & grill at Kishimaa Downport, James knew Karse Vaali at the time he found his artifacts and could supply some useful information.

ARMAS DEBRENNIS

Once an editor on *State of the Gate*, Armas is now a highly-paid corporate communications officer with Delgado. He likes his new job and big salary, and is philosophical about the collapse of LeyCom LIC. He, like everyone else, had some suspicions about what was going on, but let the matter drop long ago.

ALEXANDER EVRO

Alexander Evro was a prominent reporter on the *State of the Gate* periodical. He moved on to an editorial job for Takashi Publishing when LeyCom was bought out, and disappeared in 989 while on holiday on Daramm.

FERRIS

Ferris is an ex-Imperial Army non-commissioned officer who is now employed as a senior customs official on Kishimaa.

JAHMIR GULDI

A Broker at Dadegadi Starport.

GRANDDAD

'Granddad' is Karse Vaali's grandfather, or great uncle, or some other relative – the story varies from time to time. He is an ancient Belter, a rare thing in the dangerous world of outsystem prospecting. There are several other Belters who also know him as Granddad, so it may be that the title is honorary rather than familial. Granddad knows everything there is to know about Belting and fixing starships, and can be impatient with those of lesser wisdom. He is a friendly sort though, and quite willing to spend an afternoon with fellow spacers. In his time he has traveled right across the sector and (according to some of his tales) out as far as the Renkard Union on the other side of Gateway Sector.

CORPORAL RAYA HASKII

Leader of the squad of Marines on Kam who have remained faithful to their duties. Haskii is overworked, depressed and snappish on her better days, and does little more than go through the motions of guarding the port.

LIEUTENANT ALICE JAKAII, IN

Skipper of the System Defence Boat *Annapabar G-109*, Alice Jakaii is a blonde woman of just under average height. At 27 years old she is the senior officer of a division of 4 SDBs that forms half of the 33rd SDB Annapabar Squadron. Jakaii is close to getting a promotion to lieutenant-commander and probably a Jump-capable command such as an escort destroyer. She is a competent but fairly unremarkable officer whose ship and crew are smart and efficient. A career naval officer, she is pretty sure she is never going to reach high rank but would be very glad to get a cruiser and rank as a full

Commander or even Captain. Despite her limited ambitions she sees a long future in the Navy and considers it to be her life, or her calling.

MORGAN LAKARNIS

Morgan is a self-important buffoon, and a drunkard to boot. He holds the position of Port Authority Director at Kam Downport, where he abuses the position as much as his vast personal incompetence allows him to. Morgan habitually dresses in out-of-fashion suits and shirts of a loud color. He is never far from a half-empty bottle.

LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER URLICH

MALLIEW, IN

Master and Commander of the Imperial Navy destroyer *Midu Sargharma*, based out of Annapabar.

DR AVNER MIRACRU

Curator of the Boroais Collection at Novotucca, on Dadegadi. Murdered when the collection was attacked.

MYLA

Myla is Karse Vaali's rather shy and naïve niece, taken in when her parents' ship suffered a fatal accident a few years back. Morgan Lakarnis is attracted to her, but she sees him as what he is – a self-important buffoon – and is not interested.

TANYA PATRICE-ROVAMS

Once a reporter for *State of the Gate*, Tanya now lives on Ohasset with her husband and three children. She illustrates children's books, and will not discuss her days as a reporter. Anyone interviewing her will be able to tell that she has been and remains thoroughly intimidated.

SENIOR COORDINATOR PETYR ORLANE

An officer of the ITC Trade Authority and Annapabar Port Authority.

LIEUTENANT JARVIS SINGO

Imperial Marine Lieutenant stationed on Kam. Singo has more or less abdicated his position as a result of long neglect by high command.

KAILLE SUULIG

Master of the independent merchant vessel *Legendary Ledger*, Suulig is tall, slim and athletic, but tends to overdress in flashy, bright colored clothing. His constant air of self-importance and willingness to protest loudly about *everything* hides a sharp mind and a keen eye for the best profit. Suulig is known to sail rather close to the wind and has been caught with illicit goods aboard more than once, though he has usually managed to weasel or bluster his way out of serious charges. Unknown to the authorities, Suulig is not just an occasional smuggler or customs dodger, he is an outright crook. He does have a faint moral streak however, and would never knowingly become involved in murder, piracy or political activities. Other than that, anything goes.

BRIANA STALLING

Stalling, once an energetic young reporter on *State of the Gate*, is now an elderly, plump lady enjoying a quiet retirement on Kam. She is working on a novel at no great speed and generally taking

things easy. She occasionally longs for the old days, but manages to convince herself that she's better off staying safe and quiet on a backwater world. Stalling was threatened many times, and has almost forgotten about the last threat she received; that if she ever leaves Kam she will be hunted down and killed. Certainly she has discounted the threat as just one more from someone she offended long ago.

