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REPORT TO FIELD OPERATIVES

ÆON TRINITY TRANSMISSION [NEPTUNE DIVISION]

Extraterrestrial Office, Deputy Office Director Giorgios Alekandros Gamemenos

Fellow Trinity Members —

You have served Æon Trinity, and through it humanity itself, admirably. Indeed, you have triumphed gloriously, pursuing the truth with great determination. Your accomplishments are beyond our wildest expectations, against challenges none of us could have conceived just a few short months ago.

A simple investigation on Luna uncovered a malignant cancer within the Æsculapian and Orgotek Orders: the Huang-Marr Project, in which amoral psions worked *with* Aberrants and performed unspeakable experiments on fellow humans. Your actions were essential to exposing the conspiracy and apprehending those involved. In the name of the Æon Trinity, I commend your courage. Humanity is grateful to you.

Your dedicated pursuit of the Huang-Marr conspirators also brought you into direct conflict with Chromatic raiders. The Æon Trinity was as surprised as anyone by the aliens' sudden appearance. Although the attackers were driven off, we find ourselves faced with a great mystery: How did the Chromatics reach our Solar System? Our initial studies of the few aliens captured from the raid, as well as the remains of their spacecraft, has revealed little useful information thus far; we don't have time to wait for more.

Considering your quick thinking and the commitment you have shown in the past, we feel you are well-suited to help discover the answer to the Chromatic enigma. We request that you join a mission to Karroo, the scientific research and mining colony in the Crab Nebula, to assist in what we've termed Operation: Revelation — the retrieval of live Chromatics. It is possible that the aliens may not be native to the Crab Nebula; they could have transported themselves there by the same process that they came to our Solar System.

It is Æon's hope that your endeavor to the Crab Nebula will provide further insight into the means by which the Chromatics can travel across vast distances of space — and will reveal the full extent of the Chromatic threat.

Please arrive at the Æon Trinity's central headquarters in the Federated States' Chicago arcology by the end of this month. In the interim, Special Agent Hector Ramirez will transmit what information on Karroo and the Chromatics that Æon feels is relevant to this mission. Familiarize yourself with this data prior to your mission briefing. Time is short; use it wisely.

Cordially,

Gamemenos

Extraterrestrial Office, 17:15:22 5.23.2120

Hope Sacrifice Unity

Notice of Subpoena

**United Nations Office
of Judicial Administration,
5.24.2120**

>>> attached file <<<

You are hereby ordered to be present at the main judicial chamber of the United Nations to divulge any knowledge or actions taken regarding the investigation of allegations of illegal biotechnological research among the psi orders.

You are hereby ordered to bring all documentation, in whatever medium it may exist, pertaining to the activities and information as specified above. The documentation will be taken into United Nations custody only for the duration of the hearings associated with this subpoena, and will be returned to your possession upon the conclusion of this investigation.

If you are unable to afford transportation to Olympus, contact the Office of Judicial Administration nearest you to arrange for a special travel dispensation.

If you are unable to afford counsel, contact the Office of Judicial Administration to arrange for a United Nations-sponsored legal representative. Please review the enclosed guidelines pertaining to the use of independent and dependent counsel in United Nations hearings. Your presence is directed for the purposes of questioning. You are not charged with any crime at this time; the Revised Modified Code of Basic Justice (ed. 2111) does not apply here.

If you have any questions regarding this subpoena or the proceedings from which it issues, contact the Office of Judicial Administration for clarification.

You must acknowledge receipt of this subpoena within 48 hours of confirmation of delivery to your person. Failure to appear before this hearing may result in fines and imprisonment.

United Nations Probes Psion Corruption

— GN Special Report " 2120 GN

OLYMPUS — The United Nations made a formal announcement today that it is pursuing an investigation into recent claims of psi-order malfeasance. Philip Bacciocci of the United Nations Department of Psion Relations said, "While we have no absolute evidence at this time, the United Nations must take reports of psion corruption seriously. We are conducting a preliminary investigation at this time to confirm the claims' validity. The United Nations will proceed further only if the situation warrants it."

The illegal, even immoral, acts were allegedly performed by psions of the Æsculapian and Orgotek orders. The Federated States and Nippon led a number of nations in urging the UN to enact sanctions against all psions due to the claims. UN Council for Human Rights Abuses Director Felicia McMullen responded, "We're still at the information-gathering stage. There is no reason to restrict psion rights at this time." McMullen did add, "Should we find evidence of wrong-doing [on the part of the psi orders], the United Nations will take decisive steps."

Highly placed sources inside the United Nations admit that the Department of Psion Affairs is divided on whether to initiate full-scale public hearings to "decisively settle the questions raised in the public mind." Sources also revealed that the UN currently delays such hearings to avoid anti-psion backlash by the public.

>>> **Note to operatives: This survey of opinions expressed in the popular media should help to place your actions in a social context. Pay attention to their concerns as you plan your efforts. — Ramirez <<<**

EDITORIAL SURVEY

Compiled by Triton Division search

CORRUPTION IN THE WEST

— **Jin Yuhong, Beijing Daily Report** © 2120 Asian Media Syndicate

The thoughtful student of the unfolding Huang-Marr conspiracy must soon be struck by a notable fact: This is a disease of the European and North American psi orders. No breath of scandal mars our own beloved Ministry of Psionic Affairs. Is it not time for the other orders to set aside their petty bickering and acknowledge Minister Bue's rightful place as leader of all orders?

We of the *Daily Report* call upon the United Nations to not merely investigate the misdeeds of the few, but the organizational failings of the many. We have long requested that the orders submit to a more coherent disciplinary framework. We no longer request it, we demand it. In the face of the renewed Chromatic threat and continued Aberrant menace, it is time that the orders act as one. Further, this "one" should be modeled after that which has preserved its integrity without losing its social commitment. This is not a time for scoundrels or dreamers, but for leaders and planners.

WE MUST SEIZE THE INITIATIVE

— **Roberto Garcia, Colombia Today** © 2120 New Sudamerican Media

Once again we see the monsters north of the equator treating the rest of the universe as fodder for their inhuman experiments. How long can this sort of cruelty persist? *Colombia Today* appreciates the leadership of Proxy del Fuego and his force, but they are few, while the villains are many. It is time for the patriotic men and women — psion and neutral alike — of our continent to take up the struggle against our oppressors. The longer we refrain from committing ourselves fully, the greater the erosion of our hard-won liberties by the encroaching orders.

Let us begin by boycotting their goods and services. When Norça can supply us with the world's best biotechnology, what need have we for Æsculapian drugs or Orgotek laboratory creature-machines? We of the southern hemisphere have the world's leaders in entertainment; why consume the tawdry fantasies churned out by third-rate Nordamerican media? We of the south have the greatest viable resources on the Earth; let us take greater control of them. It is time for South America, Africa and Australia to take control of our own affairs.

TRUTH, NOT SPECULATION

— **Con Heisler, The Painful Truth** © 2120 MMI

Obviously, issues of renegade psions should be investigated to the fullest extent possible. Nobody wants a bunch of enhanced humans taking laws or morals into their own hands.

Let's maintain some perspective though, folks. If the Huang-Marr conspiracy involves a few dozen Æsculapian and Orgotek members, let's make sure they get the justice that's coming to them. If it turns out the entire orders are in on this, let's make them all answer for their crimes. If, due to some insane possibility, all psions are a part of the conspiracy, let's clean house.

But c'mon, people, don't jump the gun. The United Nations will uncover the truth, with the help of dedicated reporters like yours truly and the assistance of independent organizations like the Æon Trinity. Let's stick to the facts and not panic without reason.

After all, there are still thousands of psions out there watching our borders against proven threats like Aberrants — remember them? Plus the Chromatics have just found our home. That's all we need right now — to squabble amongst ourselves while freaks and space lizards come down and wipe us out.

FSA SUPPORTS UN INVESTIGATION INTO PSION CORRUPTION

— **Press release, Office of Administration, Federated States of America, 5.2120**

The FSA takes the occasion of the United Nations investigation to denounce in the strongest possible terms the psi orders' widespread abuses. Ever since 2104, the Federated States warned that the orders represent an opportunity for human corruption on a scale not seen since the Aberrant Era of the 21st century.

The recent revelations of psi order crimes prove the accuracy of our concerns. The Federated States remains certain that the UN shall uncover far worse incriminations during its inquiry. Indeed, given the gravity of this particular crisis, the Federated States makes an exception to our usual policy of distance from UN operations. All true humans must work together to defend the entire race.

The Central Security Agency will survey anew all FSA citizens in search of internal corruption sponsored by the orders. Further, the Federated States Military shall assist UN officials in arresting and transporting previously charged conspirators. America hopes that our great nation will be free of the blight of psion criminals by the end of the year.

The Federated States hopes that other nations will see the wisdom of our long-standing policy of careful surveillance of all psions. Psions themselves proclaim their differences from humanity as we know it. The Federated States takes them at their word, and regards them with the caution we bring to all threats to the survival of the species. It is time for all the peoples of humanity to unite against a common adversary.

GET A BRAIN, NEUTS

— **Anonymous post on North American OpNet node [attributed to the Aberrant Promotion League]**

Trust the government fuckheads to keep thinking psions belong to us. Fat chance. It's not the FSA goons that dish out the hurting to us, it's the damned psions. They're not like us at all, you fragile, pale sacks of guts. If you can't even tell the difference between us and them, you deserve the government you get.

Free tip, meatsicles: If it uses subquantum energy, it's a psion, not an Aberrant. We don't play around with some weak Zen force; we can restructure the universe from the ground up if we want. At least keep your targets straight, yeh?

JUSTICE FOR HUMANITY

— **Press release, French Government-in-Exile, Québec, 5.2120**

The government of the French nation in exile joins the government of the Federated States of America in condemning the psi orders' criminal activities. The psions' crimes come as no surprise to the French people. The orders' negligence destroyed our great nation in 2114. Recent events are merely a repetition of the same tragic pattern that encourages humanity's dependency and then shatters that trust.

THREAT FROM THE STARS

— **Newsflash © 5.21.2120 Genman Enterprises**

Everyone is concerned with the UN investigation into the psi orders — but what of the recent Chromatic raid? The public is justifiably proud of our decisive victory against the aliens. Although there were tragic deaths and losses in millions of yuan, the destruction could have easily been much more severe.

Most people seem to think that the danger is over, so our attention turns to claims of corrupt psions. However, history has shown — most recently with the Aberrants — that out of sight does not mean out of mind. The Chromatics are still out there, ladies and gentlemen. If they found our home once, we can be sure that they will do so again.

ADDENDUM TO FIELD OPERATIVES

ÆON TRINITY TRANSMISSION [NEPTUNE DIVISION]

Extraterrestrial Office, Deputy Office Director Giorgios Alekandros Gamemenos

Fellow Trinity Members —

By now many of you have received summons to the United Nations hearings about the dreadful “Huang-Marr” business. It is unfortunate that this circumstance occurs while Æon is assembling you for such a sensitive operation.

The Chromatics’ recent attack may simply be the first in a series of raids, after all. And we cannot discount the possibility, however unlikely, that the aliens may be in league with the Aberrants. The UN’s investigation is certainly important, but the Æon Trinity feels — and I’m sure you’ll agree — that discovering the source of the Chromatics’ interstellar travel holds a much higher priority.

The Trinity must go forward with Operation: Revelation, and your involvement is essential to its success. An Æon associate will provide you with transportation to our central facilities in Chicago. You may be gone for some time, so pack accordingly. Special Agent Hector Ramirez will be on hand to assist in the briefing prior to *Shaka*’s departure. Considering this mission’s importance, I will try to be present as well to ensure everyone understands this mission’s full importance.

Rest assured that the Æon Trinity will take care of contacting the United Nations about this mission. As with most bureaucratic pursuits, the UN investigation is sure to take quite some time. We are confident that, barring any difficulties, you should return in time to provide the United Nations with your insights into the Huang-Marr conspiracy.

With that in mind, please make sure to contact this office before speaking with the media or public at large. At times of crisis, we must place special emphasis on our dedication to unity. You may review Æon’s standard induction history for examples of the harm that independent acts may do at times like this. We are all in this together.

Regards,

Gamemenos

Extraterrestrial Office, 09:42:00 5.24.2120

Hope Sacrifice Unity

Architecture as Monstrosity

— Alexander Billie,
Architectural Review ©
2110 WEI

It is unimaginable that any serious person of education and aesthetic sense can examine the Æon Trinity's architectural presence in the Chicago Cube with anything but horror. Very nearly every bad idea of the last 30 years presents itself in the Trinity's Neptune complex for one's appalled study.

Let us begin with the exterior. After all, the surgeon must first remove bandages and scabs before treating the wounds beneath. The original design for the Chicago Cube had a certain sensible, if rudimentary, aesthetic. A flat unadorned addition to the city skyline. It needed no symbolism, being itself a symbol of the so-called "Aberrant War" era, marking the fiery passage of old ideas and the plasteel birth of new innovations.

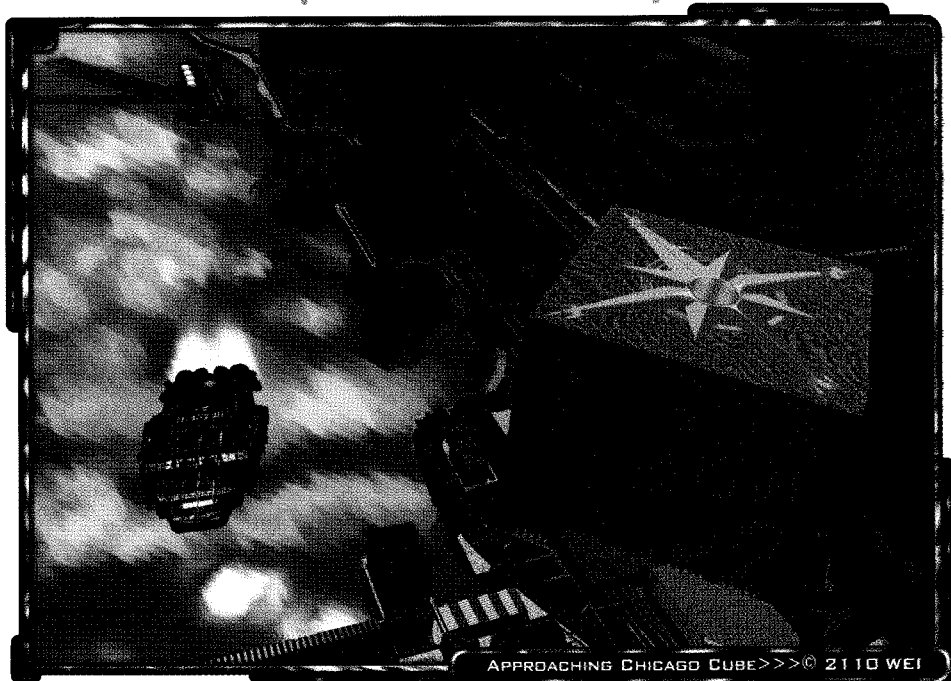
Unfortunately, the self-proclaimed humanitarians of Æon couldn't leave well enough alone. No, they went through and added ornamentation, trying to make the Chicago Cube look less the united single structure it is and more like an accumulation of smaller independent sites. The meaning of the Cube is lost in this welter.

Now, being fortified with a sort of visual inoculation, let us pass inside to the heart of kitsch. And indeed it is just as bad as, or worse, than one would expect from the exterior meddling. The Neptune complex's interior is a recreation of the 1920s milieu, drawing on photographic references to the original quarters of the Æon Society for Gentlemen. How quaint! How altogether too cute for words! What an appalling waste of resources!

It shouldn't be necessary to remind this altruistic group that the 1920s were not an

altogether admirable era, that architecture does in fact shape cognition, and that the Trinity is therefore helping to create precisely the disorder, elitism, social chasms and other unpleasantness against which it claims to struggle. It must be very efficient to have a single organization responsible for both making problems and solving them.

I could continue, but I haven't the heart. See the tawdry sentimentalism for yourself if you like. The effort at ontogeny recapitulating philogeny results in successive floors reflecting successively later eras. Ogle the crude scraps of acknowledgment tossed at the non-Western world in (pathetic, amusement-park-like) recreations of the various milieus in which the Æon Trinity operates. View this horrid mess, if you have the stomach for it.



>>> Note to operatives: This Triton basic report serves as a supplement to your technical archives. The enclosed WEI article is also useful for those of you who wonder why we can't see Karroo (or Far Nyumba, or other colonies) through telescopes. Please familiarize yourself with the fundamentals before pestering our astronomical staff! — Ramirez <<<

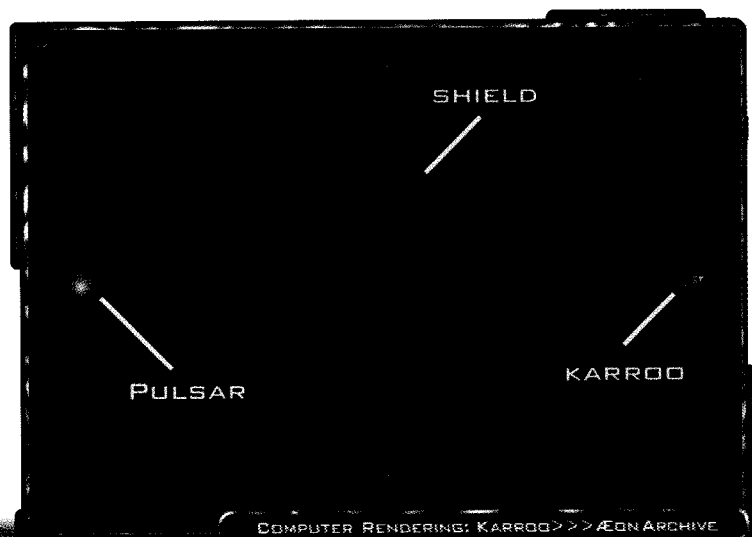
ANALYSIS: KARROO MINING COLONY

The human race has no home more alien than Karroo. Here no planet supports life — even other settled worlds at least begin with the basics of atmosphere and gravity. Here no sun illuminates the sky, separating day from night.

Eight thousand years ago, the region of space that is now the Crab Nebula looked like any other part of a galactic arm, with stars a few light years apart from each other. Some of them had planetary systems like our sun's. Some were wrapped in material like the asteroid belt, debris from dust specks to mountain-sized masses that never coalesced into planets. One of the stars was a supergiant, an old red star. It formed billions of years before our sun, with dozens of times more mass. Where our sun is comfortably middle-aged, in that bygone age, this star had already drifted into the final stages of stellar senility. Then came the last day of its stellar life: it exploded.

The human mind lacks terms of reference to encompass the ensuing event's true scale. Earth orbits the sun at a distance of eight light minutes, while Pluto circles at eight light hours. In comparison, the Crab Nebula supernova swept across that distance at very nearly the speed of light itself, quickly reducing every solid object to a fiery cloud of subatomic components. It continued to spread, though slowing as it went. Nearby star systems disappeared in the fireball. Farther away, stars and large planets — gas giants to rival Jupiter and Saturn — survived, but small ones crumbled. Still farther away, worlds survived but any living thing on their surface died in a flood of radiation far more intense than a thousand nuclear bombs.

At the center of this stellar holocaust, the remaining mass of the exploded star collapsed into what astronomers call a pulsar. As massive as the sun but smaller than the





BIRTH OF A SUPERNOVA >>> ÆON ARCHIVE

Earth, each spoonful of a pulsar weighs as much as a mountain. A pulsar spins dozens of times a second. Astronomers discovered Karroo's pulsar by the beams of radio waves it emitted, created when gas from surrounding space fell in on the pulsar and disintegrated. All around it, across dozens of light years, glowing gases fill once-empty space. They remain hot enough to shine brightly, *thousands* of years after the initial explosion. This snarl of filaments, vortices, sheets and clouds of gas makes up the visible Crab Nebula.

It is not a smooth spread, like cosmic batter. Rather, the nebula is made of a myriad of tangles. The star that lingers on as the nebula's pulsar didn't erupt perfectly spherical, and different points along the edge of the initial fireball ran into different sorts of obstructions. Think of how complicated the flow of water from the top of a waterfall or even a faucet can become — then scale

up the distances from centimeters to billions of kilometers. On average, the Crab Nebula is thinner than Earth's atmosphere at 100 kilometers above sea level. In some places it's much thinner than that, and in some places it's much more dense.

The Karroo Mining Colony shelters in one of the nebula's rarefied pockets, formed when expanding gases "splashed" against a star system, much like a wave strikes a rock. The "Shield," as Karroo inhabitants call it, is a roughly disk-shaped piece of this former star system. It's a slowly spinning gathering of dust and rocks 200 million kilometers wide and up to 50 million kilometers thick. The Shield isn't one solid mass, but, in the words of an Upeo astronomer, "a bunch of rocks that spend time near each other."

Still, the sector is thick and dense enough that gases from the Nebula's center wrap around it rather than blast through it, much like water flows around an obstruction. This creates a calm zone behind the

Shield stretching more than two billion kilometers, the equivalent of a bay sheltered from storms by an island or promontory.

Karoo perches in the so-called "Pocket," not very far away from the Shield's back side, astronomically speaking — close enough to mine the Shield and study the nebula, but not close enough

to worry about debris in irregular orbits. Gases rush by on all sides, glowing more brightly than our full Moon. It's a beautiful if profoundly alien sight.

And yet we have brought our own sense of humanity to the Crab Nebula, in the form of the thousands of courageous men and women who mine the region for scientific enlightenment and mineral wealth.

What You See Is Not What You Get

— Linda Terence, *Science Features* © 2120 WEI

Most of us don't have to think about the speed of light. If we're driving or flying or even taking a spacecraft somewhere, we think about travel time. Most of us realize that we have to allow some time to get anywhere. But unless we're making transcontinental calls with pre-OpNet echoing or are calling the Moon (or someplace further away), we're used to sending signals by light and not having to wait at all.

But even light takes time to get from here to there; just under 300,000 kilometers per second, in fact. It takes a light beam a bit more than a second to go to the Moon and back to Earth. If the sun went out while you read this sentence, you wouldn't know it for eight minutes; that's how long light takes to get to Earth. Anyone on Pluto wouldn't get the news for eight *hours*.

Well, the Crab Nebula is 7,000 light years from Earth. That means we on the Earth see a snapshot of it the way it was before the Egyptian pyramids were built. To find out what it's like *now*, you have to go there by a means faster than light — with an Upeo wa Macho psion, if you happen to have one lying around, or with a jump ship.

Once you get there, you see the phenomenon as it is. The view you get of the Crab Nebula up close won't reach Earth until sometime around A.D. 9100.

>>> This report was relayed by Karroo's mayor to the Æon Trinity shortly after *Shaka's* first arrival at the Crab Nebula. It's the most comprehensive information we have on Chromatic placements near Karroo. — Ramirez <<<

Subject: Chromatic Sites

From: Dr. Fatima Tomussa

To: Mayor Susan N'gamba

Encryption: DSE

Transmission type: holofile [enclosed textfile]

Date: 22:00:00 02.01.2120

Susan —

Here's the summary report you requested. Yes, I'm bothering you again about our feint plan; I've tacked it on the end of the report.

Me again,

Fatima Tomussa

Chief of Astronomical Services

>>>ATTACHED FILE<<<

CHROMATIC LOCATIONS

CONFIRMED TARGETS

We've confirmed 26 concentrations of Chromatics in the Shield. There are an additional 22 probable targets and 17 possible sites. I think most of the "possibles" are data errors, but I'm including them here for your review.

TARGET DESIGNATIONS

We're still developing a formal classification scheme for the confirmed targets, but here's what we have at the moment.

- **Primary installations:** Power consumption, waste emissions and vehicle movements suggest at least 100 of the enemy at each of these sites. The largest one, closest to the Shield's center of mass, may have a thousand or more individuals most of the time. From activity patterns, we guess that the primary installations are all fairly independent, pursuing a wide range of activities.

We still know very little about how Chromatics organize their society. There's a major split within my staff between those who think there is a unified overall command (despite the demonstrable redundancies), and those who think there isn't. I'm inclined to the former in spite of the evidence. Call it gut instinct. The Chromatics seem to have a pack mentality. I think they'd rip themselves apart without a central coordinating power.

Major installations rank eight definite targets and two probables.

- **Secondary installations:** Each of these has between 20 and 100 individuals present most of the time. We've had better luck establishing remote-observation units close to these. The secondaries don't seem to run on as high a standard. Think of some of our own slum modules and you've got the idea.

Secondary installations rank 17 confirmed targets, 10 probables and nine possibles.

- **Enclaves:** These seem to have less than 20 Chromatics present, and the quality of defense is very low. Unfortunately, they're mostly far away from us, with the major installations in between.

Enclaves rank one definite, 10 probables and eight possibles.

INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING

Okay, you've sat in on our strategy sessions, but as you say, it doesn't hurt to document our procedures. We harvest information from:

- **Telescopic observations (visual light):** We look for exhaust jets, moving vehicles and other signs of intelligent behavior.

• **Telescopic observations (long wavelengths):** Radio signals and the like, trying to monitor communications traffic, and emissions from power plants and other industrial processes.

• **Telescopic observations (short wavelengths):** Microwave and other emissions, as best we can — most of it is beamed pretty tightly.

• **Remote observations (research and mining craft):** We encourage miners to carry telescopes and probes to get data from other points of view. Unfortunately, few of them want to do it; they resent losing the potential cargo mass. The science teams have their own equipment, of course, and are much better at relaying any information they find.

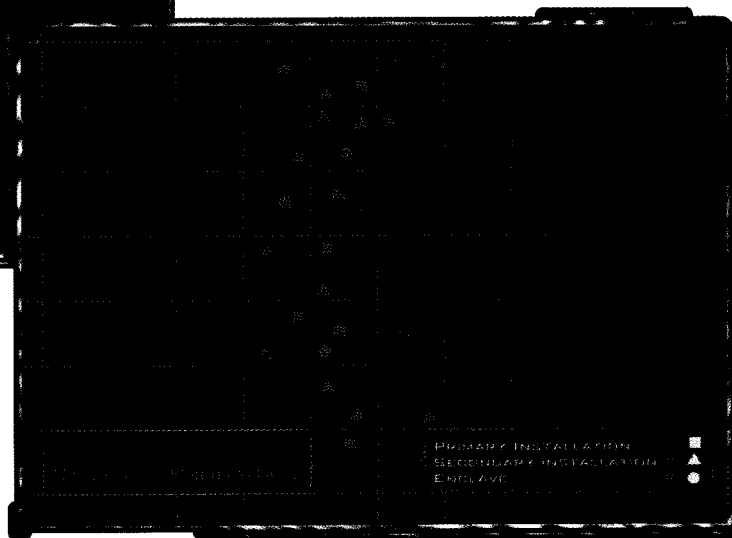
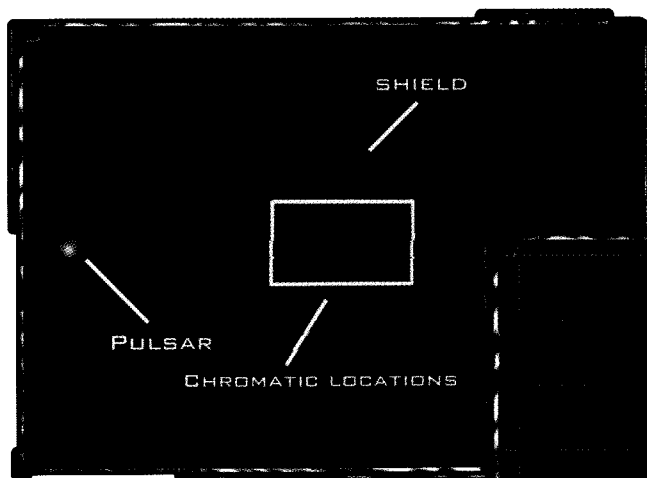
• **Remote observations (drones):** We launch small vehicles with advanced computer agents on board to maneuver through the

Shield for close-in views. We have better luck with the small installations, where perimeter patrols are much more lax.

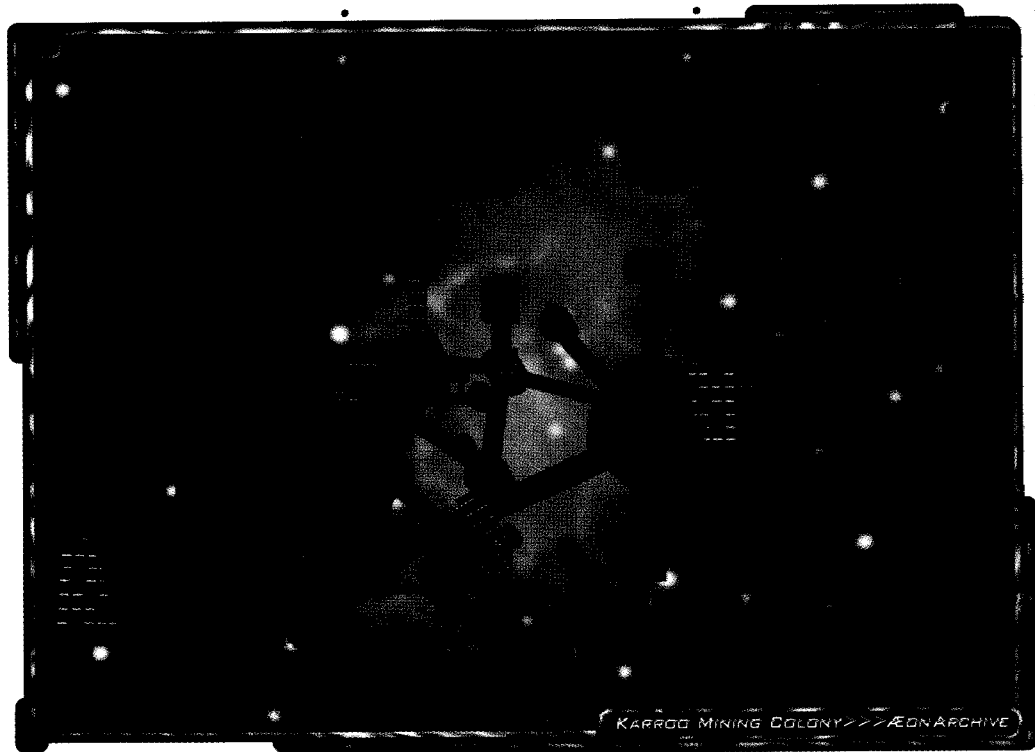
THE RAID

We need to look at the facilities more closely. As in, from the inside. Yes, I'm still pestering you for a raid. But look, I've got a strategy.

We need to make a feint. Round up some of Ruth's lovely exhaust cannons and whatever else in the way of impressive weaponry we can find, and send them straight at a nearby primary installation. Hold off launching them until we send a couple of well-equipped Fives on a slow, careful trip around the Shield. They hit one of the enclaves near the far edge — get in, grab specimens of aliens and hardware, take a lot of holos and other evidence, and get out, — before the toadies regroup. It's chancy, I know, but I'm confident it will work.



>>>This is the best comprehensive piece we've found on the woman in charge of Karroo. You'll need all the help you can get, so familiarize yourself with her background. — Ramirez <<<



Susan N'gamba: The View from 7,000 Light Years

— *Profiles In Leadership* © 2113 OBC

Susan N'gamba is the military commander of one of the most unusual towns in the universe — Karroo, the research and mining colony in the distant Crab Nebula. There are plenty of high-tech communities in exotic new locales these days, but few offer such a spectacular view.

The commander has a holo on her wall with an old-fashioned signboard pointing to her hometown of Accra and other African

cities. There's a sign over the board, reading "The Very West Coast."

So what does Africa look like from this far away?

"A very small dot," N'gamba says with a laugh.

Growing up Moving

Susan N'gamba's parents lived in the city of Accra for a few years after she was born. At the age of five, her family took her on the road. N'gamba's parents were part of Africa's New Professionals movement; skilled professionals who roamed across

national borders to assist in rebuilding cities and societies across the continent.

This was part of the unification effort that resulted in the development of the United African Nations. N'gamba came of age in the 2080s, accustomed to a life of traveling and working with diverse folks to address equally diverse needs. She learned from her parents that a single united Africa — that is more than the sum of its parts — wasn't just propaganda, but a tangible goal.

SUSAN N'GAMBA

After graduating preparatory school in 2089, N'gamba joined Ghana's military, one of the nations that pushed for a united continent. The New Professionals was a consolidated group at that point, and much of the roaming her parents had done was no longer practiced. N'gamba desired the excitement of the field, though, and considered the armed forces the perfect place to apply her technical and social skills.

Into the Order

By 2104, Susan N'gamba was already a skilled tactician as well as a technical resources expert. She'd spent 15 years in the military, attached to both field commands and public-works efforts. The appearance of the Upeo wa Macho offered an incredible opportunity to pursue new projects. The UAN and Upeo worked closely together, using the psi order's wondrous teleportation abilities in humanity's best interests. N'gamba's background was suited perfectly to such efforts, and she was one of a few carefully selected individuals who acted as liaisons for the order.

Although N'gamba apparently had the latency required to become a teleporter, she never went through the procedure. She explains her choice:

"The Upeo are dedicated to using their psi abilities; they may not know much of anything else. I was appointed liaison because of my other skills. I see no reason to distract myself from those efforts by stepping into the Prometheus chamber. I'm quite busy — and happy — helping in my own way."

Though a vitally charismatic figure, Upeo wa Macho Proxy Bolade Atwan simply isn't the organizational genius that, say, Proxies Cassel or Zweidler are. Atwan is the heart and driving force of the Upeo, but not even she can be everywhere at once. People with administrative skills — like Susan N'gamba — are very important to the Upeo wa Macho's success.

From the Atlantic Ocean to the Crab Nebula

Susan N'gamba explains her dedicated pursuit — and ultimate achievement — of military commander at Karroo at some length:

"It's no secret that my career is an effort to continually challenge myself. I care little for routine. That isn't to say that my previous work in resource management or tactical coordination wasn't important. It certainly was, and people just as capable — or even more so — have taken up those efforts. I would do a disservice to the UAN and humanity if I were to fall into routine. My nature rebels against it.

"The situation at Karroo is one of tremendous challenge and great danger. Strange, hostile beings have attacked our outpost in the Crab Nebula. We don't know where they've come from or why they struck. Even with the Upeo's assistance, it is difficult for us to properly support the colony from a distance.

"My skills are best used in times of challenge, under circumstances that require quick thinking and a commitment to others."

The once peaceful Karroo colony faces a bizarre and dangerous enemy in the form of the so-called "chromatic" aliens. But if Commander Susan N'gamba is any indication of the spirit and dedication of Karroo's residents, it's the aliens who should watch out.

>>> Note to operatives: The following files provide further insight into Karroo's current circumstances. Some of this data is quite subjective; try to maintain an open mind during your stay at the Crab Nebula. — Ramirez <<<

ANALYSIS: TRIBALISM AT KARROO

— **Notse Eyadema, Executive Assistant to the Mayor, 08.19.2118**

To anyone who researches the history of isolated communities, it's amazing that Karroo hangs together as well as it does. Considering the colony's enclosed environment, panic, psychosis, even mass murder seem inevitable. While we certainly have problems >>> suicide and homicide statistics (2114-2118) <<< things have gone remarkably well.

This is due in large part to a strong common identity: Although far from home, most Karroo residents are representatives of the UAN. We try to maintain the African continent's efforts to unite disparate people under a common banner.

But the banner finally seems to be unraveling.

As we know, Karroo supports the UAN's embrace of a person's racial and tribal individuality — through tribal motifs in artwork, adopting tribal fashions in clothing, and studying tribal language and folkways. Even tribal religions are welcome. However, recent months show an increase in inter-tribal rivalry and even segregation.

So far competition hasn't taken on an overtly negative context. It's all expressions of pride in one's own heritage rather than denigration of another's. But the line dividing the two is razor thin.

People need identities that function more specifically than "we are of Karroo." The founding representatives of the United African Nations knew of this need when they created One Africa.

Similarly, we must actively encourage the positive aspects of shared diversity and unified vision. I suggest that, where enough people show interest in a particular tribal affiliation, let them occupy a module or some other discrete unit. Let them decorate to taste. Make sure they comply with all the general rules of conduct, of course, but otherwise let them manage their own affairs. Further, let's encourage constructive competition. I suggest three different kinds of competitive endeavors that residents can pursue:

- **Athletic:** "Big games, small wars," as the old saying goes. Humanity has an undeniably aggressive side. Better to provide a clear vent for it than to bottle it up. This is also less lethal than constantly hunting Chromatics.

- **Productivity:** See how groups do when it comes to research, mining, life-support maintenance and other industries. Encouraging safety as well as superior work ensures that our community benefits in tangible as well as psychological ways.

- **Artistic:** The powers of the universe know that we're all desperate for new jokes, not to mention songs, games, plays and other entertainment. Let's see what the tribes can do. But let's also allow for synthesizing and composite works, and encourage groups to work together.

I worry very much about how things might go wrong. We're dangling over the abyss. But if we play it just right, we *might* be able to hold on.

REPORT: A SOLDIER'S ACCOUNT OF KARROO

— Gunso Gloria Manchester, Seventh Legion, personal report to Legions Command, 5.18.2120

I was part of *Shaka's* second mission to Karroo. I'm setting down my personal experiences as an unofficial supplement to [Chusa] Commander Thompson's report, because good intelligence requires multiple vantage points.

Karroo is *strange*. I don't know how the people there manage to keep from going crazy. As part of the Seventh Legion, I thought I'd seen lots of weird environments, but I never realized how much I take for granted. No matter how far you get from the sun — and I've been way out past Pluto to hunt Aberrants in the Oort Cloud — there's still a night sky. It's just that the sun gets very small and dim. But at Karroo, there are only about four visible stars. The rest of the sky is this weird glow, like the universe's biggest aurora borealis.

Well, that's not quite true. Look off in one direction and you see a quarter-sky full of rocks. The natives call it the Shield. I call it strange. The thing casts a shadow, too. It's dark right around Karroo, with light reflected into the shadowed area. You can see the edges of this bubble protected by the Shield, whereas in the space of a few kilometers, density of matter in the area increases tremendously. It's dramatic, but it's one more weird thing — it's not like night, but like being underneath an umbrella on a bright day, except you can see the atmosphere.

There's no easy way, as near as I can tell, to judge distances. Who has a feel for 80 light years' worth of hot gas? The whole time we were there, I was completely dependent on inertial instruments to tell me where I was, how far I'd come, and how far it was to wherever I was going.

But the people who live there hang on somehow. I gather they had a few suicides early on, but not nearly as many as I'd expect. I got the sense of a society slowly breaking down, though. They're heavy into tribal motifs — and if history tells us anything, tribal identity breeds tribal conflict. I hope we can get some more missions out to them soon; it'd be too weird to jump in and find them all dead, slaughtered by each other in a fit of cabin fever.

I remember a time we found a monitoring post in the Oort gone that way, and that was only four adults. Karroo has thousands of people — and kids. They deserve more future than they have.

Off in the distance, up against the Shield, are Chromatics. A lot of them, I gather. I suppose the toadies are weird enough to fit in with the landscape. I'd just as soon not see any more of them, though. I thought the last guy I went out with had strange appetites, but at least his mouth was right there on his face instead of somewhere down on his stomach.

I'm glad I went to Karroo. I saw things I never imagined. I really hope that my next assignment doesn't take me anyplace nearly that odd, though. I've developed a new appreciation for real nighttime and stars.

FOR STORYTELLERS EYES ONLY!

This section is for Storytellers only; it provides the information, plot hooks and statistics needed to run the final installment in the **Darkness Revealed** series for **Trinity**. Players should stop reading *now* and restrict themselves to perusing the full-color setting section.

What Is This?

Heaven Through Iron Gates is the first episode of **Ascent into Light**, the final book in the **Darkness Revealed** adventure trilogy. This episode can serve as either a continuation of the series begun in **Descent into Darkness** and continued in **Passage Through Shadow**, or as a stand-alone story that can be your players' introduction to the Trinity Universe.

Darkness Revealed is an epic series, but one that operates from moment to moment. Viewed from a distance, the characters' actions might be grand stuff, but here those events are broken into small-scale, immediate, personal incidents. The flow of the plot derives from the choices that the characters make, not from any "master plot" that *must* be followed.

Each episode in this book is split into two sections: full-color setting and black-and-white rules information. The former is "color text" in more ways than one — it consists of interesting background information pertinent to the story. Players should read the setting material before — or at appropriate points during — the episode. The setting sets the stage for the scenario and provides references to use during the story.

The black-and-white rules portion of the episode — the material you are reading now — consists of Storyteller-specific information. From here on in (or at least until the beginning of the next episode), you get a plot synopsis, specific episode and source material, suggested ways to advance the plot, hints for nudging things along, and even Storyteller-character write ups. This is the meat of the adventure, the part that really tells you what's going on.

So get ready. The previous episodes are nothing compared to what's coming up.

The Plot

This brief synopsis describes the events of *Heaven Through Iron Gates*. Later sections go into full detail; this is for orientation. **Once more: If you're not the Storyteller, don't read this! You'll just spoil the surprises!**

What Has Gone Before

In previous episodes of **Darkness Revealed**, a straightforward investigation of peculiar events plunged the characters into the midst of a conspiracy woven among the psi orders. Complications led the characters across Luna, to Mars, and back to Earth. The characters proved crucial in revealing the Huang-Marr Project, a conspiracy involving immoral biotechnological research. The characters first confirmed its existence, then tracked down its members and finally brought the ringleaders to justice.

On the heels of these efforts, the characters were exposed to a new complication: The Chromatics, alien enemies of mankind, made their first incursion into our Solar System. The characters joined in the defense of *Eyrie*, a space station targeted in the Chromatics' attack. The station was destroyed, but the characters helped drive back the assault and even capture alien prisoners.

In getting this far, the characters showed a knack for quick response and skill in both analysis and action. The characters find their abilities pushed even further during the course of the next episode, as they respond to the mysterious new alien crisis.

Overview

Heaven Through Iron Gates begins in the aftermath of **Passage Through Shadow** — you can vary the exact period of time between episodes to address any subplots you want to pursue, but the main events unfold at a rapid pace. Only a few days have passed. Cleanup of the downed *Eyrie* has just begun, as has gathering the wreckage of Chromatic ships in near space.

Scientists and psions pore over Chromatic corpses and ships, searching for clues, above all to the mystery of how the Chromatics manage to teleport. Up until **Passage**

Through Shadow, everyone thought that humans had a monopoly on extradimensional travel. Furthermore, scientists thought Chromatics had a fairly limited (though powerful), set of psionic talents that didn't include Teleportation.

The public is not currently worried about the Chromatics — after all, didn't we crush their attack? However, those with broader perspective on events are concerned, even panicked. Humanity has no idea of the Chromatics' full capabilities — their numbers, level of technology, home system, agenda — while it seems the aliens know far too much about us.

The United Nations was already working to address concerns regarding psi-order corruption. Its investigation into Huang-Marr was already underway when the Chromatics appeared in human space. The UN brought its inquiry to light to assuage public fears, but the international organization is too large to respond to yet another crisis — the Chromatics — in such a short time.

