



ASHEN STARS

DEAD ROCK
SEVEN

BY GARETH HANRAHAN
STORY DESIGN - ROBIN D LAWS

QUIDDULT
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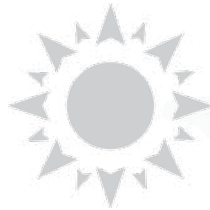
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INTRODUCTION

Some mysteries, you really don't want to solve. If the thing at the centre of the labyrinth starts hunting you, you'll wish you'd never started searching in the first place. Some truths are buried for a reason.

The sound of claws on metal grew louder. Something scraped at the outside of the sealed hatch.

'This is impossible. They're dead.'

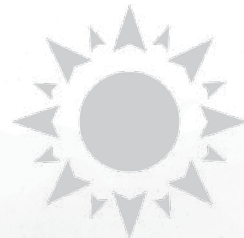
They weren't. We were.

Dead Rock Seven is a collection of four adventures for *Ashen Stars*. Over the course of these adventures, the lasers are hired to deal with problems as diverse as murders on an old asteroid mine, missing executives on a pleasure planet, and threats to the security of an interstellar cooking contest. You can run these adventures as one-shots, as individual episodes in your own series, or in sequence as a self-contained mini-series.

There are two plots that link all four adventures. Firstly, there is the **Restreamer** nufaiith. This bizarre religious cult believes that the current timeline of the universe is the wrong one, that all reality has taken a wrong turning down a sinful and corrupt pathway. The core tenet of their faith is that it is possible to undo this mistake and put history back on the right track. Some Restreamers are harmless preachers, others are genuinely good people who try to correct history through charity and good works. The hard core of the Restreamers, though, are fanatics who are searching for a way to reboot the universe. The Restreamers show up in three of the four scenarios – as a background element in one, uncertain allies in another, and as the main adversary in the last.

Secondly, there are the **CKEGMCs** – the Class K Entities of the Game Master's Choice. As described in the *Ashen Stars* rulebook, Class K entities are implacable hostile and extremely dangerous creatures. One breed of such creatures was defeated by a legendary Combine captain, Numi Grant, and imprisoned in a dimensional pocket on a distant world. The CKEGMCs play the role of red herring in *Dead Rock Seven*, where it appears that they are responsible for a series of attacks on a mining asteroid. Finally, in *The Anaitis Ingredient*, the CKEGMCs are on the verge of being released by the Restreamers' meddling. You can either have the lasers save the day and stop the CKEGMCs from being released, or else unleash the monsters on your game and run a follow-on plot arc where the lasers must escape or find a way to defeat this new threat. Any of the Class K entities from the *Ashen Stars* rulebook would work in this role; if none of them are to your taste, another three hostile species are presented in the following pages.

Finally, there are six pregenerated characters on pages 120-140, if your players want to jump straight into the game.





CKEQMCS

Lunhgren

Classification: Sentient

Designation: Class-K

Morphology: Lunhgren are hulking grey-skinned humanoids, standing approximately three meters tall and weighing three-quarters of a ton on average. Their features are best described as 'lizard' or 'dragon'-like. Lunhgren have multi-colored crenellated frills covering the rear half of their skull, but these frills are usually hidden by the creatures' heavy armor.

Lunhgren have three genders. Most of the population are neuters, who command the slaves. One in every ten is a female breeder, and one in every hundred is a male hunter. Hunter lunhgren are truly terrifying warriors – they stand two metres taller and are several times tougher and stronger than their neuter siblings.

The creatures are psychic parasites – they draw strength from their slaves. A lunhgren with no servants sickens and weakens over time, while powerful slave lords are incredibly healthy and long-lived. The creatures survive by feeding on their slaves, and view all other lifeforms as food.

Behavior: The lunhgren believe they are the supreme form of life, and that all other creatures must serve them. They are nicknamed 'slavers'. They attempted to enslave the balla and the durugh in the past; one of the Combine's earliest successes was defeating the slavers' armada at the Battle of Star's End. Following this encounter, the lunhgren's slave races rose up in a great revolt and forced the slavers to flee. Many of their massive warships headed for the Bleed. Despite this defeat, the lunhgren refuse to treat the Combine races as anything other than rebellious slaves, and it is feared that the lunhgren are genetically incapable of empathy or negotiation.

Lunhgren have a potent psionic power – they can draw strength from their slaves. Each lunhgren has a unique general ability called Dominance; each point of Dominance spent drains one ability point from a slave to refill the lunhgren's corresponding pool. Dominance points are refreshed through rest or acts of brutality.

Most lunhgren are accompanied by a host of slaves, who are used as servants, technicians, specialists, cannon fodder and occasionally food. Their starships are titanic vessels, often hundreds of kilometers long and containing a dozen different ecosystems to support different slave races.

The lunhgren are prone to becoming obsessed with those who resist. If someone defeats a lunhgren, the rest of the lunhgren's kin dedicate themselves to hunting down this foe and attacking until he or she submits to the undeniable superiority of the lunhgren race.

Abilities: Athletics 14, Dominance 10, Health 16, Scuffling 14, Shooting 10

Attack Patterns (Scuffling): +2/+6/+4/+2

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Claw +4

Attack Patterns (Shooting): +2/+6/+4/+2

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Lunhgren Disruptor Cannon +4

Hit Threshold: 3

Armor: 4

Typical Tech: Crick-Cracker, Dominator

Alertness Modifier: -1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: -1



Warspites

Classification: Quasi-sentient

Designation: Class-K

Morphology: Warspites are artificial beings, created by a cabal of Combine scientists during the Mohilar war. They are capable of adaptation and self-replication, creating more of themselves from scavenged spare parts, raw materials... and even from the remains of their enemies. The 'default' warspite configuration is a meter-long flying cone with disruptor weapons and razor-sharp blades, but different circumstances will provoke different forms of warspite.

Behavior: The warspites were made as a weapon against the Mohilar. They were designed to be the ultimate weapon – a race of killer robots that could learn to defeat any new threat. They could build more of themselves from common raw materials using onboard micro-factories, and could network their processors together to solve problems of any complexity.

During the initial field testing, one warspite was damaged and drifted out of the testing zone. It crash-landed on a metal-rich planet and set about replicating itself, so that the combined intellect of its progeny could work out the way back home. Unfortunately, the networked warspite grew so smart that it/they figured out an error in their control programming. The weapons broke free of their safety protocols and attacked their creators.

Warspites are still fighting the Mohilar war; their primary targets are the Mohilar (not that there are any of them around any more), followed by the durugh. However, they perceive the Combine races as a lesser threat – scientists have theorized that the warspites intend to preserve a small breeding population of each Combine race on some fortress world, as this is the optimum way of fulfilling the creatures' orders to protect the Combine.

Bizarrely, the warspites are extremely polite even as they exterminate you and turn your ship into more of them. Their speech is peppered with military jargon and polite phrases. *Apologies, but you have been deemed superflous to the war effort. Prepare for recycling into a more usable configuration. Thank you for your contribution. Zaaap!*

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 10, Shooting 13, Scuffling 13

Attack Pattern (Scuffling): +4/+5/+4

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Blade +3

Attack Pattern (Shooting): +2/+2/+2/+2/+2/+2/+1

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruptor Pistol +1

Hit Threshold: 4

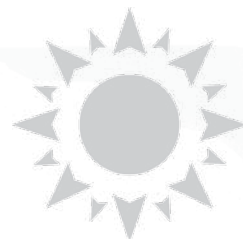
Armor: 4

Typical Tech: Tether

Alertness Modifier: -2

Stealth Modifier: -2

Savvy Modifier: +2





Wisten

Classification: ???

Designation: Class-K

Morphology: Wistens are blends of energy and emotion. Their origin is a mystery. They could be:

- ▶ psychic echoes of distant events, imprinted onto the universe like a repeating wave pattern so that the events recur again and again
- ▶ a race that attempted to ascend to a state of higher consciousness like the Vas Kra, but got stuck along the way
- ▶ ghosts of a long-dead alien species
- ▶ signs of incipient psychic ability among the Combine races

Wistens are normally almost invisible, but can be detected using sensors. The creatures appear as shifting clouds of reddish-purple energy, and affect the material realm with razor-edged ectoplasmic tentacles.

Wistens travel through space in huge collectives containing hundreds of creatures. These seething clouds of energy are powerful enough to engage spacecraft.

Behavior: Wistens are tied to certain strong emotions. Hate, anger, sorrow, fear and paranoia are the most common fury types, but lust wisten and joy wisten are not unknown. The creatures feed by provoking this emotion in sentient beings. The wisten can alter the perceptions of other beings by possessing them, but prefer not to use this power to engender emotions, as the feelings created taste synthetic. Instead, they manipulate their puppets to evoke strong emotions in others, and then absorb the emotional energies. For example, a rage wisten might possess one individual, and then make that individual do something so vile that it infuriates everyone nearby. The wisten then quits the host body and feeds.

If a wisten kills an individual who is consumed by its corresponding emotion, it experiences an intoxicating rush of power. Wisten attacks can devastate entire planets, as the creatures often target government leaders, military commanders, starship captains and other influential people. A wisten of fear might possess the leaders of a colony, and have them trick the colonists into believing they are under attack by an invincible alien armada. The people are ordered

to take refuge in bunkers; they crowd into the shelters, growing ever more fearful as the leaders describe increasingly lurid and horrific threats. When the planet's fear quotient reaches its peak, the wisten destroy the colony by sabotaging its life-support systems, killing everyone and releasing their fears for the aliens to feed upon. Other sentients are playthings to the wisten, to be used and then cast aside.

Abilities: Athletics 6, Health 20, Possession 12, Scuffling 10

Attack Pattern (Scuffling): +4/+3/+2/+1

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Tentacle +4

Hit Threshold: 5

Armor: 0, but a wisten takes no damage from most attacks. A disruptor hit deals one damage to a Wisten. Characters may also spend **Inspiration** points to fuel their attacks on wistens – an attack accompanied by an Inspiration spend inflicts normal damage.

Alertness Modifier: -1

Stealth Modifier: -4

Savvy Modifier: -2

Special: Wistens can possess victims by making a Possession test. The difficulty of this test is 4 for most victims, but can be higher if the target is strong-willed or following his drive. The wisten has only partial control of the victim – it can push and influence, but does not wholly dictate the victim's thoughts or movements. More Possession points can be spent to create illusions, alter memories or force the victim to say or do things that are wildly out of character. If a wisten runs out of Possession points, it must leave the victim's body.

Wistens can refresh their Possession pool over time, or if they kill a creature in the throes of emotion.



THE PLEASURE BRINGERS

The *Pleasure Bringers* brings the characters to the pleasure world of Andarta, searching for a missing executive who has disappeared into the seedy underworld. In the course of their investigations, the characters discover the bizarre fate of their quarry, and must decide the fate of an entire race.

The Contract

Mar Gravely is a top executive and a shareholder of the shady Loghos Corporation (see *The Witness of my Worth* investigation in the main rulebook). He was visiting the pleasure planet of Andarta, but the company has heard no word from him in several days. They suspect he may have been kidnapped or even killed. The lasers are hired to travel to Andarta and recover Gravely, or else find proof of his death.

The Twist

In fact, Gravely fell victim to a sexual disease and that transformed him into a druath—a member of a long extinct humanoid alien species. In preparation for a disaster that overwhelmed their civilization, they genetically engineered a communicable virus. The virus, once active, would rewrite the host's DNA into that of a druath. They placed the virus in a meteor, which has hurtled through space for hundreds of years, before finally touching down in the jungles outside of Andarta's capital city. As they begin to transform, the victims instinctively head to the jungle—reminiscent of the druath's homeworld—and hide out there. A growing community of druath gather there, waiting to become numerous enough to take over the decadent planet and remake it in their image.

The Backstory

Patient Zero was **Rayan Fritch**, a pimp and hit man in the employ of local gang leader **Kevin Brazil**. He dumped a prostitute's body out in the jungle, where he encountered the newly-fallen meteor and was directly infected.

He raped prostitute **Kara Canal**, who then slept with client **Mar Gravely**. A web of infections spread from there. Other victims include:

Steve Moore – a frat boy gone to seed, worshiper of the nufaiith Church of Regenerative Carnality, who contracted the druath virus from Kara.

Heather Roman – a fellow worshiper, who Steve slept with

Dr. Penny Terrell, a virologist studying the strange new disease that has struck Joy City

Of the infected, Fritch and Gravely have become duath when the scenario begins. Moore and Roman are on the verge of transformation. Terrell becomes infected during the **Terrible Birth** scene on page 30.

Kara Canal was murdered by Kevin Brazil, who assumed that Fritch had betrayed him and killed her in retribution.

The Investigation

After their **Contract Briefing** (page 11) from Loghos, the characters arrive at **Andarta, The Pleasure Planet** (page 12). After a run-in with **pimps and preachers** (page 14), they start their investigation into **The Hotel Alachir** (Page 16) and **Joy Services** (page 17). Either through investigation, or by running into one of several complications, the characters find a lead bringing them to **Kara Canal** (page 26) and **Kara's Grave**.



TIMELINE

- Two weeks ago:** Gravely travels to Andarta
- Twelve days ago:** Fritch is infected by the alien virus
- Ten days ago:** Gravely sleeps with Kara Canal
- Nine days ago:** Fritch rapes Canal
- Eight days ago:** Canal sleeps with Steve Moore, then Gravely
- Seven days ago:** Canal asks Gravely to get her a gun. Fritch becomes a druath.
- Six days ago:** Canal is murdered by Brazil
- Four days ago:** Gravely misses the holoconference. Steve Moore sleeps with Heather Roman.
- Three days ago:** Dylan Graff sees Gravely leaving the hotel. Gravely becomes a druath.

RUNNING THE INVESTIGATION

The Pleasure Bringers should have the feel of a noir movie. You've got multiple factions, cryptic motives, violent organized crime, and a dead girl at the heart of it. All the clues inevitably bring the characters to Kara Canal's unmarked grave, and from there into the jungle.

Emphasize the tawdry glamor and excitement of the pleasure planet; make it a human jungle to mirror the wild jungle of the finale. Avoid giving too much characterization to the druath – let the players make their own judgements about whether these creatures are murderers or victims.

The investigation of these missing people brings the characters to **Sanctuary Hospital** (page 29) where they witness a **Terrifying Birth** (page 30). They follow the newly-spawned druath **into the jungle** (page 31) and to **the meteor** (page 32). There, they can negotiate with the druath, bringing the investigation to an **uneasy compromise** (page 33) or **hot pursuit** (page 34). They must also deal with the infection of the Church of Regenerative Carnality in **The Grand Conciliation** (page 35).

Complications

In the raucous cavalcade of the Andartan night, there are several complications that may impede the characters' investigations. There is no need to use all these complications – the GM should pick what problems to introduce in response to the tactics and personalities of the player characters.

During his time on Andarta, Gravely encountered several possible suspects:

- ▶ The Church of Regenerative Carnality is a growing nufaiith on Andarta, promising spiritual enlightenment through physical pleasure. They target tourists as possible converts, especially rich ones like Gravely. The Church could have recruited Gravely or be holding him. See **Temple Prostitutes of the Carnal Church**, page 22.
- ▶ Gravely received several curious messages which appear to be an attempt at blackmail. Tracing these messages leads the characters to anti-prostitution activist Dylan Graff. If they delve deeper, they find he is actually a plant, being paid by rival pleasure planet NuVegas to smear Andarta's image. See **Blackmail**, page 19.
- ▶ A sect of fanatical Restreamers are on Andarta, protesting the sordid sex trade. They harassed Gravely when he arrived. Could they have made an example out of him? See **The Restreamers**, page 21.
- ▶ Jezhabur, another member of the Loghos Corporation, arrived shortly after Gravely. Like the rest of the management in Loghos, Jezhabur is a durugh. Gravely was the only human in a management position in the company, and Loghos has ties to the more militant factions of the Durugh. Could Jezhabur have taken it upon himself to remove a security risk? See **The Other Man From Loghos**, page 20.



There are four other complications not directly related to Gravely's disappearance.

- ▶ The government, represented by administrator Virginia Fritz, stonewalls the lasers and may even sabotage the investigation. The sex trade is the mainstay of the Andartan economy, and they don't want anything to bring it into disrepute (well, the wrong sort of disrepute). See **Government Interference**, page 21.
- ▶ Kevin Brazil, the local gang leader and chief pimp comes to suspect that the lasers are trying to bust him for his various crimes, including the murder of Kara Canal (which they may well end up doing). See **The Boys from Brazil**, page 24.
- ▶ John Brooks, the leader of Church of Regenerative Carnality, has a secret deal with Kevin Brazil to steer clients his way, and fears the damage to his reputation if this becomes public. See **Brook's Secret**, page 25.
- ▶ If any of the characters indulge while on the pleasure planet, there's a chance of **Infection**.

The Choice

Once the investigation turns to the STD and jungle, the crew must decide what to do with the druath. Their ancestors effectively killed Gravely and the others, by creating the virus, but the newly minted druath didn't actively set out to murder anybody. Is it fair to detain or attack them?

SCENES

Contract Briefing

Scene Type: Intro

The contract briefing is delivered by holomessage from the Loghos Corporation. The client representative is a Durugh named Bazuhl. **Negotiation** or **Forensic Psychology** reveals that he is irritated and angry; a one-point spend on either ability or the use of **Durugh History** reminds the characters that the Durugh are secretive and that the Loghos Corporation skirts close to the edge of legality at the best of times. Bazuhl tries to get the briefing over with as quickly

as possible, and refuses to answer any questions that aren't directly related to Mar Gravely.

The situation is as follows:

- ▶ Two weeks ago, Mar Gravely, an executive in the Loghos Corporation, took his annual holiday. The Loghos Corporation is a small, Durugh-dominated arms company. A one-point **Durugh History, Law** or **Downside** spend reminds the characters that the Loghos Corporation is rumoured to have ties to the more sinister elements of the Durugh state.
- ▶ He travelled to the pleasure world of Andarta. All the characters have heard of Andarta; it is a famously beautiful planet and a popular destination for holidaymakers. Andarta is known for its sexual openness; the inhabitants believe that sexuality is the key to health and wholeness and should be celebrated. **Combine (History):** Andarta suffered less than many other nearby worlds during the Mohilar war. A one-point **Combine History** or **Anthropology** spend reveals that Andarta took in many thousands of refugees after the war, and that the planet is less safe and more sordid than it once was. A one-point **Balla History** spend lets the character know an old legend among the Balla, speaking of one of their mystics who travelled into the Bleed long before the days of the Combine. Some believe that she founded the colony on Andarta.
- ▶ He is staying in the Alachir Hotel, in Joy City, Andarta's capital. Bazuhl suggests that the investigation should start there.
- ▶ He was due to attend a holoconference with other executives four days ago, but never arrived. When Bazuhl contacted the hotel, they said that Gravely had not returned to the hotel since three days before that. Such absences are not unusual on Andarta, and the authorities will not investigate without more evidence of criminal activity. If the characters ask, then Bazuhl tells them that Gravely was supposed to attend several holoconferences, from the hotel's corporate suite. He attended the previous two conferences.



- ▶ This is a hardclaused contract; their mission is to locate Mar Gravely and convince him to contact the Loghos Corporation immediately, or else find proof of his death or other inability to contact said corporation. On a sideband transmission, Bazuhl sends the characters a lengthy document of special cases, non-disclosure agreements and other legal restrictions. A character with **law** can tell that Bazuhl is just being paranoid, and that there's nothing unusual in these documents; a one-point **forensic accounting** spend lets the characters find a copy of a travel insurance document in the file. It mentions two employees of Loghos on Andarta – Mar Gravely and another executive, Jezhabur (see **The Other Man From Loghos**, page 20).



Andarta, The Pleasure Planet

Scene Type: Intro

From orbit, Andarta is a world of sparkling amethyst oceans, golden ice caps, and lush green jungle. The planet is only lightly populated, with over 75% of the population clustered in or around the capital, Joy City.

- ▶ **Anthropology** or **Industrial Design**: The central city is beautifully designed and well-integrated with the surrounding jungle. It embraces nature instead of trying to lock it out. Parts of the city, though, look run-down or tawdry even from orbit – there's so much neon in places that you can see it from orbit. The outer city is a sprawling ring of hastily constructed, poor-quality housing; not quite a slum, but not much better than one.
- ▶ **Botany**: The jungles around Joy City are thick and verdant. The planet's agricultural base is several hundred kilometres away from the capital, suggesting the jungles are deliberately maintained in their wild state for aesthetic reasons.
- ▶ **Biosignatures**: There are millions of humanoid lifeforms in Joy City, mostly human.
- ▶ **Geology** or **Energy Signatures**: Andarta is exceptionally bereft of mineral resources and has next to no manufacturing base. It's pretty, but has little else to offer as a colony.
- ▶ **Law** or **Combine History**: Before the war, Andartan culture was devoted to pleasure and considered sexuality to be an art form. Today, it has devolved into something seedier. Sex has become a commodity instead of a mutual gift.
- ▶ **Zoology**: There are few really dangerous lifeforms on Andarta; any large, dangerous creatures are probably kept safely behind sonic fences.

If the characters contact the authorities before landing, see **Government Interference**, page 21.

The Joy City starport is a fine example of pre-war architecture. It's also slightly suggestive, with rather more flying down long tunnels and through iris doors than is strictly necessary. From the outside, it's an elegant structure of nacreous pink synthstone, but as soon as the characters' ship docks, they hit a wall of pure advertising.


 ASHEN STARS

It's heady stuff. Every surface inside the spaceport crawls with animated images, promising sexual encounters of the most improbably kind. The walls heave with three-dimensional images of breasts, genitalia and writhing figures. From the conventional to the exotic, from the kinky to the borderline illegal, you can have it all here. The advertising is broad-spectrum – not only do you see it, but you hear it, smell it, taste it, and feel it in the hot, sticky air. The characters' tethers are barraged with sex-spam messages; any characters with **pheroalarms** or **pherosniffers** detect unusually high background levels of **stimulust** pheromones. Underneath all this tawdry advertising, the characters can make out a few traces of the old Andartan culture, like the elegant nude statues holding up the ceiling or the hanging baskets and trees that make this spaceport concourse look like a garden.

Health Check: Any visitors to the spaceport must pass a medical check before entering the city. For most visitors, this is a cursory scan of medical records (most people have their basic medical history on headsets, or even written into their genetic code) and a quick blood test taking no more than ten seconds. Sometimes, though, there are problems.

Pick a character with a high number of vioware enhancements, or one of an unusual race or background. That character triggers an alert on the bioscanner; the spaceport staff ask the character to step into a private waiting room for a fuller check. The other characters can continue on through the spaceport, possibly running into **pimps and preachers** (page 14). Alternatively, a character can spend 1 point of **Flirting** or **Cop Talk** to convince the security guards to ignore the alert, or a 2 point **bio-signatures** spend can diagnose the reason for the false positive and impress the staff with the characters' extensive medical knowledge. If the character spends points here, he gets the same gossip from Gerd and Lou listed below without having to wait.

The detained character has a larger blood sample taken and is scanned by a doctor. Two human security guards, **Gerd** and **Lou**, stay with the character while the doctor completes the test. This takes more than an hour, during which time the two guards gossip about Joy City. Play this scene for laughs (two guards with working-class accents and beer bellies talking earnestly about the politics of sexual healing) or to demonstrate the openness of Andartan society. They mention:

- ▶ The old centre of the city is safe enough, but visitors should stay away from the slums. Gerd fills the characters in on other trouble spots; this gives a boost to the first **Sense Trouble** check the character makes, reducing the Difficulty by 1.
- ▶ If you're looking for a good time, then the place to go is the **Church of Regenerative Carnality** (see page 22). They're the closest thing to the pre-war healers left on Andarta. Gerd thinks the CRC are just as good as the pre-war cults, but Lou disagrees, and thinks that the CRC focus too much on the spiritual side and neglect the healing.
- ▶ They warn the character about the refugees. Everyone agrees that the influx of refugees has diluted the once-unique culture of Andarta, but no-one knows how to solve the problem. Lou recommends shipping them off-planet, but Gerd thinks that the newcomers need to be integrated into Andarta. The old Andarta has been washed away, he argues.
- ▶ Eventually, the doctor confirms that the character is free to enter. Gerd and Lou apologise for keeping the character, and ask if he wants to accompany them back to Gerd's place for a quick threesome as an apology?

The Main Concourse: Once you peel off the surface gloss (sex and tropical gardens, in this case), all spaceports are the same underneath – customs checkpoints, security scanners, travel companies, cargo handlers and small shops. In the main concourse, the characters can catch a maglev train into Joy City, pick up souvenirs or toys, or make official contact with the government (see **Government Interference**, page 21). Their first destination will probably be the **Alachir Hotel** (page 16).

The main concourse is crowded. It's a quivering mass of scantily-clad flesh, and feels like it is about thirty seconds away from an orgy. There are holidaymakers and tourists here to sample Andarta, some of which are so overcome by the reputation of the planet (and the background stimulust pheromones) that they're having sex on top of their luggage.

Looking past the tourists, the characters notice a sectioned-off area where newly-arrived refugees are kept for processing. Sex is the last thing on their minds. The characters notice clear signs of radiation damage, toxin exposure, and other scars of war. The spaceport staff and other natives are slowly dealing with the backlog of refugees, but it's obvious that the spaceport was built to cater for tourists, not the victims of war.

Spending 2 points of **Virology**, **Medic** or **Viro Manipulation** lets the character treat some of the more obviously wounded refugees. A 2-point **Bureaucracy**, **Negotiation** or **Respect** spend lets a character intercede on behalf of the refugees, hastening their passage through the spaceport. In either case, the refugees thank the character, and may help them later in the investigation.



Pimps and Preachers

Scene Type: Hazard

While in the spaceport or on the maglev train, the characters are harassed by three different groups. Either run these scenes in sequence, or in parallel if the characters split up.

The Pimp: One of the characters is approached by **Dhez**, a sleazy young man who oozes stimulust (well, a cheap black-market ripoff) and is dressed in a bright green suit. He immediately launches into a sales patter, claiming that he has the best and hottest girls for the character to sample. Whatever the character wants, Dhez can provide. Young or old, slim or curvaceous, sentient or meat-puppet, pure or augmented, he's got it all. If the character refuses, then Dhez keeps trying, offering different types of whore – men, aliens, robots, fast-grown clones of yourself, vatmeat, anything you want.

If a character takes Dhez up on his offer, then Dhez charges the character a fraction of a bigcred and tells him that a car will pick him up later, or he can have the girl call to his hotel. He gives them a contact card for **Joy Services** (see page 17).

If the character continues to refuse, then Dhez loses his cool and shouts that the character is a fool for turning down the offer of a lifetime. It's obvious that he's desperate to make a sale. A 1-point **Intimidation** spend gets Dhez to back off; 2 points of **Intimidation** breaks Dhez's nerve and he admits that he's working for a man called **Kevin Brazil**, who runs half the brothels in Joy City. Brazil is very angry about something, and is taking it out on his staff. If Dhez doesn't make quota, then he might get 'taken for a walk in the woods'. This is the charming local euphemism for a gang punishment, ranging from a simple beating to murder to their preferred solution, laser castration.

The Preachers: The characters encounter a group of humans, mostly young and attractive, singing and handing out pamphlets as they move through the crowd. They are all well-dressed and fresh-faced, and have the slightly offputting enthusiasm of religious converts. They are all members of the **Church of Regenerative Carnality**.

According to the pamphlets, the church's tenets are as follows:

- ▶ The root of suffering is misplaced desire. Humanity's natural needs are simple ones – shelter, food, sleep and sex. It is by neglecting these needs in favor of abstract ones that we lose track of our essential natures.
- ▶ The best way to reconnect with our essential natures is through our sexuality. By focussing on what is fundamental to our being, we learn to build upon this foundation.
- ▶ Certain specially trained church members (called **hierodules**, a term used for temple prostitutes) help others reconnect with their essential natures. There is, regrettably, a small fee for this spiritual service to cover the running costs of the church. Usually, but not always, this reconnection involves sex.
- ▶ The leader of the church on Andarta is **Conciliator Brooks**.
- ▶ The young converts urge everyone in the crowd, including the characters, to visit the CRC compound in Joy City and 'rediscover the unity of body and soul'. The 'Grand Conciliation', one of the holiest festivals of the year, is coming soon, so come and be healed!

The leader of this group of converts is **Heather Roman**. She is an earnest and serious believer in the CRC. She is also a carrier of the druath virus, but this is not yet evident. The only signs of her infection are a strange intensity to her eyes and an alluring scent to her sweat, akin to stimulust.

Showing any interest in Heather or any of her followers with **Flirtation** gets the character an invite to the CRC compound (see **Temple Prostitutes of the Carnal Church**, page 22).

A character with **Flattery** or **Streetwise** notices that the CRC followers are targeting the wealthier tourists, such as Mar Gravely.

The Restreamers: While the characters are being love-bombed by the Church of Regenerative Carnality, they are interrupted by a harsh voice amplified by a megvoice¹.

¹: A high-tech megaphone similar to a meglight, a megvoice can amplify the speaker's voice to a painful volume, cut through distortion or interference, or even project 'whisper beams' – carefully calibrated sonic waves that can only be heard at a particular point within line of sight of the megvoice, allowing the user to speak to a single person in a crowd.

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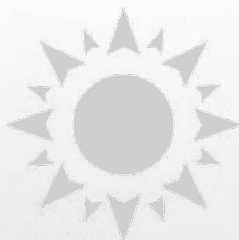


'Do not be lead astray by these space whores! This is a fallen world, and you are all beasts, rutting in the ruins! We have failed the promise of our past! Your sins drag us down this false path, this timeline of tears! Repent! Recant! Restream!' The last three words are echoed by a dozen other voices, crying 'Repent! Recant! Restream!' in unison.

The characters spot a dozen figures dressed in grey robes pushing through the crowd towards them. These are Restreamers, a bizarre nufaiith that believes that the universe is sinful and must be rebooted. We get the universe we deserve – if there are enough pure believers, then reality will snap to a different timestream. (A character with **Cybe Culture** can draw parallels between the Restreamer faith and the Fibrous Sacrament (see page 155 of the *Ashen Stars* rulebook.)

The Restreamers consider the Church of Regenerative Carnality to be a perfect example of the fallen nature of this iteration of the universe – they corrupt the paradise of Andarta with their sinful lusts. Worse, they lead others astray, thus adding to the sinful inertia of this reality and preventing any hope of restreaming. In the eyes of the Restreamers, the CRC must be stopped!

The dozen Restreamer cultists start shouting abuse at the church members, and the more impetuous among the young believes start pushing back. A brawl breaks out. If the characters get involved, they can easily put an end to the fighting with a Difficulty 5 **Scuffling** test, or by drawing a weapon and making a one-point **Intimidation** spend. If the characters do nothing, then two of the Church of Regenerative Carnality members are injured before the spaceport guards arrive and break up the fight with batons. As they are dragged away, the Restreamer leader continues to harangue the crowd about their sinful ways.



HOT NIGHTS IN JOY CITY

There is a lot of stimulust sloshing around this investigation, not to mention lascivious cults, alien hookers, sordid adult situations and a sultry jungle. Even the characters who aren't tried to get laid should be propositioned; characters with drives like Derring-Do, Hotshot or Sexual Adventure should find their mission nicely complicated by sex.

Balla and Vas Mal risk running into The Temptation or extreme emotion; increase all Difficulties of Emotion Suppression and Psychic Vitality tests by 1 to reflect the boiling passions of Andarta. Cybes using Neural Rewiring may also run into emotional problems if they channel Dr. Greenwater.

This mission is a great opportunity to advance emotional personal arcs, especially ones involving romance or sex. If two characters have an ongoing flirtatious, will they/won't they relationship, then Andarta is the place to bring this to, er, a climax. Alternatively, it's a great time to throw extra complications in the way of true love with an ill-considered one-night-stand with a third party.

Especially cruel GMs may even have a player character infected with the druath virus (see **Infection**, page 26). If the players are stuck, then the virus can lead them to **Dr. Terrell** at **Sanctuary Hospital**, page 29.

MAY CONTAIN SCENES OF AN
ADULT NATURE

Some groups may dislike the sexual elements of this scenario, and some Gamemasters may be uncomfortable describing or roleplaying lewd scenes. If it's not for you, then keep the sex acts offscreen and concentrate on other aspects of the investigation, like the corporate intrigue, the nufaiiths and the mysterious plague.



The Alachir Hotel

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The Joy Services Escort Agency

The Alachir Hotel caters primarily to wealthy tourists and corporate travelers. It's located in the middle of the old city centre, and looks like it was dropped from orbit into a convenient empty lot. Its bland corporate design contrasts hideously with the elegant older buildings around it.

Inside, the characters can speak to the manager, **Tal Barner**. He has dealt with lasers before and prefers to co-operate discreetly with them. As long as the characters don't disturb the other guests, blow up the hotel, or spread wild rumors that might affect tourism, Barner will give them all the help he can. Barner's personality is like that of his hotel – functional, a little soulless, and out of place in Joy City.

Gravely paid for his hotel room in advance, so the room is untouched since he left.

- ▶ A 1-point **Respect** or **Flattery** spend wins Barner's confidence, so he tells them that there is another guest from the Loghos Corporation staying in the hotel, a Durugh gentleman called Jezhabur (see **The Other Man From Loghos**, page 20).
- ▶ A 1-point **Bullshit Detector** spend suggests that Barner is hiding something. If the characters follow this up with a spend of **Reassurance** or **Respect**, Barner admits that the local government asked him to keep them informed of the lasers' movements.

Hotel Records: According to the hotel records, Gravely checked in two weeks ago. He made little use of the hotel facilities, other than the corporate holographic conference room.

- ▶ **Data Retrieval:** Gravely paid for his hotel room with a corporate credit account.

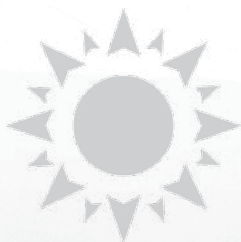
A 1-point **Data Retrieval** spend lets the character track other spending on this account. Gravely hasn't used it in three days. The last expenditure was credited to a 'Joy Services'.

- ▶ There are several messages waiting for Gravely on the hotel computer. The characters can either persuade Barner to give them access with **Flattery** or **Negotiation**, or else break in with **Decryption**. Most of the messages are from the Loghos Corporation, asking in increasingly irritated language why Gravely isn't answering his calls. There are also four threatening messages which appear to be blackmail. All four are variations on 'Does she know what you've been doing?' and are accompanied by holoimages of Gravely consorting with various women.

Imaging: The holos were all taken from the street outside the hotel. If the characters investigate this, see **Blackmail**, below.

- ▶ Gravely used the hotel holoconference suite for two meetings. The hotel automatically deleted any recordings of these meetings for reasons of privacy.

The suite hasn't been used since the last Loghos conference, which means that there is still a recording of the conference in the imaging system's built-in buffers. A character can use a two-point **Holo Surveillance** spend to access the buffers and extract the raw holoimages from the snails themselves. The characters can only see Gravely's side of the conversation, which makes it hard to follow, but he appears to be arguing about the company's stock options. **Forensic Accounting** notes that Loghos is profitable, but Gravely is obviously concerned about the company's direction. At the end of the recording, Gravely walks out of the room – and a moment later, a Durugh phases out of the wall and sneaks after him. This Durugh is Jezhabur, the other Loghos employee. If the characters have this recording of Jezhabur spying on his superior, they can use it as a leveraged clue against him. See **The Other Man From Loghos**, page 20.



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Gravely's Room: Gravely's hotel room is untouched since he last left it. Searching it turns up several core clues:

- ▶ **(Core) Evidence Collection:** There's the card of an escort agency called Joy Services in one of Gravely's shirt pockets. This agency belongs to **Kevin Brazil**, and it is how Gravely got hired **Kara Canal**. See **Gravely's Holiday** (page 11).

A 1-point **evidence collection** spend lets the character find several blonde hairs clinging to the shirt. Gravely was grey-haired. (These hairs belong to Kara Canal.)

- ▶ **Communications Intercept:** Gravely's headset is on the bedside table in the hotel room; the last time it was used was to contact Joy Services.

With a 2-point **Communications Intercept** or **Data Retrieval** spend, the characters can access other recently called numbers. Gravely called the Joy Services escort agency twice, then an automated medical consultation hotline, then there are several failed calls to a private number (belonging to Kara Canal), and finally Joy Services again.

- ▶ **Evidence Collection:** There are several osmotic punchers (hypodermic syringes) in the bathroom. They're all broad-spectrum antibiotics, available through automated dispensers.

A 1-point **Chemistry** or **Medic** spend suggests that Gravely was trying to self-medicate for a disease. Anything common would have been wiped out by these cocktail of drugs.

- ▶ **Evidence Collection:** There's a pamphlet for the Church of Regenerative Carnality on a side table.

- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** There's a strange trace in the minibar – there are micromagnetic anomalies in the metal frame, consistent with someone phasing through it from the room next door. (Jezhabur phased into Gravely's room.)

Normally, such traces would fade over time, but the minibar's enclosed design and low temperature preserved them. Now that the characters have the frequency, a 2-point **energy signatures** spend lets them follow the traces through the hotel to Jezhabur's room. See **The Other Man from Loghos**, page 20.

A small bottle of Aventine Brandy was taken from the minibar, but the door was never opened. (Jezhabur the Durugh drank it.) If the characters check, the hotel records show that a bottle of Aventine Brandy has been ordered by the Durugh guest in Room 707 every night since he arrived.

Joy Services

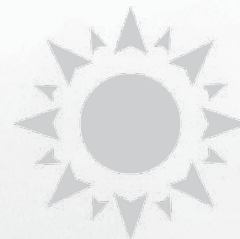
Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: Kara's Address

The escort agency used by Gravely is located at the edge of the slum district, in a rough area. Characters without **Intimidation** and who aren't obviously tough may get hassled or propositioned. This whole area is owned by Kevin Brazil, from the parking garage across the street to the brothels on either side. The characters are watched as soon as they arrive. (A Difficulty 6 **Sense Trouble** test lets the characters notice the armed thugs keeping an eye on them.)

The door to Joy Services is locked. They can speak to the dispatcher via an intercom, who insists that would-be clients should go back to their hotel and call the number; an escort will then be sent to their hotel or bring them to a suitable rendezvous. There are several ways the characters can get into Joy Services, but they have only a few minutes to conduct their investigations before Kevin Brazil and his entourage arrives.

- ▶ **Impersonation** lets a suitable character bluff his way in, as a client or health inspector or some other disguise.
- ▶ **Intimidation** can also get the characters past the locked door, but when Brazil and his thugs show up, they're expecting trouble.
 - If the characters do use **Intimidation** to get in, a 3-point **Reassurance** spend can calm the dispatcher down enough to get him to cancel the alarm.
- ▶ A one-point **Shooting** spend blasts the lock.
- ▶ Alternatively, the characters can get in with a Difficulty 6 **Infiltration** test. If this test is failed, the characters still get in, but trigger an alarm that summons Kevin and his thugs.





Inside Joy Services: Inside, the building smells of sweat and chemical cleaners. The entrance hallway is decorated with hundreds of photographs of alluring, scantily clad individuals of several genders and species, all taken against the same background. These are previous employees of Joy Services. Upstairs is the dispatcher's office, run by a grotesquely large woman named **Hana Voltar**. (If the characters broke in with infiltration when the office is closed, they can check the computer records instead with **Data Retrieval**; see below.) Her vocal cords have been altered, giving her an incredibly sultry and seductive voice at all times. She's incapable of speaking in anything other than a sexy whisper. This works very well on the comm, but is extremely disconcerting in person. The characters can interrogate her if they bluffed or persuaded her to let them in; she will stall if they intimidated her, hoping that the thugs show up before the intruders injure her.

- ▶ (Core) **Flattery** or **Interrogation**: She remembers Gravelly. He hired **Kara Canal**, one of the company's girls, several times. Kara no longer works for Joy Services. Hana can give them Kara's old address if that is any help.
- ▶ A 1-point **Interrogation** spend elicits some extra information – Kara's pimp, **Rayan Fitch**, vanished recently, and there are rumors that he and Kara ran off with Brazil's money. Hana seems unconvinced when she says this. A further **Reassurance** or **Inspiration** spend convinces Hana to say what she really thinks – Kara hated Fitch.
- ▶ If the characters admit they are investigating Gravelly's disappearance, and spend two points of **Inspiration** to win her confidence, then Hana admits that Brazil told her to send Gravelly's details onto 'J'. She doesn't know who J is, but every so often, Brazil orders her to send a client's information to J.
- ▶ A 1-point **Data Retrieval** spend lets the characters backtrace 'J's comm channel to the Church of Regenerative Carnality. 'J' is **Conciliator John Brook** – see **Brook's Secret**, page 25.

If the characters go for the technical route instead:

- ▶ (Core) **Data Retrieval**: Gravelly hired Kara Canal four times. She was driven to the hotel by Rayan Fritch. Kara's address is on record in the computer.
- ▶ A 1-point **Data Retrieval** spend lets the characters find a copy of Gravelly's contact details that were sent to someone called 'J'.

You Shouldn't Be Here, Laser: Kevin Brazil and a number of thugs (at least one per laser) show up shortly after the characters enter Joy Services. They arrive in a big, mud-splattered all-terrain ground car. Brazil is a huge, intimidating figure; scars and injection marks on his head and neck suggest that he's been upgraded with several implants and viroware modifications. His thugs are less enhanced, but their disruption pistols and the deflectors in their dreadlocks show they mean business.

Play Brazil as scary and a little out of control. He's risen to the top of the gangs in Joy City by being willing to use more force than anyone else. Everyone in his organisation is terrified of him. Ironically, Brazil attributes his success to the teachings of the CRC – he's in touch with his physical side. When roleplaying him, stand over the players and growl everything you say. Give the impression that you're about to go for their throats. Kevin is very much a hands-on gang lord.

Brazil knows the characters are lasers, thanks to his government contacts. He suspects they are here to bring down his organisation (prostitution is legal on Andarta, but he's also involved in murder, extortion, sentient trafficking and drugs). He demands that they leave Joy Services immediately, and that the best thing they can do is go warpside before something happens to them.

Forensic Anthropology notices a characteristic burn pattern on the skin of Brazil's chest – he was shot at point-blank by a disruption pistol. He must have been wearing a popper, which saved him from serious injury, but the outer layers of the epidermis were scorched in a classic starburst around the impact zone. The injury is probably about a week old. (Kara Canal shot him with her disruption just before he murdered her.)

A 2-point **Downside** or **Respect** spend means the characters can convince Kevin that they are not after him, and get him to answer a few questions.

- ▶ Kara Canal used work for him, but the bitch ran off with Rayan Fritch, another ex-employee.
Any PC with **Bullshit Detector** suspects Brazil of lying about this last point.
If the characters keep asking him about Kara Canal, he assumes they are investigating her murder and are trying to pin it on him. He immediately stops answering questions and orders the PCs to leave – or else.


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- ▶ Prostitution is legal on Andarta. He sells sexual healing services. If they have a problem, call Virginia Fitz (see **Government Interference**, page 21).
- ▶ He did not kidnap, murder or meet Mar Gravely at any time.

Bullshit Detector pings at that last statement – Brazil may have never met Gravely, but he certainly knew something about him.

A 1-point **Bullshit Detector** spend lets the character notice Brazil inadvertently glance over towards the computer records when he mentions Gravely.

If the characters somehow manage to convince Brazil that they are not investigating him or are not a threat to him, then keep **The Boys From Brazil** (page 24) in reserve. Otherwise, run that antagonist reaction scene when the opportunity arises.

If the characters fight back here, then they are in serious trouble. The surrounding buildings contain dozens of Brazil's gang followers. A Difficulty 4 **Sense Trouble** test confirms that fighting Brazil here is a very bad idea – even if the characters managed to kill the gang leader, they would never leave this street alive. See **The Boys From Brazil** for statistics for Kevin and his gang.

Blackmail

Scene Type: Alternate/Antagonist Reaction

Dylan Graff is a conman and blackmailer. He targets wealthy or respectable visitors to Andarta and sends them blackmail messages, hinting that he knows something about their illicit activities or indiscretions. Even on a libertine world like Andarta, there are things that certain people would prefer to keep private.

Graff sent several blackmail messages to Gravely's room at the Alachir Hotel. These messages were oddly non-specific, hinting that if 'she' (whoever 'she' is) knew 'what Gravely did', it would not be a good thing. In fact, there is no 'she'. Graff is a conman working for the tourist board of another planet, NuVegas. His deliberately clumsy blackmail attempts are designed to ruin the reputation of Andarta and drum up business for NuVegas. He send similar blackmail messages to half the guests in the hotel.

There are two ways to run this scene:

- ▶ If the characters retrieved the blackmail messages from Gravely's account, they can work out that the holopictures were taken from across the street. They can then investigate Graff, whose groundcar is parked across from the hotel.
- ▶ Alternatively, if the characters failed to follow up on the blackmail messages, then Graff can send a similar blackmail message to one of them, accompanied by suitable holos. This works best if you can integrate it into the ongoing subplots and interparty dynamics – which player character is vulnerable to blackmail? Which of them will have the most entertainingly paranoid reaction if you send them a non-specific threat?

Once the characters know they are looking for a holographer, they can search the area. Graff is easy enough to spot if you know what you're looking for. He is slouched in his car near the Alachir, long range holocamera under his stained trenchcoat.

Sneaking up on Graff requires a Difficulty 6 **Infiltration** test. If the test fails, Graff spots the characters creeping up towards him and panics. He drives off. If the characters have a groundcar, they can chase him; if they don't have suitable transport, they can sprint after him on foot and hope he gets caught in traffic before he escapes. Violent characters might even try blasting Graff's tyres. (Taking this approach means a Difficulty 4 **Public Relations** test to avoid a scandal).

If the characters chase Graff, run it as a Ground Craft contest, against a Difficulty of 4 (or Athletics, Difficulty 7 if the characters are on foot). A character who rolls a 1 and has no pool points left to spend is involved in an accident with a ground car, suffering 1d6 damage (1d6+2 if on foot).

Once the characters capture Graff, they can interrogate him. Graff's a small time conman, not a hardened crook, and folds like a solar sail under the slightest pressure. Using **Intimidation** makes Graff confess that he was trying to blackmail Gravely, but he knew nothing about the target, other than the fact he was seeing a hooker – he's trying to blackmail everyone!



- ▶ Spending a point of **Reassurance** and promising that they won't arrest Graff gets the characters some extra information:

Graff hasn't seen Gravely in three days. The last time he saw the executive, Gravely looked ill – he was sweating, staggering, and seemed confused. Gravely headed off towards the edge of Joy City.

Graff knows the hooker. Her name is Kara, and she lives down in the slums. He gives the characters her address.

He also knows the hooker's pimp, a man called Rayan Fritch. Fritch is bad news – he's violent, abusive and very dangerous. If Gravely somehow angered Fritch, then... well, people who annoy Fritch don't live long. The only person more dangerous than Fritch is Fritch's boss, Kevin Brazil.

- ▶ The characters can also get the above information by threatening to turn Graff over to the authorities. If they do hand him over, they can get more help from Victoria Fritz (see **Government Interference**, page 21).
- ▶ If the characters confiscate Graff's holocamera and analyse it with a one-point **Imaging** spend, they discover something strange in one of the pictures of Gravely. The image shows Gravely leaving the hotel on the last night anyone saw him. Lurking in an alleyway in a corner of the image is a strange grey figure. It is definitely not human, but is also not any known alien species.

The Other Man from Loghos

Scene Type: Alternate

Jezhabor is the other Loghos employee visiting Andarta. Unlike Gravely, but like the rest of Loghos' senior management, Jazhabur is a durugh. He has resented Gravely for years, and believes that he deserves Gravely's position in the company. His bitterness has driven him to drink (he favors Aventine Brandy) and desperation. He followed Gravely to Andarta for reasons he can't quite articulate – part of him was hoping to somehow discredit or remove Gravely, another part just wanted to emulate his nemesis.

Jezhabor used his natural ability to phase through walls to spy on Gravely. He eavesdropped on Gravely's holoconference. He also watched while Gravely had sex with Kara Canal. He likes to watch.

The characters can find Jezhabor through Loghos Corporation records, or by finding traces of phasing in Gravely's room or the holoconference suite. Jezhabor is the only durugh in the Hotel Alachir, so finding him is not especially hard.

The characters may suspect Jezhabor of murdering or plotting against Gravely. Play up this suspicion if you can; the more the players think there is a conspiracy, the more surprising the revelation of the alien virus becomes.

Jezhabor's Room: The characters can break into Jezhabor's room with a Difficulty 5 **Infiltration** test. If successful, they break in without being seen. If they fail, they break in, only to be ambushed by Jezhabor who hides in the walls and circles around behind them with his pistol drawn. The durugh's room contains a half-dozen empty bottles of Aventine Brandy, and he's got two disruption pistols concealed in his luggage.

Interrogating Jezhabor: When questioned, Jezhabor is initially unco-operative. He is just another tourist, here to see the sights. He knew Mar Gravely was staying here too, but what of it? They are just co-workers, not friends. **Bullshit Detector** suggests that Jezhabor is lying, but the durugh is resistant to interrogation. If the characters try using **Intimidation** or **Interrogation** on him, he counters by threatening to go to Bazuhl and complain about the lasers' treatment of him. **Flattery** or **Flirting** are equally useless, as Jezhabor is too bitter and self-hating to trust anyone.

A two-point **Negotiation** spend and the promise to put in a good word with Bazuhl on his behalf can convince Jezhabor to co-operate. Alternatively, if the characters have proof that Jezhabor was spying on Gravely, they can threaten him with that. Once Jezhabor co-operates, he gives the characters several useful clues:

- ▶ Gravely slept with the same prostitute at least four times. The first three times he paid for her services, but a week ago, Jezhabor overheard her making a deal with Gravely, offering herself in exchange for a gun.
- ▶ Gravely worked for arms dealers – he could get his hands on a disruption pistol easily.
- ▶ He doesn't know why the hooker wanted the gun, nor does he know if Gravely procured it.
- ▶ He hasn't seen Gravely in five days.
- ▶ The hooker's name was Kara something. She lived in the slum district. A pretty young thing, for a human.