SUPERVISOR IAIO SUKARNO

A senior member of Gateway City Traffic Control, Sukano is a vaguely oriental/Indonesian looking individual who thoroughly hates his job but sticks at it because he cannot trust anyone else to do it properly. He cordially hates independent merchant captains and though polite, is always frosty with them. Sukano works very long hours and has little life away from Traffic Control, which means that he basically hates his life and everyone in it, but remains at his post out of duty.

SHANA TE

Once a reporter on *State of the Gate*, Shana is now a field correspondent for TAS, and continues poking her nose into every place it should not be. She has run several biting articles aimed at Nells and the Old Guard, and most recently had a go at Prince Garlan as a typical example of an overfed, useless drone member of the Imperial Family, who should be made to get a job.

Shana was just starting out during her time on *State of the Gate* and is now in her mid 30s. She is a small, slightly overweight woman with a dry wit and a disarming smile, who excels at getting interviewees to say something they really should not have. Shana is fairly active on the Highlord-Diamond Prince region, but tends to move about a lot to avoid excessive harassment.

If the travellers can track her down, she has a host of conspiracy theories about the region's politics, some of which are fairly close to the truth and others are the product of an over-active imagination. She has written, but never published, an article detailing the fall of LeyCom LIC, and linking the 'dirty tricks' campaign that brought down the firm to the Sharushid Megacorporation. She has also found evidence of a Sharushid office specializing in dirty tricks of this sort, but again, has not gone public just yet.

FIRST OFFICER JANINE TILSENN

First officer of the maritime freightliner *Broad and Deep*, on Shamuus.

WILLIAM URIALLIIA

Captain of the ITC-registered freighter *Panaethera*, Uriallia is 41 years old, and a bureaucrat more than a spacer. He joined the merchant service late in life, after a long stint in Starport Administration. He is a fussy and nitpicky captain, whose ship is always immaculate and correct in every detail. Passengers speak highly of the vessel but find her skipper very distant. Although he is a ship manager rather than the leader of the command team, Uriallia is respected by his crew, mainly because he plays fair with them. Crewmembers deserving a promotion or a bonus can be sure they will get it, and slackers who make work for others are sure to be disciplined or fired.

KARSE VAALI

Karse is a middle-aged, stocky, half-bald Belter, whose body has over a square meter of burns and various other injuries. He is

missing half a finger from his right hand, and has several nasty scars. Most of these resulted from Belting injuries but a couple are clearly knife wounds. He laughs these off as disputes with his ex-wife, which may in fact be true.

Karse is a hotdog pilot who likes pushing his ship to the limits, mainly to antagonise the individual he calls 'Granddad. He is also someone to whom an almost empty glass is 'nearly half full'; an irrepressible optimist.

Karse has a strange alien artifact (See Episode 1) which he will not part with. It is a flattened ovoid of what appears to be some sort of lightweight metal, but with patterns made up of superdense matter embedded in it (making it rather heavy). It does not resemble anything the travellers have seen before and Karse cannot identify it, but he thinks it is either a data recording device (or, he adds with a grin, some kind of experimental novelty Frisbee.)

HELENE WALLIS

Head of a firm making specialist shipping containers, Helene Wallis is an attractive woman in her early 40s, who is well known in artifact collecting circles as an amateur authority on Ursa society and culture, and a collector of their artifacts. She is based at Gateway City, Annapabar. **Referee:** Wallis is a ZAK operative.

STARSHIPS

LABORATORY SHIP *LIGHT OF TRUTH*

The *Light of Truth* is the ship loaned to Dr Markia by the Archduke, and therefore the vessel available to the travellers. It is fully detailed in the Appendix rather than here.

LOYAL SECTOR GUARD 'PEOPLE'S FIGHTER'

The so-called 'People's Fighter' is a cheap and not especially good combat vessel designed to be operated by poorly trained crews and operated from frontier starports. Slow and not especially effective in combat, it is easy to pilot and maintain, making it possible to have an armed presence in places (and on budgets) that would normally preclude any sort of orbital defense force. While less than stellar in performance, the People's Fighter can deal with a minor threat and can deter many problems by its presence – any armed craft is better than none.

USP FP-0604401-020000-00001-0 MCr 7.470 7 Tons
Bat Bear 1 1 Crew: 1
Bat 1 1 TL: 8
Cargo: 0.880 Fuel: 1.000 EP: 0.280 Agility: 4
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
Architects Fee: MCr 0.075 Cost in Quantity: MCr 5.976

SUBSIDIZED MERCHANT *LEGENDARY LEDGER*

The *Legendary Ledger* is a fairly typical 400 ton Subsidized Merchant plying the Imperial Trade Cluster and the Serpent Main. She uses fuel bladders to make the crossing between the two from time to time, but tends to remain in one area for a year or two at a time. The *Ledger* is in most ways a standard subbie, armed with two turrets each containing a single beam laser and a sandcaster, but for the fact that her skipper, Kaille Suulig, is an out-and-out crook.