The UN eagerly accepted Æon Trinity's offer to pursue the Chromatic enigma. While the Trinity works on finding out more about the aliens, the UN devotes its attention to scrutinizing Huang-Marr. Characters who went through the first two installments of **Darkness Revealed** are central to this entire mess. Naturally, that makes them star witnesses before the UN. After all, there would be no Huang-Marr hearings if not for the characters' efforts.

But Æon persuades the characters that they have a more vital role to play. Namely, probing the mystery of the Chromatics' arrival in our Solar System. To get more information, the Trinity looks to the one place where Æon knows Chromatics live close to human beings: the Karroo Mining Colony. The jump ship *Shaka* has gone there twice, and heads out a third time with the characters. (Also, the Trinity is concerned that the characters may divulge more about Huang-Marr than Æon prefers, so the mission to Karroo serves to get them out of the way for a while.) The team assembles very, very quickly for the hastily planned Operation: Revelation.

Shaka takes three frigates on the mission. The jump ship itself has its seasoned crew, commanded by Robert Linsey Marsden, plus the players' characters and Ministry Agent Robert Wei. After a subquantum jump to Karroo, the characters meet Mayor N'gamba and her staff and plan a strategy

for capturing Chromatics. The characters are the linchpin of a two-pronged attack, sneaking "behind" alien strongholds while Marsden's forces draw off the Chromatics. The characters face the challenge of entering a Chromatic enclave, subduing one or more of the aliens, and returning safely with their prisoner(s).

The subsequent interrogation catapults events to an even more tense and dramatic level. The characters learn that the Chromatic assault *used a captured human teleporter to travel to Earth!* (Although the characters may never know it, the teleporter sacrificed himself during the battle of *Eyrie*, taking advantage of a power surge caused by attacking human forces to blow up the entire mother ship.) Even more shocking, the raid in **Passage Through Shadow** was only a precursor. A much larger Chromatic invasion fleet gathers, and will strike soon.

As if that isn't enough to digest, the shock of this revelation triggers another, even more staggering announcement. Karroo Mayor N'gamba claims that *she is actually a teleporter*. At her proxy's command, N'gamba has remained incognito at Karroo for years. Recent events have shown N'gamba that she can no longer remain an observer, no matter what Proxy Atwan ordered. N'gamba assists the characters and *Shaka* in returning to Earth to bring back news of the impending Chromatic invasion.

(Before the return, Wei suffers from subquantum backlash. Although apparently unharmed, Wei has fallen victim to a mysterious enemy that reveals itself in the final episode, *Climbing to Tartarus*.)

Thus the characters are the first humans in half a decade to travel as passengers of an Upeo wa Macho teleporter. The characters return to the Æon Trinity headquarters in Chicago. They present their account to their main Æon contact, Hector Ramirez, as well as to William Renton, the head of Proteus Division.

The final shock of the episode occurs when the characters are directed by Ramirez and Renton to keep N'gamba — indeed, the entire mission — under wraps. N'gamba and Wei want to warn the public immediately of the impending invasion, forcing the characters to choose between loyalty to the Æon Trinity or to spread word with their comrades. The decision each character makes determines her role in the climactic final episode, *Climbing to Tartarus*.



Theme

Heaven Through Iron Gates is about overcoming barriers: of distance, of fear, of ignorance, and of lust for power. The “Iron Gates” of the title are both physical and psychological. Barriers of many sorts appear throughout this episode, inhibiting the characters’ progress and throwing them off track. But if the characters persist, they break through the gates — to face the challenges looming in the dramatic final episode.

Mood

Above all else, the mood in *Heaven Through Iron Gates* is tense. This episode should unfold with the edge-of-the-seat tension of an action-packed thriller. (The characters act in the common interest of humanity, but right doesn’t always make might, and there is no guarantee of success.) Mankind teeters on the brink of destruction, facing confrontation with a foe who possesses unknown capabilities, at a time when those dedicated to humanity’s defense are torn by dissent and dispute. The characters must race through the chaos, searching for answers. Simply finding the truth

isn’t enough, though; the characters race against time without even knowing when the countdown will reach zero. Adrenaline should flow freely throughout this episode.

The Setting

Most of *Heaven Through Iron Gates* takes place at the Karroo research and mining colony, in the midst of the Crab Nebula. This setting is bookended by introductory and concluding scenes on Earth, at the *Æon Trinity*’s central headquarters in Chicago.

The Crab Nebula

Eight thousand years before the events of **Darkness Revealed**, a star 10 times more massive than our sun blew to bits in a supernova. A cloud of gas blasted through surrounding space, lit by the fading traces of the explosion and by the effects of the pulsar at the nebula’s center.

The supernova hurled most of the star’s mass into space. What remains is compressed into a rapidly rotating neutron star, or pulsar, so dense that each cubic inch weighs six million tons. It spins 30

times a second, casting off intense jets of X-rays from its poles and pulling magnetic fields around it into immensely tangled knots.

It's important to keep in mind that observers on Earth don't see the Crab Nebula as it actually is in 2120, but as it was 7,000 years ago. Light doesn't travel instantaneously. (The light of the explosion reached Earth in A.D. 1054.) Viewed from Earth, the Crab Nebula is 10 light years across and shines in brilliant blue-white clouds surrounded by bright-red gaseous filaments. From Karroo's immediate vantage point, the nebula is 82 light years across and glows less intensely yet more dramatically. The pulsar also spins more slowly up close than when seen from Earth. (The rest of the descriptive material here focuses on the Crab Nebula as it is for Karroo's inhabitants.)

The Karroo colony is complex (the **Trinity Field Report: Extrasolar Colonies** provides extensive data). Most people live in a combination of prefabricated modules as well as nearby tethered, hollowed-out asteroids. Once airlocks seal off the asteroids, the interiors are pressurized and used for gardens, parks or other "outdoor" environments — not as good as a planet's surface, but much better than life among endless three-meter-high decks.

In addition to areas set up for human enjoyment, Karroo's "front end" (the part facing the Shield) consists of several gigantic asteroids that are being mined. These rocks range from tons to megatons in mass, sometimes requiring a significant fraction of the colony's small ships to tow them into place. Karroo's views of the Shield are therefore obscured by sizable obstructions. Depending on one's position, half or more of the Shield may lie beyond mining projects.

The Karroo Neighborhood

Gas doesn't spread evenly throughout the Crab Nebula. It clumps into filaments in response to electromagnetic fields and irregularities of mass in the pre-supernova star. Matter around the supernova also creates relatively open pockets of space, bubbles within the nebula.

Karroo occupies one such bubble (which residents call the Pocket). A cluster of asteroids and dust clouds lacked the mass necessary to collapse into a star or even a super-Jovian gas giant and lies outside the Pocket, between Karroo and the pulsar. Early human explorers called this barrier the Shield. Irregular clumps of rock from centimeters to kilometers across move in orbits around the disk's center of mass. The Pocket is roughly circular, 200 million kilometers across and eight light hours deep (the distance between Pluto and our sun).

In the nebula at large, gases are up to hundreds of times the density of the matter between the plan-

ets in our Solar System. The nebula isn't anywhere as dense as an atmosphere, but is at least as dense as the trace matter found in near-Earth orbit. Beyond the Shield, gas density falls dramatically; Karroo's miners maneuver among asteroids immersed in a medium no more dangerous than the vacuum of our Asteroid Belt.

Karroo has no night. The heart of the nebula lies beyond the protective disk, but the rest of the sky shines more brightly than the full Moon does on Earth. Toward the neutron star, shades of blue-white dominate; streaks of red encroach on the still-expanding edge of the nebula. Where gases cool and twist together along the edges of Karroo's bubble, greens and oranges shine in shadows.

Karroo's inhabitants mine the Shield. Its constituent rocks are rich in heavy metals; light debris succumbed to the Crab Nebula's pressure long ago. Exotic compounds form on the edges of the Pocket, and small craft harvest them as well. Individual craft, large ships requiring multi-person crews, and teams working with remote unmanned units navigate within the diffusing corpse of the supernova.

Social Division on Karroo

Isolation in the midst of danger breeds two contradictory responses, both of which affect Karroo's social life.

First, there's the tendency to join together in the face of shared adversity. On most important matters, Karroo's population takes less time to reach agreement than the same number of people would in a terrestrial city. Minor grievances are set aside "until there's more time for it" — often to be forgotten entirely.

Second, there's cabin fever. Constant stresses lead to flaring conflict over trivial matters. It's dangerous to fight over big matters, so passions find outlet in scraps motivated by choices in *faux* vistas, clothing, music and the like. Food fights sometimes turn bloody. Karroo's people have to keep so much bottled up that once emotions leak out, they quickly flood, whether or not it's at all appropriate to the disagreement at hand.

Luckily, the Chromatics' existence is an important outlet for much of this aggression. The aliens may have started the conflict, but Karroo's residents are only too happy to maintain it. Skirmishes over the years not only keep the Chromatics far enough away from the human colony for comfort, but they channel the worst of the colonists' aggressions against someone other than themselves.



Ironically, *Shaka's* first arrival fed cabin fever. The people of Karroo kept things together for five years in the hope that their isolation would end someday. Now it has. Unfortunately, there's not yet any practical way for the vast majority of Karroo-dwellers to depart, either temporarily or permanently. Relief mingles with the sharp frustration of knowing that, though the goal is closer than ever, it's still out of reach. Tempers flare more brightly as the accumulated unpleasantness of half a decade creeps toward the surface.

Karroo's social life revolves strongly around tribal divisions. In the Africa of 2120, most people come from highly mixed ethnic backgrounds. But tribal identity does matter in UAN policy-making, and it's even more important to those searching for identity in the midst of isolation. Tribal leagues provide counseling, team recreations, employment opportunities and other routines of social interaction. Inter-tribal competitions (sports, mining, culture) help focus and defuse tensions, offering acceptable, defined outlets for aggression.

Non-African residents of Karroo (mostly Europeans, Russians and North Americans who took mining contracts) have formed their own

Eurocentric "tribes" in often unconscious imitation. The cultural distinctions still fit well enough that xenophobia is virtually nonexistent. Barring the Eurocentric "tribes," non-African visitors to Karroo likely don't distinguish the ethnic features separating one group from its neighbors, but they quickly notice the presence of distinct social factions.

Storytellers who wish to introduce details of tribal competition to their stories should consult a few basic books on African cultures. Most of the people at Karroo come from the middle-western portion of the continent, in what's now Mali, Ghana, Congo and nearby countries. Feel free to adjust details to make them interesting for the particular team involved.

Mayor N'gamba and her immediate circle of advisors tread a very delicate line on tribal matters. They welcome and take advantage of any opportunity to bring people together and release mounting hostilities. They don't welcome further sources of division. The Karroo government takes a hands-off approach, hoping to neither encourage nor discourage tribal associations except in extreme cases.

Powering Karroo

Karroo generates power through a combination of means. Its hyper-fusion generators serve as the primary power source. Gas miners bring in vital deuterium from water-rich rocks and gas flows to keep generators running. However, generators are insufficient for all of Karroo's needs.

Hyper-fusion is supplemented by solar collectors spread along the fringes of the Pocket. These collectors beam microwaves back to Karroo, the net result providing power sufficient to keep Karroo operational. There's not much to spare, though. One of Mayor N'gamba's most urgent priorities is getting Earth to send more hyper-fusion generators and solar collectors.

Day-to-Day Life

At any given moment, approximately one-third of Karroo's adult residents are away from the colony on scattered science, mining or patrol efforts. Others are just back from jaunts or preparing for a fresh departure. Another third works in Karroo's refineries, power-maintenance and life-support facilities. The thousands remaining are involved in a number of activities.

Mining supports a large portion of Karroo residents. The simplest forms of mining involve taking a big piece of rock and breaking it up into many small pieces, keeping the valuable bits (metals, minerals, chemicals, gems) and discarding the rest. This generally means towing an asteroid determined (or hoped) to contain something valuable, breaking it up at a convenient facility and jettisoning whatever shards of worthless rock that don't become radiation shielding. Karroo maintains small but extremely efficient refining facilities. Even trace concentrations of valuable ores are collected, concentrated and processed.

Some miners improve their harvesting by taking along tools to break up rocks where they find them. That way they need to haul in only small pieces for processing. Skilled miners break off as much useless material as possible in the field, returning with a very high content of useful material for mass recovered.

Miners harvest chemicals as well as metals. For gas mining, a ship uses a "gas net" (a fine screen that stretches for kilometers on a side) anchored with small thrusters in the gas flow outside the Pocket. The craft returns in days or weeks to see what's been caught. The size and composition of the screen's mesh determine what passes through and what sticks.

Straightforward chemical and mechanical adjustments in the net allow screening for hydrogen, oxygen, carbon and methane compounds, water vapor and other trace elements spread throughout the nebula. These chemicals — especially oxygen and water — are vital to Karroo. Processing trapped elements involves sending static electric charges through a gas net and using a variety of chemical hoses to scrape it down.

Much of the refining machinery at the colony works automatically. Yet people are still necessary for many key duties — to attach drills and hoses, remove filled waste bins and attach new ones, gather up refined ores and carry them off for secondary refining into pure metals (or chemicals), and to see that power flows without interruption.

Mining aside, scientists of several disciplines at Karroo study the wealth of information that exists in the Crab Nebula. Astronomers seek to understand more precisely how the nebula was created, and how it evolves. Geologists focus on the Shield and planetary, pseudo-planetary and proto-planetary debris. Chemists trace reactions within gas streamers and test the properties of exotic molecules created after mega-lightning discharges. Biologists probe the nebula for native life (so far without success) and

The Inhabitants

Over 50% of Karroo's 87,000 inhabitants are adults between 18 and 55 years old. Almost half of the remaining number are children; the rest are older adults. Chusa Roland Thompson, the Legions' commander in **Trinity Field Report: Extrasolar Colonies**, mistakenly assumes that the children on Karroo were all born during the isolation. This is understandable, since Thompson was going from the colony's basic data ("Minors: 3,600"). Actually, half were born there or brought in with families prior to being cut off, leaving a fair number of teens and older adolescents.

Although an independent colony in 2114, Karroo wasn't at the point of being a complete society as the UAN would define it. The current emphasis on tribal identity is compensation for its lack of social conventions. Trapped far away from anyone else, Karroo's people had to reinvent a whole society. Many groups of similar size would not have done so well.

study how Karroo's people, animals and plants cope with the unusual environment. The colony itself offers a prime location to study many of these effects, but many scientists venture into the field when need be.

Remaining residents pursue a variety of tasks. Researchers work in labs and observatories, children are at class or recreation, instructors teach children and employees, medical staff attends to patients or research, administration addresses bureaucratic necessities, technicians maintain colony functions, and security goes on internal patrol. Karroo is always bustling.

Æon Trinity's Chicago Headquarters

Although the Æon Trinity espouses "unity," the group's leaders recognized the need for diversity. Chicago is Æon's official headquarters, but the Trinity also has field offices scattered across settled space. These branches are located on each continent and on Luna, and are dedicated to overseeing activities in those regions. Æon operatives have their own offices as need be, reporting either by transmission or in person to a field outpost.

Satellite branches are much smaller than the headquarters described below (they're often only a single office space), but they follow the same organization — each division (Neptune, Triton and Proteus) has separate facilities. This ensures that if one part of local Æon Trinity is struck down for whatever reason, the other two can still carry on.

A private subway system connects the Chicago divisions, and Neptune and Triton Divisions are also linked to Chicago's public-transit system (Proteus, as described below, is isolated from public contact). People going from one division to another never have to wait more than 10 minutes — usually only five minutes during normal business hours — to arrive at their destinations.

Neptune Division

The Æon Society for Gentlemen built its first headquarters along the shore of Lake Michigan in the 1920s. Although the group evolved over the years, its central headquarters stayed put. When the first arcology complexes arose in Chicago during the 21st century, the Neptune Division facility formed the eastern corner of the Chicago Cube. The kilometer-square sector is not actually cubical, but then naming doesn't necessarily reflect reality. Now Neville Archer, Neptune's director,

looks out over the lake from 700 meters above the ground, the offices and other facilities of his staff spreading out below him. People flying above the Chicago Cube see its roof painted with a gigantic compass rose; Archer can look up through a transparent panel in the middle stroke of the "E."

When the public thinks of Æon, it imagines Neptune Division. This group is the Trinity's face, pursuing various humanitarian efforts from aiding the homeless to mediating disputes between factions of all sorts (social, political and religious). Neptune's facility is decorated in what amounts to a history lesson. The first few floors follow 1920s styles. Each higher level shifts the style ahead another decade — Art Deco and American Craftsman, Art Nouveau, Wright's early style, Le Corbusier's flat designs, Post-Modern, New Millennium. The top floors are influenced by natural and cultural styles found everywhere that Neptune operates — *faux* vistas of ocean-bottom volcanic labyrinths, African organic patterns, elaborate geometry emulating crystal habitats among Saturn's rings. The Cube therefore showcases the architectural and artistic styles contemporary to Æon's various incarnations.

Large arcology sectors dominate Chicago's lakefront and environs, but the Chicago Cube is a distinctive cultural center by virtue of Æon's presence. Whether admired or hated, the Æon Trinity is always noticed and considered when civic affairs are discussed. The Cube is the best people-watching point in the city.

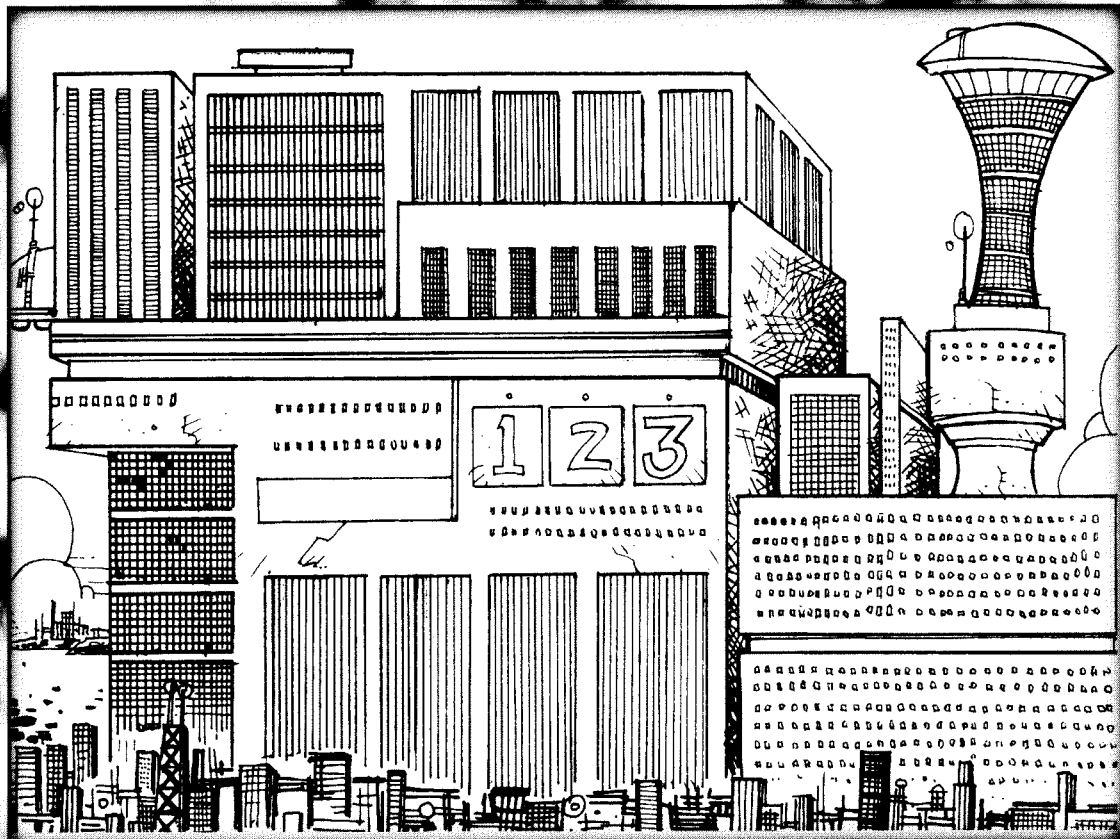
Triton Division

When the Æon Society for Gentlemen founded a separate research division, it bought properties adjacent to the University of Chicago. Although the entire area was severely damaged during the Aberrant War, the surviving facilities became the nucleus of the modern Triton Division headquarters.

Triton's scientists, scholars, professors, indexers and investigators are Æon's "people behind the scenes." The public knows little about this division, other than that it's dedicated to recovering information for humanity's benefit. Triton does much more than simply gather disparate documents. The division's members claim there is no secret that Triton cannot uncover.

Proteus Division

The public at large doesn't know about Proteus Division. As far as Joe Hologram knows, the "Trinity" of Æon refers to its tenets of "Hope,



Sacrifice, Unity.” Since Proteus Division operatives often act undercover of one of the other divisions (if not disguised as members of some other group altogether), even those who recognize Æon’s hand don’t perceive it as a third distinct organizational arm.

Proteus crosses over with the other two divisions in many cases, working with Neptune on delicate political issues or with Triton on dangerous investigations. The group also moves in to control sensitive sites, protect (or dispatch) important individuals, and provide defense for other Æon members.

Those aware of Proteus’ existence have little information on where the division is headquartered, and speculation runs rampant. In truth, Proteus Division’s main complex is underneath Lake Michigan. Most of the traffic to and from the division HQ uses secret underground tunnels that connect to Neptune and Triton Divisions.

Proteus Division’s headquarters includes space for far more people than actually live or work there. Æon Trinity planners realized long ago that Trinity members may need a bolt hole, and Proteus’ headquarters responds to that concern. The

chambers beneath Lake Michigan can hold every Æon senior official and tens of thousands of subordinates, and have life support and food supplies to operate independently for three years.

Running *Heaven Through Iron Gates*

This book assumes that characters participated in the events of **Descent into Darkness** and **Passage Through Shadow**. The experience gained there forms their primary qualifications to take part in the events of *Heaven Through Iron Gates*. The characters are contacted as a result of their involvement in exposing the Huang-Marr conspiracy and repelling the Chromatic attack.

Incorporating characters who participated in **Descent into Darkness** but not **Passage Through Shadow** takes a little work. Although the characters weren’t on hand to defend against the Chromatics’ raid, they are still key witnesses regarding the Huang-Marr Project. Æon isn’t sure how much the characters will tell the UN. The Karroo mission puts the characters safely beyond the UN’s reach until Æon can deal with the hearings.

Toward that end, the Trinity plays up the characters' dedication and skill, as noted in Gamemenos' commendation (see page 2). *Æon* pushes the vast importance of this mission, and assures the characters that it will speak to the UN on their behalf. At that point, subsequent events flow naturally.

Passage Through Shadow leads into **Ascent into Light**, so characters who took part in either preceding episode should have no problem qualifying for the Karroo mission. However, characters who skipped **Descent into Darkness** did not meet Robert Wei, the Ministry telepath. It's a simple matter to include him here. He's along in case the characters don't have a telepath of their own, or as backup — plus *Æon* wants Wei out of the UN investigators' reach for much the same reason as it does the characters themselves!

Newcomers

Introducing completely new characters to this installment of the *Darkness Revealed* series is tricky. Under normal circumstances, relatively inexperienced and low-ranking characters would never be a part of events of such interstellar significance. Since they weren't on the scene for important events, the characters must have useful skills — combat, science or diplomatic expertise — and strong loyalty to *Æon*. It should make sense that the characters, out of the thousands of possible candidates, were chosen to be among the few dozen going to Karroo.

Æon operative Hector Ramirez and Ministry agent Robert Wei are present here to not only supplement the characters' own abilities, but to serve as bridges to continuity and exposition for new characters.

The Episode as Background

As always, you may take events in a different direction, using the information here for your own story purposes. The developments of *Iron Gates* are important to the unfolding Trinity Universe, but can be presented in a variety of ways. This is a resource, not a cookbook that must be followed to the letter.

Behind the Scenes

Mankind has always had a love/hate relationship with the Gifted; it has only been psions' unflagging public dedication to humanity's protection that silenced detractors. The eradication of the Chitra Bhanu concerned many, although the public was encouraged by the fact that psions seemed willing to take down their own to prevent them from going rogue as Aberrants had. The Gifted tread a fine line,

though. Psions are always in the spotlight, their actions under constant scrutiny.

The solid documentation of Huang-Marr's secret immoral experiments and vague reports of far-reaching corruption lay the groundwork for a general panic. The Chromatic assault, though repelled successfully, sends public fears out of control. People are less worried about aliens in our Solar System than they are by the fact that the vaunted psions seemed to have no foreknowledge of the attack. The public fears that the psions' priority is no longer defending humanity but pursuing their own agendas.

Governments and the public clamor for action from someone, *anyone*. Depending on the channel on at the moment, characters might see calls for volunteer mobs to rise against known psi-order facilities, for governments to nationalize order resources, for hackers to break order network security, and for other, less coherent acts. Voices speak out in support of psions, but their words are drowned out by the public's cries of concern and panic.

The *Æon* Trinity

The *Æon* Trinity's leaders think in the long term — years, decades, even centuries. They try to allow room for unpredictable changes, but they're happiest with a situation whose broad parameters do not change. *Æon* itself is dedicated to controlling those parameters to eliminate any possible surprise and chaos. The Huang-Marr conspiracy is an unforeseen ripple, but the Trinity is well-equipped to compensate for it. The Chromatic invasion, however, is a complete surprise.

Æon's first reaction is simple: It needs time to prepare an effective, coordinated defense — publicly and behind the scenes — that won't just make things worse later on. All *Æon* Trinity actions in *Heaven Through Iron Gates* relate to this concern, as detailed below:

- Get more information. The Karroo mission to retrieve Chromatic specimens and information is the highest priority. The Trinity must discover how the aliens learned Earth's location and how they traveled here. *Æon* must gain an accurate appraisal of the enemy before it can take appropriate action.

- Forestall premature action. *Æon*'s institutional memory recalls times in centuries past when failure resulted from reflexive response to an unknown situation. The hastily organized UN inves-

tigation will, *Æon* hopes, keep potential rabble-rousers, political grandstanders and other sources of trouble busy long enough for *Æon* to formulate and present its own plan.

- Control the flow of information. By sending the characters to Karroo, *Æon* removes them from the scene while it formulates a response to psi-order malfeasance. The characters will be fit into this plan upon their return. *Æon* operatives also set to work influencing the media, governments and the UN to downplay the crisis as much as possible.

This all might seem Machiavellian, but *Æon* archives document two centuries of sorrow and suffering. The Trinity absolutely will not allow humanity to plunge into another such era. There can be no hope nor unity — nor even meaningful sacrifice — in the midst of complete chaos.

Operatives and Associates

People who work with the *Æon* Trinity generally fall into one of two categories: operative or associate.

An operative, also called an agent, is a full-fledged member of *Æon*. The person works for the Trinity full-time, has access to the organization's resources (at least as much as his Status allows) and benefits from *Æon*'s complete trust. Being an operative means the character may answer to only the *Æon* Trinity. *Æon* keeps a close eye on its personnel and expects staunch loyalty. An operative almost always has the *Æon* Trinity as his Allegiance.

An associate is someone who devotes up to half her time working with the *Æon* Trinity. An associate may otherwise work for a psi order, a government, a private company or may follow her own pursuits. The person works for *Æon* on a contract basis; like an operative, an associate has access to the Trinity's resources as far as her Status allows. However, *Æon* does not bestow the same level of trust to an associate as it does to an operative. Each associate is valued highly, but the Trinity never forgets that an associate does not have *Æon*'s goals foremost in mind. Her loyalty is diluted by service to another group. An associate may answer to more than one master (although her non-*Æon* responsibilities usually take priority). However, she has the opportunity to take on missions of interest to both — or either — group.

The United Nations

This organization does its best to guide humanity. The *Æon* Trinity provides useful support and guidance, but the UN is not *Æon*'s lackey. Similarly, though China, the UAN and Brazil are significant socio-political powers, the UN does its best to maintain an objective view.

The UN cannot ignore concerns raised by the Huang-Marr conspiracy. Humanity is already close to the edge with Aberrant attacks growing more coordinated, and psions are still far too much of an unknown for the UN's comfort. The UN hopes that it can complete its investigation quickly and provide the public with a list of culprits that leaves the majority of psions in the clear. Frankly, the UN doesn't want to consider what could happen if two — or possibly more — psi orders prove to be utterly corrupt.

The Media

The media is having a field day. Corrupt psions, invading aliens — it just needs a romance angle to cover all the bases. Dedicated journalists attempt to discover the truth behind the hysteria, but there are enough flash rags screaming headlines that reasonable investigation is lost in the hype. No matter how positive the information the UN uncovers, psi orders' public reputations have suffered a staggering blow — the *Æsculapians* and *Orgotek* most of all.

From Earth to Karroo

All *Æon* divisions set to work simultaneously to coordinate Operation: Revelation. Neptune directs the jump ship *Shaka* to be readied and deals with whatever governments and institutions to which characters are accountable. Triton compiles data on Chromatics and Karroo for the mission. Proteus assembles a strike team to support the characters in achieving their mission objective.

The characters arrive at Neptune headquarters at the tail end of this preparation. If they come by ground transport, the characters are exposed to the lower levels' anachronistic 1920s decor. If they are brought in by a Trinity associate, the craft lands on the roof of the Chicago Cube. It's a dramatic flight, through clouds and across Lake Michigan to the arcological sprawl of the Chicago waterfront, culminating in a vertical descent between taller structures to the Cube's broad top. Proteus security meets the team at either entrance (although security at street level is disguised as a

Special Equipment

Special bioware restraints are obviously of paramount importance to the mission. *Shaka* carries 11 Chromatic restraints; all that *Æon*, Orgotek and the *Æsculapians* managed to make before the mission's departure. Ramirez covers the restraints' and the transmitter's basic operation (they're described in *Technology*, page 110) and encourages the characters to study them further. The devices aren't fool-proof and Ramirez cautions the psions to be very careful with them.

The characters also receive an experimental drug to help keep a Chromatic subdued once it's captured. *Æon* has studied enough of the aliens' physiology that it has a fair idea of what chemicals can knock out a Chromatic without killing it. The sedative renders an alien unconscious for about six hours. The drug was synthesized hastily, though, so characters have only 12 doses.

Aside from the biotech and drugs, the characters are equipped with combat gear. *Æon* provides the characters with sonics, tasers and netguns (see *Trinity*, pages 263 to 266), since the characters are supposed to capture, not kill, Chromatics. Characters can bring along their own weapons as well, although slugthrowers and flechettes are recommended due to the aliens' ability to diffuse energy attacks.

Protection is also important. Each character has a military vac suit. They're just as described in *Trinity* (see *VES* or vac suit, page 269), except the military version has ceramic inserts for a total of [2/4, 1] protection.

The characters are expected to return this equipment after the mission concludes.

pleasant receptionist wearing a subdued business suit). The characters wait only a minute or two before Special Agent Hector Ramirez arrives to escort them on a short elevator ride to an interior conference facility.

Deputy Director Giorgios Alekandros Gamemenos awaits the team in the room. His presence reinforces the mission's importance; Gamemenos heads up *Æon*'s extraterrestrial affairs. He takes the time to greet each character and thank them all for their recent efforts. After

some small talk (designed to make the characters feel more comfortable), Gamemenos lets his subordinate take the floor.

Ramirez explains that the characters are to apprehend Chromatic leaders in the Crab Nebula and discover the race's full capabilities. The few aliens taken alive in the recent raid were interrogated with a variety of experimental bioware devices, but it's apparent that they know little. *Æon* thinks the aliens were chosen for the raid because of their lack of sensitive knowledge. Indeed, the captured Chromatics simply don't know — or care — how they got from their homeworld to Earth: "Pilots make the ships go. Soldiers fight."

As with any interstellar jaunt, the trip to the Crab Nebula takes some time — a couple weeks. However, learning more about the aliens is worth the tremendous time and expense of sending a Leviathan. If characters express concern that the Chromatics may strike Earth while they're gone, Gamemenos smiles. He agrees that it's a valid point. However, until the characters return, they must hope that Earth's forces can take care of any other stabs the aliens make.

The characters go to Karroo with one UN/Legions frigate and two UAN frigates, as well as with a Ministry telepath. Gamemenos assures the characters that all operatives act as support — the characters themselves are in charge of the actual capture. Additionally, the characters will have special bioware with which to restrain Chromatic captives, as well as a device that will allow the characters to take part in telepathic contact during interrogation.

Sealing the Deal

Ramirez and Gamemenos discuss Operation: Revelation's parameters in the larger context. They cover the first two priorities described under *The Æon Trinity*, page 25, conveniently overlooking the fact that having the characters out of the Solar System negates the possibility of them saying something potentially damaging at the UN hearings. The officials also point out the opportunities for prestige and advancement associated with this mission. Humanity's saviors reap rewards of various sorts.

Ramirez and Gamemenos play on each character's Nature and Allegiance. Although the characters may not know it, *Æon* has extensive profiles on each of them by now, and it's not above exploiting these loyalties for humanity's good.

Allegiance to *Æon* is addressed easily. Allegiance to a psi order or government, while requiring a different focus, is little more difficult. Various psi orders and human governments might seem to have good reasons for characters to address specific issues or problems other than the Chromatic threat. The FSA might want to know more about Orgotek's corruption, for example, and asks allied characters to look into it. However, humanity must turn its attention from the relatively petty concerns of an already dissolved conspiracy and turn to the danger of hostile aliens. Specific issues can be resolved after a threat to the very Earth itself is resolved. All psi orders and governments can hopefully recognize this need.

Characters' Natures allow for even more manipulation:

- Intellectually oriented characters (Analyst, Critic, Judge) face the opportunity to unravel intellectual problems of unrivaled complexity and mystery in the form of Chromatics' interstellar travel.

- Characters oriented toward social order (Bureaucrat, Follower, Traditionalist) can help preserve order in the face of unprecedented chaotic threat.

- Characters oriented toward social change (Architect, Rebel, Visionary) have the chance to apply their discoveries to redirect humanity's course from its current pettiness.

- Challenge-oriented characters (Explorer, Martyr, Survivor) face incalculable odds and the opportunity for unimaginable discoveries and experiences.

- Characters in for the action and danger (Bravo, Hedonist, Thrillseeker) can take a ride across vast distances, see the bizarre Karroo colony firsthand, and have a chance to fight Chromatics.

During this entire scene, you should never state (but may imply) that one reason for this mission is to get the characters out of the way. **Descent into Darkness** and **Passage Through Shadow** contained revelations powerful enough to shake even the most loyal psion's beliefs, and the Trinity doesn't want to take any chances right now. *Æon* must gain control of the present circumstances if it hopes to head off disaster. Since it can't be certain what characters might say at the UN investigation, *Æon* prefers to take them out of the equation.

Up the Well

Time is of the essence, as the characters should know by now. Any questions they have must be answered en route to the jump ship *Shaka*. Ramirez leaves the characters, claiming he must go speak with UN representatives about its investigation. Gamemenos leads the characters to an awaiting hopper (whatever luggage they brought was loaded on during the meeting) that takes them to Chicago's Mercer Spaceport. A quick transfer later and they're feeling the by-now familiar crush of g-forces as a high-speed shuttle lifts off to rendezvous with *Shaka*.

The shuttle reaches the awaiting jump ship in just over an hour. *Shaka*, in Lunar orbit, carries less than its regular full crew and ship complement since it's being readied on such short notice. The mission includes:

- A jump-ship crew of 50, all *Æon* operatives or associates skilled in mechanics, engineering, communications and sensor maintenance and repair. Each shift requires 20 people, so some crew members must take double shifts. *Æon* convinced Orgotek and the Legions to trade the convenience of more crew members for a faster launch.

- Three Kestrel-class frigates, *Widkin* (a UN/Legions registry) and *Niger* and *Biko* (UAN registries) and their crews.

- 24 E-15 and 10 Locust-C hybrid fighters, and two MUT-01 "Mutt" transports, all docked to *Shaka* and the frigates.

All craft but the Mutts are described in **Trinity**, starting on page 284 (the Mutts are described on page 111).

The fleet is an imposing sight — the gigantic yet eerily graceful jump ship with massive frigates and tiny hybrids sprouting from its sides, the Moon hanging starkly brilliant in the background. The Leviathans are the pride of psion development and a triumph of human science. The characters are about to leave the Solar System aboard the most valuable piece of equipment humanity has ever created, to capture dangerous aliens. Convey this sense of wonder and import as the characters approach *Shaka*.

The shuttle docks with the jump ship. While service personnel off-load the characters' gear, Gamemenos takes them to the Leviathan's bridge.

The characters encounter Robert Linsey Marsden in the opalescent corridor leading to the bridge. The player of a Legionnaire or longtime

Æon-affiliated character can make a standard **Academics** roll to recognize the name. Two extra successes indicates that the character knows Marsden spent much of his Legions career studying Aberrant tactics, while three extra successes brings to mind that Marsden recently began a similar pursuit of Chromatic methods. Marsden greets the team in typically gruff fashion, stating that he's got a ship to get underway and doesn't have time to shoot the shit.

Marsden waves dismissively and stalks off, barking into a comlink about ready status. Gamemenos looks nonplused; although Marsden comes off as crude, he is a natural leader. The assistant director further explains that Marsden recently joined Æon as a full operative. He's in charge of getting the characters to Karroo safely. Once there, Marsden coordinates frigate support to protect *Shaka* against any hostiles, leaving the characters to pursue their capture mission. Gamemenos cautions that Marsden maintains command of the jump ship and frigates at all times. The characters are to concern themselves purely with capturing and interrogating Chromatics.

The characters soon reach *Shaka's* bridge. It's a surprisingly small chamber for such a large ship, located in the upper front part of the Leviathan.

Bioglass panels above various control consoles look out into space, while the sides of the room display all manner of biotech and hardtech controls and circuitry. Close to the characters' entry corridor (and between an evidently similar corridor leading somewhere else into the ship) stands an ARES pod (see **Trinity**, page 277).

A woman and man talk to one another as they look out the forward view panel. The woman, Konstanze Feist, wears a complicated bodysuit (a standard **Engineering** roll confirms that it's a MARS suit, the complement to the ARES). The man, Robert Wei, wears a Chinese military uniform.

Feist is *Shaka's* clairsentient pilot. Characters who took part in **Descent into Darkness'** third episode, *The Downward Spiral*, should recognize Wei. He is the Ministry psion who allowed the characters to interrogate the captured Huang-Marr conspirators in the aftermath of Summit Center's destruction on Mars.

Gamemenos introduces everyone; Feist is quietly polite, while Wei seems pleased to see the characters again (or interested to meet them for the first time if they hadn't met in the previous episode). Gamemenos explains that Wei brought



those same prisoners to Earth during the events of **Passage Through Shadow**. Æon wants a skilled telepath on this mission (if the characters have one or more in their team, Wei is included as backup in case of complications), and Wei has experience in investigation and interrogation techniques.

If the characters did meet Wei before, Gamemenos points out that it only made sense to have them work together again. Apparently China's Ministry was more than willing to assign Wei to Operation: Revelation. Also, allow the characters to wonder at the odd coincidence that Æon has key personnel (the characters and Wei), who know many details behind Huang-Marr, about to leave near space. What's a little paranoia among friends, after all?

The Jump

Marsden, with a half-dozen members of the bridge crew, bursts back upon the bridge before the characters can do little more than engage in small talk. *Shaka* is ready to go, so Gamemenos wishes them all luck and departs. Marsden, along more for his tactical skill than his naval experience, lets the crew perform final duties with minimal interruptions. (If anyone asks, Marsden is a last-minute replacement for *Shaka*'s previous commander, Roland Thompson, who's recuperating from a flight accident.)

The characters are directed to flight chairs along the side of the bridge. Once buckled in, they have a majestic view of the Leviathan's spokes stretching forward and pointing the way. This view also reveals the "tugboat" that hauls *Shaka* from Lunar orbit and off the plane of the ecliptic to jump.

The tug, little more than a powerful engine, tows *Shaka* for one day to a safe jump distance. After the initial acceleration surge, the characters can unbuckle and use this time to discuss plans or talk with Storyteller characters. Otherwise fast-forward to the jump itself.

Characters familiar with the first jump-ship processes may marvel that *Shaka* can jump so close to Earth. Feist is more than happy to explain the improvements to the Tesser made since the first jumps. Although the technicians haven't reduced the recharge time (in fact, field use shows these times take longer than the first tests indicated), they have refined many of the processes that resulted in massive subquantum waves. The ship still gives off tremendous backlash when jumping, but can do so far closer to Earth than before. (Feist's explanation involves detailed mention of physics

and noetics terms that quickly baffle all but the most dedicated scientists.)

Once at a safe distance, the tugboat disengages and turns for home. Feist takes the helm, reorienting *Shaka*'s trajectory and checking her systems before entering the ARES pod. The characters soon feel a steady hum through the bridge floor that quickly becomes a powerful throbbing. All psion characters sense this effect strongly on a noetic level, as if psionic force is being drawn together in waves — which is essentially what's happening. Feist triggers the ship's Tesser, which now warms to full power. The characters see a bright light flare beyond the Leviathan's forward spokes, then they all "fall down" a bright tunnel as the ship heads for Karroo.

Travel

Chronometers on the ship note that the trip through subquantum space (or "subspace") takes a matter of hours — not that the characters are in much shape to check. They spend the entire time confused, as though drunk or dreaming, not readily capable of complex thought. Many of the people onboard *Shaka* take sleeping pills or strong sedatives just beforehand to relax through the trip. See **Trinity Field Report: Extrasolar Colonies** for further information on subquantum jumps.

Feist emerges from the ARES after *Shaka* manifests thousands of kilometers from Karroo (about two days out). She's obviously tired and the rest of the bridge crew is disoriented, but since this is *Shaka*'s third time out they quickly fall into routine. Once the crew confirms that all systems are online, Feist sinks back in her control chair and explains that they'll determine the actual transit time after reaching Karroo. The colony operates as closely as it can to Lunar Standard Time, and should indicate how far off *Shaka*'s subjective time is from real time. In truth, the characters emerge from subspace three days after they left Earth space.

The Nebula Flare

The Leviathan heads in uneventfully at first. However, less than nine hours from the colony, one of the Crab Nebula's periodic astronomical dangers occurs. Over-stressed magnetic fields snap into a new configuration along the Pocket's edge, sending electromagnetic flares arcing across space.

For *Shaka* it's like entering a pitched space battle. None of the giga-kilometer lightning bolts actually strike the jump ship, but they don't have to. Their close passage is enough to send massive surges throughout *Shaka's* electrical systems. The Leviathan takes four Structural Levels of damage.

The attached frigates and hybrids are partially insulated by *Shaka* itself. *Widkin* and *Biko* take two Structural Levels each while *Niger* takes three. Three E-15s and four Locusts are destroyed outright, but the remaining hybrids take only one Structural Level apiece.

Systems overload throughout the jump ship, casting showers of sparks and starting small fires. Damage-control resources are strained to the limit in seconds. If you want to add a personal touch to things, require each player to make a standard **Athletics** roll to save his character from taking a level of Bashing damage from random knocks. The barrage lasts only seconds but damage control takes longer. Marsden orders *Widkin* detached to provide perimeter defense as *Shaka* limps in to Karroo at half normal engine capacity.