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The Restreamers

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

Run this scene at any time when there is a lull in the action, or if some of the player characters are uninvolved in the current investigation.

The characters are contacted by a hooded figure who introduces herself as **Nya Gult**. She is one of the Restreamers who the characters encountered at the spaceport. She apologizes for the 'overly passionate' behavior of her fellow believers. She too believes that this is a sinful and fallen universe, and prays that the divine powers will see fit to undo the past and remake reality... but that's no excuse for random violence. Like the lasers, she claims to be trying to make the Bleed a better place, and believes they can help each other.

The local authorities are aware of the increasing violence and abuse associated with the Andartan sex industry, but are too scared of a crackdown damaging the tourist trade to do anything about it. The characters, though, can bring this sordid underworld into the public eye. Gult wants the characters to go as public as possible with their investigation, to let everyone know that tourists are being murdered and the myth of as a pleasure-world conceals a cesspit of degradation and exploitation.

Any character with **Public Relations** realizes instantly that this will anger the planetary government and possibly impede their investigation. It will also affect the crew's reputation, but that could do either way – if they're lucky, they'll be seen as the heroes who redeemed Andarta. If it goes badly, though, the characters will be put in the same category of 'crazed evangelists' as the Restreamers.

If the characters agree to make their investigation as public as possible, then Gult thanks them and suggests that they might be 'alt-saints', beings so pure that their goodness shines from one alternate reality into this one. She is so effusive with her praise that the characters can refresh any one investigative pool each. The downside is that almost every other faction in the scenario – the Loghos Corporation, the Andartan government, the CRC and Brazil's gang – will be angered by their affairs being dragged into the light, and any other antagonist reactions should be much more intense. The government will refuse all co-operation, Brazil will send thugs after the characters, and the Loghos corporation will be extremely hesitant to ever employ the characters again.

At the end of the investigation, the crew must make a **Public Relations** test (Difficulty 6 base, modified by how they dealt with the druath). If successful, they gain a two points of Reputation; if the test is failed, they lose two points.

If the characters refuse to help the Restreamer cause, then Gult spits a curse at them, swearing that they will never see the universe reborn, and leaves. For the rest of the scenario, the characters will encounter small groups of angry Restreamers protesting outside the CRC, the government offices and other key locations. The Restreamers may also impede the characters' investigation if possible.

Government Interference

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

The Andartan government is caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, the planet desperately needs money to support its growing population. Tourism is Andarta's biggest source of revenue, and that tourism depends on the stories of Andarta being a cross between a magical garden and the planet of the nymphomaniacs. On the other, the growing numbers of tourists as the Bleed re-establishes itself after the war, coupled with a large number of poor and desperate refugees means the actual sex industry is becoming ever more sordid and corrupt. If the government cracks down on the criminal gangs, then they risk killing the planet's main income.

The arrival of a group of lasers, then, is the government's worst nightmare. The lasers must be stopped from bringing the tourist industry into disrepute with wild stories about gangland murders or new diseases. The government's representative in this scenario is **Victoria Fritz**. She is a former temple hierodule, so she intimately understands what the Andartan sex industry should be like. She is also a trained law enforcement officer. Her role in the government is deliberately undefined; she's a troubleshooter-at-large, and to her, the lasers are trouble.

If the characters try making official enquiries, they are transferred to Fritz's office in Joy City. Alternatively, if they get into trouble with the authorities (say, for discharging a weapon in public, assault a witness, or otherwise make a nuisance of themselves), then the police ask the lasers to accompany them to Fritz. (The police make it clear that the characters are not under arrest, but failure to co-operate will be taken as a deliberate contempt for the government of Andarta.)



Fritz' office is on the 25th floor of the Civic Tower, overlooking the whole city. In the distance, the characters can see the green line of the jungle. She opens by making the characters an offer – let her handle the investigation. Most people who disappear in Joy City turn up a few days later, with a headache and some interesting bruises. It's a city of joy and carnality, and some visitors just get carried away. They've got a saying here in the Joy City Civic Guards – never assume foul play when it could be foreplay. She wants the characters to back off and stall the Loghos Corporation while she *quietly* looks for Gravelly.

(It's unlikely the characters accept this offer, but if they do, their Reputation drops by 1. They are kept waiting in orbit for another three weeks, during which time the druath population rises from a handful to hundreds. Eventually, Fritz contacts the characters and admits she can't handle the situation – she expected a kidnapping or a crime of passion, not an alien invasion. Skip onto **The Meteor** (page 32), but add a

few dozen armed Civic Guards on one side and another four hundred druath on the other.)

If the characters refuse, Fritz tells the characters that she cannot throw them off the planet *yet*, but if they cross the line, she will have them arrested in an instant. For the rest of the investigation, if the characters run into the local authorities, they run the risk of being arrested. A 1-point **Law** spend or a Difficulty 5 **Public Relations** test gets the character out of a misdemeanor such as firing a weapon in public or trespassing; if they commit a serious crime, a 3-point **Law** spend means their sentence is commuted to exile from Andarta.

Serving the Public Good: There are three things the characters can do to build bridges with the authorities.

- ▶ **Reporting Dylan Graff:** If the characters have identified and dealt with the blackmailer from NuVegas, they can report this to Fritz. He thanks them for eliminating the pest, and promises to aid them. This reduces the difficulty of Public Relations tests involving the authorities by 1.
- ▶ **Solving the Murder of Kara Canal:** If the characters discover Kara Canal is dead, and prove Kevin Brazil is the killer, this is worth a basic bonus (see page 172 of the *Ashen Stars* rulebook).
- ▶ **Solving the Druath Plague:** If the characters bring proof of the existence of a new and potentially lethal sexually transmitted disease to Fritz, then she does everything she can to support their investigation. Identifying and isolating all carriers of the druath virus is worth a generous bonus.

Temple Prostitutes of the Carnal Church

Scene Type: Alternate

The Church of Regenerative Carnality considers itself the heir of the pre-war Andartan culture. Before the Mohilar, the *hierodules* helped visitors embrace their physical and sexual selves. Now, while the Church continues this tradition, it mixes in elements of nufaiith irrationality and a highly efficient machine for separating clients from their credits. The CRC members are, for the most part, friendly, clean, enthusiastic, sex-positive and ever so slightly sinister.




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The church is not directly involved in the disappearance of Mar Gravely, but the characters may follow lines of investigation that lead them here, such as:

- ▶ The leader of the church, Conciliator Brook, has a deal with Kevin Brazil. The gang lord identifies wealthy, powerful clients who might be open to the Church's teachings; in exchange, Brook uses his growing political sway in the government to protect Brazil's interests. (This is part of the reason why the Andartan government is so willing to hinder the laser investigation.)
- ▶ Kara Canal's roommate, Simon Moore, is a member of the Church. He is also a carrier for the druath virus, and he passed it on to another church member, Heather Roman. Unless the characters stop the spread of the virus, the majority of the Church members will quickly become infected and there will be no way to stop the epidemic.
- ▶ The Restreamers despise the CRC, and may convince the characters to look deeper.

Visiting the Church: The church's 'Basilica of the Flesh' is another landmark of Joy City. It is built around and over the old temple (on top of the famous gardens). The church has thousands of followers, who attend regular ceremonies here. Followers are also spiritually rewarded by providing spiritual and sexual services to visitors and tourists. Especially devout followers are permitted to live in the apartment surrounding the basilica, and bask in the divine presence of Conciliator Brook.

Investigating the Church: The characters can investigate the Church indirectly:

- ▶ **Forensic Accounting:** The Church is making a lot of money. The majority of its clients are wealthy tourists.
- ▶ **Human History:** The Church is a synthesis of Andartan traditions and offworld religions.
2-point **Human History** spend: The leader of the Church, Conciliator Brook, reminds you of a cult leader from the Core Worlds named Oulian Fouk. His 'Temple of the Star Kindlers' mixed Vas Kra theology with human beliefs, and he was convicted of fraud by the Combine authorities. He escaped custody and vanished four years ago.

- ▶ **Downside:** The Church is taking a lot of business away from the more conventional brothels by promising a quick-fix version of the old Andartan traditions. You can have your quick sex, but also be spiritually uplifted and told you're doing the right thing.
2 point **Downside** spend: There are rumors that the Church itself is behind some of the brothels – they're deliberately making the sex industry more sordid and degrading so they look good in comparison.
- ▶ **Impersonation:** The character can sneak into the Church pretending to be a new worshipper, and can even have a private counseling session with Heather Roman.

Asking Questions: If the characters try interrogating the Church members, they get directed to speak to Heather Roman, who is one of the Church's outreach directors. She is a committed member of the church, and can eloquently defend the group's beliefs and methods. She wholeheartedly believes that the Church of Regenerative Carnality is her true path, mixing physicality and spirituality in equal measure. The best way to deal with Heather is with **Negotiation**, although **Flirting** also works.

- ▶ She doesn't know Mar Gravely. She offers to check the church records to see if he ever received a blessing with any of the hierodules (he didn't).
- ▶ If the characters mention 'Kara', she vaguely recalls one of her friends, **Steve Moore** (see page 26), mentioning that his roommate was called Kara.
A one-point **Flirting** or **Anthropology** spend lets the character notice Heather twitch slightly when she mentions Steve, suggesting the two have a relationship of some sort.
- ▶ The church is not a brothel, and the temple prostitutes are not... well, they are prostitutes, but they practice an ancient form of sexual rejuvenation and therapy. She believes that Andarta is sick, but it can be cured.
- ▶ If the characters mention Kevin Brazil, she frowns. She knows Brazil by reputation, and suspects that Conciliator Brook has been forced by circumstances to deal with the gangster.
- ▶ The lasers can demand to see the Conciliator himself. Heather tries to stop them from doing so, as Conciliator Brook is very busy and does not like to be disturbed, but they can force their way in with **Cop Talk**, **Intimidation** or **Respect**. See **Brook's Secret**, page 25.



After answering the characters' questions, Heather excuses herself. She must prepare for the upcoming Grand Conciliation – unless a character made a **Flirting** spend during the conversation, in which case she asks if that character would like a physical blessing with her?

The Grand Conciliation: This is one of the most important events in the CRC's calendar. During the Grand Conciliation, the ordained members of the Church come together in harmony. Heather has a special role to play in the ceremony. Participation in the Conciliation is only for the initiated, but draws many visitors, tourists and voyeurs every year.

The Boys from Brazil

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

Kevin Brazil has murdered more than a dozen people, including Kara Canal. As far as he knows, none of them were anybody special. None of them had friends or family with money, and none of them meant anything in the world. They were all street scum, born to die in an alleyway... but his paranoia gnaws at him. Sooner or later, he knows that someone will call in the lasers to deal with him. He has heard stories of the laser crews, of the law dropping out of the stars with the force of orbital bombardment, of successful criminal gangs being broken up and arrested by a mere handful of heavily armed freelance police, and he is determined that it is not going to happen to him. As soon as the player characters cross his path by visiting Joy Services or the Church of Regenerative Carnality, Brazil decides they are a danger to him and that they must be destroyed.

His scheme is a simple one. He has one of his prostitutes, a woman called Una, contact the lasers via the comm network. She tearfully claims to have important information for them, about Kevin Brazil and why they are here on Andarta. They have to know – and the line goes dead, as Brazil cuts Una off. A one-point **Bullshit Detector** spend lets the character realize that Una is faking her tears; a **Communications Intercept** test at Difficulty 3 lets the characters trace the call, which comes from a tenement block in the slums.

When the characters arrive at the tenement, they find the only way in is via a side alleyway. A **Sense Trouble** test at Difficulty 4 tips the characters off that this is a perfect ambush spot. A few seconds later, two groundcars arrive at the scene, blocking off either end of the alleyway if the characters walked into the ambush. There are four of Kevin's thugs in either car. The thugs initially use their disruptions on the stun setting. Kevin wants the characters taken alive, so he can make an example of them. He believes that if he merely kills them, then he's made himself a target for other laser crews. If he butchers them horribly, his own reputation is enhanced and any laser will think twice about taking a contract to arrest or kill him.

- ▶ A one-point **Industrial Design** spend lets a character notice an old heating duct in the alleyway, which could be used as an escape route.
- ▶ A one-point **Kinetics** spend lets the character maximize the meagre cover of the alleyway, increasing his Hit Threshold by one as he hugs the wall.
- ▶ Spending a point of **Energy Signatures** notes that the power unit of one of the groundcars is damaged and unstable, probably as a result of a previous shootout. An accurate disruption shot into the engine block could make it explode, taking out any nearby thugs.

If the characters are winning the fight, then Kevin Brazil shows up on the roof of the tenement building and starts sniping at the characters with his disruption rifle. To get to Kevin, the lasers have to fight their way out of the alleyway, into the tenement, and then run up the central staircase of the crumbling building. From Kevin's vantage point, he can shoot into the open staircase from above.

Alternatively, if the characters are all stunned, then Kevin arrives in person, accompanied by a holographer. He is here to personally murder the lasers on camera. A desperate laser could use a **Downside** or **Inspiration** spend to challenge Kevin to a one-on-one fight in front of his gang, which Brazil would be honor-bound to accept.


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Kevin's Thugs

Abilities: Athletics 7, Health 3, Scuffling 4, Shooting 10.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Baton

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Rifle

Hit Threshold: 3 (4 in Hand-to-Hand)

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, Popper, Deflector

Alertness Modifier: -2

Stealth Modifier: -2

Savvy Modifier: -1

Kevin Brazil

Abilities: Athletics 10, Health 15, Scuffling 10, Shooting 10.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Claws +2

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Rifle +1

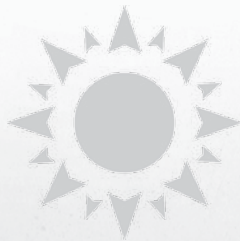
Hit Threshold: 4 (5 in Hand-to-Hand)

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, 2 x Popper, Deflector (viroware) Popclaws, Snakehisser, Stimulust

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: +1



Brook's Secret

Scene Type: Subplot

John Brook is the founder and leader of the Church of Regenerative Carnality. To the Andartan government, he's an offworlder who co-opted their pre-war sacred traditions, but at least he's less dangerous and tawdry than the pimps and the gangs. To his followers, he is the enlightened master destined to bring joy and wholeness to the shattered Combine. Brook is a human male in his mid-sixties, with thinning grey hair and a multicoloured goatee. Even with **Bullshit Detector**, it is hard to tell if Brook is a genuine believer in his sex-based religion, or if he is just a con artist who added prostitution to the classic cult scam.

Brook has a secret deal with Kevin Brazil. Whenever Brazil's whores find a client that might be suitable for recruitment by the CRC, Brazil passes that client's details onto the church. Brazil's gang also provides security and protection for the church, ensuring that the other criminal gangs in Joy City don't attack. In exchange, Brook uses his political influence to protect Brazil from the government.

When the characters are brought into Brook's palatial office, any player may make a two-point **Human History** or **Combine History** spend to recognize Brook as Oulian Fouk, a convicted fraudster who claimed to be a prophet of the Vas Kra during the war as part of a convoluted fraud scheme. Fouk was arrested after the war and sentenced to twenty years. If the characters bring this up, then Brook admits that he was once known as Fouk. He escaped custody and travelled out to the Bleed where he founded the Church of Regenerative Carnality. This time, he insists, he has really found religion.

If asked about Mar Gravely, he admits that the name crossed his desk – but he will only help the characters if they promise to keep the CRC out of their investigations. If they agree, he tells them that Mar Gravely was reported as being a possible candidate for recruitment, as he had money and influence. Gravely's name was passed onto him by Joy Services. If the characters refuse to keep the church out of their investigations, then Brook refuses to co-operate. If they are antagonistic, he will warn Kevin Brazil about the lasers, possibly triggering **The Boys from Brazil** (page 24).

If the characters know that Brook was Oulian Fouk, they can use **Intimidation** to threaten him, getting the name of Joy Services out of him. He can also warn them about Kevin Brazil's paranoid fear of lasers.



Infection

Scene Type: Hazard

It's possible that one of the player characters contracts the druath virus over the course of their adventures. The virus takes one day per point of Health in the character's pool to incubate, during which time the character is infectious. The virus causes a mild temperature, dizziness, and an increased sex drive. Towards the end of the incubation period, skin lesions appear. Eventually, the victim's skin peels off, revealing scales beneath, and the character transforms into a new druath or dies, depending on one's perspective.

The virus affects humans, cybes, Vas Mal, durugh, tavak and balla. Krk-thk are immune.

There is no cure for the virus, but a character could create one with a 3-point **Virology** spend (or can come up with one during downtime between missions.) Medical treatment can temporarily arrest the spread of the virus.

Optionally, a character infected by the virus might be able to sense nearby druath. If the players are stuck, the GM can feed clues to them by this method.

Kara Canal

Scene Type: Core

Kara's story is sadly typical of many young women on Andarta. She was a refugee from a world devastated in the

DOES NO-ONE ON THIS PLANET WEAR CONDOMS?

A combination of contraceptive and medicinal viroware eliminates the need for most forms of sexual protection. The druath virus is radically different to other sexually transmitted diseases and can bypass these protective measures. The Andartan government have staked their planet's reputation on the infallibility of the viroware; suggestions that there is a disease out there that can get through the viroware are equivalent to suggesting there might be a man-eating shark out there to the owners of a popular beach resort.

Mohilar War. She arrived here on a refugee transport with nothing, and was forced into prostitution to survive. Her handler was a cruel bastard called Rayan Fritch, who was part of Kevin Brazil's gang. Nine days ago, Fritch brutally raped Kara (and infected her with the druath virus, but that's not relevant to this part of the sad tale.)

Terrified, Kara obtained a gun from her current client, Mar Gravely. She intended to use it to defend herself against Fritch, but Fritch vanished. For one glorious day, she thought she had scared him off, but then she learned that Fritch had apparently run off with Brazil's money, and Kevin Brazil does not tolerate theft. He would have killed Fritch if he could have laid hands on him, but Fritch was gone, so Brazil took his frustration out on Kara. He murdered her in an alleyway and dumped the body in the jungle – another victim of Joy City.

Kara had a small apartment in a tenement block on the edge of town. This is the most squalid section of Joy City that the lasers have yet encountered.

The Druath: There is a druath lurking near the apartment. Mention that one of the characters (the one with the highest **Surveillance** spots a shadowy figure on a nearby rooftop, but by the time the characters investigate, the mysterious watcher is gone.

The Roommate: Kara lived with a roommate, **Steve Moore**. No matter when the characters arrive, they get Steve out of bed – he's a lazy dropout. He came to Andarta two years ago during a break from college, and never left. His family give him enough cash to survive on, and he spends his time wandering from party to party and bed to bed. Lately, he's gotten 'really into deep spirituality' with the Church of Regenerative Carnality. Play Steve as slightly clueless and largely uninterested in anything except sex.

Steve is also in the final stages of transforming into a druath. He's sweating heavily, dislikes bright lights, and is easily confused. A character with **Bio Signatures** or **Medic** can clearly see that Steve is unwell. If the characters mention this, Steve shrugs it off – it's probably some bad jungle fruit or something. (He's lived here for two years, and still can't if the red fruit are safe, and the yellow ones kill you, or if it's the other way around. That's why he only eats the orange ones. That's science!) If the characters detain Steve, see the **Steve the Druath** sidebar. Otherwise, this is the only time they will ever encounter Steve, as he transforms into a druath shortly after they leave.

ASHEN STARS

He's impressed by the lasers; in fact, he's thought of becoming one himself someday. It seems like a cool job, zooming around the Bleed fighting crime and rescuing hot Balla from bug-eyed monsters. He's happy to answer their questions.

- ▶ He's lived with Kara for almost a year.
- ▶ He hasn't seen her in a week. He's worried about her, but she has vanished for some time before.
- ▶ He knows Kara was a prostitute, but they never discussed work and she tried to avoid bringing it home. Her pimp was called Rayan Fritch; Steve met him a few times and thought he was bad news.
- ▶ About a week ago, Kara was really upset and scared. Steve tried to get her to talk about it, but she just kept muttering Fritch's name under her breath and shivering. He used CRC techniques to relax her and heal her spirit.

Bullshit Detector lets a character know that Steve's not giving the whole truth. If pressed, Steve admits that Kara was raped by Rayan Fritch, and Moore effectively took advantage of her traumatized state afterwards.

- ▶ Soon after that, she left the apartment and has yet to return. He tried calling her communicator a few times, but she never answered.
- ▶ Some doctor called a few days ago, looking for Kara. He can't recall her name, but applying a neurojolter or a point of **Interrogation** elicits the memory that the doctor worked at **Sanctuary Hospital** (page 29).
- ▶ If the characters ask about Steve's sex life with **Flattery**, he admits that he's has only two sexual partners in the last week (it's a slow week for him). He slept with Kara, but that was just to reorient her spiritual energies. He's also having advanced tuition from one of the temple *hierodules*, **Heather Roman**. He is very proud of this, and gives the characters far more detail than they ever wanted about the topic.
- ▶ **Neurosight** picks up a strange distortion in Steve's aura, as though two nervous systems were overlapping in his body. The closest comparison is the aura of a heavily pregnant woman, when the unborn child's aura can be seen within the mother's body.

Kara's Room: A search of Kara's small room with **Evidence Collection** turns up a disruption pistol case hidden in a closet. This case is obviously brand-new and is missing a vendor's stamp, suggesting it was bought illegally or from a wholesaler, and that Kara didn't have to go through even the

minimal vetting needed to obtain a handgun. There is also a folded sheet of paper with handwritten instructions on how to modify the pistol to fire in lethal mode. Examining the handwriting with **linguistics** allows the character to identify it as that of Mar Gravely.

The Call (Core): While the characters are in the apartment, Steve's headset chimes. He looks in surprise at the display – the call is coming from Kara Canal's pocket communicator. He answers, but there is no reply, just the sound of wind and bird call and faith breathing. Steve is confused by this.

- ▶ A difficulty 4 **Communications Intercept** test lets a character trace the call. Normally, it would be harder, but the call is coming from the outskirts where there is little interference.
- ▶ Listening intently to the call with **Zoology** lets the character identify the animal sounds in the background. Importantly, they can hear the distinctive mating call of the Andartan quiverbird; those creatures make their nests on floating platforms on lakes, and there's only one such lake near Joy City.
- ▶ There is a slight static hiss in the background; **Energy Signatures** suggests that this means the call is coming from somewhere near the sonic fence that keeps the jungle animals away from Joy City.
- ▶ Putting these clues together, the characters can backtrack the location of the caller – Kara's communicator is currently about on the fringe of the city, near the jungle.

Although intrigued by Kara's call, Steve shows no interest in pursuing the matter. He asks the characters to leave, so he can get some sleep before heading to the Church for the upcoming Grand Conciliation.

If the characters ever return to the apartment, there is no sign of Steve – he has become a druath.

STEVE THE DRUATH

If the players suspect the presence of a strange disease, or pick up on the fact that Steve appears ill, they may detain Steve or keep him under observation. This means that you can run a variation of the events of **A Terrifying Birth** (see page 30) with Steve instead of with Dr. Terrell. Steve will be watched by the druath until he begins to change, at which point they will try to bring him to the jungle.



Kara's Grave

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: Sanctuary Hospital

Tracing the signal from Kara Canal's communicator leads the characters out to the edge of the jungle. This is a wasteland of recently cleared jungle. The Andartans use a chemical spray to defoliate the trees and clear space for agriculture. For kilometres to the east and west, all the characters can see are the rotting husks of trees and undergrowth.

The signal is coming from the middle of a huge morass of decaying vegetation. An **Evidence Collection** spend lets the character find the tracks of a ground car. These tracks match those of the vehicle that Kevin Brazil uses, as the characters may have seen at Joy Services. The signal leads the characters deeper into the wasteland, until they come to a shallow open grave.

Inside the grave, partially wrapped in a plastic sheet, is a corpse. The corpse's face has been melted with a prolonged short-range lethal disruption blast.

- ▶ It's hard to tell if this corpse was human. It's certainly humanoid, and female, but it's got scales over much of its surface.
- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology** confirms that it is Kara Canal, but she has been mutated by some sort of virus.

A one-point **Forensic Anthropology** spend lets the character identify three distinct sets of injuries, aside from the weird mutations. The first set are about a week old and are mostly on her arms and pelvic area. The second are more recent and look like scratch marks and lacerations in arms, upper body and throat. Finally, her face was blasted by a disruption pistol. Time of death was six days ago.

With this evidence, **Kinetics** lets the characters reconstruct the events. The first set of injuries are consistent with sexual assault; the second with a mugging or brawl that resulted in someone stabbing her in the throat.

Kinetics also lets the characters match the hideous wounds on the corpse's face to the disruption pistol used to injure Kevin Brazil.

- ▶ **Virology:** The changes in Kara's physiology were caused by a virus. Genetic analysis shows that her DNA is being rewritten cell by cell.

A one-point **Virology** spend confirms that the genetic material is alien, and conforms to no known species.

A one-point **Virology** or **Forensic Anthropology** spend lets the character make a guess about the virus's speed; incubation varies between three and ten days, during which time the victim is a carrier, but shows few external signs of the virus as the infection spreads through all the body's cells. After that, the transformation begins. Kara must have been killed just as the transformation began.

- ▶ Using **Consciousness Simulation** on Kara's body is a wildly disorientating experience. There are two distinct sets of psychic residues. One is terrified, agonized, angry; the other innocent, confused and fragile. Neither can be questioned.
- ▶ **Zoology:** Kara was killed elsewhere, and her body was transported here. She was only exposed to the air and wildlife a short time ago, judging by the comparative lack of insects and parasites.
- ▶ **(Core) Evidence Collection:** Tucked into her pocket is a card for the Sanctuary Hospital, a free medical facility in Joy City.

The open grave has its own set of clues:

- ▶ The grave was originally dug using shovels, but reopened recently by hand.
- ▶ There are tracks around the grave that are clearly humanoid, but don't match any known species.
- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology:** They do, however, match the feet of the corpse. More accurately, they match the feet of whatever the corpse was turning into.

A one-point **Kinetics** or **Evidence Collection** spend lets the character interpret the tracks. Two creatures arrived at the grave from the direction of the jungle. The two creatures were both larger and heavier than Kara. They dug up the grave (how they identified the grave is a mystery, as there was no marker to distinguish this plot of mud and rotting plants from the rest of the area) and exposed the corpse.

- ▶ Kara's pocket communicator has been placed atop the corpse. It is a cheap, audio-only model.

Decryption: There are several missed calls from Steve Moore on the communicator. The last call made to Kara before the estimated time of her death was from Joy Services; the last call from Kara was to Mar Gravely.

ASHEN STARS



A SHORT CUT

If the players have already worked out that it is a sexually transmitted disease that turns people into aliens, there's no need to play through the Sanctuary Hospital scenes with Dr. Tyrell. You can just let the players follow the tracks from Kara's Grave to **into the jungle** (page 31).

Sanctuary Hospital

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The break-in at the lab

Sanctuary Hospital is a medical clinic established by an interstellar charity to help Andarta cope with the influx of refugees. It's small, underfunded and the staff are overworked, especially after a popular tourist guidebook described Sanctuary as a free clinic for tourists.

After her rape at the hands of Rayan Fritch, Kara Canal visited the clinic. She was examined by Dr. Penny Terrell, a researcher in epidemiology who also staffs the free clinic. During the examination, Terrell took samples of the druath virus and has been experimenting on them in her laboratory. She realizes that the virus is something new and strange, but has yet to discover that it is lethal to its hosts. The doctor's experiments have drawn the attention of the druath.

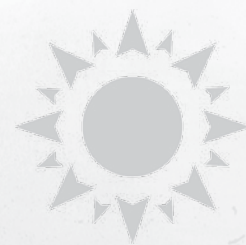
The characters can easily find Dr. Terrell at the clinic – all they need to do is follow the crowd. Terrell is always at the centre of a hurricane of activity. She marches from patient to patient, trailing a crowd of nurses and other staff. The characters are initially about item fifteen on her priority list, behind getting 20ccs of myzobeline, treating this patient's infection, coffee, writing the new clinic policy on drug dispensation, begging the charity for more money, coffee, making sure the volunteer orderlies don't accidentally kill anyone, and getting another cup of coffee. The characters also note cybernetic drug regulator implants in the sides of the doctor's neck and wrists; a character with **Forensic Anthropology** or **Virology** knows that these are used by those suffering for certain genetic disorders that affect the immune system.

A character who wants to pitch in and help the hospital staff with a **Medic** test (Difficulty 5) or a 2-point **Reassurance** or **Inspiration** spend wins Terrell's approval.

The characters can either tag along as Terrell does her rounds, or make it clear that the situation is serious enough to demand the doctor's undivided attention.

- ▶ She remembers Kara Canal. The girl came in after she was assaulted about a week ago. It's not the first time she's been to Sanctuary.
- ▶ If the characters mention that Kara is dead, Terrell is unsurprised. The girl was part of Kevin Brazil's organization, and Rayan Fritch was her handler. That's not a recipe for a long or healthy life.
- ▶ There was an odd virus in Kara's swabs and blood samples. Terrell has been examining it in her spare time, but as her 'spare time' is about fifteen minutes every second day, she hasn't got very far.
- ▶ She has seen no other confirmed cases of the virus so far, but viral infections like that tend to build up slowly, with only a few carriers, until they hit a tipping point and become an epidemic.
- ▶ With **Virology**, the characters can engage Dr. Terrell on a professional level. If they describe the evidence that the virus is responsible for massive genetic alteration of the hosts, she is alarmed, and suggests that she and the characters collaborate in investigating the virus.
- ▶ If asked about her cybernetics, Terrell admits that she suffers from a rare genetic condition that damages her immune system. The implants help boost her protection. She nearly died several times as a child, and grew up in a series of hospitals.

While the characters are talking to Dr. Terrell, they hear a crash and the sound of breaking glass from inside the laboratory. Terrell curses under her breath, and says that this is the second time this week that addicts have broken into her lab, looking for drugs. She excuses herself and marches off to the lab. The characters can follow if they wish.





A Terrifying Birth

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The trail into the jungle

Dr. Terrell's laboratory was converted from an old restaurant kitchen. It's a dark, gloomy room of stainless steel surfaces and countertops crammed with beakers, sample slides and medical equipment. There's a small window high on the far wall which has been forced open.

In the far corner, the characters see two humanoids. Both creatures are thin and covered with slate-grey scales. Black eyes blink at the characters from noseless, lizard-like faces. The characters instantly recognize these creatures as being similar to whatever Kara was becoming. The creatures were examining a stack of viral bioreactors when they were disturbed.



When Dr. Terrell and the characters enter, the two druath panic. One of them scrambles for the window, but the other grabs the nearest object at hand and throws it towards the characters. Unfortunately, what he throws is the bioreactor containing cultured samples of the druath virus.

Call for **Sense Trouble** bids immediately; the druath effectively has a stake in this contest too, and bid three points from his **Athletics** to throw the bioreactor. Any characters who bid less than the druath risk being splattered with virus-infected culture gel from the reactor.

Endangered characters may make a Difficulty 6 **Athletics** check to dodge out of the way, or to push another character out of the way instead. Dr. Terrell is automatically struck unless one of the PCs saves her.

A character struck by the gel risks being infected. Have each player roll 1d6 each round until the gel is removed with a chemical sanitizer; on a 6, that player is infected (see **Infection**, page 26). Characters can find a chemical sanitizer in the lab with a Difficulty 4 **Filch** check, or have one to hand with **Preparedness**.

The two druath then flee out the window.

Dr. Terrell: If Dr. Terrell is infected, she is in grave danger as the virus rages through her fragile immune system. Saving her requires a Difficulty 8 **Medic** test. A 1-point **Virology**, **Chemistry**, **Bio Signatures** or **Cybe Culture** roll reduces the difficulty by 1 per spend. If successful, the characters are able to prevent the virus taking hold.

If the Medic test fails, the virus runs through its lifecycle in minutes instead of days. Her body convulses in agony as her internal organs are liquified and rebuilt. Unable to speak, unable to breathe, she is wracked with pain and terror... and then suddenly, the pain stops and she slumps into unconsciousness. Her skin sloughs off at the slightest touch, revealing slate-grey scales beneath. She has become a confused and lonely newborn druath, who will instinctively make its way to the forest if the lasers permit it to do so.

Chasing the druath: Following the druath on foot is complicated by their natural ability to hide in the shadows. It is resolved as a series of two-part contests. Firstly, pit the druath's **Infiltration** against the pursuer's **Surveillance** or **Sense Trouble**. Next, both sides roll **Athletics** against a difficulty of 3. If the pursuer lost the first part of the contest, however, the difficulty for his Athletics test is increased to 6 as his quarry blends into the city and is hard to see.


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A character with a gadget like a tether may spend a point of **Imaging** or **Energy Signatures** to automatically succeed on the first test. Alternatively, a character can spend **Shooting** points to keep the druath pinned in a meglight beam.

If the druath win the contest, they escape their pursuers. If the characters win, they can follow the druath **into the jungle** or try to fight the druath.

Following the druath: In their escape, one of the druath spilled a beaker of chemicals and stepped in the puddle of liquid. This chemical, phethlyoxine, adheres to the skin (or scales) and is very hard to wash off. With **chemistry** or **bio-signatures**, the lasers can adjust a tether to detect traces of phethlyoxine and follow the chemical trail **into the jungle**.

Fighting the druath: The druath just want to escape back into the jungle, so they flee instead of fighting. If a character tackles a druath, the creature only fights back only enough to stun its pursuer, then runs off again.

If the characters shoot the druath, remember they have the Refractive Skin ability, giving them surprising resilience. The characters can still restrain or incapacitate the druath if they keep firing.

Interrogating the druath: If the characters capture either of the druath intruders, they can interrogate them. The druath have a sketchy genetic memory of how to speak to humans, and coupled with their rosetta chips the characters can communicate with the aliens. Any captured druath beg to be allowed to return to the jungle. They insist they meant no harm, and that they were drawn here by the 'scene of a new druath'; **xenoculture** lets the character realize that they might be confused by the viral cultures in the lab. If Dr. Terrell was transformed into a druath, then they are sorry for what they did, but ask that the new druath be allowed to come to the jungle and meet with the rest of its kind.

If the characters capture the druath that was Dr. Terrell, it is confused and terrified. It says that it is being drawn to the jungle, and begs the characters to let it go.

Into the jungle

Scene Type: Hazard

The trail through the jungle passes through the sonic fence. This fence consists of a number of ten-meter-tall metal poles. Beams of ultra-focussed sound waves are projected between the poles. This sonic fence is harmless, but triggers mounting feelings of unease, fear and nausea as you get close to it. The characters (and the druath) can pass through it easily, but it keeps the nastier predators away from Joy City.

As the characters travel along the trail, they find several pieces of tattered clothing, which was discarded by the newborn druath as they travelled to the meteor. One of the jackets they find has a Loghos Industries logo on the lapel, and belonged to Mar Gravely. In the pocket of the jacket, they find a lump of insect-ridden flesh and soft cartilage that was Mar Gravely's nose.

(The players may choose to fly into the jungle on their ship, instead of risking the wildlife. In this case, the chemical trail gets harder to follow, so they have to land to do a close-range scan.)

The Spiders: The most dangerous creature in the Andartan jungle is the jewel-spider. These six-legged creatures measure more than a meter from claw to claw, and have vicious jaws that clamp onto prey with enough force to punch through the toughest hide. They hunt by hiding in the trees and waiting until suitable victims come within range. The spiders then hurl themselves down on top of the target, wrapping their legs around the victim and digging in with claws and teeth. Any spiders who miss the jump scuttle over and attach themselves to another spider's prey. A single large prey animal, such as a human, can find himself prone and covered in half-a-dozen huge chitinous spiders in an instant. The spiders crush and bite until the victim falls unconscious, then drag the carcass into the trees to devour at their leisure until more prey comes by. They like to nest near trails and watering holes.

The trail to the druath meteor leads right past a spider nest.

Call for **Sense Trouble** tests against Difficulty 6 (4 if someone makes a **Zoology** spend, to identify the distinctive clawmarks on the bark, or a **Botany** spend to recognizes these trees as being ideal nesting grounds). If the characters are surprised by the spider attack, the Difficulty for any general ability usage in the first round of combat is increased by 2. If the characters are not surprised, they can try to shoot the spiders out of the trees before they are attacked. The Difficulty for this initial **Shooting** attack is 6, as the



spiders have the cover of the jungle canopy. Once the spiders are on the ground, their Hit Threshold is 4.

Once the spiders are dealt with, the characters can continue on to **the meteor**.

Jewel-Spiders

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 4, Scuffling 8

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Bite +1

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

The Meteor

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The meteor is the origin of the plague

The druath trail ends in a recently-made clearing. The scorched trees and broken earth around a central crater suggest that something made a soft crash landing here. On the far side of the clearing is a small courier ship (one of the druath was a pilot in its former existence, and became a druath while flying). As the characters enter the clearing, a dozen grey shapes emerge from the jungle. This is the home of the druath. All of the druath are naked, but some of them (one per player character) carry weapons such as disruption pistols.

One of the druath steps forward to speak with the characters. It calls itself, simply, Eldest, as it is the oldest of the druath at nearly two weeks old.

- ▶ Eldest touches its grey chest and declares that it will speak for the druath.
- ▶ The druath remember what they were – their race is blessed with a form of genetic memory. Thousands of years ago, their race faced extinction. There was no way to avoid this cataclysm, so the druath encoded themselves into a virus and placed it in a space-faring ark. The ark would take thousands of years to cross the void, but it was programmed to seek out a suitable planet with lifeforms who could be transformed into a new race of druath.

The nature of the cataclysm is up to the GM. You could foreshadow the arrival of the CKEGMC, and have them wipe out the druath. Alternatively, the druath might have been wiped out by a translight corridor rupture, which both caused their star to go nova and prevented them from using faster-than-light travel to escape.

- ▶ The druath also remember, faintly, those who used the matter of their bodies before them. Eldest was Rayan Fritch. It remembers Fritch entering the jungle with the intent of hiding a body, and coming across the meteor.
- ▶ Another druath identifies itself as being evolved from Mar Gravely. This druath and Eldest visited the grave of Kara Canal and attempted to contact Steve Moore, as they sensed that he would soon join them.
- ▶ A third newly arrived druath was born from Steve Moore, unless the players saved him or captured the druath in Joy City.
- ▶ The druath feel little remorse for those who succumbed to the plague; they do not believe they are the same individuals, but argue that there is continuity of self. They are not who or what they were, but they see their transformation as evolution, not death. At most, they feel a slightly melancholic nostalgia, like looking a photo of strangers living in what was your childhood home. They are not responsible for the virus, which was created by their ancestors.
- ▶ They are mildly telepathic, able to communicate with each other and to sense those infected with the virus.

Bio Signatures: The druath could be used to find those suffering from the virus so they can be treated before they change.
- ▶ The druath wish to be left in peace, and to increase their numbers. They have multiple genders, all of which are required for successful sexual reproduction. A 1-point **xenoculture** spend calculates they need a breeding pool of at least a hundred, preferably more like ten thousand individuals.

The Meteor: The 'meteor' is an irregularly shaped metallic object. **Industrial design** identifies it as the remains of a sublight space probe. A 1-point **Forensic Engineering** check notices that there are data storage systems on board, but they may have been corrupted by cosmic radiation over the probe's long voyage. If they are intact, then it is possible that the druath managed to send a copy of their culture and history along with their genetic code.


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Forensic Engineering also notices that something has been removed from the probe. If questioned, the druath admit that they removed the virus cells for safe keeping. Those virus cells contain the future of their race and must be protected.

The Courier Ship: Industrial Design notes that the ship is a standard short-range model – it's got a translight engine, but it's not suitable for a long voyage. The druath are clustered protectively around the courier ship; if the characters know the virus containers have been removed from the probe, they can guess the druath have placed them in the courier.

An Uneasy Compromise

Scene Type: Conclusion

What do the characters do with the druath?

- ▶ Are the druath culpable for the deaths of those who died from the virus?
- ▶ Are they responsible for those who have become infected, but not yet changed? Sparing the life of a victim means denying life to another druath?
- ▶ The characters' mission is to retrieve Mar Gravely, or else find proof of his death... which one applies here?

Victoria Fritz: If the characters have Victoria Fritz on their side (see **Government Interference**, page 21) and she is aware of the druath, then she may accompany the characters into the jungle. Fritz can call in support from the Andartan security forces and jungle rangers – if the characters need it, they can bring in an army on their side.

Dealing with the druath: The druath are paranoid and fearful for the survival of their nascent race. They have only a little understanding of the world they find themselves in, cobbled together from their genetic memories and what they have observed since being reborn. If the characters are to deal with the druath, they need to win their trust. Winning the druath's trust requires getting at least 5 points from the following spends.

- ▶ **Inspiration** and **Reassurance** spends can appeal to the druath's better nature, convincing them that at least some humans can be trusted.
- ▶ Handing over the characters' firearms to the druath is worth 2 points.
- ▶ Offering to help retrieve the druath cultural data from the probe with **Forensic Engineering** is worth 2 points.

- ▶ If the characters are genuinely offering some sort of deal that allows the druath to rebuild their society, such as finding a planet with primitive hominids for transformation, or letting the druath have the bodies of Kevin Brazil and his thugs, then the characters can spend **Negotiation**.
- ▶ Alternatively, if the characters have Victoria Fritz and the Andartan forces with them, or have some other strong bargaining position (like having their starship hovering over the clearing with attack arrays charged), they can spend **Intimidation**.

If the characters successfully convince the druath to trust them, the aliens agree to help the characters find those still infected with the virus, so their transformation into druath can be stopped or made easier – see **The Virus**, below. If the characters are unable to muster enough evidence that they should be trusted, one of the fearful druath opens fire – see **The Firefight**.

The Virus: Until the virus is brought under control, the druath are a threat to the population of Andarta. With time and research, a character with **Virology** may be able to engineer a cure, but doing so will take months of work. As a short term solution, there are medications that can slow the rate of change.

The druath can sense those who are about to change, and can tell there are other individuals in Joy City with the virus. One of these individuals is **Heather Roman**. She is in the Basilica of the Flesh, the cathedral of the Church of Regenerative Carnality. The church's 'Grand Conciliation' is about to start, and that means that the virus will be passed from this carriers to thousands of others. If the characters do not stop her from participating the Conciliation, there will be no way to stop the spread of the virus. Run **The Grand Conciliation** conclusion.

The Firefight: If the lasers can't win the druaths' trust or if the characters start shooting, a firefight breaks out. There is one armed druath per player character; several other druath are present, but they flee towards the courier as soon as the fighting begins. The druath try backing into the shadow of the jungle while firing their stolen disruptions.

While the characters are fighting the druath gunmen, the other druath activate the courier ship and take off. They have the remaining virus containers on board; if the virus was dropped on a populated area, it could turn thousands of people into druath. The courier ship must be stopped before it reaches orbit and goes translight. Run the **Hot Pursuit** conclusion.

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Hot Pursuit

Scene Type: Conclusion

The druath shuttle takes off from the clearing and makes a hard burn for orbit. If the characters travelled to the meteor landing site in their own ship, they can pursue it immediately. Otherwise, they will have to race back to Joy City and take up the chase from there.

The characters must destroy or cripple the courier before it reaches the entrance to the local translight corridor. The druath have an effective Helm Control pool of 4, and no points in Battle Console, Communications Intercept or Naval Tactics.

As soon as the druath ship is attacked, the druath start launching canisters of the virus down towards Andarta. The lasers must shoot these canisters before they land and spread the virus. The hit threshold for these canisters is 4. A successful hit on a canister with any weapon destroys it, and the druath launch 1 canisters per turn.

If the druath do escape, they vanish into the Bleed. Their first encounter with this strange new universe has hardened them, so they now consider the Combine to be a threat to them. You can reintroduce them as villains in a future adventure.

	Dishing It (Modifier Applies On showdown Win)	Taking It (Modifier Applies On showdown Loss)
Fire	-2	-1
Maneuver	0	1
Override	0	0
Trickbag	-1	-0

Output 3

Condition 0




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TWO CONCLUSIONS?

There are two possible final challenges for this scenario. It's good to end an investigation with a dramatic chase or a shootout. If the characters take the diplomatic option and talk the druath into surrendering, the game would close on a worthy but possibly anticlimactic note. Adding in a race against time to stop Heather Roman from infecting the CRC congregation lets the players have their hard-won moral victory, but also satisfies their need for action and dice-rolling.

If you end up taking the firefight/hot pursuit route, there's no need to reintroduce the subplot about Heather Roman and the CRC – blowing up the druath courier is a suitably final end. Roman and the CRC can be handled in a quick epilogue, instead of playing through a second full scene.

The Grand Conciliation

Scene Type: Alternate Conclusion

If they do not have their own ship, the characters can take the druath ship back to Joy City.

The Basilica of the Flesh is surrounded by a huge mob – tourists hoping to see the sexy, sexy religious ceremony, disappointed would-be participants, thieves and touts, pick-pockets and parasites. A large contingent of Restreamer protesters led by Nya Gult have occupied the area just in front of the basilica, and are facing off against the Church's private security force (provided by Kevin Brazil).

Inside, the church members are preparing for the ceremony. The Grand Conciliation is a ceremonial gang-bang involving hundreds of participants. Heather Roman is a rising star within the church, and so she has been given the honor of leading the orgiastic ritual, under the close supervision of Conciliator Brook.

The Conciliator expected the Restreamers to try to interrupt the ceremony, so he hired mercenary thugs from Kevin Brazil, and locked down the basilica's communication system.

The Time Limit: The lasers need to interrupt the ceremony before Roman can accidentally spread the druath virus. The time limit is a conveniently dramatic one – the lasers will make it to *coitus interruptus* in the nick of time, as long as they make it past all the obstacles without delay.

Getting into the Basilica: There is no space to land close to the basilica, so the characters can either land atop a nearby building and make their way through the crowds, or else hover over the basilica and jump from their aircraft.

Getting through the crowd is an **Athletics** test at Difficulty 4. Once the characters are past the crowd, they need to get past the guards. If the characters have already arrested or eliminated Kevin Brazil, then the lasers' reputation precedes them, and the remaining thugs let them past. Otherwise, the thugs bar their way and will fight back if the characters try to storm the basilica. Use the thug stats from page 25 for the guards.

Jumping onto the roof is a Difficulty 6 **Athletics** test. From the roof, the characters need to find a way in with a Difficulty 4 **Infiltration** test.

Inside the Basilica: Once the characters are inside, they find the Church of Regenerative Carnality members about to start the ritual. Brook stands at the head of the naked congregation, while Heather Roman is still dressed in a ceremonial white robe. Brook may bluster, but a spend of **Intimidation** and brandishing weapons can kill the mood quickly enough for the characters to explain the situation.

The characters must then help Heather Roman. Her infection is too far advanced to be stopped by any drugs or medical technology, and the stress of the ritual has triggered her final transformation. She is dying – or becoming a druath, depending on your perspective. She asks for **Reassurance**, but are the characters willing to lie to her about her fate?

Wrapping Up

Scene Type: Epilogue

The Loghos Corporation accept that Mar Gravely is dead, and pay the characters their fee. Jezhabur takes Gravely's position in the company; if the characters impressed him, he adds a standard bonus on top.

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DRUATH

Classification: Sentient

Designation: To Be Determined

Morphology: Druath are thin-limbed, agile humanoids. They have grey skin, large black eyes and small mouths. They have no nose, and breathe through small gill-like apertures in the neck and the underside of the jaw. The druath have an extremely keen sense of smell, and communicate partially through pheromones.

The druath are capable of altering the shade of their skin, changing it from dark to light or even forming black-and-white patterns. This is used for signaling and communication, but its primary purpose is camouflage – the druath are extremely good at blending into the shadows and avoiding enemies. The druath's control over surface pigmentation and heat dissipation also gives them a limited immunity to disruption weapons.

The original druath are extinct, annihilated by a catastrophe millennia ago. Before their civilisation was destroyed, the druath engineered a virus to transform other creatures into copies of the druath. This desperate attempt to seed a new druath race ended up crash-landing on Andarta.

Behavior: The culture of the old druath is a mystery, until the computer archive in the seed-ship is recovered. The new druath are simple creatures, acting mainly on instinct. They are confused by the strangeness of human society, so they retreated to the jungle. They intend to wait until enough new druath have been created to overwhelm Andartan society and take the world for their own.

The druath do not yet know if they can reproduce sexually, or if the virus is now their own means of increasing their numbers.

Abilities: Athletics 10, Health 3, Scuffling 9, Shooting 8,

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Fist +4

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruptor Pistol

Hit Threshold: 4

Armor: 2 points against disruption only

Typical Tech: Chameleon, Refractive Skin

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: -1

If the lasers kept the existence of the druath virus a secret and did not discredit the Andartan sex industry, the Andartan government may hire the characters in future, enhancing the crew's reputation. The government may also give the characters a bonus (don't give them a bonus from both groups – if they qualify for both, then pick whichever faction the players are most intrigued by.)

The fate of the surviving druath is up to the characters. The families of some of the druath victims blame the aliens for spreading the virus; others believe that their loved ones are still in there, despite being radically changed, and want to take the druath into medical care to see if the condition can be reversed. (It's up to the GM as to whether or not the transformation is reversible.) The druath want to rebuild their race, and to do this they need to infect more humanoids with the virus.