The *Ledger* will always have legitimate cargo or passengers aboard, but likewise rarely fails to find something to under-declare or smuggle into port. Her skipper can bluster or weasel his way out of almost any situation, and is becoming even more blatant about his illegal trade activities.

USP R1-4211112-020000-20000-0 MCr139.45 400 Tons
Bat Bear 2 2 Crew: 19
Bat 2 2 TL: 9
Cargo: 213 Passengers: 5 Low: 10 Fuel: 44 EP: 4 Agility: 1
Craft: 1x 20T Launch
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Architects Fee: MCr1.4 Cost in Quantity: MCr111.56

SYSTEM DEFENCE BOAT *ANNAPABAR G-109*

Captained by Lieutenant Alice Jakaii, *Annapabar G-109* is an example of the *Shugukan* (*Dragon*) class SDB that has been in service for decades. A 400-ton boat, the *Shugukan* is armed with two triple missile turrets and two triple beam lasers. It is a cramped design, often known as a 'pig boat' for its conditions, but *G-109* is a clean and efficient ship, setting an example to her division mates.

USP SD-4206842-900000-30003-0 MCr558.208 400 Tons
Bat Bear 2 1 Crew: 11
Bat 2 1 TL: 10
Cargo: 10 Fuel: 32 EP: 32 Agility: 6
Craft: 1x 4T Air/Raft
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
Architects Fee: MCr5.58 Cost in Quantity: MCr446.606

ITC FREIGHTER *PANAETHERA*

A 5000-ton freightliner registered out of Annapabar, *Panaethera* is typical of the 'flagship' ITC vessel. Clean, efficient, well enough armed to defend herself and crewed by picked personnel under a competent if nit-picky captain, the *Panaethera* carries cargo and passengers across the ITC and on a run out to Spinward as far as Shangri-La. She makes port at Annapabar about once every 8 months, where she stands down for a month then heads out again.

USP CT-E422242-030000-40002-0 MCr 1,760.668 5 KTons
Bat Bear 2 2 2 Crew: 39
Bat 2 2 2 TL: 13

Cargo: 3,042 Emergency Low: 10 Fuel: 1,100 EP: 100 Agility: 1
Shipboard Security Detail: 5
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Architects Fee: MCr 17.607 Cost in Quantity: MCr 1,408.534

IMPERIAL NAVY DESTROYER *MIDU SARGHARMA*

Based out of Annapabar Naval Base, the *Midu Sargharma* is under the command of under Lt-commander Ulrich Malliew. She is a rather old but serviceable ship of the *Chrysanthemum* class currently assigned to commerce protection and flag-showing operations on the Serpent Main.

USP DE-A4469J2-150000-05204-0 MCr913.48 1000 Tons
Bat Bear 5 11 1 Crew: 16
Bat 5 11 1 TL: 14
Cargo: 0 Passengers: 0 Fuel: 490 EP: 90 Agility: 6
Craft: 1x 50T Cutter
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops, no Fuel Purification
Cost in Quantity: MCr730.784
1 Dual Fusion Turret, 2 Triple Missile Turrets, 2 single Particle Accelerator Barbettes, 5 Triple Sandcaster Turrets.

BRINDAN EXTRACTION LIC VESSEL *BRINDAN PRIME*

The *Brindan Prime* is a dispersed structure 5000 ton mobile prospecting base and ore refinery. It incorporates two Factor-4 100 ton Repulsor Bays to "push" and maneuver small asteroids, as well as 12 single pulse laser turrets that are used for mining ops. The four modular cutters can swap out their cargo modules for on-board fuel modules to scoop for fuel.

USP MO-E712232-060004-10000-0 MCr 1,847.002 5000Tons
Bat Bear 2 1 C Crew: 64
Bat 2 1 C TL: 11
Cargo: 2,616 Emergency Low: 16 Fuel: 600 EP: 100 Agility: 1
Shipboard Security Detail: 5 Pulse Lasers
Craft: 4 x 50T Modular Cutters
Fuel Treatment: On Board Fuel Purification
4 Cutter Modules

1 Ore Refinery (300 tons, Crew 5, 10 Energy Points, Cost MCr 25)
Architects Fee: MCr 18.470 Cost in Quantity: MCr 1,477.602

FIGHTERS FROM *BRINDAN PRIME*

The *Brindan Prime*'s fighters are standard LSG 'People's Fighters', bought legally through proper channels.

ORE CUTTERS FROM *BRINDAN PRIME*

The *Brindan Prime*'s ore cutters are standard cutters.

CM-0202211-000000-00001-0 MCr 26.600 50 Tons
Bat Bear 1 Crew: 1
Bat 1 TL: 9
Cargo: 4.5 Fuel: 1 EP: 1 Agility: 2
1 30 ton cargo module
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
Architects Fee: MCr 0.266 Cost in Quantity: MCr 21.280

FAR TRADER *AUGUST IN SAMARKAND*

A Far Trader called up for naval auxiliary service from a regular run in the Dadegadi system. It is a fairly standard vessel of the type.