Characters may contribute to repair efforts, although the worst must wait until *Shaka* reaches Karroo (see Repairing Vehicle Damage in **Trinity**, page 279). Note that repair times take two to three times the normal rates. The colony lacks all but the bare minimum biotechnological facilities. Everything beyond the basics must be rigged or improvised almost from scratch — that takes time, even when biotech engineers know what they're doing.

The official damage report arrives as Karroo comes into view: Basic systems will be back online in a day, but the Tesser will take at least three days to repair using the parts on hand. The crew has a full schedule ahead of it, and the three frigates will have that much harder of a time defending a craft that can barely move.

At Karroo

Marsden transmits *Shaka's* condition to Karroo traffic control during the approach; a reception group waits at the dock. Mayor N'gamba's executive assistant Notse Eyadema leads the welcoming contingent. Eyadema is a vigorous, athletic man of about 30; his build shows his past as champion in several intertribal competitions. He's new to the business of governance, and is constantly surprised to find that he's good at it.

Eyadema is concerned about *Shaka's* condition and offers whatever assistance Karroo can lend.

Marsden is appreciative, but leaves the details to the repair crew. In the meantime, he and the mission team (the characters and Wei) should meet with Karroo's mayor.

The route to the mayor's office takes them through half a dozen colony modules. You can use this opportunity to offer glimpses into various aspects of Karroo life, including:

- **Design.** All module exterior surfaces are in a limited range of gray and brown tints, showing their origins as asteroidal slag. Within this sameness, though, Karroo is a riot of color and texture. The inhabitants of each deck improvise wall hangings, paint schemes and other forms of decoration. The *trompe l'oeil* art of painting that looks like windows (or openings in floors or ceilings) flourishes throughout Karroo, in many cases replacing the modern version of *faux vistas* popular back on Earth. Scenes include authentic images of the space around Karroo, terrestrial landscapes and fantasy images.

- **Tribal motifs.** As noted under "Social Division in Karroo" (page 20), tribal identity helps keep Karroo's people from drifting into boredom and psychosis. Most modules host groups that identify with one large or any of several small-but-related tribes. The different environments reflect those identities with art, music and other cultural references that draw on tribal heritage.

- **Audio sampling.** Although humans have a relatively poor sense of hearing, we still derive a lot of subconscious information about our environment from sound. Through a combination of trapping ambient sounds and generating new ones through complex arrays of speakers, sonic engineers can feed in cues that make an environment seem like something other than just thousands of meters of fabricated module. Karroo uses such technology to convey a sense of open space as opposed to physical confinement.

- **Music.** Most individuals have music of some kind in their personal quarters, and work groups with similar preferences make use of background music. Music is uncommon in public areas, though; it presents too much potential for disagreement. Mayor N'gamba places few restrictions on live music, and actively encourages live performances. Simply viewing such events helps reduce tension and provides more satisfaction than consuming pre-recorded entertainment.



Meeting the Mayor

The characters, Wei and Marsden meet Karroo's mayor in a good-sized but unassuming office. Photographs, paintings, star charts and sculptures adorn the walls, but lend a sense of comfort rather than pretension. There is a small meeting table to one side. The mayor's desk sits before a heavily shielded plexi panel that looks out on the nebula.

Mayor Susan N'gamba is at her desk when the group enters. She is a handsome woman in her mid-50s who rose to political leadership after Karroo's exile. It isn't her first choice of employment, but she was best-suited to take the job. N'gamba's military background is especially useful in light of ongoing Chromatic hostilities.

Although obviously tired from the stress of the job, N'gamba also looks freshly agitated. *Shaka's* return, so soon after its last departure, surely means added complications. Even so, Mayor N'gamba is courteous (though efficient) in her dealings with the characters.

During the course of the conversation, a successful **Rapport** roll indicates that the mayor ap-

pears slightly distracted, as though worried about something in addition to the subject at hand. If asked, she merely refers vaguely to the stresses of administration.

Characters with **Telepathy** may be tempted to probe away and unravel this (and other) mysteries on the spot. There are several ways to shut such characters down. Most immediately, N'gamba has high Willpower and strong Psi, and is likely to resist and detect telepathic intrusion. Furthermore, she has half a decade of practice at masking her thoughts — especially about her secret psionic Aptitude. Finally, almost everyone regards telepathic probing without explicit permission as rude, even illegal in some places.

Characters who read N'gamba's biography (starting on page 13) are likely to use **Attunement** to sense her psionic aura. Attunement is a passive talent, and may be done without seeming rude. N'gamba does indeed have a strong aura, confirming that she has psi potential. It's impossible to determine if she is latent or active, though; presumably the former if her bio is to be believed. She brushes questions about her latency aside as not relevant to the current situation.

Explaining the Mission

The characters should take no more than a few minutes to explain Æon's concerns. If they fail to emphasize the mission's importance, Wei or Marsden adds clarifying remarks. N'gamba should get the message that humanity's very existence is at risk.

N'gamba rose through the ranks by dealing promptly with crises. Once she understands the full import of what the characters say, she offers enthusiastic support, even voicing a wish that she could join in the hunt for Chromatics. (She is a skilled military tactician, and it'd be a nice change from administration.) But Karroo needs her attention. N'gamba helps expedite the characters' mission instead, providing them with access to Karroo's equipment and labs.

The mayor suggests the following people would provide the best aid:

- Fatima Tomussa, chief of astronomical facilities
- Inge Stalaski, chief of security and defense
- Ruth Sharon Kowokole, chief of mining operations

N'gamba says she will contact each person. She observes that the characters should probably rest before conducting any further meetings, especially since Karroo is going on night cycle. Marsden leaves to check on the ships' status, but is available should the characters need him. Wei is effectively part of the characters' team at this point, so he goes with them.

Eyadema acts as guide, taking the characters to rooms on Karroo (although the characters can stay on *Shaka* if they're paranoid), and chaperoning them around the next day. Eyadema plans to take the characters to see Tomussa, Stalaski and then Kowokole. However, they can be encountered in any order the characters wish.

Meeting the Astronomer

Although still in her 20s — she was barely an adult when Karroo was isolated — Fatima Tomussa oversees Karroo's astronomical facilities. Her brilliance in both scientific research and management is unmatched in all the nebula.

Astronomy is located in the Ootel Industrial Module. It follows the standard residential module design, modified to accommodate many telescopes and other sensory equipment. Telescopes are set along the complex's long axis. Pseudo-gravity grids are located in the walls and beneath telescope plat-

forms. The entire setup is a bit Escher-like, since "down" and "up" change depending on which platform you're standing. Characters who fail a standard **Willpower** test become disoriented while in Ootel (+1 difficulty to any roll requiring close concentration).

The characters undoubtedly want information on known Chromatic sites in the nebula. Tomussa laughs at this request and produces detailed records (the data starting on page 11 is simply an overview). She has a good grasp of where most Chromatics hide; studying the Crab Nebula in close proximity leads to studying its other inhabitants. Tomussa confirms that the Chromatics here belong to an outpost; Karroo has yet to find anything remotely resembling a home planet for the aliens.

Tomussa explains that the Chromatics used to have a main base on the Karroo side of the Shield. A trio of Upeo destroyed it before vanishing themselves — although Tomussa puts the date of that destruction at 2116, two years *after* the teleporters disappeared from Earth. She can provide no explanation for the Upeo's (comparatively) recent visitation. The three jumpers were close-mouthed and stayed only a short time. It's a significant mystery, but the characters have other priorities right now (which Wei reminds them of if need be). **Trinity Field Report: Extrasolar Colonies** provides more information on this event.

After losing the main base, the remaining Chromatics built small ones within the dense part of the Shield disk, midway between the nebula and the Pocket. "Dense" is a relative term, since the Shield isn't solid. It simply refers to the central region in which loose rocks from the size of dust specks to small moons gather. Even in the densest parts of the Shield, serious obstacles still orbit well apart from each other, at ranges of kilometers to hundreds of kilometers. (As the Shield gradually diffuses toward the outer edge, gaps extend to thousands of kilometers between asteroids to finally match the nebula's typical debris density.)

Chromatic raiding parties dart out through a "channel" cleared through 10 million kilometers of the Shield's rough axis. (Remember, the Shield is not a smooth wheel, just a loose assortment of material, so it lacks the precise axis of a flat plane or planet.)

Tomussa's staff already has several potential lines of attack to the alien outposts. Major N'gamba and her advisors follow a defensive policy regarding the Chromatics; the colony hasn't had

the resources or personnel to launch a full-scale raid. Karroo monitors Chromatic activity and responds to the aliens' infrequent raids, but seldom initiates offensive actions. *Shaka's* previous trips brought much-needed armament to help defend the colony, but Karroo hasn't finalized any counteroffensive plans.

Given the chance to lay out their ideas to a fresh audience, the astronomers quickly draw charts, call up holos and gesture vigorously. Their ideas include:

- The feint. As described on page 12, a fleet of vessels mounts a primary attack on the Chromatic front lines, while a small group (or even a single vessel) slips around the Shield to strike at vulnerable enclaves.

- The cauterization. This approach calls for identifying a Chromatic enclave on the Shield's fringe. A large human fleet interdicts it, cutting it off from contact with the rest of the Shield long enough to take alien prisoners.

- The direct push. Some Karrooans feel that the Chromatics show little grasp of space tactics. These people believe the humans should use their superior tactical abilities in a large, coordinated attack, mustering all of Karroo's firepower for a straight-on assault.

Meeting the Defender

Inge Stalaski comes across as an awesomely average man: medium build, medium complexion, calm manner, no particular mannerisms, quiet voice. He seems to have no distinguishing features whatsoever.

But as he speaks about his work, his inner nature emerges. Stalaski cares deeply about the well-being of all those at Karroo. Cooperating with fresh forces from outside the nebula therefore pleases him.

Stalaski feels that the cauterization plan is the best method of attack, since it concentrates human forces. However, he admits that high-ranking Chromatics are likely to be found further in, limiting the plan's effectiveness. Battle plans aside, Stalaski has studied Chromatic strategy and tactics, and has the following advice:

- Chromatics seem to fear dying in cold and darkness above all else. Tactics that isolate Chromatics and interfere with their light-generating abilities appear to do at least as much psychological as physical damage.

- Chromatics seem to work best in small units, the equivalent of modern military strike squads.

Individuals and large groups succumb to confusion or disorientation. Stalaski's forces help cover withdrawals from conflict by disrupting Chromatic formations.

Meeting the Miner

Ruth Sharon Kowokole is very different from the other Karroo leaders. Like Mayor N'gamba, she is one of the older colonists, and is very shy. She became introverted after a habitat module's life-support systems exploded while she was repairing them. The accident left her seriously disfigured. Karroo lacks the resources for complete reconstructive surgery, and problems with Kowokole's immune system made their efforts that much more complicated. She retains significant scarring and a fair degree of mobility impairment — she must use braces or (more commonly) a wheelchair when in greater than 0.5g.

Kowokole prefers to deal with others via agents and comlinks rather than in person. She meets with the characters face-to-face only if they insist on it. Otherwise she uses customized agents projected in industrial module hangar decks and equipment lockers to explain the devices available to characters.

The colony had relatively little time to respond to the Chromatic attacks before being cut off from Earth in 2114. As a result, Karroo was left with fewer military vehicles and weapons than needed for the long term. The colony wasn't idle in its years of isolation, instead continuing a tradition of technical innovation and fresh responses to old problems. This is illustrated in the new vehicles and weapons that the mining chief shows the characters. Kowokole takes justifiable pride in presenting each of these innovations.

The craft and weapons don't work quite like anything else the characters have encountered before, but anyone with flight or military training should quickly recognize their usefulness in the nebula. Some examples of mining ships and an ingenious weapon, the exhaust cannon, are detailed under Technology, page 112

Building the Better Mousetrap

Karroo has a mostly complete Chromatic holding facility, designed through the joint efforts of Stalaski and Kowokole's staffs. The colony pursued a long-term plan of apprehending aliens to interrogate them on its own. The hard part has been catching a live Chromatic. This is something characters involved in **Passage Through Shadow**

may have already attempted in defense of *Eyrie*. The restraint devices they have brought along provide them with a definite edge this time.

The cells occupy an industrial module not currently in use. It's spherical, with three concentric decks. Power systems occupy the innermost sphere. The middle one has space for 24 cells (only nine are finished), while the outer one is open, leaving room for security personnel and equipment to monitor each cell and its occupant.

The cells are based on Stalaski's observations that the Chromatics fear isolation, cold and dark. Each cell is three meters on a side and absolutely featureless. Inset lights can dim to complete darkness, and thermostats maintain a near-Arctic chill. An insulated tube runs from each cell to a makeshift access port on the module's outer hull. A ship carrying captured Chromatics could dock and shunt each Chromatic into its own cell in short order.

Planning the Attack

After gathering various facts, the characters must decide on a plan of attack. The final choice is up to them, although it's likely that N'gamba vetoes the direct push idea. The feint maneuver is by far the recommended method.

The feint involves having the characters take a single craft (presumably one of the Mutts) "up" or "around" the Shield and approaching one of the central Chromatic enclaves from along the pulsar side (the characters would have inertial compasses programmed with the locations of known Chromatic sites). They should go around the Shield to avoid the large enclaves, since those likely have strong defenses. Small isolated settlements are scattered on the Shield's far side, away from Karroo — and away from where human forces, led by Marsden, launch their diversionary attack.

Circumventing the Shield takes a full 22 hours from Karroo to the designated site (taking into account an average Vacuum Speed of 3, which allows for maneuvering through the Shield's asteroids). Once in position, the characters send a coded "go" signal relayed by small transmitters dropped along the way.

At that point, Marsden's forces launch an attack on the Shield's Karroo side. This should bring Chromatic forces toward Marsden's position, allowing the characters relatively easy access to sites the Chromatics leave behind.

The following details presume that the characters use this plan. However, cauterization can

work; Marsden's forces must encapsulate a site and hold it off from Chromatic reinforcements while the characters land and attempt capture. A direct push is simply a bad idea given current military resources. Characters lacking tactical skill may call upon Marsden or N'gamba for advice in the matter (both recommend the feint).

Another approach of the characters' own design may require you to modify existing information somewhat. That's fine. The feint is simply a framework for action, not a straitjacket.

Target Options

There are three Chromatic sites that look like viable targets to tactically trained individuals (N'gamba, Marsden, any characters with Command 3 or higher and/or the Tactics Specialty). Tomussa helpfully designates them Alpha, Beta and Gamma Enclaves. The Karroos aren't certain of each site's function, but they think they have a pretty good idea. Alpha seems to be an observatory of some sort; Beta appears to be an R&R facility; Gamma is probably some kind of command center. Each enclave is described in greater detail, starting on page 39.

The Mission

The characters may want to take time to plan, but they've already lost three days in subspace transit to Karroo, and who knows if the Chromatics are already attacking Earth while they dawdle? Wei and Marsden voice these very concerns if the characters don't, and push to carry out Operation: Revelation with all due speed. Meeting various personnel, discussing the plan of attack, deciding on the target and working out details among Marsden's crew and Karroo's defense forces lasts long into Karroo's next night cycle. However, the characters should launch the mission the following morning.

Shaka is still in rough shape after a day, with only basic maneuvering and weapons capabilities. Frigate crews and Karroo's engineering staff haven't had the time or resources to repair all three frigates. Instead, they focused their efforts on the less damaged *Widkin* and *Biko* — even scavenging some parts from *Niger*. The first two are fully operational (though each is still down one Structural Level). *Niger* is little more than a floating weapons platform. The workers use the remains of the ruined fighters to effect repairs on the less damaged hybrids. The 21 E-15s, six Locust-Cs and two Mutts are singed and dented, but fully operational.

Whatever the characters' final plan, *Shaka*, *Niger* and 10 fighters aren't a part of it. The jump ship sits with Karroo between it and the Shield, with *Niger* next to it providing defense. The fighters (seven E-15s and three Locusts) offer mobile support.

The remaining craft — minus the ship(s) the characters use to slip around to the desired Chromatic enclave — make the frontal assault. Karroo also supplies four exhaust cannons and six of the miners' single-man "Ones" to take part in the diversion; although slow on their own, these ships can be docked temporarily to the frigates.

The characters should probably take only one of the Mutts, possibly with a hybrid or two for support. The characters should want speed and stealth over heavy-duty firepower. (The Mutts are provided to serve as the characters' primary transport; the ships' cargo bays can hold any Chromatic captives until the aliens are off-loaded into cells.)

Additionally, a character may want to engage in holding off Chromatics, flying one of the fighters or even one of the mining craft. He's welcome to do so; however, he can't take part in the actual on-site capture of aliens. It's up to the characters to decide, of course — just so long as *somebody* kidnaps Chromatics.

Departure

Karroo lies eight million kilometers from the Shield's near side — roughly a 12-hour trip at Vacuum Speed 3 (or six hours at VS 4). If the characters perform the feint maneuver, they spend another 10 hours negotiating the edge and far side of the Shield, traveling at VS 3 (VS 4 is too fast to traverse the asteroid field safely; a character who tries makes all **Pilot** rolls at +2 difficulty). They may use this time to get acquainted with whatever Storyteller characters they've brought with them on their raid and/or to prepare for the actual infiltration. Psions may wish to focus on rest and rebuilding any expended Psi, so as to operate at maximum capacity during the hunt.

Imposing from a distance, the Shield is truly impressive up close. Its center looks like an endless wall, stretching off into the distance in all directions. Straight ahead, almost no light shines through from the nebula beyond. There's only a faint red glow from dust clouds warmed into incandescence.

The Shield has no sharp edge marking its outer limit, only a decreasing accumulation of asteroids heading out from the center. The cumulative effect is like looking through a break in low-lying clouds,

only to see higher clouds beyond — it's asteroids, and more asteroids, and always more, off until the "horizon" blurs. The inner nebula lies past a volume of asteroid-filled space of 46 million kilometers (roughly a third the distance from Earth to the sun).

The feint maneuver doesn't take the characters all the way around the Shield. They will want to traverse a relatively safe route through it, though, and skirt around Chromatic installations. This involves going far enough through the edge that the Shield becomes noticeably thinner than at its center, and then going through to the relatively empty space on the other side. Relay transmitters deposited along the way mark the return course.

Staying Behind

Heaven Through Iron Gates assumes the characters head up the mission to capture live Chromatics. That need not be the case. A character recovering from injuries or lacking expertise in zero-g maneuvering and combat may wish to wait at Karroo during the hunt. If so, he has three days to spend while the capture team heads to the Shield, carries out its plan and returns.

During this time, a character can explore Karroo, interacting with its population. The department heads provide some idea of the range of personalities found at Karroo. Consult **Trinity**, **Extrasolar Colonies** and this episode's setting section for potential plot threads. Karroo offers many interesting features:

- Routine mining operations, including trips to and from the Shield or the edge of the Pocket.
- Judging (or participating in) intertribal athletic, musical, artistic or other competitions.
- Fending off or yielding to the romantic advances of Karrooans who haven't seen many newcomers for five years.
- Helping repair the ships or even parts of the colony.



Rounding the Shield

The characters proceed in a Mutt, fully equipped with weapons, basic bioVARGs and Chromatic restraints. Half a dozen relay satellites clamp to the ship's hull, for release at appropriate intervals.

As the ship approaches the Shield's edge, the density of surrounding nebula gases rises. This creates a sharp boundary between the relatively calm Pocket space and the outer nebula space. Visually, the transition is spectacular: The ship moves out of shadow into bright nebula light and a tangled flow of blue-white gases. The gases are far more rarefied than a planetary atmosphere, but they seem opaque over tens of light years.

Traversing this boundary is challenging. The pilot's player makes a standard **Pilot** roll to maneuver safely through the transition zone. If successful, the pilot holds the ship steady through the buffeting gases. On a failure, the ship loses one Handling level; on a botch, the ship loses a number of Structural Levels equal to the botches rolled.

The astronomers and soldiers worked out what they think is a safe course, but there's no

accounting for the unexpected — as mission planners were the first to point out. The pilot must make three more rolls inside the Shield, for a total of four. **Farsensing** (either by the pilot or by a character relaying information) adds a die to the pilot character's Dice Pool. Additionally, each success on the **Pilot** roll reduces transit time by an hour (to a minimum of five hours). To create more drama than simply, "you pass more rocks," a few circumstances are provided that describe the events of a **Pilot** roll.

- An asteroid with pockets of volatile gases cracks under impact with a small asteroid. The gases jet out like rocket exhaust, sending the large asteroid hurtling through space. The pilot must detect the incoming asteroid — against the "background noise" of countless others in constant motion — and take evasive action. If the **Pilot** roll fails, the ship suffers a Structural Level of damage.

- One of the nebula's infrequent electrical discharges occurs. The result is a small-scale electrical storm like the one that zapped *Shaka* as it approached Karroo. If the **Pilot** roll fails, the ship suffers a Structural Level of damage.

- A dense gas cloud, difficult to make out against the background of the nebula, crosses the ship's path. If the **Pilot** roll fails, the gas clogs the engines and abrades the windows, cameras and anything else pointing out the front (or nebula) side of the ship. The ship's Handling is reduced by one and it loses a Structural Level.

- A pre-stellar mass close to the pulsar erupts into a premature nova, creating a brief shower of charged particles. This affects the ship much like an internal power surge and may inflict radiation damage on the characters (leaving lingering consequences even though the shock wave passes quickly). If the **Pilot** roll fails, the ship's Handling is reduced by one, any number of malfunctions may occur, and characters could each suffer one Lethal Health Level due to radiation exposure.

- The pulsar suddenly flares blindingly bright; anyone looking out that half of the ship must make a standard **Athletics** roll to turn away in time. Failure means the character is effectively blinded for the next hour (see **Trinity**, page 246). A successful **Pilot** roll avoids the worst effects of this phenomenon.

- A dead Chromatic, killed by something like the phenomena above or something as mundane as explosive decompression, drifts into view. It takes a very close approach to confirm that the Chromatic is dead (although they aren't known to be able to survive in vacuum), and thoroughly mummified.

The characters can attempt emergency repairs on any damage sustained in transit. The shortage of tools and the stress of the situation put **Engineering** rolls at +1 difficulty. External damage requires a spacewalk to fix. This isn't dangerous in itself, thanks to magnetic clamps and backup nylon-composite ropes. Spacewalking does provide for dramatic scenery and tension, though.

The Distraction

Once the characters are in position, they send the signal to Marsden's fleet. Only a couple of minutes later, the relays forward the message that the feint is underway. It soon becomes apparent (studying ship sensors or through clairsentient scans) that Chromatic forces take the bait. Drive flares appear throughout the Shield's axial region in the spots Karroo confirmed as Chromatic enclaves. Numerous alien ships head off to engage Marsden's forces, leaving the characters a relatively open avenue to their target.

Draw on the following information if any of the characters take part in the feint — or simply if you want to heighten the drama for the team.

The human fleet — comprised of almost 30 hybrid craft and 10 mining ships backed by the frigate *Widkin* and *Biko's* significant firepower — move toward a concentration of Chromatic enclaves opposite where the characters are headed. The Chromatics scramble 40 of their fighters, joined within 15 minutes by another 20 craft. Characters involved in this fight who did not take part in **Passage Through Shadow's** battle for *Eyrie* should find this first direct encounter disturbing. Although distinctly alien, the Chromatic ships are eerily similar to old human biocraft designs.

How Chromatics Fight

Chromatics are a highly cunning race; skilled warriors use psionic talents to disguise their true locations or to create false images to confuse the enemy. Psi powers aside, Chromatics are fast and strong for their size, their natural predatory instincts serving them well in combat. Local humans have seen firsthand the aliens' skill in close combat when the Chromatics have gained entry to Karroo or human ships.

Unfortunately for the Chromatics, these talents don't extend completely to space combat. Very few of the aliens can cloak an entire fighter craft, and although agile, they've been flying for only a few years. Add to that the fact that the Chromatic race fears absolute darkness and cold — the two key elements of space. In the end, Chromatics are at a serious disadvantage against human opponents in vacuum. If Karroo forces knew these full details, N'gamba would probably have launched a major offensive some time ago.

However, the Chromatics have superior numbers. Their biofighters compensate for lack of training by ganging up on human fighters (usually three-to-one). They also try to hide and/or sneak up on large ships, such as the frigates, for a surprise boarding. Much as they fear space, the warriors try to channel that fear into aggression against opponents. The most courageous of them are practiced at leaping from ship to ship. Once inside a human craft, Chromatics become much more dangerous opponents.

The Karrooans are familiar with these tactics, and Marsden made a point of getting up to speed on the details. Humans therefore favor engaging the Chromatics at a distance. The aliens aren't foolish enough to be drawn out into open space. While human forces start outside the Shield's main concentration in the relatively clear

space of the Pocket, Chromatic fighters hide behind asteroids and take pot shots at human forces until they finally engage.

Even at the Shield's edge, the proliferation of asteroids and tatters of nebula gas make for tricky maneuvering. Both forces use huge asteroids — from a few dozen meters to a kilometer or more in diameter — as temporary cover, while simultaneously trying to avoid running into the smaller rocks. The battle takes place in a kind of deadly slow motion.

The Abduction

Tomussa and staff have identified several promising targets for the characters' attack: sites well away from large enclaves but still likely to hold a few Chromatics who probably perform sensitive duties for the race. The three enclaves dubbed Alpha, Beta and Gamma share the same basic design template (although their interiors vary with their individual functions).

The Chromatics are very new to space development and stick with designs that they know work. Each enclave runs through a roughly 500-meter-diameter asteroid with an entrance on either end: a main hangar big enough for a single hybrid-class ship and a smaller hangar sufficient for docking (or for individual exit). A nine-meter-wide central corridor runs between them, linked to the two exits through airlocks. Smaller passages branch off from the main to form separate tunnel networks: living quarters, communal areas, work spaces, storage.

None of the corridors are smoothed out completely; rough walls give Chromatics better hand- and footholds to use when moving in the natural microgravity (and it reminds them of home). Entry into a chamber is gained through a relatively small opening (Chromatics are smaller and more limber than humans), with a thick, heavy door "plug" made of biomaterial. The enclaves are all located in mineral-rich asteroids; light gleams off veins of various rare or precious metals.

The enclaves are powered by biotech solar collectors (characters confirm on a standard **Science** roll that all Chromatic technology is apparently comprised of rudimentary biotech designs). Large collector panels wrap over much of the enclave-asteroid's exterior on the pulsar side. Power and life-support conduits snake throughout the interior. Pseudo-gravity is notably absent.

Each enclave can hold a full contingent of up to 40 Chromatics. Most combat-trained aliens went to assist in driving off the human forces, leaving between three and six warrior guards. The remaining occupants are not practiced fighters (although Chromatics are dangerous predators even without combat training). The number of noncombatant occupants in each site is listed with the respective enclave description.

Alpha Enclave

Alpha Enclave lies closest to the Crab pulsar, mere thousands of kilometers inside the Shield. The tunnels branching from the main corridor end in a series of different chambers that look out on the pulsar side of the nebula. Each contains a variety of alien equipment. A standard **Science** roll confirms that this facility appears to be an observatory, but it would require much more intensive investigation (and more time than the characters have) to discern the specific function of each device.

A small-scale manufacturing facility, split into a half-dozen small "shops," occupies the side of the asteroid facing away from the pulsar. Chromatics have a lot to learn about making tools on a mass scale. But as with science, they work hard at it. The shops contain many broken and unfinished pieces. Characters who take the time to study the items (a standard **Investigation** roll) notice that the level of workmanship rises steadily from old pieces to new ones.

Tomussa is right that Alpha is primarily an observatory, but not in quite the way she thinks. The Chromatics are new to the world of high technology, but study it diligently. They combine their scientific curiosity with a religious zeal found in few human scientists after Newton. Astronomy has a high degree of meditative or spiritual importance to the aliens. Mechanical instruments bear inscriptions of no obvious purpose to human observers; the equivalent of prayers and petitions for blessing. The Chromatics in the Crab Nebula hold to the religious aspects even more strongly than do their homeworlders. The aliens are cut off from their planet and the race's accumulated wisdom and insight. Thus Alpha Enclave isn't just a lab, but something of a church.

Chromatics hold a deep fear of complete darkness. The aliens' dominant cultures believe that darkness hides all the worst terrors known to the race — powerful, shadowy predators and other unimaginable horrors. These alien "astronomers" serve as spiritual guardians, probing the dark

reaches of space, establishing borders and routes along which to guide soldiers. Astronomers do not fight, but fulfill an important guiding and spiritual role.

The Chromatic staff here includes six astronomers and two assistants (see the noncombatant description on page 54). None of these aliens is prepared to fight, but they defend themselves if attacked. A character who uses **Pilfer** on a scientist Chromatic discovers the strong conviction that living is preferable over death in battle, even with the risk of dishonor. Surviving increases the chance to broaden the individual's knowledge for the race's greater good.

Beta Enclave

Beta Enclave lies closest to the Shield's center, about 100,000 kilometers in from the pulsar side. It conforms most strongly to the general enclave template. Most of the asteroid is solid rock, with only small shafts carved through the interior. Beta has three "levels" (though the term doesn't mean much in microgravity). Each level has nine rooms, all of which open directly onto the central shaft, as well as onto a circular hallway that runs perpendicular to the shaft. This circular corridor intersects the central shaft about a third of the way down on either side. Rooms themselves are rough and unadorned (except for portions the residents have modified themselves, as indicated below).

Beta Enclave is a sanitarium. Years of isolation in the Crab Nebula have taken their toll on many Chromatics. The aliens lack cultural and psychological tools to cope with even routine space flight, let alone being left on the frontier and constantly battling dangerous enemies. Some become sufficiently unreliable that, though not a danger to other Chromatics, they aren't useful for serious work. There are no truly mad aliens on Beta; a dangerously unbalanced Chromatic is killed. The aliens aren't heartless, but their outpost is on a constant danger footing. The Chromatics can't afford to coddle homicidal maniacs or the hopelessly insane. The aliens in Beta retain enough awareness of the universe that their fellows retain hope that the patients may recover someday.

Beta's patients/prisoners divert themselves by puzzling over the Crab pulsar and arguing various theories. Some believe that the pulsar is a primal god who speaks in a language that transcends Chromatics' own mundane "light-speech." Others see the entire nebula as a cryptogram, with mean-

ing hidden in frequencies of gas emissions and the like. Others have derangements that draw on the aliens' own natures, and aren't readily explicable in human terms.

Some of the residents have gone partially blind (they have four eyes, remember) from staring at the pulsar's rapid fluctuations in a futile attempt to trigger an epiphany. Some aliens' cells feature elaborate religious, social and/or mathematical analyses burned into the walls with self-generated laser beams. Some inscribe artwork onto the walls, while a few use tools and psi-lasers to smooth the walls of their cells into geometric planes and curves in search of a fundamental truth in form. Characters exploring the cells should receive an impression of stark simplicity overlaid with very complex weirdness.

Making telepathic contact with visionary Chromatics proves unsettling, if not outright dangerous. These aliens' minds hold wild visions full of confusing imagery and disjointed, chaotic associations. A psion trying to make any mental contact suffers +1 difficulty to all Mental-related rolls for the remainder of the scene.

The first and second enclave levels hold the patients' cells, which currently house 11 Chromatics (one per room). The third level has three supply rooms and quarters for up to six guards. All of the patients are, in the words of a 20th century writer, "mostly harmless." In fact, the mentally disturbed aliens have trouble retaining any sort of focus beyond their own pursuits, finding it difficult to even pay attention to others who display hostile intent. Roll **Willpower** for each Chromatic; if successful, it tears itself away from studying cosmic mysteries to battle any intruders.

Though mentally disturbed, these Chromatics can still supply the characters with what they need to know. A good portion of Beta's inhabitants were "scientist-priests" who crumbled under the stress. Their thoughts are muddled, but they still know the race's overall agenda.

Gamma Enclave

Gamma Enclave lies a bit off the Shield's central axis, closer to the pulsar side than is Beta. Gamma's exterior sports a cluster of biotech devices, presumably communications equipment. Antennae, relay pods, thick cables and shielding spread across most of the asteroid's surface. It also bears scorch marks and even small craters where experimental systems melted down.

Inside, the outermost areas are tunneled thoroughly. Only thin stone divides passages and keeps out deadly vacuum. Monitoring devices flicker strange colors and shapes that only Chromatics can comprehend, while numerous cables snake through small connecting tunnels from the generators spread throughout the interior. There are also charred rooms inside, victims of more meltdowns. Colored bars — the Chromatics' way of warning against hard radiation — mark these areas off.

Living quarters occupy the enclave's interior, as far as possible from the radiation that inevitably leaks from some devices. (Chromatics have a way to go toward implementing safety procedures, and they lack the resources in the Crab Nebula to implement all of what little they do know.) This area includes a couple of machine shops, storerooms, a mess area and even classrooms — with what seems to be art on the walls. (The pieces are in a way; the structures and images are Chromatic versions of posters, illustrating virtues such as courage and integrity).

Although Gamma is too small to be a primary facility, frequent traffic and complex light pulses between it and larger bases has suggested to Stalaski that it's some sort of backup intelligence/command center — and that's just what it is. Chromatic commanders worry about losing touch with their forces scattered across the nebula. Gamma Enclave is one of eight backup sites scattered throughout the Shield, each capable of carrying all essential communications traffic between Chromatic units. Standard-operating procedure calls for sending duplicate signals through at least one, preferably more, of the backup command centers to keep enclave crews alert and practiced.

The 16 technicians of Gamma Enclave are all young Chromatics who hope to achieve higher ranks in due season. They're freshly optimistic thanks to a recent visit from Chromatic home forces (shortly before the raid on Earth, in fact). What they lack in experience, these aliens try to compensate for with enthusiasm. They feel slighted now, though, since the "true" warriors went off to fight the approaching enemy force. How can young Chromatics win glory when others fight all the battles? The characters' appearance at this enclave gives the Chromatics the chance to show their worth.

A character who succeeds in a cross-matched **Intelligence** plus **Brawl** or **Martial Arts** roll notices that this bunch of Chromatics doesn't fight very

well. Unfortunately, they're determined. Subduing the young Chromatics without killing them is tricky. None of this group shows any inclination to surrender until at least two of its number are killed in battle. Surrender is then a matter of humiliation, but not total disgrace, since it is to an obviously superior foe. They're not a completely suicidal race; living to fight again another day has its place in Chromatic ethics.

Approaching the Enclave

The aliens aren't totally without defenses. Among the other bioware tools they use, the Chromatics have sensors scattered throughout the Shield. These devices set up interference patterns in the gases flowing among the asteroids to detect any passage, like that of a ship. The sensors warned of Marsden's approaching forces. More scattered on the pulsar side alert the targeted enclave of the characters' approach.

The Chromatics at the site scramble to defend themselves. The guards left behind for defense alert the other aliens (even in Beta Enclave, although few of the patients register what's happening). Then half of the warrior guards — between three and six at your discretion — don bulky vac suits and hide outside the asteroid. The vac suits are more biotech, grown from genetic samples of tough-skinned beasts from the Chromatics' homeworld; they provide [1/4, 1] protection and a five-hour air supply. The remaining guards help Chromatics inside find cover, although in the short time they have this mainly involves running around and panicking.

The Chromatics outside move very slowly to keep out of sight of the human ship (the characters are at +3 difficulty on any rolls to spot lurking Chromatics). When the Mutt comes within a few dozen meters of the enclave, the aliens lunge for airlocks and windows (**Athletics** at +1 difficulty) and try to break in.

The ensuing combat may prove messy. Chromatic guards are not the race's best warriors; if they were, they'd be out at the primary battle. They aren't incompetent, though, and hope to pull a scrap of glory from a probably disastrous situation. The characters face warriors fighting with desperate effort and little tactical skill.

Still, if things go too catastrophically for the characters, you may have a Chromatic guard or two lose purchase and tumble into the depths of the Shield. This scene should be challenging for the characters, but not ultimately lethal.

The Capture

Once the guards are defeated outside, the ones inside trigger a panic signal and prepare for attack (if the characters attack Gamma Enclave, the residents send off a half-dozen flares). The characters see a small bioware device shoot out from the enclave, flashing brilliantly and transmitting a shriek of sound across a wide audio range. The characters may shoot it down (**Firearms** at +2 difficulty — it's small and moving quickly — but losing one Structural Level destroys it). Otherwise it hits an asteroid after a while and explodes. Whatever happens, the light and transmission are already traveling through vacuum and reach another enclave soon enough. The characters must move quickly.

Luckily, the characters have little trouble gaining access to the asteroid. If they dock inside, the remaining Chromatic guards have the opportunity to hide near the central shaft and fire at the characters as soon as they emerge from the Mutt. The smaller entrance isn't much better, since the Chromatics can wait further down the central corridor and fire up at whatever comes in.

These opponents aren't as skilled as others the characters may have encountered. These Chromatics can't cloak themselves and their self-generated holograms can be startling, but aren't reality-grade. Their natural lasers and bioweapons are still deadly, though (use the write up in **Trinity**, page 306). The untrained aliens are at a similar level of psionic skill, although they have the stats on page 54 of this book.

Actually capturing one or more Chromatics involves careful effort. Rendering a Chromatic unconscious requires that the characters keep an eye on the damage they're dealing (although it's impossible to tell that "your taser shot inflicts four Health Levels"). Bashing damage creates fewer complications. If the characters planned ahead, gas and smoke grenades come in very handy, confusing if not actually knocking out the enemy. The characters' vac suits should protect them from any gas, barring rents in the durable material. (You can exploit such an occurrence if you want to inject a little low comedy into the proceedings.)

Refer to each enclave description for the residents' respective combat tactics. After the guards are dealt with, the characters should have little trouble rounding up noncombatants. Once the characters have an unconscious Chromatic, fitting the bioware restraints they've brought along takes only a few turns.

A restrained but conscious Chromatic warrior immediately tries to commit suicide by building up an internal photokinetic charge and releasing it on his primary brain. The restraints bleed off this energy, providing a painful but not harmful shock. Noncombatants simply thrash about, trying to free themselves. After a few minutes' effort, most Chromatics lapse into stunned acquiescence. A particularly willful alien may continue to struggle for hours (two successes on a standard **Willpower** roll are required each hour or as the drama of the scene demands for an alien to continue struggling).

The Return

No calamities mar the trip back to Karroo unless the characters themselves try to rush things. The beacons laid down on the approach to the enclave mark a safe route back. Unless they ran into serious complications, the characters finish their mission before the enclave's alert flare causes Chromatic forces to break off their fight with Marsden's contingent.

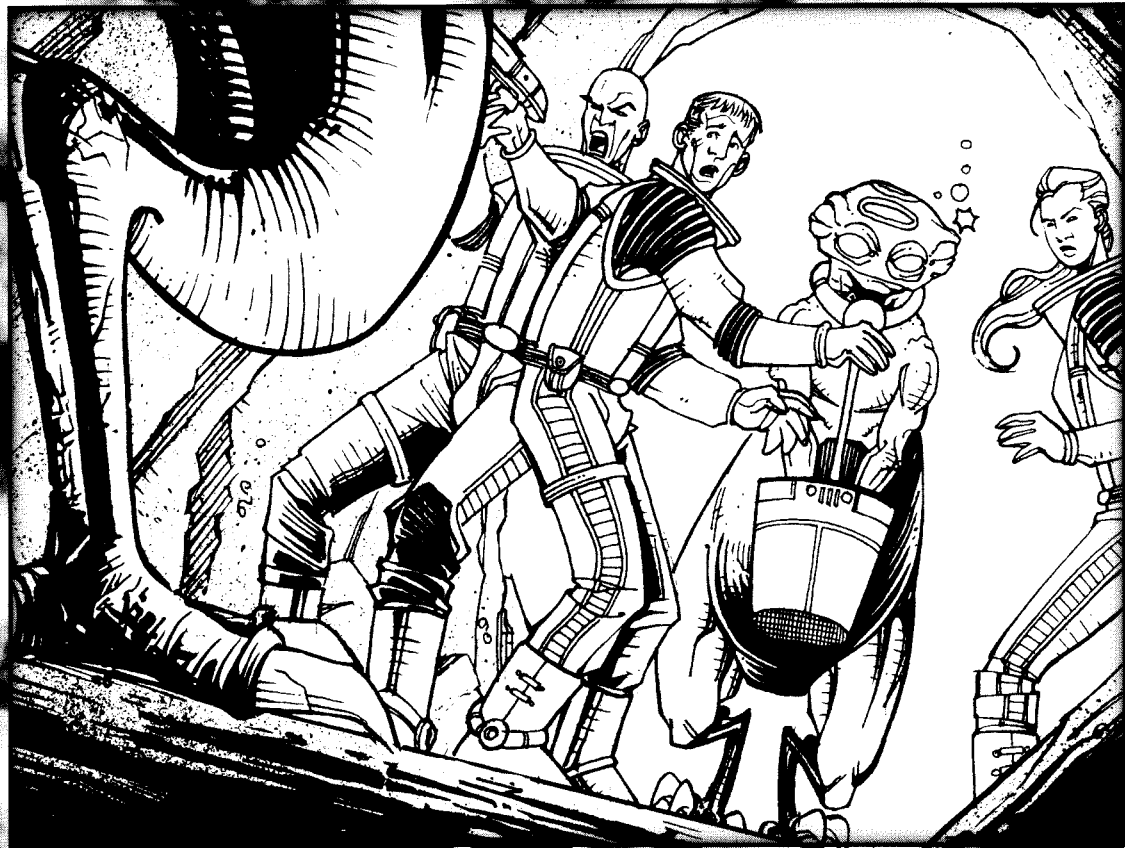
Marsden's feint is a total success. Minimal damage is inflicted to either side during the cat-and-mouse skirmish, but the human forces keep the Chromatics busy enough that the characters can complete their mission. The forces involved in the feint disengage as the characters make their way back around the Shield. Marsden holds position in the Pocket to escort the characters back when they emerge from the asteroid field.

The Captives Awaken

The prisoners recover during the return to Karroo (use the standard healing rates in **Trinity**, page 253). Although in restraints, the aliens could still make trouble by tumbling around the cargo area. The characters have several means at hand to keep the Chromatics subdued:

- **Drugs.** The sedative **Æon** gave the characters is certainly useful, but hard to apply during the initial capture. It isn't easy to get a Chromatic to hold still for a shot (use **Melee** to hit, but three extra successes are required to trigger the injection; otherwise the syringe dangles from the alien). The characters can apply the drug once restraints are on. Having only 12 doses, the characters may wish to save some for the interrogation.

- **Weapons.** Knockout gases, tasers and other weapons keep the prisoners in line, assuming the users do their jobs with a modicum of care. If not, one or more prisoners might die — or possibly escape if restraints are damaged.



- **Psi.** A variety of psi techniques (including **Stun**, **Brainjack**, **Will Control** and **Passive Voice**) can keep a Chromatic unconscious or at least confused. Ordinarily, a warrior-trained Chromatic finding itself in such a predicament would commit suicide; thanks to the restraints that's not an option. Any telepathic examination of Chromatics in transit reveals only fear and confusion — coherent thoughts come few and far between at this point.