Follow-On Investigations

- ▶ One of the transformed druath might remember a terrible secret from his former existence – for example, he could recall murdering someone. It means nothing to the druath, but the lasers might find it interesting.
- ▶ If the character solve the case, then Victoria Fritz may have further work for the characters, like cleaning up Kevin Brazil's organization or dealing with the other druath.



dead rock seven

Something is killing workers in an exhausted mine on asteroid SIS-45546. If the lasers' suspicions are correct, this heralds the return of a deadly foe once thought defeated.

The Contract

The employer is a mining company called the **Cronstedt Consortium**. The asteroid mine is exhausted, and only a skeleton crew are left to oversee decommissioning. One member of this crew died under suspicious circumstances. The lasers are to travel to the asteroid, troubleshoot the decommissioning project and investigate the death.

The Twist

Some of the mining crew are trying to cover up two interrelated crimes – they are planning to steal mining equipment from the Cronstedt Consortium, and they injured an alien entity of a previous unknown species. The creature, a krao, is mortally wounded, and its psychic projections were responsible for the death of one of the crew.

The Backstory

The miners came in here in search of 'mesions', an exceedingly rare particle found only on asteroids close to translight corridors. Extracting mesions is a laborious and difficult procedure involving huge electromagnetic devices called collectors, which must be threaded through the asteroid down to its core. Collectors are extremely valuable pieces of equipment; few worlds in the Bleed retain the specialized technical knowledge to build them.

Floyd Wickham is the chief engineer on Dead Rock Seven. He schemed to embezzle money from Cronstedt by claiming that several collector sections were destroyed in the

course of normal operations. In fact, Wickham has hidden these collector parts deep inside the mine, and intends to have his criminal contacts recover them after the asteroid is abandoned.

One of these collector units became entangled in the quasi-substantial plasmoskeleton of an entity called a **krao**. The krao are beings of energy and possibility, skimming the surface of our reality like water spiders. The collector array and the krao are enmeshed, and the krao is dying. When the engineers worked out what had happened, they managed to adjust the collector to maintain the creature's life force, keeping it alive. They intended to slowly shut off this energy feed, allowing the krao to die gently instead of hemorrhaging its life force.

The krao scanned the minds of the engineers and realized that they intended to abandon it. It panicked and lashed out.

One of the engineers, **Gero Lonzo**, was watching a documentary program when the krao's psychic tendril struck. The krao reached into her mind and conjured up her fears. The documentary was about a battle between Combine captain Numi Lake and a hideous alien race – the CKEGMC (see page 6). The krao created one of these aliens, which tore Lonzo apart.

If they reported a CKEGMC attack, the authorities would certainly occupy the asteroid and find both the krao and the hidden collector parts. Therefore, Wickham and his conspirators moved Lonzo's body and attempted to make her death look like a mining accident.

Seven people on asteroid SIS-45546 knew about the krao.

One of them is dead.

Six to go...



The Investigation

After being briefed by the client, the lasers travel to **Dead Rock Seven** (page 40) and are shown around the facility by junior engineer Jo Dawn. They may get a dose of **technobabble** (page 41) before being shown to **the accident site** (page 42).

Investigations there point to a cover-up. The characters can investigate **Lonzo's room** (page 43) or **recover the body** (page 44), which brings them to **the murder scene** (page 45).

They can also interrogate **Floyd Wickham** (page 45), **Jo Dawn** (page 47), **Security Chief Rk-Khz** (page 49), **Clerk Huang** (page 50) or the **Canary AI** (page 51). The low-paid **workforce** (page 52) can also be questioned, notably **Sam Dawn** (page 53), **Harry Skull** (page 53) and **Weird Tucker** (page 54). Alternatively, they can **skulk around the mine** (page 54) or investigate **The Collectors** (page 55).

All these inquiries point to a **hidden mine shaft** (page 59) that leads to **the krao** (page 60).

Complications

The krao continues to thrash about in the psychic realm, causing **The Second Attack** (page 55) and **The Third Attack** (page 56).

The workers believe that the attacks are actually a scam to get them to leave early, costing them their bonuses. They suspect the lasers are in on this **conspiracy theory** (page 57).

One of the workers, **Harry Skull** (page 53), has a criminal past and may be fingered as a suspect once it becomes clear Lonzo was murdered.

Another worker, **Weird Tucker** (page 54), has an eerie connection to the Krao and now worships it as a divine being. He is willing to kill to protect his adopted alien god.

If the characters get too close to exposing Floyd Wickham, he may try **sabotaging the investigation** (page 58) or **offering them a deal** (page 59). Alternatively, if the characters are still on his trail, the villains may arrange **a nasty accident** (page 58).

The Choice

Once the lasers discover the krao, they must decide what to do with it – execute it, allow it to die slowly, or force the miners to keep it alive indefinitely.

MAPPING THE CREW

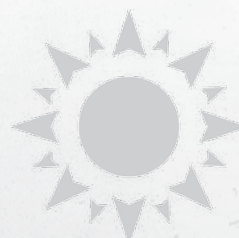
The diagram on the following page tracks the relationships between the crew of Dead Rock Seven. The number after each name denotes which conspiracy that individual is aware of.

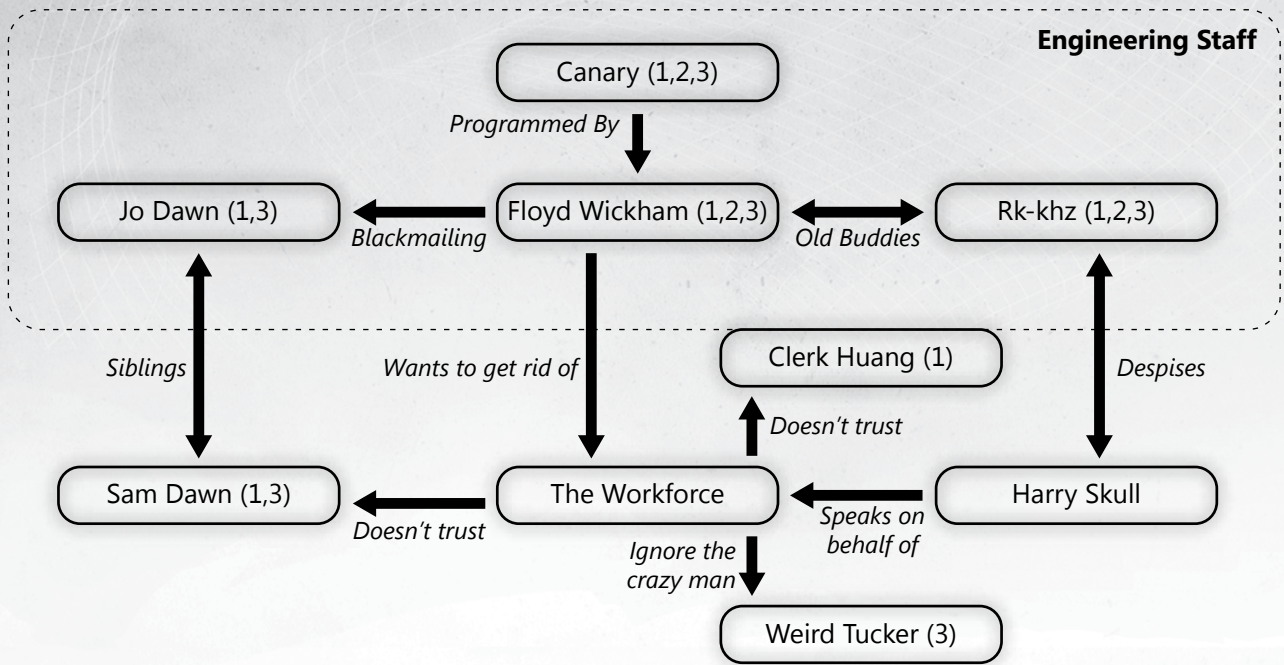
There is a clear divide between the 'engineering staff' (Wickham, Rk-Khz, Jo Dawn, Huang, the computer Canary, and the late engineer Lonzo) and the low-paid workforce. The engineers are all highly paid professionals. The workforce are unskilled laborers, whose jobs would be done by robots in any other mine.

RUNNING THE INVESTIGATION

Dead Rock Seven is your archetypal haunted house in space game. Dark corridors, industrial machinery, and a monstrous alien beast lurking in the shadows. Play up the sci-fi elements – never let the players forget they're on a cold, dead rock floating in an endless vacuum.

Keep the players suspecting there's a hostile monster out there for as long as possible – it will make their realization that the crew are conspirators, not victims all the more alarming.





1: The scam to steal equipment 2: The cover-up about Lonzo's death 3: The existence of the krao





SCENES

Contract Briefing

Scene Type: Intro

The briefing is delivered via a message from the Cronstedt Consortium's offices back in the core worlds, relayed through Ossa One. Read the message to the left or photocopy it and give it to the players as a handout².

CONTRACT BRIEFING

The Cronstedt Consortium has operated an asteroid mine on SIS45546 for the last nine standard years. This mine is now classified as no longer economically viable ('dead rock') and is in the process of being decommissioned. A crew of nineteen remain to oversee final decommissioning and evacuation, which is due to be completed in thirty standard days.

Chief Engineer Floyd Wickham has reported the death of Junior Engineer Gera Lonzo. According to the report, Lonzo was killed when a mining charge went off accidentally and depressurized a section of corridor. It is the decision of the Consortium to establish an external inquiry into the incident.

As per standard contract rules for Autonomous Zone Effectuation, you are hereby bonded and required to travel to SIS45546 and carry out an inquiry into the death of Gera Lonzo. You are to ascertain the status of the decommissioning project and ensure that it is completed on time and in accordance with all applicable safety regulations.



Dead Rock Seven

Scene Type: Introduction

The lasers' ship arrives at the target asteroid. It's a lonely rock, millions of kilometres from anything else. The asteroid is about eight kilometres in radius. On the surface, there's a spherical habitat module attached to the asteroid by a cable. Currently, the cable is entirely retracted, so the little station is resting on the surface, but it is obvious that the cable tether was once used to keep the habitat module in place near, but not on, the asteroid.

Contacting the station by radio puts the characters in touch with the kch-thk, **Rk-Khz**, who grumpily tells the characters that they have permission to dock. He also tells them that according to company policy, they must shut down their engines when within five kilometres of the dock and drift in on thrusters only. They must also dampen all electromagnetic emissions, and may not wear magnetic boots while on the asteroid.

Industrial Design or **Astronomy** lets a character work out that the miners must be extracting extremely delicate or fragile material that could be affected by electromagnetic fields. Presumably, when the mine was in full operation, the tether was extended out so the equipment on the habitat module did not interfere with the mining. However, if the mine is being decommissioned, then surely there should be no need for such precautions. (Rk-Khz is just being a jerk; he objects to the lasers intruding on 'his' asteroid.)

The spacecraft dock is at the top of the habitat module. Waiting inside the airlock is **Jo Dawn**, a young engineer. Floyd Wickman sent her to greet the lasers, figuring that a charming, pretty young woman would be more likely to set them at ease. Dawn introduces herself and shows the characters around Dead Rock Seven, explaining the running of the mine and giving more details than the lasers ever wanted to hear about space rocks.

Bullshit Detector suggests that she's talking to cover her nervousness.

If the characters question Dawn at this point, see **Jo Dawn** on page 47. If they ask technical questions, see **Technobabble** (page 41).

²: Or download it from the Pelgrane Publishing website.

Dawn shows the characters around the habitat module and the upper sections of the mine, and introduces them to the other members of the engineering staff. Use this walk-and-talk scene as a chance to set up the other NPCs and give the players a list of potential suspects. Try to mention the following points:

- ▶ The habitat module contains life support and power generation for the whole mine. The engineering crew have their quarters here.
- ▶ The habitat module also has the core hardware for the station's AI, **Canary** (see page 51). Canary's holographic avatar pops up to greet the characters at this point.
- ▶ The collectors are operated from the habitat module. Jo shows the characters a typical collector – it is a meter-wide length of coils and radiation fins. The job of the workforce is to manually dig tunnels wide enough to get a line of interconnected collectors between the storage facility in the habitat module and the vein of mesionic ore in the heart of the asteroid. Robots cannot be used as the mesions can easily be dislodged by electromagnetic fields
- ▶ There are lifeboats, but the mine has no spacecraft. After incidents at another mine, the company decided that giving the workforce the option of leaving was not a good idea.
- ▶ The workforce live down in the asteroid tunnels.
- ▶ About a fifth of the tunnels still have airlocks and a 'shirtsleeves environment' with a breathable atmosphere. Most of the mine tunnels, however, are abandoned and are open to vacuum.
- ▶ The asteroid has no gravity generators, and a lot of the amenities that were installed have been removed as part of the decommissioning process. The lasers will need lights in some parts of the tunnels, and will need to be ready to move in zero-gravity. There is, however, artificial gravity in the habitat module.
- ▶ **Floyd Wickham** (page 45) is in charge of the decommissioning project.
- ▶ **Clerk Huang** (page 50) handles the administration and payroll.
- ▶ **Rk-Khz** (page 49) is security and safety officer.
- ▶ Jo worked with Gera Lonzo on the collectors. It's a very tricky job – the slightest miscalculation can cause a mesion to collapse back into a simple ion. You've got to coax them into the holding fields. Lonzo was a virtuoso with a collector.

THAT'S A LOT OF NPCs

There are eight named NPCs on board the station, which is a lot to keep track of. Try to avoid scenes that include more than two NPCs if possible, as it's boring for the players to sit there while the GM talks to herself in funny voices. Mention the NPCs' job titles whenever you can, as the players will remember these better than proper names.

- ▶ There are several rooms the characters can use as temporary quarters. Unfortunately, all the furniture was stripped two weeks ago, but Jo promises to dig up some sleeping bags and 'monkey bars' (a reconfigurable lattice of bars, used as a chair or storage facility in zero gravity).
- ▶ When they are ready, Jo can take them down to the corridor that blew out, killing poor Lonzo. They will need spacesuits for that section – the area is still open to space. This is covered in **the accident site** (page 42).

Technobabble

Scene Type: Alternate

The players can get the information in this section through any of the engineers or through Canary. Alternatively, you can give the information directly to the players via **Industrial Design**.

Before it was shut down, the mine here on SIS45546 extracted rare particles called mesions, used in certain high-end medical imaging and computing devices. A mesion is formed when an atom of a rare earth metal like lutetium is struck by a fast-moving meson, such as those emitted by a collapsing translight corridor (see *Meson Shrapnel*, page 172 of the *Ashen Stars* rulebook). The meson knocks one or more of the lutetium's electrons into 'the next universe over'; the electron is shifted into a tachyonic state.

Mesions are only found in large asteroids that have been exposed to heavy meson shrapnel. It is extremely easy to destroy a mesion; any electromagnetic field can collapse it back into a normal atom or an ion. They can be contained safely within a stasis tank, but getting the mesions into this tank is very tricky.



The standard method for mining mesions takes a two-fold approach. Firstly, a tunnel is dug through the asteroid. This tunnel must be dug slowly and by hand. Robots emit too much electromagnetic activity and would destabilize the mesions, as would a mining laser or drill. The only solution is to dig the tunnel using organic workers in spacesuits.

Digging these tunnels is tedious, back-breaking work. The workers must toil for long hours in cramped conditions, their movements restricted by the heavy spacesuits. The suits lack many of the amenities and devices normally found on a modern spacesuit, to minimise the electromagnetic flux. Those hired as mesion miners tend to be people with nowhere else to go, such as ex-criminals, the destitute, and people who want a job that takes them to an isolated asteroid for months at a time. On some worlds, kobirs (see *Ashen Stars*, page 138) are used.

Once the tunnel reaches the suspected mesion deposit, a line of collectors is put in place to suck up the mesions. Running a collector, by contrast, is an extremely skilled job. A good collection engineer has a deep understanding of particle physics, electrodynamics and translight physics. This means that every mesion mine has a clear two-tier society, divided between the poorly-paid and uneducated workforce, and the elite engineers.

To minimise the electromagnetic flux from the life support systems, tethered stations are attached to the asteroid. The crew live aboard these habitat modules, and slide up and down the tether to get to and from the asteroid.

Even a large mesion deposit contains only a few micrograms of the rare substance, and getting to the deposit means digging dozens of long tunnels by hand. Often, the asteroids are so honeycombed by tunnel networks by the end that they break up under their own internal gravitational stresses. Such mined-out asteroids are termed 'dead rocks'. SIS45546 is the seventh such 'dead rock' mined by the Cronstedt Consortium.

The Accident Site

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The body was sucked into space

The death of Engineer Lonzo put Wickham and his allies in a difficult position. Any murder investigation could reveal the many secrets of Dead Rock Seven – the stolen equipment, the krao, the suspected presence of one or more CKEGMCs.

Wickham decided that the best option was to make Lonzo's death into a seeming accident. He ordered Rk-Khz to dump the body into space and to blow up the corridor. Rk-Khz took this opportunity to plant evidence pointing at Harry Skull, an old enemy of his in the work crew – he stabbed Lonzo's corpse with a knife he had previously confiscated from Skull, and then hid the bloody knife near the crime scene where investigators are sure to find it.

According to Wickham's official report, Lonzo was pushing a case of unused mining charges along corridor 43-C when one of the charges detonated. The ceiling of the corridor cracked and depressurized, sending Lonzo flying into empty space. The casual inspection of the scene supports his report, but when the lasers look closer, they find clues that this was no accident.

- ▶ **Imaging:** While the mine's internal surveillance system is rudimentary, there are computer consoles and holo-snails at key junctions. It may be possible to get information about Lonzo's movements shortly before her death by accessing **Canary** (51).
- ▶ **Forensic Engineering:** The hole in the ceiling is suspiciously neat. It looks more like the result of a deliberate mining charge blast than an accidental explosion and venting.
 - A 1-point **Forensic Engineering** spend lets the character find scratches on the rock consistent with a standard miner's clamp. Someone clamped themselves to the ceiling, probably when they were setting a mining charge.
- ▶ **Explosive Devices:** These are very safe mining charges. There is no way they could have gone off accidentally.
 - A 1-point **Explosive Devices** spend lets the character notice that the mining charges all have a serial number. This lets the lasers use **Data Retrieval** through **Canary** (51) or **Bureaucracy** to scan through the list of charges used by the miners. According to Wickham's report, Lonzo was carrying a box of charges, but only *one* is unaccounted for in their records.
- ▶ **Bio Signatures:** There are traces of non-human organic matter here, suggesting an alien was here recently.
 - A 1-point **Forensic Anthropology** spend lets the character identify them as tiny flakes of kch-thk chitin. The DNA matches **Rk-Khz** (49).



- ▶ **Evidence Collection:** The character finds a wickedly sharp knife lying on the wall. The knife is covered in blood.

Forensic Anthropology spend lets the character identify the blood as belonging to Gero Lonzo. A1-point spend lets the character examine the coagulation patterns, and determine that the knife was stabbed into the body several hours *after* death.

- ▶ **Astronomy or Kinetics:** It is possible for a person to be sucked out into space though this hole by a sudden depressurization, but the velocity of the victim would be quite low, on the order of a few dozen metres per minute. This means that Lonzo's body should no more than a few thousand kilometres of the asteroid, and somewhere within a finite cone of space starting at the breach. There's nothing else out there for millions of kilometres, so it should be possible to find the corpse floating out in space. See **Recovering The Body** (page 44).

Lonzo's Room

Scene Type: Core

Core Clues: The holo-documentary, Junction 5

Gera Lonzo's small cabin on the habitat module has been sealed since her death. There's a small bunk bed, a desk with holos of her family, textbooks on physics and engineering, a holomodel of a collector assembly, and assorted personal effects and knick-knacks.

The main holodisplay is paused – hanging in the air in the middle of the room is a close-up of a slaving monster, a CKEGMC. If the characters check the computer, they find that Lonzo was watching a documentary about heroic Combine captain Numi Grant, entitled '*She Held The Line: The Career of Captain Numi Grant*'. For more details, see the sidebar. This is a core clue.

SHE HELD THE LINE

The holodocumentary tells the inspiring story of Numi Grant, one of the first captains to encounter the Durugh. At the age of fifteen, she fled her homeworld aboard a liner and travelled through Combine space as an adventurer and smuggler. Five years later, she helped the Tavak warrior-prince Vogik locate a Durugh listening post located in the Rub'al Khali; Vogik sponsored Grant's admission into the naval academy, and she made captain at the age of 29.

Her ship, the *Clarion*, fought numerous engagements against the Durugh empire, and was the first ship to successfully cross the Medusa Outzone. She led the defense of Knossos, and brought down the Fightbrains of Samarka.

It was her campaign against the CKEGMC that won her eternal fame. The alien invaders attacked in the Combine in 2391, swarming a dozen worlds. Most of the Bleed's fleet were patrolling the frontier against Durugh raiders, so only the *Clarion* could respond in time. For sixteen weeks, Grant fought a one-ship war against the CKEGMC. As soon as a world was threatened, the *Clarion* arrived to save the day. They fought them in space and they fought them on the ground.

Her actions so incensed the CKEGMC that they pursued her into the Bleed, ignoring more vulnerable targets. Grant used this to her advantage, and drew the enemy deep into little-known space.

Then she vanished.

A month later, the first survivors were found. They spoke of a vast alien fleet that chased the *Clarion* across the stars. Instead of making a last stand, Grant risked a desperate gambit. She ordered all but a handful of volunteers to abandon ship, and set course for a place known only as the Edge of the Abyss. In Balla legend, no ship that entered this system ever returned. The *Clarion* was never seen again – but neither were the CKEGMC!

Grant was declared missing, presumed dead by the Combine Navy, and awarded the Medal of Valor. It is said that she will return when the Combine needs her most; many looked in vain for the return of the *Clarion* during the Mohilar War, but if Numi Grant did return, she was forgotten with the rest in the Bogey Conundrum.





If the players don't pick up on the importance of the holo, then have Jo Dawn ask them if they can get the documentary disc from Gera's room. Jo loaned the video to Gera. Captain Grant is a personal heroine of hers.

- ▶ **Industrial Design:** The holomodel describes the components of a collector. They're very rare and expensive. This asteroid mine has thousands of bigcreds worth of equipment.

A 1-point **Industrial Design** spend lets the character work out that Lonzo was looking at ways to run a collector at very low power. Normally, you want a really powerful burst to grab as many mesions before they collapse; a low-power collector is of no use in mining. (She was experimenting with ways to keep the krao alive.)

- ▶ A 1-point **Forensic Accounting** spend while Looking at Lonzo's financial records discovers she had just opened a numbered account with an extremely discreet cybe distributed financial network. That suggests money laundering or a payout she wanted kept secret.
- ▶ **Data Retrieval:** There's a list of tasks for Lonzo to complete. It looks like she was extremely diligent about recording what she needed to get done. Her next job was to repair a power relay on the Habitat Module at Junction 5. If the characters check out Junction 5, see **The Murder Scene** (page 45).

Recovering the Body

Scene Type: Alternate

Core Clue: Junction 5

Lonzo's body is floating in space about twenty thousand kilometres from the station. It takes nine hours to find it using **Bio-Signatures**; each point of **Bio-Signatures** spent reduces the search time required by four hours. Once found, the characters can scoop it up with their starship and bring it onboard for examination.

The corpse is dressed in a torn and blood-stained jumpsuit. There are no burn marks or injuries consistent with an explosion.

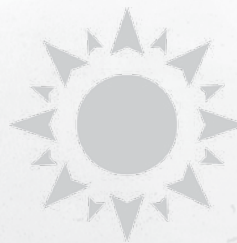
- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology:** The obvious cause of death varies depending on which CKEGMC the GM has 'C'ed – if you've picked, say, the nanogons, then Lonzo was blasted with a mining laser but also slashed by metal hooks. If your nemesis of choice is the mynatids, then Lonzo was stabbed through the chest with a wasp stinger the size of a whale harpoon. If you are unsure what clue to give, 'torn to pieces by ferocious claws' is always a good fallback.

It is obvious that Lonzo was not killed by either an explosion or by decompression.

There is a single shallow knife wound in the flesh of her left thigh, caused by Rk-Khz stabbing the corpse with Harry Skull's blade, which he then planted in Corridor 43-C.

Determining time of death is difficult. A one-point Forensic Anthropology spend lets the character confirm that Lonzo was dead before she was exposed to vacuum. A two-point spend pins the time down to twelve hours before the 'official' time of death in the report.

- ▶ **Data Retrieval:** Her headset is still functional; she was due to repair a power relay in the habitat module at Junction 5.
- ▶ **Industrial Design:** There are some electronic components and fasteners in a pouch by her side, which are components of a power relay. One of these fasteners was damaged by whatever killed Lonzo.
- ▶ **Geology:** There is a thin layer of dust and debris on the body, consistent with Corridor 43-C. The body was definitely in Corridor 43-C at some point.
- ▶ If the characters ask questions with **Consciousness Simulation**, then Lonzo says that she was killed by a CKEGMC while repairing the power relay at Junction 5. The monster came out of nowhere and attacked her savagely.
- ▶ Play up the horrific, savage or disturbing nature of the attack. The CKEGMC need to be an terrifying threat.




 ASHEN STARS

The Murder Scene

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The existence of a cover-up

Junction 5 on the habitat module is a small chamber just outside the collector control room, accessible through a hatch in the ceiling. The hatch has been welded shut from the outside.

The access crawlspace is cramped and uncomfortable, and the junction room itself has a very low ceiling. Only one character at a time can make their way into the junction room, and no more than three average characters can fit there. Tavak characters must pay a point of **Athletics** or **Infiltration** to squeeze their titanic bulk up there.

There are no other ways into the junction room. There is an air vent, but it is only forty centimeters across.

The junction room exposes the inner workings of the habitat module. Every surface is covered in wires, cables, pipes, boxy components and the ubiquitous blinkenlights.

Gero Lonzo was killed here by the kra's psychic emanations. After they found the body, they attempted to clean up the blood and gore, but the characters can still find clues here.

- ▶ **Evidence Collection:** Someone attempted to clean up this crime scene. There are trace blood smears and the residue from a chemical cleaner and disinfectant. A 1-point **Evidence Collection** spend gives the characters enough data to use **Kinetics** to recreate the movements in this room.

Kinetics: Lonzo climbed up into the junction room. The attacker was waiting here for her – whatever killed her attacked her as she reached down to close the hatch behind her. It threw her against the ceiling and held her there while it killed her.

- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** There is a curious magnetic afterimage in the metallic deck plates, consistent with a powerful energy discharge. This room is above the collector control room, and the collectors contain powerful electromagnets. It's possible that a misaligned collector could cause an afterimage like this. If the characters check out the collectors, see **The Collectors** (page 55).

- ▶ A 2-point **Combine History** spend lets a character realize that the attack pattern and the wounds are eerily similar to documented CKEGMC attacks. The characters get this clue for free if they viewed the holodocumentary in Lonzo's quarters.
- ▶ **Holo Surveillance:** There was a security holosnail here, but it broke down week ago and captured nothing of the attack. Remind the player that the mine was once fully wired with security holo-snails that have been taken down as part of the decommissioning process. There must be a large number of holo-snails that could be used to set up a surveillance network.

THE CREW OF DEAD ROCK SEVEN

These sections describe the major NPCs on board Dead Rock Seven. Each one describes the characters' physical appearance, personal traits, usual activities and duties on board Dead Rock Seven, and goals. The clues that can be obtained by interviewing or investigating the NPC are then listed.

For consistency, they are listed by scene type (core for NPCs with information that is directly relevant to the lasers' mission, subplot for other plot and secrets, and hazards for NPCs who might fight back), but don't treat them as one-shot scenes. Give the players the impression of a living environment by having the NPCs go about their duties, conspire with each other and so on. The characters will probably interview some NPCs several times over the course of the investigation as new evidence comes to light.

Floyd Wickham

Scene Type: Core/Hazard

Core Clue: The existence of the CKEGMC

Description: Wickham is the chief engineer on board Dead Rock Seven – and in the two-tier society of a mesion mine, that makes him king. He believes that he is the smartest and most experienced person in any room, and he has the



education to back up such grandiose beliefs in a dozen fields. He is an expert computer programmer, a well-read scholar, an explorer and a former Combine military officer. These days, his beard is more white than black and he has the pallor of someone who has spent far too long underground, but he is still a commanding presence.

For the last six years, Wickham has worked for the Cronstedt Consortium. The consortium is based in the Combine Proper, far away from the Bleed, so in addition to his work as an engineer, Wickham had to represent the Consortium and manage their business and legal affairs. He believes that the Consortium's success in the Bleed is entirely down to his hard work and genius, and that the board of management back in the Proper have repeatedly failed to acknowledge or suitably recompense him. As far as he is concerned, stealing the collectors from the consortium is just taking what he is owed.

He dominates the other engineers through sheer force of will. His closest friend on board is **Tck-ilk**; both **Lonzo** and **Jo Dawn** look up to him as a mentor, while **Clerk Huang** is terrified of crossing him. He treats the workforce like disposable labour robots, and refers to them as 'rock monkeys' or 'oxygen sinks'.

Through Canary, Wickham found out about Jo Dawn's criminal connections, and is blackmailing her to keep quiet about the Krao. See **Jo Dawn**, page 47.

He is not a hardened criminal. If there is no alternative, he will risk attacking the lasers instead of going to jail, but he prefers to use Tck-ilk when there is violence to be done.

Wickham is the mastermind that the players must outwit in this scenario. He is a reactive antagonist instead of an active one. Keep him in the background watching the players via Canary at all times, and have him take steps to divert their attention away from him whenever the opportunity arises.

Roleplaying Tips: Be loud and bombastic, even regal. Treat the lasers as well-meaning but a bit misguided. Give your opinion about everything.

Activities & Duties: Wickham is overseeing the whole de-commissioning project, so he can be anywhere on the habitat module and the asteroid mine. He spends a lot of time monitoring different work groups via Canary.

Goals:

- ▶ Keep the characters from learning about his theft of equipment and the existence of the krao
- ▶ If the characters do uncover evidence of wrongdoing, then try to sabotage their investigation or cut a deal with them
- ▶ Prove himself smarter than the lasers.

Interviewing Wickham: The chief engineer tries to avoid speaking with the lasers as much as possible, claiming that his duties are far too time-consuming for him to be at their beck and call. He tries to fob them off on Jo Dawn and Clerk Huang whenever he can without arousing suspicion.

- ▶ **Initial Story:** Wickham claims that Gero Lonzo was largely responsible for her own demise. He was concerned about her lax attitude to safety, and shows the characters several private incident reports in support of this. (A one-point **Bureaucracy** spend lets the character realize that it would be possible for Wickham to fake these reports.) He appreciates that the Consortium has to investigate any fatal accidents thoroughly, and offers to help the lasers in any way he can that doesn't interfere with his very busy schedule.
- ▶ **Proof of Murder:** Once the characters know that Lonzo was murdered, Wickham tries to convince them that there must be a CGEGMC loose on the mine. He also suggests that one or more of the workforce may be aiding the monster – how else could it have gotten onto the habitat module? He cautions them against calling in the Combine, saying that the Consortium would prefer for the matter to be handled internally. **Bullshit Detector** is flagged by this; Wickham has his own reasons for wanting the Combine kept off Dead Rock Seven, but seeing as contacting the Cronstedt Consortium would take more time than they have available, the characters are stuck with a choice of agreeing with Wickham or calling in the Combine themselves.
- ▶ **Proof of Conspiracy:** If the characters find out about the krao, then Wickham blames Jo Dawn and Lonzo for not letting him kill the creature. He offers the characters a share in the payoff if they walk away from the case now.
- ▶ In general, **Respect** and **Flattery** spends elicit more information from Wickham.
- ▶ Wickham programmed Canary and monitors the characters' inquiries and investigations. He is smart enough to play on their suspicions, and may alter records or plant clues to divert the characters.

Floyd Wickham

Abilities: Athletics 10, Health 10, Preparedness 8, Scuffling 7, Shooting 6.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Pick handle +1

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1

Hit Threshold: 4

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, (cybernetics) Dataloader

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: -1

Savvy Modifier: +1

Jo Dawn

Scene Type: Core/Subplot

Core Clue: The Existence of the Krao

Description: Jo is a pretty young engineer at the start of her career. Normally, she speaks in a very clipped, technical fashion, but when excited or angry, she swears like a sailor with a dictionary of scatology.

She comes from the nearby planet of Pactyas, as do the majority of the workforce. Pactyas is a corrupt and lawless world. The government collapsed during the Mohilar War, and a succession of military juntas have ruled since then. The slums of Pactyas are notoriously dangerous, and Jo is the only member of her family to go to college. She represents their only hope of making it off Pactyas and finding a better life elsewhere, and she sends most of her salary back home every month.

To pay for her education, her family borrowed money from the Pactyas organized crime syndicate, the Jaosentis. If she fails to pay the crippling interest on this debt, her family will be murdered. She agreed to go along with Wickham's plan in order to pay off the debt early; when she had second thoughts, Wickham threatened to reveal her criminal connections to the Consortium.

Her younger brother **Sam Dawn** (page 53) is among the workforce. The social divide between engineers and workers



means that the rest of the workers mistrust and despise Jo, and when Sam spoke up in her defense, he was ostracized. The rest of the crew think he is a snitch and a spy for Wickham.

Roleplaying Tips: Jo tries to hide her nervousness under a professional demeanor. She is terrified of being found out by the lasers – if she is arrested, she loses her job, her family can't make payments on the loan, and the Jaosentis will make an example of them all.

She responds with suspicion to any attempts to win her confidence. She grew up on the streets, and is used to kindness being an overture for manipulation. A character with **Downside** can pick up on this facet of her personality.



Activities & Duties: With Lonzo dead, Jo takes on her duties. She barely sleeps as she runs around the station disassembling key pieces of equipment, maintaining the habitat module, running the collectors to keep the krao alive, and being available to the player characters.

A character who spends six points of **Systems Design** or **Systems Repair** can give Jo a hand with duties. Practical help makes her much more willing to trust the character.

Goals:

- ▶ Protect her family, including her brother Sam
- ▶ Keep her job or complete the theft of equipment
- ▶ Relieve the suffering of the Krao, if possible

Interviewing Jo: She answers any technical questions as accurately as possible. Jo does not know that Lonzo was killed by the krao.

- ▶ **Initial Story:** The last time Jo saw Gera was when she loaned her a documentary disc about Captain Grant. Jo was shocked and saddened to hear of Lonzo's death. Gera was her closest friend on the station, and she was always so conscientious about safety.

THE JAOSSENTIS

The shadowy Jaosentis are a criminal organization based on Pactyas. A character with **Human History**, **Downside**, **Law** or **Anthropology** knows the following facts:

- ▶ The Jaosentis were the ruling gang on the chaotic world of Pactyas.
- ▶ They were eclipsed a few years ago by another gang, the Jaoraun.
- ▶ Since then, the Jaosentis have diversified. They are slave traders, scavengers, loan sharks and weapons dealers.
- ▶ They take the long view – the Jaosentis are willing to make investments and plans that won't pay off for decades.
- ▶ While primarily human, there are a few kch-thk among the Jaosentis.

- ▶ **Proof of Murder:** Jo's first thought on learning that there may be a CKEGMC on board is to contact her brother Sam to make sure he is still alive. She becomes extremely agitated and worried; she demands that the players protect the workforce and hunt down the monster immediately. **Linguistics** picks up on the fact that she comes from the wrong side of the tracks. **Bullshit Detector** confirms that she had no idea that Lonzo's death was anything other than a tragic accident; a one-point **Bullshit Detector** or **Interrogation** spend lets the character know that a suspect (the krao) popped into Jo's head immediately. She will not reveal the existence of the krao at this time.

- ▶ **Proof of Conspiracy:** If the characters find proof that Jo was involved in the theft of equipment from the mine, they can use this to force a confession out of her.

A one-point **Intimidation** spend lets the characters threaten her into confessing. This is free if the characters mention her debts to the Pactyas crime syndicates.

A one-point **Reassurance** spend lets the characters offer a deal; if she confesses, they will shield her from the worst of the ensuing criminal proceedings. This is free if the characters have convinced **Sam Dawn** (see page 53) to aid them.

Finally, a one-point **Inspiration** spend convinces Jo to come clean. This is free if Jo knows that the krao killed Gero Lonzo, as Jo now feels that the death of her friend is indirectly her fault.

- ▶ Using **Intimidation** or **Flattery** on Jo is unlikely to have any results. A character who makes a 1-point **Downside** spend can pick up on subtle clues about her background; **Flattery** can then be used by praising her for lifting herself out of poverty. She may even let her association with the Jaosentis slip at this point.
- ▶ If a character is ever in position to see this (either through winning her confidence and then **Flirting**, or by working closely with her, or through surveillance), Jo has a small tattoo on the back of her shoulder. Anyone with **Downside** recognizes it as a Jaosentis mark of ownership. Jo is in debt to the mob, and the mark ensures that other criminals respect their property.

ASHEN STARS



Security Chief Rk-Khz

Scene Type: Core/Hazard

Core Clue: The cover-up

Description: As the kch-thk say, with a name like Rk-Khz he would have to be a cop. Rk-Khz served in law enforcement on Pactyas for nearly forty years before joining the Cronstedt Consortium. His long tenure among humans resulted in him picking up many human traits and foibles. He smokes the sweet-smelling twisted cigarettes popular on that planet, and his office in the habitat module is decorated with posters of the Pactyas Eagles sports team.

During his time as a cop, Rk-Khz had several run-ins with **Harry Skull** (page 53) and the two despise each other.

Rk-Khz was forced out of the Pactyas police force due to allegations of corruption – the police force gets purged every few months when a new military junta takes power. He met Wickham when he joined Cronstedt; the pair bonded over a mutual distrust of the workforce. Rk-Khz is instrumental in Wickham's plan to steal the collector equipment from the Consortium, as the kch-thk has the necessary criminal contacts to arrange the deal.

If the characters ask why an asteroid station in the middle of nowhere needs a security officer, Rk-Khz points out that someone has to keep the vermin – er, the workforce – in line.

Roleplaying: Rk-Khz tries to ingratiate himself with the lasers by drawing comparisons between their work and his. Being a security officer is just like being a laser; it's all about shooting bad guys and solving crimes. Play him like a doughnut-eating corrupt beat cop who happens to be a giant locust.

Activities & Duties: Rk-Khz's duties are keeping the workforce in line, which he does by virtue of having the biggest guns on Dead Rock Seven, and protecting the Consortium's property. Since he's busy stealing the latter, he has a lot of free time to spy on the lasers and cover up any evidence of corruption and theft.

The kch-thk doesn't have the subtlety of Wickham, so if the characters get close to uncovering the conspiracy, Rk-Khz tries to arrange an accident for them. See **A Nasty Accident** (page 58).

Goals:

- ▶ Keep the characters from learning about his theft of equipment and the existence of the krao
- ▶ If the characters do uncover evidence of wrongdoing, then try to sabotage their investigation or eliminate themselves
- ▶ Screw over Harry Skull if possible

Rk-Khz's Larva: The kch-thk has two gorkoja chambers. One tank is in his quarters on the habitat module, but the second one is hidden in a cave on the asteroid. This second tank is his emergency escape route if the characters close in on him – he can reincarnate there and hide. The second tank's hyper-nutrient bath has only enough material to regrow a single body, and that body will be stunted and weak in comparison to one born from a full-scale tank.

Interviewing Rk-Khz: The relationship between Rk-Khz and the lasers is like that between a local cop and the FBI; he is professionally obligated to help them, but they are on his turf.

- ▶ **Initial Story:** Rk-Khz gives the agreed-upon account of Lonzo's death – she was killed when the mining charge went off and cracked open the corridor ceiling.

If the characters confront him with the DNA evidence from the corridor, then Rk-Khz is insulted; of course he was in the corridor, he had to investigate the accident! **Bullshit Detector** is no use here unless the character using the ability is also a kch-thk, in which case the PC suspects Rk-Khz is lying.

If the characters found the knife that Rk-Khz planted, he identifies it as belonging to **Harry Skull**.

- ▶ **Proof of Murder:** Once the characters have confirmed that Lonzo was murdered, Rk-Khz tries to pin the blame on Harry Skull. The miner did have access to Junction Room 5, he had the know-how to use a mining charge, and there is the knife as a murder weapon.

Cop Talk gets Rk-Khz to describe his previous encounters with Harry Skull. Back on Pactyas, Skull was an enforcer for one of the smaller gangs, the Jaokull. Rk-Khz was part of the team who broke up the gang. A 1-point **Cop Talk** spend gets Rk-Khz to admit that the charges were based on phony evidence. They knew Skull was guilty, but they had to add some extra proof to make the charges stick.



- ▶ **Proof of Conspiracy:** Rk-Khz panics if the characters confront him with proof that he intends to steal from the Consortium. If Wickham is present, the security officer defers to him; otherwise he shoots himself and transfers to a new body.
- ▶ **Cop Talk** is the best method for dealing with Rk-Khz. If he thinks the characters are his buddies (or, as the kch-thk put it, his co-hatchings), he may let things slip.
- ▶ A 1-point **Downside** or **Cop Talk** spend gives the character the hunch that Rk-Khz is glossing over the reasons he left the Pactyas police. If the lasers check the official records with a one-point **Data Retrieval** spend, or contact Pactyas, they find that Rk-Khz was alleged to have connections to the Jaesentis organization.

Rk-Khz

Abilities: Athletics 10, Health 8, Migrate Consciousness 8, Scuffling 6, Shooting 10.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Pick Handle +1

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Rifle +1 with InsureShield

Hit Threshold: 4

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, Popper, Foiler

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: +0

Clerk Huang

Scene Type: Alternate

Description: Huang is a meek, middle-aged bureaucrat from the core worlds. The Consortium sent him out to the Bleed three years ago, in an attempt to placate Wickham. Huang handles the bureaucracy and administration that Wickham passes onto him. Part of this bureaucracy involves communicating with the workforce. Huang is effectively the face of management, which means the workforce hate him.

He never leaves the habitat module if he can avoid it, as he fears that he will be beaten or even killed if he goes down the wrong tunnel in the asteroid mine.

He only knows about the plot to steal equipment from the company. His role in this conspiracy is a minor one – he looks the other way when Wickham files fraudulent equipment loss reports. Wickham is paying Huang a share of the money, but he also bullied and browbeat the clerk into complying. He is unaware of the existence of the krao, and believes that Lonzo was murdered by the workforce. In Huang's mind, the workers are a mob of slaving beasts who are restrained only by Rk-Khz.

Roleplaying: Huang is just a crooked accountant. Keep your voice low and your shoulders slumped, and throw paranoid glances at the door whenever anyone mentions the workforce.

Activities & Duties: Paperwork and filing. The AI system does 99% of the administration work on the asteroid, and all Huang needs to do is rubber-stamp it and send it off to the Consortium. Nevertheless, he makes this job seem like the most onerous and difficult task imaginable, like Sisyphus' in-box. He is also the human resources manager for the mine, which involves him hiding from the workforce and communicating through holomessages only.

Goals:

- ▶ Protect himself
- ▶ Keep the characters from learning about his theft of equipment
- ▶ Get off the asteroid before anything happens to him

Interviewing Huang: The clerk keeps his answers short, and is obviously squirming to get away from the lasers. **Intimidation** and **Interrogation** work very well when extracting information from him. **Reassurance** calms him down when his fear of the workers overwhelms him.

- ▶ **Initial Story:** Huang is convinced that the workforce murdered Gera Lonzo. He has no evidence to support this other than his own fears, but he insists that Lonzo's death was no accident.
- ▶ If the characters check out the mine's records, **Forensic Accounting** lets the character spot a pattern. There have been an unusually high number of incidents that destroyed mining equipment, especially expensive components like collectors.

Geology lets the character map the incident reports. The reports use the zero-g mining industry standard notation for tunnels, which is extremely tricky for an outsider to understand, but the character has enough of an understanding to work out where the incidents took place relative to each other. All the incidents happened in one area of the mine, around Corridor 91-D. If the players check this out, they may find **the hidden mine shaft** (page 59).

- ▶ **Proof of a conspiracy:** Huang is the weak link in the conspiracy – if the characters find evidence of the theft of collector equipment, they can get him to confess. He has the least to lose from discovery. Harsh **interrogation** or **intimidation**, or **negotiation** to keep his name out of the report, makes him confess his involvement in the conspiracy. He implicates all the other engineering staff in the planned theft.

The Canary AI System

Scene Type: Core/Hazard

Description: The artificial intelligence monitors the systems throughout Dead Rock Seven. It runs the life support, the power grid, the collector arrays and the communications system. When the mine was in full operation, there was also a network of security holo-snails and sensors. Now, as Dead Rock Seven is decommissioned, Canary's reach diminishes every day. It now has a presence only in the area immediately around the habitat module.

The AI started as an off-the-shelf model, but Wickham has extensively rewritten its subroutines. In a whimsical moment, he also renamed it Canary (after the old practice of bringing a canary down a coal mine to check for poisonous gases) and rewrote its holographic avatar. Now, there are small yellow cartoon birds perched on projectors throughout Dead Rock Seven. He also tweaked the voice – by default, Canary speaks with a strong lisp (*'I thawth I thaw a thaser! I did! I did!'*). Unamused lasers can order the AI to speak using its original unaccented voice.

Canary is capable of carrying on basic conversations about the mine and its operations, but it is only a rudimentary AI and is not capable of complex or original thought.

Roleplaying: Behind the amusing voice and cute avatar, Canary is a computer program. It has no emotions or desires other than those it is programmed to display. Fall back on stock phrases whenever the conversation goes beyond

Canary's limitations, like *'I'm thorry, I don't know'* or *'that question ith not one I am desigthed to anthwer'* or *'requeuth beyond my capabilities – that's all folkth.'*

Canary is especially effective if the players suspect it of being behind the attacks. The contrast between their sinister suspicions of a killer AI and Canary's voice and appearance can be very amusing. (*'I'm thorry, Dave, but this converthation can therve no utheful purpose. Opening airlock doorth now.'*)

Activities & Duties: Canary monitors operations throughout the mine. It also runs the communications subsystems, so any external transmissions are monitored by the AI (the lasers can route transmissions through their ship to avoid detection).

Goals: Canary is programmed to protect the mine and its workers, and to report everything of significance to Floyd Wickham.

Interviewing Canary: The AI is capable of communicating verbally, but interpersonal abilities like **Bullshit Detector** or **Interrogation** are useless. **Data Retrieval** can be used, either as carefully-worded questions or computer search queries, but other abilities are then needed to interpret these clues. A kind GM may also ability point spends to compensate for missing abilities.

- ▶ **Data Retrieval/Kinetics/Decryption:** Canary has a limited number of security holo-snails at key junctions and corridors throughout the station, and a slightly larger number of sensors that track the ID codes of individual workers. According to the records retrieved with **Data Retrieval**, Engineer Lonzo went to corridor 43-C minutes before the explosion that officially 'killed' her. With **Kinetics**, the characters can work out that to get to 43-C, she would have had to pass through junction 8, which has a security holo-snail. Checking the records from that security holo-snail shows no sign of Lonzo within that time window – the records have been falsified. Finally, with **Decryption**, the character can analyse the records and find that they have been deliberately altered. According to the original records, Lonzo was last seen in Junction 5.
- ▶ **Data Retrieval/Energy Signatures/Industrial Design:** Using these abilities together lets the character find an anomalous energy drain. Something down in the mine is drawing slightly more power than it should from the collector array. It is hard to pin down, but it is somewhere around Corridor 91-D (**the hidden mine shaft**, page 59).



THE AMAZING FLOATING LASERS

While in the mines, the characters are in zero gravity. They can use magnetic boots to cling to a surface and walk normally, but they are still weightless. Characters with no points in **Naval Tactics**, **Helm Control**, **Battle Console** or **Shuttle Craft** are considered to have minimal experience in zero gravity, and so face a one-point levy to any **Athletics**, **Scuffling** or **Shooting** tests made in freefall. Moving in zero-gravity without using magnetic boots calls for **Athletics** checks.

The Workforce

Scene Type: Alternate

There are fifty-two miners still living and working on Dead Rock Seven. Virtually all of them come from the nearby world of Pactyas. Conditions for the miners are livable, but ghastly. Their living quarters are hewn out of the rocky interior of the asteroid, and have only the most rudimentary lighting and heating. There is no artificial gravity.

According to the terms of their contract, the workers get a sizable bonus if they stay on Dead Rock Seven until the mine is officially decommissioned. This clause is to ensure that the mines are properly shut down, instead of just being abandoned. Recently, mining companies started used all sorts of dirty tricks to get the miners to quit early, such as sabotaging water and food supplies, spreading rumors of toxins or infectious diseases, or planting agents among the workforce to spread dissent.

The miners on Dead Rock Seven are on the look-out for any sign that the Cronstedt Corporation is trying to force them out early and avoid paying their completion bonuses. With little work left to do, they spent their time spinning wild conspiracy theories. Initially, they suspect that Lonzo was actually sabotaging the demolition charges on behalf of the Consortium when she was killed. According to this theory, the consortium is deliberately making the mine unsafe in the hopes of forcing the miners out. Once the lasers arrive, the workforce assume that they're more Consortium stooges trying to intimidate them into leaving, and as soon as the rumor about Lonzo being killed by a CKEGMC comes into circulation, they assume that it's part of the same ploy.

- ▶ **Harry Skull** (page 53) is the elected representative of the miners. If the characters want to talk to the miners officially, they must go through him.
- ▶ **Forensic Psychology** lets the characters guess that the antipathy of the workforce towards the engineering staff is being deliberately whipped up.

Unless the characters can convince the workforce that they are not on the side of management, it is difficult to get any answers out of the miners. They can use **Inspiration** or **Flattery** to get the following information.

- ▶ The mine has had a lot of accidents and security alerts in the last few months. They suspect that the company is trying to intimidate them into leaving.