USP A2-21212R1-030000-00001-0 MCr101.98 200 Tons
Bat Bear 1 1 Crew: 5
Bat 1 1 TL: 11
Cargo: 62 Passengers: 7 Low: 6 Fuel: 44 EP: 4 Agility: 1
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Architects Fee: MCr1.02 Cost in Quantity: MCr81.59

APPENDIX: PLAYER REFERENCE AND LIBRARY DATA

Rimward eventually leads to the Hive Federation. To Coreward and Spinward lie Imperial provinces.

This information should be freely available to the players via any library terminal or their ship's computer.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It is the Year 993, during the Golden Age of the Third Imperium. Here in the Gateway Domain, great events are unfolding. The old Archduke has recently been deposed (by the Emperor himself) in favour of Marcus Aaron Erechs, a businessman and entrepreneur from the region.

Archduke Erechs has turned the stagnant economy of the region around, breaking the hold of the "old guard" firms on critical industries and allowing a new surge of entrepreneurial activity to begin. This has created some instability, since any boom has a downside, and the entrenched business interests previously favoured by the Archduke are angry. The old Archduke remains a powerful figure in business.

The Domain capital has recently been moved from Dukh to Annapabar, which lies at the center of a cluster of worlds on the very edge of the Imperium. Some have questioned the Archduke's wisdom of pouring investment into this new Imperial Trade Cluster where it is so vulnerable on the frontier. Others speak of the creation of a powerful bastion against incursions of military and commercial sort from beyond the border. Cynics remark how much more healthy it must be to be away from Dukh, center of the old Archduke's power.

Away to Rimward, the Solomani Rim War is raging, drawing ships and money away from other frontiers like Gateway. The war occasionally reaches Gateway in the form of commerce raiders and pro-Solomani agitation, since the Rimward end of the Sector was heavily settled by the Rule of Man and retains certain Old Earth influences.

Much of the region referred to as "Gateway Domain" actually lies outside the Imperium. Only Ley Sector and a scattering of worlds beyond are actually under Imperial control. The Imperium and the Archduke have some influence in these border regions, but no direct power.

Within Ley Sector, a few worlds are not Imperial Members. Some are Client States, some Independent and some form part of the Khuur League, an economic federation formed from the remnants of a local empire crushed 200 years ago by the Imperium.

There are certain distinct regions within the Sector: Vilani influences are strongest in the Coreward-Spinward area, and Solomani in the Rimward end. The Luriani (a human subspecies adapted for a semi-aquatic environment) are important in the central region of the sector. All these are variations on the standard Imperial culture, and local variations also exist.

Directly to Rimward lies the Glimmerdrift Reaches Sector, with a few Imperial worlds and a scattering of independents plus some minor states. To Trailing is a buffer zone of largish states and independent worlds, then the 2000 Worlds of the K'Kree. Trailing-

LIBRARY DATA

This information represents data that is available on library computers anywhere in the Sector. It may not be 100% accurate.

Annababar (Ley/Diamond-Prince - 1936). Current Gateway Domain capital, established by Archduke Erechs in 990 upon his installation as Archduke.

Climbing Kit, Basic – A set of accessories designed to make climbing easier. Includes a safety harness, gloves and rock shoes, belt with secure holders for tools, and head protection.

Communicator, Personal (“Comm”) - A hand-held, single channel communication device. On world with a tech level of 8 or higher a personal communicator is able to tap into the world's satellite communication network and with the proper address, contact any other communicator in the world (for a fee). The channel is private, but not secure and may be monitored on some worlds. Usually network access can be arranged at the local starport for a small fee. On worlds with a tech level of 7 or less, personal communicators will not work except for direct comm-to-comm contact over distances of not more than a few hundred meters.

Many individuals purchase accessories for their comm. The most useful is a specialized computer device called an Aide. The Aide stores a considerable amount of information that the character feels he may find useful, downloads news or market information when available, and reminds the character about his schedule at appropriate times. Many travellers conduct their business by comm while on the move. An Aide costs Cr 250.

Daramm (Ley/Spearhead -0812) - Luriani homeworld.

Desert Kit, Individual – A basic desert outfit including loose-fitting trousers and shirt, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, water bottle and mineral tablets.

Dirir (Ley/Highlord - 0129) - Sector capital under the Vilani and Solomani Imperiums. Post Long Night, the world became known as Darren's Folly, and has retained this name ever since.

Dukh (Ley/Nightmare - 1210). Ley Sector capital, and former Gateway Domain capital.

Emperor Gavin – Current Emperor after the 989 abdication of Styryx. Gavin is the eldest son of Styryx.