- **Brute force.** Repeated blows to the head subdue Chromatics just as effectively as they do human beings, and with all the same risks of concussion. It's easy to knock out a bound and shrouded Chromatic, but hard to do so without dealing unwanted brain damage.

- **Make it somebody else's problem.** The characters can transfer the still-unconscious aliens to Marsden's frigates and let Legionnaires handle it.

The Interrogation

The strike force returns to Karroo without incident and sets about transferring the captives into the cells prepared by Kowokole and her staff. A Chromatic has about two-thirds the mass of a

human being, so maneuvering one through microgravity is very similar to handling a human. A standard **Might** or **Athletics** roll is sufficient to get each Chromatic out of the Mutt and into the chute without banging the alien around unnecessarily.

Once each Chromatic is in its cell, its restraint harness is secured to the wall. This should happen quickly unless you feel like adding complications.

Even resting on the journey to and from the Shield, the characters and Marsden's forces are probably worn out by their efforts. N'gamba is just as interested as the characters are in finding out what the Chromatics know, but she urges everyone to recuperate before performing any interrogation. The aliens are unlikely to cause problems, so there's no reason the characters shouldn't get some sleep.

Taking Part

The next morning, Eyadema brings the characters and Wei to the interrogation chamber, a hastily completed tenth cell in the holding facility. Marsden, N'gamba and her three department heads already wait there. They are

all committed to taking part in the Chromatic interrogation. There are a dozen headbands on the telepathic transmitter; this shouldn't be a problem if the characters number six or less. Otherwise, drop Eyadema and department heads as needed to make room. Wei insists that he's necessary to support (or perform) the telepathic interrogation, while Marsden is under orders from the Trinity to monitor it as well. N'gamba has jurisdiction here and could technically take over the whole thing should she want; the characters have no ground to prohibit her from taking part. If the characters are fewer than six, N'gamba adds scientific and technical personnel to fill out the open headband spots.

Roleplay jurisdiction as much as you like. If characters want to get involved in the political aspects of responsibility, have each Storyteller character present any arguments he has and see how things fall out. Characters with social abilities have a golden opportunity to act as mediators in any disputes. Otherwise, just explain the arrangement and make sure the characters, Wei, Marsden and N'gamba all have spots.

The characters and Wei then consult on which Chromatic to question first (if there's only one alien prisoner, the choice is simple). Wei suggests whichever Chromatic is unconscious but least injured; open to examination, but not distracted by pain and the healing process. If none of the aliens stand out in this way, he recommends sedating one. A conscious Chromatic has its wits at its disposal and is sure to resist any mental probes.

Kowokole and her technical staff spent the last couple of days finishing the interrogation room, including rigging leads from the normal cell sensors to monitors in the chamber. The characters can look over any captives from there and make their choice.

The characters can go in, sedate the subject and bring it to the interrogation room. If the psions are not interested in doing so, Wei and some Legionnaires do it. The interrogating telepath (one of the characters; Wei does the honors if the team has no telepath) sets up the relay harness and begins. **Pilfer** is the most reliable choice for telepathic interrogation; other techniques such as **Mindspeak** or **Will Control** offer incomplete interface with the subject's thoughts.

Revelations

Initial telepathic examination (relayed to all humans by the bioware transmitters) takes time and gentle probing. Despite Telepathy being the great equalizer, Chromatic thoughts are very bizarre. The telepath must get used to (if not actually comfortable with) the prisoner's memory processes before diving in too deep. After characters observe a myriad of strange images (light and complex abstract shapes figure prominently), the telepath hits on two strong clusters of memories dealing with Earth and humanity.

The first is only weeks old. The telepathic transmitter shows a large alien craft — a thick, vaguely manta-ray-like ship very similar to the one that appeared over Earth a short time ago. This craft hangs over a reddish-brown globe. Then the image flashes, showing the ship leaving the Shield toward the pulsar side. The characters get the sense that their prisoner was on that ship, and was sent to the Crab Nebula to help relieve other Chromatics. The ship also brought much-needed supplies.

Thoughts of the conflict in the nebula trigger another set of images in the Chromatic's mind. These images are more chaotic and come from much further in the alien's past. The characters telepathically experience memories of Aberrants from an alien viewpoint — creatures seeming to well up from darkness, coming from the cold

Chromatic Language

Chromatics "speak" in patterns of light, motion and images. Verbal communication supplements this much like gestures and body language do for humans. This "light-speech" is capable of carrying as much nuance and emphasis as do human languages — more so in many cases. Skilled Chromatic linguists can actually recreate scenes holographically, telling a story with detailed images.

At some points the interrogated prisoner passes on a memory conveyed by another Chromatic. This memory is itself a detailed scene. When a communicating Chromatic "speaks" carefully, one Chromatic can know almost exactly every aspect of another's actions, motivations and even feelings. (This "borrowed" communication is important for relating events to characters that no one single Chromatic could convey.)

depths of space. The Aberrants are tied to strong feelings of fear and hatred.

Then in a dazzling burst of light, the Chromatic remembers luminous shapes, beings of some sort that the subject considers gods of great power and wisdom. The characters glean that these beings appeared before the Chromatics to show them how to defend against the menace from the great darkness.

The characters learn undeniably that Chromatics consider all humans — neutral, psion and Aberrant — “corrupters” or “tormentors.” They are seen as beasts from the great darkness of space bent on destroying Chromatics (for their part, the Chromatics think of themselves simply as “people” or more literally, “true thinking creatures”). It’s hard to say if the Chromatics regard everyone else as corrupters, since it doesn’t seem that the aliens have met other races yet. The prisoner gushes gratitude and dedication when thinking of the shining, bodiless gods who appeared to show the Chromatics how to fight back.

The prisoner recalls that other Chromatics who spoke for the gods (the concept best translates as “witnesses”), were given the means to make wondrous devices that would protect them from the terrors. There are rapid flashes of many incredible things from the Chromatic’s point of view — things that look disturbingly familiar to human observers as biotech designs. The bodiless ones returned, then, and warned the witnesses that a new force of creatures would soon arrive. If the Chromatics acted quickly and used the special tools that the bodiless ones revealed to them, the aliens could capture this next wave.

The image shifts, showing the Chromatic holding some kind of restrictive harness (not unlike the one in which the prisoner is bound). The alien then helps bind a human being into the device. At that moment, a flash of powerful emotion slips from Mayor N’gamba through the telepathic transmitter’s receptors. The characters sense a single word: “Upeo.”

The telepath running the interrogation may make a standard **Academics** roll to try and compare human and Chromatic time scales. If successful, the psion feels reasonably sure that this memory of capture originates at roughly the same time the Upeo wa Macho vanished from Earth.

The Mystery of the Upeo

Although some characters may have suspected it already, the team should be rocked by

confirmation that Chromatics have held human teleporters captive for five years. The characters surely want to learn more about the bodiless “gods,” the location of the Chromatic homeworld, how Aberrants and Upeo found it, and more. The prisoner doesn’t know the answers to any of these questions — none of the Chromatic captives do. Pushing along this line of inquiry muddles the subject’s thoughts and reveals nothing useful.

However, checking into how the Chromatics deal with these things triggers fresh memories. First, the bodiless gods of light themselves brought the Chromatics’ most intrepid warriors to the Crab Nebula. Although terrified of space, the subject seems to think that the nebula is the threshold of the gods’ realm. (Call it heaven, true enlightenment, what have you. Much like the rest of these telepathic images, each character translates the images as best fits her personal religious and/or philosophical beliefs.) The warriors armed themselves with their gifts and attacked the enemy — the Karroo colony.

The prisoner was still on the Chromatic homeworld during the past few years, so images of Karroo battles are evidently relayed from the subject’s discussions with resident aliens. Memories of home rise up in response — of putting the Upeo in larger, more complex bio-harnesses and of much poking and prodding. The characters find that the prisoner assisted in these efforts with little idea what was going on. One thought is clear, though: The Chromatics sought a way to control the Upeo’s power.

Another quick memory jump and the characters see the reddish-brown planet again, receding rapidly. The view spins as the Chromatic turns its gaze; the by-now familiar manta-like alien jump ship nears rapidly. A number of small Chromatic biofighters streak toward the mother ship as well. It seems the characters are watching the prisoner remember when it left the Chromatic homeworld for Karroo. Feelings of fear and excitement translate through.

Then, as the mother ship fills most of the alien’s view, the prisoner’s gaze shifts one last time. The Chromatic looks past the jump ship in this memory, revealing a number of similar large manta-craft floating in space. Swarms of biofighters cloud the vacuum around the huge ships, along with a collection of rotund craft that may well be troop transports. It’s difficult to get an exact number of the alien jump ships — one

character sees six, another sees 60 — but it's undeniable that the Chromatics have constructed many of their own jump ships that use human teleporters to traverse the stars.

The characters are almost overwhelmed by an intense feeling of pride that the prisoner feels when recalling the sight. The Chromatic is stirred tremendously at the memory of many ships during the terrors of the corrupters' space. It imagines how great the race's glory will be when the scouting expedition returns to confirm the location of the tormentors' home. Then the Chromatics will leap as one to strike down the enemy that would destroy them.

Upeo Unveiled

The prisoner's emotions are much stronger at this point; it's likely that the sedative is wearing off. It's advisable to conclude the interrogation now. The characters certainly have enough to discuss — namely that the Chromatics have captured who knows how many teleporters and plan on using them to launch a full-scale assault on Earth!

The revelations leave the interrogators — at least the Storyteller characters — in stunned silence. As everyone digests what they've learned, Wei motions Legionnaire guards to take the already stirring Chromatic back to its cell. The characters find they're thirsty and have mild headaches. Not surprising, since they've been in a multiple telepathic link for over four hours.

The revelations aren't done yet, though. Mayor N'gamba has wrestled to a decision. Just as everyone collects their wits, she speaks. Not one for playing word games, N'gamba makes a straightforward declaration: She is an actual teleporter, a full member of the Upeo wa Macho. This is possibly the straw that breaks the camel's back for the characters; it certainly is for Marsden.

The characters may be deeply and profoundly angered by what could be considered a deliberate deception. If they don't rise up in outrage, have Marsden start shouting, pointing out all the times teleporters were needed in the recent past (the *Esperanza* disaster, this very mission and anything else you want to throw into the pot). If the characters take the lead on this, Marsden backs them up, even accusing that N'gamba is heartless and morally bankrupt. By remaining silent, she's allowed others to face wholly unnecessary risks — and to die. Wei and other more level-headed characters must calm any outbursts before they can learn anything else from N'gamba.

A character may try a passive emotion-evaluation psi technique (**Sense Emotion, Mind's Eye**) or use **Rapport** to confirm that N'gamba is deeply scared, but apparently honest. Make sure to convey that this is possibly the toughest thing N'gamba has ever done. The mayor makes a visible effort to gather herself, taking a deep breath and forcing herself to meet the characters' gaze.

N'gamba explains haltingly that there was always tension between some of the orders regarding the Upeo wa Macho's duty. This conflict was kept secret, but it grew over time. The other orders finally came to see Upeo less as an independent group and more as a tool to serve the others. N'gamba says that high-ranking members of the other orders wanted to impress the Upeo into some sort of mandatory transportation service; some of the more extreme even suggested backing this up with psionic or biotech control. Bitterness bleeds into N'gamba's voice as she points out that the Upeo's concerns apparently didn't warrant the freedom of action that, say, Herzog's visions or del Fuego's private war did.

It all came to a head in 2114. The Upeo Proxy Bolade Atwan returned to the order's base with news that the other proxies had voted to officially place the Upeo under their control. Atwan called for a full-scale retreat, knowing that Cassel and del Fuego's people had technology to shut down teleportation, even if only temporarily. The Upeo had to leave and consider what to do next. Some of the jumpers were sent to alert others in the field, while the remainder gathered together vital equipment.

When news came of the *Esperanza* attack, Atwan and the teleporters assumed it was a plot to lure them in for capture. N'gamba admits with great emotional distress that, as far as she knows, the Upeo on Earth didn't think there really was an attack. Instead of transporting psion forces to the station, the teleporters fled.

N'gamba herself was stationed at Karroo when all this happened. She was told to lay low (easy enough, since N'gamba was part of a small collection of teleporters who kept their abilities secret), and commanded to not return to Earth until Proxy Atwan gave word.

Karroo was visited by Upeo over the next few years, but no matter how hard N'gamba pushed, she never learned what happened on Earth or why the colony had to remain isolated. The mayor felt increasing concern, but she was a soldier and

fiercely dedicated to her proxy. N'gamba was told that Earth was safe enough, and that this plan was for the good of the order.

On their last trip to Karroo, visiting teleporters refused to tell N'gamba how they disposed of the encroaching Chromatic attack fleet, nor did they explain where it went. However, they did caution N'gamba against jumping anywhere at all. Apparently, many teleporters who'd gone exploring had never returned. N'gamba confirms that a sizable force of Upeo tried to locate the Chromatic homeworld.

N'gamba obviously has a hard time speaking at this point. She didn't hear from her order for years, and waited with increasing trepidation. She considered a clandestine return to Earth when *Shaka* came through a few months ago. That's when N'gamba learned of the *Esperanza* crash and had detailed news of the past five years. Devastated by what the Upeo's departure had done, N'gamba promised herself that she would no longer sit by idly. However, she wasn't sure what her next step should be — until now.

The Chromatics have captured teleporters and are using them in the very fashion the other orders once proposed for the Upeo. The aliens have a fleet of mother ships packed full of biofighters, poised to attack Earth. N'gamba cannot allow her people to be imprisoned or Earth to be destroyed and pledges herself to helping the characters.

The Great Debate

By now everybody should have something to be surprised about. Marsden thinks strongly of hauling N'gamba back to face charges of criminal negligence, even suggesting telepathic examination to get leads on other teleporters' whereabouts. Marsden can be talked into holding off, though he doesn't drop his hostility or suspicions.

N'gamba's aides are likewise shocked and feel betrayed. There's much a teleporter might have done in the last five years to make life easier and safe for the people of Karroo. N'gamba admits that there's no excuse for her actions. She thought her proxy knew best and followed orders in good faith. N'gamba regrets her actions and is determined to assist in any way she can from now on, but her aides remain unconvinced.

For her part, N'gamba is dismayed by the impending Chromatic invasion and deeply appalled at the hostility toward her. Any characters who

show signs of sympathy win her immediate, deep gratitude. Wei cautiously supports N'gamba, claiming that the current circumstances are still dire.

There's a substantial opportunity for roleplaying here. None of the major figures can claim a clear-cut monopoly on truth or justice. However, don't let the ensuing debate run on indefinitely. If none of the characters points out that this information must be brought back to Earth, Wei is the voice of reason once again and suggests they table further discussion for the moment.

Return to Earth

Anyone who takes a moment to think agrees that news of the impending Chromatic invasion must get back to Earth immediately. Matters of Upeo agendas and who should have done what five years ago should wait until after the aliens are dealt with. The group can thus return to Earth in something resembling a united manner.

A Minor Problem

Despite the exhaustion of the past few days, time is running out — after all, the characters have been gone from Earth for two weeks now. Marsden marches off to get his forces together for the return trip. N'gamba hands off responsibility to others at Karroo so that she can return with the characters. Wei helps get the Chromatic prisoners ready for transfer to one of the frigates. The characters can assist with any of this, and all goes smoothly except for a hiccup with the Chromatics.

A subquantum wave washes over any psions in the prison module, overloading the dampening suit of the Chromatic currently being transferred. The suit flashes brilliantly, momentarily blinding everyone in the area. All characters in that area are affected by an **Attunement** backlash as described in **Trinity** (page 192). Roll for Wei's backlash; whatever you get, look concerned at the results. Any characters with Wei see him jerk and crumple to the deck, stunned momentarily.

Even if a character takes no damage from the backlash, he is startled by its suddenness, unable to act for one turn. The Chromatic in transit seems to be hit less severely by the wave. As far as the characters can tell, the alien somehow overloaded its suit and triggered the backlash itself. The Chromatic wastes no time ripping its arms and legs free of the shackles and looks to escape. Tearing free of its bonds takes the alien's free action; resolve subsequent combat turns normally.

The fight should be over quickly; the Chromatic still operates with no Psi points thanks to the dampening device. If the characters aren't on hand to subdue the alien, Legionnaires pull Wei to safety and kill the Chromatic. If that was the only captive the characters had, they at least have the telepathic images recorded by the transmitter.

Wei regains his senses by the time combat ends. He appears slightly disoriented and extremely embarrassed by the event. The Ministry agent downplays any need of assistance and suggests that all the recent stress must have weakened him more than he thought. It's obvious to anyone that Wei prefers that the matter be dropped (understandable to anyone familiar with Asian culture).

Shaka's Jaunt

Anyone who goes with Marsden discovers another problem. *Shaka* won't be ready for another week, possibly longer. The repairs went smoothly while Marsden and the characters made their raid, but it still takes time to re-charge the jump engines.

N'gamba arrives shortly after to offer a solution: She can take the jump ship and crew herself. Marsden accepts, recognizing a good offer when he hears it. While he doesn't trust N'gamba in many ways, he has no other choice under the circumstances.

Once all the ships are docked to *Shaka* and the prisoners and passengers are safely aboard, the jump ship leaves Karroo and heads for safe distance. The return goes far more smoothly. Outward bound, the characters felt serious psychological distress. They still feel disorientation on the return jump, but the experience is much more pleasant. It's not unlike a daydream or the mellow buzz of good alcohol.

Both subjectively and objectively, the return trip takes somewhat less than half the time that the outward trip did (the second journey is one day out from Karroo, and then 40 hours in subspace). It's apparent that an Upeo can trigger a subquantum jump with infinitely greater skill than even the most skilled clairsentient can use a Tesser. N'gamba has an instinctive control over her power, and manipulates it with a level of finesse that escapes those who must rely on mechanical aids.

From *Shaka* to *Æon*

Shaka emerges outside Lunar orbit merely one day's travel from Earth. The ship's sudden arrival triggers response craft from the Seventh Legion, already tense after the Chromatic mother ship recently invaded Earth space.

As *Shaka* settles into orbit, N'gamba initially thinks she can manage another teleportation to the Earth's surface. The characters see that she looks pale, and as N'gamba focuses she almost falls from her chair. She's obviously more drained from the jump than she expected, admitting that even when she was in practice, it could take days to fully recover her energy after an interstellar leap. The characters have to use conventional transportation to Earth.

The Legion patrol craft arrive as if on cue. They're surprised to see *Shaka* back so soon, but after confirming that the jump ship isn't full of Aberrants or aliens, they offer an escort to Earth. The characters should want to get back quickly to the *Æon* Trinity with their report (if they suggest going elsewhere, Marsden and Wei point out that this is an official *Æon* mission and the characters' presence is expected back in Chicago upon their return).

The characters can pile into one of the Mutts, but Marsden strongly recommends waiting for a Legion transport to pick them up. (It's a no-frills military version of an L-B Comet; use the stats in *Trinity*, page 285.) Marsden doesn't push the issue, but since he's in charge of the ships he assumes command of any alien captives. The characters have the transmitter with its recorded images, as well as N'gamba; the Chromatics will be along shortly.

Æon at Home

The characters should signal ahead to an *Æon* superior — such as Ramirez — that they're coming. If they talk about relaying sensitive information like “a living Upeo wa Macho member,” Marsden interrupts immediately. This is huge news and even an encrypted transmission can be compromised. All Ramirez is likely to learn is that Operation: Revelation has some major news.

The transport lands on the roof of the Chicago Cube in mid-morning. Special Agent Ramirez greets the characters along with standard Proteus Division security. Ramirez escorts the team down to a secure briefing room. There should be an odd sense of *déjà vu*; the characters first came to Chicago in a similar fashion only a short time ago. Ramirez expresses surprise at the characters' early return. He's also puzzled to see N'gamba and asks



why she's here. As soon as he learns of N'gamba's role, Ramirez's eyes widen. He apologizes, explains that he's not really qualified to deal with the ramifications of this, and goes to get someone higher up.

If the characters become restless or alarmed at the wait, Wei points out the facts of life in bureaucracies. Æon believes in decisive action, and at critical moments wants those with the authority on hand immediately. Ramirez is sufficient to get some of Æon's resources mobilized, but the characters' news is worthy of immediate senior attention.

Debriefing

Ramirez returns in just a few minutes, escorting a handsome middle-aged man whom he introduces as William Renton, head of Proteus Division. Characters who have worked with Proteus in the past may recognize Renton before Ramirez introduces him. The characters should be surprised to meet one of *the* top Æon officials, but it makes sense under the circumstances.

Renton has a small, heavily customized biocomputer. After greeting everyone, he places

the biocomp on the table and turns it on. A friendly computer agent appears and Renton's fingers flicker over the keypad, after which the image vanishes. He explains that the biocomp will record their conversation while blocking any electronic eavesdropping. Unknown to the characters, that's only a small portion of the biocomp's function. Its true purpose is to prohibit N'gamba from teleporting away.

Renton is quite personable, but in a professional manner. Characters easily sense Renton is a man of action. He takes a moment when greeting N'gamba to tell her that he's familiar with her distinguished record of service. Renton also expresses fascination to learn of N'gamba's previously undeclared Aptitude. He also compliments the characters on their good deeds (remember that Æon has extensive profiles on the characters).

After everyone's comfortable, Renton asks the team to tell its story. He politely but crisply asks for clarification on any points the characters obviously gloss over or confuse. Wei and N'gamba give the characters the floor during the debriefing, content to provide clarification when necessary.

It should be very difficult to deceive Renton; he is a neutral, but he's both a student and a practitioner of the arts of deception, and knows what to look for. Psions all too easily underestimate what human beings have done for millennia with native intelligence and wits.

Persuasion

Once the characters finish, Renton appears thoughtful for almost a minute before speaking (in truth, he had a plan as soon as Ramirez told him that there was a teleporter in the briefing room). Renton starts off covering issues detailed previously under *The Æon Trinity*, page 25. He focuses on one aspect, though: Æon needs time to prepare a united response. The inter-order turmoil N'gamba described that motivated Upeo flight must not come out now. Huang-Marr is still fresh in people's minds and the UN investigation is already underway. Any news of divisiveness among the orders must be downplayed as much as possible, or all the orders may be doomed.

The Proteus director casts doubt on the need for immediate action. Moving rashly on N'gamba's claims and the Chromatic interrogation could put humanity in a worse position than it is. The characters have done a fine job, but now Æon must confirm the Chromatic's memories and discuss N'gamba's story with the Æon Council to determine the best steps to take.

Smooth dialogue aside, Renton's underlying message is that the news of an impending Chromatic invasion — and of a living Upeo — should remain secret until Æon can decide what to do about it.

The characters are likely stunned by this sudden turn. After all, weren't they sent to Karroo with frantic speed for fear that the Chromatics were planning an invasion?

Renton rebuffs the characters' concerns, pointing out the folly of rash action, and the wisdom of Æon's past guidance. Ramirez supports Renton. If there were points during *Descent into Darkness* or *Passage Through Shadow* (or other missions the characters undertook for Æon) at which impulsive action led to harm, Ramirez brings them up in a friendly-but-concerned way.

N'gamba initially urges immediate action but soon sits back, apparently letting the characters take charge of the argument. Yet she grows increasingly distracted and irritated during the course of the debate. Characters who express doubts about delaying are backed by Robert Wei. He agrees that immediate action is called for. If the characters don't actually say "Æon coverup," Wei does.

Renton and Ramirez act reasonably but forcefully until the debate takes an ugly turn (Wei's comment or a similar one by a character is sufficient). The duo then leans heavily on any characters with extensive ties to Æon. Ramirez recites the many occasions on which Æon proved to have the wisest course of action, and points out the harm done by those acting without vision for the big picture. Even a matter like invasion, Renton says, requires consideration of a larger context.

The debate likely becomes very intense. Don't allow Renton or Ramirez (or Wei) to back down; keep the dialogue going. Much rests on the decisions made here, and the characters have a lot to vent. At the height of the argument (or just before you think the characters are about to trade words for violence), N'gamba starts from her seat and shouts that they're in a trap.

She claims that something's inhibiting the use of her powers, just as Proxy Atwan feared. Renton confirms this (polite and seated the whole while), stating that, as a matter of fact, there *is* a teleportation damper running. A character can use **Attunement** to sense that there is a specific psionic effect operating in the room. With one extra success, a character knows that the emission comes from the conference table. The only thing on the table is Renton's biocomp.

Wei leaps to his feet, joining N'gamba. The pair obviously wants to get out of there immediately, and looks to the characters for support.

Conclusions

This is a moment of crisis for the characters: Do they side with Æon and keep things under wraps? Or do they go with N'gamba and Wei and alert humanity of the impending Chromatic threat?

There is no right answer. Although much of *Climbing to Tartarus* is designed from the point of view that the characters defy the Æon Trinity, it allows for characters who remain loyal to Æon. Choices must be made in a split second, and it's possible that the characters are divided. They have no time to persuade one another, however. N'gamba and Wei are on the move with any characters who join them. Renton directs Ramirez and loyal characters to restrain the rogues (he also taps a communication device on his wrist, summoning Proteus guards from the hall).

Fleeing characters know it's unlikely in the extreme that they'll make it past Æon's security through conventional means. If the characters don't seize on the obvious option of breaking the



teleport damper, N'gamba takes the initiative. Robert Wei uses his Telepathy with devastating effectiveness (see Wei's write up, page 109) against opponents as well.

Renton, Ramirez and any loyal characters try to delay the rebels for the few turns it takes for security to arrive. The Storyteller characters do not resort to lethal force.

It's important to the story that N'gamba and Wei escape. If a character doesn't break the damper, the Upeo or the Ministry agent does. Once the device is destroyed, N'gamba focuses for a teleport. She says she's going someplace safe, to warn humanity whether the Trinity approves or not. Wei and any characters who've already sided with N'gamba vanish with her an instant later in a shimmering flux of subquantum energy.

Aftermath

As they vanish, fleeing characters see Proteus guards burst into the room, and Renton leap for N'gamba. The Proteus director's calm façade is replaced by cold anger. There is a moment of disorientation, as with the jump from Karroo, but on a much smaller scale.

This episode concludes on this cliffhanger for any rebellious characters. Things pick up immediately afterward in *Climbing to Tartarus*, with the characters arriving with N'gamba in her home town of Accra.

The Loyalists

Characters who stay behind get further experience with Aeon's fist. If characters show any signs of resistance, arriving guards put them in restraints (subjecting the characters to debatably unnecessary rough handling that inflicts a level of Bashing damage without leaving any visible marks). Then, his composure returned, Renton questions them very carefully and thoroughly, aiming to strip mine their recollections of the Karroo experience. The telepathy transmitter is there as further evidence (unless one of the rebels snatched it before fleeing). Characters who become uncooperative are threatened with interrogation assisted by drugs or telepathy. (In truth, Renton would rather not do this, but is willing to if lesser means do not suffice.)

After that, remaining characters spend time in "protective custody." Some time later, Proteus agents

escort the characters to the UN hearings described in *Climbing to Tartarus* (see page 63). That is their first opportunity to regain freedom and join the other characters.

If the characters proved loyal to *Æon* in the brief scuffle, obviously doing their best to restrain the rebels, Renton looks on them much more favorably. These characters have the unenviable role of trying to apprehend their former teammates.

Æon mobilizes almost immediately. Triton researchers dig for all they can find on Susan N'gamba. Neptune prepares media responses in case the rebels pop up at some news station and start shouting proclamations. Proteus alerts its agents throughout near space to be on the lookout for the rebels.

Although this conclusion doesn't involve an immediate scene change, it should provide a no-less-ominous cliffhanger for the characters. Issues aren't as clear-cut as they once were, and it looks like things will only become more muddled in the near future.

Other Endings

Events obviously move toward a specific conclusion. However, you can pursue other alternatives if you wish.

- **The Chromatics Arrive:** As explained in *Climbing to Tartarus*, the Chromatics wait for some time for the return of their first strike mission. This gives humanity a valuable opportunity to learn of the impending invasion and set up a counterattack. If you want the aliens to invade sooner, humanity is not well-prepared. The Chromatics are able to land numerous strike teams on Earth, Luna and the orbital stations before human forces can marshal sufficiently. The entire conflict gets very ugly, and Aberrants may even decide to join the fray. This is a rather dark turn of events, but the choice is yours.

- **N'gamba Is Captured:** It's possible that every character sides with *Æon* and agrees to restrain Susan N'gamba. *Æon* finally leaks news of the alien invasion, but no one learns of N'gamba. The characters may wonder what becomes of her, but *Æon* says nothing. Perhaps they have a change of heart and try to release her; perhaps they decide *Æon* knows best.

- **Taking a Hostage:** The characters might decide to fight their way out of the Trinity headquarters with or without N'gamba. The only way they have a remote chance of doing so is to take Renton hostage (Ramirez isn't of high enough rank to matter much). This is sure to be extremely difficult. Renton says his people will do whatever's necessary to stop the characters. Proteus won't hesitate to use any non-lethal means to knock out the entire bunch and sort

things out afterward. If the characters are somehow resistant to these attempts, security takes Renton out of the equation when the director gives the order. Even if the characters do escape, they're considered enemies of *Æon* from that point forward.

Dramatis Personae

The following are profiles and statistics for important individuals in *Heaven Through Iron Gates*. There are a number of people with whom the characters can interact, not only in their official mission but in any other stories that you wish to run at *Æon*'s facility or on Karroo.



Giorgios Alekandros Gamemenos, Neptune Division Deputy Director, Extraterrestrial Office

Gamemenos is a middle-aged Greek man of lean, wiry build. His face and arms carry faint scars from a series of explosions and surgical treatments from a decade previous. (A small group of technophobes mounted a series of assassination attempts against those believed to cater to psions. The attempts failed, but Gamemenos and others took repeated damage before Proteus Division solved the problem in its usual terminal fashion.)

Gamemenos radiates a very sincere compassion: He genuinely believes in Æon Trinity ideals, and takes his role as shaper and implementer of policy very seriously. To Gamemenos, Æon — even with all its faults — is humanity's best hope and he'll help it succeed insofar as he can.

Special Agent Hector Ramirez

Ramirez is a Hispanic man who would be stocky if he were a bit shorter. He has an energetic, friendly personality with a firm undercurrent of confident authority. He carries himself in a military manner when on duty, with precise movements. During his appearance in *Heaven Through Iron Gates*, he wears a standard jumpsuit with the Æon Trinity emblem, emphasizing his role as representative of the one organization doing something to keep the human race from falling into chaos.

See *Descent into Darkness*, page 39, for complete statistics on Ramirez.



Robert Linsey Marsden, *Shaka*
Commander

Marsden's personal history echoes the course of world affairs to some degree. He grew up in the Federated States in a family not known for either brilliant success or horrible failure; it simply got by. A random sweep for psionic potential sponsored by Orgotek discovered that he had strong Psychokinesis potential. Æon Trinity helped him cut through the

maze of FSA paperwork that mires efforts to leave the country or join a psi order (and bogs things down for someone trying both). By way of gratitude, Marsden went through the Legions' basic training and joined the Fifth Legion to lend a hand on the home front.

Marsden found he had a knack for predicting enemy maneuvers (which some attribute to auxiliary Telepathy potential), and was of great use in the Legions' pursuit of Aberrants in North America. The Æon Trinity soon requested his assistance on special assignments. Marsden enjoyed the challenge, and after a few years started feeling constrained by relatively repetitive Blight Zone patrols. His understanding of general Aberrant methods was considerable, but Marsden found himself increasingly interested in the alien Chromatics. He wanted to pit himself against a truly alien mind.

When the time came to re-up with the Legions, Marsden joined Æon full-time instead. Although Marsden has been a vocal critic of many Trinity policies and actions, he feels its goals are sound. And Æon values operatives who think for themselves (to a certain degree).

Although he's not the brightest intellectual light on the block, Marsden has an excellent grasp of strategy and tactics, and his fellow troops respect his abilities. In the field, Marsden doesn't pay much attention to idle chitchat or boasting — he's concerned with addressing the problem at hand.

Ministry Agent Robert Wei

Wei is a handsome young Chinese man. He reflects his government's ambition to draw on the best of western traits and incorporate them into a Chinese framework. Wei combines friendly openness and knowledge of technology with a staunch love of country and sense of duty, making him a valuable asset to both Æon and the Ministry. As with Ramirez, unless the characters made many serious mistakes during *Descent into Darkness*, they can count on a friendly personal response. If not, Wei still deals with them with something more than bureaucratic impartiality.

See *Descent into Darkness*, page 114, for complete statistics on Wei. Additionally, page 109 of this book shows changes Wei undergoes as of the trip to Karroo.

Inge Stalaski, Karroo Chief of Security and Defense

In Stalaski's youth, he was part of a radical Polish group that protested — often violently — its nation's militant expansionist policy. He spent

several years in prison, but earned his release with good behavior. Stalaski went to Karroo as an opportunity to start a new life, in which he could explore the introspective side of himself that he discovered in prison.

When Karroo lost contact with the outside universe, Stalaski had a brief but intense breakdown. Memories of his time in prison and doubts about his ability to do anything constructive flooded back. He won his way through, and recognized Karroo's security as a goal worthy of his sustained efforts. He worked as N'gamba's assistant until she assumed the position of mayor. Stalaski was as surprised as anyone when she appointed him chief.

Because of his own experience with prison, Inge is loathe to use jail as punishment. Still, he does so if he must and Karroo's residents know it. Stalaski won't risk the colony as a whole because of any one person's preference to remain at liberty. He maintains a strong though flexible code of justice that keeps Karroo protected and its people safe, all with a minimum of interference in personal affairs.

Fatima Tomussa, Karroo Chief of Astronomical Facilities

Tomussa is one of the youngest authorities on Karroo. She just completed her graduate studies when Karroo was cut off from the rest of humanity. She earned her current position through demonstrated ability at both science and administration (not necessarily aptitudes that go together). She's sometimes compared to a pixie (usually in a friendly fashion or when she's out of earshot): Tomussa is tiny but extremely energetic and almost always in a good mood. On an intellectual level she grasps the problems that others have with life on Karroo, but she's thrilled to be where she is, doing what she is, and wouldn't trade it for anything she can imagine.

Ruth Sharon Kowokole, Karroo Chief of Mining Operations

Before an industrial accident in 2116, Kowokole was fairly typical among Karroo's engineers. She was good-looking, if not exactly beautiful, a personable leader, well-liked by those under her authority, and popular with the rest of the colony. That changed when an explosion almost killed her. Karroo's medical resources were sparse, and without knowing how

long the colony's isolation might last, the medical corps couldn't in good conscience use up all of their reconstruction materials on one patient. Kowokole emerged from sickbay with major scars and the need for braces or a wheelchair whenever in more than half Earth gravity.

Kowokole became shy and isolated. Now she'd much rather deal with others through a computer agent that shows the way she used to look. She breaks off any relationships that might become romantic, preserving only businesslike and technical dealings. She roams through Karroo's electronic libraries in her personal time, exploring the sights and sounds of Earth and constructing elaborate daydream fantasies for herself.

Chromatic Civilians

Most Chromatics use the template given in **Trinity**, page 306. Those statistics represent fairly typical warriors, but are not representative of the higher race. Young soldiers and technicians have one less point of Stamina but one more of Dexterity; if they survive, they gain practice in sustaining physical activity at the expense of some degree of agility. Astronomers have one less point in all combat Abilities, but have Intelligence 3. The "visionaries" have normal statistics but need to make a **Willpower** roll any turn in which intense concentration is required. All of these noncombatant types aren't as skilled with subquantum manipulation, either; they have Psi 4.

Mayor Susan N'gamba

Susan N'gamba's parents were managers who moved up and down the Atlantic coast of Africa, working contract assignments ranging from six months to three years long. (This mobility made it difficult for her to deal with emerging tribal sympathies among Karroo's people; she's accustomed to thinking of herself in social rather than ethnic terms.) Like many children of the New Professionals, N'gamba's primary allegiance developed toward the UAN as a whole rather than to any component tribe or geographical area. She does have a distinct fondness for Accra, Ghana, where she was born. Her parents returned to Accra every few years, finally even retiring there.

N'gamba joined Ghana's military, one of the UAN's member nations. She retained some of her parents' wanderlust and decided that the armed forces was the perfect place to apply both her technical and social skills. N'gamba then saw a

new opportunity with the Upeo wa Macho. She didn't consider becoming a psion, having no idea that she was even latent, but wanted to venture into the field with the Upeo. N'gamba quickly learned that she had the potential required to become a teleporter, though. She finally agreed to become a psion, but decided to keep her abilities a secret. N'gamba wanted to explore her potential without suffering demands from outside forces.

Karoo gave her the opportunity to help build a truly new frontier. N'gamba was quite happy living in such an isolated locale — until she was ordered by secretive Upeo that she must not return to Earth until she was told otherwise. Loyal to a fault, N'gamba waited with increasing frustration, for her comrades' return and for an explanation. In an attempt to channel this aggravation, N'gamba devoted herself entirely to the well-being of Karroo.



Image: N'gamba is a stately woman, worn prematurely by her responsibilities and worries. She's of average height and not particularly distinguished in her features, but she carries herself with an air of earned authority. When N'gamba settles into conversation, she focuses on the people she's talking to with an intensity tempered by friendliness. She makes it a point not to suggest favoritism toward one faction or another

within Karroo's population, and favors clothing, jewelry, hairstyles and the like in generic styles.

Roleplaying Hints: You're not quite sure whether to laugh or cry. For half a decade you've been The One in Charge. Now you don't have to be. But can you trust the new arrivals? And if you can trust the characters, can you trust the higher powers involved? You must be on your guard — even if your beloved proxy was mistaken about the other orders, she probably wasn't *completely* wrong. Approach each challenge with open-eyed caution, hoping that it'll work out, but preparing for it to fail somehow.

Name: Susan N'gamba

Nature: Architect

Allegiance: Karroo (secondarily, Upeo wa Macho)

Physical Attributes

Strength 2

Dexterity 3

Stamina 3

Mental Attributes

Perception 3

Intelligence (Logical) 4

Wits 3

Social Attributes

Appearance 2

Manipulation (Authoritative) 4

Charisma (Genial) 4

Aptitude: [Teleportation] For the time being, handle N'gamba's teleporting by *fiat*. It works when it needs to, within the general limits described in the course of the episode. No detailed treatment of Teleportation is provided since nothing more is needed for this story.

Willpower: 8

Psi: 6

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 1, Followers 3, Influence (Karoo) 4, Resources (Karoo) 4

Gear: personal clothes and artwork created by Karroo inhabitants; for hardware she simply draws on Karroo's resources

Abilities

Might 2

Athletics 3, Firearms 2,

Martial Arts 3,

Pilot 3, Stealth 2

Endurance 2

Abilities

Awareness 3,

Investigation 3

Academics 3,

Bureaucracy 3,

Engineering 2,

Linguistics (French,

English, Arabic) 3,

Science 3, Survival 2

Meditation 1,

Rapport 3

Abilities

Intimidation 1

Command 4,

Interrogation 1,

Subterfuge 2

Etiquette 3, Savvy 3



William Renton, Proteus Division Director

Saving the world is a difficult task. Most people want to be rescued only from obvious menaces, and want all the tough decisions kept far away and out of sight. Individuals and organizations like Proteus face a constant battle against cynicism. It's very easy to slip into the belief that the people one protects are little more than sheep; without respect, compassion gradually becomes meaningless. William Renton, Director of Proteus Division, continues to fight this battle. He considers his personal war lost for the most part. Renton admits that he expects neither understanding nor agreement, only obedience from the rest of humanity. However, there are times when past idealism rises up within him. Someday Renton may re-discover hope, but he has sacrificed himself to Æon's cause for the moment.

Renton joined Æon as an idealistic young man, signing up with Triton Division to do historical research to preserve the truth of things against the then-new FSA's propaganda efforts. When he proved to have substantial aptitude for small-unit tactics and for carefully planned infiltration and subversion operations, Proteus Division sought to move him over.

Renton has spent the last 30 years helping do the shadowy deeds that protect the Trinity's public face. For him, the end doesn't justify the means so much as it *is* the means: His whole life is dedicated to

the preservation of the Trinity's position in society. What the Æon Council does with that status is its business.

Image: Renton retains the charismatic style that made him a good media representative in his pre-Proteus days. (Since changing divisions, he's seldom appeared in public and is usually identified in a vaguely truthful but misleading way.) Renton has calm brown eyes and shoulder-length loosely curled dark hair; he seems decades younger than he is. He wears custom-tailored smart clothes that slowly cycle fashions throughout the day, so that he gets the equivalent of two to four changes of suit each day. He always exhibits a friendly manner.

Roleplaying Hints: Your job is to solve problems. You know quite well that you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar — in other words, if you can subtly urge the characters to see the Trinity's wisdom, there's no need to bully them. However, if tougher means are called for, you'll use them. Failure is unacceptable.

Name: William Renton

Nature: Leader

Allegiance: Æon Trinity

Physical Attributes

Strength 3

Dexterity 3

Stamina 3

Mental Attributes

Perception 3

Intelligence (Pragmatic) 4

Wits 3

Social Attributes

Appearance (Pleasant) 4

Manipulation (Authoritative) 4

Charisma (Cool) 4

Willpower: 8

Psi: 1

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Cipher 3, Contacts 5, Devices 3, Followers 5, Resources 4, Status (Æon Trinity) 5

Gear: Renton has access to the whole spectrum of Æon Trinity resources, but does not carry personal weaponry or defenses; he summons guards if he needs them

Abilities

Brawl 4, Might 3

Athletics 3, Drive 2,

Firearms 4, Legerde-

main 2, Melee 2, Pil-

ot 2, Stealth 4

Resistance 4

Abilities

Awareness 3,

Investigation 4

Bureaucracy 4, Engi-

neering 1, Intrusion 4,

Linguistics

(Chinese, German,

Nihonjin, Arabic) 4

Rapport 3

Abilities

Intimidation 3,

Style 2

Command 4, Interro-

gation 3, Subterfuge 4

Etiquette 3, Savvy 4

REPORT TO FIELD OPERATIVES

ÆON TRINITY TRANSMISSION [NEPTUNE DIVISION]

Central Office, Director Neville Archer

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a problem.

We have confirmed that a member of the Upeo wa Macho — an active teleporter — has returned to Earth. It seems that Susan N'gamba, mayor of the Karroo colony and United African Nations general, was a practicing teleporter. For reasons we do not yet fully understand, N'gamba kept her psionic abilities secret for an entire decade.

Discovering an Upeo is staggering, considering the mystery surrounding the Teleportation Order's disappearance in 2114. However, N'gamba fled from the safety of the Æon Trinity and is at large somewhere in near space. We are confident that she has not left the Solar System. Research shows that such an effort significantly tires an Upeo, and N'gamba just recently made a jump from the Crab Nebula.