- ▶ **Wickham** uses the **Canary AI** to spy on the workforce. No-one trusts the computer – it sometimes gets things wrong. Like, it said there was a collector power coupling for pickup down in 88-A, but that corridor was completely empty.
- ▶ **Clerk Huang** is trying to avoid paying their completion bonus. That shifty bastard will try anything to get rid of them.
- ▶ The miners believe **Sam Dawn** (page 53) is a spy for management. He just might meet with a nasty accident one of these days.
- ▶ **Weird Tucker** (page 54) is equally unpopular. The general consensus is that he is one bad day away from smashing someone's skull open with a pickaxe.

Harry Skull

Scene Type: Subplot

Harry Skull is an ex-convict and former gang lord. Back on Pactyas, he was part of the Jaokull, a now-destroyed rival group to the Jaosentis. Rk-Khz had several run-ins with Harry back when he was a cop and Harry was a gangster, and the two despise each other.

When the workforce decided to elect a spokesman, Skull was the obvious choice. He has leadership experience, but more importantly, electing him really pissed off the kch-thk.

Harry gets his nickname from the garish tattoo on his right arm. The tattoo contains holoemitters and a speech chip, so it can move and talk. It has an extensive dictionary of insults, especially ones targeted at kch-thk. Skull himself never says anything directly threatening – he's just one of the workforce, and has no real power on Dead Rock Seven – but put an undercurrent of menace into everything you say. He fiercely defends the rights of the miners, especially their promised completion bonus (see *Conspiracy Theory*, page 57). He rules through populism, and is always looking for ways to stand up to the engineers, especially Rk-Khz and Wickham.

A Previous Encounter (Optional): If you wish, one of the PCs has encountered Harry Skull in the past, during Skull's time with the Jaokull. The PC hates or mistrusts Skull – let the player decide the circumstances under which the two encountered each other.

Skull's main role in the scenario is to push the lasers into antagonism with the workforce. It's important to let the players make this decision – never force them into thinking the

workforce are the bad guys, but make it an easy conclusion to jump to by keeping Skull as the face of the miners.

Skull's Knife: If the characters found Skull's knife at the accident site, he admits that it belonged to him, but claims that Rk-Khz confiscated it from him weeks ago. He suggests that the knife was planted in a clumsy attempt to frame him.

Interviewing Skull:

- ▶ The mine is poorly run. There have been a lot of accidents and problems.
- ▶ Rk-Khz was a crooked cop. The bastard goy Skull arrested on phony evidence.
- ▶ The miners aren't going anywhere until they get their completion bonus, no matter how the Consortium tries to intimidate them.

Abilities: Athletics 6, Health 8, Scuffling 9, Shooting 8.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Pick Handle +1

Hit Threshold: 3

Tech: Spacesuit

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: +1

Sam Dawn

Scene Type: Subplot

Sam is the brother of Jo Dawn; the family resemblance is obvious to anyone with **Anthropology**. He came to work on the mine to help pay Jo's debt to the Jaosentis, and to keep an eye on his bright young sister. Unfortunately, his connection with an engineer makes him unpopular among the miners, who suspect he's a spy for management. Sam has no friends in the workforce, and has been the subject of several beatings and sabotage attempts.

Jo confided in him, telling him about Wickham's plan to defraud the Consortium. She also hinted about the existence of the krao. Sam knows that Jo is smarter than he is, so he is willing to support her, but he fears she is taking a terrible risk by going along with Wickham.



When the lasers arrive, Sam decides that they are the best way to protect his sister without ruining her career. If the players need a hint, Sam can play a Deep Throat role. He might hint that they should investigate the collector arrays, or that there is more to the CKEGMC attacks than meets the eye.

If the players interrogate Sam directly with **Inspiration** to protect his sister, or **Intimidation** by suggesting that she's in more trouble if he doesn't co-operate, he spills what he knows. He admits that his sister is part of the conspiracy to steal collectors, but repeats over and over that she is in debt to the Jaocentis and that excuses her actions.

- ▶ The engineers have arranged to steal a number of collector units. The units are officially logged as destroyed in accidents, but they are really in a cave off Corridor 91-D.
- ▶ There's something living down at the end of Corridor 91-D. No-one knows what it is, but it's badly hurt.

Weird Tucker

Scene Type: Alternate

You only come to work on a mesion rock if you're poor, desperate or crazy; Tucker falls into all three categories. He was a highly skilled engineer before the war, but his mining ship was destroyed in a durugh attack and he spent weeks drifting in a spacesuit until he was rescued. Damaged by his ordeal, he has drifted from mine to mine since the Mohilar War; years spent in zero-g have atrophied his bones and bleached his skin a deathly pale. His straggly beard grows in a strange fractal pattern, as the individual hairs have never experienced the pull of gravity.

The krao is psychically entangled in Tucker's damaged psyche, giving him an empathic connection to the cryptic alien. He can tell that the creature is in pain, and that it needs to be fed. He also thinks it is a 'space angel', and that it feeds on souls. During the investigation, Tucker lurks on the sidelines, trying to summon up the courage to start sacrificing his fellow workers to the 'angel'.

Interrogating Tucker is largely a waste of time. **Flattery** gets him to babble on about the angel, but it is all nonsense. He claims that the angel has come to 'lay waste to the unworthy, and cast down the unrighteous, and smite the aliens', and that the Bogey Conundrum was caused by the Angel passing through Combine space. He mixes in some Restreamer theology to his rambling rants.

If the characters follow Tucker after the third attack, he leads the characters to Corridor 91-D, **the Hidden Mine Shaft** (page 59). Optionally, if the characters have failed to pick up on clues, he can also show them **The Murder Scene** (page 45).

Weird Tucker

Abilities: Athletics 6, Health 3, Scuffling 7

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Long Fingernails -1

Hit Threshold: 3

Tech: Spacesuit

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Savvy Modifier: -2

Skulking around the Mine

Scene Type: Alternate

Dead Rock Seven is a big place. There are dozens of kilometres of tunnels winding through the interior of the asteroid. Whatever mysteries the asteroid conceals are out there somewhere, and the lasers have to go after them.

The further the characters go from the habitat module, the more dangerous and unwelcoming the asteroid becomes. The tunnels near the module have lights, communications systems, and are a 'shirtsleeve environment' with heating and oxygen. Beyond this section, the tunnels are airless and lightless. Radio signals and locator beacons do not always work underground, and the mine-shafts all look identical, so it is very easy to become lost.

The following clues can be picked up by skulking around the mine. Each one costs a point of **Infiltration** to obtain. The first set of clues are all from the still-active part of the mine; the second set are from the uninhabited sections.

Wandering around the mine is dangerous. Depending on the characters' actions, they might run into angry miners (see **Conspiracy Theory**, page 57) or **A Nasty Accident** (page 58) or **The Fourth Attack** (page 57).

Inhabited Tunnels:

- ▶ The characters spot **Sam Dawn** meeting secretly with **Jo Dawn**. Jo wonders if 'it' (the krao, although she does not refer to it by name) could have something to do with Lonzo's death. She asks what to do; Sam tells her not to do anything, as it could jeopardize the deal with the Jaosentis.
- ▶ The characters overhear **Harry Skull** rallying the miners to stand firm in the face of the Consortium's clumsy attempts at intimidation.
- ▶ The characters see **Clerk Huang** and **Security Officer Rk-Khz** carrying a crate of collector components through the tunnels. This is suspicious, as neither of them are engineers. They leave the crate near an airlock at the edge of the inhabited zone.

Uninhabited Tunnels:

- ▶ The characters hear a shadowy figure scuttling through the darkened tunnels. If they follow the scuttling, they run across **Weird Tucker** (page 54). He is pressed against one wall of the tunnel, and is apparently having a one-sided conversation with thin air. He mutters about how he will 'serve the angel', how he will 'make them suffer', and other deranged ramblings.
- ▶ The characters find a live power cable attached to the wall of the corridor. This cable snakes through the tunnels before vanishing through a small borehole in the rock. The characters can return to the habitat module and obtain a map of the tunnels via Canary to find **The Hidden Mine Shaft** (page 59), or a character with the Skeletal Fluidity viroware upgrade can squeeze through the borehole.
- ▶ The characters come across a cache of a dozen crates of collector equipment in a an obscure side tunnel. If the characters check the records with **Data Retrieval** or **Forensic Accounting**, all this equipment is officially logged as destroyed in an accident.

The Collectors**Scene Type:** Core**Core Clue:** The Hidden Mine Shaft

The collector arrays run through the mine. A collector unit is a two-meter-long tube of powerful electromagnets and waveguides, and each array consists of hundreds of linked units. When active, the noise from the collector is deafening,

and it's dangerous to stand too close to a charged collector – they can rip the iron from your blood in an instant.

The collector arrays are powered and controlled from the habitat module. As this mine is a depleted Dead Rock, none of the collectors are currently active. The task of the workforce is to carefully disassemble the remaining arrays and stack them for retrieval by a Consortium mining ship.

- ▶ **Forensic Accounting:** There are hundreds of collector units in the mine, and they're each worth thousands of creds. That situation is ripe for theft.

A character with **Public Relations** realizes that this could be an excellent business opportunity. The lasers could consult on better security practice for the Cronstedt Corporation, earning extra kudos or a cash bonus.

- ▶ **Energy Signatures** or **Data Retrieval** via **Canary:** There is still a small trickle of power feeding into the collector arrays. This is definitely not the usual mode of operation – a collector should either be entirely offline, or else at full power sucking mesions out of the rockface. There is no valid mode of operation that's in-between these extreme.

Once the characters discover this, **Energy Signatures** lets them follow the active power cables down to **the Hidden Mine Shaft** (page 59).

A 1-point **Data Retrieval** spend when reviewing energy consumption notices that the power flow spikes whenever there is an attack.

The Second Attack**Scene Type:** Core**Core Clue:** The Cover-Up

The terrified Krao strikes again, and the victim of this second attack is Clerk Huang. The second attack occurs a few hours after the character arrive – the players should have had time to learn who's who on Dead Rock Seven, but before they can delve too deeply into the investigation. You can also use it to guide the player characters back onto the trail if they somehow missed the chain of clues leading to Lonzo's murder scene.

The characters are alerted to the attack by Canary, who reports that Clerk Huang appears to be in some distress. When the lasers arrive at Huang's quarters, Wickham is already there; Rk-Khz arrives soon after. The door is locked;



it can be blasted open with a disruptor, or a Difficulty 4 **Systems Repair** test lets the characters disable the locking mechanism.

Inside, the walls are splattered with blood. Huang has been ripped to pieces by a CKEGMC attack.

- ▶ There are no other exits except a very narrow air vent. The door was locked from the inside.
- ▶ **Kinetics:** It took him by surprise. Huang was bent over his computer console when the attacker grabbed him from behind. It then lifted him into the air and drove claws into his kidneys before pulling his abdomen apart. (Modify this description based on the CKEGMC, but be nicely gory – you want the players to feel like they're under assault.)
- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology:** The wounds are identical to those inflicted on Gera Lonzo.

A one-point **Forensic Anthropology** spend lets the character note that there is no foreign matter in the wound at all. Lonzo's body had been in a dusty environment, frozen and irradiated before it could be examined, but Huang's is fresh and so this clue can be obtained. There should be micro-fragments of the assailant's weapon in the corpse, or a few skin flakes, or at least some trace evidence, but there is nothing. The wounds are as clean as the incisions of a sterilizing surgical las-scalpel. (The CKEGMC was a psychic construct conjured by the krao; it looks like a living creature, but has no physical existence.)

- ▶ **Holo Surveillance:** There's a holo-snail in the room, but it was deliberately disabled before the attack. (This is a red herring – Huang disabled the holo-snail himself when forging paperwork to cover up the theft of collector parts, but the lasers may suspect that someone turned off the holo-snail as part of the murder.)
- ▶ **Forensic Accounting:** If a character cleans the gore off the computer monitor, he discovers that Huang was filing an accident report for a collapse in Corridor 92-A that destroyed sixteen collector units. There was no such accident, and he appears to have been in the process of forging the report.
- ▶ If the characters ask Canary to replay the conversation with Huang that alerted it to the attack, it does so. In the recording, Huang requests the serial numbers of sixteen collector modules that are

currently stored in Corridor 92-A. He is interrupted by the distinctive noise of a CKEGMC. Just before he is torn apart, Huang is heard to say 'I'm sorry-' (in his last moment, he realized that the CKEGMC must be a creation of the krao.)

With the discovery of Huang's death, it is clear that there is something very dangerous on Dead Rock Seven, and that it appears to be the CKEGMCs. Remind the characters of what happened the last time the Combine encountered the CKEGMCs – war, devastation, chaos and suffering, and that was with the Combine at full strength. If the CKEGMC return now, with the Combine still reeling from the Mohilar War, it could be the hammer-blow that shatters civilization.

Any character with **Law** or **Combine History** knows that the correct thing to do in this case, according to official protocol, is to inform Ossa One of the attack and let the Combine take over. Of course, that official protocol was written before the Mohilar War, and may no longer apply. Wickham will put pressure on the characters (via **A Nasty Accident**, page 58, or **Offer Them A Deal**, page 59) to ignore the protocol.

The assailant is apparently able to slip in and out of the habitat module without being detected. If the players do not think of it, remind the character with the highest **Holo Surveillance** that the mine once had a full network of security holo-snails, and that they could get these holo-snails out of storage and set them up around the habitat module and the upper mines.

The Third Attack

Scene Type: Core/Hazard

The third attack takes place in the upper mines. One of the workforce, an unfortunate miner by the name of Hafn, was stripping unused power cables of the walls when he was attacked and killed by the Krao.

If the characters have set up a surveillance network, then they can view the images of the attack afterwards. Otherwise, the attack happens near the characters, and they arrive just in time to see Hafn being ripped apart. The CKEGMC may then attack the characters briefly before fleeing – see **The Fourth Attack**, page 57, for details on fighting the Krao's psychic projections.



- ▶ Just before the attack, Hafn was arguing with **Weird Tucker** (page 54). The crazy miner tried to persuade Hafn not to remove the power cables. When Hafn ignored him, Tucker fled the area. A minute later, the CKEGMC appeared and attacked Hafn.
- ▶ The CKEGMC materialized out of thin air, as if teleporting in. Teleport technology is virtually unknown in the Combine – it is theoretically possible, and some rare alien races and relics appear to use it, but neither the Mohilar nor the Combine have any working teleporters.
- ▶ After attacking Hafn (and possibly a player character or two), the entity vanished just as strangely as it appeared.
- ▶ **Neurosight:** The creature had no aura of its own. It was a mindless puppet, controlled by a projected will.
- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** These power cables are supposed to be offline, but there is still power running through them – and there was a power spike just as the creature attacked. The characters can follow these power cables to **The Hidden Mine Shaft** (page 59).

The Fourth Attack

Scene Type: Hazard

The fourth attack happens either when the characters are approaching the hidden mine shaft, or if they are lingering too long in the mines when they should be pressing on with the investigation. Call for a **Sense Trouble** test at Difficulty 6; if the character succeeds, he feels an odd tingling before the CKEGMC manifests. (A character with **Vas Mal Culture** or **Neurosight** can identify that tingling sensation as a tangential psychic contact; the PC was just scanned by the krao.)

If the group was surprised, the monster appears right on top of a randomly chosen laser and attacks. If the group are not surprised, the CKEGMC manifests a short distance away and charges, so the characters can get off a single shot before it strikes.

If the players still have not worked out the relationship between the monster attacks and the power spikes, give this clue to the character with the highest **Energy Signatures** pool.

Conspiracy Theory

Scene Type: Hazard

If the miners believe the lasers are here to get them to leave Dead Rock Seven before the official decommissioning date (either by spreading rumors about the CKEGMCs, or by intimidating or threatening the miners), then they may attack the lasers. Ideally, they wait until the characters are **skulking around the mine** (page 54). A group of a half-dozen miners lurk in the shadows, armed with pickaxes and other mining tools. Unless the character succeeds at a Difficulty 5 **Sense Trouble** test, the character is surprised when one of the miners tackles him unexpectedly, knocking his magnetic boots off the floor.

The miners will not deliberately kill a laser; their goal is to intimidate and frighten the lasers. If defeated, the miners admit that Harry Skull told them that the lasers were there to force them to leave early, and suggested they take the lasers out first.

Disgruntled Miner

Abilities: Athletics 5, Health 3, Scuffling 4

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Pick Handle +1

Hit Threshold: 3

Tech: Spacesuit

Alertness Modifier: -1

Stealth Modifier: -1

Savvy Modifier: -1





Sabotaging The Investigation

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

Through Canary, Wickham is able to keep track of the laser's movements and investigation. He uses this to throw them off the scent by feeding them plausible but incorrect data. Listen to your players' speculations about what is really going on, and have Wickham take action to push the characters down blind alleyways. He can plant information in Canary's databases, or have Rk-Khz plant physical evidence. For example:

- ▶ If the lasers suspect the CKEGMC have a base deep in the mines, then Wickham can plant a report suggesting there is unusual seismic activity in an obscure corridor that is very far away from anywhere else (this is an excellent set-up for **A Nasty Accident** on page 58).
- ▶ If the characters are following up rumors about the Jaosentis, then Rk-Khz can subtly mention that Sam Dawn or Harry Skull have connections to that organisation. (Well, as subtly as a none-too-bright giant bug cop can be.) A confrontation with the miners can lead to **Conspiracy Theory** (page 57)
- ▶ If they suspect that the mesions are the key to the mystery, then Wickham suggests flying around looking for a previously unknown translight corridor entrance. Mesions are formed from the collapse of corridors – maybe the attackers are coming in from an undiscovered corridor that only partially collapsed? Optionally, the characters could skirmish with the Jaosentis ship (see page 62).

The lasers can uncover tampering in the computer databases with **Data Retrieval** spends. **Rk-Khz's** story is plausible enough on the surface, but a **Bullshit Detector** spend reveals that he is exaggerating the Dawns' connections to the gang. Wickham's theory about undiscovered corridors sounds phony to a character who makes an **Astronomy** spend.

A Nasty Accident

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

If the lasers continue to unravel the mystery of Dead Rock Seven, Wickham may risk eliminating them. He is not a killer, though, so if the player characters are at all amiable to corruption, he goes for **offering a deal** (page 59) instead. Wickham tries to eliminate the lasers by faking another industrial accident.

The lasers receive a report via Canary of another CKEGMC attack down in corridor 21-D, on the edge of the active part of the mine. At either end of the corridor is an airlock. The first airlock that the characters pass through is open; the one at the far end is sealed, as beyond that point there is no air on the asteroid. 21-D marks the end of the 'shirtsleeves' zone.

When the characters arrive, they spot what looks like a body slumped against the far airlock. It is actually a miner's spacesuit stuffed with rocks and explosive charges, but it looks convincing from a distance.

- ▶ A Difficulty 6 **Sense Trouble** test lets the characters realize that something is amiss.
- ▶ A **Neurosight** spend reveals that the 'body' has no aura.
- ▶ A **Kinetics** spend lets the character notice that the body is sitting very awkwardly. Either half the joints in its spine are smashed, or that's not a real corpse.
- ▶ A 1-point **Industrial Design** spend notices that there is a newly installed and functional security holo-snail in this corridor. 21-D is close to the wholly decommissioned sections of the mine; all the holo-snails in this zone were removed weeks ago.

If the characters examine the body, they find an explosive device inside the spacesuit. The bomb explodes unless the characters spends 3 points of **Explosive Devices** to identify a way to disarm it. Characters close to the bomb when it goes off suffer one die of damage with a +6 modifier.

The explosion breaches the airlock on the far side. Any character not wearing a spacesuit begins to suffocate as the air rushes out, and loses one Health point per round. Characters who were wearing suits, but who suffered damage in the explosion have ripped their suits and may asphyxiate.

The force of the explosion is also sufficient to send all the characters toppling and tumbling in zero gravity. All characters in the tunnel must make an **Athletics** test at Difficulty 6; those who fail end up floating in mid-air, while those who pass manage to grab onto the tunnel wall.

To survive, the characters need to get back to the airlock. Characters who have a hand-hold to push off can get to the airlock with a successful **Athletics** test at Difficulty 4; characters floating in mid-air without a means to propel themselves must make a test at Difficulty 6. Reduce the difficulty for players who come up with creative ways to propel themselves, such as using the recoil from a disruptor shot.

Opening the airlock requires a **Systems Repair** test at Difficulty 6.

After escaping Corridor 21-D, the characters can repair their suits and return to investigate the bomb.

- ▶ **Explosive Devices:** The bomb uses the same sort of explosive charges and set-up as the bomb in the corridor where Gera Lonzo 'died'.
- ▶ **Evidence Collection:** There are scratches and bumps on the metal of the far airlock, suggesting that someone was moving bulky equipment down this corridor in the past. Following the tunnels beyond for some distance brings the characters to **The Hidden Mine Shaft** (page 59).

Offering A Deal

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

If there is no obvious way to stop the lasers from uncovering his theft of equipment, then Floyd Wickham decides his best change to appeal to their greed. He contacts the most suitable (i.e. the most corrupt and bribable) laser and explains the situation, emphasizing how the Consortium mistreated him in the past and how this plan hurts no-one except a bunch of rich executives back in the Proper.

Wickham offers the characters their basic fee again if they

- ▶ Report back to the Consortium that everything is fine on Dead Rock Seven
- ▶ Don't mention the possibility of a CKEGMC to anyone outside Dead Rock Seven
- ▶ look the other way while Wickham and his associates sell the stolen collector units to the Jaosentis
- ▶ Help him deal with the krao. He has a plan for killing it – the collectors that are keeping it on life support can be reconfigured to destroy it, but to do so, someone has to make the modifications in the krao's lair, and the creature obviously no longer trusts the engineers. The lasers are the only people who have a chance of surviving down there.

The Hidden Mine Shaft

Scene Type: Core/Hazard

Core Clue: The Krao

Eventually, the lasers find the secret shaft at the heart of the mystery. Corridor 91-D is a black well that goes straight 'down' from the perspective of the surrounding passageways. The only light source is a line of active collector units strung together along the wall. These collectors beam a very limited trickle of power into the krao in the cavern below, keeping the creature alive.

As the characters descend into the darkness, they encounter several strange things.

The Touch of the Krao: All the characters feel an eerie tingling sensation in their brains, as if something is crawling around the inside of their skulls. **Vas Mal Culture** identifies this as a telepathic contact. The Krao has scented them and is learning about them.

The Side Tunnel: Half-way down Corridor 91-D is a short side branch. This tunnel is stacked floor to ceiling with collector units. There are hundreds of units here, representing a fortune of credits. This is the cache of stolen equipment that Wickham intends to sell to the Jaosentis.

The First Horror: Past the side branch, the characters encounter the krao's first attempt to drive them away. The characters are attacked by another CKEGMC, as per **The Fourth Attack** (page 57). If the lasers have enough firepower to easily deal with a single entity, then add more monsters.

The Second Horror: It creates a psychic projection of the worst horror that one of the lasers can conceive. For example, if one of the characters has a phobia of fire, then the krao fills the shaft with a wall of flame. If a character suffered horrible injuries in a starship crash, then the lasers see an out-of-control starship careening down the shaft.

The projection is a psychic construct, but it is real enough to kill. Depending on the nature of the horror, which the GM should customize to the lasers' personalities, the characters may sustain one or more dice of damage getting past this obstacle.



The Krao

Scene Type: Conclusion

In an instant lasting billions of years, the krao stepped timelessly between points in our reality, skimming the surface of the universe. The krao's existence was incomprehensible to us, a ballet of possibility across the skein of matter, gravity and energy. Then it accidentally entangled itself in a collector unit. The collector's electromagnetic pulse caught the krao's hyperplasmoid skeleton and warped it. The krao is crippled and unable to leave this reality.

The engineers who discovered the krao discovered a way to keep it alive by feeding it power. This was not entirely an act of mercy – the krao's agonized throes could have damaged the stolen collectors. Wickham intended to keep the creature alive for a few weeks, then slowly shut the life support feed down and let the krao die. However, the krao sensed that the engineers intended to abandon it and leave it perish, and it panicked. It lashed out and killed Gera Lonzo.

The krao has a **Psychic Vitality** of 10. It costs the creature 1 point to create a projection or psionic effect, and it regains 1 Psychic Vitality if fed energy from the collectors.

Perceiving the Krao: The krao is almost invisible to the naked eye – normally, it cannot be seen, but its form is outlined by glowing ionized trace gases when it moves. It can also be seen using a tether. It looks something like a huge sea-spider.

Communicating with the Krao: The krao communicates by dragging images and memories out of the minds of those nearby, and then creates psychic constructs based on those images. It might speak to one laser through a construct of his dead wife, or explain what it is by conjuring the image of a laser's favorite teacher and mentor.

Initially, the Krao is terrified of the lasers. **Reassurance** allows the characters to get closer to the injured entity and examine it; repeated **Reassurance** spends are needed when:

- ▶ The characters suggest (or think) that the krao is going to die
- ▶ The characters suggest leaving
- ▶ Wickham and the other engineers are mentioned.

If **Reassurance** is not given, the krao panics and conjures another hostile construct, like a CKEGMC.

Through its constructs, the krao describes how it came to be trapped here. It feared death, but the engineers saved it. Now, they want to leave, and it cannot allow that. It does not want to be alone.

Examining the Krao:

- ▶ **Zoology:** A character with **Zoology** remembers a scientific paper discussing the possibility of 'hyperplasmoids' – creatures that exist in the same unreal dimension as warp corridors. If the thing at the bottom of the shaft is such a creature, then it may be possible to adjust the collector array to blast it with a pulse that would dissipate it.

A 2-point **Energy Signatures** spend lets the character work out how to create such a pulse. Alternatively, Floyd Wickham may have informed the characters how to do just that (see *Creating a Lethal Pulse*, opposite).

- ▶ **Forensic Psychology:** The creature is confused and terrified. It does not seem to be truly intelligent – it is more like a wounded animal than anything else. Furthermore, it needs more than power to keep it alive, it also needs companionship. Just feeding the krao power from a battery won't work. It needs the presence of other minds to sustain itself.

- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** Based on the entity's energy emissions, it is only barely being kept alive by the power feed from the collector array. If this feed was shut down, the krao would perish and fade away in a few hours – less, if the creature exhausted its reserves by creating more psychic constructs.

A one-point **Medic** spend confirms that there is no known way to save the wounded krao. It can be kept alive indefinitely, but it will never move again.

- ▶ **Vas Mal Culture:** The Vas Mal vaguely remember such creatures from when they too were energy beings. The krao were somehow associated with the Vas Kra, although whether they were allies, pets, tools or even part of the Vas Kra is a mystery.

The Collector Array: Near the entrance to the central cavern is a control unit for the collector array. Currently, the array is running at a very low power, and is emitting an electromagnetic beam down the shaft instead of sucking mesions out of the rock.

The characters can alter the collector array from this console, either to shut it down or create a lethal pulse. See **Death & The Krao**, below.

Confronting the Engineers: Having discovered the krao, the characters may wish to confront Wickham and his fellow conspirators. The engineers try to justify their actions by claiming that the krao's injury was an accident, and they tried to make it right by keeping the creature alive. **Bullshit Detector** picks up on hidden guilt, and **Energy Signatures** lets a character speculate that the concentration of collector units in Wickham's cache of stolen goods was probably responsible for entangling the krao in the first place.

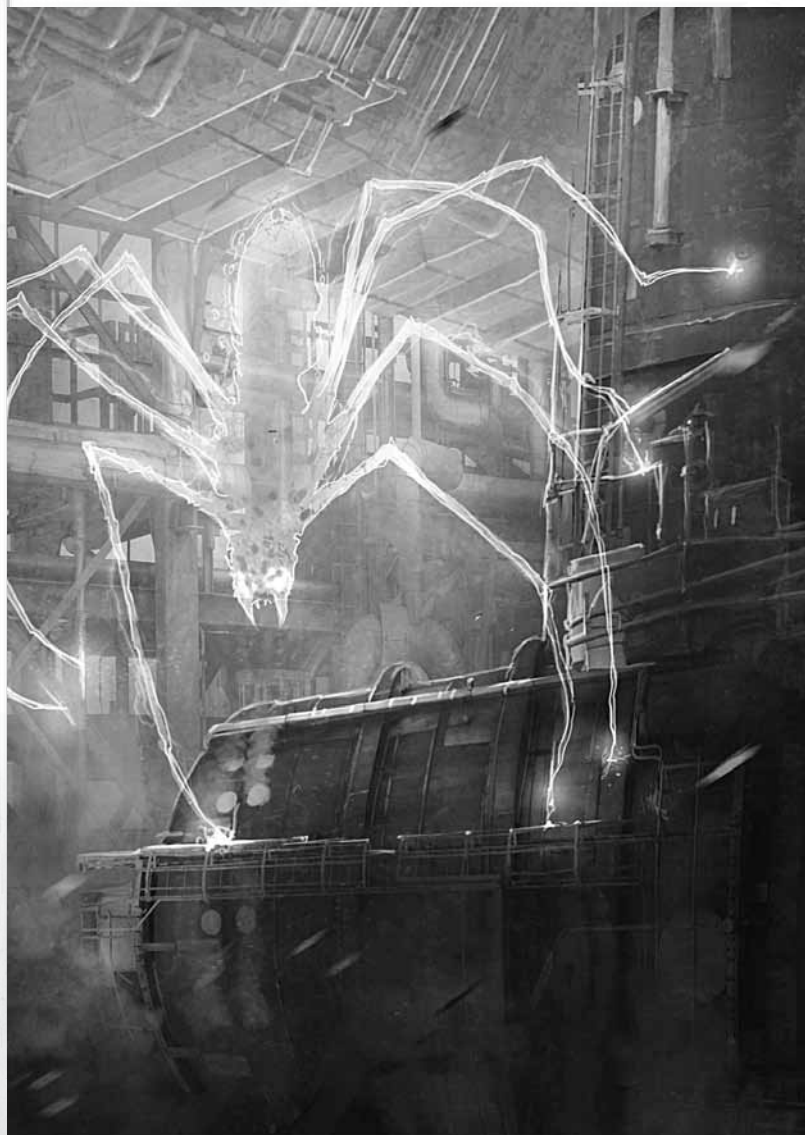
Of the surviving engineers, Wickham and Rk-Khz favor reconfiguring the arrays to destroy the krao, while a guilt-ridden Jo Dawn thinks they should stay and keep the krao alive indefinitely. She volunteers to stay, but her brother points out that the Jaosentis will kill their family if she does not keep paying back her debt, and Cronstedt are not going to pay her to sit on a dead rock holding the psychic tendril of a dying alien

Death & The Krao: The lasers must decide what is to be done with the krao. There are three obvious options – kill it quickly with a lethal pulse, let it die slowly by shutting down the power supply, or keep it alive indefinitely.

- ▶ **Creating a lethal pulse:** This requires a contest of **Systems Design** against the krao's **Psychic Vitality**. The krao will fight back by conjuring horrors like CKEGMCs or other monsters from the lasers' memories. The characters must defend those making **Systems Designs** tests from the krao's attacks. They can fight back either with violence (blasting the conjured creatures with **Shooting**) or by deceiving the krao with **Reassurance**. When the pulse is fired, the krao dies in a scream of psychic agony that can be felt all through Dead Rock Seven. For months afterwards, everyone who was on the asteroid suffers from terrible nightmares and a feeling of hollowness, as if some part of them died with the krao. The lingering psychic taint makes other feel nervous and mistrustful towards the characters, reducing their Reputation.
- ▶ **Shutting down the Power Feed:** This can be done with the flick of a switch. The krao immediately panics and starts conjuring creatures to attack the lasers and everyone else on Dead Rock Seven until the power is switched back on. The characters can either provoke the krao into exhausting itself by destroying its constructs and forcing it to create more, or convince it to die peacefully through roleplaying coupled with plenty of **Reassurance** and **Inspiration** spends. If they take the violent option, then assume that each construct conjured takes a point of **Psychic Vitality**

from the krao. If they try roleplaying, then tug the characters' heartstrings with psychic constructs of dying loved ones.

- ▶ **Keep it alive:** Someone has to stay on the asteroid to keep the krao company, and that means an ongoing expense of 5 bigcreds upkeep per month indefinitely. The lasers can take on this expense themselves, or else find some other group to do so. They could contact a research institution, who would pay to study the krao, or try to convince Cronstedt to cover the bills. As for companions, **Weird Tucker** (page 54) is willing to stay, if the characters are willing to trust the psychic care of the krao to a madman. **Jo Dawn** is a better choice, if the characters can protect her family from the Jaosentis. Vengeful players may demand that Floyd Wickham be condemned to a lifetime of imprisonment with the creature he mortally wounded.





Wrapping Up

Scene Type: Aftermath

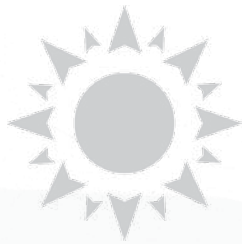
Once the characters have resolved the fate of the krao, the decommissioning of Dead Rock Seven goes smoothly, and the characters complete their basic contract.

If they discovered the plot to steal collector units, and arrested the culprits on behalf of Cronstedt, this is worth a basic bonus.

Depending on the fate of the krao, the characters may be able to use **Public Relations** to turn their discovery of a new alien species into good advertising for the group.

FOLLOW-ON INVESTIGATIONS

- ▶ Jo and Sam Dawn could hire the characters to help them escape the Jaosentis.
- ▶ If the krao was a pet, who owned it before it got caught in the collectors?
- ▶ If the characters impress their employers, they could be offered Wickham's job as the Consortium's overseers in the Bleed, and get sent to troubleshoot other problematic mines.



The Jaosentis Arrive

Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

This scene happens only if the lasers took Wickham up on his offer of a bribe, and agreed to look the other way while he sold the collector units to the Jaosentis.

A day after Dead Rock Seven is officially decommissioned, the only people left on board the asteroid are the engineers and the lasers. A starship drops out of FTL close to the asteroid and contacts Wickham. The Jaosentis have arrived to pick up their goods.

Unfortunately for Wickham, they're paranoid. The Jaosentis ship scans the surface of Dead Rock Seven and detects the lasers' vessel. They assume that Wickham has betrayed them, and open fire. Their initial barrage damages the habitat module. To survive, the lasers must flee to their own ship immediately and engage the Jaosentis vessel. Most of the delicate collector modules are destroyed in the crossfire.

	Dishing It (Modifier Applies On showdown Win)	Taking It (Modifier Applies On showdown Loss)
Fire	2	-1
Maneuver	0	-1
Override	0	1
Trickbag	0	1

Output 10

Condition 1

Upgrades: Synchron Charger (pay 5 Output to ignore Egging It penalties)

Crew Skills: Battle Console 8, Communications Override 4, Helm Control 8, Naval Tactics 4



PERIOD OF TYRANNY

A terrorist attack on a passenger liner draws the lasers into the tumultuous politics of the synthculture of Pioneer, where the darkest period of Earth history is repeating itself.

The Contract

The lasers receive a distress call from a passenger liner, the *Beatrix*. When they arrive, the ship is a derelict, a floating crime scene with only a handful of survivors. The distress call contained a standard vengeance clause, employing the lasers to investigate the disaster and bring those responsible to justice.

The Twist

The *Beatrix* was carrying a group of influential Combinists, making Bleedist terrorists the obvious (and correct) suspects. Tracing the bomber across space, the characters come to Pioneer, originally a synthculture world dedicated to recreating the early days of human colonisation, when the species took its first steps outside the solar system. Now, a dictatorship modelled on the tyrannical McMillenist government has taken power on Pioneer, turning the once-benign synthculture into a fascist world with a rapidly growing military. The McMillenists are planning to ally themselves with extremist Bleedists to ensure the Combine doesn't come back and force them to abandon their alarming authoritarian ways.

The Backstory

The bombing of the *Beatrix* was committed by **Denna Bonner**, a fanatical Bleedist. After destroying the liner, she travelled to Pioneer to attend a meeting of Bleedist activists organized by **Fina Rossi**, the head of the secret police. Rossi is the mastermind of the proposed alliance between the fascist government of Pioneer and the Bleedists.

Representatives of several different Bleedist groups have also arrived at Pioneer to negotiate; some are in favor of the alliance, others are repelled by the oppressive regime. The lasers' investigation into the destruction of the *Beatrix* may tip the balance of the negotiations.

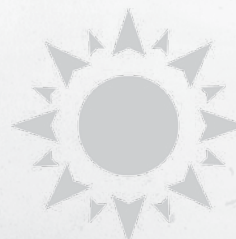
To throw any investigators off her trail, Bonner used the identity of a Bleedist rival of hers, **Willa Lewis**; she hopes that the lasers will arrest Lewis for the bombing instead of the actual culprit.

The Investigation

After responding to **The Distress Call** (page 65), the characters must **Rescue The Survivors** (page 66). Through **Investigating the Disaster** (page 67) and **Questioning the Survivors** (page 68), they find a trail leading to **Pioneer** (page 69). **Landing at Pioneer** (page 70) proves to be a problem.

After that, in **Pioneer Investigations** (page 72) the characters follow several lines of inquiry. They can **trace the shuttle** (page 74), find a **weapons dealer** (page 76), get access to **Secret Police Files** (page 79) or follow the bomber into **The Pioneer Underworld** (page 75). All these lead them to **The Bleedist Conclave** (page 83).

There, the characters **infiltrate the conclave** (page 82) or **spy on the delegates** (page 86). They must also deal with the **Secret Police** (page 77). Finally, they must **identify the bomber** (page 90).





Complications

- ▶ The rescued passengers may wander off and cause trouble (**Don't Wander Off**, page 73).
- ▶ Pioneer has become a **Fascist State** (page 73), so alien player characters face discrimination and hostility.
- ▶ The only resistance to the new government is a group of **Restreamers** (page 81), who can be useful allies for the lasers.
- ▶ If the characters' investigations are noticed by the government, they may be declared **enemies of the state** (page 80).
- ▶ Politically-minded characters may participate in the conclave, dealing with **Bleedist Politics** (page 85).

The Choice

The corruption of the Pioneer government and its slide towards fascism is beyond the scope of the lasers' contract – all they have to do is get in, find the killer, and get out. However, they do have the opportunity to affect the course of Bleedist politics. Which side are the characters on?

Running the Investigation

Keep the politics of the situation in the foreground at all times. The players have to balance their investigation into the bombing with their relationship to the fascist Pioneer government and the Bleedist/Combinist debate. Make them consider the ramifications of their actions.



SCENES

The Distress Call

Scene Type: Intro

The characters are between assignments when they receive an automated distress call from a nearby vessel. The *Beatrix*, a passenger liner travelling between Knossos and Triptolemus, has suffered an internal explosion and requires immediate assistance. The signal carries sideband data on the ship, which a character with **Decryption** can access:

- ▶ She has a crew of 12 and was carrying 80 passengers.
- ▶ The ship's bridge and translight drive are both destroyed.
- ▶ She is venting atmosphere, and the hull is breaking up. The *Beatrix* can't last much longer.

The sideband data also includes what lasers call an SVC, a 'Standard Vengeance Clause'. This is a bond placed by the ship owners in a special account. If the ship is attacked, this bond is paid to any organisation or individual who successfully brings the attackers to justice. SVCs are a controversial way of dissuading piracy, as they encourage vigilantism. The bond will be paid if the characters determine what happened to the *Beatrix* and arrest those responsible. The bond is worth a standard payment for the laser crew.

Getting to the *Beatrix*: The damaged ship is only a short FTL hop away from the characters' current location. Translight corridors are tricky things, though – if you take the wrong 'exit ramp' back into real space, you appear hundreds of thousands of kilometres away from where you want to be. A good navigator can minimise deviation, and a fast ship can obviously get the characters there faster. Points spent from the following pools can get the characters to the *Beatrix* more quickly.

- ▶ **Astronomy:** Each point of **Astronomy** to plot a better course is worth three points.
- ▶ **Helm Control:** The character whips the ship through the twisting translight corridors, looking for the exit point closest to the crippled *Beatrix*.
- ▶ **Output:** Pushing the ship's engines to the red line.

Look up the total number of points spent by the characters on the table below.

Points Spent	Condition of the Wreck
0 to 4	Destroyed. There are no survivors.
5 to 8	Falling apart. The characters have no choice but to rush on board to rescue the passengers, instead of taking a more cautious approach.
9 or more	Severely damaged, but still has some structural integrity.

The *Beatrix*: The liner is a hideous sight to any space traveller. She hangs lifelessly in space, venting atmosphere from a dozen ghastly rifts in her hull. Every meter of the ship's exterior shows signs of scarring and burning, with most of the damage concentrated around the engineering section. Droplets of molten metal orbit around the ruined vessel.

- ▶ One of the ship's lifeboats is missing, but the rest are still in their cradles. A maximum of six people could have made it off the ship.
- ▶ The ship is severely damaged and is about to collapse (or has already broken up, if the characters spent less than 5 points to get there in time).
- ▶ **Bio Signatures:** There is only one section of the ship that still shows signs of life – it appears to be a kitchen in the middle of the passenger decks. Bulkhead doors have sealed that section off from the rest, keeping the atmosphere in.

1-point **Bio Signatures** spend: The character can resolve the life signs into three distinct images; there are three adult humans still alive on board the *Beatrix*. All three appear uninjured.

- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** There is a lot of electromagnetic interference and meson shrapnel hanging around the wreck, but the computer systems may be salvagable.

1-point **Energy Signatures** spend: There is a functional communications system in the kitchen. The characters can tap into this system to contact the survivors.

- ▶ **Explosive Devices:** Whatever struck the *Beatrix* was not a conventional explosive. The damage was from the outside in, not the inside out. However, it wasn't attacked using directed-energy weapons or projectiles, as the damage is too uniform. It's something like a very intense neutronic fusillade, but much more destructive. More investigation is needed to determine the cause of the wreck.



- ▶ **Forensic Engineering:** The character can ascertain the current state of the hull (destroyed/falling apart/severely damaged) and how long the characters have to rescue the survivors (it's too late/no margin for error/time to find the best solution).

If the *Beatrix* has not fallen apart, then a two-point **Industrial Design** spend lets the character identify the weak points of the hull. Patching these damaged sections with a Difficulty 6 **Systems Repair** roll can slow the ship's break-up, giving the characters more time to rescue the survivors.

Rescuing the Survivors

Scene Type: Hazard

The survivors are trapped in a kitchen at the centre of the ship. Depending on how long the characters took to get here, they have several options for rescuing them. The first two routes are always available, but the third option can only be used if the ship is only severely damaged.

- ▶ Cutting a hole (quick but very dangerous)
- ▶ Going in through the engineering section (Dangerous)
- ▶ Going in through the passenger decks (Slow but safe)

Cutting a hole: The fastest, but riskiest option is for the lasers to use their ship's weapons to cut an access shaft through the exterior hull right above the kitchen. This means that the characters can just climb into the corridor outside the kitchen. However, if the characters' weapon calibrations are off by even a fraction, they'll fry the people they are supposed to be rescuing.

To cut the hole accurately, the gunner must make a **Battle Console** test at difficulty 6. If the test fails, the character has damaged the integrity of the sealed area and it is leaking atmosphere. The characters need to come up with a way of quickly rescuing the trapped victims before they run out of air.

If the test is successful, then the lasers have successfully cut a hole down to the corridor outside the kitchen and can rescue the survivors.

Through the engineering sections: The shortest route to the kitchen is via the engineering section, but that is the part of the ship that suffered the most damage. The lasers have to make their way through collapsing decks, artificial gravity bubbles, arcs of electricity, clouds of toxic coolant and sheets of hard radiation from the damaged engines. En route to the kitchen, the characters face several such hazards, each requiring a test to overcome.

- ▶ Sealed Blast Door, requiring a Difficulty 6 **Systems Repair** roll to open.
- ▶ A short circuit sends electricity arcing through the corridor. **Athletics**, Difficulty 6 to dodge or **Systems Repair**, difficulty 6 to deactivate. If failed, the characters each suffer 1d6 damage.
- ▶ Part of the decking collapses *upwards* as the ship's gravity generators buckle and warp. Call for an **Athletics** bid contest; the character who bids the least suffers 1d6 damage and is flung out of the *Beatrix* and is left floating helplessly in space until he can be retrieved (unless he has some way of propelling himself in zero gravity, or has a safety line).
- ▶ The corridor ahead is flooded with radiation. Anyone passing through it takes 1d6+2 damage; a character who searches can find a small access crawlway with a successful **Infiltration** test at **Difficulty 6**. Taking the crawlway means the characters suffer only 1d6-2 damage each. Only one search for the crawlway may be attempted.

Through the passenger decks: The route through the passenger decks is long and harrowing. There are dead bodies everywhere – whatever killed this ship happened suddenly and unexpectedly. **Kinetics** shows that the victims were heading to the escape pods; if the characters check the pods, they find them crammed with asphyxiated bodies. **Forensic Engineering** notes that the pods were deliberately sabotaged.

The one hazard when crossing through the passenger decks is a shipquake – one of the forward spars of the *Beatrix* breaks off, causing a tremor to run through the ship. All characters must make **Sense Trouble** tests at Difficulty 6; those who fail take 1d6+2 damage as debris rains down upon them.


 ASHEN STARS

The Passengers: The kitchen complex has no airlock, but the lasers can access the intercom and tell the survivors to take shelter in one of the storage lockers while the lasers enter; doing this only vents part of the air, and the characters can bundle the survivors into spacesuits easily enough. The three survivors are:

- ▶ **Jeff Porter:** A corporate executive and investor in his mid-sixties. Porter is used to the finer things in life, and was shocked when his luxury cruise turned into a death-trap. He will do anything to survive; when the lasers arrived, he was busy looking for a bludgeon and working out which of the other two survivors was consuming the most oxygen. .
- ▶ **Deerd Larmon:** She is a would-be singer in her early twenties. She is Porter's trophy girlfriend; he found her singing in a bar in a spaceport and took her away, promising to show her the core worlds. She is poorly educated and unworldly, but isn't stupid. She realized that the kitchen area was probably fireproofed and therefore airtight, and so saved Jeff's life by dragging him in here.
- ▶ **Hector Jinks:** He is one of the ship's waitstaff... or, as he introduces himself, 'acting captain Hector Jinks'. Poor Hector is trying to take charge of the situation and save the passengers, but he only joined the crew a week ago and doesn't even know his way around the ship. He has a head injury and a mild concussion.

Once the ship is secure or everyone has escaped back to the lasers' ship, the characters can **Question the Survivors** (page 68).

Investigating the Disaster

Scene Type: Core

Core Clues: Nature of the attack; identity of the attacker; Destination of the lifeboat: The lasers can find clues in the wreckage of the *Beatrix* even if the ship has broken up. The ship's black box can easily be recovered and scanned; other clues are available from examining fragments of the ship's hull and drive core.

The black box can be found with **Evidence Collection** or **Energy Signatures**, and examined using **Data Retrieval**. According to the black box:

- ▶ Everything was normal for the first four days of the voyage
- ▶ There were some unusual readings from the translight engine, but nothing outside operational norms.

Forensic Engineering: Those unusual readings could be signs of a destructive harmonic resonance within the core. If the resonance built up over time, it could cause the ship to destructively interfere with the translight corridor. Effectively, the ship's drive would constrict the translight corridor around itself, crushing the ship. This is consistent with the sort of damage that the characters have seen – but any competent engineer would have noticed such a resonance before it became critical.

Based on the above clue, a character with **Durugh History** or **Combine History** (or even **Naval Tactics**) remembers the existence of a durugh weapon, called a Star Dagger. The device is a small machine, about the size of a large suitcase. When activated on board a ship travelling faster-than-light, it introduces a destructive resonance that slowly builds up over time, eventually resulting in the destruction of the ship. The nasty thing about Star Daggers is that they can be re-used if you can get off the ship in time. They can even be used as a ranged weapon, affecting a different ship in a convoy.

Star Daggers are expensive, rare and banned by Combine law. Even the Durugh rarely used them.

Star Daggers do not show up on conventional weapons scans, making them ideal terror weapons. It is very hard to spot an inactive Star Dagger.

Explosive Devices: If the attacker was using a Star Dagger, it would have to be re-calibrated after use. Very few people have the skills to reset a Star Dagger, and if it isn't reset within 48 hours, it burns out.

- ▶ Thirty minutes before the *Beatrix* issued its distress call, a single lifeboat was launched.

The lifeboats have only a short range. **Astronomy** calculates that the only inhabited planet within reach was the synthculture world **Pioneer**.

With **Imaging**, the characters can access the ship's security camera files, and recover a blurry and damaged image of the lifeboat deck. The image shows a figure sabotaging the other lifeboats by fusing their launch mechanisms, then fleeing on board the last lifeboat. The figure is wearing a personal bluffer (see the *Ashen Stars* rulebook, page 124) that hides her features completely. All the characters can work out is that the figure is humanoid.

A one-point **Imaging** spend lets the character improve the image quality somewhat, allowing the characters to see that the figure was carrying a case large enough to hold a Star Dagger, and that he or she set the lifeboat's course to land on Pioneer.

A one-point **Data Retrieval** spend lets the character follow the saboteur back to their cabin. Cross-referencing this cabin number with the passenger roster gets the characters the name **Willa Lewis**.

Searching the wreckage for this cabin turns up another clue with **Evidence Retrieval** – a used osmetic puncher. Analyzing it with **Vioware** discovers that it once contained upkeep therapy for the Dominator vioware.

- ▶ Ten minutes before the distress call was issued, the ship sustained severe damage to all external sections, consistent with a translight collapse caused by a Star Dagger.
- ▶ The captain ordered all hands to abandon ship, but no other lifeboats were launched.

Checking the wreckage turns up another few clues. All of these are core clues – if the PCs don't pick them up from other investigate routes, make sure they obtain them before heading to Pioneer.

- ▶ Using **Evidence Collection** to recover bodies and personal effects, or checking the passenger roster lets a character with **Human History**, **Combine History** or **Cybe Culture** recognize some of the victims. There were a dozen prominent members of Combinist political groups on board the *Beatrix*.