EMPEROR STYRYX – ABDICATED 989. CURRENT WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

Erechs, Marcus Aaron - Archduke of Gateway. Appointed by Emperor Gavin in 990, Erechs was a prominent corporate leader in the Domain and vocal and commercial opponent of the previous Archduke. Of common birth, Erechs built his single merchant ship into a Domain-wide commercial powerhouse known as MAE Lines. Familiar with the people and the economics of the Domain his policies, radically different from most previous administrations, have begun to turn around a Domain that for centuries has been considered an unimportant backwater to most Imperial experts. Applications for Imperial membership are at an all time high, and trade revenues have quadrupled under his guidance. Industrial and agricultural exports are on rise, and immigration of Imperial citizens

into the Domain has begun a similar rise.

Excavation Tool Kit – Basic digging tools; shovels, picks and sledgehammers. Working with improvised tools takes at least four times as long.

Field Kit, Personal –A basic field operations and survival kit containing a bush hat, pants, shirt and a warm jerkin, a waterproof poncho/blanket, water bottle, belt pack with fire-starting equipment and 1 day's (almost inedible) iron rations, and a machete (treat as Blade). Boots must be purchased separately. Above TL6, the kit also includes half a dozen chemical lightsticks.

Hive Federation – A region dominated by the Hivers and their “subject” races, found to Rimward/Trailing of Gateway Domain.

Ice Terrain Kit, Personal –A set of accessories that make crossing ice or climbing icy surfaces a little less hazardous. Includes crampons for boots, snowshoes, rope and a brightly-colored “rescue blanket”. The ice terrain kit does not include clothing.

Igikur – an octopus-like race of long-lived but extremely xenophobic beings native to Igikur/Ley.

Imperial Planetological Society (IPS) – One of several scientific fellowships that exist throughout the Imperium, the IPS is funded by member donations to some extent, but receives a substantial annual donation from the Imperial Household. Its aim is to discover and catalog everything there is to know about the worlds of the Imperium (and along the borders); their characteristics, life, history and so on. The IPS is more interested in animals and rocks than in people and cultures, but it is something of a generalist organization.

The IPS does have a ‘loony fringe’ which sponsors expeditions into special phenomena such as Deadspace or into regions of ‘crank interest’ such as the Ancients. For the most part, however, it is a respected scientific body whose membership includes a large number of (well-off) amateur scientists and planetologists as well as the more mainstream body of respected professionals.

Student Membership of the IPS costs Cr100 per year and has no real benefits other than a regular newsletter containing interesting but low-importance information. Associate Membership of the IPS costs Cr 10,000 per year and grants access to IPS databases and facilities. Full membership requires a degree in an appropriate subject (Astrophysics, Planetology, Xenobiology etc) with relevant Knowledge skills at rank-6 or better, plus an annual fee of Cr 1000. Full IPS members have access to all databases and receive a monthly gazette containing deep, insightful articles. They receive preferred status when applying for positions on expeditions.

Fellowship of the IPS is conferred upon eminent scientists and those who make important discoveries in the fields of Planetology, Astrophysics, Xeno-Anthroplogy and so on. Fellows are permitted to request a research grant or funding for an expedition, though there is relatively little money to be had. The most prominent fellow of the IPS in Gateway Domain is Prince Garlan.

Imperial Trade Cluster - A highly developed and active jump one main located in the Diamond Price Subsector. Established by Archduke Erechs in 991 in an effort to better control the flow of ‘outworld’ cargoes and passengers into and out of the Imperium itself. Any and all cargo originating from or destined for a non-

Imperial or Client State world must be inspected and certified by the Imperial Trade Cluster Authority. Any class A or B starport located in the jump-1 cluster centered at Annapabar (1936) qualifies as an Imperial Trade Cluster Authority inspection point.

K'Kree – Militant vegetarian major race found to Trailing of Gateway sector. The K'kree are dedicated to exterminating all G'naak (Vermin, or carnivorous/omnivorous creatures). They are herd creatures, ruled by Steppelords and Overlords. Their supreme leader is the Overlord of Overlords. The K'Kree have an uneasy relationship with humans and other omnivorous creatures. Cooperation is possible, but conflict is not uncommon.

Karameshi – A human culture that originated in Delphi sector during the Long Night. At its height the Karameshi Fellowship encompassed a dozen or so worlds at a peak TL of 12. The Fellowship was too easy-going and beset by internal politics to survive in the harsh years of the Long Night. Central government collapsed and the Fellowship disintegrated. Karameshi enclaves still exist across Delphi Sector, living a life of good-natured, almost lazy, anarchy that seems to please the adherents of the culture, but is almost by definition unable to get anything done.

Kukugukhe (Ley/Nightmare - 1406). Former Imperial Naval Depot destroyed in 185 by the Julian Protectorate during the Julian Wars.