Details are sketchy at the moment, but it seems that Æon Trinity operatives assisted N'gamba in her flight. Any aid N'gamba is receiving is the result of misguided loyalty. We all understand that the Upeo surely went through harrowing experiences in the past, but the safest place for N'gamba — and any other teleporters — is with Æon. We face a volatile political situation, and the Trinity is best-equipped to discern the most effective way to reveal the Upeo's return. Renegade efforts will probably stir public doubt about psions into full-blown paranoia. The Aberrant War showed us all how devastating this can be. Although psions are humanity's protectors, we cannot take the chance of the populace leaping to the wrong conclusions.

Remember, the United Nations just authorized full hearings into psi-order malfeasance, based on its preliminary investigation over the past few weeks. Humanity is clamoring for information, but hype and hearsay threaten to bury the truth. We cannot leave this to the UN, capable though that body is. Æon must compile and present the necessary issues in their most positive light. Otherwise we are in danger of losing the vital support of the psi orders, and governments will turn their attention from exterior threats to bringing psions under control.

Fellow colleagues, this obviously comes at the worst possible time. Not only do the Aberrants' random attacks continue, but the alien Chromatics have somehow found Earth. Human forces repelled the first Chromatic raid so decisively that the public has given little thought to whether the aliens may take further action. People are more concerned with experiencing a repeat of the terrible Aberrant era — though now with psions in the role of pariahs — than they are about strange creatures hiding among the stars.

We cannot afford to be so single-minded in our concerns. Psion corruption is a danger, of course. But we must also address the Chromatic threat. If we are too preoccupied with vilifying psions, the aliens may destroy the Earth in their next attack.

Again, the Upeo are the key. We understand that the Chromatics are using teleporters to come here. However, the Trinity is not yet certain whether those Upeo act as captives — or whether they're in league with the Chromatics. Æon has alien captives whom we shall continue to interrogate. However, Susan N'gamba knows the answers to many questions.

The Æon Trinity must recover N'gamba and any rogue operatives as quickly as possible. We must discover what they know and give that information due consideration in our plans. Above all, Æon must present a united front. In this way, we encourage the rest of humanity to follow suit. Only by doing so can we hope to overcome the threats that face us all.

Neville Archer

Director, Neptune Division, 06:47:09 6.22.2120

Æon Trinity





Fallen Angels?

— Cori Heisler, *The Painful Truth* © 2120 MMI

One by one, stories are leaking out from all over — Basel, Chicago, the Blight Zone, Luna and even Mars. By now we've all heard tales of corruption and inhumanity among the psi orders. Looks like the orders are engaged in their most crucial battle ever. I'm not talking about Aberrants or aliens — although the decisive destruction of Chromatic raider showed that psions can still rally against those threats when need be. I'm talking about public opinion. Humanity's ability to trust in psions hangs in the balance.

A recent OpNet poll showed that, in the wake of allegations of psi-order corruption, over 43% of the population no longer trusts psions. A startling 7% feel the orders may try to seize control of human governments.

The United Nations' initial investigation into the "Huang-Marr conspiracy" — reportedly a modern Frankenstein project going on underneath Proxy Matthieu Zweidler's very nose — dug up enough evidence to authorize further hearings. This isn't exactly a ringing endorsement of psions, humanity's self-proclaimed defenders.

Credit where it's due, of course. The orders have been exceedingly helpful in providing whatever the UN asks for. The mysteriously altruistic Æon Trinity even volunteered to coordinate any information-gathering the UN needs. The psi orders are falling over themselves to show that they're taking care of their own bad apples (and the apples in this Huang-Marr thing are rotten indeed).

This is called spin control, people. Every time you flick on a holo, there's more news about psions doing good in the community, saving lives, unveiling hospitals and getting kittens down from trees. Even the heretofore-distant proxies like Zweidler are getting into the act, giving interviews, taking photo opportunities and trying to come across as just Regular Folks.

I'm not saying they aren't earnest, but I can't help but wonder if this outrage at fellow psions gone bad is completely genuine, or if it's meant to cover other actions the orders don't want us to know about.

And it seems Joe Hologram agrees. AdStar claims that demand for psion endorsements has dropped over 32% in the last month. The popular animated holo *Strike Team Psion*, once thought a mainstay of the airways, is now "on hiatus." And in perhaps the most telling blow, Kostbaar's much-anticipated line of Legionwear has been delayed two months over "issues of quality control."

The message is clear: The movers and shakers are backing away from the orders, just in case. Everyone says this is just a little shakeup and that things will return to normal. But the elite have always voted with their money, and right now the yuan are abandoning the psions faster than the Upeo left the system.

As they say in Nordamerica, "Howdy!"

Yes, this is an official Æon Trinity file. No, I'm not with "the group." You can call me a "concerned party" — actually, you can call me "Junior Mal," since that's my handle. There are serious matters brewing, as you've probably noticed. I'm not here to give you all the answers, but maybe this file will help shed some light where it's darkest.

Don't ask me where I got this — all you need to know is that it checks out. Start poking around, you'll see for yourself (although I recommend updating your life insurance before you do).

No need to thank me, pals. I'm not really doing you a favor, just trying to keep you from making decisions you'll regret later. If there is a later.

— Junior Mal

EXCERPT: *ESPERANZA* INCIDENT TRANSMISSION LOG

>>> NOT FOR GENERAL RELEASE <<<

>>> TRANSMISSION LOG: EDITED FOR CONTENT <<<

[Recorded 09:25:37 — 10:06:44 8.17.2114]

Earth Orbital Station *Esperanza*: Ulan Bator, this is *Esperanza* checking in. Our 'head just went to bed claiming he's got an upset stomach. Other than that, all systems normal. We'll report again when we hit Marseilles' slice of sky.

Ulan Bator Orbital Monitoring Station: *Esperanza*, you're five minutes early on check-in. You've never been early before. Who are you, and what have you done with the slackers I normally work with?

***Esperanza*:** [sound of laughter] [static] you, our ISRA is down for routine barf-bucket maintenance. Without him messing up procedure, we can [static]

Ulan Bator OMS: *Esperanza*, you're breaking up. Repeat last.

***Esperanza*:** [static] know, Khalil, we just got two flares off the main solar collector. It gave us a surge and an EMP spike. I don't like this. Switching to external cameras [static] — Mother of God!

Ulan Bator OMS: [static] signal is choppy, *Esperanza*. What do you see?

***Esperanza*:** Something's torn the mail collector right off its moorings. It's drifting in — going to hit the hydroponics section. [sound of sirens] Hydroponics initiating evac procedures.... Getting motion on hull scanners.

Ulan Bator OMS: We're initiating rescue procedures down here, *Esperanza*. Hang in there. Keep talking to us. What do you see?

***Esperanza*:** I see three, no, four bogeys tearing in near the living quarters. Aberrants! Activating defense grid and bringing down airlock doors. Defense grid'll do dick — they're too close. [static] inside now. Weapons fire over the intercom; [static] tossing charges and retreating room by room.

Ulan Bator OMS: Gridley, hang in there. I've opened emergency communications to the orders to coordinate rescue response. Is everyone online?



Proxy Alex Cassel: Check, Ulan Bator. *Esperanza*, this is Alex Cassel. Assistance is on its way. Are you receiving, *Esperanza*?

Esperanza: [static] receiving, Proxy Cassel. Two — now three, emergency evac pods launched. [static] blown to hell. Fucking bastards!

Cassel: *Esperanza*, this is Cassel. Shut your defense grid down. We've got an interceptor out there. *Jordan* is an estimated two minutes, 12 seconds away. Reinforcements are on board.

Esperanza: Hope there's a shitload of them, sir. [sound of explosion] [static] collector has impacted hydroponics. Repeat, the main solar collector has impacted hydroponics and has changed our orbital vector. Calculating [static] now.... Oh, fuck.

Ulan Bator OMS: What is it, *Esperanza*? Keep talking to us. We can't help you if you don't tell us what's going on.

Esperanza: [static] can't help us unless you're going to jack a forklift into orbit, Ulan Bator! We're going to scrape atmosphere in minutes. Christ! Transmitting vector and impact coordinates.

Proxy Matthieu Zweidler: *Mein Gott!* Look at the target! I must recall my people. [static]

Cassel: Do we have time to evacuate?

Proxy Rebecca Bue Li: No. Just enough time to pray.

Cassel: Unless we get someone up there. Atwan! Where the hell are you? We need your help here.

Proxy Bolade Atwan: Negative, Cassel. If you need our help, first explain the blips that just appeared on low-altitude radar around our port. You know — the ones moving at Mach one that refuse to answer our hails.

Cassel: Never mind that, Bolade. If we don't get people onto *Esperanza* now, it's going to flatten half of Europe! Screw our argument; we've got something more important to deal with!

Esperanza: *Jordan* is docking. [static] We have confirmation of nine psions on board. Correction, eight — one is down already. And what the hell are you talking about down there?

Atwan: I'm sorry, Cassel, but I don't buy this convenient "disaster." You know what we've decided, you've monitored us making plans to leave — and now, out of the blue, you're begging for help? While hostile craft close in on my 'port, mind you. It all seems a little too pat to me. Just the sort of thing you'd pull to keep us grounded, Cassel. You all made your choice and we made ours. It's too late to stop the process anyway.

Yellowjacket Interceptor Jordan: Whoever is listening down there, this is Captain Alais Ramsey of the *Jordan*. I don't know what you're talking about, but [static] up here soon, like in the next [sound of explosion] ass, the crew's ass, and Europe's collective ass in under an hour.

Esperanza: Lady, are you saying this is a [static] —ing hoax? Christ, I hope a piece of this station comes down on your fucking head!

Atwan: I'm sorry, *Esperanza*, or whoever you really are. I know Cassel and his cohorts too well to be drawn into another gambit. The stakes are too high.

Bue: I recommend you consider this threat real.

Atwan: Sure, Becca. Like you weren't backing Cassel's play the whole time. You have six orders at your disposal — if there's a real threat to *Esperanza*, why not send some of them? Unless they're busy doing something else. Sorry, but we are leaving.

Cassel: Jesus fucking Christ, Bolade, there are millions of lives at stake!

Atwan: I have visual confirmation of the troops disembarking from the ships, Alex. Nice uniforms. Goodbye. [static]

Cassel: Bolade? Atwan! Damn you! Atwan!

>>> TRANSMISSION LOG ENDS <<<



Huang- Marr Hearings Continue

— Warren Shaw, *Retrospective* ©
2120 OBC

After a week-long investigation, the United Nations initiated formal hearings into possible psi-order wrongdoing. This is the direct result of an Æon Trinity investigation into the “Huang-Marr Project” — a secret program of immoral research and human testing allegedly coordinated between at least two psi orders. The United Nations Committee on Human Rights Abuses said it is “sufficiently concerned by events relating to Huang-Marr that it warrants further investigation into all psi-order affairs.”

Despite subject matter sensational enough to overshadow the recent Chromatic attack in near space, the initial hearings were rather dry. The interviews covered numerous technical details, analyzing old transcripts and reviewing legal precedents.

The committee is obviously looking for the truth; sensationalism and scapegoats aren't on the agenda. A group calling itself “DISorder” is determined to stir the hornet's nest of controversy, however. It has picketed the United Nations on Luna, pushing a list of demands ranging from reasonable to bloodthirsty. Among its more extreme directives, DISorder calls for the immediate execution of every surviving member of the Huang-Marr Project itself.

The protests remain peaceful for the moment. Yet it is obvious that unless the UN committee makes some revelations soon, DISorder will look to generate some attention on its own. The UN would certainly prove an effective venue for their “statement.”

· TRITON ARCHIVE ·

THE INVISIBLE MENACE!

— Anti-Aberrant Defense
League leaflet

Vigilance in our darkest hour! The ABBERANTS are close to victory! There PAWNS, the so-called alein CHROMATICS, struck at humanity only a few short WEEKS ago. Luckily, those psions still loyal to Earth shook off the Abberant's mind control attempts in time to rally and CRUSH the attack!

Our Great Enemy did not expect that we would DEFY their careful plans. BUT mankind could not take advantage of this SURPRISE. The ABBERANTS and their HUMAN CONSPIRATORS triggered a plan to sow confusion amongst are forces, giving them time to plan a SECOND attack!!

The Aberrants have seized control of the MEDIA and are using it to turn our attention from DANGER in the STARS. Instead, we see NOTHING but news of PSION CORRUPTION! The ABBERANTS must destroy the psi Orders so that they can RULE Earth. So the Fiends have flooded bandwidth full of HATE and FEAR of the loyal psions!

We must be ready for VIOLENTS!! The ENEMY wants us to PANIC and CRUSIFY all psions — and when we do, the ABBERANTS and their friends will SWEEP in and DESTROY us all!! Don't be fooled by what the news says! DANGER is IMINENT! You MUST be PREPARED!!!

PSION MALFEASANCE

Transcript of United Nations Preliminary Investigation, 5.26.2120

Presiding: Delegate Phillip Bacciocci (United Nations Department of Psion Affairs), Right Hon. Felicia McMullen (United Nations Committee on Human Rights Abuses), Right Hon. Walter Jikembe (UAN Judiciary), Right Hon. Carina Schwartz (Independent Counsel, appointed by the psi orders)

Amici Curiae: Siobhan DuChamp (ISRA); Li Xu (Ministry); Hector Ramirez (Æon Trinity); Helen Czarnek (Amnesty International)

Summary: Testimony of Dr. Althea Polonsky [09:00:00 to 11:50:07 LST]. Dr. Polonsky's testimony included details of experiments performed by the alleged Huang-Marr Project conspirators, and experiment results. This information subsequently led to the United Nations' decision to begin public hearings into psion wrongdoing. Further testimony [excerpted below] detailed bureaucratic particulars.

Bacciocci: Your name is Dr. Althea Polonsky?

Polonsky: That is correct.

Bacciocci: And you have been a doctor and a member of the Æsculapian Order for how long?

Polonsky: For six years.

Jikembe: And what is your role in the order?

Polonsky: I served for two years at Montessor Clinic as a surgeon, then moved into research at the attached neurophysiology laboratory.

Jikembe: Doing what?

Polonsky: Research.

Schwartz: Research into what?

Polonsky: Psionic power and nerve function.

McMullen: And when were you approached by the Huang-Marr Project?

Polonsky: Dr. Marr approached me two years ago. He said that he'd read some of my papers and was impressed with the con-

nections I'd made between active Mazarin-Rashoud node function and increased clarity of nervous system signal transmission.

McMullen: Dr. Polonsky, did Dr. Marr talk about anything else?

Polonsky: Yes, he asked if I would be interested in joining a more advanced project based on some of my work.

Jikembe: And you accepted?

Polonsky: Yes.

Jikembe: Knowing what you did would violate any number of laws and ethical standards intrinsic to the medical profession?

Polonsky: Well, that wasn't necessarily a foregone conclusion.

Jikembe: Considering the social opinion regarding Aberrants and your own oaths to medicine and the psi orders, it is not an unreasonable assumption, correct?

Polonsky: [pause] Yes.

Schwartz: Why did you accept, then?

Polonsky: [pause] Because Drs. Marr and Beitz explained the potential benefit of what we were doing, and offered assurances that the violations would be kept to a minimum.

Bacciocci: Dr. Beitz, you say. Would this be Dr. Gustaf Beitz?

Polonsky: Yes.

Schwartz: The Dr. Gustaf Beitz who was responsible for allocating funds to various research projects within the Æsculapian Order, as well as to projects undertaken by other orders and private institutions?

Polonsky: Yes.

McMullen: Were you aware of Dr. Beitz's position and title — in short, his identity?

Polonsky: Yes.

Schwartz: Did you feel, at any point, that there was any pressure exerted on you to become part of this project? That, for example, your own position or funding for your work would be at risk if you didn't agree to work on the Huang-Marr Project?

Polonsky: No. [pause] Yes... Well, perhaps. It was intimidating for a junior researcher to suddenly be face to face with some of the biggest names in the order, you know? And to be asked to work with them.

Jikembe: Was there ever any overt threat made to your employment as a potential penalty for noncompliance?

Polonsky: Overt? No.

Bacciocci: Does that mean that threats were implied?

Polonsky: I don't know. It means... [pause] They never said anything, but every so often you'd read about a transfer to the Mimas orbiter or even occasionally someone who died at an infectious-disease station or something. You'd look that person's work up, out of professional curiosity, and you'd find that the rex was working on something similar or connected to your own. But nothing overt, no. No "Join us or we'll end your career."

Jikembe: How many other conspirators did you meet?

Li: Objection — "conspirators" is a loaded term. "Fellow researchers" would be more appropriate.

Bacciocci: Sustained. Mr. Jikembe, rephrase the question.

Jikembe: Over the course of your tenure on the project, how many fellow researchers did you come in contact with?

Polonsky: [pause] Over a dozen.

Jikembe: Could you identify those people again if necessary?

Polonsky: Some, I think. The ones I worked closely with. Others... I don't know.

McMullen: Were all of your fellow researchers members of your order?

Polonsky: No. There were at least three visitors from Orgotek that I can remember, possibly more. And I heard that some Norça were involved, but I can't confirm that. [Noise in the gallery. McMullen calls for quiet]

Jikembe: Could you identify those psions if asked?

Polonsky: I don't know.

Jikembe: Were any other fellow researchers, ones with whom you did not come into contact directly, ever mentioned in your presence or mentioned to you?

Polonsky: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Schwartz: Did you ever hear the names of anyone else on the project besides those people you worked with directly.

Polonsky: Ah. Yes. A bit. A few.

Jikembe: Such as?

Polonsky: Well, Dr. Huang, of course. And Drs. Grabowski, Ross and Mangels, plus a couple of the other personnel at Beaulac whom I had to work with in order to correlate some results. A few others, not many.

Jikembe: Was Proxy Zweidler's name ever mentioned in connection with the project?

Polonsky: No. Never.

Jikembe: Did Dr. Beitz indicate at any time that he had Dr. Zweidler's approval or foreknowledge of the project?

Polonsky: No. There was actually some discussion about how they had to tiptoe around Proxy Zweidler until they had some concrete results. They suggested that the proxy would be so happy with what they'd come up with that everything else would be swept under the rug.

Jikembe: So Proxy Zweidler's name was mentioned. Earlier you said that his name was never said. Can you explain this discrepancy in your testimony?

Polonsky: Well... [pause] It was, I mean, he never *did* anything on the project, you know?

Jikembe: But his name was mentioned?

Polonsky: [pause] If you're going to be technical—

Jikembe: Please answer the question.

Ramirez: Objection!

Bacciocci: Overruled. Answer the question, Dr. Polonsky.

Polonsky: [whisper] Mentioned, yes. But he wasn't part of it. I swear, he wasn't.

Jikembe: Thank you, Dr. Polonsky. No further questions.

PSION MALFEASANCE

>>> SUPPRESSED TESTIMONY <<<

Transcript of United Nations Preliminary Investigation, 5.24.2120

Summary: Testimony of Dr. Althea Polonsky [09:47:15 to 10:14:28 LST]. Dr. Polonsky's testimony within this period of time was edited out for security reasons. Ms. Czarnek initiates further discussion immediately after the first mention of the Huang-Marr Project. This exchange specifically regards Dr. Polonsky's statement about "active Mazarin-Rashoud node function."

Czarnek: "Active"? The node has a passive function?

Polonsky: In a way. [pause] Research revealed a genetic variation in some individuals related to the Mazarin-Rashoud node. At this basic level... well...

McMullen: Doctor Polonsky.

Polonsky: Very well. At this basic level, this genetic antecedent to the M-R node indicates the potential for an individual to become a psion or an Aberrant. [Noise in the gallery. McMullen calls for quiet.]

Jikembe: You're saying that psions and Aberrants are the same thing?!

Polonsky: Certainly not. I am saying that, before any enhanced abilities manifest, such a person could become a psion or an Aberrant. The actual sequencing is different for each. In layman's terms, if you unlock the M-R node's coding one way, you become a psion. If you unlock it a different way, you turn into an Aberrant.

Understand that psion and Aberrant abilities diverge completely from that point. Their powers are derived entirely differently — Aberrants cannot use psi, and psions cannot use the "quantum" abilities that Aberrants channel. Further, manifesting one aspect precludes any possibility of ever developing the opposing one.

I must stress that this is a grossly oversimplified explanation and it is still quite theoretical.

Bacciocci: [pause] This is rather startling news. Why was none of this disclosed to the public, or at least to ranking authorities?

Ramirez: If I may? Thank you. Considering this assembly's reaction, can you imagine what the common person would think? If they heard that the M-R node can make a psion or an Aberrant, there would be widespread panic.

Polonsky: I must clarify that, sir. The Mazarin-Rashoud *node* is indeed a physical structure that enables Aberrant powers. However, the genetic makeup from which the node develops is not predisposed to Aberrant — or psion — ability. Instead, this Mazarin-Rashoud "sequence," if you will, is simply a genetic flag indicating that a person has the potential to manifest a form of new capabilities.

Ramirez: Noted. Still, it would be foolish to reveal this hypothesis to the public before scientists can establish more concrete information.

Bacciocci: That is subject to debate, Mr. Ramirez. Still, these hearings were not assembled to address this issue. These claims will be suppressed until such time as qualified individuals may investigate further.

McMullen: Agreed.

GENMAN

The Biggest Bang of All?

— Hunter P. Hunter, *Muzzein Music* © 2120 Genman

It's like nothing anyone's ever heard — and that's the problem. You know what Hunter's talking about here, phen and men alike — the brand-new bang mix from Cernach that claims to incorporate sounds from the recent battle with the Chromatics and — believe it if you dare — *sounds from inside the alien ship itself.*

Mixes Alpha through Omicron all seem to bear the statement out — you can clearly hear the lasers and the metal twisting, overlaid with snippets from UN and Chinese defense-force communications. Cernach's Aine O'Maonlai went on record as saying that the percussive beats are actually remixed samples of two fighters colliding in high atmosphere.

And then there are the other noises, the ones like nothing from this world. We're talking squeaks, slithers, growls, barks and electronicoid deedles that just haven't been heard before, even in the repertoire of innovators like All La Bamba and the 40 Thieves or Green Chambord. That's where the wild claims come in.

The conventional noises alone are classified stuff — no one knows how Cernach got their hands on the military communications, but Hunter has heard that a few heads have rolled at Chinese Fleet HQ (and not just figuratively, if the rumors are correct). But this other jazz — and believe me, who'd have thunk you could get jazz and bang inflections out of the yammering of a bunch of glow-in-the-dark aliens? — couldn't possibly have come from even military sources. These guys had to have had someone on the inside, either with the psions who did a take-no-prisoners charge into the heart of alien light itself, or...

Dare I say it?

Hunter dares.

Do the heads who make up Cernach have connections to the other side? Are aliens taking over the muzzein bang industry? And if they are, if they can hatch groove like this, would that be such a bad thing?

Hunter out.



CHROMATICS - THE NEXT BANG DIVAS?>> ©GENMAN

P · R · E



Production Notes:
Trailer, v1.0

Luna Strike III: Atlas Falling

From Phoenix Rising Entertainment

The time is now. The place is Luna. Terrorists hold the Moon — the heart of human government — in a bloody grip. Only minutes remain before violence erupts and our leaders start dying, one by one.

— Hey, Yuki, what sort of holo shots will we mix in here? Can we get the one of the Atlas statue in the lobby rolling over, or will the director pitch a fit over that? It's now or never.

— Right. Close up shots here, you think? Have to establish the villains as bad guys but make them sexy. I mean, what sorts of badassess take over the UN? Got to show the kids that these guys have to have balls the size of Titan. Where can we turn for help?

— Standard pan-up of Our Hero. God, he's an asshole, but he sells. Allah alone knows why. Yuki, you think we can use the shot where he *doesn't* have a hard-on, or will Marketing whine? To our last defender. A man without psi powers. A man with nothing but courage, strength...

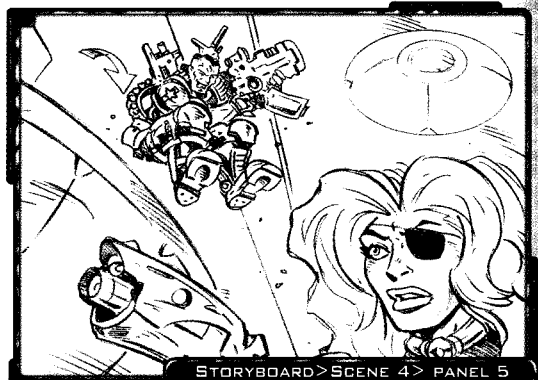
— God, I hate this tag line.
...and a very big gun.

Coming this Fall to Everywhere:

Luc Cassidy is Ivan Blak in Luna Strike III: Atlas Falling

The worlds will be watching.

— And that's a wrap. Close with standard big explosion in the background — it doesn't matter if one's in the film or not. This thing is so over the top and far from reality that it doesn't matter. What happened to the days when we made *real* holos?



Psions — The New Aberrants?

Transcript: *Ground Zero* broadcast news magazine

Broadcast: OBC Channel 46

Host: Tomas Ostopopolis

Panel Guests: Author Haile Steiner, Æsculapian Administrative Director Pierce Monahan, news personality Dahlia Allende

Ostopopolis: ...And we're back. We were talking about renegade psions. It's been a decade since the Chitra Bhanu were declared anathema and dealt with—

Steiner: Dealt with? Isn't that a rather polite way of saying "exterminated"?

Ostopopolis: I'm not sure what you're getting at.

Steiner: Let's not beat around the bush. The Chitra were accused, convicted and condemned — all by a court of their so-called peers — without any outside input.

Monahan: That's not technically—

Steiner: Did we see evidence of taint in the Chitra Bhanu other than what the orders gave us? Hardly unbiased in the matter, weren't they? That's not the only instance, either. The Upeo vanished without a trace, at the exact same time as a global catastrophe. Of course, that was some kind of "mysterious accident."

Ostopopolis: Actually, the most recent—

Steiner: So there are two orders "gone" — the two smallest, comprised of predominantly non-white members. I might add! Makes you wonder if the Norça are next on the block. With Chitra and Upeo psions gone, the remaining orders run amuck, performing *experiments* and *killing* people! And who are the worst offenders?

Monahan: I think you're making a gross exaggeration, Mr. Steiner. We—

Steiner: I'll tell you who: The very people who led the charge against the Chitra, and who probably got rid of the Upeo. What if — and this is just a theory so you can stop puffing, Pierce — what if the orders we've got left are the ones that are *really* tainted? What they've been doing the past few years sure as hell seems to indicate it! What if they got rid of the other two just to cover things up? It makes a certain kind of sense, don't you think?

Allende: ...er, I think the orders are wonderful, Mr. Steiner. Psions have done so many nice things for us over the years that it seems really ungrateful saying that kind of thing.

Ostopopolis: Uh, yes. We'll be right back with more of *Ground Zero* after this.

The Concert of the Millennium!

—Hunter P. Hunter, *Muzzain Music* © 2120 Genman Enterprises

The bang artists Cernach, considered by yours truly to be "the year's most influential new bangers," just announced that they'll play an exclusive gig — though they don't know where or when.

"We know something important's going to happen with the Chromatics," said lead singer Aine O'Maonlai. "After all, if they've been here once they'll surely come back. And music always adds drama to any situation. So we'll wait in orbit for them. When they pop back in and all hell breaks loose, we'll use the sounds we get to make music with — and relay it live!" O'Maonlai also suggested that a few lucky fans might get to go up the well with the band.

O'Maonlai deflected queries as to the band's safety by saying, "We'll be safe as houses up there, as long as the UN doesn't cock things up and shoot us by mistake." UN officials never responded to Hunter's calls.

Hunter thought that Cernach's last track was the biggest thing they could do, but it's time to re-evaluate. If Cernach pulls this off — and doesn't get killed in the process — this will be the biggest show. Ever.

Even if they *do* get themselves killed, it's a helluva note to go out on. The band's next of kin will likely be set for life — if the Chromatics don't get us all, that is Hunter out.

ÆON TRINITY FACTBOOK: EARTH: AFRICA: GHANA

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- Schools
- Night Life
- City Services
- Museums
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- Upeo wa Macho Monument
- Zoo

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Makola Spaceport is one of the most modern and busiest spaceports on Earth. It boasts over 30 launches a day to near space, Luna and even Mars! Makola is also one of only two spaceports with daily launches to the orbital station *Mujukuu*, the pride of the UAN space program.

Touch>>> here <<< for more information on *Mujukuu* travel and residential arrangements.

Makola Spaceport has an impeccable safety record, and takes pride in its extensive security procedures. Travelers who use Makola, either for planetary or extraterrestrial travel, should bring two forms of identification. Also, plan for at least an extra half hour of travel time.

Any travelers caught falsifying documents or otherwise attempting to avoid Makola's security procedures will be prosecuted under UAN terrorist regulations.

>>> **Transmission interrupted! Try Again/End/Print/Quit** <<<

LIGHTS IN THE SKIES

Available 8.23.2120

Until then, keep looking to the skies....



PseudoPs, Assault on Karroo, Lights in the Skies, Aberrant, The Corruption and Battleground 2222 are all "©" of Bloody Heavens Games, 2120



In this innovative tactical sim, you take command in Earth's recent victory over the Chromatic invaders! Advanced holographic technology translates the actual alien assault and our own orbital forces' stalwart defense!

Play from any of nine vantage points! Take the role of a fighter pilot mounting an assault on the Chromatic mother ship! Become any of FIVE psions or human troops repelling the alien invaders inside mysterious Eyrice Station! Can you handle taking over the Lunar strategic defense command? How about coordinating Chinese military forces? Do you dare to try to get inside an alien's mind and sentence Earth to total destruction?

Lights in the Skies provides over 300 hours of gameplay on nine paths, all with full interactive sim and featuring all the advances that won Assault on Karroo more awards than any other game, ever!

Choose from space combat sim, full tactical sim, representational sim, or first person sim. It comes complete with Bloody Heavens' revolutionary PseudoPs game engine, that allows players to recreate the effects of really playing a psion!

NEW INTERACT >>> BLOODY HEAVENS

Back again!

Thought you could use a bit more educational reading now that you have some downtime. How do I know you have downtime? You don't want to know, get me?

Anyway, here's some more of Æon's oh-so-classified stuff, this time on the Upeo. There are some things here that the secretive Ms. N'gamba may not have clued you in on. Not saying she's holding out, but only an idiot would spill everything to complete strangers.

Why do you think I'm keeping up this clever secrecy bit? You have more important things to worry about right now than me, yeh?

— Junior Mal

TACTICAL ANALYSIS: UPEO WA MACHO

— **Chow Kei-Ma [Proteus Division] and Liesl DuBois [Orgotek] 8.11.2114**

TOP-SECRET SECURITY CLEARANCE — NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

>>> Authorized on the Authority of the United Nations Security Council, the Æon Trinity and the Psi Orders <<<

SUMMARY

There is little inherently dangerous in an Upeo wa Macho's primary psionic ability. The limitations of subquantum particle manipulation that makes teleportation possible render it impossible for a teleporter to materialize inside a solid object, or even in most cases within a liquid [H₂O seems to be the maximum liquid density into which an Upeo can teleport safely, though impurities in most standing water renders this moot]. It is believed that were an Upeo to teleport himself into another object, a fusion reaction would result. The reader is referred to Einstein for the results of such an encounter.

Teleportation's advantage is therefore strictly tactical. By allowing rapid redeployment of troops and ordnance, teleportation gives a sufficiently skilled Upeo an unparalleled edge over a normal soldier. For example: With teleportation, a soldier can fire and then teleport out to a sniper's vantage point, drawing enemy fire on his former position and exposing the target to fire from his new one.

Teleportation also allows unique deployment of explosive and anti-personnel weaponry. A teleporter can walk into a room, pull the pin on a grenade, drop it, and reach a safe distance instantaneously. There are unsubstantiated reports that certain Upeo have reached such a level of mastery that they can even teleport objects into a location without transporting themselves along with them.

The classic image of the teleporter blinking into combat, uttering a witty comment, and then dropping his ordnance and vanishing is a myth. A well-trained Upeo soldier teleports to an unobtrusive location (preferably with cover), prepares a series of charges and then leaves with no one the wiser.

Reconnaissance also benefits from the use of teleportation. Using psi, an Upeo can reach a safe or otherwise inaccessible vantage point without drawing fire or triggering anti-personnel devices en route. From such a location, the individual can report all intelligence in perfect safety. While this form of recon is in some ways inferior to clairsentient scanning since it requires visual observation, it avoids the problem of psi dampers, taint residue, subquantum flux and other circumstances that can conflict with clairsentient scans.

Furthermore, Upeo reconnaissance has the advantage of drawing fire, outlining enemy positions for retaliatory strikes. A variation on this tactic is also possible, drawing fire onto a target that's already dead or dying while exposing the shooters to a counterattack.

In many ways, the ability to teleport is not really the Upeo's deadliest weapon. It is his understanding of how to put this gift to best advantage that makes him a potentially unbeatable opponent.

WEAKNESSES AND RECOMMENDED RESPONSES

Upeo tactics are predicated on surprise, on being proactive, not reactive. If an Upeo is surprised, his normal response is hasty retreat (assuming the enemy doesn't drop him first).

Much as with any strenuous activity, the number of times a teleporter can jump in rapid succession is limited. Even the most efficacious Upeo tactics have limited application once the jumper tires. Recommended response to a teleporter, then, is to force him to jump as often as possible in a short period of time, making him drain his psionic and physical reserves.

Means of defending against Upeo reconnaissance include setting perimeter weapons with sensors rigged to look for sudden shifts in air pressure, as well as placing mines or trapping sites that offer good teleportation vantage points. Fogging or otherwise obscuring vision also works well, as most Upeo not linked to a clairsentient or other ranged surveillance must rely on line-of-sight jumps. On unfamiliar ground, the more a teleporter's field of vision is distorted or obscured, the more helpless he is.

An Upeo can teleport back to a site with which he is familiar. Numerous Upeo have visited tactical centers, individual order headquarters and the like. As a result, teleporters could easily strike at any tactical command they wish. With that in mind, we suggest an immediate relocation of all sensitive sites — or, at the very least, a complete renovation. The less familiar the site is, the more difficult it is for the Upeo to access it.

As far as can be determined, there is no way to keep a determined teleporter out of a large area. The possibility of a suicide Upeo bomber should not be discounted. A renegade teleporter could easily level as many cities as he has bombs. Upeo working in concert would likely be unstoppable.

CONCLUSION

Should action be necessary against the Upeo, it must be singular, rapid and surgical. If the Upeo get a chance to regroup and counterattack, any numerical advantage we hold is lost. In this committee's opinion, an orbital strike that annihilates all targets in an area is the only effective option at this point. Such a maneuver is overt and would be impossible to disguise from the public.

A covert action requires deploying ground troops rapidly with strong clairsentient and telepathic aid, backed by heavy air support and enacting some manner of subquantum interference. Even in a best-case scenario, however, there is no way to prevent numerous Upeo from escaping. This could well result in any fugitives mounting subsequent guerrilla actions against our forces.

Despite these tactical considerations, we must never forget that the teleporters are a formidable (if small) group. We must plan for the unexpected should we ever be forced to act against the order.

Climbing to Tartarus is the closing chapter of Trinity's **Darkness Revealed** adventure trilogy. The characters must struggle against significant odds to unify humanity in time to defend against attackers from both without and within. The preceding color pages should be shared with players at appropriate points during the episode, providing their characters with background and insight.

Overview

As the curtain rises on *Climbing to Tartarus*, the characters are on the run from their erstwhile benefactors, the Æon Trinity (for characters who sided with the Trinity, see the Æon Option: Playing John Law sidebar). Accompanied by the prodigal teleporter Susan N'gamba and the steadfast Ministry agent Robert Wei, the team fled the "protection" of Æon's Chicago headquarters after realizing their former patrons were apparently unwilling to tell the universe that aliens held human teleporters captive for use in a massive attack on Earth — and that the attack is imminent.

N'gamba psionically transports the characters and Wei to her hometown of Accra, Africa. The characters take the now-

exhausted N'gamba to a hotel. With a moment to think, the characters realize the significance of their situation. They possess news of vital importance to all humanity, but the longer they hide out the greater the chance the Chromatics will arrive unopposed.

Mysterious figures soon, whom the characters likely assume to be Proteus operatives (the truth is explained under *The Assassins Unveiled*, below), assault the hotel. The characters and their companions barely escape the attack in time. On the run yet again, they must take action or capture is inevitable.

The United Nations' hearings into psion corruption provide the perfect means to spread the news of invasion. After all, dignitaries from every nation and political group are present and — unlike the UN's preliminary investigation — the hearings are broadcast live throughout near space.

N'gamba still recovers from her recent jump from Karroo. She doesn't want to keep expending energy, so the characters must head for the Moon by conventional means. Assailants dog the characters uncannily each step of the way. With effort, the characters make their way to Luna nonetheless.

Infiltrating the UN, the characters are dogged by security. N'gamba finally uses precious psi to teleport the team into the general assembly. This spectacular entrance gives the characters time make an impassioned plea to the delegates about the imminent assault. Supporting evidence from N'gamba and — in a surprising act of support — Otha Herzog himself, present at the hearings, lends credence to the announcement. Humanity is warned and, as Æon predicted, surges into chaotic uproar at the news.

The Trinity shows it isn't omniscient, however. It assumed that a reappearing Upeo would sow confusion and fear among the populace. Æon isn't entirely wrong. However, N'gamba is proof that at least one Upeo still lives. This galvanizes humanity into action — if nothing else, Earth forces can exact vengeance upon Chromatics for what they've done to the teleporters.

Æon Option: Playing John Law

This material assumes that the characters side with N'gamba and Wei. Still, as noted at the conclusion of *Heaven Through Iron Gates*, it's possible that some or all of the characters agree with the Æon Trinity's desire to keep the impending invasion and revelations about the Upeo under wraps.

In this case, N'gamba and Wei still escape and head for the United Nations (Wei has his reasons for going along with this, as discussed below). The characters form the team sent to capture the fugitives. A continuing series of sidebars, each titled "Æon Option:," explains how to handle a team loyal to Æon during these events.

The Æon team may also choose conscience over loyalty at any point and switch sides, in which case you can revert to the regular narrative.

Despite this show of support, the UN must think of the many rather than the few. Although the Chromatics apparently use human teleporters to jump, the UN decides that rescuing imprisoned Upeo is too much of a gamble. Human forces must destroy the alien ships as quickly and decisively as possible, no matter who's on board. This is war.

Æon has other ideas — as should the characters. The Trinity reconciles with the characters during hurried preparations for Earth's defense, offering them a part in a rescue attempt. The characters try to liberate as many captured Upeo wa Macho as possible. The United Nations doesn't block the plan, but provides a grim warning: Earth's preservation is the UN's ultimate goal in this engagement. Any humans on board a Chromatic ship targeted for destruction cannot expect aid from UN defense forces.

Human forces are still only partially prepared when psionic shock waves ripple across near space, signaling the Chromatics' arrival. The aliens appear much further out than the characters did upon their return in *Shaka* (a bit of defiance by the captured Upeo, giving human forces more time to prepare). The rescue team — comprised of the characters, N'gamba and Wei — slips through enemy lines during the conflict and boards one of the alien mother ships.

Then comes the climactic confrontation. While battling aliens and rescuing imprisoned Upeo, the characters learn why things have gone so poorly for them recently. They've harbored a traitor in their midst for some time — none other than the ever helpful Robert Wei.

Wei is psionically possessed by a Doyen, a member of an alien race known to the proxies but as yet not revealed to humanity at large. Wei's alien is one of a faction that's malevolent toward humans — and these aliens are the prime movers behind the Chromatic war with humanity. The particular Doyen possessing Wei discovered the characters' recent efforts at Karroo and dominated the Ministry agent to monitor the psions' actions (that's what the subquantum backlash in the Chromatic holding cell was really all about — see page 47).

The alien is intent on foiling the team's plans and making sure that Earth and the Upeo are never reunited. As such, it works throughout *Climbing to Tartarus* to foil the team's plans (including arranging several attempts on the psions' lives). It is only at the last, however, that Wei's possessor reveals its true colors.

At the adventure's climax, the characters must defeat "not-Wei" (preferably without killing the psion himself), fight off Chromatics defending their ship, and get to safety before the United Nations space fleet kills them all.

A piece of cake.

Theme

The theme of *Climbing to Tartarus* is truth. On the surface, the moral choices that the characters and their associates face are fairly straightforward. The Upeo wa Macho made a bad moral choice (and indirectly helped kill millions) by valuing personal freedom over their duty to help other psions get to the *Esperanza* (although Proxy Atwan had every reason to suspect that it was a trap). The Æon Trinity is initially a villain (except to those psions who stick with it) for its attempts to ramrod the team into obeying seemingly arbitrary — if not outright soulless — orders. The Æsculapians and Orgotek have already been revealed to harbor corruption. The only ones the characters can trust are themselves and those who've stuck with them through every hardship — primarily N'gamba and Wei.

But these truths are relatively easy to swallow. Truly difficult revelations lie underneath. Perhaps

The Assassins Unveiled

The nameless assassins who harass the team in Accra and on Luna are *ronin* psions retained by human pawns of the Doyen. These agents have been drawn in even further by the Doyen than was Argente Essem (the hapless Doyen spy from *Passage Through Shadow* who didn't even know he was really transmitting secrets to the enemy). These rogues keep finding the team because the Doyen possessing Wei uses low-level telepathy to call in its human minions.

The assassins are programmed thoroughly. Their memories are carefully wiped of any incriminating details, and most of their personalities are erased as well. These things are barely human, having been recreated as little more than organic killing machines. Any attempt to engage one of these pseudo-automatons in conversation bears this out immediately.

But, to the Doyen, the agents are just more tainted tools to be thrown away when the job is finished.

there was a reason for the Upeo's choice to leave while *Esperanza* fell. Perhaps *Æon* sees a larger picture than do the characters. Perhaps corruption within an order does not mean that the order as a whole is corrupt. And perhaps those people whom the team trusts implicitly aren't worthy... or aren't even people at all, at least not in the strict sense of the term.

Mood

The mood of *Climbing to Tartarus* is immediacy and desperation. The *Æon* Trinity wants the characters back *now*. The Chromatic fleet is coming *now*, and there's no time to lose to mobilize humanity's defenses. The fate of humanity rests on the characters, and they should know it. With that in mind, the entire episode should have a fast pace. There is no time to waste in reflection or excessive planning, not when disaster could strike at any second. Furthermore, while the public doesn't yet know about the impending Chromatic invasion (it's up to the characters to sound the alarm, after all), the recent Chromatic raid and the ongoing UN hearings have everyone on edge. Psions are no longer trusted implicitly. Accusations and rumors fly. In other words, the characters can't coast on their reputations as psions.

Dead Dead Dead

And we mean it. There is every chance that some or all of the characters will flat-line by the end of **Darkness Revealed**. After all, they run up against *Æon*, an invading Chromatic fleet and an intensely powerful alien that secretly occupies the body of a trusted ally. Be prepared for what might happen if some or all of the characters go down. Talk to your players about backup characters — other psions inspired by the original team, allies or followers of same, or a new crew sent in by *Æon*. Let everyone know the stakes beforehand, so no player is caught entirely unawares when that laser blast fatally burns through his character's sternum. And above all, make sure that the integrity of the story overrides random die rolls.