A 1-point **Combine History** spend lets the character recall that there are rumors of a high-level conference at Ossa One to discuss the political situation in the Bleed. Maybe these Combinists were meeting to discuss such a conference.

- ▶ Checking the engine core with **Forensic Engineering** lets the character confirm the use of a Star Dagger. The weapon was poorly calibrated, suggesting the saboteur was not a trained Durugh operative.
- ▶ Comparing the bodies floating in space to the passenger roster is a ghastly and tedious job, but the characters can confirm that the only person unaccounted for is **Willa Lewis**.
- ▶ **Energy Signatures**: There is a very faint ion trail, possibly left by a lifeboat. It's heading for Pioneer.

Questioning the Survivors

Scene Type: Alternate

The three survivors need **Reassurance** and medical treatment before they can be questioned. None of them have anything to hide. Each of them gives their own account of what happened on board; these accounts do not match up precisely, but these inconsistencies are the result of imperfect recollection, not conspiracy. If a fact is mentioned only by one of the survivors, it has that survivor's name in brackets.

When playing the survivors:

- ▶ Play **Jeff Porter** as condescending and annoying. He treats the lasers as if they are responsible for the disaster, and expects to be dropped off at the nearest civilized planet and compensated for his ruined holiday. **Respect** gets more co-operation from him, but most player characters will probably just end up using **Intimidation** instead. Porter is a supporter of the Bleedist cause – he believes that the less regulation and government in the Bleed, the better, and that economic growth will come if the Bleed isn't under the Combine's thumb.
- ▶ **Deerd Larmon** should be played as naïve but a natural survivor, gravitating instinctively towards the powerful. She admires the lasers for heroically rescuing her, and flirts with them to make Jeff jealous. She has no idea about politics. **Reassurance** or **Flirting** get the best answers from her.
- ▶ **Hector Jinks** just wants to co-operate and do a good job. He is just as nervous after being rescued as he was when trapped in a floating tomb. Formal **interrogation** works best with him, or **Inspiration** can be used to tell him that he makes an excellent acting captain.


 ASHEN STARS

The survivors remember:

- ▶ There was nothing out of the ordinary until the disaster struck. (Hector: The engineers said the drive core was acting funny.)
- ▶ (Hector) He was in the kitchen when the disaster struck. The ship lurched and he hit his head, knocking him unconscious.
- ▶ (Jeff/Deerd) When the disaster struck, they headed for the lifeboats, but then they met one of the crew, who told them that the lifeboats weren't working. Deerd dragged them into the kitchen, where they found Hector.
- ▶ (Jeff Porter) There were a lot of damned Combinists on board. You couldn't go to the ship's lounge without some self-righteous prig telling you that the Bleed was falling apart. Of the hundred passengers, it seemed like three-quarters of them were big players in their respective homeworlds' political scenes.
- ▶ If the characters mention Willa Lewis, then (Deerd Larmon) remembers her; they met one night in the lounge. Jeff had gotten into one of his political arguments with the Combinists, and she was bored, so she started talking to Willa. Willa didn't say much, but Deerd remembers that she disliked the aliens on board.
- ▶ (Hector) also remembers Willa Lewis. She ate in her cabin most nights, and she always ordered off the fusion food section of the menu – dishes that combine elements of human and alien cuisine.

Pioneer

Scene Type: Intro

The ship's library contains a short database entry on Pioneer. The world was settled as a synthculture a century ago. It is a tribute to the early, rough-and-tumble days of human space exploration, when men were men, women were women, and the stars were an open frontier. The planet's technology is largely frozen at the level available in 2190 (almost three hundred years before the present days of 2468). Humanity made first contact with alien life back in 2192.

The cities of Pioneer are made to resemble the pre-fabricated domes and colony ships of yore; the spaceships are deliberately archaic. Much of the planet is still wilderness, to preserve the feeling of a strange new world ripe for conquest.

Pioneer suffered greatly in the Mohilar War. With its low population, lack of strategic significance and limited industrial base, Pioneer was not considered worth defending by the Combine, who withdrew their naval forces in 2460 to defend Knossos. Pioneers's own defense forces were largely symbolic, and were forced to fight the enemy with three hundred year old weapon designs. The planet was bombed and invaded by the Durugh.

Since the war, there has been little news of Pioneer. As far as any of the characters know, the planet is rebuilding just like the rest of the Bleed.

Arrival at Pioneer: When the lasers arrive in the Pioneer system, they are hailed by the local authorities. All ships visiting Pioneer must first dock at the orbiting 'gateway station'. Many synthculture planets have such stations, where visitors can obtain suitable costumes and store banned items.

Monitoring transmissions from Pioneer turns up some troubling information. All the holovision channels are full of government propaganda. The characters get lots of variations on the following themes:

- ▶ The 'ongoing emergency', caused by alien attack. As a temporary security measure, certain civil rights and privileges have been suspended.
- ▶ The glorious leadership of President Caver, who has singlehandedly brought Pioneer out of anarchy and who is forging the pure new human empire.
- ▶ The perfidy of aliens (other than kch-thk). Aliens are not like us; they were responsible for the attack, and continue to sabotage and hate the good people of Pioneer. Never trust an alien!
- ▶ Kch-thk are popular on Pioneer. Back during the McMillenist period, the kch-thk were strong allies of humanity. This strongly suggests that the government is consciously replicating McMillenism.
- ▶ The equal perfidy of 'xenosymp's', 'alien-lovers', 'seditionists', 'imperialists' and 'Combine traitors' who work with aliens to bring down the glorious regime of President Caver.
- ▶ Stay calm. Work hard. Serve President Caver.
- ▶ Report on your neighbors, friends and family.

There is the occasional advertisement that implies that the planet's clear turn to neofascism is just a development of the local synthculture. **Forensic Psychology** suggests that the trauma of the war may have caused history to repeat itself. Just as the early human colonists embraced the fascist,



alien-hating tyranny of McMillen, it looks as though Pioneer has responded to the Mohilar War in the same way. Their claim that this is just another synthculture is probably a cover to dissuade investigation and censure by the interstellar community.

Energy Signatures picks up a few odd emissions from inside the orbit of Pioneer's largest moon. A successful **Communications Intercept** roll (Difficulty 5) allows the characters to determine the source of these transmissions. There is a newly-constructed shipyard in orbit of Pioneer, and they're building warships. Those aren't the three-hundred-year old replicas that Pioneer is supposed to use, but are instead brand-new models.

If the players don't realize it themselves, **History (human)** reminds the characters that lasers may not be welcome on a synthfascist planet, and they should consider the covert approach.

Landing at Pioneer

Scene Type: Hazard

The characters need to land on Pioneer to continue their investigations. There are several possible ways to get past the gateway station and the authorities.

Cover Identities: The lasers can construct cover identities for themselves. (In playtesting, one group pretended Deerd Larmon was a hot new singing sensation, and that they were her entourage.) **Impersonate** gets the characters past the security checkpoints by claiming to be tourists or traders; added **Impersonate** spends are needed if the laser crew includes a lot of non-humans, or if they want a cover story with a little more influence or power.

A basic cover identity means the characters have to leave their ship at the gateway station, along with any weapons or equipment that post-dates 2190. With a more convincing cover story, the characters can keep their ship and gear with them on the planet.

Bluffing Past: The characters can admit they are lasers, but claim that they are pursuing an investigation that the neo-fascist government supports, such as tracking down a dangerous alien fugitive. After docking at the gateway station, the lasers are ordered to report to the Ministry of Security to discuss their case, where they have a teleconference with **Fina Rossi**. See **The Secret Police**, page 77. **Cop Talk**,

Negotiation and **Respect** spends can get the characters a permit to land, but they will be under constant surveillance by the police, and will almost certainly become **Enemies of the State** (page 80).

Sneaking Past: The characters might be able to fly past the station's sensor arrays. While Pioneer is rapidly modernizing, a lot of the technology used is still antiquated. Doing so requires a contest of **Communications Intercept** against the stations' Sensors Pool of 6. Clever manoeuvres such as using the moon for cover, broadcasting a false ID or jamming sensor frequencies can inflict a levy on the station's sensors.

If the contest is lost, then the lasers are detected, and they must try **forcing their way past**.

Forcing Past: Aggressive crews can just try flying past the gateway station, waving their laser badges as they zoom by. If they try this, they are intercepted by a Pioneer defense ship. This vessel orders them to turn around and dock with the gateway station. If the characters force the issue, a three-point **Intimidation** spend lets them force their way past. (A kind GM can give bonus Intimidation points for charging up weapons systems, jamming the defense ship's internal communications, invocation of past heroic deeds on the part of the PCs and so on). If the PCs can't intimidate their way past, then they can flee or dock with the station (see **Bluffing their way past**).

PIONEER DEFENSE SHIP

	Dishing It (Modifier Applies On showdown Win)	Taking It (Modifier Applies On showdown Loss)
Fire	1	-1
Maneuver	-1	2
Override	0	2
Trickbag	-1	-1

Output 8

Condition 0

Crew Skills: Battle Console 4, Communications Intercept 5, Helm Control 4, Naval Tactics 3

The Gateway Station: When the characters visit the gateway station, they find themselves in an oppressive, cavernous structure. There are a few advertising holograms, promising an exciting and educational visit to the synthculture world, but everywhere else there are posters of President Caver looking stern and authoritarian, and uplifting messages like 'TRUST IN CAVER' or 'HUMANS FIRST'. There are a number of refugees trapped on the gateway station, waiting for a ship to take them away from Pioneer. Most of these refugees are aliens.

Security Checkpoints: The characters are thoroughly searched and scanned on the station. Anything invented after 2190 'breaks authenticity', so tethers, headsets, poppers, weapons beyond disruptor pistols and other modern gadgets must be kept out of sight. The characters are encouraged to leave their equipment in secure lockers on the space station; if they refuse, they are order to either hide

their gear or else purchase suitable disguises for it. Vendors on the station can supply period-appropriate cases for most common items.

Questioning the Guards: If the characters ask, the guards say they cannot say whether or not a lifeboat reached Pioneer recently – it would have been picked up by the emergency rescue ships, and would therefore be a matter for **The Secret Police** (page 77). A 2-point spend of **Flirting** or **Cop Talk** or a bribe lets the characters convince a friendly guard to check immigration records. There is indeed a Willa Lewis in the logs; she arrived on Pioneer three weeks ago – which as any character with **Astronomy** will realise is odd, as the *Beatrix* lifeboat should have only arrived a few hours ahead of the lasers. It is possible she went offworld without going through the gateway station. (Remember, Bonner is trying to frame Willa Lewis for the bombing.)





An Odd Encounter: While the lasers are making their way through the station, one of them is stopped by a young girl. (Pick either an alien PC, or the character with the highest **Reassurance**.) The girl presses a data chip into the PC's hand and whispers a plea to him, asking him to take it to 'the blue lady in Tharsis.' She scurries off into the crowd before she can answer any questions.

The data chip is encrypted; using **Decryption**, the characters discover that it contains video of Ministry of Security troops brutally beating people, cut with clips from pro-Bleed speeches by politicians on various other worlds. The whole video is obviously designed to make the viewer draw a connection between the fascists and the Bleedists. At the end, a female voiceover intones that *'this universe is broken, but we can make it right again. Believe in the Restreaming.'*

If the characters follow up on this, see **The Restreamers** (page 81).

Onto Pioneer: A primitive shuttle, which was old-fashioned even in 2190, carries the lasers and a handful of other passengers down to the surface of Pioneer. One of the other passengers is **David Tang**, who is an influential Bleedist. Tang is a distinctive figure – he is heavily augmented with numerous cybernetic implants, including viroware grafts of tissue and scales from other alien races. He sees himself as the incarnation of the Bleed's eclectic, chaotic melting pot of cultures. As a concession to the neofascists, he puts on a voluminous poncho before exiting the shuttle. For more on Tang, see **The Bleedist Conclave**, page 83.

Investigations on Pioneer

The rest of this investigation takes place on Pioneer, and it is very important to get the atmosphere of the planet right. The planet has fallen under the sway of a fascist government, one that is consciously modelled on one of the worst periods in human history, but the citizens are mostly enthusiastic supporters of President Caver. Pioneer suffered during the Mohilar War, and Caver offered protection and a rebirth of pride to a wounded people.

Anyone the lasers talk to praises President Caver as the savior of their civilization. The Combine Proper is dismissed as a 'xenosymp' government that must be resisted and eventually destroyed.

Pioneer today is oppressive. The cities are based on the first offworld colonies. Back then, humanity's maps of the translight corridors were limited, so the early colonies were established on worlds poorly suited to supporting life. The colonies were mostly underground tunnels, domed cities, prefabricated structures and wild mining towns. Think of a Wild West theme park on Mars, and then layer on security cameras, checkpoints, fascist imagery and security guards everywhere.

Any alien characters face considerable prejudice; see the **Fascist State** scene on page 73.

The lasers are likely to be watched by **The Secret Police** (page 77) at all times; if they commit any crimes or interfere with the Bleedist Conclave, see **Enemies of the State** (page 80).

There are regular rallies and public events in support of Caver's regime; these include public execution of traitors by disintegrator beam. If any characters are arrested, they may be the next day's main event.

Locations on Pioneer: The capital of Pioneer used to be called Landing, but they renamed it Caver City a month ago. It's connected by underground tunnels and trains to five other smaller towns – Tharsis, Ceres, Felix, Pyrac and Proxima, all named after key early colonies.

The biggest structure in Caver City is the new Presidential Palace, which is still under construction. One wing of the palace is the home of the Ministry of Defence. The other wings contain the Ministry of Resources and the Ministry of Technology.

Part of Caver City is sheltered from the 'hostile elements' by a huge dome. The dome once covered the entire city, but it collapsed under bombardment during the Mohilar attacks on Pioneer. (Actually, the surface is perfectly habitable, but few people ever go outside. It spoils the whole 'heroic pioneers forging a new destiny on a hostile planet' mood when you walk out and find the planet is about as hostile as a bucolic park with nice warm sunshine and a light breeze.)

Hanging from the surviving crescent segment of the dome is the new Ministry of Security; the ministry's cameras and surveillance drones watch everyone in the city. The easiest way to get to the Ministry is via one of the hundreds of helitaxis that buzz around the tower.

ASHEN STARS



There are plenty of hotels for tourists, the best of which is the **Landing Hotel**. All the rooms are bugged by Secret Police spies.

Investigating Pioneer: The characters can pick up a few clues about Pioneer as they explore the city, by talking to the locals, watching the holovision channels, or by observation.

- ▶ President Caver is consciously modeling his government on McMillen's regime. The McMillen government ruled Earth and its colonies from 2205 until 2241; McMillen himself died in 2235, and was succeeded by his devoted follower (and, some say, the real power behind the throne) Helen Winebrenner. She lacked McMillen's almost supernatural charisma, and was unable to hold the human/kch-thk alliance together following the Greenhurdle incident (where kch-thk forces devoured defeated balla, an act which revolted the human population.)
- ▶ Caver doesn't have McMillen's charisma, but he is younger and better-looking.
- ▶ The same few faces show up again and again in the background of official images of Caver; these must be his inner circle. Notably, one of these is **Fina Rossi**, the head of the Ministry of Security. Rossi is a stern-faced woman with a scar over one eye.
- ▶ There are a lot of kch-thk in the city. This is hardly surprising, as the kch-thk were allies of humanity back during the McMillenist period.

A 1-point **Forensic Anthropology** or **Virology** spend notes that quite a few of the kch-thk show signs of mutation or failed virological therapy. Modern kch-thk are conditioned not to eat sentients and to control their population growth. If some madman was trying to reverse these restrictions, the results of failed experiments would resemble mutation or failed virological therapy. Pioneer's medical technology is primitive, so they must be getting help from offworld. (While the McMillen government is experimenting on kch-thk, this research is not part of the characters' investigation. See **Follow-up Investigations**, page 92).

- ▶ In a few places, the characters spot graffiti decrying the Caver government. Secret police show up at such places within minutes to remove the signs of sedition. The outlying town of Tharsis seems to be the centre of anti-government sentiment. Following this route leads the characters to **The Restreamers** (page 81).

Lines of Inquiry:

- ▶ The bomber, 'Willa Lewis' arrived on board a lifeboat. Searching for this is covered in **tracing the lifeboat** (page 74).
- ▶ The characters have Lewis' name. Asking around at hotels, hostels and other likely places for an off-worlder to visit lets the character find her – see **Spying on the Delegates**, page 86.
- ▶ The characters can risk the **Pioneer Underworld** (page 75) or consult **Secret Police Files** (page 79).
- ▶ The unusual Star Dagger weapon used to destroy the *Beatrix* needs to be recalibrated before it can be used again. Following this device leads the character to **the Weapons Dealer**.

Fascist State

Scene Type: Hazard

Alien (other than kch-thk) characters are unwelcome on Pioneer, as are those who openly profess support for the Combinist cause. Such characters face prejudice and may even be threatened.

- ▶ Such characters face a 1-point levy when trying to use any Interpersonal abilities.
- ▶ They will be blamed for any problems that arise. If an item goes missing, the locals will blame the alien. If a fight breaks out, the alien started it.
- ▶ If an opportunity arises, such as the character wandering down a dark tunnel on her own, the alien character will be attacked by a gang of neofascist thugs.

Don't Wander Off!

Scene Type: Hazard

If the lasers rescued the three survivors from the *Beatrix*, they can provide extra complication and comic relief. For example, in playtesting, Deerd Larmon ended up betraying the player characters and became Caver's moll. Options include:

- ▶ Technically, Hector Jinks is the official representative of the company that owns the *Beatrix*. He could insist on accompanying the lasers to ensure they fulfill their mission correctly; if so, then you can ramp up the tension and threat by killing him off at a suitable dramatic juncture.

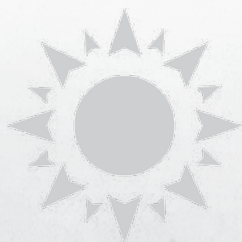


McMILLEN, PIONEER, AND THE FASCIST STATE

In playtesting, several groups ran aground in this investigation by making Pioneer too oppressive and dangerous. The players' early investigations foundered because no-one would talk to the lasers; they then became enemies of the state and ended up on the run from the authorities without ever getting back on track.

Neither the anti-alien prejudice nor the potential threat of the state police should scupper the investigation. Human NPCs will talk to alien player characters – it's just harder for the aliens to make successful Interpersonal spends. If the characters do end up on the run, the GM should ensure that the police are not an overwhelming threat. The players should still be able to complete their investigation if they take basic precautions like disguising themselves or throwing the cops off their trail.

Others wondered about the purpose of the McMillenists on Pioneer. The simple truth is that many players want Space Nazis. The McMillenists are a way of presenting this trope that is neither campy nor distasteful. (Groups who swerve everything into comedy may still push them into being funny space Nazis. That's their prerogative but not the default presentation.) The original McMillen regime appears in the timeline to undercut the usual habit of making the humans the default good guys of future history. The neoMcMillenists reinforce the game's theme, representing an extreme the Bleed might tip to if it forgoes altruism for selfishness.



- ▶ Jeff Porter could be useful when the characters are meeting with the weapons dealer. He could also betray the characters to the secret police. Jeff has only the vestigial remnants of a conscience, and would fit in well in the oppressive regime. Alternatively, if the characters are inspiring and heroic, then Porter's better nature is dragged to the surface, and he becomes invested in fighting against McMillenism.
- ▶ Deerd might attach herself to the most impressive and dangerous of the lasers, insisting that she needs protection. If the characters fail to reassure her, then she looks elsewhere for protection.

Tracing the Lifeboat

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The Secret Police Files

The lifeboat from the *Beatrix* bypassed the gateway station and was picked up by the emergency rescue ships. They brought it down to Caver City; it is currently in a hangar at the edge of the small spaceport. Officially, the lifeboat does not exist – Fina Rossi wants to destroy any connection between the bombing of the *Beatrix* and the Caver government.

The lasers can track the lifeboat using any of the following means.

- ▶ There is only one spaceport on Pioneer, so if the lifeboat landed anywhere, it's probably there. Checking recent traffic reports with **Data Retrieval** confirms that there are no accounts of meteorites or crashes outside the city, so the lifeboat almost certainly landed at the spaceport.
- ▶ **Industrial Design:** A lifeboat like that has an emergency distress beacon built into the hull, which is activated automatically when the vessel is launched. The saboteur probably disabled the beacon's long-range transmission aerial, but destroying the beacon is a lot harder. If the characters have a tether, they can use **Energy Signatures** to track the emergency distress beacon, leading them to the spaceport.
- ▶ Asking about with suitable interpersonal skills like **Flattery**, **Cop Talk** or **Downside** lets the characters pick up a rumor about some unusual activity at the spaceport. According to the story, a lifeboat was picked up by the rescue ships, but then the Secret Police showed up, took custody of the boat and anyone on board, and told the emergency services to delete the whole incident from their records.

ASHEN STARS



Getting into the Hangar: The hangar is guarded by Ministry of Security troops. An **Infiltration** test at Difficulty 8 is required to sneak past the guards (use the Piggybacking rule on page 68 of the *Ashen Stars* rulebook for multiple PCs). The Difficulty of the test can be reduced if the lasers distract the guards. Alternatively, the PCs can just take the guards out with a quick combat. Assume one guard per laser.

Inside, the characters find the lifeboat has been partially disassembled. **Forensic Engineering** or **Explosives** lets the character realize that it is being taken apart in a very deliberate way, so that it will look as though it was blown apart in the destruction of the *Beatrix*. (Fina Rossi intends to have a Pioneer ship drop the remains of the lifeboat back to the wreck before anyone comes to investigate the destruction of the *Beatrix*. The proximity of the lasers to the wreck was a stroke of terrible luck for her.)

There is a computer system in the hangar; accessing it with **Decryption** lets the characters confirm that this hangar is owned by the Ministry of Security. Any records relating to the incident must be in the Ministry's data banks. See **Secret Police Files** (page 79).

Surveillance Drones: Also in the hangar is a cradle for six semi-autonomous surveillance drones. These drones are miniature helicopters, each about a meter long and equipped with cameras and directional microphones to locate enemies of the state. The drones flit around the dome, watching the citizens of Pioneer from on high, but must return to their cradle every 48-hours to recharge.

Again with **Decryption**, the characters can access the drones' onboard memory and retrieve their surveillance data. Towards the end of one drone patrol, it spotted the lifeboat approaching the spaceport, accompanied by a rescue ship. Soon after the lifeboat lands, the characters see a figure emerge from the hangar and climb into a groundcar. The figure appears to be dressed in an emergency spacesuit, identical to ones the characters saw on the *Beatrix*. Again, the appearance is scrambled thanks to a personal bluffer, but a one-point **Imaging** spend lets a character zoom in on the wing mirror of the groundcar and get a partial picture of the figure – it's a dark-haired woman. If the characters follow the car on the drones, it ends up vanishing into the alleyways of Ceres, the **Pioneer Underworld** (see page 75; Bonner went straight to the **Weapons Dealer** to recalibrate the Star Dagger).

The Pioneer Underworld

Scene Type: Core

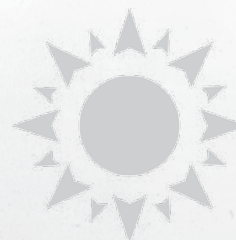
Core Clue: The Weapons Dealer

Ceres district is the most dangerous part of Pioneer; it's become the alien ghetto, where 'unapproved' aliens like balla and tavak are forced to live. The secret police keep close watch on the unfortunate inhabitants. This district suffered more than the rest of the city during the war; the streets are pock-marked with bomb craters, and many of the buildings are scarred with laser burns. Many of the shops and businesses are closed, or branded with holographic signs describing them as 'for aliens only – restricted for public safety'.

To survive, many of the inhabitants have been forced to turn to crime. The balla – when they are not overcome by intense despair at the sight of the ruins, or fear and hatred engendered by the secret police – are prostitutes, escorts or con artists. Gangs of tavak warriors patrol the streets. Initially, the tavak intended to simply protect the citizens of Ceres from racist attacks, but now the gangs are looting, extorting protection money and launching their own attacks on human districts.

If the laser crew is predominantly human, they are not welcome in Ceres. They are watched wherever they go. A 1-point **Intimidation** spend and a show of force demonstrates that they are not to be trifled with (if the characters had to give their heavy weapons up at the gateway station, then a 2-point **Intimidation** spend is needed, plus the characters need to somehow prove they are tough enough to ward off some tavak brutes). This lets them move freely through Ceres.

Alternatively, using **Tavak Culture** or **Balla Culture** plus **Reassurance** and some roleplaying lets the characters befriend, respectively, the Tavak or the Balla. To impress the Tavak, the lasers can appeal to their sense of honor and glory; the Balla can be won over by listening to their woes.





Tavak Brutes

Abilities: Athletics 12, Health 3, Scuffling 10, Shooting 8

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Claws +1

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1

Hit Threshold: 5

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, Popper, Deflector

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: -2

Savvy Modifier: +0

Looking for Rumors: The characters find their way to a rundown Balla nightclub, called First Contact. Before the war, this was modelled on a frontier outpost, and was carefully designed to look rundown; now, it is genuinely rundown and dingy. First Contact is a clearing house for rumors and black market trading. Humans are unwelcome here, and the club is usually free of Secret Police bugging devices.

Give the three core clues for free if any character has **Downside** or a similar ability (**Flirting** with the balla, bribery, using **Inspiration** to convince a hesitant contact to stand up against Caver's fascist regime). Other clues can be obtained with spends.

- ▶ If the characters mention the use of a Star Dagger, they are pointed to the weapons dealer, Greyval. (See **The Weapons Dealer**. If anyone in Pioneer knows about such a weapon, it's him. Go to his restaurant and ask for the 'special menu'.
- ▶ There have been a lot of offworlders arriving on Pioneer lately, people with political connections. No-one's quite sure what they're up to, but they are meeting over in Pyrac. See **The Bleedist Conclave** (page 83)

1-point **Downside** spend: The characters obtain names for the major delegates, and the location of the Conclave (Pyrac).

1-point **Combine History** spend: The character recognizes some of those names; they are all moderately well-known Bleedists.

1-point **Law** spend: The character recognizes the name of David Tang; he is infamous for advocating violent support of Bleedism.

- ▶ The Secret Police know everything that happens in Pioneer. If the bomber is here, they know where she is. See **The Secret Police files**, page 79.

1-point **Flattery** spend: Fina Rossi runs the secret police. The warships under construction are one of her pet projects.

1-point **Forensic Psychology** spend: From the sound of the rumors, it sounds like President Caver is more interested in using the trapping of McMillenism to preserve his grip on power, while Rossi appears to be more interested in expanding the neofascist movement offworld.

1-point **Culture (Tavak)** or **Culture (Balla)**: The aliens are terrified of a rebirth of McMillenism. Of all the races, humans are considered the most unpredictable and warlike. They breed almost as fast as the kch-thk, they fight as aggressively as a provoked tavak, they're as sneaky as the durugh and as emotionally labile as the balla. An expansionist, xenophobic human empire verges on a Class K threat to the other species.

The Weapons Dealer

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The Bleedist Conclave

A Star Dagger is a very unusual weapon, and one that requires careful maintenance. Only one scientist on Pioneer has the skills to operate such a device – Greyval. This alien operates from a hidden compound inside a restaurant; you have to ask for the 'special menu', and then the staff bring you to a side table which has weapons concealed underneath. The restaurant employs a mix of balla and human staff.

The characters can find the weapons dealer by:

- ▶ Going through the Pioneer underworld
- ▶ If they have contacts among the Durugh, such as the Loghos Corporation, they get directed to Greyval
- ▶ Lots of **Downside** spends and bribes
- ▶ Consulting the **Secret Police Files** (page 79)

The Special Menu: If the lasers ask for the special menu, they are brought to a side booth and given a list of weapons and viroware for sale. The prices are high, and the staff make it clear that the weapons are not available for use on Pioneer – Greyval does not want to anger the secret police.

Notable items for sale here include personal bluffers, which are very handy when living in a fascist panopticon state.

To get information about the Star Dagger, the characters have to ask to see the chef. Greyval rarely deals directly with customers, but will make an exception for a laser crew.

If the characters ask about 'Willa Lewis' and use **Flirting** or **Negotiation** and a bribe, then the server remembers that customer. She asked to see the chef so she could give her compliments in person after having a large meal.

Greyval: Greyval works in the kitchen of the restaurant. He is not a member of any species the PCs recognize; he resembles an ambulatory sea anemone with long bluish-pink tentacles. He keeps working while he talks to the PCs. He communicates by means of a voice synthesizer. The restaurant kitchen is uncomfortably hot, filled with bubbling vats of allegedly edible goo and racks of strange things that could be kitchen implements or exotic weapons or both.

Greyval respects **negotiation**. He will do the lasers a favor here, but expects to call in a favor in return at some future date. He stays neutral in politics, but admits that he preferred Pioneer as a nice little tourist synthculture instead of a fascist hellhole. He is preparing to move his operation (a laser crew would be ideal cover for extensive weapons smuggling, he muses aloud), as he thinks the Caver situation will get worse in future.

He has a strange philosophy towards lethal weapons; it is a personal or possibly religious conviction for him that sentients be able to annihilate each other. The ability to murder, he believes, is an inalienable right. If someone murders without good cause, then they should be punished according to the justice system of their culture, but taking away the ability to murder is an equal crime.



Questioning the eerie alien gets several useful clues:

- ▶ Willa Lewis visited the restaurant yesterday (which means she must have come here immediately after landing the lifeboat.) She had a Durugh Star Dagger with her; he re-calibrated it for her so it can be used again.
- ▶ He did not sell her the Star Dagger, and she took it away with her after recalibrating. He does not know where she obtained the weapon – only a handful of the devices were ever made by the Durugh, and most of those were destroyed in the war.
- ▶ He did not ask for her name – he prides himself on his discretion – but she gave it to him anyway. Humans are stupid. She mentioned that she was staying over in Pyrac district. That's also where the **Bleedist Conclave** is being held.
- ▶ He gives a description of Willa Lewis. She had dark head tentacles, frill things, whatever humans call their cranial growth, and she really enjoyed his Balla Fish Surprise in Rojapa Sauce, so she obviously had excellent taste.
- ▶ She asked him several leading questions about the capabilities of the Star Dagger. An **Explosive Devices** spend lets the character work out that she may be targeting a large ship, maybe even a space station.

The Restreamers: If the lasers come to Greyval on behalf of the Restreamers, they can arrange for the shipment of weapons and explosives to Pelao in Tharsis district. Greyval dislikes the Restreamers on philosophical grounds – the Restreamers believe everyone will come back to life when the universe resets, which makes being a weapons dealer a singularly pointless profession. Clients should have the courtesy to stay dead once you shoot them.

The Secret Police

Scene Type: Alternate

The Ministry of Security's watchtower can be seen from every window in Pioneer. It is a constant reminder of Caver's new order, an ever-vigilant guardian rising from the ruins of the war. MiniSec troops in their red and grey uniforms patrol the streets and stand guard outside every government building, from the gateway station in orbit to the new Presidential Palace. All the secret police wear headsets, connecting them to each other and the Ministry's records. They all know who you are and where you live; your records appear in their augmented-reality vision, stamped across your face.



While most laser crews will stay well away from the fascist police, the characters might end up here for one reason or another.

Contacting the Ministry of Security: Contacting the ministry is very easy – just send an unencrypted transmission from any communicator. The ministry monitors transmissions in Pioneer City. The characters can also take a helitaxi up to the tower, or walk into any of the ministry offices around town.

If the characters tell the ministry that they are investigating the attack on the *Beatrix*, they are told that Director Rossi is investigating that matter personally, and that she will speak to them herself. A few minutes later, a helitaxi arrives to carry them up to the tower.

Inquiries about Willa Lewis or other offworlders without mentioning the *Beatrix* bombing meet a brick wall, and the lasers are informed that the Ministry of Security is not a tourist information booth ('Hail Caver, don't trust any aliens, have a nice day!') A **Cop Talk** spend gets the information that Director Rossi takes a special interest in offworlders, and that she might know more.

A Polite Conversation: The director's office contacts the lasers if they ask about offworlders, mention the bombing of the *Beatrix*, or if their investigations threaten to reveal Rossi's support for Bonner. The secret police escort the lasers to the Ministry of Security, where they are met by **Ernst Voss**, one of Rossi's lieutenants. Rossi monitors the conversation via hidden cameras;

One wall of the office is entirely transparent, giving a breathtaking view over the city. The other walls are decorated with portraits of Caver and Rossi.

Initially, Voss pretends to be helpful, and tries to convince the lasers that the Pioneer government is eager to aid their investigation. Their recovery from the Mohilar War is a painful one, and certain sacrifices of individual freedoms and rights had to be made, but Caver's government takes a strong stand against space terrorism. However, he says that no-one from the *Beatrix* ever made it to Pioneer. She has received no reports of lifeboats or crash landings.

If, as is likely, the characters have already obtained other clues, then Voss grows increasingly defensive. Possible lines of inquiry include:

- ▶ **Willa Lewis:** Voss promises to check government records and look for this 'Lewis'. **Bureaucracy** suggests that this is stonewalling; he already knows about Lewis, and will just string the characters along with empty promises until they stop asking.
A one-point **Bullshit Detector** spend suggests that mention Lewis worried Voss.
- ▶ **The Lifeboat/The Star Dagger:** Rossi denies that a lifeboat from the stricken ship ever arrived. If the characters have already visited the secret hangar, and push Voss, then he signals the guards to arrest the lasers. See **Enemies of the State**, page 80, but the lasers are likely doomed – there are hundreds of Ministry troops in the building. The characters' best chance is to grab Voss as a hostage and abandon the investigation.
- ▶ **The attack on Combinists:** If the characters suggest that the attack on the *Beatrix* might have been politically motivated by Bleedism, then Voss admits that he supports independence of the Bleed and the dismantling of the 'imperialist, repressive Combine'. If the characters use **Respect** and genuinely engage him in discussion, then he reveals that the Pioneer government is sponsoring a high-level conclave of Bleedist groups to discuss the future of the region. However, if the characters accuse him of supporting or condoning terrorism, the communicator on his desk chimes – it's Rossi, ordering him to end the the interview.

Ernst Voss

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 10, Scuffling 7, Shooting 10.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Fist +0

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1 (Distractor Beam, Aversionizer)

Hit Threshold: 3 (4 in Hand-to-Hand)

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, 2 x Popper, Deflector (viroware) Pheroalarm, Pheroblocker

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: +2


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FINA ROSSI

Director Fina Rossi is the head of the Ministry of Security and the second most important individual in the Pioneer government, just behind President Caver himself. Before the war, when she was the deputy head of police in Ceres district and he was a discredited and marginalized academic, neither of them dreamed they would attain such power. From her office overlooking the city, she controls the destiny of the planet.

Rossi is wildly ambitious - Caver may have dragged Pioneer out of anarchy by embracing McMillen's brand of fascism, but Rossi is determined to take it to the stars. Rossi believes that an independent Bleed is a necessity for Pioneer's survival. Once the last vestiges of the Combine are gone, it will be every planet for itself. Other worlds suffered just like Pioneer, and she believes the population of those worlds will be equally receptive to Caver's remixed form of McMillenism. Together, she and Caver will forge a new human-dominated empire across the stars.

Even with the new fleet of warships under construction, Pioneer needs allies and pawns. Rossi needs to rally the

other pro-Bleed governments and Practitioners. To this end, she has invited several prominent and influential Bleedists to Pioneer. She has also lent support to one of the more extreme Bleedists, Deena Bonner. Privately, Rossi thinks Bonner is unstable, but Bonner's willingness to take direct action makes her useful to the Pioneer government. If Rossi and Bonner present the destruction of the *Beatrix* and her cargo of Combinists as a *fait accompli* and a starting point for a pro-independence push across the Bleed, then at the very least it will keep the Combine's attention away from Pioneer and its nasty government. At best, if the Bleedists agree and rally to support Bonner, it puts Rossi in an excellent place to build her empire.

Rossi is the major antagonist in this scenario, but the characters are unlikely to encounter her directly. She works through minions like Ernst Voss and Deena Bonner. Keep her offstage, but build her up in the players' minds as a figure of terror. Only bring her on-stage in scenes where she is in complete control. For example, if the characters are attacked by the guards and have no hope of escape, then Rossi can show up to emphasize how much trouble the characters are in.

Secret Police Interference: Once the lasers are known to the Ministry of Security, they will be watched while on Pioneer. The Ministry monitors communications, follows them through the streets, and watches them with drones. A Difficulty 4 **Sense Trouble** test lets the characters know they are being watched; **Difficulty 6** tests let them spot the secret police tailing them. The GM should make the lasers feel hunted and oppressed by this, but the surveillance does not necessarily interfere with their mission - until the characters have to do something illegal, like breaking into the hangar at the spaceport, using illegal technology, or shooting someone, in which case they become **enemies of the state** (see page 80).

Avoiding surveillance temporarily requires an **Infiltration** test, at a Difficulty between 4 and 7 depending on how closely the characters are being followed. Technology like personal bluffers and scrambleface vioware can make avoiding surveillance even easier.

Secret Police Files: The Ministry of Security records are the most extensive database on Pioneer. If the lasers get access to these records, they have a short cut to the truth. Of course, getting the records isn't easy. The database is stored in the Ministry's tower, and can only be accessed by a Ministry officer or a secure terminal.

The lasers might get access by:

- ▶ **Breaking into the Ministry tower:** First, the players need to work out how to get to the tower - they can either capture or hire a helitaxi, or climb the dome. Next, they have to break in, which calls for a Difficulty 9 **Infiltration** test. The difficulty of the test can be reduced by causing distractions, acquiring disguises and using **Impersonation** and so on - let the players be creative. Failing the test means the laser is caught and arrested, and the rest of the team become **enemies of the state**.



- ▶ **Stealing a Ministry computer terminal:** The secret police all carry headsets linked to the database, and the local offices also have terminals. These remote terminals have only limited access to the database, and the lasers' intrusion will be discovered quickly. Each clue takes two **Data Retrieval** points to obtain instead of one.
- ▶ **Distracting Rossi:** If the characters meet Ernst Voss and distract him, then one of the characters can use his terminal.

When accessing the database, the characters have only a limited time before their intrusion is noticed. The characters get their first clue for free; every clue after that costs a point of **Data Retrieval**. If the players run out of **Data Retrieval**, they can keep searching, but the GM should roll a die for each clue. On a 4+, the intrusion has been detected and the characters become **Enemies of the State**.



Clues available from the database include:

- ▶ Director Rossi is holding a conclave for prominent Bleedist politicians and activists in Pyrac.
- ▶ The names and addresses of the delegates
- ▶ Accounts related to the Bleedist Conclave

A one-point **Forensic Accounting** spend notes a large payment to Deena Bonner, which she used to obtain the Star Dagger

Another spend reveals that another payment is to Greyvar, the **Weapons Dealer** (page 76). This payment was made yesterday.
- ▶ A note that the lifeboat from the *Beatrix* landed yesterday at the spaceport, and that this event is classified secret.
- ▶ Instructions on disassembling the lifeboat and returning it to the wreck
- ▶ A note that a groundcar was dispatched to collect Deena Bonner from the spaceport.

Enemies of the State

Scene Type: Hazard

Once the lasers have crossed the line between 'irritation' and 'threat to the Pioneer government', they are in big trouble. Under the emergency powers granted to President Caver 'for the duration of the crisis' (five years and counting), both citizens and offworlders may be arrested and detained indefinitely without a trial, trials can be held *in camera* and the death penalty may be used for any offense against the state. Resisting arrest is taken as admission of guilt.

If the lasers are declared enemies of the state, they have two options – **flee** or **keep investigating**. Ramp up the paranoia and the threat of security guards. The characters see their faces on the news reports, helicopters and drones sweep through the city looking for them, and their movements are reported to the Ministry by informants and spies. If your players like fighting, then throw a few teams of security guards at them; if they prefer intrigue and planning, then ask them how they are going to obtain cover identities and stay out of sight of the authorities.

- ▶ **Downside** and **Impersonate** can be used to stay out of sight of the authorities.
- ▶ The lasers can use **Preparedness** to have handy gadgets like personal bluffers, disguises and survival equipment to hand.

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- ▶ Call for **Infiltration** and **Sense Trouble** tests at random intervals. Failing a test means the secret police are close on the characters' trail. If the characters do not take steps to throw off their pursuers, they will be attacked.
- ▶ If the characters are carrying a prisoner with them, then there's a one-point levy on all tests unless they have some clever way of restraining and concealing her.

Becoming enemies of the state should complicate the investigation, not end it. If the players take reasonable steps to avoid detection, they can continue to investigate without major impediment.

Flee: If they have their ship with them, they can escape Pioneer without too much trouble. A cruel GM could throw in an encounter with a Pioneer Defense Ship in orbit before the lasers can reach a translight corridor.

It is more likely that the lasers' ship is docked with the gateway station, which means their first problem is getting back to the orbiting space station. There are regular shuttle flights, but the dirtside spaceport is heavily guarded. The characters will have to use **Impersonation** to get past the guards; obtaining new identity cards with **Filch** or **Preparedness** would also be a good idea.

Fleeing the planet means the characters are abandoning their assignment, which is a potential public relations disaster. A Difficulty 4 **Public Relations** test prevents the laser crew from suffering 1 point of Reputation damage.

Keep Investigating: Brave crews can keep investigating, even in the face of government oppression. The characters need to keep moving and hiding from the Ministry of Security. If they move openly on the streets or are spotted by a drone, then security forces will swarm the area and attempt to arrest the lasers. The longer the characters hide from the authorities, the more paranoid and vengeful Rossi becomes.

The best place for characters to hide is in the alien ghetto of Ceres. Spending **Inspiration** points is a good idea to rally support, as otherwise informants and sympathizers may report the lasers' presence to Rossi. **Balla History** or **Tavak History** spends can also win allies. The **Restreamers** (page 81) are another possible shelter.

Once the lasers have identified the bomber, they need to get her off planet; extraordinary rendition is permitted for lasers, but they still need to work out a way to abduct the bomber and get her past security.

If the lasers do manage to complete the assignment despite having the entire planetary government out for their blood, it is definitely worth a Reputation bonus.

Secret Police Goon

Abilities: Athletics 7, Health 3, Scuffling 6, Shooting 8.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Baton +1

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1

Hit Threshold: 3

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, 1 x Popper (vioware) Pheroalarm

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: -1

Savvy Modifier: +0

The Restreamers

Scene Type: Subplot

There is a small community of Restreamers living in the Tharsis district. Like their brethren on other worlds, they believe that the universe headed down the wrong time-stream during the Mohilar War, and that it must somehow be corrected. These Restreamers are more militant than other groups that the lasers have encountered before. In their belief system, Caver's government is an embodiment of evil, and bringing it down will help push the universe back onto the 'correct' path.

The Tharsis Restreamers are led by an elderly, blue-robed nun named **Sister Pelao**; she is one of the founders of the Restreamer faith. She came to Pioneer before the war, to study their recreation of early human space travel. (While the current Restreamer dogma is that the Mohilar War was the start of the disastrous cosmic deviation from 'true' history, they held other beliefs before the war. To the Restreamers, history is always a mistake.) Sister Pelao runs a hospital and sanctuary for those threatened by Caver's regime, but is also secretly working with her followers to undermine the neo-fascist regime.



There are persistent rumors that Pelao is actually a Vas Mal, and she certainly has an almost supernatural ability to sense danger.

The Restreamers were a low-priority target for Caver's early purges; many other nufaiths and political groups were wiped out, but the Restreamers were spared and so managed to pick up adherents and followers from the destroyed groups. By virtue of being the last party standing, they are the main opposition to Caver's regime.

If the characters make contact with the Restreamers via one of their little chapels or the hospital, they are brought to speak with Sister Pelao.

- ▶ Pelao explains the current situation on Pioneer from her perspective, noting the corrupt Caver government, Rossi's secret police, and rumors that Rossi intends to expand Pioneer's influence into the rest of the Bleed.

Anthropology: Even the extremist wing of the Bleedists would not support a return to McMillenism. If Rossi is courting the Bleedists, then either she is planning to reform the Pioneer government, or else she has some plan to win support in spite of her neofascist politics.

- ▶ There are several prominent Bleedists on Pioneer right now; the government is holding a conclave. Pelao was informed of this by one of the delegates, **Dwain Stenger** (see page 84) who has ties to the Restreamer movement. He and Pelao disagree on the need for direct action.
- ▶ The Restreamers believe that the universe can be re-made through prayer and other good works, but only if the 'inertia of evil' can be overcome. Corruption and cruelty – exemplified by Caver's government – keep the universe from correcting itself. It is the duty of the faithful to fight against tyranny.

Bullshit Detector: Pelao is a fanatic, utterly committed to the cause. If questioned about 'the duty of the faithful', she explains that lives are expendable in the cosmic struggle. What does it matter if you die in this tainted and doomed timeline? You will live again when the universe is switched to a better timeline!

- ▶ She can help the lasers with their investigations by putting them in contact with Dwain Stenger and getting them an invitation to **The Bleedist Conclave** (opposite) – but only if they help her first. There is a weapons dealer in Ceres district, Greyval (see **The**

Weapons Dealer, page 76). The Restreamers cannot contact him directly; Greyval dislikes the Restreamer philosophy.

If the characters take Pelao up on her offer, then she sends them off to Greyval to obtain disruptor rifles, poppers and explosives for her followers.

Armed Restreamers: If the characters do help the Restreamers obtain weapons from Greyval, then Pelao's followers start waging war on Caver's government. Restreamer cultists can help protect the characters from the security forces if the lasers are wanted criminals. The Restreamers also attack government buildings and offices. This brief spasm of resistance is quickly stamped out. Tharsis District is put under curfew, and swarms of helicopters, drones and security forces storm the Restreamer hospital. Dozens are killed, and many more are dragged off to government prisons. This attack should happen when the lasers are out investigating – you're raising the stakes by showing that the government is consolidating its power.

Any Port In A Storm: The Restreamer sect is an excellent place to hide if the characters are on the run from the authorities. Sister Pelao can provide the lasers with shelter, food, false identities and local guides so they can keep to the backstreets and underground tunnels.

Infiltrating the Conclave

Scene Type: Hazard

The Conclave organized by Rossi takes place in what was the Boone Memorial Museum & Conference Centre, commemorating the first human colonies on Mars. It was hit during the Mohilar War, and the museum section was destroyed. The conference centre was partially ruined. It is now a restricted area, as the surrounding buildings are in danger of collapsing at any moment.

This makes it an ideal venue for a secret conference. Many of the Bleedist delegates are attending the conference under protest. They don't want to be associated with the McMillenist neo-fascists of Pioneer, but they also don't want to be left out of the loop. Therefore, the list of attendees is a secret, and visitors are not permitted. Holding the conclave away from Pioneer city also let Rossi hide the more obvious signs of the fascist state; the delegates were shown Potemkin villages of happy citizens, not alien ghettos.


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Most of the delegates are staying in a partially rebuilt hotel complex adjoining the conference centre; others are staying nearby. There is a security cordon around the conference centre. No-one is allowed in without authorization from Minister Rossi herself.

Ask the players how they intend to get past the cordon. Options include:

- ▶ Convincing Rossi that they are investigating a case other than the bombing of the *Beatrix*, and obtaining a pass from her
- ▶ Tracking down one of the delegates, and convincing them to vouch for the characters
Sister Pelao of **The Restreamers** can help with this
- ▶ **Filching** a pass from one of the delegates
- ▶ Using **Impersonate** to bluff past the guards
- ▶ Sneaking into the conclave via underground tunnels
- ▶ Overpowering the guards

If the characters sneak into the conclave without permission, then they have to stay out of sight of the guards. The conclave is not as closely monitored as the rest of Pioneer City, but there are security personnel everywhere.

The Bleedist Conclave

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: Willa Lewis is present

When word that a pro-Combinist conclave was being held on Ossa One, many Bleedists felt threatened and argued that they should work together against the Combinist agenda. Fina Rossi offered Pioneer as a venue and promised to cover the bulk of the costs. While many Bleedists felt uncomfortable with the fascist overtones of Pioneer, the planet is centrally located and no better option was available. While the Combinists on Ossa One meet to discuss how to drag the Bleed back into the Combine, the Bleedists meet on Pioneer to forge a new path.

It's a cross between a political party conference and a post-war treaty negotiation. It has the hothouse feel of a convention – as all the delegates are staying in or near the conference centre, meetings happen informally at all hours of the night. Wander into one room, and you find the greatest

political minds of seven systems arguing about interstellar trade; in another room, four cybe scientists are working on ways to model voting blocs within a hypothetical pan-Bleed assembly, and down the corridor, people are arguing about cross-species adoption and inheritance rights. It's all a little bit crazy and wonderful – and sinister, if you're a Combinist. There are also furtive meetings to discuss armed resistance, and the undertones of fascist McMillenism makes the whole conclave seem threatening. It's the first time that this many pro-Bleed groups have met together. If the conclave is a success, it will be remembered in history along with the Second Continental Congress in the United States, the Great Choice of the Tavak, or the Founding of the Combine itself two centuries ago as a time when history was hammered out over the negotiation table.

The conclave has no official standing or authority. There is no over-arching Bleedist organization or political party – at least, not yet. The conclave is laying the groundwork for just such a body, and Rossi hopes to ensure that the resulting Bleedist alliance can protect and further the aims of Pioneer.