Khuur League - A 'mercantile' confederation located on the trailing edge of the sector. Most of the worlds in the League are the former core worlds that made up the Sydymic Empire. Formed shortly after the fall of the Empire in 675, the League began as nothing more than a true trade confederation, under the watchful eye of the Imperium. As the years past, and the vigilance of the Imperium waned the League began to enlarge its range of activities to include the 'mutual defense of member worlds from villainous forces'.

Long Night Remembrance – A fanatical Vilani group whose political arm vigorously opposes everything Solomani. Linked to terrorist acts against Solomani businesses and cultural centres such as museums.

Lords of Thunder, The – An extremist group of K'Kree now ruling a small empire in Crucis Margin sector. The Lords of Thunder follow the teachings of Axavktrr xur, a K'kree philosophical and moral stance largely discredited since the Hiver War. About 150 years ago their leader, L'Iluii'!pri'vguurlg was banished for his defiance towards the Overlord of Lords, the K'Kree supreme leader.

Loyal Sector Guard – An unofficial and technically illegal organization formed by several powerful figures and trade interests. The LSG maintains a force of mercenary troops and space vessels for the explicit purpose of defending the sector, its people and its economy from attack. The LSG has always remained within the law (other than by existing at all) in its operations, which are conducted in the same way as legal mercenary tickets. The LSG offers advisors, cadres and security forces for vulnerable areas that cannot afford adequate protection. Its fighters and patrol craft protect vulnerable starports and strictly enforce Imperial Law. The LSG is growing, and could become a "people's militia" in time. This development is viewed with concern by the authorities, but in the meantime the contribution of the LSG to stability in the region cannot be denied.

Muhrani – Minor sentient race inhabiting 470-092 in Ley Sector. Muhrani resemble 2-meter long caterpillars, with 10 limbs including

manipulating "hands". They live in small family groups and display little technology, but are known to have access to TL 8.

Portable Airlock – A flexible pressure tent kept rigid by a collapsible frame, the portable airlock has two openings and thus can be sealed to a bulkhead to create an emergency airlock. It is most commonly used when cutting into a starship hull for rescue purposes, to preserve the environment inside, but can be also used to seal a building against NBC conditions. The airlock is big enough for two vac suited persons at once, and is reasonably robust. It comes with a small air bottle to inflate it, but normally relies on pressure from the area being cut into.

Prince Garlan - A nephew of Emperor Styryx, Garlan has been highly active in Gateway Domain in recent years. His retinue visits frontier outposts as well as major worlds, and he is generally well-thought-of by the people of the sector. Garlan is known to be approachable and willing to consider using his influence to solve a local problem.

Ramshackle Empire – See Rule of Man, Second Imperium

Rescue Ball – A rescue ball is intended to allow personnel to survive a pressure breach in a space vessel. It consists of a 2m-diameter ball of reflectorized plastic and a small air bottle good for 4 person-hours. Rescue balls are mandatory aboard passenger-carrying starships. They are located at strategic points around the ship and in staterooms. Intended for untrained personnel, they are very easy to use. The character open a zipped flap, climbs inside and zips the opening shut, then triggers the air bottle to inflate the ball. A clear section allows vision, and most rescue balls have a "glove" that a character can insert her arm into in order to manipulate outside objects in addition to a towing or securing tether.

The ball is reasonably robust, and gives a good radar return due to the metallic coating. A person inside one can move around (assuming there is some gravity) by walking on the inside, treadmill fashion. Balls are normally intended for the use of a single person, though more than one individual can get into one at need.

Rule of Man – Solomani name for the Second Imperium.

Second Imperium – After the conquest of the Ziru Sirka by the Terrans, the latter took over the remains of the Vilani Imperium and thus created the Second Imperium, also known as the Ramshackle Empire or the Rule of Man. The Second Imperium lasted approximately 400 years before collapsing into the Long Night.

Siblinghood of Harsh Reality – A rather grim sect founded in Ley Sector. The Siblinghood make excellent starship crews, famed for their technical competence and their tireless devotion to duty.

Softsuit – An emergency vac suit designed to allow crews to survive disaster aboard a starship or space vessel long enough to do something about it. Softsuits are not durable enough for prolonged use, and attempts to use them instead of standard vac suits usually end in tragedy.

Sopas – The Sydite language.

Sopater - Sydite name for Khuur (Ley/Sydymic - 3026), their homeworld.

Solomani – The word can mean many things: an individual

member of the Solomani Confederation, the Confederation itself, a person (possibly an Imperial citizen) whose culture and traditions are strongly influenced by “old Earth” (such people are often completely loyal Imperial citizens who have nothing in common with the Solomani Confederation and its present-day peoples. Most commonly the word is used to mean any idea, concept, person or object which seems to have more connection with old Earth culture than any of the many other Imperial cultures. At present there is often some suspicion associated with the word, but this is because of the war and not a common theme.

Solomani Confederation – A powerful human state to Rimward-Spinward of gateway Domain. The Solomani Confederation is centred upon the spiritual and ancestral home of the Solomani people; Terra.