Be prepared. This is one nasty situation.

Every eye might be an informer's, every hand might be a Trinity agent's. If the characters are going to save humanity, they must defy it — and that means they're isolated and on the run. The second the characters relax, trust or feel comfortable is the second the story loses steam.

Keep the pressure on. After all, it's not like *Æon* or the Chromatics would slack off, is it?

Setting

Climbing to Tartarus has a series of wildly disparate settings. It starts in Africa, switches to Luna and reaches its climax in space (with a *de-nouement* back in Switzerland). Information on Accra is covered below. Details on Luna and near space are available in **Luna Rising** and **Descent into Darkness**; Basel is covered in **Passage Through Shadow**. As the action of the story jumps around, so does the atmosphere of each location. Luna and Accra shouldn't feel interchangeable, after all.

Accra, Ghana

One of the fastest growing cities in Africa, Accra is both a cultural and an economic powerhouse. Located on the Gulf of Guinea (at the center of the so-called Accra Region), the city is a hub for sea, land, air and space shipping. Accra was built on the site of villages of the Ga people, and coalesced into its more-or-less modern form in the 19th century, drawing from Dutch, Danish and British colonial outposts. As a result, the city has a cosmopolitan feel and look. Classic African, colonial, modern and post-modern architecture jumble on the city's skyline. The city does not conform to an arcology format; despite the urban center's rapid expansion, Accra has remained remarkably true to its original blueprint for growth, established in the 1920s. Thus, the city's map is mostly regular, making travel within it, to the Makola Spaceport or to the deep-water port of Tema (subsumed by Accra long ago) fast, easy and inexpensive.

Accra's main business is shipping; its hub status lets it handle all sorts of cargoes that small or less conveniently located cities can't. The city is also home to almost a dozen universities, including the University of Ghana (now almost two centuries old) and the Ada Technical Institute, one of the most reputable research and technical schools on the continent (and one from which Orgotek recruits heavily).

The city also hosts a rather extensive historical and tourist district, boasting one of the world's finest zoological gardens, the mausoleum of Kwame N'krumah, the George Padmore Research Library and more. There are also extensive beaches located within the city's limits; these draw crowds numbering in the millions each year.

Apart from the immediate downtown and shipping districts, much of Accra is residential. City planning allows for numerous parks and fountains, not to mention monuments and statuary. Downtown is a mass of skyscrapers looming over tourist sites; industrial and shipping complexes reign to the south and west.

At the moment, the city's permanent population is just over two million, with that number swelling by another 100,000 when colleges and universities swing into session. In addition, there are usually another 50,000 or so tourists, mainly Australians or other Africans, in town at any given time. Students and even permanent residents tend to be somewhat ill-informed about the city's layout and customs, due to the melange Accra has become.

City security is provided primarily by Accra's well-armed and well-trained police force, supplemented by UAN army regulars. The nation of Ghana (of which Accra is the capital) is a leading state in the United African Nations, and relies on UAN central services and military rather than providing its own.

Makola Spaceport

While not up to the status of Kenyatta on the other side of the continent, Makola expands rapidly and expects to host traffic equal to its famous counterpart within seven years. Originally, Ghana and indeed all of West Africa was serviced by the Upeo-run port in Nigeria. Makola was begun after the Upeo's disappearance.

Makola Spaceport is a modern, well-planned facility. The site is laid out in a fashion much like a barbell, with terrestrial transport handled on the west side's maze of landing pads and runways, while extraplanetary flights launch from the east. A single high-speed tram line connects the two, while terminal buildings rim the north side of both landing fields. Maintenance sheds and hangars for in-atmosphere craft are on the west and east sides of the field, while spacecraft hangars and maintenance buildings are scattered across the entire eastern half of the port.

The United Nations Council Chambers (Luna)

It's easy to get into the United Nations complex in Olympus. Tours costing just a few yuan leave the facility's front atrium every half-hour, providing tourists and school groups with behind-the-scenes looks at debating chambers, conference rooms, the delegates' cafeteria and most impressively, the general assembly chamber. This room has extensive wood paneling and an inlaid marble floor with seating for 1600 delegates, translators, aides and adjuncts, not to mention a central debating floor, a raised podium with an enhanced A/V system (donated by Bose-Wakamatsu) that can tap into and subvert LunaNet, and a gallery for guests and tour groups.

The general assembly is familiar to most humans who keep up with the news. Debates and sessions are broadcast regularly throughout near space, and something of a cult of rhetoric has sprung up around a few of the more eloquent (and hologenic) orators. Hearings are usually held in one of the facility's council chambers, but due to the high interest level of psion issues, the UN holds its Huang-Marr hearings in the general assembly.

Although innocuous on the surface, the complex is quite well-defended. The majority of the site's space is beneath the Lunar surface in the underpart of Olympus' Mezzanine. Each chamber is contained in a massive plasteel box, spring-mounted to minimize damage from tremors and surface impacts. Most doors have airlock-grade seals, and thick plasticrete lies behind the rooms' wood paneling. The UN also provides lodging for its delegates and employees within the complex.

In addition to the glass-lined atrium main entrance, there is a maintenance/shipping access door (which leads to a freight elevator headed up to a landing pad attached to the Yutu Yinchon Spaceport), an evacuation door and a security route into the complex. All employees know about these entrances. It is also possible, though very difficult, to access the facility through its life-support conduits. Travel to the complex is by maglev tube or surface street within the Mezzanine dome. Four guards are stationed at each entrance at all times on two-hour rotating shifts.

UN Security

Armed and armored guards patrol the entire UN complex in pairs, with 18 staff on duty and another 36 on site at all times (security uses the police-officer template in *Trinity*, page 306). Security is heavily armed with both lethal and non-lethal options; they're trained to reach for their webguns first and to subdue rather than kill intruders. However, guards are authorized to use lethal force under extraordinary circumstances. If security believes delegates or the site itself to be in danger, guards shoot on sight.

Mare Ingenii Base

The Mare Ingenii base is probably the most important single site in humanity's attempt to reclaim the stars (though the return of the Upeo may change that). At once a center for research and development as well as a shipyard and spaceport, Mare Ingenii is the heart and mind of the jump-ship project. It was here that the first jump ships were launched. Many of the top technicians and researchers still involved in creating new and better jump ships live and work here, and their talents are a resource humanity cannot afford to lose.

The Legions maintain a full squadron on the site, supplementing the original Orgotek defense forces. Mare Ingenii also has extensive perimeter-defense systems — both automatic sensors and weaponry, and manned outposts — as well as an orbital-defense platform that stays in geosynchronous orbit over the facility. The United Nations and psi-order forces work together to cover the perimeter and the orbital station.

The base itself has four surface landing fields around it at the four compass points, each of which has an airlock shed on the surface and a pneumatic elevator leading down to the complex proper. These pads are used for freight and deliveries; the north pad sees the heaviest traffic.

There are also eight underground launch pads, each of which is sealed by plasteel airlock doors. These doors are covered in Lunar rock for camouflage purposes, and are located two kilometers further out from the base proper than are the visible landing zones. Maglev tubes connect these chambers with one another in a spoked ring, with the base itself at the center. The pads house the actual jump ships. Due to the Leviathans' obvious value, it is no wonder that the hangar doors are rated to withstand anything up to a direct hit

from a one-megaton nuclear device.

The Thompson Crater on the site is a gigantic pressurized dry dock. The development team coordinated by the Æon Trinity does not trust orbital construction facilities to maintain sufficient security — as the original *Mazat* site proved when The Colony destroyed it. Although less efficient, working below the Lunar surface has proven to be much safer.

The core of the Mare Ingenii base gives the place its nickname — “the Jack-in-the-Box,” or just “the Box.” Ingenii's architects mounted the central structure well below the Lunar surface inside a solid plasteel box. That box is mounted in a frame that surrounds the entire structure (the maglev tubes are linked by flexible segments, with termini within the box itself), and attached to its encasement by a veritable forest of springs. This arrangement cushions sensitive equipment and valuable personnel inside from the effects of any shock waves produced by bombing, crashes or Aberrant assaults. As tough as the launch pads are, the base's central core is even tougher.

Despite being built by Orgotek, much of the base is hardtech, like the box that holds it. However, biotech has a pervasive presence — life-support conduits, furniture, uniforms. Different projects and offices are assigned space within a rectangular grid. The most sensitive areas — the armory and research laboratories, along with the garages used for model construction and computer cores — are located at the bottom of the base. In a rare fit of insight, someone located administration on the highest level of the complex, along with receiving terminals for the surface landing pads.

The middle levels house offices, support facilities, the site's communications center and other important but nonessential departments. Warehousing is also handled here, complete with a second series of maglev tube connectors. Most of the site's hydroponics works (two levels' worth) are located on the mid-levels, though small farms (used mainly to recycle oxygen) exist on every level.

Mare Ingenii boasts an extensive in-house security system of human and automated guards, the latter category including everything up to and including autocannons slaved to security cameras and motion sensors. All in-house doors have airtight seals and security keypads

with seven-digit codes, and there are airlock doors every 10 meters along corridors. Certain sensitive locales have gas ducts built into the local ventilation systems; in case of intrusion, airlock doors drop and knockout (or on one memorable occasion, lethal) gas is pumped into the isolated area.

Mare Ingenii is under tight security at all times. There is no room for strays to go wandering about looking for excitement. Even with the rediscovery of the Upeo, the jump-ship program is too important to allow any random elements into the site that houses it.

Running Climbing to Tartarus

The previous episode, *Heaven Through Iron Gates*, is the only essential link at this point. **Descent into Darkness** and **Passage Through Shadow**, the first two books in the **Darkness Revealed** series, are vital to building events to this stage. However, the story takes a dramatic shift to a much larger scale with the beginning of **Ascent into Light**. As long as the characters were on board for *Heaven Through Iron Gates*, events from that episode lead naturally into this story.

Bypassing Heaven Through Iron Gates

If you discard the first episode of this book for whatever reason, things get sticky. The best way to incorporate a new team into the ongoing storyline is to have the psions already near Accra (the city to which N'gamba flees after escaping Æon's Chicago headquarters).

Æon compiles a list of her likely destinations, with Accra at the top of the list. (Assume, as mentioned above, that she escaped alone... except for Ministry agent Wei). The Trinity contacts its operatives or associates in the area — the characters — and asks them to bring N'gamba and Wei back in. Æon suggests that N'gamba is likely worn out from her recent teleports and may try to move on through conventional methods.

The characters are to monitor spaceports and train stations, but the Trinity thinks it best that they move on N'gamba's parents' home immediately. As is appropriately cinematic, N'gamba just happens to be there, recovering from her recent excursions. Wei is gone, making plans for a trip to

Luna. (Wei — the Doyen possessing him, really — continues his charade for the moment. He plans on setting up N'gamba as a terrorist, sabotaging the UN himself with N'gamba as the patsy. If successful, this turn of events presents the Upeo in a sinister light to the public, and psions as a whole find themselves in a tight spot.)

Thanks to the presence of noncombatants (Susan N'gamba's parents), the characters are less likely to go in shooting. N'gamba has a chance to explain her situation to the characters, hopefully convincing them of how important it is that they help her.

Behind the Scenes

The characters have tremendously important news of an alien invasion that could occur at any time. They're on the run with a member of a psi order whose entire fellowship was thought lost. Æon operatives and alien lackeys are hard on the characters' heels. They have little time and nowhere to turn; they must rely on one another to make it through this dangerous turn of events.

The Æon Trinity

During the course of **Darkness Revealed**, characters learn that Æon is not exactly the kindly organization it presents itself to be. Neither is it a sinister agency bent on dominating humanity. As is often the case, the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

The Trinity is at its most Machiavellian during this episode — looking at every conceivable option and planning accordingly. Æon is not infallible, though. After all, it thinks it best to silence word of invasion and teleporters until it can make its own plans. Although it can respond quickly to circumstances (as shown in the Huang-Marr incident, the expedition to Karroo, and the upcoming Upeo rescue mission), the Trinity more frequently defaults to a bureaucratic mentality. It looks at the big picture, after all, which requires input from many sources, as well as discussing all feasible options.

As *Climbing to Tartarus* proves, in looking on such a broad scale, Æon loses sight of important details — namely, personal loyalty and truth. If the characters make it to the end of this story, they give the Trinity a great deal to think about regarding what it has become.

Aliens

Chromatics

The Chromatics bear intense hatred for humanity, believing it a race of "corrupters." Chromatics hold nothing back in their war, turning the enemy's own tools against it. This is most telling in the aliens' use of captured teleporters. The Upeo are forced to transport a massive invasion fleet from the Chromatics' home system to Earth's doorstep.

Considering that the Chromatics sent an assault force to Earth a month ago, it may seem that it's taken them a long time to get the main invasion underway. The time frame makes sense with the proper perspective. As noted in **Passage Through Shadow**, the first attack was designed to confirm Earth's location and to recover a secret Doyen recording device that held key tactical information on human forces. The data, translated with the help of Doyen allies, would provide the Chromatics with vital human targets at which to strike.

The foray was unsuccessful, but the aliens aren't immediately aware of that. The odd Doyen are seldom on hand to clarify things for the Chromatics, so the hostile aliens must rely on whatever they can learn from the captured Upeo. The teleporters take full advantage of the language barrier and the Chromatics' ignorance, spreading disinformation at every opportunity. As far as the Chromatics know, it could take months for the scout force to return — if it ever makes it back at all. However, the Upeo make an error when they hope to scare the Chromatics by suggesting that the mother ship could be lost forever in the great void. The idea frightens the aliens, but also makes them more resolute in their invasion.

The Chromatics decide that they cannot wait indefinitely; when the scout doesn't return after what translates to 20 Earth days, the aliens mobilize the assault fleet. It takes days to head out from the Chromatic homeworld and force the Upeo to trigger their jumps, but the fleet's arrival is inevitable. The Chromatics arrive in our Solar System only six days after the characters themselves return from Karroo.

The Doyen

As revealed in **Passage Through Shadow**, a fourth alien race, called "the Doyen," has made contact with humanity. Known only to the proxies and a select few individuals, these strange beings are well-aware of humanity but stay out of its affairs for the most part. The proxies have therefore decided to not reveal the aliens' existence to humanity at large.

However, a faction of the Doyen has taken action against humans. Although all Doyen consider Aberrants a threat to the cosmos, this group believes that all humanity will inevitably become tainted. The faction found the Chromatics and provided them with biotech advances stolen directly from humanity so that the aliens could battle mankind.

These Doyen aren't above using human agents as well. Fundamentally, humanity must be destroyed. The faction knows that it holds a significant advantage in keeping its existence secret from humanity. As a result, the single Doyen that possesses Wei maintains secrecy unless it's certain that it has no other option.

Arrival in Accra

As a teleporter can only jump to a point she sees or has strong memories of, it should be no surprise that Susan N'gamba's desperate action lands her in her home city of Accra. In the tension of the previous episode's climax, N'gamba leaps for a place within the city that holds strong emotional resonance, one of the few places that has remained a constant throughout her life: Accra's famous zoological gardens.

The entire group arrives smack dab in the elephant compound in late afternoon (about a half-hour before sunset, when the park closes). While the compound, with its surrounding moat, replica termite mounds and amenities is a marvel of the zookeeper's art, it's also designed to keep its rather large (and surprisingly psionically sensitive) inhabitants inside.

N'gamba is seriously drained after this leap. She had recovered only a portion of her psionic reserves from the Karroo jump, and the psionic damper at the Æon headquarters siphoned off even more. The team has little time to address this situation, though, as four elephants (one bull, two cows and an immature male) in the pen go berserk upon the characters' sudden arrival.

The entire compound is surrounded by a moat, which itself has a four-meter-high stone wall around it, and is topped by a chain-link fence. The walls are rough enough to climb with relative ease, but the excited pachyderms complicate the situation. Needless to say, killing the animals (even in self-defense) is not a recommended solution — but neither is getting trampled. Of course, the characters are probably also interested in avoiding unwanted attention, which is difficult the longer they stay in the compound.



The characters could dodge the elephants until zookeepers show up. It takes about two minutes for personnel, armed with tranquilizer rifles, to arrive and put the animals to sleep, help the team out through the rear maintenance exit, and then call the police. If the characters panic, they are likely in custody by nightfall. Still, they've dealt with greater threats, so escaping over the walls or through the rear exit should not be difficult if they remain cool.

The crowd thins as the park winds down, but numerous witnesses still stroll about. The characters can hide in a rest room or maintenance shed for a few minutes to take stock of their situation. N'gamba is seriously drained, and while she doesn't need immediate medical attention, she's in no shape to teleport again or do much of anything for the time being. The rest of the group is probably exhausted from weeks of constant activity, and the elephant altercation doesn't help matters.

The team's first order of business is getting out of the zoo and finding a place to rest. While the disturbance at the pen alerts zoo security (which stakes out the exits looking for the wise guys who jumped

into the pachyderm pit to tease the animals), it should be fairly easy (standard **Subterfuge** or **Stealth** rolls) to get past the guards or over the park walls.

Hiding Out

N'gamba's parents were still semi-nomadic when she took the post at Karroo; while she knows they settled in Accra, she isn't sure where. Wei suggests getting a hotel room as an alternative. Accra relies heavily on the tourist trade, so there's no shortage of hotels, motels and flophouses. Ones in the seedier parts of the city are less likely to be picky about clientele; just the sort of thing the characters want.

The team ends up in utilitarian lodging in one of the city's less attractive neighborhoods, but the desk clerk doesn't ask questions and the hotel's security (read: tappable surveillance) is poor. Plus, the place is cheap, which is a good thing considering that the characters are restricted to their cash on hand. During check-in, characters can make **Attunement** checks to notice Wei use a psionic ability. He says he's sensing if they're being followed, and confirms that they're not. In truth, the Doyen possessing Wei summons lackeys from Cairo.

DARKNESS REVEALED:

(If the team isn't bright enough to pay cash, Æon picks up any use of credit almost immediately. A Proteus retrieval squad drops in within a few hours. Indeed, the characters should suffer the consequences of this or other acts of blatant stupidity. There is no room for screw ups at this point; don't be shy about driving the point home.)

Each hotel room is approximately four meters by seven meters, with two beds, a bathroom and a closet by the front door. A connecting door joins every two rooms together. Each room has a sliding glass door that opens onto a meter-wide balcony with a meter-high iron railing.

Safely ensconced, Wei recommends they rest before doing anything else. N'gamba wants to shower and eat, and the characters probably feel similarly. After taking care of such details, the fugitives can consider their options.

N'gamba feels it's imperative that they announce the impending invasion. She doesn't know about the Huang-Marr hearings, so it's up to the characters to realize the inquiries are their best opportunity. If they miss that their best option is to sneak to Luna and somehow get to the UN hearings being transmitted live across near space, Wei suggests it (he plans for the sabotage routine described in *Bypassing Heaven Through Iron Gates*, above, just in case his assassins don't do their job). N'gamba seizes on the idea enthusiastically, but she's still too worn out to jump anywhere.

With any luck, the characters themselves cover these points without much input from Wei or N'gamba. It's their future, after all, and their call to make. You should use only one of the Storyteller characters to nudge the team in the right direction, assuming the characters are absolutely bogged down and have no clue as to what to do next.

Whatever their decision, the group needs local assistance — at least to get disguises (Wei is still in his Ministry uniform), but possibly also for cash and maybe even medical attention. Just as the characters discuss details, the assault squad summoned by Wei swings through the windows.

Assassins!

There are as many interlopers as there are team members, including Wei and N'gamba. The attackers crash through the balcony (having swung from the roof) into however many rooms hold characters. Due to tight quarters, the attack

Discovering the Traitor

Savvy players may mistrust Wei. If you handle things well, though, the hidden Doyen should remain undiscovered until the climactic final scene. After all, up until recently, Wei has been nothing but helpful to the characters. He's supported them in every fashion, and his previous uses of psi were genuinely for the characters' benefit. The Doyen keeps up Wei's considerate persona, and makes sure that his subversive efforts still seem helpful.

Even **Telepathy** attempts revealing nothing about Wei. Doyen are powerful psions, especially in telepathic capabilities. The spy easily hauls out Wei's stored memories and feelings regarding the characters (normally, the Ministry agent is quite sympathetic to them), covering the alien's true nature. Clairsentient **Danger Sense** reveals nothing, either, since it warns only of imminent physical danger, not evil intent.

The Doyen is not a two-dimensional thug, but perhaps the characters' greatest antagonist in this trilogy. Movies don't haul out their main bad guys in the first reel, and neither should you. Sow subtle hints instead, building toward the climactic confrontation between the characters and the Doyen. This makes things much more rewarding for everyone involved.

degenerates into a furious brawl. The assassins wear charcoal-gray uniforms and masks, and carry laser carbines, but prefer to use melee weapons and psi powers (close quarters renders firearms dangerous to everyone, including the user). The attackers make absolutely no sound, even when gutshot or tortured, but appear well-coordinated. See the description on page 107 for more details.

The fight is confusing but brief — the attackers don't speak and appear to be skilled psions, though they don't appear to be affiliated with Æon. They seem intent on killing their opponents (the characters!) rather than subduing or taking prisoners, and they make a concerted effort to take N'gamba out permanently.

On an **Awareness** roll (+1 difficulty), a character notes that Wei fights defensively, but doesn't throw himself into the thick of things (the Doyen controlling Wei wants to make sure it maintains believability, but isn't willing to sacrifice its host for the sake of verisimilitude).

Victory or Defeat?

If the invaders win, it's all over, obviously. The characters should cut and run if it looks like they're in trouble; N'gamba might even manage a small teleport (and then collapse again) if the characters are obviously in a no-win situation. If the team wins, however, things get really sticky. The attackers kill their own subdued and wounded rather than let them be captured, while the survivors flee into the city. Characters attempting to follow are subject to **Brainjack** attempts, thanks to Wei (even a single turn is enough for the quarry to escape). Should anyone register the psionic emanations that Wei gives off, he explains that he's trying to follow the attackers telepathically — of course, he expresses disappointment at his eventual failure.

Attempts to discover where these terrorists came from prove fruitless. They wear no insignia, are racially and gender-diverse and bear no identification. Further, there's little time to investigate before the local authorities arrive — characters hear shouting from elsewhere in the building and in the street outside.

The best guess anyone may have is that these are rogue psions working for a group that has somehow learned of N'gamba's existence and wants her out of the way. The question of who this might be, however, remains unanswered — as does the nagging issue of how these anonymous assailants found them so quickly. Assumptions should generally fall to the Æon Trinity, although any characters who've worked in the organization for any length of time know that this is not a typical *modus operandi* — unless these people are from some heretofore unknown branch....

A quick telesthetic scan doesn't help unravel the mystery, either. The best images reveal a subject arriving at a decrepit warehouse, joined by the others. No mysterious crime lord shows up to give the assassins orders. They merely open a crate, unload the outfits and weapons inside, board a nondescript aircraft, disembark after some time, and head for the hotel. It's impossible to determine if the individuals received any transmission to meet at the site. There's no opportunity to sense in greater detail if the characters want to avoid being taken in by the police.

A Mysterious Benefactor

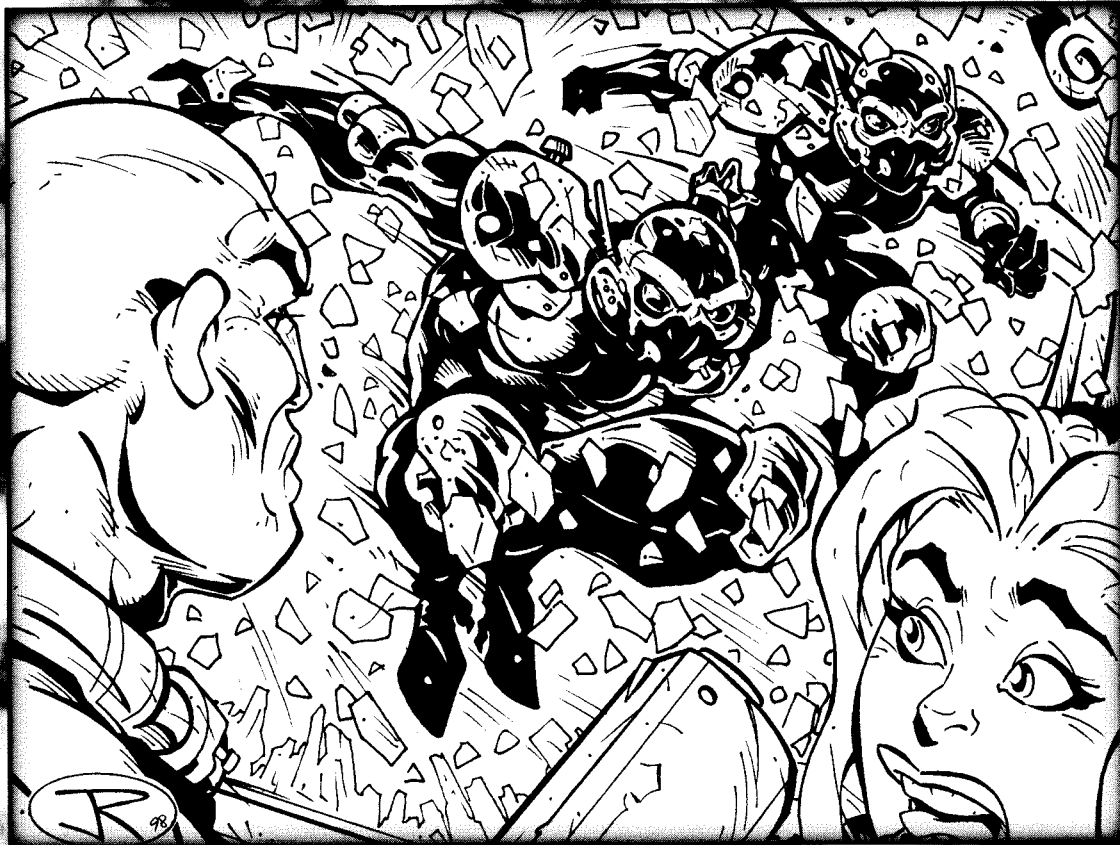
At some point (either before the attack on the hotel room or after the characters reach the N'gamba home), a character with a cell uplink on his minicomputer gets a curious transmission. It's confidential data liberated from Æon's files, specifically the *Esperanza* transcript from page 60. The individual providing this information goes by the name "Junior Mal," a tongue-in-cheek play on "Divis Mal." Any tests (**Engineering** or **Electrokinesis** use) of the data confirms its legitimacy. As far as the characters can tell, this transmission really occurred. This gives rise to such burning questions as: Who sent it? If they're not with the Trinity, how did they get access to this transmission? Why was it sent to the characters? Why the secrecy?

Otha Herzog and one of his Mashriqi, William Kaige Miller, are behind Junior Mal. Clairsentients are quite capable of finding the team wherever they go, and can crack Æon security with telesthetic skills when need be.

ISRA has foreseen tremendous subquantum disturbances in the near future. The turbulence is too great for even Herzog to pierce at the moment — a sure-fire indicator that major events are in the offing. He has seen some key details, though. Among these are the characters themselves, as well as certain sensitive data regarding the Upeo. Miller actually sent the transmission, since he has more of a knack for things technological, and can "relate better to youth," as the Old Man puts it.

The characters would likely be greatly relieved to know the source of the transmission, but Herzog believes it best if ISRA's involvement remains secret for the time being. The Old Man will step forward when the time is right.

It's not unreasonable to assume that the characters' escapade with the elephants might have gained the attention of some interested party. If the characters don't consider this, have N'gamba point it out (she's been kicking herself for jumping there reflexively, and is prepared to take the blame). Wei is inclined to believe that the attackers were sent by the Trinity (he wants the characters to keep all ties to any possible assistance severed).



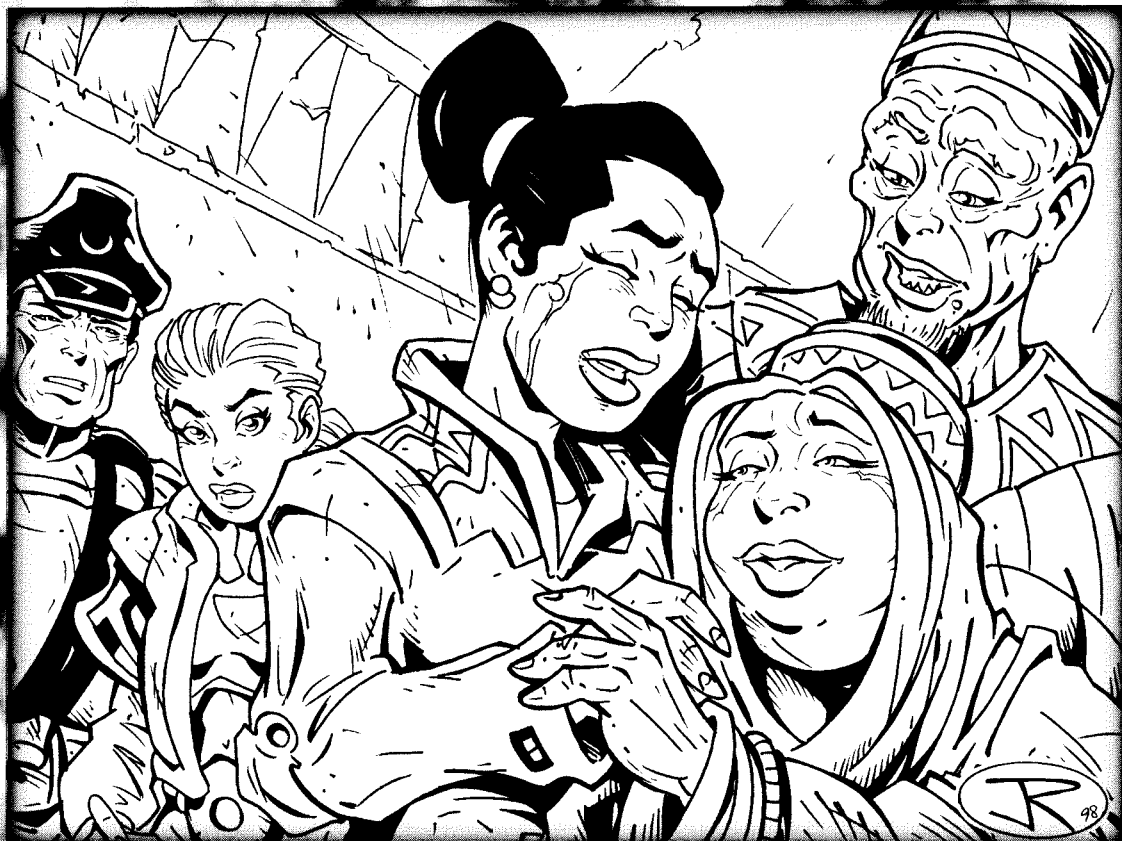
Homecoming

It's obvious that the hotel is no longer safe. Unless they want to risk police attention, the characters need to move quickly. It's inadvisable to go to another hotel, since they may simply set themselves up for another attack. The group must find allies of some sort, people they can trust. N'gamba decides against contacting friends in the military; even if she could trust them, they're probably being monitored through military as well as Æon channels. The other best option is to delve into Accra's seamy side. N'gamba has a few leads, but a standard **Savvy** roll confirms that they'll have a tough time finding anyone this early in the evening.

The characters need a place to lie low for a few hours until the night life begins. With some trepidation, N'gamba suggests her parents' house. She's loathe to involve her family considering the danger, and there's every possibility that her parents are being watched. However, N'gamba can't stand to be so close after years away from Earth, only to miss the chance to see her family — perhaps for the last time.

It's not difficult to leave the hotel unopposed; anyone who assumes the characters were involved in the ruckus isn't dumb enough to play hero and stop them. Once clear, the characters can stop at a public phone terminal and look up N'gamba's parents' address with reasonable safety (Æon couldn't have taps on every phone in Accra... could it?). This same type of terminal supplies a simple but effective map of the area that a character can download into his minicomp. Then it's just a matter of getting to the house.

Susan N'gamba's parents, Joseph and Marie, reside in a sun-yellow colonial-Dutch-style three-floor home in one of Accra's comfortable residential districts. Everything looks peaceful, but on a standard **Command** roll a character can see any number of handy tactical positions in the area in which to set up surveillance. It would be foolish to march right up to the front door. N'gamba has recovered enough energy to perform a short jump inside the house if she can get a decent look indoors (N'gamba never lived there, so she doesn't have a clear mental image of her parents' home).



Providing this perspective is simple enough if there's a clairsentient and a telepath in the group (the clear uses **Sensory Projection** to scan one of the rooms, while the tel uses **Mindspeak** to transmit the image into N'gamba's mind). Wei stands in for a telepath if need be. If the team lacks a clear, it has to sneak in. In that case, the characters are spotted by an Æon operative watching the house. The agent calls in his report and is told to sit tight. The Trinity still needs time to assemble a capture team, and assumes (rightly) that the characters will take time to lie low for a few hours and plan.

Not surprisingly, Joseph and Marie N'gamba are shocked to see their daughter appear in their living room (along with some ragged-looking strangers). They haven't seen their daughter for years, and had no idea that Susan was a psion teleporter.

A tearful reunion follows, wherein Susan fills in her parents on the events of the past few years. This can serve as a great way to catch new characters (or players) up on recent events (or simply to remind everyone what's been going on).

Travel Plans

Susan N'gamba's folks understand the danger their daughter is in, but agree to help without hesitation. The characters are welcome to use the house as long as they need to. A clairsentient with **Danger Sense** feels an underlying tension, but no immediate threats, so this seems to be the best option for the moment. If nothing else, the group can stay here until the night life hits full swing, then slip out to track down contacts whom N'gamba remembers.

Susan N'gamba is still committed to spreading the news of invasion to as many people as possible. The characters may want to contact an individual government or the media. A standard **Bureaucracy** roll confirms that any attempts of this sort will get the characters bogged down in red tape and time-wasting questions — not to mention that such efforts give Æon the chance to slip in and sway things in its favor. Despite the dangers, intruding upon the live UN hearings is by far the most effective means to sound the alarm without the Æon Trinity — or anyone else — stopping them.

N'gamba is not used to teleporting around everywhere, and wants to save her energy for when she needs it. She thinks it's best that they get to the Moon by conventional methods, which means getting a ship. N'gamba has some connections from her days as an Upeo tactician on Earth. They're old leads, but better than nothing. She doesn't want to try most of them, since any conventional ties are likely monitored by Æon. That leaves underworld connections. N'gamba's best lead for transportation is Ian Steere, a local trader who dabbles in hauling contraband. She's never worked with Steere, knowing him by reputation only, but considers that a plus since anyone tracking them won't anticipate the connection.

If any characters know the region or are skilled in dealing with criminal elements, N'gamba immediately bows to their greater experience. In that case, substitute Mandisa Letwaba, an underworld middleman, for Ian Steere in the interactions below (the characters may well still meet Letwaba through Steere, but N'gamba's only seedy connection is Steere). Both characters are described under *Dramatis Personae*, starting on page 107.

N'gamba doesn't know where Steere hangs out — or even if he's still based in the region — but it's the best lead she can think of. After a tearful and heartfelt goodbye to her parents, N'gamba leaves the house with the characters. (Men of roughly medium build, like Wei, can take advantage of Joseph N'gamba's wardrobe, while short women can choose from Maria N'gamba's clothes.) The group is tracked by the Æon operative on stakeout, but the characters can use **Stealth** to lose him (see the rules on shadowing, *Trinity*, page 235).

Accra's criminal element is much like any other; characters with illicit backgrounds find themselves right at home. A few well-placed inquiries (standard **Savvy** rolls) put the characters in touch with a representative of Ian Steere. N'gamba's unwilling to deal with anyone besides Steere himself; since the middleman has no idea of the stakes, he accepts a few yuan to trouble Steere directly. A short phone call on a public terminal (with a simple "Remember me?" from N'gamba in the video feed) arouses Steere's curiosity.

The characters meet Steere in Chiri's, a relatively upscale adult club. He does remember N'gamba, but heard she'd last been at Karroo. The

Æon Option: Arrival in Accra

The team takes the place of the Æon operative assigned to monitor Joseph and Marie N'gamba. The characters arrive in Accra's Makola Spaceport, set up a base of operations (read: a hotel) and then head for the N'gamba home.

Staking out the residence, they see Susan N'gamba and Robert Wei arrive. Before the psions can move in, the Doyen-triggered assassins strike (Wei calls them to the house, since he and N'gamba never went to a hotel). This provides the characters with a nice bit of confusion, since the attackers are obviously after N'gamba, but Æon never said anything about a second team. The characters should defend the fugitives from these assassins (the team was sent to apprehend N'gamba, not kill her).

N'gamba assumes the assassins were sent by Æon — protestations on the characters' part are ignored. After all, the Trinity has withheld information from them in the past; who's to say the characters weren't sent to Accra to act as witnesses to N'gamba's murder by "mysterious forces"? N'gamba believes (and Wei grudgingly concurs) that Æon isn't above setting up such a scenario for its own ends.

She tries to sway the characters to her side, explaining that humanity must be told of the impending invasion. In her excitement, N'gamba may spill her plans to head for the UN. If the characters agree to assist her, continue the plot as normal. Otherwise, forward to Æon Option: Heading to Luna, page 88.

characters are probably loathe to tell Steere any more than what's absolutely necessary. That's fine by him — in fact, once Steere learns they want quiet, undocumented passage somewhere, he holds up a hand. He wants to know only where, when and how important. An answer of "not very" to the last is cheap, but Steere doesn't worry much about keeping it secret. An answer of "extremely" is much more expensive, but Steere handles the details personally.



Decisions, Decisions

There's no reason the characters must use Ian Steere. If pressed, even N'gamba admits that she doesn't know him that well. He had a good reputation, but that was years ago. The characters can try to find other ways to Luna if they don't want to chance using Steere.

Certain Backgrounds, such as Contacts or Allies, can help get the team where it's going. Playing on Backgrounds also helps integrate the characters ever further into the Trinity Universe. Still, for such an unusual circumstance, odds are that even a devoted Ally is going to put this in the "heavy-duty favor" category. Such help provides you with an number of new scenarios as the characters pay the favor back — if the characters survive.

Æon, guessing rightly that N'gamba is about worn out, has used its influence to put Makola Spaceport's security on alert. The Trinity also sends in local psion operatives to monitor for any use of psi by the characters. All the security and psions traipsing around the spaceport makes things difficult for the characters if they go it

alone. Attempts at cleverness — "I'll blow something up to make a diversion" — don't work, either. The UAN takes its space trade seriously, but has no problem with shutting down an entire port if there's even a whiff of terrorism. The characters must rely on subtlety and natural skill rather than force or psi to slip through the gauntlet.

Realistically speaking, there is a limited variety of options for getting off-planet:

- Stow away
- Be smuggled to Luna, either by bribing someone on a legitimate ship or by using a smuggler (Steere or someone else)
- Forge identification (or purchase false ID) and take passage on a normal transport
- Hijack a ship and go for broke

Each of these options has pros and cons, to put it mildly. Stowing away, while inexpensive, is potentially fatal. (What happens if the compartment the team hides in isn't climate controlled?) Stowing away on a small ship might cause flight problems as the characters add unaccounted mass to the voyage (which has the potential to throw off flight trajectories and other variables, and that's bad). Stowing away also requires sneaking

across the Makola tarmac and onto the chosen vessel, which, depending on the size of the team and the security patrolling around, might not be the easiest thing to do.

Smuggling is probably the safest way to go, though it has drawbacks as well. If they mistrust Steere for whatever reason, characters with solid underworld connections should be able to find another smuggler who can get the team off-planet. Luna is the busiest smuggling hub in human space, and there's always *someone* going there with contraband. Still, there's no guarantee that a spacer who's bribed to hide the team will stay bribed. There's also a chance that the ship doesn't go directly to Luna, that it takes its sweet time, or even that the smuggler is hijacked in near orbit by daring pirates. In the last case, the team may have to take over the ship it's on and find a way to get safe landing clearance on Luna — assuming any of the characters knows how to fly a spacecraft.

There is an extensive underground market in Accra. Mandisa Letwaba is the most reliable fixer in the area, and can provide forged documents for a price (they start at ¥500 per person and go up from there, more if the team is recognized). The characters may not have sufficient funds on them to purchase new IDs for everyone involved. If the characters go this route, they need to hunt up the black market (either through Steere or on their own) and rapidly obtain documents of sufficient quality to get past the heightened security at the space port. If the documents aren't up to snuff, the characters find themselves in a great deal of trouble.

Hijacking a ship is incredibly risky. Unless the team does a very good job of it (swiping the craft without anyone noticing, making inspired **Bureaucracy** or **Subterfuge** rolls to convince the tower that they're a legitimate flight), they stick out like a sore thumb. Deviations from flight plans or a dispossessed pilot screaming that her ship was stolen provokes extremely intemperate responses from airport security. While it's unlikely that the four Bakuhatsu E-15 fighters stationed at the spaceport actually blow the hijacked ship out of the sky, they don't sit still for a hijacking and certainly fire to disable. In the wake of Sydney, no one takes chances with spaceport security any more.

Although Steere provides the characters with the most feasible travel option, there is no "right" way for the team to make its way to Luna. What is important is that the characters act decisively and carefully instead of leaping before they look. With

good roleplaying and precautions, even something that appears as foolhardy as stowing away can be a successful way to go. In the end, what matters most is the quality of roleplaying and the attempt rather than the specific mode of transportation.

Whatever the method, appropriate planning and action results in the characters leaving Accra sometime just before dawn (if they don't sleep at all) or by late morning (if they decide to get some rest). In the recent excitement, it may surprise the characters to remember that they returned to Earth only four days ago — and fled Chicago just yesterday.

Return to Luna

As long as the characters get out of Accra without incident, the actual flight to Luna is uneventful (though if the team stows away in a cargo bay, it's certainly uncomfortable). Unless the team is painfully unlucky or does something monumentally stupid, there really aren't many complications that can ensue at this point. Still, if they get cocky you might want to have the characters' ID questioned, their vessel stopped and searched, or their transport attacked by space pirates, just to remind them that they're not invulnerable. It's only when the team tries to land on Luna that the *real* problems resume.

Short on Cash?

Whatever choice the characters make, they probably need to spread some money around. If they don't have cash on hand or appropriate gear to trade, there's always the chance that they can work off their debt by running an errand or two. Mind you, said errands are probably highly illegal; if the team is caught or even spotted, its reputation is soiled even further.

On the other hand, the psions might feel that time is so tight that they should just force the smuggler/forgers/whomever to do work for them. In that case, the team should keep a sharp eye on their captive criminal, since he'll likely take advantage of any opportunity to escape — even causing them all to be captured (better to sit in jail in Accra than possibly end up spaced *en route* to the Moon).

Characters can also promise "favors" or future considerations in exchange for help now. Such deals with the devil should be appropriately back-loaded in favor of whomever the characters deal with.

If the characters stowed away, the ship they're on should get clearance to land with no problem. The fun begins once the ship touches down. What if the vessel lands on an unpressurized LZ — or on the Lunar surface? How do the characters get to safety then? What if they get unpacked themselves? And even in a best-case scenario, how do they get from the interior of the ship to the teeming warrens of Luna without being spotted? Unauthorized personnel skulking around cargo bays are usually not treated politely by security or teamsters.