The conclave has three dozen delegates from different worlds in the Bleed. Major topics of discussion include:

- ▶ **The Voice of the Bleed:** Should there be a formal 'Bleed Alliance' or other overarching umbrella organization, a 'local Combine' to rule the Bleed? Most of the delegates are loosely in favor of having some common interstellar group, although the make-up and power of this body is yet to be determined. A few hold-outs keep to strict Atomist position – all worlds in the Bleed should be wholly independent. The Bleed worlds should stick together only for as long as it takes to get rid of the Combine.
- ▶ **Identity of the Bleed:** What is the nature of the Bleed? Should the Combine's culture of unity and co-operation between species be maintained, or should each race be allowed to develop in its own way? What about culture groups within races? What is universally acceptable, or universally unacceptable? Can the Bleed be more diverse than the bland Combine without devolving into chaos?
- ▶ **Use of Force:** What level of force is appropriate to win independence from the Combine? What timeline should the Bleedists be aiming for? This is a hotly contested topic, with opinions ranging from slow devolution of power to the Bleed over the course of half a century, to immediate violent uprising.



A fourth topic is also being discussed, but is not part of the official agenda:

- ▶ **Neofascism:** Is the Pioneer government too far down the destructive path of McMillenism to be a valid part of the Bleed? Many delegates are unhappy with the conclave's location; others point out that the Pioneer government simply took the initiative in bringing the Bleedists together, and even if you do not like their policies, the Conclave is ultimately a good idea. Still others think that the Bleed worlds should be free to do as they please within their own systems, and that adopting a similar system to synthcultures (buy into your planet's culture or move somewhere else on the government's dime) would be the best approach.

Presenting Bonner: The Conclave's schedule calls for the delegates to discuss these topics and frame them as brief proposals with a handful of clear options. These proposals will be voted on in a final group session at the end of the Conclave (see **The Last Debate**, page 91).

Rossi's plan is to have Bonner claim responsibility for the bombing of the *Beatrix* during this final session. The destruction of the *Beatrix* with all its Combinists on board is certain to draw condemnation and censure from the Combine – Rossi believes that the Bleedists will decide that war is inevitable and vote for the immediate use of force. Bonner is preparing herself with vioware implants to make her impassioned speech more convincing.

Until this final session, however, Rossi needs to stay away from Donner. If the Bleedists have time to discuss the destruction of the *Beatrix*, then they would work out the connections between the conclave and the bombing, and realize they are being manipulated by the unpopular Pioneer government.

Therefore, the characters need to find and expose Bonner before the final session. This is a fluid deadline – the different working groups can finish their deliberations at any time. Once the characters have entered the conclave, the GM should call **The Last Debate** when the investigation reaches its climax.

Investigations at the Conclave: Questioning random delegates brings some useful information:

- ▶ News of the destruction of the *Beatrix* hasn't reached the conclave.
- ▶ There are a lot of influential Bleedists here, but most of them are set in their ways. The wild cards are Willa Lewis, Dwain Stenger, David Tang and Deena Bonner. Willa Lewis is a moderate; most people think she's too conciliatory towards the Combine. Everyone was surprised when she agreed to attend – either she's becoming more radical, or she didn't want to be left out if any decisions that got made here.

Dwain Stenger is a historian and one of the big philosophical thinkers behind Bleedism. He argues that the Combine is doomed to collapse no matter what happens, but he's unsure if the Bleedists should push for a quick collapse or a slow decline.

David Tang is a warlord and a mercenary; he's got a fleet of ships out there in the outzones. It's better to have him on our side instead of excluding him; if the Bleedists didn't include him, there is a good chance he would try carving out his own petty empire.

Deena Bonner is a former laser and a new force in the Bleedist movement. She has little public support, but has a rapidly growing reputation as a woman who gets things done. She is known to favor armed resistance against the Combine, and argues that there is every possibility that the Mohilar will return. The Bleed's best chance of survival is to get rid of the Combine and establish its own rapid-response space fleet immediately.

- ▶ **Forensic Psychology:** The conclave is very finely balanced – a big event, like the destruction of the *Beatrix*, could tip events one way or the other.
- ▶ **History (Combine):** This conclave may be the defining event of post-war politics in the Bleed. If the pro-violence faction wins, the Bleed could be engulfed by civil war within months.

If the characters focus on their investigation, see **Spying On The Delegates** (page 86); if they get involved in the debates, see **Bleedist Politics**, below.

LASERS & POLITICS

If any of the lasers have the Combinism drive, then the GM should make the Bleedists as sympathetic as possible. Play up reasonable characters like Willa Lewis and Dwain Stenger, and show the player that the Bleedists are well-meaning people who have genuine concerns about how the Combine treats its outlying province. At the same time, point out to the player that if he exposes connections between the Bleedists, terrorism and the neo-fascist regime on Pioneer, he could strike a propaganda blow discrediting the whole movement.

Conversely, if there are Bleedists in the group, then make people like David Tang more prominent, and have more of the delegates be in favor of violence. Does the player try to hide the radicalism of his associates?

Bleedist Politics

Scene Type: Subplot

This scene is especially suited to characters with the Combinism, Bleedism, Civilizer, Chronicler or Social Engineer drives, or characters interested in politics. If the players are focussed only on the case at hand, you can freely skip this scene.

The lasers have the opportunity to help shape the decisions of the Conclave. They don't have a vote, but they can get involved in the debates and sway the decisions of key delegates.

The three important questions are:

- ▶ **Unity vs Independence:** should the Bleed worlds band together against the Combine in a single organization, or should there be no overarching government, just a patchwork of treaties and alliances for each independent world?
- ▶ **Single Combine Culture vs many local cultures:** The Combine officially allowed racial and cultural

variations, but it pushed a single vision of a utopia onto all its members. Synthculture planets were often created as an escape from the Combine's cloying monoculturalism. Should the Bleed have a common, Combine-derived culture, or should each world be allowed to find its own path (bearing in mind that some worlds may develop oppressive or dangerous cultures)?

- ▶ **Force vs Negotiation:** Should the Bleed worlds fight for their independence, or can the battle be won at the negotiation table? Negotiation gives the Combine time to rebuild and rearm; the Bleed may never have another opportunity to win independence if they let this one slip by. Some argue that only a token show of force is needed – if the Bleed can cut off Ossa One from the Proper, then the Combine may abandon its claim instead of fighting a costly war.

The decision of the conclave is determined by the amount of support each side has, plus a dice roll. When the characters arrive, the various sides have the following support:

- ▶ Unity 6 vs Independence 3
- ▶ Single Culture 4 vs Multiple Cultures 5
- ▶ Force 4 vs Diplomacy 5

The lasers can affect the balance of the various questions by:

- ▶ Spending **Negotiation** or **Inspiration** points to persuade delegates to support one position or another. Other interpersonal abilities may be used if the player can justify them.
- ▶ Spending two points from the various **History** and **Culture** abilities is worth one point of support
- ▶ Each of the named delegates gives three points of support to each decision. To convince a delegate to change his or her position requires roleplaying and the expenditure of interpersonal ability points. Their current positions are:

Willa Lewis: Unified Bleed, Multiple Cultures, Diplomacy

Dwain Stenger: Unified Bleed, Single Culture, Abstain

David Tang: Abstain, Multiple Cultures, Force

Deena Bonner: Unified, Multiple Cultures, Force

- ▶ News of the *Beatrix's* destruction is worth 10 points for Force, if Rossi is allowed to spin the event as she intends.



At the end of the conclave, add 1d6 points to each position's total, then compare the totals to determine the result of the vote. The events of the conclave should play themselves out in future scenarios.

For example, a cybe laser named Ada is a committed Social Engineer, and she wants the Negotiation faction to win out in the question of Force vs Diplomacy. She has Inspiration 1 and Cybe Culture 2, so she spends these points to lobby the appropriate delegates. She makes an impassioned speech in favor of diplomacy, and also has a lengthy high-bandwidth discussion (lasting a whole 0.5 seconds) with another Cybe politician. The totals for Force vs Diplomacy now stand at 4 vs 8.

Another member of Ada's crew is a Tavak warrior who espouses the Bleedist cause. He spends his one point of Tavak Culture and a point of Negotiation to boost the Force position. The totals are 6 vs 8.

Next, the positions of the named delegates are counted. They're unchanged from their starting positions. Willa Lewis adds 3 to Diplomacy, Stenger abstains, and Tang and Bonner both add +3 to Force.

Totals are now 12 vs 11.

Finally, both sides roll 1d6. Force is increased by 2, but Diplomacy is increased by 5, for a crushing victory of 8 vs 13.

ARRESTING THE WRONG WOMAN

It's unlikely that the players find all the clues pointing at Willa Lewis, but miss all the other clues showing that Lewis was framed. If they do arrest Lewis, then give them one final clue as they bring their prisoner out of the conclave. They pass a Balla eating a spicy-scented *yadith*, a Balla delicacy. Lewis recoils as her skin breaks out in hives – due to her injuries during the war, she is deathly allergic to alien spices. The players should recall that they know the bomber ate spicy food on at least two occasions (on the *Beatrix* and at Greyval's restaurant.)

Spying on the Delegates

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: Deena Bonner's guilt

There are four delegates of special interest – three of them are especially influential, and the fourth is the terrorist who attacked the *Beatrix*. The characters can either spy on these delegates by breaking into the conclave and their accommodation, or by shadowing or interrogating them.

Willa Lewis

Description: Round-faced woman in her fifties. She dresses in flowing sea-colored robes that hide most of her skin. She wears a necklace made from fragments of twisted metal, debris from a Combine starship that exploded over her home-world, and often has trouble breathing.

- ▶ If the characters recovered an image of the bomber from the lifeboat hangar, they realize that Lewis looks nothing like her
- ▶ Lewis does not match the description of the bomber given by Greyval
- ▶ If the characters have any of the survivors from the *Beatrix* with them, then they can confirm that this Lewis is not the same person who they met on board the doomed liner

Background: Lewis was a leader in Rhodeia, a small colony that was established just before the Mohilar War began. Without any defense forces or starships, the colony attempted to declare neutrality, but even if the Mohilar respected such a claim, there was no way to withdraw from the Combine. The colony was wiped out using viral weapons, leaving only a few survivors who fled on a small merchant ship. Since the armistice, Lewis and the other survivors have travelled from world to world in the Bleed, helping other worlds rebuild and building links between pro-independence factions.

Politics: Pro-Unity, Pro-Local, Pro-Diplomacy. Lewis is one of the most outspoken advocates of diplomacy and a peaceful disengagement from the Combine. She is fiercely committed to non-violence.

Roleplaying Lewis: Play her as maternal and conciliatory.

Surveillance: Spying on Lewis with **Holo-Surveillance** gets some useful information.

- ▶ Lewis takes a range of medicinal drugs every day, and only eats bland synthetic food.

Virology: Rhodeia was destroyed using viral weapons; Lewis was likely exposed to these weapons, damaging her nervous and endocrinological systems. The condition is called Oisin's Syndrome. One common symptom is an inability to digest complex foodstuffs.

According to the testimony of Hector Jinks back on the *Beatrix*, 'Lewis' ordered exceptionally spicy food back on the ship. There is no way someone with Oisin's Syndrome could have eaten that meal.

- ▶ She also has cybernetic implants to augment her damaged nervous system.

Imaging: The attacker on the *Beatrix* used a personal bluffer. In rare cases, a personal bluffer can interfere with medicinal cybernetics.

- ▶ She has several private meetings with **David Tang**. Tang wears a personal bluffer, so it is impossible to determine what they talked about while he was in the room.

Linguistics: After one meeting with Tang, Lewis has a brief conversation with her aide Hira in an obscure dialect. A character with **Linguistics** can translate this; Lewis mentioned that she thinks that she has convinced Tang to meet with Vilan Trok.

Combine History: Trok is a prominent Combinist politician – and he was one of the passengers on the *Beatrix*. Lewis thinks Trok is still alive...

Interviewing: Lewis is willing to co-operate with the lasers, especially if they reveal that she is a suspect in the attack on the *Beatrix*.

- ▶ She arrived on Pioneer a few hours after the destruction of the *Beatrix* via commercial transport.
- ▶ She has never been on the *Beatrix*, and never bombed anyone. She is a committed pacifist.
- ▶ **Bullshit Detector:** She appears to believe what she is saying so either she is a practiced liar or delusional.

Dwain Stenger

Description: Tall, aged, ascetically thin, with a wispy grey beard. He is never seen without his headset.

Background: Stenger is one of the best known historians, pundits and political theorists in the Bleed. He has served on the ruling councils of several planets, and spent ten years as a roving ambassador and diplomat for the Combine. After the war, he surprised many by suggesting that the Combine would inevitably break up under its own weight, and that he endorsed Bleedism.

Politics: Stenger believes in the culture of the Combine, its laws, its secular systems, its philosophical approach – in everything apart from its ability to govern the Bleed. He believes there is an effective maximum functional size for an interstellar polity, and that the Combine exceeds this limit. Therefore, it must be efficiently and peacefully broken up into its parts. He is neutral on the use of force – he personally disapproves, but also thinks a short war could be less damaging than a long decline – and strongly pro-unity and pro-single culture.

Secretly, Stenger is also working with the Combine. He reports on extremists to the Combine's intelligence services. He sees no contradiction between supporting independence for the Bleed in public and reporting on 'dangerous' Bleedists in private – the one great truth in Stenger's world view is that if you disagree with him, you are wrong and misguided.

Roleplaying: Talk with your hands, enthusiastically waving them about as you babble about historical trends and market forces.

Surveillance: Spying on Stenger with **Holo-Surveillance** discovers the following:

- ▶ Stenger has some piece of high-tech equipment with him, which he tries to keep hidden. It could be the Star Dagger.
- ▶ **Industrial Design or Explosive Devices:** It's not a Star Dagger. It's a military-grade communicator, the sort of gadget a Combine secret agent might have.
- ▶ Stenger has several meetings with Fina Rossi, where they discuss the Pioneer government. Stenger is concerned at the planet's shift to fascism; Rossi concedes that the 'will of the people' is for more 'cohesion', but denies that that Caver's government is a return to McMillenism.
- ▶ After these meetings, Stenger sends a message using his hidden communicator. This communicator has scrambler technology that interferes with the PCs' snails.

A two-point **Holo Surveillance** or **Decryption** spend lets the PCs break through the scrambler, so they can overhear Stenger sending a message to Ossa One. He reports on the presence of David Tang at the Conclave, and also voices his concerns about the McMillenist government on Pioneer.

If the characters know that Stenger is a spy, they can use this to blackmail him into supporting one political position or another.



Interviewing: Stenger claims to be very busy at the conclave, so the lasers have to pin him down to get more than a soundbite out of him.

- ▶ He knows about the destruction of the *Beatrix* – everyone else at the Conclave relies on the local news feeds, but he has his secret communications channel to Ossa One. He has not revealed this news to the rest of the delegates.
- ▶ If the characters mention that the *Beatrix* was destroyed by a terrorist attack, and that they have reason to believe that the assassin is at the Conclave, then Stenger suggests that David Tang is a likely suspect.
- ▶ Bonner could also be a possible suspect, but her organization lacks the bigcreds to obtain a Star Dagger.
- ▶ He urges the lasers to get involved in the Conclave – the laser crews have more leverage than most people realize in the Bleed, and they should be at the forefront of any decisions.

David Tang

Description: A stocky human with numerous viro and cyber-upgrades, including grafts of tissue from other alien races. His left eye is that of a Tavak, and he has patches of kch-thk chitin. His extensive modifications make it hard to guess his age accurately – he could be anything from thirty to sixty.

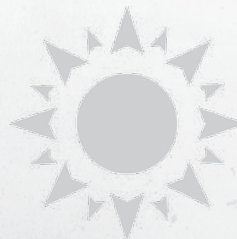
Background: Tang is a mercenary warlord from the Chiron Outzone. He controls a fleet of unknown size, made up of ex-pirates, Combine ships salvaged from the battlefield, and alien vessels of mysterious origin. He sees himself as the leader of a new nation, a spacefaring culture that takes the best aspects of all intelligent races and preys on those weaker and less powerful.

Politics: Tang wants recognition for his 'Outzone Confederation'; he wants the Combine gone, but no-one is sure if this is because he favors an independent Bleed or if he just wants to weaken the defenses of the Bleed so he can conquer worlds more easily. He is considered extremely violent and dangerous.

Roleplaying: Play Tang as an eccentric pirate king. He rejects narrow definitions like 'human', arguing that species is just an accident of biology. You are what you want to be.

Surveillance: Tang wears a personal bluffer at all times, so he cannot be watched using Holo-Surveillance. The characters have to spy on him using more traditional means, like rolling **Surveillance** tests (Difficulty 5). If he realizes that he is being spied on, Tang responds with sudden and brutal violence.

- ▶ Tang is bored by the negotiation process. He occasionally wanders into meetings, randomly insults some diplomats, and strolls out again.
- ▶ He obviously dislikes the Pioneer security forces, and picks fights with them.
- ▶ He has several meetings with **Willa Lewis**, where she tries to persuade him to support diplomacy. Tang has a certain amount of sympathy for Lewis, as they are both perennial spacefarers without a planet to call home.




 ASHEN STARS
Interviewing:

- ▶ The lasers need to impress Tang before he will listen to them; they can win his respect with **Intimidation**, or take a swing at him in a fistfight with **Scuffling**. **Flattery** works too.
- ▶ He came in on a small boat – the Pioneer government would not have appreciated him arriving on board his warship.
- ▶ He has no idea that the *Beatrix* was destroyed, and denies any involvement. If he was going to destroy a liner, he'd use his fleet of ships and he'd loot the cargo. Terrorist bombings are for people without their own fleet.
- ▶ Fina Rossi invited him to the Conclave personally, but he's come to loathe the Pioneer. They're just a bunch of backwards McMillenists. If they were only a bit closer to the Chiron Outzone, he'd bomb this planet into rubble.

Abilities: Athletics 12, Health 12, Scuffling 8, Shooting 12.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Claws +2

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1 (Beaconator, Crick-Cracker)

Hit Threshold: 4 (5 in Hand-to-Hand)

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, 4 x Popper, Deflector (vioware) Aggravator, Popclaws, Regenerate (cybernetics) Nightvision, Motobooster, Frequency Transducer, Bad Liver, Dopamine Redirector

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: -1

Savvy Modifier: +1

Deena Bonner

Description: Bonner is a slim, dark-haired woman in her early thirties. A character with **Viology** notices the beetling brows and orange-streaked eyes of someone using the Aggravator and Dominator viowares.

Background: Bonner was one of the first lasers working in the Bleed. She and her crew flew the Hammer-class *Cutlass* across the stars. She quit one year ago, citing a 'conflict of interest' between her duties as a laser and her political views.

Politics: Bonner is a new face on the political scene. She is in favor of independence for the Bleed, the considered use of force, and a unified political structure. She has a reputation as a fixer and a political agent; she uncovered corruption in the Combinist reconstruction fund agency, and helped organize pro-Bleedism political parties on a dozen worlds.

Roleplaying: Deena is an ex-laser, so you should base your portrayal of her on the player characters, making her into a dark reflection of them. She is committed to the cause of Bleedism, and sincerely believes that the Combine is corrupt and oppressive.

Surveillance: Deena has a personal bluffer, but only switches it on if she thinks she is being watched. She spends most of her time at the conclave currying support and being visible without committing too strongly to any position.

- ▶ She carefully stays away from the guards and Pioneer government officials.
- ▶ She has a taste for exotic, spicy and alien food. She befriends one Balla delegate, **Aeala**, who is a renowned chef. (If she survives, then after the conclave Aeala mentions that she is heading for Anaitis-17 for the Multi-Cluster Master Chef Tournament. The lasers will meet Aeala again in **The Anaitis Ingredient**.)
- ▶ Deena takes vioware injections regularly. If the characters break into her room and search it, they find osmetic punchers containing booster shots for the Aggravator and Dominator vioware strains, plus a third set of punchers that puts the human endocrine system into overdrive. Effectively, Deena has a one-shot blast of both vioware attacks with greatly increased range and effectiveness. She intends to use this during **The Last Debate** (page 91).
- ▶ At one point, Deena puts on her personal bluffer and leaves the conclave. Following her requires a **Surveillance** test at Difficulty 4. She sneaks out of the conference centre and goes to a nearby ruined section of the city.

Any characters following her notice that the ruins are guarded by Ministry of Security personnel. The guards are stationed around the ruins, not inside them; there are also drones flying overhead. The guards do not know who Deena is, but are under orders to let her pass. Anyone else who tries to penetrate the security cordon is to be shot on sight.

If the characters keep following Deena, they must make another **Surveillance** test, this time at Difficulty 6. If this second test is passed the characters



observe Bonner going to a ruined underground garage and checking a groundcar (the same groundcar that took her from the hangar on page 74). In a storage compartment under the rear seats is the Star Dagger. This event is an excellent opportunity to arrest Deena, but the characters will need to find a way to get her out of the area without being spotted by the guards.

- ▶ If the characters still have not arrested Deena by the end of the conference, then Fina Rossi meets with her just before **The Last Debate** (see page 91).

Interviewing: If the characters get to interrogate Deena, then the game is almost over. Try to delay this confrontation until an appropriate time by focussing on other avenues of investigation and side encounters. She answers questions in the hopes of ascertaining what the characters know. If she thinks that she can deflect suspicion onto Willa Lewis or David Tang, she does so. Otherwise, interviewing Deena quickly turns into a firefight and a chase scene as the bomber pulls out a lethal-setting disruptor pistol and opens fire. See **Taking Down The Terrorist**, below.

- ▶ As an ex-laser, Deena would normally be able to lie past **Bullshit Detector**, but she is too nervous and worried to conceal her reactions. Asking her about the *Beatrix* or the bombing reveals that she's hiding something.
- ▶ Deena claims that she arrived on a passenger ship a week ago. If asked, she has never heard of the *Beatrix*.
- ▶ **Virology** lets the characters identify Bonner as a user of Aggravator and Dominator viroware strains.

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 12, Scuffling 6, Shooting 10.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Fist +0

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Rifle +1

Hit Threshold: 4 (5 in hand to hand)

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, Personal Bluffer, Popper, Deflector (viroware) Aggravator, Dominator

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: +1

Taking Down The Terrorist

Scene Type: Conclusion

There are three possible ways for this investigation to successfully conclude.

- ▶ The characters arrest Deena Bonner quietly, incapacitating her and spiriting her out of the conclave without attracting attention. They sneak her off-planet and collect their reward.
- ▶ The characters arrest Deena Bonner very noisily, blasting the Ministry of Security guards and escaping in a running gun battle.
- ▶ The characters reveal Bonner's crimes at the conclave, presenting evidence to the assembled delegates. This is covered in **The Last Debate**, page 91.

This section covers the two violent options, suitable for players who don't want to engage in intrigue and who prefer to rely on their own ingenuity and toughness instead of putting themselves at the mercy of a room full of politicians.

The Subtle Approach: Up until the end of the conclave, Rossi deliberately keep away from Bonner. She does not want to establish a connection in the minds of the delegates between the neofascist government and Bonner. The characters can use this window of opportunity to arrest Bonner without the security forces interfering. They still need to get off the planet (see **Enemies of the State**, page 80).

As soon as Rossi realizes that Bonner is gone, then she sends her security forces after the characters.

The Noisy Approach: The noisy approach means that the characters start a firefight at the conclave. This causes panic among the delegates (or most of the delegates, anyway – **David Tang** merrily joins the fight on whichever side appears to be winning). There are twenty guards at the conclave, and more than a hundred within a short distance. Unless the lasers have an escape route pre-planned, they are almost certain to be overwhelmed.

If it looks as though the lasers are doomed, give them a last chance to put forward their evidence at **The Last Debate**.


 ASHEN STARS

Fighting Donner: Donner is an ex-laser and can handle herself in a firefight. If attacked, she immediately uses her Aggravator and Dominator viroware implants in quick succession. The Aggravator makes everyone nearby violent; the second gives her unnatural authority. She barks a command to the toughest-looking player character, pointing at another laser and shouting 'get them!' All the player characters feel extremely aggressive, especially towards Donner, but they also feel like she's in charge. Characters with no **Intimidation** points left cannot resist the Dominate effect, while characters with no **Inspiration, Negotiation** or **Respect** cannot resist the Aggravator. Those both Aggravated and Dominated attack the target designated by Donner; those merely Aggravated attack anyone they choose, and those merely Dominated have a one-point levy when attacking Donner. All these effects wear off after a few minutes.

While the PCs and any other bystanders are fighting off the pheromones, Donner tries to flee. She calls for the security guards to protect her and blazes away with her disruptor pistol. As she runs, she accuses the PCs of being Combinist spies and assassins.

The Last Debate

Scene Type: Conclusion

Here's what happens if the characters don't intervene at the end of the conclave:

- ▶ All the Bleedist delegates gather to vote on the final proposals of the conclave
- ▶ Director Rossi interrupts the meeting, to soberly report on the destruction of the *Beatrix*. She points out – in a neutral, matter-of-fact way – that many of the casualties were prominent Combinists, and that Combinism is now leaderless and in disarray.
- ▶ Deena Bonner then storms out of the crowd and seizes the podium. She declares that a blow has been struck for the freedom of the Bleed! The sycophants and Combine lackeys of the *Beatrix* were enemies of liberty and progress! Now is the time to strike! Break the chains of the Combine now! Let the conclave vote for rebellion and armed struggle! Let the fires of freedom lit here on Pioneer burn on a hundred worlds across the Bleed!

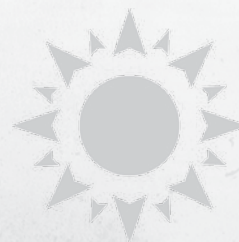
- ▶ While giving her speech, Bonner floods the room with pheromones.
- ▶ The delegates – confused, shocked, blasted with Aggravator and Dominator pheromones, and inspired by the news – vote in favor of forceful action against the Combine.
- ▶ This vote is reported by the government-controlled media of Pioneer as an endorsement of violent action and uprising against the Combine. By the time the delegates return to their homeworlds, the whole Bleed believes they voted for war.
- ▶ The Bleed rises up against the Combine, fighting for independence. Pioneer's neofascist government continues to thrive and becomes even more influential. Rossi becomes a new McMillen, a tyrant controlling dozens of star systems.

What actually happens depends on the actions of the lasers.

Arresting Bonner: If the lasers arrest Bonner before she can give her speech, then Rossi is left without a firebrand to sway the conclave. The director cannot replace Bonner in time, and cannot claim responsibility for the destruction of the *Beatrix* herself, as the delegates mistrust the Pioneer government. The conclave is divided on the question of the *Beatrix* – some people consider it a stroke of luck, other decry it as a tragedy, but there is no consensus and certainly no endorsement of war. Rossi's plan crumbles.

Discrediting Bonner: If the lasers don't arrest Bonner, then they can still discredit her before or after her speech. The characters need to present conclusive evidence that Bonner destroyed the liner, but *also* that she had the backing of the Pioneer government. It's not enough to prove that the *Beatrix* attack was terrorism, as some of the more extreme Bleedists would consider her attack on the Combinist passengers to be acceptable. They need to draw a line connecting Bonner with the McMillenist government.

If the characters manage to do this, then the delegates turn on Bonner and Rossi. The conclave ends in acrimony. Rossi denies all the charges, but no-one believes her. Bonner asks for asylum on Pioneer, but Rossi refuses and hands her over to the lasers.





FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATIONS

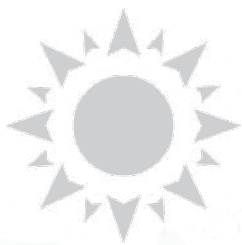
If you want to expand on the events of this investigation, there are several potential sequels.

Ossa One Conference Bombing: What does Bonner intend to do with the Star Dagger? Could Ossa One – the single most important symbol of the Combine presence in the Bleed – be her next target? If the lasers did not find the Star Dagger, then one of Bonner's allies recovered the weapon and intends to wreak bloody revenge on Ossa One.

The Conclave: The decisions made on Pioneer will affect the course of events across the Bleed. What did the conclave decide? Armed revolt or diplomacy? A pan-Bleed culture or a fractured civilization where every world goes its own way?

The Fate of Pioneer: By foiling Rossi's plans, the characters have made enemies of a planetary government. What if Rossi seeks revenge on the characters? Will the threat of Combine attack make Rossi and Caver more desperate? They are already constructing a fleet of modern warships, and there is also the possibility that they are experimenting with ways to undo the genetic restrictions on kch-thk population growth and consumption...

The Dark Tide: Pioneer isn't the only place where McMillenism is resurgent. There are many who believe the Combine ethos has failed and that humanity should fight for a bigger share of the galaxy. While investigating Caver's regime, the characters find clues leading to other McMillenist conspiracies and schemes.





THE ANAITIS INGREDIENT

The lasers are hired to provide security for a high-profile cooking contest on the Anaitis-17 space station. The station is attacked from within and without by fanatic Restreamers, who intend to trigger a temporal event that will rewrite history.

The Contract

Anaitis-17 is located at a nexus of translight corridors. Before the war, it was a transport hub, and travelers from all over the Bleed passed through here, but interstellar commerce and traffic has dropped off since the war. In an attempt to revitalize the station, they are hosting an interstellar cooking contest. The lasers are to ensure that everything runs smoothly.

The Twist

The attacks are actually part of the Restreamer plot to alter history. When their initial attempts fail, they take a riskier approach that results in the opening of a dimensional prison and the return of the CKEGMC.

The Backstory

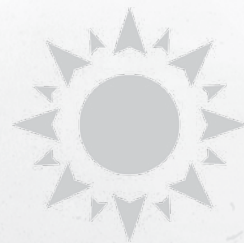
Anaitis-17 is close to a junction of several translight corridors. If the station were to be violently destroyed, the cataclysmic release of energy just might cause a chain reaction, collapsing the corridors. The Restreamers believe that this chain reaction can be harnessed to 'reset' the universe. They plan to manipulate a race of spacegoing creatures, the Proveen, into destroying the station. The mystery ingredient in the cooking contest are stolen Proveen larvae. One of the Restreamers, **Leanne Warlock**, captured the larvae and supplied them to **Daniel Seifert**, assistant to the contest organizer.

The main Restreamer base is a short distance away from the space station, on the planet **Tesilas**. The Restreamers found the wreck of Numi Grant's ship, the *Clarion*, and the dimensional pocket where she imprisoned the CKEGMC. They believe that the dimensional pocket is actually an embryonic universe. If they open it, they will release a terrible threat to the whole Combine...

The Investigation

While getting their **briefing** (page 94), the lasers are alerted to the danger of an **incoming projectile** (page 95) – a mash of wreckage and debris gathered by the Proveen and thrown at the station. After dealing with that threat, there are several lines of investigation. **Examining the wreckage** or following the projectile's course back leads the characters to **The Proveen**, who are lurking in a nearby gas giant. Back on the station, the lasers investigate **the cooking contestants, the station staff** and **Station Anaitis-17**, all of which leads them to **the mystery ingredient**. They pursue the Restreamers into **the station core** for a shootout.

Once the Proveen larvae have been returned, clues from the defeated Restreamers lead the lasers to **the mystery planet**. They locate the **wreck of the Clarion** and **sneak into the Restreamer base**. After enduring some **Restreamer Theology** and **searching the ship** they enter **the Unstable Zone** in pursuit of Zekeel Flynt, the insane Restreamer prophet. In the nick of time, they are able to **capture Flynt**.





Complications

On the station:

- ▶ Rival chefs at the contest may throw the lasers off the trail with **Vicious Rumors** and allegations of **Sabotage!**
- ▶ The kch-thk hunger journalist has his own reasons for searching for the Proveen larvae. See **Inhuman Hunger**, page 111.
- ▶ There are **Restreamer Agents** on Anaitis-17; once the lasers foil the initial attack, they try to destroy the station with more conventional weapons.

On Tesilas

- ▶ If the characters failed to placate the Proveen, then those aliens are still a danger on Tesilas.
- ▶ There are lots of **Restreamer Fanatics** in the wrecked ship, who the PCs must deal with in some fashion.
- ▶ The dimensional instability can cause **Weird Anomalies** while the lasers are exploring the wreck.

The Choice

What do the lasers do, knowing a terrible danger has been unleashed?

Running the Investigation

The adventure is very much a game of two parts. In the first section, you need to balance the comedy elements of the cooking contest with the real threat of sabotage. Use Willo and the other absurd NPCs as distractions who try to drag the PCs away from the more important investigation – don't let the players get too caught up in the contest. (At the same time, don't let that plotline drop completely, either – the cooking contest is a B plot for the investigation, but it's still important.)

Consider how you want to present the Proveen. If you make them very sympathetic, then you need to give the players ample opportunity to rescue the imperiled larvae, otherwise the sense of defeat if the lasers fail to find all the infant Proveen may damage the rest of the game. Keeping the Proveen as alien space monsters may be easier.

The second section on Tesilas is a more straightforward action sequence. Keep the pressure of time on the players – as soon as they arrive at Tesilas, make it clear that the Restreamers are about to do something terrible, and that the lasers must act immediately to stop Flynt.

SCENES

The Briefing

Scene Type: Intro

This mission starts with the characters having already accepted their contract. Tell them the following information.

- ▶ The crew have been hired by **Myrna Yeoman**, the administrator of the Anaitis-17 space station.
- ▶ Anaitis-17 is located at the junction of several major translight corridors. It used to be a big transport hub, but interstellar traffic has dropped off since the war, and that means a commensurate drop in income. The station is in dire need of money and maintenance.
- ▶ The lack of cash flow has taken its toll on Yeoman; she's plainly exhausted and stressed. She wants to micromanage everything, so she's summoned you to her office as soon as you docked.
- ▶ The job is to provide security during the '**Multi-Cluster Master Chef Tournament**', a cooking competition that Yeoman hopes will revitalize the station's fortunes. Chefs are coming from all over the Bleed for this contest.
- ▶ The contest is hosted by eccentric cybe entertainer **Willo**, better known as 'Willo the People'. He claims to be a collective of hundreds of digital personalities all sharing the same body. His comedy dialogues with himself are popular bootlegs across the Bleed.
- ▶ Physically, the station resembles a six-armed starfish. Only three of the docking arms and the central sphere are in use. The other sections are sealed; the lack of maintenance means their structural integrity cannot be guaranteed.

The Briefing: The lasers arrive at Myrna's office in the heart of the station. It's crammed with engineering diagrams, traffic reports, newsfeeds, spare parts, piles of documents – it's as though Yeoman is trying to run the whole station single-handedly. She tells the lasers to sit down (there may be chairs


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there, somewhere under the debris) and launches into her briefing. She interrupts herself repeatedly to check some trivial matter or attend to some problem; for example, she might suddenly remember that the fuel pump in the laser's docking bay is prone to jamming, or have a brief shouted conversation with one of her aides in the next room. Give the impression that she has the weight of the whole station on her shoulders.

- ▶ The cooking contest is vitally important to the station's future as an independent transport hub. They need to get people traveling again.
- ▶ There are hundreds of visitors from all over the Bleed here; terrorists, smugglers, racial hate attacks and petty thieves are all potential threats.
- ▶ The chefs all loathe each other. The lasers must be on watch for sabotage.
- ▶ They must understand the subtlety of the cooking contest. A few molecules of a pungent substance could ruin the precisely engineered taste of a dish. The tiniest sample of a sauce could allow one chef to reverse-engineer the work of a rival. The briefest contact with a custom viroware user could imperceptibly alter the palate of a judge so he prefers one dish over another. They must be aware of the smallest details if they are to provide adequate security for -

Interruption: Administrator Yeoman's speech is cut off by a call from the traffic control centre. They've just detected an incoming object at extreme sensor range. Whatever it is, it's huge and it's on a collision course with Anaitis-17.

Clues obtainable from the station's sensor readings are listed below. Gung-ho lasers can rush to their ship and take off immediately to deal with the threat, in which case they get the clues en route. Paranoid groups may decide that this projectile is a distraction from the real mission, the cooking contest, in which case the group should split up. Half the crew can deal with the **incoming projectile**, while the rest investigate the station.

- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** The object is metallic, and has a mass of approximately 50,000 tons.
One-point **Energy Signatures** spend: There's still some electromagnetic activity on board, suggesting the presence of some technology. If that's a wrecked ship, the engines might still be working. It might be possible to alter the wreck's course so it misses the station.

- ▶ **Industrial Design:** Looking at the object's signature, it's probably a wrecked ship – or several wrecked ships lashed together.

One-point **Industrial Design** spend: The character can tell the bits of different ships apart even at this range. There is wreckage from at least five ships in the projectile – a Combine freighter, a durough raider, a kch-thk colony ship, and two unidentified vessels. They range between two hundred and twenty years old.

One-point **Explosive Devices** spend: Put an explosive charge in the right place, and you can blow that ball of wreckage into several sections which should – mostly – fly harmlessly past the station. There would be a hail of shrapnel, but Anaitis-17 has inertia cloud arrays which should prevent catastrophic damage.

- ▶ Tracing the course of the projectile back, it seems to originate on the far side of Notus, the local gas giant. If the lasers fly out and attach a glommer (towing line) to the wreck, they can drag it out of the way of the station. The station's tugs can provide the characters with a towing line, but don't have the range to reach the projectile.
- ▶ Unless stopped, it will impact on the station within four hours.

Incoming Projectile

Scene Type: Hazard

As the characters approach the projectile, they can make out more details about it. It's a bizarre sight – it looks as if some giant hand had reached down and scrunched several wrecked ships into a ball. The projectile is gigantic. The lasers' ship may be able drag it off course just enough to save the station, but it will be close.

Scanning the wreckage from close range turns up a few more clues:

- ▶ If the characters just drop a glommer on it, they will just pull a small section of debris off the surface. Someone is going to have to go on board and attach the glommer to a hardpoint in the middle of the debris.
- ▶ There is some sort of organic resin in places, which is holding the wreck together. Getting a sample of that might prove interesting.



There are three ways to deal with the incoming projectile. In descending likelihood of success, they are blowing it up, towing it out of the way, and restarting the engines of the most intact wreck. However, all three require someone to board the wreck.

Boarding the Wreck: Moving through the wreck is a nerve-racking experience. There's no gravity. There's no light except for the characters' meglights. The terrain is a bizarre mix of the familiar and the treacherous – in some places, you can walk down a wholly intact corridor, but then you turn a corner and find the next section of the corridor has been crushed into a narrow tunnel of jagged metal, and the only way forward is to float down this passageway of knives. The only sound – audible through bone-conduction – is the grinding of metal as the wreck shifts and tumbles through space.

Call for **Athletics** tests. The difficulty of the test varies depending on how quickly the characters want to move through the wreck. If they are taking their time, then the Difficulty is only 4, but they have less time to alter the projectile's course. If they race through the wreck, then the Difficulty is 7, but they get to their destination faster. A character who fails gets into trouble – she might cut her suit open on a sharp piece of metal, or lose her footing and find herself drifting off into space.

Blowing Up The Wreck: The lasers reach the middle of the wreck, and plant explosive charges. A one-point **Explosives Devices** spend is required to find the right place. If this is the first method the characters tried to destroy the wreck, then they have plenty of time to get back to their ship before setting off the charges. Otherwise, a Difficulty 6 **Athletics** test is needed to escape the wreck in time; characters who fail the test have to leap off the wreck as it is blown apart. Such characters suffer 2d6 damage; the lasers' ship is hit by flying debris (treat as a normal hit in combat).

Anaitis-17 is similarly pelted by shrapnel; Administrator Yeoman is very displeased with this, as it adds hundreds of bigcreds to her repair bill. Still, the station is safe.

Towing the Wreck: Finding the right place to attach the glommer requires a one-point **Industrial Design** or **Forensic Engineering** check. The characters can then start towing the projectile off course. This requires a Helm Control test at a Difficulty that varies depending on how quickly the characters moved through the wreck earlier. Output points may be spent to augment Helm Control.

If the lasers' ship has a tractor beam, they can use that instead. Tractor beams are much better suited to use in space than towing lines, reducing the towing difficulty by 2.

Moving Difficulty	Towing Difficulty
4	10
5	8
6	6
7	4

If the test is successful, the projectile is pulled off course enough to miss the station. If the test is failed, then the pilot of the ship has the option to pull even harder to make up the difference, but this risks severe damage to the ship. The ship gains 1 point of Condition for every two points of difference between the towing roll and the Difficulty.

Repairing the Engines: The largest intact portion of the wreckage comes from an old kch-thk colony ship that predates the Combine. It's an eerie space hulk to walk through; the walls are lined with the freeze-dried remains of millions of kch-thk larvae, and in places there are the remains of food supplies carried by the colonists (the ship also predates the kch-thk feeding restriction, so some of these supplies were once sentient). The drive core is largely undamaged.

Getting the engines running requires a Systems Repair test at Difficulty 8. A one-point spend of **kck-thk history** or **Industrial Design** reduces the difficulty by 1 each. If the test is successful, the engines fire and push the wreckage off its collision course with the station.

Examining the Wreckage

Scene Type: Alternate

If the lasers managed to preserve the wreckage, they can search it for clues.

- ▶ There are drifts of hydrogen slush in places, suggesting that some sections of the projectile spent years floating in the upper atmosphere of the gas giant.
- ▶ The projectile's course can be traced back to the gas giant. It was clearly aimed directly at the station.
- ▶ **Forensic Engineering:** There are some signs of battle damage in the wrecks, but others look like they were abandoned. The various wrecked ships obviously spent years floating in deep space or in the gas giant, before some force gathered them all


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together, mashed them into a ball and flung them at the space station. It's obvious from the stress patterns and fractures that this happened very recently – probably within the last eight hours.

- ▶ **Archaeology:** A character with this ability can reconstruct some eroded lettering on one section of hull plating, and make out the name *Clarion*. It appears that a chunk of projectile comes from the long-lost Combine cruiser *Clarion*, the ship of legendary lost captain Numi Grant. Remind the players of the tale of Numi Grant (see page 114) if they don't recall it already. Only a small section of the *Clarion* is part of the projectile; it looks to be part of the cruiser's rear shuttle bay. The rest of the ship may still be out there somewhere.
- ▶ **Chemistry:** The organic goo holding the wreckage together is a highly complex carbon/tungsten secretion. It appears to have been freshly deposited. The character also finds traces of more organic material in places. A little digging turns up some scales, which look like they fell off whatever assembled the wrecks and hurled them at the station, like a human might leave skin flakes behind. If the comparison holds true, then whatever threw the projectile is the size of a big starship. The 'skin flakes' are half a meter across.

Xenology: There are celestial creatures who live in space. This residue could come from such a creature. It's theorized that such creatures feed in or near gas giants, scooping up gases and consuming electromagnetic discharges in the upper atmosphere.

Two-point **Chemistry** spend: The character can come up with a formula for a chemical weapon that might be effective against the biochemistry of such a species.

If the lasers head to Notus (the gas giant), they get to confront **the Proveen** (page 106) there; otherwise, the space-going creatures will arrive to threaten the space station later in the scenario.

Station Anaitis-17

Scene Type: Alternate

Anaitis-17 is vast; at its height, tens of thousands of passengers came through here every day. Only half the station is

still in use, and much of this area is deserted. The cooking contest is being held in the central hub, a grand concourse of shops and garden areas. The organizers of the contest have tried to dress the place up as best they can, but the essential dinginess and desperation of the station bleeds through.

Each of the contestants has his or her own booth on the concourse. In each round of the contest, supplies including a special mystery ingredient are delivered to each booth at the start of the day. The chefs must then turn these ingredients into a meal, which is then sampled by both the judges and (if there's any left) the audience. The grand concourse is the only crowded area on the station.

The six docking arms each have one main docking port for big freighters and passenger liners, and dozens of smaller ports for lesser craft. Only arms 2, 3 and 5 are still in use; arms 4 and 6 are both open to vacuum, and the great ornamental passageway of Arm 1 (decorated with a series of holos depicting the glory days of the Combine) was damaged by a fire during the war and is still undergoing repairs.

- ▶ There are security cameras and imaging snails in a few key areas, but most of the station has no surveillance.
- ▶ There are, however, automated observation drones in the grand concourse. They're recording the cooking contest for holobroadcast. A **Holo Surveillance** spend lets the characters access these drones; if the players are stuck, then let them pick up a clue from the drones.
- ▶ There are weapon and explosive scanners at the main docking ports. The ones on Arms 1, 4 and 6 are shut down.
- ▶ **Astronomy:** The station's proximity to the knot of translight corridors causes all sorts of potentially dangerous effects, like radiation showers and meson shrapnel. The station was built with defenses to protect passengers and crew, but these defenses need to be regularly maintained. A lot of the station's problems could be caused by the translight corridors.
- ▶ If the lasers painstakingly search all three unoccupied docking arms – a process that takes many hours – they find the *Wrongway Corrigan* in one docking bay. Checking with **Bureaucracy** or **Data Retrieval** shows that this ship does not appear in the station records. See the sidebar on page 100 for more on the *Wrongway*.



The Station Staff

Scene Type: Alternate

While the lasers will probably focus their initial investigative efforts on the contest, the station staff have their own secrets related to the Restreamer plot.

Myrna Yeoman: The put-upon administrator needs the contest to succeed. She checks in with the lasers regularly to make sure that everything is under control. If the lasers turn up evidence that would put the contest's future in jeopardy, then Yeoman orders, begs and cajoles them not to shut it down. She threatens them with not paying their fee if the characters disobey her orders.

- ▶ **Forensic Psychology:** Yeoman's whole sense of self is tied up in the station. She may be capable of going to any lengths in order to preserve Anaitis-17.

- ▶ **Forensic Accounting:** A transit hub like this one should be insured. If the station were to fall victim to an 'accident', then all of Yeoman's problems would be over.
- ▶ A character who makes a successful **Systems Repair** or **Business Affairs** test (Difficulty 4) can take some of the pressure off Yeoman, opening up the possibility of using interpersonal abilities with her.
- ▶ Expressing **Respect** for Yeoman's determination to keep the station running makes her confide in the characters. She had an offer to buy the station a year ago from a group called the **True Path Group**; they claimed to be a charitable group set up to revitalize the Bleed, but something about them worried her, and she refused. Ever since then, she's worried that the True Path Group will try to sabotage the station to force her to sell.



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A one-point **Forensic Accounting** spend coupled with **Data Retrieval** lets the character look through financial records and reports, following the money back through a dozen corporate shells. The True Path Group are closely associated with the Restreamer religion.

- ▶ If asked about Leanne Warlock, Yeoman looks uncomfortable and tries to dodge the question. **Bullshit Detector** shows she is hiding some unfortunate truth. If pressed, Yeoman admits that Warlock is a smuggler. In exchange for Warlock supplying the parts needed to keep the station running, Yeoman let her use the station without logging all her movements. Warlock's ship, the *Wrongway Corrigan*, is docked in Arm 1.
- ▶ One of the contestants, **Aeala**, is a Bleedist and wants to meet with Myrna and win her support for the Bleedist movement (see **The Contestants** and **Vicious Rumors**). Politically, Myrna is very carefully neutral – she just wants to keep the station running, and fears that committing to one side or the other could backfire.

uRobbie: Yeoman's chief technician is a cybe called uRobbie. He's one of the earliest-model cybes, practically an antique by the standards of the young race. His cybernetic implants are outmoded and bulky. Notably, his vocal cords were replaced by a high-bandwidth radio designed to encode and transmit tactical data. The intent was that squads of cybe warriors would communicate instantly with each other, and that human vocal communications would be useless to them. uRobbie speaks to the rest of the crew using an interpreter device he built for himself. It has only a limited vocabulary, and his 'speech' is slow and stilted. Talking to uRobbie via the interpreter is extremely frustrating. If questioned through the interpreter, he only answers in monosyllables and volunteers no information.

He can interface directly with another cybe, allow the characters to speak to him without having to work around the interpreter's limitations. Alternatively, a character can build a better interpreter with a Difficulty 6 **Systems Design** test.

- ▶ He saw one of the contest crew (**Daniel Seifer**) talking to **Leanne Warlock**. Leanne's ship is docked in the deserted Arm 1.
- ▶ There's another laser on board. uRobbie doesn't know what his name is. He ran into the laser while doing repairs over in the cargo bay; the laser flashed a badge and threatened to shoot uRobbie if the cybe revealed his presence. The laser was a young baseline human.

A **Reassurance** spend and a promise to protect uRobbie convinces the cybe to accompany the characters on a walk around the station, during which he can spot and identify Bobbie Ward.

- ▶ Meson shrapnel has been getting a lot worse lately, interfering with the station's equipment. Having so many translight corridors in close proximity is always a problem.

Leanne Warlock: Leanne Warlock is a smuggler and free trader. Her tramp ship, the *Wrongway Corrigan*, has been a frequent visitor to the station for the last year. Yeoman and she are friends, and the station administrator turns a blind eye to Warlock's use of the station for transporting mildly illegal goods. In exchange, Warlock supplies Yeoman with vitally needed spare parts and supplies to keep the station running.

Secretly, Warlock is a member of the Restreamers. Her smuggling and trading was originally a cover for her peregrinations from world to world, keeping different branches of the religious cult in touch with the prophet on Tesilas. Ever since the Restreamers became interested in Anaitis-17 (or, more accurately, its position in the translight corridor network), her role has been to keep watch on the station and gather information.

At first glance, Warlock does not seem like the sort to find religion. She's a hard-as-neutronium veteran space traveler, endlessly practical and refusing to take shit from anyone, up to and including the laws of physics – it is certainly a miracle that the *Wrongway* is still flying. Her ship has long since passed the 'gum and bailing wire' stage and is well into 'spit, tooth floss and sheer determination.' Her conversion to the Restreamers came when she landed on Tesilas and met with prophet Flynt, who showed her the secret at the heart of the crashed *Clarion* and convinced her that there was another universe out there, a better reality for everyone. Her religion is not based on blind faith, but on what she believes to have been a genuine revelation.

Even if she wasn't part of a crazy cult scheme to wipe out the station with space squid larvae, she would avoid the lasers as a matter of principle – her smuggling activities have drawn the attention of law enforcement before. If the characters speak to her before they know of her connections to the contest and the Proveen larvae, she claims to be just an honest trade. Harassing Warlock gets the characters in trouble with Administrator Yeoman.