Solomani Rim War – A major conflict currently (1000) being fought to Rimward-Spinward of Ley Sector. The war has drawn off considerable Imperial forces. Solomani sympathizers and commerce raiders cause some trouble in Gateway Domain, but the main battle fronts are sectors away.

State of the Gate – A defunct monthly gazette published by LeyCom LIC, based out of Shanape. State of the Gate was famed for its ability to dig dirt on big business and prominent figures. Back issues are rather difficult to get hold of as a result of several legal injunctions and what appears to be a deliberate suppression of the magazine. LeyCom LIC was bought out by a competitor in 985 and no longer exists, even as an imprint.

If back issues can be located, the magazine reads like a catalog of corporate misdeeds and corruption. The ‘Old Guard’ firms that dominated Ley Sector’s economy feature prominently and frequently and there are some interesting articles about an up-and-coming new shipping company (MAE Lines) and the big companies’ attempts to squash it, plus an assortment of features about local politics and business that are now very dated. One interesting feature is the monthly ‘Violence and Intimidation Roundup’ which lists threats, legal cases and acts of violence against the magazine, its reporters, and the publisher.

LeyCom LIC was sold off for a very cheap price after several key employees departed or met with accidents. Two reporters and an executive were murdered by parties unknown. It is fairly clear that someone went after LeyCom to bury it, and succeeded. The book publishing arm survived as an imprint of Takashi Publishing LIC for three years, and was then merged with other assets, effectively making it disappear. Takashi barely outlived its acquisition, folding in 988 after running into severe financial troubles.

Survey Satellite – A Survey satellite, or Sursat, can be launched from a shipboard missile launcher or a ground launcher. It is capable of undertaking basic communications and beacon functions and quite sophisticated mapping and survey operations. A sursat can report on weather and atmospheric conditions constantly. Life is 3-5 years if placed in a stable orbit.

Survival Kit, Personal – A small backpack or belt pack containing personal survival equipment. Higher-tech versions include more advanced equipment, but basic functionality is the same. Contents include:

- Small knife
- Fire-starting equipment

- Blanket/poncho
- 4 days’ preserved rations
- Water bottle
- Compass
- Light cord or string
- Mirror
- Water purification tablets
- Survival manual

Survival Kit, Vehicle – A standard kit carried aboard lifeboats, vehicles and starships, the Vehicle Survival Kit designed to equip 4 people. Imperial Law requires that all spacegoing vessels include one kit per 4 passengers or crew. Contents include:

- 1 Survival Rifle, plus 50 rounds shot and 50 ball
- 1 Hatchet
- 1 Field Medical Kit
- 4 Personal Survival Kit
- 4 Field Kit, Personal
- 4 Sets/Emergency Cold Weather Clothing
- 4 Combination Masks plus extra filters
- Field Rations for 60 person-days (15 days for 4 people)
- 4 Bulk water storage containers with filters
- 1 Water Purification Kit
- 2 Pressure Tent

Sydymic War (640-675) - A long and bloody war between the Imperium and the Sydymic Empire, consisting of primarily massive planetary assaults and protracted surface campaigns across two subsectors.

Takashi Publishing LIC – a mid-range publishing house in Ley Sector, Takashi ran into financial trouble in the late 980s and folded. Much of its stock was bought up by Ankaanikou Olaam, a subsidiary of Sharushid.

Third Imperium – Founded 1000 years ago from the expanding Sylean Federation, the Third Imperium is ruled from Capital/Core. It claims direct continuance from the Ziru Sirka and Rule of Man.

Tool Set, Rescue – A comprehensive set of supports, cutting gear and other tools used to reach and rescue trapped persons. The kit does not include sensors.

Ugiirkidan (Ley/Gaudix Drift - 1420). Imperial Naval Depot established in 249.

Water Purification/Distillation Kit – Designed to provide safe drinking water for 4 persons, the kit contains chemical tablets and filters, plus a collapsible still (which requires a heat source; normally this is heat tablets provided with the kit) to distil liquids.

Ziru Sirka – Literally “Grand Empire of Stars”, the Ziru Sirka is also known as the Vilani, or First, Imperium. It ruled Charted space for millennia before suffering decline and eventually being toppled by the Terrans.

THE MISSION

This summary should be made available to the players at any time.

Dr Markia has use of the ship for one entire year, after which time he must justify continued use before a board appointed by the Archduke. During this time, minor repairs, fuel and replenishment of minimal life support supplies will be available on an Archducal expense account from any Class A or B starport. Other expenses must be met by the crew.

The mission is a pet project for Dr Markhia, but it also has a very real chance of creating considerable wealth. Several Imperial and Archducal funds exist to reward scientific excellence, and there is always the "lottery win" scenario, where the team uncovers a new way of using existing technology leading to a patent or even an entirely "new" idea from studying alien cultures and ruins.