Smuggled characters face fewer problems. Presumably a smuggled team's hosts have done this sort of thing before (Steere certainly has), and have a routine set up for getting "special" passengers past customs and immigration. Still, there are dangers: guards looking for bribes or suffering pangs of conscience, the possibility of increased security on Luna and even the potential perfidy of the smugglers themselves.

Characters with forged documents must go through the same rigmarole on Luna that they did on Earth. If anything, Lunar security is tighter than Earth-normal at major spaceports such as Yutu Yinchon or Wroclaw. Small or private spaceports — and the Moon is positively pockmarked with them — have lesser or nonexistent security procedures, making it easier to get in there. Once through, it's a relatively simple matter to take ground transportation into Olympus.

Hijackers, unless they follow standard flight procedure or have ties to secret criminal landing sites, find it extremely difficult to land. A combination of **Bureaucracy** and **Subterfuge** is necessary to talk past Olympus Control; otherwise Seventh Legion fighters scramble to bring the craft in and try to apprehend the crew for questioning. Going to an underworld site, like the Pit, requires successful **Savvy** rolls or the characters may find their stolen craft appropriated by the locals, and the characters themselves may take a spacewalk without a suit. An alternative plan, if there are enough vac suits on board, is to land on the Lunar surface near civilization and walk in. This requires contacting friends inside to give the characters entry, or breaching a maintenance hatch. The latter brings a Vacuum Emergency Response team to check the unauthorized entry, but the characters should be gone by then if they're quick about it.

Æon Option: Heading to Luna

If the team catches N'gamba and ignores her pleas, things get tidy (and uneventful) fast. With that in mind, it's best to assume that N'gamba has enough juice left to teleport out of the character's clutches at the last minute, especially if the psions manage to track her to Makola. A cat-and-mouse chase through the terminals and hangars, possibly involving airport security and Wei's faceless assassins, can provide plenty of tension and excitement.

Ultimately, N'gamba and Wei should escape again — this time to Luna. N'gamba must arrive at the UN hearings, and the characters should be on hand for that climactic scene. Æon provides for the characters' passage to Luna, but arriving on the Moon presents other problems. They have no idea where N'gamba came in, requiring further investigation to track down the fugitives. The characters have an idea that she's headed for the UN complex, though, perhaps from N'gamba's parents, or the rebels are spotted scouting out the UN complex.

The characters can sit tight at the UN and wait for N'gamba and Wei. That sort of vigil can get boring quickly, so you may want to work in complications — demands from officials that the characters testify, newswid hounds who smell a story and won't leave the team alone, leftovers from the Beaulac Clinic crisis (there are persistent rumors of a cybertronic version of Dr. Grabowski wreaking havoc on local nets, and the psions are just the people to lay that story to rest). Things should never get dull for the team — and with all that excitement going on, it's no surprise that N'gamba manages to pop inside the perimeter and the United Nations.

On the Moon

Once the characters actually get inside Olympus, it's not too difficult for them to reach the United Nations complex. It's located in the heart of Olympus, near a nexus of major traffic routes in the Mezzanine. Furthermore, the building is a massive tourist attraction with brochures, posters, holo-ads, guidebook entries and human-interest stories all over the place that provide direction with minimal difficulty. (**Luna Rising** contains numerous details on Olympus as a whole.)

This section of the story can serve as downtime, wherein the characters hole up somewhere and prep themselves for (what they think will be) the final effort. Time pressure can be as intense as you need it to be — if the team's beaten within an inch of its collective life, there's nothing wrong with "delaying" the Chromatic fleet a few more days until the characters get back in shape. On the other hand, don't cut them too much slack; forcing the team to invest what could literally be its last breath in bringing the news to the UN makes for great dramatic tension.

The only fly in the relatively mellow Lunar ointment comes if and when the characters are recognized. If they played through **Descent into Darkness** and **Passage Through Shadow**, the characters' faces were plastered all over Lunar media for weeks. Their recent actions have made them minor celebrities. They may even run across someone whose life they affected directly through their actions. Ironically, the leaky smoke screen Æon provided to keep the characters from testifying — namely, the mysterious trip to Karroo that they're still supposed to be on — has encouraged even more interest in the intrepid psion investigators. Contact suggestions include:

- A survivor of the Freak Alley collapse, who knows the team helped avenge that tragedy and is willing to help them. He might even know a back way into the UN complex....
- A former employee of Beaulac Clinic who lost her job because of the team's investigative efforts and who takes pleasure in blowing the whistle....
- Visiting tourists from Mars who caught the team's pictures in the news after the Olympus

Mons disaster and who loudly point out the "celebrities" to everyone in the area....

- An Æon observer told to keep an eye out for the team and who quietly raises the alarm....
- A former resident of Accra who knew Susan N'gamba way back when, and who is ebullient about seeing her again now, insisting on taking time to catch up....

Having the team recognized can provide an interesting twist to the story, making this episode much less of a linear "We're here on Luna, now let's go to the UN and we're finished" slog. Dodging admirers, enemies and old friends while supposedly on a top-secret mission humanizes what the team is doing, and should remind the psions of what they're really fighting for. In the end, how, why and even if the team gets noticed is your choice, and should be done only if you feel it heightens the players' enjoyment of the story.

More Assassins!

"Not Wei" takes advantage of a few minutes alone during the hours before leaving for Luna to summon his other squad of assassins, one killer per person in the characters' team. Planning ahead, the Doyen sends the assassins to the Moon and has them on hand to call when it feels the time is right.

That time is at a moment least convenient for the characters — preferably when they're in an enclosed area (such as a maglev tube) with lots of innocent civilians around. If the team has picked up stragglers or friends, even better. Remember, the assassins work for the Doyen and have utterly no compunction about taking human life. If shooting or imperiling civilians lessens the team's ability to mount an effective defense, that's exactly when the assassins strike.

With luck, the team fends off this assault as well. If things go poorly, have the Lunar police (use the police-officer template in **Trinity**, page 306) pour into the fray shortly after laser bolts and projectiles start flying. Wei himself takes a "shot" early in the fight and goes down, then uses his abilities surreptitiously to help the attackers. He still hedges his bets and does not reveal his true allegiance unless the entire team is down and rapidly bleeding to death. If the characters are at that stage, definitely have the police show in force, stopping Wei's assassins from delivering the *coup de grace*. Wei then plays up his "wounded in action" aspect, but makes a great show of stoically continuing on despite his injury.

Police assistance becomes problematic after the smoke clears, as the authorities naturally want

A Mysterious Benefactor, Part II

Right about now, as the team attempts to get its Moon legs, is the perfect time for Junior Mal's second missive. This one (displayed on page 71) contains a portion of Æon's top-secret report on the Upeo. Having this should provide ideas on how to best use the tactical advantage of a functioning teleporter — and what sorts of things may await the characters in the UN complex.

Forewarned is forearmed.

to bring the characters into custody for questioning (and possibly on illegal weapons charges). The only way out without resorting to more shooting is N'gamba. She jumps with the characters to their latest hideout, leaving surprised police and plenty of witnesses behind.

The characters no longer have the option of sitting and waiting for the right moment to mount their infiltration. With a band of assassins on the loose and the public aware of their presence, the characters must act *now*.

The attack also alerts Æon to the characters' general location. The Trinity already has forces deployed at the UN for the hearings (Ramirez himself just arrived to testify as well). Æon covers its bets; it's not certain where the characters are headed, but determines that the UN complex and the Mare Ingenii jump-ship base are likely targets. All Trinity personnel on Luna are brought to full alert.

Infiltrating the United Nations

Although Æon alerts its own personnel, it doesn't inform the UN. The Æon Council considered a number of cover stories, but they all led to questions the Trinity would rather not answer at the moment. However, considering the recent public firefight and the sensitive nature of the United Nations hearings, UN security is still more alert than the characters would like.

There are three ways the team can try to get into the United Nations complex: A frontal assault, slipping in through an alternate entrance or coming in as part of a tour. Of course, each has its own set of complications.

Frontal Assault

This is the most obvious approach — and the least likely to succeed. Such tactics are exactly what the site's security forces are trained to defend against. Unless the characters perform astonishingly well, they are overwhelmed quickly. The United Nations has a *lot* of guards, all of whom are very well-armed and some of whom are psions. The security team is prepared to defend the UN to the death against Aberrants; a ragtag team of psions bouncing from firefight to firefight is something they can handle easily.

If the team tries a frontal assault but isn't captured or killed, UN security sounds the alarm and restricts all access to the complex. That means no tourists, no visitors and an extra-sharp eye out for the characters. Further, images recorded of

the characters by security cameras during the conflict are broadcast throughout the Lunar colonies. These, combined with eyewitness accounts of the firefight against Wei's assassins, leave the characters with little hope of staying underground for long.

Also, a great deal of whatever moral capital the characters possess is squandered in the fight — it's hard to claim that you're fighting for the good of humanity when you're attacking UN security left and right. The combination of broadcast images and battling UN forces can cement the notion of the team as villains. No one likes a rogue psion, much less a group of homicidal ones. Everyone from the local street-level snitch to Joe Hologram now has impetus to spill the team's location.

In other words, going in the front door with guns blazing is a really poor idea.

Alternate Entrance

Coming through the United Nations shipping entrance, life-support system or even security access enables the characters to bypass most human forces. The shipping and security entrances have four armed guards each (looking very alert), who check IDs on everyone going in or out. If the characters don't have proper documentation, all hell breaks loose as described above. **Command**, **Intimidation** and **Subterfuge** do not work on the guards. If security gets even a whiff of anything foul from the characters, guards take them all in. The life-support conduits are not under guard; however, they're narrow, cramped and equipped with significant electronic security. Bypassing all this requires three **Engineering** (or **Interface**) rolls at +2 difficulty.

A character could try to access the UN computer network (to register the group as authorized personnel or to bypass life-support security). Doing so pits the character against the UN's 9 fail-safe (see **Trinity**, page 236, or the **Trinity Technology Manual** for information on hacking). If the character fails any one of these rolls, an alarm sounds (the UN is on alert status already; they take even a power glitch seriously).

The characters may want to try one of these alternate entrances even if they have no hope of bluffing through. After all, if they can push past the guards, the characters are effectively inside the complex. Once inside, they can sprint for the council chambers and hope to spill the beans before security gets them.

Taking the Tour

This is the most daring idea, but has the greatest chance of getting the characters in unnoticed. Again, UN security isn't looking for the characters yet (the Trinity is, but it's not in charge of tours). If the characters buy tickets to the sightseeing tour and play it cool, they can get inside with little trouble. This plan means the characters must go in unarmed (security scans all visitors thoroughly for weapons).

If the team takes the tour (¥7 per adult), each player must succeed at a standard **Subterfuge** roll to pass for a tourist. (Actually roleplaying the part and wearing a disguise can only help.) Each tour has a single chipper guide (most likely a college student trying to pick up some extra cash) and, more ominously, a pair of armed guards. The latter bracket the tour group; one up front and one in back. At the start of the tour, the guide explains that the guards are there for the group's protection, but that there's absolutely nothing to worry about.

Once through the main lobby, the tour moves through several of the council chambers, some offices, a library and other bureaucratic touchstones. After 45 minutes, the tour finally arrives at the viewing gallery of the general assembly chamber. Although the tour security is alert for trouble at this locale, it doesn't really matter — N'gamba has a clear view of the Huang-Marr hearings below.

There's no better time to move.

Why Not Teleport?

Considered objectively, there's no reason why N'gamba doesn't simply teleport everyone directly to the UN General Assembly from their hotel room; the hearings are transmitted live so she's had a good look at the locale. However, doing so puts the characters in the unenviable position of being spectators — and what's the fun of being part a story in which Storyteller characters do everything?

The characters are the focus of this story, and N'gamba's actions should encourage this. She is extremely paranoid after the most recent assassin strike. Although N'gamba has enough psi energy to jump, she wants to save it. If they all teleport into the general assembly, N'gamba's not certain if she'll have anything left to take them out again should things go awry.

She grudgingly agrees that she could perform a short hop to the center of the assembly once

inside (although distance is relative in the subquantum stratum, longer ranges require an Upeo to channel more energy). Simply bursting into the general assembly makes the characters look like terrorists. However, appearing out of thin air with the tell-tale signature of psionic teleportation ensures that the characters seize everyone's attention long enough to call for mobilization against the impending invasion.

Addressing the Assembly

Taking the tour leads the characters right to the general assembly. Otherwise, unless one of the characters had the foresight to download a map of the UN (or to grab a promotional pamphlet), they have little idea of where they're going inside the complex. This gives a huge advantage to any security pursuing them. The UN's defenders lock doors, lay down crossfire and otherwise try to direct the team to the back end of the complex, far from where important business is conducted. It takes a lot of luck (or sustained use of Clairvoyance) to find out where the team should go.

Wei is quiet throughout the characters' approach. Attacking security would be an effective way to get the rest of the group killed, but the Doyen are more than a little cowardly about direct confrontation. The being possessing the Ministry agent can't quite work up the nerve, so it hopes that the characters will slip up themselves. Wei does nudge things along toward disaster if an opportunity presents itself, but takes no action that exposes him for what he — it — truly is.

Whatever method the characters use to get inside, N'gamba teleports them all down to the central floor. Philip Bacciocchi, of the United Nations Department of Psion Affairs, heads up the hearing along with a dozen other dignitaries and officials. There are over 1000 delegates and scores of media folk watching the proceedings in person. The characters may well be surprised to see their former superior, Hector Ramirez, at the witness table with his Æon counsel. Ramirez is certainly surprised to see them appear right before his eyes.

The characters' dramatic entrance seizes the assemblage's attention. Unless the heroes talk quickly, they lose their advantage when security sweeps in. N'gamba isn't a skilled orator and has no intention of leading off. Wei keeps silent as well — the Doyen inside him didn't think the characters would actually make it this far and considers



new options. It falls to the characters to say whatever they feel is most appropriate to get their point across. N'gamba does add verification where needed — and the mere fact of the team's dramatic entrance via teleportation should add serious credence to the story.

This is the characters' big moment in the limelight. They literally have humanity's attention. It's an historic moment, with potential for lasting heroism — or notoriety.

Unexpected Support

It is unlikely that the general assembly believes the characters' story at first pass. After all, a gang of dangerous fugitives who burst in on a vital government office, spinning a wild yarn about alien invasion and a Chromatic plot that sounds suspiciously like an Upeo-style rehash of *Mars Needs Women* seems insane. Appearing with an actual Upeo gives the tale credibility, but the UN is still skeptical.

After the characters are done with the gist of their statement, the place erupts in confusion. The characters can see security slipping between outraged, bewildered and panicked delegates. Ramirez remains at the witness table, thinking fu-

riously. Bacciocci bashes his gavel repeatedly, calling for order. Any characters who expected the assembly to raise the team on its shoulders as heroes is quite disappointed.

Before things degenerate into complete chaos and violence, a figure steps forward to the edge of the witness table and raises a hand for quiet. Everyone recognizes Otha Herzog. The Old Man started attending the hearings a few days previously. He'd kept quiet, though, so everyone quickly forgot he was even there. He'd actually been waiting for this very circumstance, and uses every bit of his formidable presence to command everyone's attention.

Standing a comfortable distance from the characters (he doesn't want them to feel pressured), Herzog announces that he is there to support everything that the characters have said. In the ensuing stunned silence, the Clairsentience Proxy verifies that the team's entire story (assuming they've told the truth) jibes with visions that he and many of his most trusted ISRAn have had. Herzog is careful to say that massive subquantum flux prevented him from coalescing the details until recently, and the characters' comments are vital to putting it all together.

Herzog then gets to the bottom line (which the characters should have said already): There is a large fleet of Chromatic ships on its way to Earth at this very moment. They will arrive in a matter of days. Humanity must mobilize immediately to combat the aliens. Just in case anyone misses the point, a handful of ISRA Mashriqi — William Kaige Miller, Varuni Venkatesan, Philip Vaughn Williams — as well as a dozen clears, their focal crystals displayed prominently, step from the assembly and call from the viewing gallery. Each clairsentient confirms that he or she has also had visions of invasion, hammering home the veracity of the characters' proclamation.

A character who happens to look at Wei during these events notices that the Ministry agent has a strangely blank expression. Commenting on it returns Wei to his normal self; excited by events in his typically subdued manner. In truth, the Doyen hiding in Wei is staggered by the ISRAns' appearance and has retreated deep within its host to regroup.

Standing Down

Herzog's support clinches things in the characters' favor. The crowd rises up in mass excitement, people running every which way to address the impending invasion. The characters and Herzog are overwhelmed by dignitaries demanding to know details of the attack.

Herzog separates himself from the characters at this point (he cares little for their violent methods), but assures the general assembly that ISRA will provide all the details that it's compiled. The Old Man exits the chamber with the general secretary (and Mashriqi in tow), presumably to discuss the visions in private.

The characters don't receive the same special treatment. Although they've delivered an important message, the characters are guilty of breaking and entering (and possibly assault, battery and other crimes) on the United Nations. Letting the team walk away scot-free from this little escapade sets a bad precedent; it encourages every bunch of wackos with a "message" to assault the UN, city hall or the local post office to be heard. Also, the general assembly chamber is ringed with psions and heavily armed normal guards who may have had companions run over by the team in its quest to reveal the truth. In other words, things are still tense.

Security divests the team of any weapons; the characters should know that further violence

Æon Option: The Announcement

The team tracks N'gamba to the United Nations. Theoretically, the psions know this is her ultimate destination after having confronted her previously. If the characters report the news to Æon, they're allowed to enter the UN complex with special visitor credentials. Æon can't get the UN to allow the characters access to weapons, but they do have the run of the place (and any psi powers should serve).

As a result, the characters assume the same kind of role as UN security forces. N'gamba and Wei slip in through the service entrance. Wei uses Telepathy to control the guards; he plans to kill N'gamba (making it look like suicide), set explosives throughout the complex and slip out. Unfortunately for Wei, the pair trips security sensors (neither is particularly skilled with security systems). With UN forces on their way, N'gamba decides to jump directly to the general assembly, so Wei delays his plan for the moment.

It's unfortunate that the characters don't get their moment in the spotlight. Instead, N'gamba makes an impassioned speech to the assembly and is subsequently supported by Herzog. If the characters went to Karroo, N'gamba spots them and calls them down to verify her story.

Things integrate with the main plot at this point; go to the end of Standing Down. The characters are with Ramirez when he offers to take N'gamba and Wei into Æon custody so that they can help against the Chromatic invasion.

won't get them anywhere. N'gamba provides an example by handing over any of her weapons.

Normally, the team would be held pending an investigation, but that would slow the action down — indeed, it would probably take the characters out of the rest of the story. Luckily, Æon operative Hector Ramirez is on hand to lend assistance. The characters spend the night in lockup (a relatively comfortable holding facility with each character in a separate room).

After getting cleaned up the next morning, they're taken to a conference room where Ramirez and a couple of UN officials (Carlin Bedford, FSA, and Eden Ouellette, UAN) await them.

Although the Trinity never admits it, the society needs the characters. By that morning it's apparent to *Æon* and the UN that the public is behind the characters — most don't even consider the legal implications of the characters' raid on the UN. All the people know is that there's a chance to bring the Upeo back, and some damn slimy aliens have them strapped to who knows what kind of hideous machinery. The characters have provided a much more easily understood target for the public's fears than nebulous possibilities of psi-order corruption. The Chromatics are a known menace, and humanity is only too happy to unleash its vengeance upon them.

Ramirez is all smiles, expressing genuine pleasure at the characters' recent escapade. He admits that, though the Trinity does not condone the characters' methods, it can't deny that they were right. Ramirez doesn't quite admit in front of the UN officials that *Æon* knew about this news — if the characters call him on it, Ramirez quickly points out that he's here to vouch for them. The United Nations frees the characters into the *Æon* Trinity's custody only. Ramirez states that *Æon* would love to have the characters help plan for Earth's defense.

Bedford and Ouellette agree that while the characters acted in humanity's best interest, they can't just go free. Going into *Æon*'s custody is primarily a public-relations move, designed to side-step demands for the moment that the characters pay for breaking into the UN. Bedford states flat out that if this supposed "Chromatic invasion" never happens, the characters can expect to face the full force of United Nations legal action. Ouellette appears nonplused by her compatriot's bluntness, but affirms that this is no idle threat.

Mounting Defenses

Earth forces go into emergency war-planning sessions. The team is released into *Æon*'s custody. Any confiscated weapons remain in the UN's care for the time being — though if the characters never took weapons into the UN, they can pick up their gear wherever they hid it. They may attend the planning (unless someone did something incredibly stupid earlier); individuals may be called upon to provide information when military options are weighed.

The United Nations, joined by designated representatives of the psi orders and *Æon* Trinity,

considers the disposition of the Upeo (the order in general and those held captive on Chromatic ships), the forces that can be brought to bear in humanity's defense, and invasion countermeasures. In light of Herzog's belief that the Chromatics will arrive within the next few days, the strategy set is brutally simple. All human defense forces — neutral and psion — are to be mobilized immediately and coordinated into two ranks: an advance fleet that will engage the Chromatics when they first emerge, and a defense fleet that will stay in Earth orbit to protect the planet. Each nation will also put its ground forces on alert just in case some of the aliens slip through.

There is a second, more grim aspect to this plan. As encouraging as news of the Upeo's survival may be, and as repugnant as the notion of humans in thrall to aliens might seem, the survival of the species as a whole comes first. That means Earth forces are directed to destroy all Chromatic craft, even those that might contain human captives. The Chromatics have shown no mercy in the past, and humanity must face the aliens with the same resolve.

The deaths of some teleporters is truly regrettable, but the UN must serve the greater good. Mankind must crush the Chromatics as completely as possible. If even a single mother ship teleports away, the Chromatics could return in the future and jeopardize the lives of humans again.

Perhaps to the characters' surprise, the *Æon* Trinity considers the UN's decision unacceptable. However, despite the Trinity's significant influence, it is not powerful enough to change the UN's directive. Ramirez, appearing uncharacteristically dour, promises the characters that things aren't over yet. He brings them into a closed-door session in which Proteus Director William Renton and Deputy Director Giorgios Gamemenos urge the United Nations to at least authorize a rescue attempt.

Eventually, the UN acquiesces, but with certain caveats. Specifically, the rescue operation can follow its own agenda, but Earth defense forces won't compensate for it. If the rescue mission gets in the way, too bad. If the ship the mission targets is blown up while the rescue team is on board, too bad. If an Earth fighter pilot has a choice between saving himself and the rescue squad, his orders are to save himself. The final caveat is that the characters themselves must take part in the mission (the UN includes N'gamba and Wei in this).

In the United Nations' eyes, a rescue mission has a limited chance of success. The characters

are problematic from a public-relations, if not a legal, standpoint. This maneuver could be successful, in which case the UN is off the hook when it pardons the characters' recent crimes. And if it fails, that's one less loose end to worry about.

All this may seem tremendously callous, but the United Nations must think of the safety of over eight billion people while simultaneously considering the social and political repercussions of the choices it makes. In the end, the race's safety far outweighs that of a handful of willful psions or even some captive teleporters. The officials don't look pleased by their choice, but they stand by it.

Accepting the Mission

Ramirez confides in the characters that his superiors were confident that the rescue mission would be authorized — although designating the characters as part of the mission was unexpected. Ramirez has every confidence that the characters will do just fine, though, and assures them that they won't be the only ones out there.

It may seem odd that Ramirez (and other Trinity personnel) treats the characters as pals once again. *Æon* doesn't see the point in holding a grudge since things worked out to benefit the Trinity's plan (although a few individuals within the organization may still bear ill feelings, if you want to pursue this in future stories). Once it learned that Upeo were held captive, the *Æon* Trinity decided it was imperative to recover them. It's now business as usual for *Æon*.

Of course, characters may consider the whole thing a suicide mission. If a character refuses to go, the UN incarcerates him (it hasn't waived any charges, just suspended them for the moment). He'll be released in a few months, but he'll miss out entirely on the battle with the Chromatics. Not that he'll necessarily have a problem with that. N'gamba, Ramirez and even other characters urge the naysayer to change his mind. There are various tactics that can be used — loyalty to humanity, desire to help captive Upeo, potential glory involved, guilt that people may die without his help.

If the team as a whole refuses to go on the rescue mission, the story is over. The team watches the fireworks from a ringside seat. At that point you can involve the characters in the Huang-Marr hearings or ship them off for a few months in Luna's Gulag. The characters simply miss out on some of the more pivotal events in the history of the universe.

No, that's not an exaggeration.

What About Wei?

The Doyen hiding in Wei has a tough time with events moving this quickly. Its race usually acts much more deliberately, and it has trouble adjusting to mercurial human behavior.

Wei is released into the Ministry's custody the same morning the characters meet with Ramirez, but returns within a few hours. The Doyen is a more powerful telepath than the one sent by the Ministry to debrief Wei. The alien easily overwhelms the unsuspecting psion, sending her back to the Ministry to explain that she and Wei agreed that he would best serve the order by staying with N'gamba to learn all he can. It makes sense to the Ministry, and allows Wei to continue spying on the characters.

Wei's hidden interloper is pleased to learn about the rescue mission. This allows the Doyen to return to its Chromatic allies while remaining undercover all the while. The alien therefore tries to learn all it can about Earth plans so that it can convey that data to the Chromatics upon their arrival. The characters notice that Wei seems more animated during this time. If asked about it, Wei simply says that he finds tactical planning very interesting. Again, as long as you don't present the possessed Wei as some cartoonish villain, there's little reason for characters to suspect him of anything untoward.

It's only after the climactic finale that all of his little oddities appear in a more sinister light.

Planning the Rescue

Once the team accepts the rescue mission, the characters are transported out to the Mare Ingenii jump-ship base to prepare. Looking out the windows during the short hopper flight from Olympus to the base, the characters see dozens of spacecraft tearing about with frantic haste. Transports carry personnel and equipment, fighters head out to frigate posts, scouts shoot off to patrol the frontier, frigates sweep into position

to take on crew and supplies. It's an impressive sight, made all the more stirring when Ramirez comments that this is just the beginning.

It would take weeks to coordinate all human forces, but it will be only a short time before the Chromatics arrive. The UN plans to coordinate defensive preparations up until the aliens are on Earth's doorstep. Similarly, the Æon Trinity doesn't delay plans for the rescue mission.

N'gamba's eyes shine with pride as she watches the gathering forces. Wei looks grim, but nods as if taking stock.

Arriving at Mare Ingenii, the characters disembark after Ramirez. He assures them that whatever belongings they brought along will be taken to rooms set aside for the team. At the moment, it's time to plan a rescue mission. The basic plan is quite simple: The characters are one of four groups that will take Scarab frigates to Chromatic mother ships, board the craft and release any humans they find. Each group is supported by three Seventh Legionnaires in Locust fighters. Æon believes that a small force has a better chance of making it through, and hopes that Earth assault forces will occupy most of the Chromatics' attention.

The characters have an edge over the other three rescue teams. Not only have the characters dealt with Chromatics before, but they have Susan N'gamba with them. If she can get a view inside a mother ship (say, with the help of a clairsentient and a scryin on board — a biotech device that displays a clairsentient's view on a screen; check **Luna Rising**, page 122), the Upeo can transport the team right in. In case the characters don't have a clear and/or a pilot in their team, Ramirez assigns them Ravit Simon, who handles both duties quite well. She simply acts as backup if the characters have these avenues covered. It's their story, after all. The team may consider going from ship to ship to free other captives. Æon recommends only one attempt, but if an opportunity presents itself, go for it.

If the characters lack weapons and armor, Æon supplies them for the mission — flechettes, sonics, tasers and netguns (see **Trinity**, pages 263 to 266) are the available choices. Slugthrowers and lasers a bad idea given the possibility of breaching. Each character also gets a military vac suit. This is the same style suit used in *Heaven Through Iron Gates* (see page 27).

After gearing up, the characters spend the next couple of days in meetings and training drills. Focus on this if you like; the characters can engage in spacewalk drills, practice firing the Scarab's weapons, go over known data on Chromatics or review details of the *Eyrie* attack. The important thing is that, early in the second day of preparations, a subquantum wave washes over the entire Solar System. Each player rolls backlash for his character, adding three dice to his dice pool (the means by which the Chromatics force the Upeo to jump results in a particularly disruptive arrival, and the nine huge mother ships make for an even larger wave).

As psion characters shake off the immediate effects of the backlash, they hear klaxons wail throughout the base. Doors slam shut, non-essential personnel are hustled into deep levels of the complex and Ramirez arrives to rush the team to the staging room.

Images transmitted by laser are arrayed across numerous video screens. Nine craft appear before a canopy of stars, with bands of brilliant color outlining parts of the ships. It's impossible to tell scale from the images, but the ships' shapes imply tremendous size. The characters hear a voice crackling across the void — the voice of a pilot on perimeter patrol in the direction of Mars. All humanity hears his words, immortalized for all time:

"They're here! The Chromatics are here!"

Launching the Mission

Personnel manning sensor controls confirm that the Chromatics are currently about seven days out from Earth. No one knows why the aliens have emerged so much farther away than did the previous craft that attacked *Eyrie* Station, but it matters little at the moment (in truth, the Upeo did it on purpose, hoping to give Earth forces time to assemble). The advance fleet is scrambled to depart within a day, to meet the enemy as far from Earth as possible. This gives Earth more time to respond to any unforeseen difficulties.

The characters are to piggyback with the assault force, looping up and around once the battle is joined. This way the rescue teams hopefully come in from behind the majority of the Chromatic forces.

The Chromatic Invasion

The characters are directed to rest, but it's difficult, even with sedatives. It's hard to ignore that alien forces are advancing on Earth at that very moment. Earth could be overwhelmed by Chromatic invaders in a matter of days. The characters themselves could be dead. Such thoughts are not conducive to sweet dreams.

The characters, along with Susan N'gamba, Robert Wei and Ravit Simon, assemble the next morning before their Scarab. The other three rescue teams are near their craft. There's no great ceremony; instead, Giorgios Gamemenos is on hand to wish everyone luck and Godspeed, then the alert sounds for everyone to get underway. The launch bay clears. Once the characters are strapped tight into the Scarab's cockpit, the bay doors crack open. The frigates lift off, joined by 12 Locust fighters already waiting above Mare Ingenii.

Also headed away from Luna are 13 frigates of various classes, along with 40 small military transports and a few lumbering freighters (mainly for cannon fodder); small fighter craft remain docked for the days-long trip to engage the enemy. A glance back shows roughly half as many large craft still in Earth orbit, along with hundreds of tiny fighters — the defense fleet. There are more battle ships in service, but many are out patrolling elsewhere in the Solar System. Although the UN sent out priority alerts after it learned of the impending invasion, it will be some time before every combat-ready craft can make it back to Earth.

This trip is uneventful but tense. At the rate the respective forces travel, they'll meet within two days. In the meantime, there's little to do but think about what may happen. A clairsentient character may want to scan for the Chromatic mother ships, hoping N'gamba can jump them there early. Simply put, the aliens are too far away for the characters to get a head start. Even a clear with 10 Psi, 5 Telesthesia and a MARS suit can use **Sensory Projection** (the power required to provide an adequate visual image for N'gamba to teleport) "only" up to 19,200 kilometers away. Although a significant distance on the ground, that range is small potatoes in space. Effectively, the characters get a sighting sufficient for a jump at roughly the same time that the battle begins.

The Battle Is Joined

The second battle to defend Earth from Chromatic invaders begins at 17:43:09 LST on June 29, 2120. The human assault forces are impressive — five freighters, 13 frigates, 40 military transports and 130 fighters.

The aliens are equally imposing. Each of the nine Chromatic mother ships resembles a gigantic bloated manta ray, with strange bands glowing softly across its dark hull. The enemy carriers dwarf the human freighters. The mother ships have guns mounted in bioware turrets studded with sensor arrays. There's no obvious bridge or airlocks, and the sensor arrays are clearly redundant. Fighters (see Technology, page 112) issue from twin launch tubes on each vessel. Each mother ship holds 36 Chromatic fighters, half of which are already launched by the time that Earth forces are within weapons range.

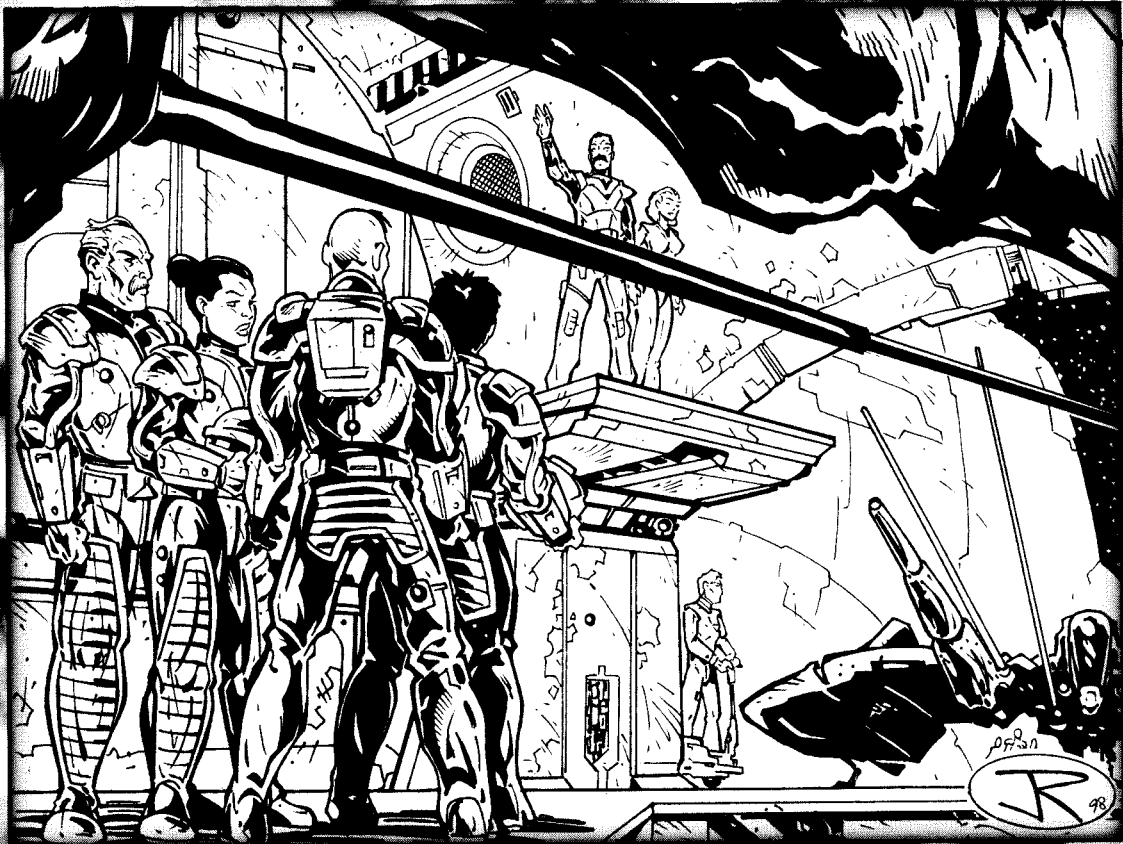
The Chromatics obviously have the numerical advantage, but human forces have proved themselves to be better space combatants. Considering the sheer numbers involved and ferocity of both sides, victory isn't a sure bet for either group. In the blink of an eye, the vacuum becomes a labyrinth of beam, particle and projectile weapons fire, with small ships darting to and fro attempting to strafe larger ships while avoiding their opposite numbers.

Such is the utter chaos into which the team launches its rescue attempt. It doesn't look promising.

Flying the Radioactive Skies

The team should select which Chromatic ship to target, coordinating with the three other rescue crews so that they head for separate craft. The characters can't avoid combat entirely, even by trying to angle around it. A trio of Chromatic fighters moves to intercept each rescue team; the Legion fighters engage the aliens, but the characters can take some shots of their own. A few of the Locust fighters and one of the Scarabs explodes during approach, sliced apart by Chromatic laser fire. It's impossible to tell which side has the upper hand in the main battle. Lasers and debris cloud the area, ships rocket about with dizzying vector changes, and explosions flare everywhere.

The characters push on, fighting past the alien squad. A clairsentient character (or Simon if the team lacks one) scans for a landing point on a mother ship. The interior consists of a gigantic



central hold (empty at the moment except for six transports docked along the interior wall). Numerous corridors and rooms located above the hold extend into the weapons turrets and engine rooms in the craft's "wings." Corridors also lead to a bridge above the launch bay, where a human is locked into a large, sinister collection of bioware tubes, shackles and strange devices. Chromatics rush about everywhere (scrambling along walls, ceiling and floors, indicating that the mother ship has no artificial gravity). The clairsentient can find what appears to be an unused storage chamber from which the characters may launch their attack. The clear displays what she sees using the ship's scryin.

N'gamba suggests that it's better to teleport to the storage room than to the bridge directly. The characters should remember that there's a moment's disorientation after a teleportation (though Upeo themselves tend to get used to it). Jumping into a nest of aliens is a bad idea.

Simon assumes the *Scarab's* controls as the characters jump out. She and the fighter escorts hold at a safe distance until they get word to come in for a pick-up, in case N'gamba isn't able to teleport them all out.

Wei is almost a nonpresence at this point. He helps other characters suit up and ready for the jump, but doesn't talk much. Let characters assume that Wei is a little nervous, but that he seems determined not to show it. In fact, the Doyen parasite is rather excited. It's about to return to its cohorts and has a great deal of important tactical information to convey. The only thing left to do is take care of the characters once they're on board.

To Catch a Body Thief

Remember that the entire scene aboard the Chromatic mother ship takes place in microgravity. Characters with little background in space have a tough time getting used to the lack of gravity — especially when doing something tricky like fighting off a ferocious Chromatic. Refer to **Trinity**, page 236, for basic information on zero-g maneuvering.

The team jumps into the storage room, the change to a weightless environment adding to the momentary disorientation. From this point, the characters may plan to sneak or fight their way to the bridge. But first they must deal with the Doyen's final gambit.

DARKNESS REVEALED:

Have everyone roll **Attunement** once the characters arrive on the mother ship. With success, they sense Wei triggering a powerful psionic effect (he sends a broadcast telepathic alert to the Chromatics, informing them of the characters' location). A character with **Danger Sense** active gets an immediate and strong warning. Although that ability doesn't register psionic threats, the seer feels certain that the Chromatics know the characters are on board. If questioned, Wei explains that he's simply scanning for nearby Chromatics.

On a standard **Rapport** roll, a character consciously realizes that Wei has acted a little odd ever since the return from Karroo. Nothing the character can put a finger on, but thinking about it, there's a distance, a coldness, that didn't exist before.

The Doyen possessing Wei realizes that it may have tipped its hand in its eagerness to call down the Chromatics. If the characters haven't already concluded that Wei is a spy of some sort, they're sure damn close. The creature backpedals, pointing out that he's just trying to help. There's no proof otherwise, but those who've made the rolls above just can't ignore the fact that, taking the time to think about it, there's something not right about Wei.

Keep the characters guessing for the moment. Suggest that this may just be paranoia, the tension of the situation confusing their perceptions. Once the Chromatics burst in, though, only the most obtuse character ignores her suspicions about Wei.

The storage room's plug-like door is yanked open and aliens pour in, attacking everyone (they're equal in number to the team; use the template in **Trinity**, page 306). If a character watches Wei closely, she notices that the Ministry agent seems to be sparring with his opponent rather than fighting for his life. It even looks like Wei is *controlling* the Chromatic's actions, faking a fight for the characters' benefit. Due to the chaos of combat, the character must spend an action to get a good look at Wei. A standard **Awareness** roll must also be made; she does nothing other than defend herself while watching.

If confronted by a character, either during or after the fight, the Doyen abandons its charade as a lost cause. There's a startling flare of light and a surge of noetic energy (everyone, including any Chromatic in the area, rolls for backlash). A smoky glowing

form separates from Wei's body and streaks out the door. Characters are welcome to take shots at it, but they do no perceivable damage. Wei, for his part, looks horrible and collapses. He's unconscious, but alive.

It's impossible for the characters to stop the Doyen or chase after it. They already hear skittering and an occasional strange, coughing bark as more Chromatics rush toward their location. Clairsentient scans show the characters to be outnumbered at least 10 to 1, probably more. They won't last long if they stay put.

A character with tactical skill (a standard **Command** roll) realizes that, considering the rabid hatred Chromatics have for humans, it's likely that virtually every alien rushes down to the storage room. The bridge might have only essential personnel in place at the moment — making it the safest place to be. If the characters don't think of this, N'gamba suggests it (that's the type of thing she'd know, after all). As soon as the idea's out there, N'gamba jumps the entire team (including the comatose Wei) directly to the bridge. This should all happen very, very rapidly. There is no time to stand around discussing options; the characters must *act*, and decisively.

Throughout the rest of this scene, the mother ship rocks as it takes fire from attacking human forces. Describe this primarily for mood. However, a sudden lurch could explain a character's failure or botch on a task — or could sway things to the characters' side if they're in a particularly tight spot. Don't be obvious, though; use these elements only if they enhance the story.

The Prisoner

Only three members of the bridge crew still are at their posts when the characters appear. They bark in alarm at the sight of the characters and attack, getting a free turn as the characters recover from the teleport. The aliens don't hold back; they're willing to sacrifice themselves to stop the intruders. It should be challenging but not difficult to defeat the trio. Once the characters do so, they can turn their attention to the biotech monstrosity — and the human being pinned within it — that occupies the rear of the bridge.

The captive Upeo is a sight out of a horror sim. An old man with pale skin and long stringy gray-blond hair, he is emaciated and completely naked. No attempt has been made to hide the abuse he has suffered. The teleporter is suspended by a web of bioware that extends out from the walls and ceiling, supporting him a half-meter

Sensitivity

The image of humans bound into servitude to serve conquerors is a powerful and disturbing one. The fact that the humans in question belong to an order that was originally founded in Africa means that this particular scenario has the potential to offend players deeply if not handled properly.

It's worth noting that, though the Upeo wa Macho was once based in Africa, the order was *never* exclusively African in composition. The only common link the Upeo had was a talent for teleportation. Beyond that, the order's members were a truly mixed bag racially, ethnically, religiously and culturally.

Before the Upeo's disappearance, the other proxies' concerns (particularly those of Alex Cassel and Rebecca Bue Li) weren't with *who* the Upeo were, but with *what* they could do. The teleporters were integral to the race's survival. The needs of the entire species outweighed the needs of the small group, so the other orders moved to ensure the Upeo's availability. While this attitude may be reprehensible from several viewpoints (including the author's), it's a utilitarian perspective rather than a racist one. Likewise the Chromatics' attitude; to them, all humans are cursed — if some humans' gifts allow them to wipe out the rest of the "corrupters," so be it.