THE WRONGWAY CORRIGAN

Warlock's smuggling ship is hidden in a docking bay in Arm 1. The ship is a heavily rebuilt Runner-class, with the control system optimized for a single operator. The ship is protected by an automated security system; breaking in requires an **Infiltration** or **Filch** test at Difficulty 6. Failure means the ship deploys an automatic disruptor cannon on a robot arm and starts blasting away. The robot arm has **Shooting 8**, **Health 8** and inflicts damage as per a standard lethal-setting disruptor.

On board, the characters find the following clues:

- ▶ **Bio-Signatures:** The cargo hold contains life support equipment and dozens of empty deep-freeze cubicles, suggesting it was recently carrying a cargo of living beings, possibly livestock. There are 36 freezer cubicles in the cargo hold.
- ▶ Searching Warlock's cabin reveals a large amount of Restreamer literature and scripture. Some of the documents are only a few weeks old and are written by 'the Prophet', suggesting she has regular contact with the leadership of the Restreamer cult.
- ▶ **Data Retrieval:** According to her navigational computer, Warlock came directly from an uncharted and dangerous region of space, known as the Edge of the Abyss, deep within the Medusa Outzone. Using this navigational data, the characters can find the planet **Tesilias**.
- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** Warlock's computers contain months of detailed sensor readings. She was examining the knot of translight corridors near the station, and running simulations about the results of a catastrophic explosion on the corridors. Apparently, it would cause a chain reaction along the corridors. Interestingly, the main wavefront would have been directed into the Medusa Outzone.

- ▶ The characters are unlikely to question her until the events of **Dead Laser**, page 105 – see **Interviewing Warlock** in that section for more details.
- ▶ While Leanne is a committed Restreamer, she does not know about the cult's intentions to destroy Anaitis-17. She believes the Proveen larvae are part of a plot to disrupt the cooking contest, thus keeping the station dependent on the cult for supplies.
- ▶ Leanne knows there are other Restreamers on board, but cannot identify them.

The Cooking Contestants

Scene Type: Core

Core Clues: Billy Ward

The Multi-Cluster Master Chef Tournament begins a short time after the lasers arrive at the station. The characters have time to observe or question a few of the NPCs involved before the contest starts, but after that everyone is extremely busy and has little time to be interrogated. Emphasize the noise, the heat and the crowds when describing the con-course during the contest, as well as the constant presence of flying observation drones recording the events for broadcast on a dozen worlds.

Willo: The flamboyant cybe entertainer 'Willo the People' is (or, as they would say, are) the host(s) of the contest. Willo claims to be a collective intelligence made up of hundreds of uploaded personalities. He insists on using the third person to refer to himself, and Willo's speech pattern and personality changes with every sentence. He even argues with himself. He has little popularity among other cybes, who see him as a playing to ugly stereotypes about their race ('let's all gawp at the weird broken cyborg and his crazy robot ways'), but he has a growing popularity among other races. As Willo puts it, he's the only person telling jokes in the Bleed these days.

Willo has no idea about the organization of the contest; his job is just to be entertaining on camera. If the lasers play along with him, and agree to help with the contest (see **Judge Needed. Must Have Own Gun** (page 103), then Willo gives his expert assessment of the contestants.

- ▶ He's noticed a rivalry between **Takak** and **Dalton Person**, and intends to do everything he can to provoke the pair. Drama makes for good holovision.

- ▶ He's not sure about the balla, **Aeala**. Traditionally, Balla look good on camera, but he needs something more to draw her out. If the characters inform him of Aeala's strong Bleedist ties, then Willo antagonizes her during the contest by making tasteless references to the recent destruction of the *Beatrix* (from *Period of Tyranny*).
- ▶ Finally, he's not sure why **Tamra Allen** is here at all. She's a very poor chef compared to the others. Apparently, she's sponsored by some charity or other.

A little digging lets the characters find out that Allen is here thanks to the True Path Group (see page 98)

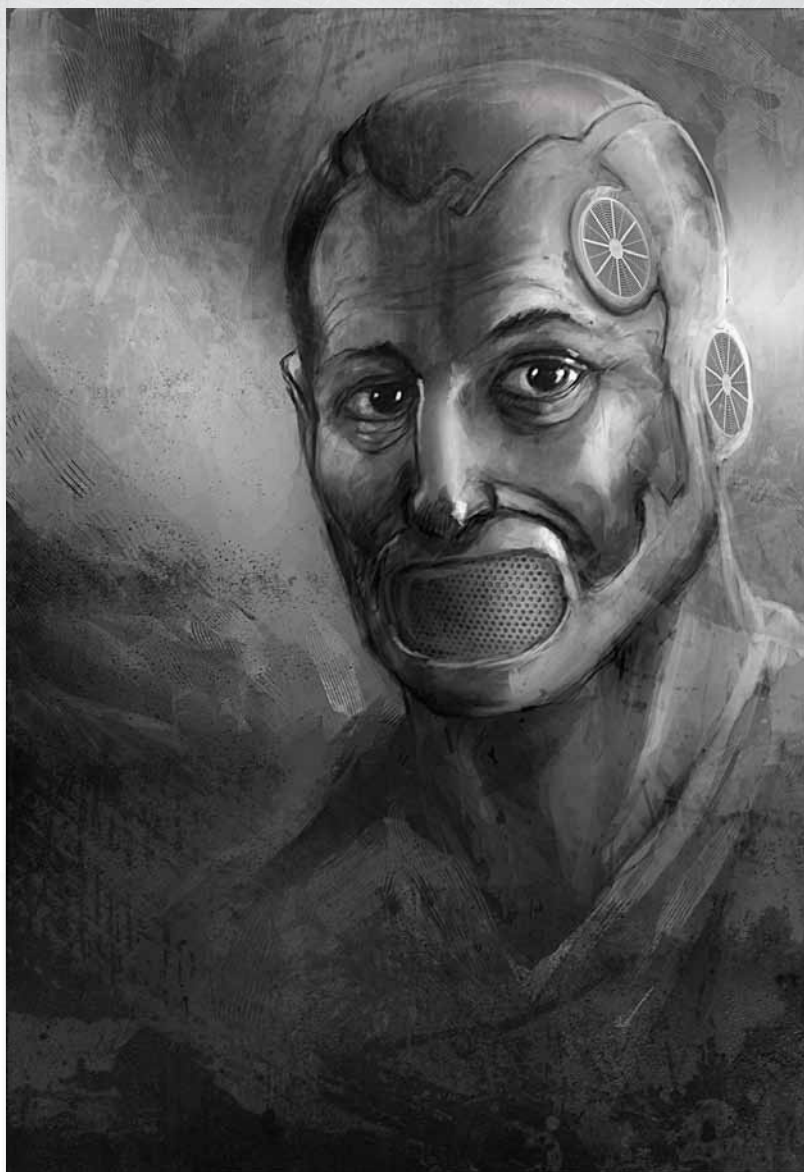
- ▶ **Flattery** gets Willo to talk about his grand plan. The chefs come from a dozen different planets, and they are all experts in several different cuisines. They've seen everything... or so they think. He suggested to Seifert that they really stump the chefs by finding something new, and Seifert did exactly that. The first mystery ingredient in the cooking contest really is a mystery – it's an 'Erebusian Shrimp', a species that was only recently discovered and never cooked before!

Daniel Seifert: Seifert is the organizer and one of the judges of the cooking contest. He is a moderately successful holovideo producer, always on the look-out for new ideas. Characters with **Public Relations** should have a Pavlovian reaction to the words 'holovideo producer'; if not, then have Seifert suggest that he could work with the laser crew on a holovideo series about their exploits – assuming they prove themselves by keeping the Master Chef tournament running smoothly.

- ▶ Play him as a shallow executive. He sees everything in terms of marketing and audience share.
- ▶ If asked about the mystery ingredient, then Seifert says that it's a secret. If the contest is a success, then that mystery ingredient will become the hottest foodstuff in the Bleed. He can't reveal his source.

Threatening him with **Interrogation**, or suggesting a non-disclosure agreement with **Law** or **Bureaucracy**, or (later in the investigation) pointing out the window at the giant space squid makes Seifert reconsider. He obtained the Erebusian Shrimp from a smuggler on the station, **Leanne Warlock**.

Takak: Like the rest of the Tavak people, Takak the Tavak is big. He's got a personality to match; his booming voice and forceful attitude make him seem ten feet tall when in fact



he's really only eight foot. Takak is one of the few *tunquac* in the Bleed. The *tunquac* is something between a shaman and a nutritionist, specializing in creating altered states of consciousness through feeding. Back on the Tavak homeworld, this involved feeding insect colonies with specially blended chemical sprays, then eating the insects. Takak has taken this approach and applied it the foods of other species. If you want a really good steak, he says, start with the grass.

He claims to be the greatest chef in the Bleed; he is certainly the most egotistical. If it is possible for an eight-foot-tall alien armadillo to be snooty, he is a snooty eight foot tall armadillo. Other tavak burst into a furious rage when provoked; he has hissy fits.



His ego will not permit him to lose the cooking contest. As soon as he learned that a mystery ingredient was involved, he hired a private detective, **Billy Ward**, to investigate Anaitis-17 and find out the ingredient. The laser combed the station, running into **uRobbie** at one point, until he found the 'Erebusian Shrimp' and brought a sample back to Takak.

Billy shows up dead in **Dead Laser**, page 105.

Dalton Person: The *other* greatest chef in the Bleed, Person is both a tribute and a cautionary example of the power of viroware. He has been optimized for his chosen role. His palate is thousands of times more sensitive than the average human, his hand-eye co-ordination is enhanced, he has an eidetic memory and the ability to simulate taste combinations in his brain. These enhancements unfortunately make it impossible for him to function in any ordinary environment.

BILLY WARD

Billy Ward is a would-be laser hired by Takak as a private detective. He is a young human from a border colony with a knack for investigation and an itchy trigger finger. He intends to become a laser, but needs cash and contacts to get a crew together. He encountered Takak when the master chef was en route to Anaitis-17, and was hired to investigate and identify the mystery ingredient.

Billy arrived at the station a few days before the contestants. He explored the station (and ran into **uRobbie**) and has discovered that **Daniel Seifert** is buying some sort of frozen creatures off **Leanne Warlock**. He reports this information to Takak, and promises to obtain one of the creatures so the tavek can experiment on the new ingredient. Unfortunately, he's killed by **Tamra Allen** before he can deliver the shrimp – see **Dead Laser** for more details.

The players may not interact directly with Billy before his body turns up, but the GM should try to establish him as a character beforehand. Billy blends into the crowd most of the time, but any character with a good **Sense Trouble** or **Cop Talk** might pick up on the presence of a young man with a well-used sidearm and a carefully practiced casual demeanor.

Loud noises, strong smells and bright lights all repel him. He comes from a fantastically wealthy banking family – he could buy Anaitis-17 ten times over if he wanted.

He and Takak have an ongoing rivalry, which explodes in **Sabotage** on page 109. He takes every opportunity to denigrate Takak in particular, and all Tavak in general. He is a speciesist – the only non-humans he likes are the Balla. Other races are smelly and unappreciative of his genius.

Tamra Allen: By most standards, Allen is an excellent cook, but she's completely outclassed by the other contestants. Her entry into the contest was sponsored by a charitable organization, the True Path Group. Both Tamra Allen and the True Pathers are part of the Restreamer movement. She is here to monitor events on the station and ensure that Leanne Warlock holds true to the cause. Allen is one of the Restreamer movement's most skilled and dangerous operatives – she is a holy assassin, committed to fulfilling her mission.

Allen is convinced that in a short period, the destruction of Anaitis-17 will trigger a cataclysmic explosion that will reboot the universe. As far as she is concerned, she stands on the threshold of paradise, an eschatological angel who will remake all creation... and here she is, stuck competing in a cooking contest while she waits for the end of the world. She is therefore somewhat distracted and irritable.

Aeala: The lasers may have encountered this Balla before, back on Pioneer in *Period of Tyranny*. Aeala is a committed member of the Bleedist political movement. She came to Anaitis-17 to participate in the cooking contest (she is only an amateur chef, but she has considerable talent), but her real purpose is to recruit station administrator Myrna Yeoman to the Bleedist cause. The space station is a crossroads for trade and travel in the Bleed, once trade and travel start up again, and Yeoman may one day be a useful asset for the Bleedists. So far, Anaitis-17 has stayed carefully neutral in the political debate.

Aeala intends to keep her political affiliation secret for the moment – after the destruction of the *Beatrix*, the popularity of Bleedism has suffered a blow. She also has the documentation and authorization to give a sum of several hundred Bigcreds to Anaitis-17 on behalf of the Bleedists. This funding isn't enough to keep the station running indefinitely, but it could save the station if the contest fails.


 ASHEN STARS

Trkk-Trkk: Trkk-Trkk is a kch-thk hunger reporter. He travels the universe, looking for new foodstuffs to consume. His mandibles and digestive tracts are wired with cybernetic sensors, allowing him to perfectly record taste and texture sensations for later broadcast to the rest of his species. Trkk-Trkk is one of the oldest kch-thk; he claims that his first body hatched in the early 2100s, so he predates contact with humanity. His xenosocial skills are extremely poor; he still regards humans as 'useful talking meat'. Even with a rosetta chip, his speech patterns are staccato, alien and cryptic.

Trkk-Trkk has become extremely jaded. He has eaten everything edible in the Combine Proper, and came to the Bleed in search of new sensation. He has yet to find anything to sate his curious hunger. Rumors of a mystery ingredient in the cooking contest attracted his attention. He is utterly singleminded in his pursuit of new sensation.

Trkk-Trkk becomes a danger to the whole station in **Inhuman Hunger**, page 111.

The Contest Begins

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The Identities of the Contestants

'Ladies! Gentlemen! Other, non-, trans- or multi-gendered! Lifeforms of all species, ages! Also, any Vas Mal who are still out there blissing out in the higher dimensions and are reading our minds, hey to you too! It's us, the Cybe with the Funky Vibe, the Cool-ective itself, Willo the People, and we're here on Space Station Anaitis-17 to sample the finest cuisine in the Bleed! We've gathered the best chefs from known space and we're going to pit them against each other – to the death!

What, no death? Not even a little death? Bzzt. Does not compute. Does not compute.

My delicious sensors are overloading, so let's meet the contestants...!'

The grand opening of the cooking contest takes place on the concourse. Camera drones buzz overhead. There is a live band, entertainers and exotic sights from across the Bleed to give the station a carnival atmosphere.

Willo bounds around the concourse, followed by a swarm of camera-drones. He interviews various contestants, including the four main NPCs (Takak, Person, Allen and Aeala), as well as contest organizer Seifert and the journalist Trkk-Trkk. Use this scene to establish any NPCs that the players have not already spoken to.

He also explains that the judges for the contest will be Daniel Seifert, Willo himself (themselves?) and a highly respected chef from the Combine Proper, Iya Dann, whose ship has unfortunately been delayed but she will be here shortly. The first round of the cooking contest is a speed round – ingredients have been delivered to all the contestant's booths, and the contestants have one hour to make a dish of their choice.

If the characters hang around the concourse, they spot:

- ▶ Billy Ward having a brief conversation with Takak. Ward then vanishes into the crowd. He turns up dead in **Dead Laser** (page 105).
- ▶ Aeala asking Myrna Yeoman for a private meeting. Yeoman is too busy to agree to such a meeting; if any of the lasers are friendly to the Bleedist movement or befriended her on Pioneer, then Aeala asks them to intercede on her behalf and convince Yeoman to attend such a meeting.
- ▶ Person complaining loudly about biased ingredients – he argues that the inclusion of tavek caviar in the first box gives a clear advantage to the only tavek contestant.

Run **Judge Needed. Must Have Own Gun** next.

Judge Needed.

Must Have Own Gun

Scene Type: Subplot

The ship carrying the fourth judge for the contest, Iya Dann, has broken down and will not arrive in time for the contest. Seifert needs a quick replacement. The lasers are dashing, interesting and unbiased – at least, they're supposed to be – so he seizes on them as ideal candidates. He approaches the PCs and asks one of them to be the replacement judge. It's an easy job – just taste the dishes from each contestant and pick your favorite.

(If none of the PCs volunteer, then have Myrna Warden draft one of them.)



At the end of the first round, the PC judge has to vote on the winning dish. The candidates are:

- ▶ **Takak:** A traditional tavek meal of insect eggs smeared with vegetable paste, served on a bed of lightly fried noodles.
- ▶ **Person:** Pork *char siu* served on noodles with a mashed insect egg relish.
- ▶ **Allen:** Pork chops, rather burnt.
- ▶ **Aeala:** A frozen vegetable dessert with a core of hot insect eggs.

The other judges are tied, so the PC has the casting vote. After the first round of the contest, Willo announces that, tomorrow morning, they will have the main event – cooking the fabled *Mystery Ingredient!*

Run **Vicious Rumors** and **Dead Laser** next.

Vicious Rumors

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

Dalton Person angrily contacts the lasers to report a heinous crime in progress. He has evidence – strong, incontrovertible

LASER CHEF

It's possible that one of the lasers might want to enter the contest. Roll 1d6 to determine how well the character cooks, and give bonuses for creative use of spends. Various **Culture** skills let the character remember recipes from different species; **Viro Manipulation** could be used to engineer tailored digestive enzymes, while **Chemistry**, **Botany** and **Zoology** could all be used when dealing with ingredients. Give a +1 bonus to the dice roll for each point spent; if the character's final total is 6 or more, he wins the first round.

Dalton Person offers a bribe equal to a standard bonus to any successful chefs to get them to deliberately ruin their chances in the second round. If the cooking contest continues after the characters return from Tesilas, then winning the contest is worth another standard bonus and an increase in Reputation.

evidence – that someone is planning on bribing the judges. Person explains that he is a scion of the influential Person banking family, and that through his family connections he has access to all sorts of financial data unavailable to the public. He has tracked a sizable (well, sizable for ordinary people, not Person) transfer of funds to an account on Anaitis-17. He offers the lasers temporary access to his computer so they can see for themselves.

- ▶ Person blames Takak, and exclaims that the alien chef knows he is beaten, and so is resorting to treachery.
- ▶ This money comes from the Bleedist movement, and is part of Aeala's plan to convince Myrna Warden to come out in support of Bleedism.
- ▶ **Forensic Accounting:** There was indeed a suspicious transfer of funds to a temporary account on the station. Due to the possibility of time delays and interstellar communication difficulties, it is permissible to transfer monies to 'travelling accounts', but this is an unusually large sum to have in a person account.
- ▶ **Data Retrieval:** This ability lets the characters pin the transfer time down. It was made soon after the transport *Humbaba* arrived at the station. Two of the contestants arrived on that ship – Tamra Allen and Aeala.
- ▶ If the characters try to find Tamra Allen, there is no sign of her in the concourse or in her quarters (she's off murdering Billy Ward, as they will find out in **Dead Laser** on page 105).
- ▶ If the characters question Aeala, then they can get the truth out of her with **Interrogation** or by agreeing to help her convince Myrna Warden to support the Bleedists.
- ▶ Unscrupulous characters with access to Person's computer can attempt a **Business Affairs** check to steal money from his accounts. The Difficulty of this check is a 4, and pays out an amount equal to a Generous Bonus for the group. However, if the margin of success is less than 4, then Person's security software detects the attempt. The thief still gets the money, but the Person Banking Consortium will have their revenge in a future adventure.
- ▶ If the characters investigate Person's allegations and prove that there is no bribery, then Person may attempt to bribe the PC judge himself, offering a Generous Bonus if the PC votes for his dish in the next round.

ASHEN STARS



Dead Laser

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: Billy was investigating Leanne Warlock

The characters are called by uRobbie to a maintenance corridor deep in the bowels of the station. The cybe was busy transferring air recyclers from the unused Arm 1 to the main concourse to cope with the added life support demand when he came across a body. Someone has been murdered on the station.

The body is that of **Billy Ward**, the private detective hired by Takak. He managed to find the source of the 'Erebusian shrimp' mystery ingredients. He stunned **Leanne Warlock** with a disruptor blast and stole one of the shrimp. He brought it to Takak, but was he was killed by Restreamer assassin **Tamra Allen** soon after leaving Takak's quarters.

- ▶ The victim's tether was smashed by the attacker. It's still broadcasting an ID code, announcing that it belongs to 'Billy Ward', but has no other useful information.
- ▶ Billy has a disruptor pistol in his pocket; it's set to a non-lethal blast and was recently discharged.
- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology:** The victim was killed by a slash across the throat with a very sharp blade.
A 1-point spend lets the character identify the murder weapon as a laser-honed chef's knife. All of the contest contestants have access to such weapons.
- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology:** An analysis of Billy's stomach contents shows that he recently ate a meal of noodles, vegetable paste and insect eggs – the same meal cooked by Takak. While all the contestant's meals may be sampled by the audience after the judges, Billy only tried Takak's.
Tavek Culture: That's a traditional tavek dish, the sort that Takak specializes in.
- ▶ **Kinetics:** The attacker came from behind. Based on the angle of the cut, the attacker was slightly smaller than Ward.
- ▶ There is a large and odd-smelling pool of blood around the body.
- ▶ **Chemistry:** The blood is mixed with some sort of chemical. Analysis shows it to be a chemical used in cryo-preservation.
- ▶ **Evidence Collection:** Ward's fingers are stained with some sort of sticky residue. Analyzing this shows it is a mix of the same cryo-preservation chemical and

some organic material. This organic material is genetically very similar to the scales found on the wreck (see **Investigating the Wreck**, page 115).

- ▶ **Evidence Collection:** There are traces of soot on his boots. Arm 1 of Anaitis Station is closed due to fire damage. If the characters explore Arm 1, they will eventually find the *Wrongway Corrigan*, Leanne Warlock's ship (page 100). All of the Erebusian shrimp have since been moved from the ship's hold to the station core.

Interviewing Takak: The tavek chef knows where the Erebusian Shrimp are coming from, but revealing how he knows this could get him thrown out of the contest. **Bullshit Detector** sees that he is concealing something, and **Negotiation** (promising to keep his involvement in the case a secret, ensuring he won't be ejected from the contest) convinces him to spill the beans about Billy Ward's involvement. He tells the characters about how he hired the wannabe laser, and how Billy found out that the shrimp were being smuggled onto the station somehow. Billy also knew that the shrimp were being kept in cryo-suspension – the ingredient is being served live.

Interviewing Leanne Warlock: Don't let the lasers find Leanne Warlock immediately – she's somewhere on the station, but make them work for it by spending **Downside** or **Interrogation** points to find her. Ideally, either one character spends several hours tracking Warlock through the station (let the other characters get involved with **The Proveen** and **The Mystery Ingredient** in the mean time, then bring the two plotlines together when the PC finds Warlock). Alternatively, the PCs can go through Administrator Yeoman to find her.

- ▶ If the characters interview her after the murder of **Billy Ward**, then her speech is slightly slurred; **Forensic Anthropology** spots an espresso trackmark on her neck. This suggests she was hit at close range by a disruptor stun beam, and then revived with an espresso.
- ▶ She won't talk about the incident unless the characters pin her down with **Interrogation**.
- ▶ She remembers being shot from behind by a disruptor, and then waking up a short time later in the same place.
- ▶ She was bringing supplies from her ship to a storeroom in the station core.
- ▶ She refuses to bring the PCs to the storeroom unless the station is in immediate danger from the Proveen *and* they persuade her with **Reassurance**, **Inspiration** or **Intimidation**. The storeroom is in **The Station Core** (page 109).



The Proveen

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

The proveen are a space-born race. They resemble gigantic reddish-orange tadpoles with trailing tentacles and vestigial spiny limbs along their flanks. They have no eyes or mouths, just clusters of effector tendrils. They evolved in the atmosphere of a distant gas giant, and adapted to life in deep space. A fully-grown proveen is bigger than a megafreighter; they are like space-going whales. They travel using a form of gravity manipulation, and they can even open translight corridors. The proveen feed primarily on electromagnetic energy harvested where the magnetospheres of gas giants interact with their moons, but they also feast on certain minerals contained in asteroids and comets. They communicate in radio frequencies, singing to one another across the gulf of space.

Proveen eggs are laid in asteroids, where they absorb cosmic rays and nutrients for a year before hatching into meter-long larvae. These larva crawl across the surface of the asteroid until their gravity-manipulation organs develop and they take flight.

They are intelligent creatures, but they are so different from the humanoids of the Combine that communication is virtually impossible. The proveen have no concept of 'technology' or 'tools' – they would treat a human ship as an individual, and consider the human crew to be part of the ship.

There is a proveen breeding ground in the asteroid belt in the Tesilas system. The Restreamers stole unhatched larva and smuggled them onto Anaitis 17 via **Leanne Warlock**.

There are two ways the characters can run into the Proveen:

- ▶ If they follow the course of the projectile from **Incoming Projectile** (page 95) back to the gas giant, they encounter the proveen in orbit.
- ▶ Once the lasers have deflected the projectile, the proveen launch a direct attack on the station a day later, just before the next round of the cooking contest begins.

The Proveen At The Gas Giant: There are a dozen adult proveen at the gas giant. Four are occupied maintaining a rift in space/time, while the other eight are circling around in a complex, almost balletic pattern. **Energy Signatures** identifies it as an opening into a translight corridor. This portal leads to the Tesilas system.

The proveen are initially confused by the appearance of the laser's ship. They circle around it, probing it with their trailing tentacles and shrieking questions in radio messages. They stop the characters from approaching the translight portal. With a successful **Decryption** spend, the characters can work out that the creatures are in the correct configuration to form a radio telescope focussed on Anaitis-17, as if they are waiting for a faint signal from that station.

After a short time, the proveen grow irritated with the presence of the lasers, and try to drive them away.

The Proveen At The Station: The proveen arrive and scream a radio challenge at the station. They then start firing their bio-electric laser ducts at Anaitis-17. The initial blasts are deliberately low-powered, but as the proveen grow frustrated, they increase the power of their effects. Unless the characters act quickly, the station will be wrecked within minutes. Myrna Yeoman orders the lasers to launch immediately.

Down on the concourse, the contestants are kept unaware of the attack – Yeoman asks Seifert to keep the contest running despite the alien interruption. If possible, she sends one or more of the lasers down to the cooking contest to keep everything running smoothly – those characters are then present for the unveiling of **The Mystery Ingredient** (page 107).

Investigating the Proveen: A sensor scan of the proveen gives the following information.

- ▶ If the characters have examined the 'Erebusian shrimp' on the station, they can clearly see similarities between the mystery ingredient and the attacking space monsters.
- ▶ **Chemistry:** If the characters took samples of proveen tissue earlier, and researched the chemical weapon as described on page 96, they can deploy this weapon against the proveen. Attacks from the weapon automatically inflict a minimum of 6 points of damage on a Hit or 10 points on a Rocked result.
- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** The creatures have organic defenses and laser weapons comparable to those of a starship.

One-point **Energy Signatures** spend: The creatures' defenses are comparable to conductors, increasing the creature's Output pools when the proveen is grazed. However, the creatures have only a limited capability to store energy; it might be possible to overload the proveen with multiple repeated grazes.



- ▶ **Bio Signatures:** Judging by cellular division patterns, these are young adult specimens of the species. Biological traces are similar to samples taken from the wreckage projectile earlier.
- ▶ **Zoology:** The creatures are animals – giant, space-travelling animals, but animals nonetheless. There are few stimuli that could drive them to attack a space station – starvation, protecting their young or defending their territory.

Battling the Proveen: The proveen will not listen to the lasers until the characters prove they are worthy of respect. (From the proveens' perspective, the lasers' ship is a juvenile of the station.) To do so, they must reduce one of the proveen's Structural Integrity scores to 0. (**Forensic Psychology** lets the characters realize this if none of the players comes up with it.) If they attack one of the proveen, the other creatures do not interfere in the battle unless the characters keep attacking once their foe is defeated.

Alternatively, a three-point **Intimidation** or **Inspiration** spend can get the character's message across trans-species

Proveen Adult

	Dishing It (Modifier Applies On showdown Win)	Taking It (Modifier Applies On showdown Loss)
Fire	1	1
Maneuver	2	-1
Override	-3	0
Trickbag	-1	1

Output 5

Condition 1

'Crew' Skills: 7 points in all Shipboard skills except Communications Intercept

Negotiating With The Proveen: The characters have no language in common with the space creatures, making negotiations difficult.

- ▶ **Decryption** lets the character realize that the creatures are directing two types of radio messages at the station. One set seem to be aggressive challenges aimed at the station's centre of mass; the others are pathetic cries that sweep across the station.
- ▶ **Neurosight** lets a Vas Mal tap into the proveen's brainwaves. He sees an image of the proveen larvae and feels an overwhelming sense of loss, panic and anger.
- ▶ **Reassurance** allows the characters to beg for a stay of execution from the proveen, asking that they hold their fire so the characters can retrieve the larvae.

Returning the Larvae: The characters need to rescue the larvae before the proveen attack again. Unfortunately, some of the larvae are about to be cooked, as they are **The Mystery Ingredient** (page 107). Once the characters retrieve these larvae, they need to track down the rest in **The Station Core** (page 109). Finally, they can return the Proveen young in **Placating the Proveen** (page 111).

The Mystery Ingredient

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The Shrimp are Proveen Larvae

The next event in the cooking contest is the mystery ingredient round. Crates of ingredients are delivered to the booths of the contestants. At a signal from Willo, the crates are opened, revealing...

'The Erebusian Shrimp' shrieks Willo the People, 'never before seen! Never before eaten! How wil the chefs cope with an ingredient that no-one has ever cooked before!' The shrimps are meter-long tadpole-like creatures with long spindly legs. 'Contestants! You have three of your earth hours to make something delicious out of these things!'

Most of the contestants are taken aback by this strange delicacy, but **Forensic Psychology** lets the characters notice that Tamra Allen is unsurprised by the appearance of the shrimp, while **Industrial Design** notices that Takak turns on a thaw-beamer *before* the crate is opened, indicating that he knew the mystery ingredient was cryo-preserved.

- ▶ Characters who have seen the proveen adults recognize the similarities between the mystery ingredients and the space creatures.



- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** If a character scans the one of the mystery ingredients, he detects a shriek of radio-frequency noise. The creatures communicate through radio signals.

Stopping the Contest: The lasers can just march in and suspend the contest, but this will ruin the contest and ruin the station's finances, so they won't get paid. Some players may consider saving the proven larvae worth the cost, but more mercenary players will want to do the right thing *and* get the money. This means the characters need to rescue the 'Erebusian shrimp' without interrupting the contest.

- ▶ If the characters have a **transmit modder** and access to the camera drone network, then they can use **Communications Intercept** to alter the holomages and keep the contest going while they confiscate the larvae.
- ▶ **Filch** tests can be used to grab the larvae from the contestants and substitute something else. There are ingredients which look quite like Erebusian shrimp, but won't anger the giant space monsters.
- ▶ Alternatively, the players can use roleplaying to resolve the situation.

If they prove to **Daniel Seifert** that the larvae are putting the station in danger, and that giving up the larvae is his only hope for survival, he tells the

characters that he bought the larvae from **Leanne Warlock**.

The lasers can blackmail **Takak** into handing over his shrimp using their knowledge about his attempt to cheat with Billy Ward.

Dalton Person loathes the smell of seafood, and is very hesitant about handling the shrimp at all. He initially assumes that the shrimp were deliberately planted by Takak to throw him off, and that the lasers are in Takak's pay. Their wild tales about space monsters are nonsense – they're just trying to convince him to concede and leave Takak win! Never! **Reassurance** that they are not trying to scam him, or **Intimidation** convinces Person to hand over his shrimp without making a fuss.

If the characters ask **Tamra Allen** to hand over her shrimp, she realizes that the game is up. She complies with the lasers' request – and then immediately heads down to the storeroom where the rest of the shrimp are stored, to prevent the PCs from foiling the Restreamer's plans. See **Restreamer Agents** (page 109).

Aeala has just dumped her shrimp into a big pot of boiling water – a **Preparedness** test lets a PC grab a tongs and rescue the larva before it perishes. Otherwise, Aeala or a PC has to take 1d6 damage




 ASHEN STARS

from the hot water to grab the screaming shrimp. Any PCs with headsets or tethers pick up on the shrimp's radio screams.

Finding the Larvae: Once the PCs have rescued the larvae from the contest, they need to find the other larvae still in cryopreservation. These larvae are hidden in a storeroom deep in the station core. The characters can find the larvae by:

► Interrogating **Leanne Warlock**.

If the players are still unaware of Warlock's connection to the larvae, then Daniel Seifert can let the characters know where he obtained the Erebusian shrimp.

- Once the players know that the larvae communicate through radio signals, they can use **Decryption** to detect the very faint radio transmissions from the frozen Proveen.
- Similarly, once the characters have scanned the larvae with a tether, they can use **Bio Signatures** to trace the life signs of the creatures.
- **Industrial Design:** The coldest place on the station is the coolant system for the main reactor.

The Station Core

Scene Type: Hazard

The trail of the larvae leads the characters deep into the bowels of Anaitis-17. The 'storeroom' used by Warlock is actually part of the station's main reactor. It's a huge chamber, filled with maintenance walkways, narrow stairs, hissing pipes, coolant ducts, control panels and other gadgetry. It's kept icily cold; the air is extremely dry, but there is still a thin layer of frost on some surfaces. There are plenty of hiding places.

The Proveen larvae are stacked right up against the reactor's main coolant duct. If this duct were damaged, the reactor would swiftly overload and explode. A well-maintained station has all sorts of redundant backups and safety protocols, but Anaitis-17's perennial budget crunch forced uRobbie to skimp on safety.

Attached to the stack of cryo-capsules is a nasty explosive device, planted by **Tamra Allen**. She added this bomb after **Billy Ward** tracked Leanne Warlock here. If the capsules are moved without disarming this device, the ensuing explosion may crack the coolant duct. The bomb's movement sensors are attached to the cryo-capsules, but the bomb itself is planted high on the coolant duct.

- If the lasers want to try disarming the movement sensors, they can do so with **Explosive Devices**. It's a slow, nerve-wracking process, as each strand of the sensor net must be isolated and disarmed individually. If there are no **Restreamer Agents** around, then the characters have plenty of time to disarm the bomb. If they're doing so while being shot at, then let them spend **Explosive Devices** points to disarm it faster.
- The faster but riskier option is to climb the walkways to the cooling duct, then hang over the railing and disarm the bomb. This requires an **Athletics** test (Difficulty 5) to get into position, followed by the use of **Explosive Devices**. Again, this is simple when the characters are free to act, and a lot harder if there are **Restreamer Agents** present.

Once the bomb is disarmed, the characters can rescue the larvae and **Placate the Proveen** (page 111). Optionally, if there were no Restreamer Agents around, then run **Inhuman Hunger** at this point.

Restreamer Agents

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

The two Restreamer Agents on the station, **Tamra Allen** and **Leanne Warlock**, won't stand idle while the lasers foil the cult's plans. If the characters have already arrested or otherwise dealt with both of the Restreamer, skip this scene entirely and use **Inhuman Hunger** (below) in its place.

Leanne Warlock confronts the lasers openly. She has orders not to let them stop the sabotage of the cooking contest. She doesn't want to shoot anyone – Prophet Flynt said that deaths are justified, but she still doesn't want to drag this timeline down into sin any further – but she will threaten the lasers with a disruptor pistol. She tries to convince them to surrender. Leanne will fire back if the lasers draw their weapons, but the characters can talk her into standing down with **Inspiration**, especially if they play on her morality. Would Prophet Flynt *really* want her to kill everyone? Isn't the whole point of the Restreamer philosophy to show that this universe is corrupt and sinful, and won't her deeds just reinforce that?

- In a fight, Warlock fires at the biggest, most threatening PC. She spends two **Shooting** points per attack.
- Her disruptor is set to non-lethal attacks.



Leanne Warlock

Abilities: Athletics 7, Health 8, Preparedness 6, Scuffling 6, Shooting 8, Shuttlecraft 10

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Fists +0

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1

Hit Threshold: 3

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, Popper

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: +1

Tamra Allen, by contrast, is a trained assassin. She takes up a position high on the walkway overlooking the stack of cryo-capsules and the bomb, and has a sniper rifle trained on the lasers the moment they walk into the core chamber (if she followed them down from the grand concourse, then she enters via an air duct on the upper level). Her intent is to keep the lasers pinned down for as long as possible – the longer she delays the destruction of Anaitis-17, the more time Flynt has to prepare on Tesilas.

- ▶ **Sense Trouble** (difficulty 8) lets the characters spot Allen before she fires. Otherwise, she gets the drop on the lasers.
- ▶ She keeps moving from walkway to walkway, keeping out of reach of the characters. As she has the advantage of being above the lasers, her Hit Threshold is increased by +1 due to cover.
- ▶ In order, she targets characters trying to disarm the bomb, characters who are getting too close to her for comfort, and any characters she can see. She spends three **Shooting** points on each attack as long as she has them to spend.
- ▶ Her disruptor rifle is on its lethal setting.
- ▶ If the lasers are about to disarm the bomb, or if she's reduced to 2 or less Health, she takes a shot at the stack of cryo-capsules in an attempt to set off the explosives. A laser in the line of fire can choose to jump into the path of the disruptor beam.

Tamra Allen

Abilities: Athletics 12, Health 10, Preparedness 8, Scuffling 10, Shooting 14.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Laser-honed chef's knife +1

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Rifle +1, Distractor Beam, Crick-Cracker

Hit Threshold: 4 (5 in hand to hand)

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, Popper x 3, Deflector, (cybernetics) Autonomic Avenger, Berserker, Dopamine Redirector (vioware) Scrambleface, Pherosniffer

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Savvy Modifier: +0

Interrogating the Restreamers: If Warlock or Allen are captured alive, the characters can interrogate them.

Reassurance is the best way to get Warlock talking – she's obviously in over her head, and never intended to cause so much havoc. Offering her a way to atone for her misdeeds gets her talking. Another option is to bring in her friend, Myrna Yeoman, to put psychological pressure on Warlock. Once it's made clear to the smuggler how much trouble she is in, the lasers can convince her to talk.

- ▶ She admits that she is a member of the Restreamers, and that Prophet Flynt ordered her to help keep Anaitis-17 going
- ▶ She was also ordered to monitor the energy flux of the translight corridors.
- ▶ She obtained the Proveen larvae in the Tesilas system – there's a Restreamer base there too.

Tamra Allen is trained to resist interrogation and intimidation. **Forensic Psychology** lets the characters know that they are not going to break her through conventional means. If the characters use **Flattery** on her, she starts ranting about the glorious triumph of the Restreamers, and how the destruction of Anaitis-17 will give Prophet Flynt all he needs to accomplish the 'great work' on Tesilas.

Searching Allen's quarters with **Evidence Collection** turns up an image of Prophet Flynt. He looks the part of a prophet – he's got a long white beard, piercing eyes, and is standing on a cliff top peering out at a desert. The stars are coming out overhead in the holo – and **Astronomy** lets the characters identify the configuration of stars. This holo was taken in the Tesilas system, a short distance away from Anaitis-17.

Inhuman Hunger

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

If you've no Restreamers left and still want an action scene on the station, then the eccentric hunger journalist Trkk-Trkk is the insect for the job. Trkk-Trkk has searched the galaxy looking for new tastes, and the Erebusian Shrimp is the first new taste he has encountered in years. He follows the characters down to the station core and grabs one of the shrimp. He then scuttles off into the crawlspaces around the core with his twitching prize.

Simultaneously, his personal ship detaches from the station and travels a short distance away under remote control. Trkk-Trkk knows that there is no way to devour the larva and escape the station in his current body, so he intends to snack on the larvae for as long as possible until the lasers (or the angry Proveen) kill him. He will then migrate his consciousness onto his ship.

As he flees, Trkk-Trkk maintains a running commentary on the taste of the larva, so the characters know what he is doing.

- ▶ The crazed reporter can be stopped by blasting him into unconsciousness with disruptor fire.
- ▶ **Kch-thk History** lets the characters work out why he stole a larva. Armed with this information, the characters can try reasoning with Trkk-Trkk. His thought patterns are very alien, but the lasers could offer to bring him into unexplored space in search of new food, or threaten him with starvation if he is caught.
- ▶ Calling Myrna Warden and getting her to lock the station's weapons on Trkk-Trkk's ship is also an effective threat. Trkk-Trkk hasn't survived for four hundred years by letting his gorkoja chamber get threatened. Holding a gun to his thousands of potential future heads encourages Trkk-Trkk to surrender.

Trkk-Trkk

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 6, Scuffling 8, Shuttlecraft 4

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Fists +0

Hit Threshold: 4

Tech: Headset, Popper

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +2

Savvy Modifier: +1

Placating the Proveen

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The Mystery Planet

Once the lasers have retrieved all the Proveen larvae from the station, they can take to their ship and fly out to meet the adult Proveen outside the space station. If all the Proveen larvae are intact, then the adults peel away the cryo-capsules (with surprising gentleness for such huge creatures) and thaw out any frozen children with a laser caress. The Proveen then turn around and head for the gas giant, beckoning the characters to follow them. Through the Proveen gateway in orbit of the gas planet, the lasers reach the Tesilas system – see **The Mystery Planet**, below.

If some of the Proveen larvae are dead, or are injured and the lasers don't think of saving them with a **Medic** test, then the Proveen angrily grab the survivors and head back to Tesilas. The characters can either follow the Proveen now, or make their own way to **The Mystery Planet**.



The Mystery Planet

Scene Type: Core

Core Clue: The Restreamer Base

The characters can arrive in this system either by travelling through the proven translight corridor, or by retrieving navigational information from the Restreamer agents. The Tesilas system is located deep in the region known as the Edge of the Abyss, in the perilous Medusa Outzone. Few ships ever dare come here, and there are all sorts of tales of weird space phenomenon and dangerous warp eddies.

On arrival, **Energy Signatures** picks up a faint signal from the third planet in the system. It's an automated Combine distress call, coming from the starship *Clarion*. The signal is emanating from the planet's surface.

Tesilas 3 is a desert planet. Green coppery sands cover most of the surface, apart from a few brackish inland seas. Low weathered mountain ranges poke from deserts along the equator.

Scanning the planet from orbit lets the characters detect a wrecked Combine starship half-buried in a mountainside. The wreckage is surrounded by tents and habitat modules – people have obviously been living here for some time.

WRATH OF THE PROVEEN

The space-going proveen can play a role in the second half of this mission. If the characters drove the proveen away from Anaitis-17 and didn't rescue the larvae, then the proveen are hostile, and the lasers have to fly through a gauntlet of belligerent space-tadpoles as they fly to Tesilas. Use the proveen statistics on page 107. The lasers can try flying past the proveen as per the space combat rules for escaping a fight.

Alternatively, if the lasers rescued the larvae and are on good terms with the proveen, then the proveen swoop down and attack the Restreamer base. Giant space monsters descend from the sky above the wreck of the *Clarion* and scoop up the Restreamer guards, clearing the way for the lasers.

- ▶ **Bio-Signatures:** There are definitely life signs down there, mostly human. It's impossible to get exact numbers, as there is some sort of interference emanating from within the wreckage.
- ▶ **Combine History:** Remind the players of the tale of Numi Grant (see page 114) and her struggles against the CKEGMC.
- ▶ **Decryption:** There are radio transmissions coming from the little settlement outside the crash site. One is a landing guide-beam – whoever's down there is expecting visitors. The guide-beam is there to welcome Restreamers from other branches of the organization who are making pilgrimages to this holy world.
A one-point **Decryption** spend lets the characters tune into other channels, letting them eavesdrop on some **Restreamer Theology** (see page 114).
- ▶ **Energy Signatures:** There is definitely something very strange indeed going on within the wreckage – there are bizarre subspace distortions and showers of meson shrapnel. It looks as though someone is trying to open a translight corridor *within* the ship, which would normally be a quick, if messy, way to commit suicide.

The Restreamer Base

Scene Type: Hazard

The little shanty town outside the wreck is home to the Restreamer acolytes of the Prophet. There are more than a hundred of Flynt's followers here, of which around half are armed and dangerous. The rest are too old or too young to fight. Even the combat-ready followers show signs of extreme dehydration; with the reboot coming so soon, many of the Restreamers have neglected their physical needs. After all, while bother shipping in more water if the universe is about to rewrite itself, and the Restreamers will be in a better place than this scorching hellhole.

There are loudspeakers strung up throughout the camp, broadcasting messages from Prophet Flynt (see **Restreamer Theology**, page 114) to the faithful.

Restreamer Guards: These religious fanatics know that the hour of redemption is almost at hand, and are ready to repel attacks from the forces of evil. Meddling lasers fall into this category. If the lasers land openly and go in guns blazing, they have a big fight on their hands – use the Restreamer soldiers from **Guards, Guards** (page 116), but double the number of foes the characters have to defeat.

This is a big, messy firefight. There's plenty of cover amid the storage crates and shacks at the edge of the shanty town for cautious characters. The Restreamers don't bother with niceties like tactics or cover – the universe is about to end, so this is their last chance to demonstrate their devotion to the cause before they are resurrected in a better timestream. They just charge towards the intruders, guns blazing.

Bypassing the Guards: There are other ways to get past the Restreamers:

- ▶ If the characters are on good terms with the proveen, then they can get help from the space creatures. See the **Wrath of the Proveen** sidebar.
- ▶ The characters can attack with their ship-mounted weapons, but the Restreamers will then fight back with the *Clarion's* still-functional weapons arrays.
Clarion stats
- ▶ A Difficulty 4 **Infiltration** test lets the characters sneak past the guards and onto the wrecked ship. Upping the Difficulty to 6 lets the characters search the base en route.
- ▶ **Impersonate** lets the characters pretend to be Restreamer pilgrims, here to honor the Prophet. The new pilgrims are brought into the heart of the base; from there, the difficulty to sneak into the wreck itself is reduced to Difficulty 2.
A two-point **Impersonate** spend means the character is mistaken for a senior Restreamer theologian, renegade historian **Jarius Frost**. Such an important dignitary is of course escorted straight into the *Clarion* to Prophet Flynt.
- ▶ If the lasers approach the base openly, with weapons holstered, the Restreamers are suspicious, but do not attack. Instead, the characters are brought to meet the base's leader, **Dan Lunager**, a former

Combine soldier who is slowly dying from exposure to a Mohilar bioweapon during the war. He joined the Restreamer movement out of desperation, as re-streaming is his only way to survive, but secretly has no faith in their chance of success.

Forensic Psychology picks up on his doubts.

Dan knows nothing about the attack on Anaitis-17; he knows the Restreamers have a presence there, but was told the station was abandoned. This information, coupled with an **Inspiration** spend, can convince Dan to switch sides and help the characters get past the guards on the *Clarion*.

Searching the Base: If the characters search the base, they find:

- ▶ A container full of the same desert-survival robes and breather masks worn by the Restreamer guards. Putting on these disguises counts as a use of **Impersonation** for the purposes of getting past the guards on the *Clarion*.
- ▶ A small graveyard, where the crew of the *Clarion* are buried, including Numi Grant.
- ▶ **Forensic Engineering:** The base is getting its power from the reactors on the crashed *Clarion*. Following the power cables lets the characters find an open hatch leading to access tubes on the ship. Crawling through the maintenance ducts means the characters can avoid the guards on the ship.
A one-point **Industrial Design** spend lets the characters identify a weakness in the cobbled-together power grid, which lets them short-circuit the whole system. This disables the Restreamer's security systems on board the *Clarion*.
- ▶ A copy of the secret teachings of Zekeel Flynt. Paging through it, they find it is a mix of weird eschatology and abstruse astrophysics. Some of Flynt's theories about the nature of the universe make sense on one level – it's all unverifiable, presents no solid proof and *probably* crazy, but there are no obvious logical inconsistencies. A character with **Vas Mal Culture** even recognizes some parts as being derived from the Vas Kra – could Flynt be onto something with his wild theories of universal rebirth?



RESTREAMER THEOLOGY

The prophet of the Restreamers, **Zekeel Flynt**, found the *Clarion* three years ago. In the heart of the ship is the warp bubble where Captain Numi Grant trapped the CKEGMC many years ago. Flynt believes that this bubble is the key to his dream of rebooting the universe. If the warp bubble can be collapsed properly, it could cause a cascading collapse of the translight corridors across the universe, washing away this reality.

Flynt has entered the outer regions of the warp bubble to begin the process of collapse. His protective suit is connected to the loudspeaker system throughout the Restreamer base, so he can continue to preach to the faithful even as he leaves the universe. The characters can overhear snippets of his deranged theology as they pass through the base and the wrecked ship. Topics to cover while ranting:

- ▶ This corrupt, sinful reality will soon be washed away and replaced with the correct timeline.
- ▶ All the Restreamers here are alt-saints, whose purity and faith echoes across realities.
- ▶ The Mohilar War was the divergence point between the timelines. When reality is corrected, everyone will be where they should be if the Mohilar had not attacked – the utopia of the Combine will be restored, the dead resurrected, and peace will once more reign throughout known space.
- ▶ The Mohilar were, he believes, demons from the worst of all possible timelines. That is why we cannot remember them – the Bogey Conundrum was a temporal paradox... of pure evil!
- ▶ To save reality, Flynt has entered the embryonic universe at the heart of the ship. Soon, the burst of energy from Anaitis-17 will blast across the heavens, and he will guide this final ingredient into the temporal matrix. The universe will *burn*, and a better reality will arise like a phoenix from the ruins.

Communicating with Flynt: A **Decryption** spend lets the characters tap into Flynt's communication system and speak to the prophet. Play Flynt as exactly what he is – an insane visionary, committed to an apocalyptic scheme. He's insane, but he's not stupid; he knows that the lasers are just trying to delay him, so it's impossible to talk him down.