More likely, Dr Markia thinks the team will either win a science prize or be able to claim a finder's fee on a new archeological site to be developed by one of the universities. At the very least, there should be a new book in it for Markhia and some incidental earnings from courier work for the crew.

Dr Markia intends to investigate inconsistencies in the official version of local history. To this end, the team will:

- Collect folklore and legends from literary works and interviews
- Cross-reference with existing data
- Investigate potential dig sites, ruins etc
- Survey likely sites for evidence of habitation in the past

Fields of Interest: Dr Markia has already identified certain things that might reward further investigation.

- The Ancients: There is some evidence that more than one species of "ancients" existed, and indeed that human-crewed ships were plying the spacelanes 300,000 years ago.
- There is evidence that around the time of the Vilani-Luriani war, conflict was ongoing in this region, which was beyond the Ziru Sirka fringe. Vilani records contain no indication of who was fighting, or why. But there are worlds with serious damage in the region. Perhaps something important happened that is now lost to history.
- A number of worlds in the sector seem to have either harbored life, or have legends of life, from long ago. Others show signs of warfare and other cataclysms that may have destroyed civilizations or their outposts.
- Patterns of colonization: Records from the Rule of Manera colonization of the region are sketchy at best. It may be possible to establish which worlds were first colonized and then founded daughter colonies, and which were colonized in the second or later waves.
- The Sydynamic Empire: The region was one dominated by the Sydites' empire. It is possible that interesting sites were left behind by the Sydites as their Empire was crushed by the Imperials.

LABORATORY SHIP

LIGHT OF TRUTH

LAB SHIP STATS

USP LZ-4721222-030000-20001-0 MCr222.988 400 Tons

Bat Bear 1 1 1 Crew: 15

Bat 1 1 1 TL: 11

Cargo: 43 Fuel: 88 EP: 8 Agility: 1

Craft: 1x 50T Modular Cutter, 1x 30T Cutter Fuel Module

Fuel Treatment: On Board Fuel Purification

Architects Fee: MCr1.98 Cost in Quantity: MCr176.8064

Detailed Description

HULL

400 tons standard, 5,600 cubic meters, Dispersed Structure Configuration (Unstreamlined)

CREW

Pilot, Navigator, 2 Engineers, Medic, 10 Scientists

ENGINEERING

Jump-2, 1G Manuever, Power plant-2, 8 EP, Agility 1

AVIONICS

Bridge, Model/2 Computer

HARDPOINTS

Two

ARMAMENT

1 Dual Beam Laser Turret, 1 Missile Rack in Mixed Dual Turret

DEFENCES

1 Sandcaster in Mixed Dual Turret

CRAFT

1x 50-ton Modular Cutter with integral ATV Module (Cost of MCr20.04)

1x 30-ton Cutter Fuel Module (Cost of MCr2.424)

1x 8-ton ATV (Cost of MCr0.03)

FUEL

88 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)

No Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS

16 Staterooms, 43 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS

1 Galley (2 tons, Cost MCr0.1)

5 Labs (8 tons each, Crew 2, Cost MCr5)

CONSTRUCTION TIME

82 Weeks Singly, 65 Weeks in Quantity

SHIP'S STORES:

Light of Truth has recently been refitted by the Navy, and has aboard all the things the Navy thinks are necessary for a Spaceworthiness certificate, rather than the things a typical merchant captain thinks he or she can get away with. The Ship's locker in particular is overstocked by normal standards.

MISSION STORES:

4 Survey Satellite
8 Field Kit, Personal
8 TL-14 Cold Weather Clothing Kit
8 Desert Kit, Personal
4 Climbing Kit
4 Ice Terrain Kit
4 Excavation Tool Kit
8 Basic Digital Multicamera
2 PRIS Binoculars
2 Densitometer
4 Portacomp
8 Scientific Field Kit

ARMS AND PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT:

2 Snub Revolver	Bridge Locker
2 4+1 Shotgun	Engineering Locker
2 Carbine	Ship's Locker
4 Autopistol	Ship's Locker
2 Cutlass	Ship's Locker
8 Blade	Ship's Locker
4 Flak Jacket	Ship's Locker
8 Combination Mask	Ship's Locker
8 Life-Support Mask	Ship's Locker

SURVIVAL AND EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT:

Rescue Balls	Located throughout the vessel
Emergency Softsuits:	2 Per Cabin, 1 per duty station, 8 spares in Locker
First Aid Kits, TL14	8 (4 in Various Locations), 4 in Ship's Locker
Survival Kits:	2 Vehicle Survival Kit (see Library Data for details) 10 Personal Survival Kit (see Library Data for details) 4 Water Purification kit
Tools:	1 Rescue Tool Set 1 Portable Airlock 1 Welding Kit, Advanced Emergency Bulkhead Patches
Beacons:	4 Emergency Beacons

Tools and Other Equipment:

Electronic Toolkit (Comprehensive)
Mechanical Toolkit (Comprehensive)