The abuses inflicted upon the Upeo are therefore cruel, but not just black and white.

above the floor. The chamber walls are coated in layers of the same organic technology. The room resembles nothing so much as a horrible parody of an incubator. Bioware tendrils snake into every orifice of the man's body and numerous small tubes and obscure devices attach elsewhere. The chamber pulses to an irregular rhythm echoed by odd bulges beneath the prisoner's skin. Perhaps the worst aspect of the tableau is the fact that the man's eyes are open and painfully sane. He seems all too aware of the degradation inflicted upon him.

The Doyen Returns

After the Doyen escapes Wei's body, it heads for the bridge to gain control of the ship. It reaches the chamber just after the characters defeat the bridge crew and turn their attention to the Upeo. The same smoky glow that left Wei's body flows into the cabin.

The characters have a better look at it now. In zero-g, the Doyen appears as a one-meter roughly spherical cloud of rust-colored smoke. The "smoke" itself looks (and actually is) tangible and viscous to the touch. A faint nimbus of light flickers around the sphere. Small silvery static charges flicker throughout the being, occasionally playing over a nearby surface like miniature lightning. Psions sense a strong subquantum signature from the Doyen.

The being hoped that the Chromatics would dispatch the humans or at least keep them occupied. It's decidedly nonplused to see its enemies standing — well, floating — on the bridge. Panic hits the Doyen. The race isn't much for thinking on its feet (perhaps because they don't have any); they're much better at long, intricate plans. The Doyen fully expected that the characters would be dead, and that it could therefore relay information on structural weaknesses in human crafts and other tactical information to the Chromatic forces. The alien is genuinely baffled that its plans didn't work.

The Doyen's frustration radiates from the alien in easily sensed empathic waves. If there's any doubt remaining, the captive teleporter stirs when it sees the Doyen. A scream of rage tears from his throat as he yells in English, "You bastard! You fucking did this to me!" The words are garbled since he must speak around the tube in his throat, but the tone is filled with utter hatred and anguish. He repeats himself a few more times, growing more hoarse before falling into a daze.

The man's first scream should be all the characters need to act against the Doyen — it's certainly all N'gamba needs to hear. The combat that follows is rather unusual. The Doyen is mostly noncorporeal, composed of a kind of plasmic core contained by telekinetic force. It is an almost purely psionic being, and as such has access to the full array of psi abilities (it stuck to Telepathy before so as not to call attention to itself). However, the Doyen is neither immortal nor invulnerable; see page 109 for details.

When a character finally lands the killing blow, everyone sees viscous smoke billow from the "wound." Sparks flicker wildly from the center of the rapidly collapsing sphere, and all psion characters hear a mind-tearing scream echo through the subquantum stratum. A backlash roll is appropriate as the Doyen's form disperses raggedly into the implicate order. The only thing that remains is a small, drifting cloud of rusty goo.

If the characters are beaten by the Doyen, things get worse. The characters are most assuredly killed by the alien entity or its Chromatic lackeys. The Doyen then shares all that it knows of Earth's defenses with the invasion fleet. The Chromatic attack proves devastating. You decide how events unfold. Does the human fleet beat the invaders back, but with heavy losses? Is Earth destroyed? Is the battle a stalemate, with neither side left capable of fighting further? And ultimately, do new heroes pick up the torch where the previous ones fell? Obviously, this is the characters' greatest battle.

If you want the characters to defeat the Doyen, even if they're almost done themselves, fallout from the surrounding battle might even things up; explosions or debris falling within the Chromatic mother ship might disable or finish off the Doyen.

Bwah-ha-ha-ha

It never makes sense for the villain to loudly proclaim his evil intentions to the heroes, particularly not as he's just about to kill them. However, without that sort of explanation, the villain's actions rarely make any sense to the heroes — especially in this case.

That's one of the reasons why Wei remains alive (though comatose) to the end. When he awakens, the Ministry agent has a hazy but insightful recollection of being possessed by an alien entity. Wei explains all the facets regarding the Doyen described in this episode. While it's impossible to understand all of the Doyen's motivations for the time being, Wei's input answers some of the characters' nagging questions.

Freedom

The team doesn't have time to rest after the battle. The telltale sounds of Chromatic claws and barks echo up the two corridors leading to the bridge. Luckily, the characters can slide pressure doors into place that should keep unwelcome visitors out for a while (at least for five minutes or so). While some characters attend to the doors, others can release the captive Upeo.

The man is barely conscious, but identifies himself as Clarence Greaves, an Upeo explorer. He has no helpful advice on how to get free from the device. He's obviously in a great deal of discomfort and has trouble focusing for more than a minute. Characters with **Engineering** and **Medicine** believe it may be possible to cut Greaves loose, but he'll more than likely be injured seriously in the process. Greaves chokes out that he doesn't care: "I'd rather die free than be left here."

Disconnecting Greaves requires three **Engineering** and two **Medicine** rolls at +1 difficulty each. **Iatrosis** techniques may be used to keep him from hemorrhaging as parts of the harness that can't simply be disengaged from the bridge wall must be removed from the Upeo. It's a disgusting procedure and Greaves is in agony throughout (although he harangues the characters if they stop). As long as the rolls don't fail, Greaves comes free — with scores of tubes, cords and bizarre growths sticking out of him; he's left Crippled. If any of the characters' liberation rolls fail, Greaves is pulled from the grotesque machine but he is Incapacitated. Should any of the characters' rolls botch, Greaves is on death's door; he must receive medical attention in five turns or he dies.

With Greaves finally freed and the Chromatics at bay, there's one last problem: The characters are in a combat zone on a technically hostile ship, one that's under fire from friendly forces. The characters must get back to their Scarab and high-tail it out of there.

The vagaries of war strike again, however. The characters may want to make sure the Scarab is in condition to receive them. (N'gamba checks if no one else does.) Simon responds almost immediately to the hail. The characters hear her voice, tense but in control, over vac-suit intercoms. Simon explains: "There's only one escort fighter left. We're mopping up another group of toadies. Any time you want a hand, we're more than welcome—"



The channel goes dead. After a moment of silence, the remaining escort pilot (a man called Turk) calls over the comm channel: "One of the bastards rammed Simon! God dammit! Get out of there now! There's no room for you on my fighter. Use whatever they've got in there and I'll carve you a path right out of their assholes!"

One of the characters may remember the Chromatic transports in the hangar; N'gamba suggests them if no one else does. It won't be easy to get there or to figure out the alien controls, but it's their best shot at escape. N'gamba feels she has one short jump left in her, which should get them all to the hangar bay. (Earth isn't an option; she doesn't have enough energy to go that distance with all these people. And, frustratingly, N'gamba never got a look inside any of the advance-fleet crafts. There isn't even time to try talking one of those ships in to pick them up, since multiple Chromatic lasers already burn through the bridge's blast doors. There simply isn't time to consider other options.)

After a moment of disorientation, the characters reappear along the vast interior wall of the mother ship's landing bay. A few Chromatics bound

in zero-g some distance away. A much more welcome sight is a bulbous alien transport docked nearby. The group can get aboard with little difficulty.

The trick is determining how to pilot the ship. Cross-matched [**Intelligence + Pilot**] or **Engineering** rolls at +1 difficulty are sufficient to determine the basics. (Characters can try repeatedly to gain control of the Chromatic ship; see *Second Chances*, **Trinity**, page 162.) The Chromatics' technological ignorance works in the characters' favor. The transport has rudimentary controls that aren't difficult to figure out with a little trial and error (designs extrapolated and simplified from human blueprints make it all the easier). After some fumbling, the characters get the engines started and the ship moving.

The craft disengages from the bay wall and lurches toward the exit. Chromatics fire hand weapons or self-generated lasers at the ship — a particularly valiant alien leaps through weightlessness to grab hold of the hull — but the sturdy craft goes unaffected by these attempts. Reaching the launch tube, simple-to-use technology once again proves beneficial. An

airlock door closes automatically behind the transport. There's a shudder as the airlock depressurizes (the Chromatic still battering away on the hull expires in gruesome fashion), and the next set of doors opens. Space beckons beyond.

The characters are free of the mother ship, but they find themselves in new danger. Human forces target every Chromatic vessel in sight. The mother ship is already under serious fire from a pair of frigates, with one entire wing disintegrating. As the transport pulls away, more parts of the mother ship rupture and explode, showering the small craft with debris as the whole thing goes up. With the mother ship gone, there's little chance the beetle-like transport will survive if the characters don't convince their allies to not fire upon them.

Luckily, Turk is nearby to fly escort (clever characters maintain a dialogue with him the whole time and alert him as soon as they emerge from the launch tube). It's touch and go for a while, but the characters can make for a frigate on the fringe of the battle by maintaining radio contact and staying close to Turk's fighter.

Victory!

Pacifica, a Kestrel-class frigate, has suffered damage and pulled back to effect repairs. A few Chromatics sweep by to take potshots, but most of the aliens are concerned with defending their mother ships at this point. After convincing *Pacifica* that they really, really aren't Chromatics who somehow figured out how to speak English (or whatever the characters' language of choice is), the characters dock. Greaves, Wei and any characters requiring immediate attention are rushed to the medical bay. The rest of the team can head for a view port to check on the battle's status from an objective perspective.

Space is a cloud of glittering metal, plastic and flesh. Human and Chromatic forces have battered one another mercilessly, but the humans have the upper hand. The characters see that four of the mother ships are destroyed, while another two seem to lie derelict. As the characters watch, a heat shimmer envelopes one of the remaining mother ships that's under heavy fire. It's not an explosion, but a teleportation effect. In moments, the craft vanishes, creating a subquantum wave. The characters must deal with backlash once again.

The last two mother ships try to gather in as many fighters as they can, but with only two prime targets remaining, Earth forces concentrate their fire to devastating effect. One of the manta-like vessels shreds under the assault. The remaining one teleports away (requiring a final backlash roll). Although a handful of individual Chromatic fighters remain, the battle is essentially over. Humanity has repelled a major alien attack.

The victory doesn't come without a cost, though. The characters learn that only 47 fighters, 16 military transports, eight frigates and one freighter remain of the initial assault force. The characters are the only rescue team to make it back, meaning that six Upeo died in the battle (and Greaves' status isn't confirmed yet). It's understandable if the characters find the victory a bitter one.

Conclusions

Three frigates, 10 transports and 20 fighters remain in the area to continue clean-up. Greaves, Wei and other highly critical patients are loaded into a few fast transports still in good condition. The ships head for Earth at maximum speed (the assault fleet traveled to the battle at VS 4; the transports head back at VS 5), taking the patients to Montessor for immediate treatment. Only characters at Incapacitated take this trip; a frigate's medical facilities are sufficient to care for up to Crippled status for a couple of days.

Characters probably arrive back two days after the fight. *Pacifica*'s captain receives orders to shuttle the characters and N'gamba to Olympus, reportedly to debrief the UN on their part in the battle. UN officials Carlin Bedford and Eden Ouellette handle the debriefing, with Gamemenos and Ramirez in attendance. They ask for the high points at first, but request details after the excitement dies down.

After a few hours of standard question-and-answer, the characters are free to go. Gamemenos and Ramirez take them to the *Æon Trinity's* Lunar offices. There, Gamemenos apologizes for any differences the characters and the Trinity may have had in the past. The team has once again showed its tremendous resourcefulness and courage in the face of overwhelming odds. *Æon* wishes to reward those efforts.

The United Nations will pardon the characters for their recent raid on the general assembly. Normally, this would simply be a bureaucratic matter, but this is not a normal situation. The characters are to be presented with the pardon and spe-



cial commendations for bravery at a special ceremony held at Montessor Clinic. The event will also honor the commanders who led the battle against the Chromatics, and will welcome the long-lost Upeo.

Montessor has been chosen for the ceremony to allow those wounded in the battle to attend personally. Ramirez admits it's no coincidence that this event will go a long way toward repairing the Æsculapians' reputation (and hopefully the psi orders' as a whole). The celebration won't stop the UN hearings, but Æon hopes it will encourage the hearings to continue in a more objective light rather than as a witch hunt.

If anyone asks about Robert Wei, Ramirez reveals that the Ministry agent regained consciousness en route to Earth, psychologically scarred by the event. The Ministry directed that Wei's role be downplayed in the extreme until it investigates the full extent of his condition. He's currently at Montessor undergoing final tests before being transferred to China. Ramirez sees if he can set up a meeting before Wei departs. If the characters obviously have some twisted vengeance on their minds, though, Ramirez doesn't help them.

Aftermath

Characters may well be tired of politics and machinations by now. It's obvious that Gamemenos and Ramirez are sincere in wanting to recognize the characters (and N'gamba's) efforts, but the characters aren't forced to attend the ceremony. Those who don't still receive the pardon and the commendation.

The characters are given hotel rooms in Olympean Towers; they have a day to rest and consider attending. That evening, N'gamba tells them that she's not one for formal events. She wants quiet time with her family, then plans on visiting Greaves. She recommends that the characters go to Montessor. N'gamba states in her pragmatic fashion that none of this would have been possible if not for their efforts; they deserve the recognition. With one last goodbye, Susan N'gamba leaves for Africa.

The next day, Ramirez picks up those character who want to attend the ceremony. Those who decline may stay another day at the hotel, but are then on their own. After a quick trip back to Mare Ingenii, Ramirez takes the characters to

one of the hangar bays, where a number of technicians check over the Chromatic transport that the characters used to escape the mother ship. Ramirez explains that Æon wants the heroes to fly the craft to Montessor, complete with an honor guard. Technicians have confirmed that the transport is safe and spaceworthy, and most controls have been figured out.

It's a simple matter to lift off with a pair of Scarabs and Locusts as escort. The characters approach Basel within a few hours. As the rotund transport descends for a landing, the characters see media and dignitaries swarm over the site. Ramirez gestures for the characters to exit first to enjoy the accolades of the crowd. Indeed, the cheers are deafening. Despite the cordons that Black Company security has set up, individuals push through to shake hands and otherwise congratulate the heroes of the day.

UN representatives, military commanders, and Proxies Zweidler and Cassel await on the podium (Otha Herzog and Solveig Larssen were also invited to attend, but both declined). After a short introductory speech by one official (congratulating the efforts of everyone — no matter their nationality, race, religion or noetic ability — to repel the dreaded Chromatics), a small holoprojector displays a recorded message from Clarence Greaves. The characters almost don't recognize him with the tubes and devices removed. He looks very pale but in good health (the image may be doctored slightly, considering Greaves was near death only four days ago). He thanks Earth forces for their efforts and hopes that the rest of the missing Upeo may someday be liberated as well.

The characters don't get to say much more than "thank you" and "I'm proud to be a human being" sound bytes before Ramirez whisks them off stage. Inside Montessor, the characters meet Pierce Monahan, the head of Æsculapian administration. Robert Wei leaves for China in a half-hour, but Monahan has agreed to Ramirez's request to give the characters a few minutes with the Ministry agent.

The characters go to a small hospital room guarded by two Black Company psions. Ramirez hangs out in a corner while the characters talk to Wei. Though tired and sedated, Wei is pleased to see the characters. The telepath is deeply sorrowful for what the Doyen did while possessing his body. Wei remembers everything in a hazy, dreamlike fashion. He explains what he understands of the Doyen's motivations, but Wei is by no means certain of everything. Wei noticeably brightens at any good wishes and

Character Development

A player may spend experience points on his character to signify permanent benefits from recent efforts. Any Abilities or Aptitude Modes that were used are obvious choices for development.

The Allies, Contacts and Status Backgrounds may also be purchased to indicate the results of intense involvement with the Æon Trinity or one of the psi orders. (Even if a player passes on this option, his character can still get help from these groups — though not as often as those who develop the relationships fully.)

Due to the high visibility the characters currently enjoy, you may grant each two dots of Influence. A player may spend experience to increase this bonus further if he played a particularly central role in the public eye. Conversely, a character who made a point of avoiding the limelight does not receive this Influence reward.

The revelations that occur in *Ascent into Light* may stagger a character's worldview. It's not surprising if a character changes his Allegiance (most notably from — or to — the Æon Trinity or the Æsculapians) as a result. Just bear in mind that doing so isn't always easy (see *Trinity*, page 175, for information on changing Allegiance).

understanding from the characters. If the characters show little sympathy, Wei is courteous but seems deeply hurt. Robert Wei was powerless to stop an entity from controlling his body, and the psionic rape has shaken him tremendously. The event has obviously left Wei in serious doubt of his own abilities, possibly even his sanity. It will be some time before he recovers fully, even with psionic aid.

Denouement

Here's where everything ends, right? The characters enjoy a hero's welcome, hailed by almost everyone. If not for the characters' unorthodox announcement, humanity would not have been prepared to drive off the invaders. Not only that, but the characters showed great courage in getting on board an actual alien jump ship to free another Upeo.

The characters are now home and safe, they've received Earth's undying gratitude, humanity defeated the alien menace, another

teleporter was rescued and the docs are showing mankind that, yes indeed, they are still on the side of good.

Although that concludes the events of **Darkness Revealed**, there are still many plot threads left to explore.

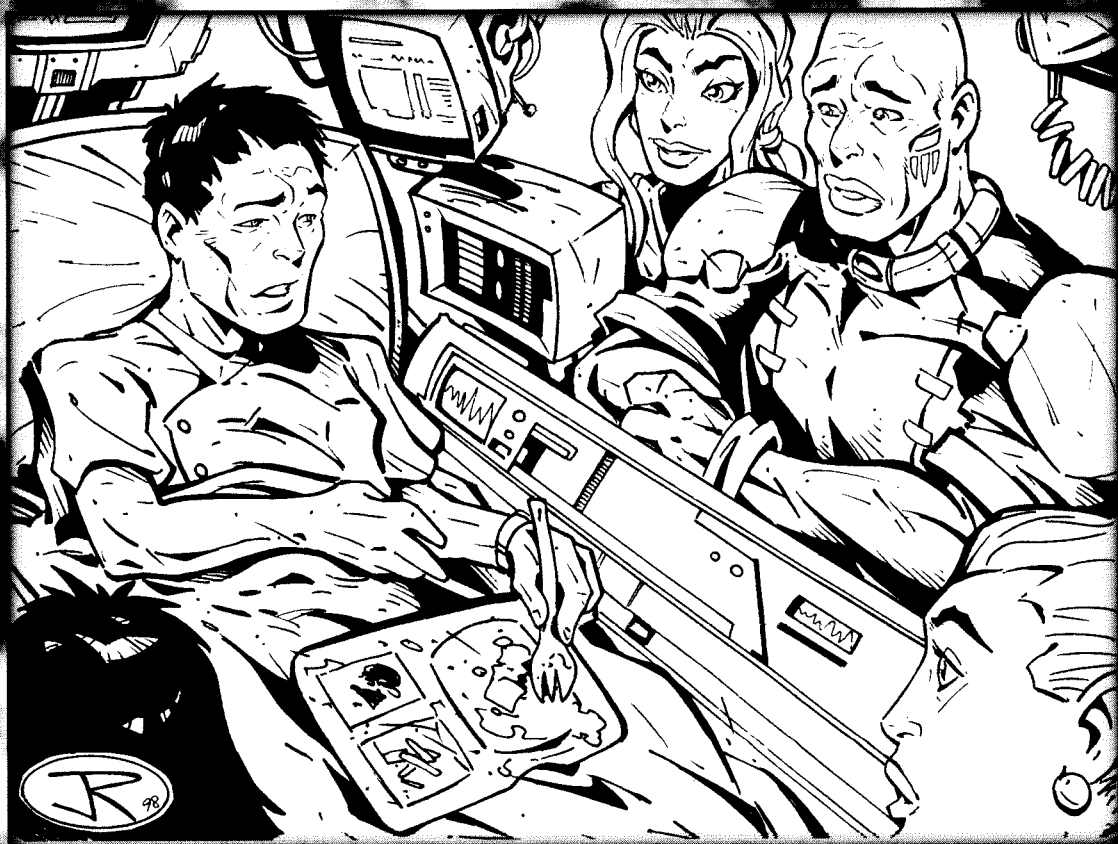
- **The UN hearings continue:** The psi orders took advantage of the Chromatic invasion to prove once again that they're humanity's first line of defense. The orders were instrumental to supplying personnel and equipment in the battle, and their selfless acts do not go unnoticed by the populace. Yet there are lingering concerns regarding the orders' many secret agendas. The characters must still report to speak about their involvement in the Huang-Marr investigation, and the UN could determine that the *Æsculapians* and/or *Orgotek* may face legal penalties.

- **The Upeo's departure:** The characters are now privy to some very sensitive details. Should the team demonstrate an inclination to go to the media with what they know, *Æon* takes the steps necessary to make sure that the story never gets out. The characters have already seen that the Trinity can be hard when it needs

to. Without a teleporter on hand to help them, the characters would be in a tight spot should trouble occur.

- **The mysterious assassins:** The characters learn that the Doyen summoned the mindwiped strike force. But if the alien possessed Wei out in Karroo, where did it get the assassins? Considering Argente Essem was presumably another Doyen plant (although an unwitting one), it's conceivable that there are other human minions running around. The difficulty is in discovering who else is a Doyen spy.

- **Strike at the Chromatics:** Humanity has recovered quite a bit from the recent battle: alien technology, live Chromatics and a former captive. It will take some time to study the Chromatic devices and prisoners, and Greaves is in no shape to engage in lengthy conversations. However, with time and diligence, humanity can discover where the Chromatics originate. Then it's time for mankind to mount its own assault — to jump to the Chromatic homeland and free the Upeo who remain in the aliens' grasp. The next adventure series, **Alien Encounter**, begins with this very expedition.



Dramatis Personae

Joseph and Marie N'gamba

The N'gambas are comfortably retired and living off the proceeds of investments. Joseph is tall and lanky and prone to explosive commentaries on anything that draws his ire. He still has most of his hair and dresses in fashions a half-century out of date, giving him an anachronistic air. Marie is short and rather overweight, reserved and unflappable — the perfect counterpoint to her husband.

Both N'gambas still feel the loss of their daughter keenly, and have no patience for anyone who questions them about the matter. Susan's return lights a fire within Joseph and Marie, bringing them to her defense despite the amazing revelations about her life.



Ian Steere

Steere claims to anyone who'll listen that he's not Scottish, that he has no idea what the bloody hell he's doing in Accra, and that he's a perfectly legitimate businessman, trader and pilot. The Accra police give him one out of three — the middle one — and extra credit for trying. There is certainly something of the self-proclaimed pirate in the way Steere carries himself, from his scraggly beard, fearsome grin and odd poofy shirts to the way his sausage-like fingers constantly fumble

with folds of cloth that conceal various implements of destruction.

A port rat since his schoolboy days, the heavysset Steere picked up the spacing habit early — he lied about his age to sign on with Lyster-Rimah Ltd. (Edinburgh's largest shipping concern) as a crewman. Wise to the profit potential inherent to his free trips up and down the gravity well, Steere began a small smuggling operation that grew rapidly into a large enterprise. By age 27, he had a ship of his own and a standing warning to stay clear of half of the orbital stations and ports in the Solar System. Steere refined his talents over the subsequent decade, building up his honest trade to cover his real money-maker.

He worked with the Upeo several times — on honest runs, taking care of less important transports on which the teleporters didn't want to waste their special skills. The work was steady enough that Steere relocated his operation to Accra, not far from the Upeo base. He thus came to N'gamba's attention.

Ravit Simon

An *Aeon* operative from Tel Aviv by way of ISRA, Ravit Simon always wanted to fly. The Israeli military, desperate for all the good pilots it could find, tapped her potential early. By the time Simon was 23, she was considered one of the best pilots (atmosphere or space) the country had, possibly one of the best Israel had ever seen. As a result, there are still any number of high-ranking officials within Israeli High Command who are convinced that Otha Herzog picked her for the Prometheus Effect not for her psionic potential, but rather to deprive the nation of her talents. Herzog himself has never deigned to respond to the accusations, and the fact remains that Simon works for organizations other than ISRA.

Simon is almost two meters tall, with curly brown hair that comes down to her shoulders. Her military training is reflected in her rock-hard physique, though rumor has it she has a secret fondness for sushi. Simon tends to wear a flight suit or something else that indicates her profession — bomber jackets being a particular favorite.

Assassins

The Doyen-controlled assassins are combat-trained and battle-ready psions. They wear bioweave armor (genetically programmed to a basic black), as well as hoods, gloves and goggles. In other words, every centimeter of each psion's skin is covered and no distinguishable characteristics are visible. They leave an impression of mechanical, anonymous automatons, not remotely human.

While the assassin team relies on psi powers and close-combat skills first and foremost, its members don't eschew technology entirely. Two wear enhancer gauntlets; the rest are armed with fighting gloves, a knife and either an Orgotek Wasp II or a Stavros II mm slugthrower; all carry Voss 63K laser carbines. The team also has access to a wide variety of surveillance equipment, including listening devices, trackers and amplification devices used to eavesdrop on distant conversations. At your discretion, each psion may have a "suicide tooth" to prevent capture, though it may be more dramatic (and less clichéd) to have one assassin gun down a fallen comrade to keep him from talking.

For statistics on the assassins, use the Proteus Division template in *Trinity*, page 304. Also add seven dots in an Aptitude of your choice for each.

Chromatics

The Chromatic warriors on this mission are exceptionally brave and fired with hatred for humanity. As such, they have no doubts about what they're doing or why they're doing it. To the Chromatics of the assault fleet, killing a human is the moral equivalent of killing a rabid dog. See *Trinity*, page 306, for the stats of Chromatic warriors, and *Passage Through Shadow*, page 113, for a profile of Chromatic leaders.



Mandisa Letwaba

Despite the stories that he allows to be perpetrated about his supposedly humble origins, Mandisa was never a child of the streets, a victim of starvation and poverty. Rather, he was born to a comfortable middle-class environment, the child of professors at two of Accra's universities (economics at the University of Ghana and bioengineering at Ada Technical, respectively). Bright and inquisitive, Letwaba found school's demands insufficient to occupy his intellect. As a result, he drifted into hobbies that engaged him fully — credential forgery, code-cracking and data hacking. As he got good, Mandisa attracted clients. These customers had friends, who presented him with ever more challenging tasks, and he rose to the occasion each time.

The breakthrough came when Letwaba realized that all of these clients were using him to do their dirty work when *he* should be the one using *them*. Taking a step back from most active commissions, Mandisa started connecting the talents of his various clients. He became a fixer, arranging combinations of skills for a fee while never touching actual illegal goods or services.

As far as his parents are concerned, Letwaba runs a perfectly respectable technical staffing firm — a waste of his talents, if you ask them. Letwaba's skills are truly known and admired only on the underside of the Accran economy.

Image: Letwaba is quite youthful — he's in his early 30s and looks a decade younger. Mandisa keeps his hair close-cropped and usually wears a headset voice module attached to his computer systems — he feels the need to be in constant touch with everything that's going on in his business. Letwaba's parents both moved to Accra from Johannesburg and are both full-blooded Zulus; his appearance reflects this heritage.

Roleplaying Hints: You're in command, and it's surprisingly easy. Your knack for systems works just as well with people as it does with data, and it's all so profitable. Don't get yourself involved unless it's a particularly intriguing or challenging situation — such as a chance to tweak the *Æon Trinity*. You've always wondered how you'd stack up against their best, and helping the team might be the way to find out.

Nature: Conniver

Allegiance: Himself

Physical Attributes

Strength 2
Dexterity 3

Stamina 3

Mental Attributes

Perception (Astute) 4

Intelligence (Bright) 4

Wits (Shrewd) 5

Social Attributes

Appearance 3

Manipulation 3

Charisma (Cool) 4

Willpower: 8

Psi: 1

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 5, Device 5, Resources 4

Equipment: L-K Personal Protector, armor vest, heavily modified Wazukana DX70 personal computer

Robert Wei... and Friend

Originally a street-taxi runner from Xianggang, Wei was spotted by a Ministry agent whom he picked up as a fare. While technically a Ministry agent in good standing, Wei spends more and more time working with Æon these days. Wei has no idea why his superiors give him such a long leash, but he's happy to take it. (The short version is that Bue still stings from a private rebuke received from Æon years back, and tries to find out as much as she can about how the Trinity operates in hopes of embarrassing the organization.)

Unfortunately, Wei isn't really Wei these days. His real personality is still present, but suppressed by the Doyen alien who's taken up residence in the telepath's body. The Doyen observed the characters capture some of its Chromatic allies during *Heaven Through Iron Gates*, and decided to assume control of one of the group in an effort to learn more of humanity's plans.

The Doyen's personality is utterly inhuman. It draws up elements of Wei's psyche for pur-

Abilities

Brawl 1
Firearms 2, Legerde-
main 4, Stealth 2
Endurance 1

Abilities

Awareness 3, Invest-
igation 3
Academics 3, Bu-
reaucracy 3, Engi-
neering 4, Intrusion 5
Linguistics (French,
Chinese, English) 3,
Science 3
Rapport 3

Abilities

Intimidation 3,
Style 3
Command 2, Interro-
gation 4, Subterfuge 4
Etiquette 1, Savvy 4

poses of interaction, then drops them as soon as the charade is unnecessary. Anyone spotting Wei at an unguarded moment may well be in for a chilling surprise.

Image: Good-looking in an almost boyish way, Wei is tall and well-built. He wears his Ministry uniform whenever he's on official business for his order, but otherwise wears civilian clothing in typical Asian styles.

Roleplaying Hints: Be Wei only as often and as long as you need to, then relax the façade. You are here to ensure the destruction of humanity as a means of preventing the spread of taint throughout the universe. Your ultimate goal in doing so is to learn as much as possible about the humans' plans, and to convey that information to the Chromatics. Striking too early would almost be worse than not striking at all; pick your moment carefully.

Nature: Alien

Allegiance: Doyen

Physical Attributes

Strength (Athletic) 4
Dexterity (Fast) 5

Stamina (Resilient) 5

Mental Attributes

Perception (Observant) 5

Intelligence (Rational) 5

Wits (Cunning) 4

Social Attributes

Appearance (Pleasant) 4
Manipulation (Disarming) 4

Charisma 3

Abilities

Brawl 4, Might 3
Athletics 4, Drive 3,
Firearms 4, Legerde-
main 3, Martial Arts 4,
Stealth 4, Survival 5
Endurance 4,
Resistance 4

Abilities

Awareness 5, Invest-
igation 1
Academics 3, Bu-
reaucracy 4, Engi-
neering 5, Intrusion 3,
Linguistics (English,
German, Portuguese,
Chromatic, Qin) 5,
Medicine 4, Science 5
Meditation 5, Rap-
port 3

Abilities

Intimidation 5, Style 1
Command 5, Interro-
gation 4, Subterfuge 4
Etiquette 3, Perform 2,
Savvy 1

Special Abilities: The human Robert Wei's template is in *Descent into Darkness*, page 114. The modifications here represent the alien presence inhabiting Wei's body. To make things easy, consider the Doyen's Attributes and Abilities the same whether it's

in Wei or in its natural form. The Doyen does have a quasi-solid body (a viscous smoky substance), and manifests its Physical Attributes as focused Telekinesis.

Psi Mastery: Doyen have powerful natural psionic abilities. Consider that the creature has each Telepathy Mode at 5; each Biokinesis, Psychokinesis and Vitakinesis Mode at 4; and each Clairsentience and Electrokinetics Mode at 3.

Reduced Damage: All mundane attacks (Bashing and Lethal) inflict half damage after soak (round down). Psionic attacks are applied normally. This reduced physical damage does not apply to Wei's body; just to the Doyen. If Wei is killed before the Doyen discards its disguise, consider the alien to have suffered half the damage inflicted on Wei.

Psi Pool: As Doyen are composed of concentrated psi energy, the alien has a significant amount of subquantum power to throw around. The Doyen starts with 25 current Psi to spend, and can make a Psi-recovery roll once every 15 minutes.

Willpower: 9

Psi: 9

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Cipher 5, Contacts 3, Followers 5, Influence (Chromatics) 5, Status (Doyen) 3

Equipment: (as Wei) Ministry uniform, Wazukana DX70 minicomp (DataWarp Friday agent), Banji Spark laser pistol, vocoder; (as Doyen) nothing

Technology

Biotechnology



- **Chromatic Restraint Harness:** The restraint contains a small-scale biocomp programmed to mimic a combination of noetic effects that will — those studying Chromatics hope — keep a captured Chromatic neutralized. A hood generates random Control Illumination and Hologram Creation effects to keep the Chromatic disoriented, while a Thermal Screen leeches out accumulated heat.

The restraint consists of a black hood that drapes over a Chromatic's head, and a silver rod with small hooks to be attached to the subject's back. Three small silver bands wrap around the Chromatic's torso to lock the whole thing into place.

Tech: ψ , Mass: 3, Tolerance: n/a, Cost: The harness is literally irreplaceable and invaluable, a prototype drawing on technology far beyond anything available to even the orders' rank and file.

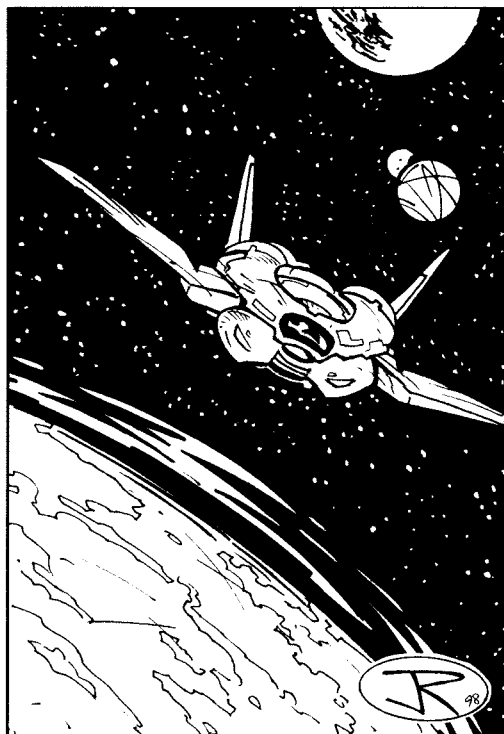
- **Telepathic Transmitter:** This piece of Ministry biotech still undergoes development. It consists of a helmet that trails organic fibers (about two meters long each) which connect to a dozen headbands, and a built-in battery system.

The battery is reliable for two uses, but frequently melts at crucial nodes if used further. (This is one of the problems the Ministry would really like to fix.)

By spending an extra point of Psi, the activator allows those wearing the headbands to observe results of the user's Telepathy techniques. The transmitter also records any images viewed with the device (although these psionic recordings are lost if the battery melts down). Any botch on a user's Psi roll deals a level of Bashing damage to everyone connected. Formatting to the transmitter negates having to expend the extra Psi point.

Tech: ψ , Mass: 2, Tolerance: ••, Cost: Not available commercially

Vehicles



• **Bakuatsu MUT-01 "Mutt" (Military Use Transport):** Used frequently by the UN and UAN, the "Mutt" is a favorite for patrol and intercept missions. It seats four in the cockpit (although it needs only a pilot and a copilot), with a central bay that can seat up to eight others or be converted to four small sleeping compartments, and a rear 100-cubic-meter cargo bay.

VT: Hybrid
Tech: Ω
CS: Mach 1.3
TS: Mach 1.6

VS: 4
Handling: +1
Mass: 29
Cost: Not available commercially
Armor: 3 [10]

Weapons: Turret-mounted heavy laser cannon (Accuracy: +2, Damage 8d10 [5] L); dual front-mounted light coilguns (Accuracy: 0, Damage: 5d10 [10] L); eight smart missiles (Accuracy: +3, Damage: 10d10 [15] L)

Karoo Mining Ships

The mining ships used at Karroo represent a legacy of continued tinkering with designs already in use in the Asteroid Belt and elsewhere. Although these craft handle as hybrids, they cannot operate in atmospheres denser than those right around the Shield.

• **One-Person Mining Ship ("One"):** This is a simple cylinder that's 12 meters long and five meters wide. The front two meters contain the pilot's cabin. It's enough to support a pilot in reasonable safety and minimal comfort for up to 10 days (12 if the pilot conserves resources). The last three meters contain small engines, powered by a solar-battery array. In between, the One consists of a single large cargo area, with temporary baffle panels that can create smaller chambers. Mining tools from explosives to laser drills can be strapped onto the One's exterior, as can ores in lots too big to fit inside the cargo area.

VT: Hybrid
Tech: Ω
VS: 3

Handling: +1 (0 for 10 cubic meters of ore strapped outside, -1 for 20 cubic meters)

Mass: 50
Cost: ••••••••

Armor: 2 [5]
Weapons: Two mining lasers (Accuracy: +0, Damage: 6d10 [5] L)

• **Five-Person Mining Ship ("Five"):** The Five consists of four crew modules, each approximately spherical and five meters across, separated by 10 meters of scaffolding. The resulting square defines the front edge of a mostly open cube, with engines in blocks at the back corners. The intervening space can be fitted with shelves, hooks and baffles for various sorts of cargo, including inflatable tanks to hold liquified gases extracted from pockets within

hollowed rocks, or ices condensed on rocks that caught dense gas flows from the inner nebula.

The crew modules are designed so that any three can support a crew of five for up to two months (three months with rationing). The fourth serves as a place to go when a crew member needs solitude; each mission designates one of the modules as "extra" at launch. Since going to this design, Karroo has lost very few miners to cabin fever and other psychological stresses.

VT: Hybrid

Tech: Ω

VS: 3

Handling: 0

Mass: 420

Cost: ●●●●●●●●

Armor: 3 [5]

Weapons: Eight mining lasers (Accuracy: 0, Damage: 6d10 [5] L)

• **Exhaust Cannon:** The exhaust cannon consists of three engines joined by scaffolding in a triangular framework. A fourth engine is set in the triangle's center, pointing in the opposite direction of the other three. A small single-person cockpit is attached to one side of the triangle.

Spaceships generate very hot exhaust gases that can damage another craft passing through the discharge. One of the first rules of space navigation is to steer clear of any place where other ships have just been. Exhaust therefore makes a fine weapon, if aimed properly.

The pilot closes in at high speed, then fires the forward-facing engine at a target — simultaneously slamming on retro rockets for the other three to turn away from the exhaust jet created by the first engine. An exhaust cannon with little forward velocity can also spin around to fire at targets in various directions (though doing so sends it shooting off in the opposite direction).

VT: Hybrid

Tech: Ω

VS: 4

Handling: 0

Mass: 74

Cost: Not available commercially

Armor: 2 [5]

Weapons: Two mining lasers (Accuracy: 0, Damage: 6d10 [5] L), one engine (Accuracy: -2, Damage: 20d10 [20] L)

Chromatic Ships

All Chromatic craft, even their engines and weapon arrays, are made entirely of biotech. Chromatic engines and weapons are not as effective overall as those of human biotech vehicles, which use hardtech propulsion and weaponry. Still, Chromatic ships have an important advantage. All craft can "heal" minor damage; a result of a biotech vehicle performing self-repair procedures. A ship can repair one Structural Level every turn. However, doing so reduces Vacuum Speed by one and restricts the ship to Cruising Speed ("healing" puts significant demands on a ship's engines).

• **Chromatic Mother Ship:** A mother ship resembles a predatory hunter from the Chromatics' homeworld (not surprising, since the aliens deliberately used genetic components from the creatures). It is a gigantic, roughly manta-shape, with a bulbous central body, a set of "wings" and a swept-forward front with a matched set of prongs extending even further forward. The curving prongs guide fighters to and from the hangar bay.

The Chromatics do not possess the secret of gravcrystals. A mother ship usually operates in weightlessness, which is far less disorienting for the aliens than it is for humans (the difficulties of zero-g maneuvers performed by Chromatics are one less than they are for humans). All surfaces throughout a mother ship have anchor hooks through which Chromatics attach their claws.

A mother ship holds 36 fighter crews (of three each), two shifts of 36 Chromatics to operate the ship, and three platoons (a platoon consists of six squads of six Chromatics), for a total complement of 288. Up to 36 fighter craft and six transports can dock within a mother ship's central bay at any one time.

VT: Freighter

Tech: ψ

VS: 2

Handling: -2

Mass: 180,000

Cost: Not available to humans

Armor: 5 [12]

Weapons: Nine laser cannons (Accuracy +1, Damage: 7d10 [3] L) — two mounted on the nose, six along the rim (adjacent to the hangar bays), one at the rear

• **Chromatic Fighter:** This craft is designed to do significant damage as quickly as possible. It has a primary pilot and two copilots, with cargo space that can house up to six battle-ready Chromatics.

VT: Hybrid

Tech: ψ

CS: Mach 1

TS: Mach 1.1

VS: 3

Handling: 0

Mass: 30

Cost: Not available to humans

Armor: 4 [5]

Weapons: Three laser cannons (Accuracy: +1, Damage: 7d10 [3] L), two in front and one in the rear

- **Chromatic Transport:** Larger and not as sleek as a fighter, the transport was designed as a ferry. It can carry up to 1,800 cubic meters of cargo or 60 Chromatic passengers.

VT: Hybrid

Tech: ψ

CS: 560 km/h

TS: 690 km/h

VS: 3

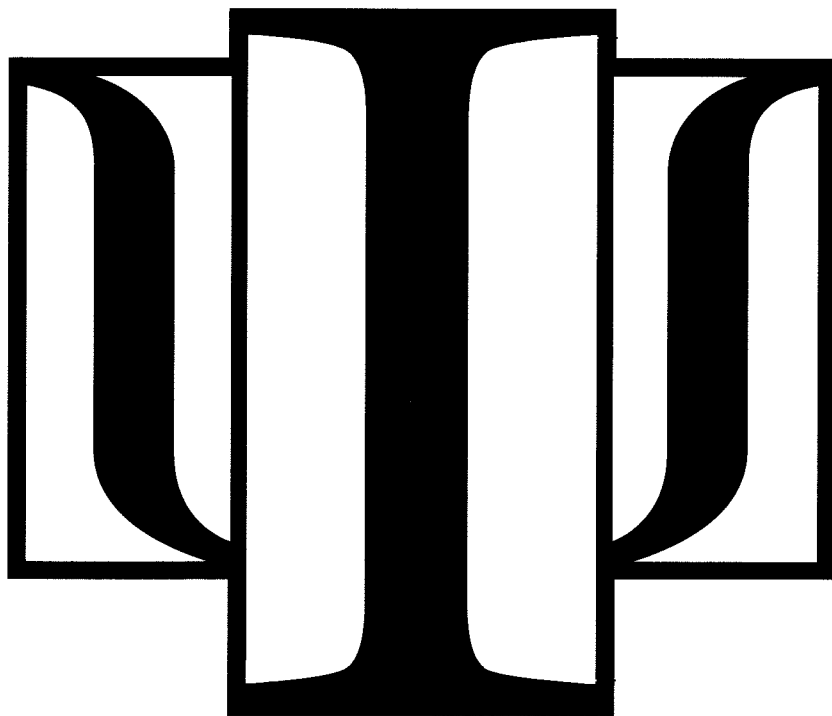
Handling: -1

Mass: 85

Cost: Not available to humans

Armor: 4 [5]

Weapons: Two front-mounted laser cannons (Accuracy: +1, Damage: 7d10 [3] L)



DARKNESS REVEALEDTM 3

ASCENT INTO LIGHT

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Of course, this is just the beginning. Wait till you see what we have planned next!

— Bates

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