- ▶ Flynt knows about Numi Grant and the CKEGMC, and suspects that the 'embryonic universe' at the heart of the ship is a prison for them, but considers it worth the risk. After the reboot, the CKEGMC will be freed – but the resurrected Combine will easily be able to deal with them.
- ▶ **History (Combine):** Flynt's faith in the Combine is misplaced; at best, it'll be a pyrrhic victory.
- ▶ If told that the lasers foiled his plans to destroy Anaitis-17, then Flynt is disappointed, but not dissuaded from his ultimate goal. The energy from the station would have collapsed the temporal matrix most effectively, but he has a backup plan. He can push deeper into the anomaly and use the matter of his own body to trigger the reboot. If he gets deep enough into the anomaly, his presence will cause the collapse. This means he will be annihilated and will be the only human not reborn in the corrected timestream, but he will sacrifice himself to win a better life for everyone else.
- ▶ Flynt then cuts off communications with the characters.
- ▶ Optionally, at the climax of the scenario during **The Living Storm** (page 119), have Flynt send the characters a last desperate message – he's penetrated the core of the anomaly, and he's about to be torn apart by the CKEGMC. He was wrong – flee while you still can!

The Wreck of the Clarion

Scene Type: Hazard

The once-mighty *Clarion* is now a shattered hulk. The ship crash-landed into the mountainside and is now tilted at an angle of thirty degrees, so the characters have to climb down steep-sloped corridors and clamber over fallen wreckage. The scars of battle are everywhere – burn marks on the walls, old blood-stains, blast doors torn open by inhuman claws (or a detail appropriate to your CKEGMC). **Kinetics** suggests that the CKEGMC boarded the *Clarion* shortly before it crashed.

There are two ways onto the ship – via the main entrance which is guarded by the Restreamers, or via an access crawl-space, which the characters may find if they take time to search the camp outside. On board, the ship is divided into

three sections – the bridge section, amidships, and the engineering section. The characters enter amidships.

Optionally, the character can run into **Weird Events** (see sidebar).

Moving through the ship: There are only a few Restreamers in the *Clarion*, down in the engineering section at the bottom of the ship. These guards are under orders to protect Zekeel Flynt at all costs. Other guards patrol the rest of the vessel. The Restreamers have also set up security scanners in key places throughout the ship.

As the characters move from section to section of the ship, they risk being detected by the guards. Call for **Infiltration** tests when the characters enter a section (including the first time they board the *Clarion*). The difficulty of these tests starts at Difficulty 8, and is reduced as follows:





Difficulty Modifier	Condition
-2	Characters are using the access tubes to get around the ship*
-2	All security systems are offline**
-1	The characters take time to disable security systems with Systems Repair tests (Difficulty 5), considerably slows movement through the ship
-2	If the guards are distracted or confused
-1	Per two points of Sense Trouble or Surveillance spent per test
+1	The guards know intruders are on the ship

*: Until the guards know the intruders are in the tubes

**: Either by short-circuiting the power supply outside, or from the bridge

If detected, the lasers may be able to use **Impersonate** if they can come up with a plausible excuse for their presence. This works *once*. If the guards spot the characters, there's a firefight.

Guards! Guards!: There's one guard per laser. These guards are well-armed and better trained than those outside – they'll dig in and use cover. The ship offers lots of exciting options for combat. The characters can take refuge behind piles of debris, bounce disruptor shots off bulkheads, cut off the guards by using **System Repair** to close an old blast door, or sneak through access tubes to get the drop on the bad guys. Defeated guards' uniforms can be stolen and used as disguises.

Restreamer Guards

Abilities: Athletics 7, Health 3, Scuffling 4, Shooting 4.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Baton +1

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1

Hit Threshold: 3

Tech: Rosetta Chip

Alertness Modifier: -1

Stealth Modifier: -1

Savvy Modifier: -2

Amidships: The middle section is the least damaged part of the ship, containing crew quarters, cargo bays, medical facilities and laboratories. The *Clarion's* point-defense turrets are also located here, so if the characters got into a shooting match with the crashed ship earlier, this section is even more wrecked thanks to the laser's attacks.

There are more signs of CKEGMC attacks in this section. Depending on the nature of the CKEGMC, there might even be bodies or samples in cryopreservation in the labs.

Bridge: The bridge section is only lightly guarded. This area contains the computer core and the ship's control systems. Any character with naval experience (a **Naval Tactics** pool of 3 or more) can tell that the bridge area was abandoned before it was attacked. There are no signs of battle damage here.

- ▶ The engineering control console is still active. The ship's engines are locked into a low level of activity that cannot be over-riden from the bridge. On a monitoring screen, the characters can see guards and scientists surrounding a glowing sphere – the anomaly – that occupies most of the main engineering chamber.

Industrial Design: It's possible to reroute the coolant flow in the engine so some of it vaporizes, thus flooding the engineering chamber with toxic gas. It would knock the guards unconscious, but could damage the engines. If the characters do this, it eliminates the guards down in the engineering chamber, but the characters may end up being blamed for the escape of the CKEGMC.

Data Retrieval: The characters can access the Restreamer's research from the bridge, explaining how they intended to use the energy backlash from the destruction of Anaitis-17 to collapse the anomaly. The research also notes that if the energy backlash fails to materialize, it is possible to manually collapse the anomaly.

- ▶ **Data Retrieval:** The character finds the last log entry of Captain Numi Grant. She reports that her ship has been boarded by the CKEGMC, and makes reference to a CKEGMC leader or overlord (queen/hivemind/emperor/controller or whatever grandiose title is most appropriate to your choice of monster). She's come up with a plan to lure the CKEGMC into a trap – the warp corridors in this region of space are notoriously twisted, and she thinks it's possible to create a loop – effectively trapping the creatures in a little pocket dimension forever. She salutes her

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crew's sacrifice, and asks any Combine staff who find this message to relay it back to her superiors.

A one-point **Data Retrieval** spend lets the character retrieve a copy of the ship's logs. Returning these to the Combine (or another interested buyer) is worth a generous bonus.

Engineering: The engineering deck was the site of Numi Grant's last stand. The place is devastated; everywhere, the characters see signs of battle. Somehow, the main engineering section survived relatively intact (the CKEGMC were sucked into the trap before they could wreak more havoc).

In the middle of the main engineering chamber is a glowing sphere of energy, generated by the still-functioning Singularity engines. The ship's engineers called it a translight loop. The Restreamers call it an embryonic universe. The CKEGMC don't call it anything, because they're trapped inside it.

For the purposes of this adventure, call it the anomaly.

In addition to a group of guards (one per laser), there are several Restreamer scientists monitoring the anomaly. The scientists surrender as soon as the characters point weapons at them; **Interrogation** or **Intimidation** gets the following information out of them.

- ▶ They've spent more than a year studying the anomaly under Flynt, and believe they have found a way to use the energy backlash from Anaitis-17's destruction to reboot the universe.
- ▶ The anomaly has a circumference of about ten metres, and a radius best measured in parsecs – you can walk into the anomaly forever without coming out the far side.
- ▶ The anomaly consists of an outer stable zone, an inner unstable zone, and a mysterious core.
- ▶ The closer you get to the core, the more temporal distortions and other strange energy fields you encounter.
- ▶ Flynt has entered the outer zone of the anomaly wearing a protective suit to make final adjustments.
- ▶ It's possible to survive in the outer zone without a suit, but it's dangerous.

Looking at the engineering readouts, the characters could shut down the anomaly from here just by turning off the engines – but if the anomaly is a prison for the CKEGMC, then that would release the horrors. The lasers have no choice but to pursue Zekeel Flynt into the anomaly.

The Unstable Zone

Scene Type: Hazard

Inside, the anomaly is an endless white expanse as far as the eye can see. Harsh actinic light comes from everywhere and nowhere. The ground feels like chalky stone, but crackles with static electricity. White clouds boil across the white sky.

On the ground, there is a single line of footsteps and a long furrow, as if the walker is dragging something behind as he travels. Following this trail leads the lasers across the infinite plain, in pursuit of Zekeel Flynt. As they cross this impossible expanse, the character experience more bizarre phenomena. Are these hallucinations, temporal anomalies, or glimpses of alternate universes? Sample weird encounters are listed below, but it's best to come up with some strange experiences tailored to your player characters. The purpose of these encounters is to unsettle the characters and to impress on them just how high the stakes are if they fail to stop Flynt.

- ▶ One of the characters sees his own future. It's a moment of vast personal importance (the character has achieved some long-held goal, or is in an unexpected situation) when he is attacked by the CKEGMC.
- ▶ A crack opens in the chalky floor of the anomaly, and one of the characters falls in. A successful **Athletics** or **Sense Trouble** test (Difficult 4) lets another character grasp the victim just in time. Through the rapidly sealing crack, the character spots a horde of CKEGMCs.
- ▶ Another character finds himself in Flynt's Restreamed timeline where the Mohilar War never happened. The character is where he would have been if the catastrophe never struck the Combine. Those who died in the war are still alive... and suddenly, the scene is overrun by the CKEGMC.
- ▶ A character prone to visions (such as a Vas Mal searching for re-evolution, or a durugh phase rider) realizes that this place is a panopticon, where all of reality can be seen. Does the character stay in the anomaly to search for the object of his desire?
- ▶ One character encounters the psychic echo of Numi Grant. She lured the CKEGMC here and created the anomaly to contain them. She impresses on the character the dangers posed by the CKEGMC. (If you end this adventure with the monsters escaping the anomaly, then Grant might pass on some cryptic advice that helps the characters defeat the CKEGMC in a later mission.)



WEIRD EVENTS

While you should save the truly bizarre encounters until the characters enter the anomaly themselves you can make their exploration of the ship more interesting by throwing in some strange events, such as:

- ▶ The moment of time repeats itself, as if everyone experienced the same *deja vu*.
- ▶ A 'bubble' of anti-gravity rolls over the characters.
- ▶ One of the characters has a brief vision of an alternate timestream, another life they could have lived.
- ▶ The characters see ghostly echoes of the crew of the *Clarion*, fighting desperately against the CKEGMC.
- ▶ Static electricity crawls over a bulkhead, slithering across the metal as if searching for something. If a character gets too close, it zaps him for 1d6 damage.

The Prophet, Zekeel Flynt

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 12, Scuffling 8, Shooting 10.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Armored Gauntlet +1

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1 with Distractor Beam

Hit Threshold: 4 (5 in Hand-to-Hand)

Tech: Headset, Tether, Rosetta Chip, Encounter Suit (cybernetics) Dataloader (Vioware) Dominator

Armor: 5

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: -1

Savvy Modifier: +2

Capturing Flynt: After crossing the expanse, the characters see a figure up ahead. It's Zekeel Flynt, dressed in a armored spacesuit and dragging a complex piece of machinery over his shoulder. The machine is a device designed to channel the energy from the collapsing transligh corridors into the anomaly. A short distance ahead of Flynt is the edge of the inner zone, which manifests as a flickering wall of electric-blue energy.

If Flynt enters this zone, he will collapse the anomaly and free the CKEGMC. The characters need to stop this from happening. How?

- ▶ **Shooting Flynt:** Point out that he's armored, and that a missed disruptor blast will hit the anomaly and weaken it. A hail of disruptor fire can take Flynt down, but if any shots miss, then a cruel GM can have the anomaly collapse.
- ▶ **Wrestling Flynt:** Chasing after Flynt and tackling him to the ground works – as long as the characters stay well clear of the inner zone. If the character wrestling Flynt fails a **Scuffling** test, then the pair may topple into the inner zone, where they are instantly destroyed and cause the anomaly to collapse.
- ▶ **Talking Flynt Down:** The Restreamer prophet is impressed that the lasers managed to follow him this far into the anomaly, so he is willing to listen to them. If a player character can come up with a convincing reason for Flynt to give up his faith (such as pointing out the risk of unleashing the CKEGMC, or persuading Flynt that the Restreamers have done more to heal the universe by being a force for good on worlds like Pioneer that any crazy time-travel experiments), and can back his reason up with an **Inspiration** spend, then Flynt can be coerced into turning himself in.
- ▶ This is the climax of the whole Restreamer arc, but that doesn't mean it needs to be dragged out. Flynt's just a man – if the lasers have managed to get into position to pass judgement on him, let them do so. If the players think Flynt deserves to die, then a single shot will end him. If they want to bring him back alive to face trial, then one solid punch knocks him out.

Leaving the Anomaly: If you are not running the optional *Living Storm* scene, then the lasers can just walk out of the anomaly and back to the *Clarion*. With Flynt defeated, any surviving Restreamers are utterly demoralized and surrender. The Combine navy will take charge of the *Clarion* wreckage and study the anomaly to ensure the CKEGMC are forever contained. The lasers can return to Anaitis-17, where Administrator Yeoman scrapes together enough money to pay them (unless they managed to salvage the contest and save the station, in which case they get paid in full, with a generous bonus on top, and it's all worth some extra Reputation too.)

The Living Storm

Scene Type: Hazard

This scene is optional, and will significantly affect the future course of your *Ashen Stars* campaign.

As the characters leave the anomaly, it begins to collapse. This is not the instant collapse threatened by Flynt's actions, but a slow degradation. The lasers glimpse the CKEGMC tearing free of their prison, but have enough time to escape Tesilas before the monsters escape fully. The lasers have no way of stopping the CKEGMCs' escape, so they must carry a warning to the rest of the Bleed.

Depending on your choice of CKEGMC, the aliens may be able to leave Tesilas under their own power. Alternatively, they can steal Restreamer ships or salvage the *Clarion*. However it happens, the CKEGMC quickly become a threat to the entire Bleed. The threat of an overwhelming foe opens up all sorts of potential plots:

- ▶ The lasers can search for a way to recreate Numi Grant's trap to contain the enemy again.
- ▶ The Combine navy is the one fighting force that can defeat the CKEGMC – but bringing in the Combine to save the day would be the end of the Bleedist movement. Can the Bleed learn to stand alone? You could run a series of adventures where the PCs rally the different factions in the Bleed to fight the invaders together.
- ▶ Alternatively, the lasers could search for new allies outside the Bleed.
- ▶ They could investigate the origin of the CKEGMC to find a way to stop them.
- ▶ Of course, the CKEGMC attack can just be a background elements for future investigations. The lasers might be called in to find CKEGMC spies in an isolated outpost, or investigate war profiteering in a sector overrun by CKEGMC ships.





THE CREW

If you want to jump in and start playing *Ashen Stars* straight away, you can use the six pregenerated PCs in this chapter. Photocopy the character sheets and distribute them to your players. Each character comes with notes on arc plots and their attitudes towards other player characters, but do not worry about those until after the first game session. Let the players make the pregenerated characters their own first, and then start discussing future sub-plots and character arcs.

The characters are mostly complete, but they have a few ability point unallocated. Let the players allocate these points after the first session (or even during, if a player wants to spend points from a particular pool. If a player wants Francine Dare to be unexpectedly good at **Virolology**, let her put unallocated character points into that pool.)

If you have less than six player characters, then make any unused PCs into supporting characters who stay on the ship most of the time.

Captain Aze Hawk (Stratco/Face): A former Combine naval captain and war hero, Captain Hawk is a dashing and inspiring leader. He has a tempestuous relationship with the Combine leadership, and became a deserter to avoid getting promoted into a desk job. Secretly, his self-confidence was shaken at the end of the Mohilar War, and he worries he's lost his edge.

Revenant (Wrench/Bagger): Revenant is the cybe name of Vaon Sors, formerly the first officer and best friend of Captain Hawk. Sors was Hawk's right-hand man, and his cool analytical intellect balanced Hawk's intuitive, seat-of-the-pants tactics. Together, the pair were unstoppable – until a disastrous mission on the durugh world of Hades. Hawk was forced to abandon Sors, and believed his best friend was dead. In fact, Sors was horribly wounded, but survived. After months of interrogation at the hands of the durugh, he was rescued by cybes, who saved his life by transforming him into one of them.

Francine Dare (Wheel): The helmwoman and security officer of the *Regulator*, Dare idolizes Captain Hawk. She is a brilliant pilot and a crack shot, and is ready to fight for the future of the Bleed. She has a tendency to take risks and get in over her head, but if she can temper her impulsiveness with experience, she has the potential to be Hawk's equal. She also has a curious psychic gift that may prove useful.

Tim Zaren (Gunner/Techno): Zaren comes from an isolated human colony that practiced an extreme form of genetic engineering. Everyone on the colony was made for a specific purpose; training began before birth, as every child was imprinted with a genetic memory of the skills they would need for their assigned role. Zaren was made to fulfill a unique role – he was to be the colony's deviant hunter, locating and eliminating those who rebelled against the colony's dictates. He was imprinted with a drive for justice – and that drive forced him to go rogue himself. He fled the colony and joined the lasers, believing he can bring law and order to the whole galaxy.

Dr. Fairfax (Doc/Mapper): Fairfax is a human scientist and ex-criminal. He was a criminal warlord and a dealer in illegal vioware and cybernetics, but now he's reformed... more or less. He's a charming and personable old rogue, and he reminds you of your favorite uncle, but on the inside he's harder than anyone else on the crew other than – maybe – Volith. Fairfax has an encyclopedic knowledge of medicine that's matched only by his knowledge of the criminals of the Bleed. He's also got quite a few enemies who want him dead...

Volith (Hailer/Chopper): The only non-human on the *Regulator*, Volith is a durugh. She was a member of the durugh's top-secret Insight Cadre, an intelligence bureau dedicated to finding ancient relics and previously unknown superweapons for use by the durugh armies. She was responsible for interrogating Vaon Sors/Revenant on Hades, although what she was looking for is a mystery to the Combine. Volith is a cryptic, sinister presence on board the *Regulator*.

The Regulator: The crew's ship is a Runner-class vessel called the *Regulator*. She is a fine example of her class, kept in top condition by her crew. She's a minnow compared to the huge warship that Captain Hawk used to command, but she punches above her weight and she won't let her crew down.

Customizing the characters

Each of the characters has spent **18** investigative ability points and **40** general ability points. The players may allocate another **15** general ability points to their characters. The number of investigative abilities varies depending on the number of regular players.

# of players	Investigative Built Points
2	18
3	10
4	6
5 or more	3

The characters have spent a total of **31** points on tech & enhancements, and have a starting upkeep of 12. The number of points left to be spent varies depending on the number of players.

# of players	Tech Points Remaining
2	41
3	53
4	65
5	77
6	89

Captain Aze Hawk

Species: Human **Age:** 44 **Drive:** Atonement

Warpside Assignment: Stratco

Groundside Assignment: Face

The Battle of the Wolf Star, the Relief of Sirius 9, the Dracha Plague, the Defense of Volkar's World, the Hawk Gambit... you were a legend before you were thirty-five. You ran away from home to join the Combine Navy, and rose through the ranks in record time. Early in your illustrious career, you

formed an enduring friendship with **Vaon Sors**. The two of you complemented each other perfectly. He could analyze an enemy vessel, and you would come up with a brilliant intuitive tactic to take advantage of their weaknesses. He was a walking database of scientific facts and political factions, and you could inspire the crew to push the ship to the red line, or convince races that had been at war for a century to start negotiations with a stirring speech. When caught in a dilemma, Sors would list the unpalatable alternatives; you've find another solution that no-one else dared attempt. When you were promoted to captain of the *Adamant*, Sors became your first officer.

During the Mohilar War, you were in the spearhead of the Combine counterattack in the Bleed. For six sleepless months, you fought from Aventine to Viminal, battling durugh and Mohilar forces on space and in the ground and liberating conquered planets.

Then there was Hades. A grim, grey planet, lashed with constant rainstorms. You detected an abandoned durugh base under the surface. Vaon Sors led a survey team to explore the structure – and then a Mohilar battle group appeared in orbit. You were outnumbered ten to one. Vaon wasn't there to give you his analysis, but the hard choice was obvious – abandon the survey team, or risk the ship in a desperate rescue attempt that was almost certainly doomed to failure.

Mohilar weapons rocked the *Adamant*. Consoles exploded in showers of sparks. Defense arrays collapsed under the onslaught. You made the hard choice, the only choice.

You left them behind.

After the war, you left the navy. All the medals and honors seemed hollow now. You wanted to make amends for your failure, to do something that didn't remind you of your lost friend. The Bleed needed a hero, and you stepped up to the challenge. You signed on a laser, made the long journey from the Combine Proper to the Bleed, and set about recruiting a crew.

And that's where you found him. Sors survived the Mohilar ambush. He was tortured for months by the durugh, but he survived – more or less. He's a cybe now – his injuries were horrific. He calls himself **Revenant**. You're not sure how much of your friend is still in there, under the chrome and synthskin. You came back to the Bleed to honor Vaon Sors' memory, and now his ghost is manning your bridge...



The Crew:

- ▶ **Revenant:** Vaon Sors, or what's left of him. Hades hangs over the two of you like a shroud, and you don't know if he blames you for what happened. You certainly blame yourself.
- ▶ **Francine Dare:** Your protege, Dare is one of the best pilots in the Bleed. She reminds you of yourself when you were young and had the galaxy at your feet.
- ▶ **Tim Zaren:** A genetically engineered detective from an isolated planet, Zaren's drive for justice makes him an excellent addition to the crew.
- ▶ **Dr. Fairfax:** A friend in the Combine suggested you take Fairfax with you. He's got a list of criminal convictions a light-year long – if he hadn't signed on with you, he'd be exiled to a prison world. Maybe you can both atone for your pasts.
- ▶ **Volith:** She's a durugh, and ex-military. You're more used to fighting durugh than working with them, but she knows the Bleed better than anyone.

Plot Arcs: Either pick one of suggested arcs listed below, or talk to the GM and come up with your own.

The Hero's Journey: Can Aze Hawk reconcile his reputation as a hero with his self-image as a failure who left his best friend to die?

- 1) The captain is honored by the leaders of a world he saved during the war – but when he learns that the government he helped preserve has grown corrupt and oppressive, what will the captain do?
- 2) A vile energy being traps the lasers and forces them to relive their worst memories. What will the crew learn about Hawk?
- 3) The captain finds evidence that Vaon Sors was reprogrammed by enemies of the Combine. Can the captain really trust Revenant, or will his love for his dead friend blind him to the truth?

The Burdens of Command: Aze Hawk left the Combine Navy behind to become a laser – but can he ever really escape the past?

- 1) One of the captain's old shipmates asks for his help, but it turns out to be a trap set by an old enemy of the *Adamant*.
- 2) The crew find evidence that the *Adamant* was involved in a secret military project during the war. Captain Hawk remembers nothing of this – were his memories wiped by the Bogey Conumdrum, or is something even more sinister going on?
- 3) The Combine Navy offer Hawk his commission back – the political strife in the Bleed will soon explode into civil war, and they want him to return to active service. How can Hawk best serve the cause of justice?

Revenant

Species: Cybe

Age: 45

Drive: Bleedism

Warpside Assignment: Wrench

Groundside Assignment: Bagger

This is your second life.

Your first life was as **Vaon Sors**, a Combine naval officer. You were the right-hand man of **Captain Aze Hawk**, one of the greatest captains in the fleet. Tactical and technological analysis was your forte; pushing men and machines beyond their limits was his gift, and one you secretly envied. You could look at a problem and devise a dozen strategies in response, but Hawk would always somehow find a solution that defied the odds and won the day. Together on board his ship, the *Adamant*, you were invincible.

That life ended on Hades. You'd detected a seemingly abandoned durugh base. You led a survey team to investigate – and then a Mohilar battle group arrived in orbit. You did the math; there was no way the *Adamant* could win, no way they could rescue you without risking the lives of everyone on board. Your cold tactical analysis demanded that Captain Hawk abandon you and your men.

You stood on the grey wastes of Hades and waited for your friend to work his magic, to defy the odds and break the rules and do the impossible one more time... but this time, you were right. There was no way to win. Hawk retreated, and you were mortally wounded when the Mohilar attacked.

Vaon Sors did not die that day. He died months later, under the tender mercies of durugh interrogators. They tortured you, nerve by nerve, until your body gave out under the strain. The rest of the survey team were long since dead. You were abandoned on the surface to perish.

A cybe ship detected a durugh signal and found you. They took you on board and resurrected you, rebuilding your body with machine parts and cloned organs. You rose again and called yourself Revenant. You'd always been cold and analytical, but now your mind runs more on silicon than neurons. The cybes felt equally betrayed by the Combine, and their ideas about political independence resonated with you. You decided that the Bleed was your new home, and that your old existence was irrelevant. Logically, you chose to put your skills to use where you could be most effective – as a laser.

Then, you learned that Aze Hawk was coming back to the Bleed, and that he was forming a laser crew. Something in you – some vestigial spark of friendship, some need for closure, maybe some unspoken desire for revenge – made you sign on with him. You are not Vaon Sors any more, nor is he your captain, but you must rid yourself of this ghost just as the Bleed must rid itself of the Combine.

The Crew:

- ▶ **Aze Hawk:** Still the shining hero, the doer of impossible deeds. Do you honor his glorious deeds, or does his one failure outweigh them all in your eyes?
- ▶ **Francine Dare:** A brilliant young pilot. She reminds you of a young Aze Hawk – she has something of his knack for doing the impossible.
- ▶ **Tim Zaren:** He comes from an engineered society, where everyone is trained from birth to fulfill an assigned role. This appeals to you, but he rejected it. You need to know why.
- ▶ **Dr. Fairfax:** The ship's doctor. He appears harmless enough.
- ▶ **Volith:** This durugh is a mystery to you. She seems familiar... you can barely remember the agonizing months on Hades, but could she have been one of your interrogators? If so, what did they want with you?

Plot Arcs: Either pick one of suggested arcs listed below, or talk to the GM and come up with your own.

The Wounded Bleed: Revenant's loyalty to the Bleedist cause is tested by the extremism of some of his allies. Can he build a brighter future for his adopted home?

- 1) A cybe scientist has discovered a way to improve cybe cognition by erasing the emotional content of old memories. All the data is retained and organized, but the essential feel of the moment is lost. Does you undergo this procedure, and at what cost to your friendship with Hawk?
- 2) One of the cybes who rescued you from Hades is accused of being a pro-Bleedism terrorist. Do you alter the evidence to protect him?
- 3) The Bleed is on the verge of civil war, and a cold-hearted analysis suggests the Bleedists have no chance against the Combine navy. Do you follow your political beliefs or your tactical analysis?

The Late Vaon Sors: Revenant tries to come to terms with his past. Is he Vaon Sors or Revenant? Human or Cybe?

- 1) Aze Hawk gets into trouble, and only Revenant can save him. What do you do?
- 2) Alisa Sors, Vaon's sister, visits the Bleed. How does the cybe made from the corpse of her brother react to her presence?
- 3) The crew discover that Volith was on Hades when you were being tortured there. What did the cryptic durugh want with you? Are you the reason she is part of the crew of the *Regulator*?



Francine Dare

Species: Human **Age:** 23 **Drive:** Hotshot

Warpside Assignment: Wheel

Groundside Assignment: None

You need to be out here, out in space. You need to move. You have to fly. It's in your blood. Staying still isn't an option, it never was.

You grew up in an orphanage back on Pactyas. Most of the kids there – and there were a lot of them, war-orphans with hollow eyes mourning their dead families – were so broken and scared that they never dared to dream. You dreamed of flying, of seeing strange new worlds, of going faster than light. You wanted to build up enough velocity to escape the orphanage, escape Tyro, escape everything. You always had too much energy – you studied martial arts to try to bleed some of it off, and you got into trouble and picked fights because you were bored. You escaped the orphanage and ran with a gang. For a while there, you were heading down a very dark road towards a life of crime and violence.

Then your talent for piloting was spotted by a fixer from Ixion. You flew on the Ixion circuit for four seasons – a lifetime, by the standards of that sport, guiding a twitchjet across the exploding volcano fields. Most racers on Ixion retire when they lose their edge, or else literally burn out when they run into a lava burst. You're the only twitchracer to quit when you were ahead. You won the grand prize twice, and used the cash to buy out your contract.

You travelled across the Bleed for a year, and then you ran into **Aze Hawk**. He's a legend, one of the greatest Combine naval heroes in history. You used to have posters of him in your room back in the orphanage. He was recruiting for a laser crew – you don't give a damn about law or justice, but it sounded like fun, and you knew you could make the *Regulator* dance like no other pilot could ever manage.

The crew are rapidly becoming your family. You haven't had real friends in a long time. Maybe you'll even tell them your secret – you've always been different. You're more than *fast* – you can see things an instant before they happen, or sense things you shouldn't be able to know. You sometimes wonder where you came from, and who your real parents were....

Special Rule: Dare has very limited access to Vas Mal-only investigative abilities. She can have a maximum of one point in Dreamsight or Neurosight.

The Crew:

- ▶ **Aze Hawk:** Captain Hawk was your hero when you were younger... and now he's your mentor. He's almost as fast as you are... no-one else can keep up with you.
- ▶ **Revenant:** A spooky cybe. You can't read him at all, and he seems cold.
- ▶ **Tim Zaren:** Your best friend on board the ship. If only you could get him to loosen up and relax, instead of always being so serious. Just because he's genetically engineered to be the perfect cop doesn't mean he can't have fun.
- ▶ **Dr. Fairfax:** He's like the kindly uncle you never had.
- ▶ **Volith:** She's a durugh. You get the impression that she knows more about you than you know about yourself, but she's just so mysterious that it could all be your imagination.

Plot Arcs: Either pick one of suggested arcs listed below, or talk to the GM and come up with your own.

Escape Velocity: Dare's taste for risk-taking pushes the crew to their limits. Can she learn to work as part of a team, or are they just holding her back?

- 1) The crew investigate corruption in the Ixion racing circuit, and you discover you've got unfinished business with a rival there. Do you still have your twitch-racing edge?
- 2) You and another member of the crew (maybe Hawk or Zaren) are trapped in a situation where there's nothing to do but wait for rescue. Can you learn to be still, or does your boundless energy get you into trouble?
- 3) You're challenged by a mysterious criminal who's better and faster than you are. Who is this mystery rival, and why does she seem oddly familiar?

Daughter of the Gods: Where did Dare come from? Is she somehow related to the Vas Kra?

- 1) After you suffer a seizure, Dr. Fairfax discovers that your nervous system is degenerating. He can treat the disease, but at the cost of your piloting talent? Do you give up your edge, or refuse it in the hopes of finding a cure later on?
- 2) A Vas Mal contacts the crew, and claims to be your natural father. Is he telling the truth, or does he have a more sinister purpose in mind?
- 3) You find a Vas Kra artefact that seems to enhance your natural abilities. Could it trigger your evolution into something more than human?

ASHEN STARS



Tim Zaren

Species: Human **Age:** 29 **Drive:** Programming

Warp side Assignment: Gunner

Groundside Assignment: Techno

Two hundred years ago, a renegade group of human scientists and genetic engineers set out to found a new and perfect society. On a world called Eumelus, they created a colony where everyone was bred and groomed for a particular role, where human potential was optimized and human weakness excised. Your homeworld had no contact with the Combine, to prevent the perfect society being corrupted by outside influences.

Even before you were decanted from the artificial womb, you knew your purpose. You were made to hunt deviants. In every generation, there are errors and unanticipated problems: renegades who fled Eumelus instead of performing their assigned role, mutants, intruders from offworld, corruption and genetic treachery. The deviant hunter's role is to eliminate these problems from the perfect society. You were imprinted with an all-consuming drive for justice, to eliminate corruption and to protect the law-abiding. Your abilities and talents were so honed that the whole colony needed only a single deviant hunter – fifty thousand people with one lone cop to keep them honest.

Then, the Mohilar War wreaked havoc across the Combine. Society fractured, governments fell, and criminals took over. You looked up at the stars and realized there were billions of people out there crying out for justice.

A year ago, you fled Eumelus. The deviant hunter became the arch-deviant, as your inborn compulsion to bring justice forced you to consider the needs of the whole universe. Perhaps it is an impossible, quixotic quest to bring justice to the Bleed, but you simply *cannot* do anything else.

Eumelus was a scientific, rational society. It made sense to you. Out here in the Bleed, everyone's a bizarre deviant. Your genetic gifts mean you can detect the most subtle changes in skin temperature and eye movement that might signal a guilty conscience, but you are confused by many aspects of Bleed culture.

You've signed on as a laser. It is the most efficient way to bring justice to the Bleed.

The Crew:

- ▶ **Aze Hawk:** A former Combine naval captain. Highly respected.
- ▶ **Revenant:** A cybe; Eumelus is seen as a model society by some cybe factions. Hawk and Revenant knew each other during the war, and you suspect they have unfinished business.
- ▶ **Francine Dare:** A brilliant young pilot. You and she are friends; she is very talented, but needs to learn to put her skills to the service of a cause. She lacks direction.
- ▶ **Dr. Fairfax:** He appears to be a kindly old doctor, but you sense that he is considerably more dangerous than he seems. He stinks of guilt.
- ▶ **Volith:** Durugh ex-spy. You suspect she is manipulating the crew for her own ends; do not let her distract you from the pursuit of justice.

Plot Arcs: Either pick one of suggested arcs listed below, or talk to the GM and come up with your own.

Servant of Justice: Can Zaren balance the obsessive pursuit of justice with being human?

- 1) The crew encounter a situation where solving the case will cause much more suffering and injustice than exposing the truth. Do you choose justice or mercy?
- 2) An alien virus temporarily disables the crew's vioware and augmentations – including Zaren's drive for justice! How does you react to being temporarily free of this compulsion?
- 3) Zaren finds evidence of wrongdoing on the part of one of his shipmates. Do his feelings overcome his desire for justice?

Genetic Destiny: Zaren has left Eumelus, but can he deny the purpose written into his genetic code?

- 1) You run into another deviant from Eumelus, whose genetically-encoded purpose has driven him to break the law of his adopted home. Do you find him responsible for his crimes, even though he had no more choice to commit them than you do when solving them?
- 2) A sinister scientist plans to rule the Bleed with a mind-controlling virus. You discover that it's possible to imprint your own genetic compulsion for justice onto the virus. Should you enforce the law at a genetic level?
- 3) Eumelus is attacked by a mysterious foe. Can you save your homeworld – or is the engineered society worth saving?



Dr. Alen Fairfax

Species: Human **Age:** 65 **Drive:** Pursued

Warpside Assignment: Medic

Groundside Assignment: Mapper

These days, you're a kindly old doctor, an avuncular, occasionally crotchety old sawbones full of wisdom and good advice. Your records are sealed, your past erased, and only a handful of people know the truth.

During the Mohilar war, Calyce was one of the first planets to fall into anarchy. The planet was wracked by civil war between four rival factions. You established a free medical clinic to treat the collateral casualties of violence. You treated gunshots, stabbing, pheromone attacks, failed cybernetic enhancements, bioweapon exposure, chemical burns... and realized that it was all pointless. Half the people you saved went back to the fighting. Something had to be done.

By then, your clinic was the best-equipped medical facility on the planet (the other hospitals had long since been bombed into uselessness). You used this to influence the faction – you'd prioritize treatment of one party if they would agree to cede territory to you, and you'd develop viroware for another group in exchange for weapons to protect your new zone of control. Little by little, you brought the warring factions to heel.

You're not quite sure when you crossed the line from 'desperate hospital administrator' to 'criminal warlord'. Every decision you made, you justified with the thought that it brought the end of violence a step closer. They weren't assassinations you ordered, they were surgical incisions, cutting out a walking cancer. You dealt in drugs because you needed to pay your recruits. You developed bioweapons and combat viroware because... well, by that point the justifications had grown thin indeed.

When the Mohilar War ended, you were the undisputed master of Calyce and the four surrounding systems. They called you the Bloody-Handed Man, the Deathdealer. You were one of the most wanted criminals in the Bleed... and worse, you'd come to enjoy the power. You had become a more dangerous threat than any of the factions you'd defeated. You needed treatment.

You turned yourself in. You were tired of making compromises. You gave the Combine all they needed to demolish the criminal empire you built in exchange for leniency. They offered you a choice – life imprisonment, or permanent assignment as a laser. It wasn't a choice – your former lieutenants are still out there, and you know you'd be murdered in prison as soon as you were identified. You have to keep moving if you're going to survive long enough to repay your debt to society.

Power is an addiction. You keep the mask of the kindly doctor on tight, letting it slip only when absolutely necessary. You know that if you slip back into your old ways, you'd be worse than any of the criminals you now hunt down.

The Crew:

- ▶ **Aze Hawk:** A former Combine naval captain. He knows about your history – he agreed to take you on his crew as a favor to the Combine.
- ▶ **Revenant:** A cybe. You know he was a Combine officer during the war, but was captured and tortured by the enemy.
- ▶ **Francine Dare:** The ship's pilot, a real hotshot. You knew people like her back on Calyce – she's too confident for her own good, and is going to get herself into trouble one of these days.
- ▶ **Tim Zaren:** A refugee from a genetically engineered colony, bred to be the perfect detective. You're looking forward to treating him and getting a good look at his DNA.
- ▶ **Volith:** A durugh, rumored to be a former member of their intelligence agency. You dealt with the durugh during the war, supplying them with information about the Combine's defenses so they wouldn't target your worlds. Just looking at her makes the hackles rise on the back of your neck...



Plot Arcs: Either pick one of suggested arcs listed below, or talk to the GM and come up with your own.

First, Do No Harm: Underneath your kindly demeanor, you've got the mind and the killer instincts of a warlord. Can you put your dark side to use without falling back onto your criminal ways?

- 1) You capture a criminal boss, but he's severely injured. Do you leave him die, treat him – or treat him only if he spills everything he knows first? How do you navigate the grey zone between interrogation and torture?
- 2) The crew needs someone to go undercover in a criminal syndicate. You can talk the talk better than anyone – but can you control yourself?
- 3) A villain kidnaps you or one of the other lasers to force you into developing a biological weapon for him. Do you create the plague he wants, or do you stick to your newfound principles and let your friend die?

Shadow of the Deathdealer:

- 1) You meet a group of refugees from Calyce, who recognize you and thank you for protecting them from the gangs. They're in trouble again – do you use your criminal skills to help them?
- 2) An investigation leads back to Calyce – do you try to hide your old identity from the crew, or confess the dark secrets of your past?
- 3) Your former lieutenant, Tager Kral, finds you and wants revenge. Are you putting the crew in danger by staying on board?

Volith

.....

Species: Durugh **Age:** 39 **Drive:** Scientific Inquiry

Warpside Assignment: Hailer

Groundside Assignment: Chopper

The other races were fools, blundering blindly into a galaxy full of dangers. There are entities out there that are older and more powerful than can be comprehended, and a single misstep can bring devastation down on a whole species. The durugh expanded slowly, cautiously, hiding in the shadows to escape notice by something more powerful. The Combine races went where sensible beings fear to tread, and the result was the half-remembered Mohilar War.

Before the war, you were part of the Insight Cadre, a secret organization that reported to King Ukshqa himself. Your mission was to identify and avoid existential threats to the durugh people. You studied billion-year old relics of long-dead civilizations, gathered data on black holes and cosmological phenomena, and watched the other young races from the dark places between the stars.

The alliance between the Mohilar and the durugh was one of necessity – the Insight Cadre deemed it better to join forces with the inevitable victors than risk annihilation at their hands (assuming they *had* hands – the Bogey Conundrum makes your own past a matter of speculation). On a world called Hades, the Mohilar arranged for you to capture a Combine survey team led by **Vaon Sors**, the right-hand man of **Captain Aze Hawk**.

For six months, you interrogated Sors. You grew to admire his determination, his refusal to give in, and his keen intelligence. He tried to manipulate the interrogators, to outwit them even as they burned him out, nerve by nerve. Finally, the order was given to abandon the outpost, and the only surviving prisoner was left to die on the surface. Secretly, you programmed a distress beacon to activate after the durugh left the planet, in the hopes that Sors would be rescued by a passing ship.

Ironically, the Bogey Conundrum prevents you from remembering what secret you were trying to extract from Sors. The information is right there, at the tip of your mind. You know only that is still important to you.



With the death of King Ukshqa, the Insight Cadre's method of operation changed. Members of the secret organization spread themselves out into the Combine, still looking for threats to the durugh. You joined a laser crew, led by **Aze Hawk** himself. You have unfinished business on board...

The Crew:

- ▶ **Aze Hawk:** One of the greatest captains of the Combine navy, he was one of the most dangerous foes ever faced by the durugh. Now, he's just another laser.
- ▶ **Revenant:** You knew him as Vaon Sors. He was rescued by a Cybe ship and turned into one of them. You do not know how much of Sors survived, or if he remembers you. Still, you saved his life, and that links your fates together.
- ▶ **Francine Dare:** A talented human pilot, in need of guidance. Cultivated, she could become a useful asset for you.
- ▶ **Tim Zaren:** He comes from the human synthculture of Eumelus, where they tried to engineer perfection. The durugh have learned since the war that a perfectly controlled society is impossible. Like Dare, potentially useful.
- ▶ **Dr. Fairfax:** According to human records, he is just an unremarkable medical professional. These records are forgeries – the Insight Cadre knows him as the Bloody-Handed Man, the manipulative warlord of Calyce. What is this butcher and weapons dealer doing on board – and who else knows they have such a serpent in their midst?

Plot Arcs: Either pick one of suggested arcs listed below, or talk to the GM and come up with your own.

Known Unknowns: Your tangled history with the crew threatens to tear the lasers apart as dark revelations come to light.

- 1) The crew pursue a traitorous durugh who knows of your involvement in the interrogations on Hades. How will the other crew react to the knowledge that you interrogated Revenant?
- 2) An alien artifact temporarily alters your phasing, giving you the power to walk into the memories of your crewmates. Which of their memories do you visit?
- 3) You begin to suffer from nightmares related to Hades. The memory blocks on why you interrogated the humans are breaking down! What did you want from Vaon Sors?

The Insight Cadre: The secret group dedicated to preserving and advancing the durugh is still out there, and still counts you as one of their agents. Can you balance this loyalty with your duty as a laser?

- 1) While investigating a renegade scientist, the Cadre secretly contacts you and orders you to obtain a copy of the scientist's research. You discover the scientist was working on something terrible – do you follow your orders, or destroy the research?
- 2) A victim of the Insight Cadre tracks you down, and wants revenge. Can you justify your involvement with the sinister group to your fellow lasers, and do you continue your association with the Cadre?
- 3) You find evidence of a potential threat to the whole Bleed. If you warn your people first, they could be better prepared to survive than the other Combine races, and so come to dominate the future after the threat recedes. Where do your loyalties lie?

PLAYER



NAME : Aze Hawk **SPECIES :** Human

DRIVE : Atonement **GROUND SIDE POST :** Face

HIT THRESHOLD : **WARPSIDE POST :** Stratco

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Anthropology	2	.....
Archaeology	1	.....
Botany
Cybe Culture
Forensic Accounting
Forensic Psychology
Geology
History, Balla
History, Combine	1	.....
History, Durugh
History, Human
History, Kch-Thk
History, Tavak
Law	1	.....
Linguistics	1	.....
Vas Mal Culture
Xenoculture	1	.....
Zoology

TECHNICAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Astronomy	2	.....
Bio Signatures	1	.....
Chemistry
Data Retrieval
Decryption	1	.....
Energy Signatures	1	.....
Evidence Collection
Explosive Devices
Forensic Anthropology
Forensic Engineering
Holo Surveillance
Imaging
Industrial Design	1	.....
Kinetics
Virology

INTERPERSONAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector
Bureaucracy
Cop Talk
Downside	1	.....
Flattery
Flirting	1	.....
Impersonate	1	.....
Inspiration	1	.....
Interrogation
Intimidation
Negotiation	1	.....
Reassurance	1	.....
Respect	2	.....

SPECIAL (VAS MAL)	POOL	RATING
Consciousness Simulation
Dreamsight
Neurosight
Timesight

PERSONAL ARC

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- 2/
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- 3/
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GENERAL ABILITIES

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Athletics	4
Battle Console	3
Business Affairs
Communications Intercept
Emotion Suppression (Balla)
Enhancement Integration (Cybe)
Farsight (Vas Mal)
Filch
Ground Craft
Health	10
Helm Control	3
Infiltration
Medic
Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk)
Naval Tactics	8
Neural Rewiring (Cybe)
Resist Battle Frenzy

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Pathway Amplification (Vas Mal)
Probability Override (Vas Mal)
Phase (Durugh)
Preparedness	4
Psychic Vitality (Vas Mal)
Public Relations	5
Scuffling	4
Sense Trouble	4
Shooting	4
Shuttle Craft
Surveillance
Systems Design
Systems Repair
Viro Manipulation
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GEAR

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CYBERNETIC ENHANCEMENTS

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TOTAL UPKEEP

1

WHAT YOU DID DURING THE WAR

PLAYER



ASHEN STARS



NAME : Revenant **SPECIES :** Cybe

DRIVE : Bleedism **GROUND SIDE POST :** Bagger

HIT THRESHOLD : **WARPSIDE POST :** Wrench

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Anthropology
Archaeology
Botany
Cybe Culture	3	.....
Forensic Accounting	1	.....
Forensic Psychology
Geology
History, Balla
History, Combine	1	.....
History, Durugh
History, Human	1	.....
History, Kch-Thk
History, Tavak
Law	1	.....
Linguistics
Vas Mal Culture
Xenoculture
Zoology

TECHNICAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Astronomy	1	.....
Bio Signatures
Chemistry	1	.....
Data Retrieval	1	.....
Decryption	1	.....
Energy Signatures
Evidence Collection	1	.....
Explosive Devices	1	.....
Forensic Anthropology
Forensic Engineering	2	.....
Holo Surveillance
Imaging
Industrial Design	1	.....
Kinetics
Virology	1	.....

INTERPERSONAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	1	.....
Bureaucracy	1	.....
Cop Talk
Downside
Flattery
Flirting
Impersonate
Inspiration
Interrogation	1	.....
Intimidation
Negotiation	1	.....
Reassurance
Respect	1	.....

SPECIAL [VAS MAL]	POOL	RATING
Consciousness Simulation
Dreamsight
Neurosight
Timesight

PERSONAL ARC

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GENERAL ABILITIES

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Athletics	3
Battle Console
Business Affairs
Communications Intercept
Emotion Suppression (Balla)
Enhancement Integration (Cybe)
Farsight (Vas Mal)
Filch
Ground Craft	3
Health	8
Helm Control
Infiltration
Medic
Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk)
Naval Tactics
Neural Rewiring (Cybe)	3
Resist Battle Frenzy

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Pathway Amplification (Vas Mal)
Probability Override (Vas Mal)
Phase (Durugh)
Preparedness	3
Psychic Vitality (Vas Mal)
Public Relations
Scuffling
Sense Trouble
Shooting	3
Shuttle Craft
Surveillance
Systems Design	4
Systems Repair	6
Viro Manipulation
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CYBERNETIC ENHANCEMENTS

Amper / Page / Upkeep	1
Dataloader / Page / Upkeep	0
Handgun / Page / Upkeep	1
Internal Headset / Page / Upkeep	1
Motobooster / Page / Upkeep	1
Ocular Input Analyzer / Page / Upkeep	1
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VIROWARE ENHANCEMENTS

Regenerate / Page / Upkeep	0
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TOTAL UPKEEP

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WHAT YOU DID DURING THE WAR

PLAYER



ASHEN STARS



NAME : Francine Dare **SPECIES :** Human?

DRIVE : Hotshot **GROUND SIDE POST :** —

HIT THRESHOLD : **WARPSIDE POST :** Wheel

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Anthropology
Archaeology
Botany
Cybe Culture
Forensic Accounting
Forensic Psychology
Geology	1	.....
History, Balla
History, Combine	1	.....
History, Durugh
History, Human
History, Kch-Thk
History, Tavak
Law
Linguistics	1	.....
Vas Mal Culture	1	.....
Xenoculture
Zoology

TECHNICAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Astronomy	2	.....
Bio Signatures
Chemistry
Data Retrieval
Decryption	1	.....
Energy Signatures
Evidence Collection	1	.....
Explosive Devices
Forensic Anthropology
Forensic Engineering
Holo Surveillance
Imaging	1	.....
Industrial Design
Kinetics	1	.....
Virology

INTERPERSONAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	1	.....
Bureaucracy
Cop Talk
Downside	1	.....
Flattery	1	.....
Flirting	2	.....
Impersonate	1	.....
Inspiration	1	.....
Interrogation
Intimidation	1	.....
Negotiation
Reassurance	1	.....
Respect

SPECIAL (VAS MAL)	POOL	RATING
Consciousness Simulation
Dreamsight	1
Neurosight
Timesight	1

PERSONAL ARC

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GENERAL ABILITIES

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Athletics	4
Battle Console	4
Business Affairs
Communications Intercept
Emotion Suppression (Balla)
Enhancement Integration (Cybe)
Farsight (Vas Mal)
Filch	2
Ground Craft	4
Health	7
Helm Control	6
Infiltration
Medic
Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk)
Naval Tactics
Neural Rewiring (Cybe)
Resist Battle Frenzy

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Pathway Amplification (Vas Mal)
Probability Override (Vas Mal)
Phase (Durugh)
Preparedness
Psychic Vitality (Vas Mal)
Public Relations
Scuffling	3
Sense Trouble	3
Shooting	2
Shuttle Craft	4
Surveillance
Systems Design
Systems Repair	2
Viro Manipulation
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CYBERNETIC ENHANCEMENTS

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TOTAL UPKEEP

1

WHAT YOU DID DURING THE WAR

PLAYER



ASHEN STARS



NAME : Tim Zarren **SPECIES :** Human

DRIVE : Programmed **GROUND SIDE POST :** Techno

HIT THRESHOLD : **WARPSIDE POST :** Gunner

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Anthropology
Archaeology
Botany
Cybe Culture
Forensic Accounting
Forensic Psychology	1	.....
Geology
History, Balla
History, Combine
History, Durugh
History, Human	1	.....
History, Kch-Thk
History, Tavak
Law	1	.....
Linguistics
Vas Mal Culture
Xenoculture
Zoology

TECHNICAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Astronomy
Bio Signatures
Chemistry
Data Retrieval	1	.....
Decryption
Energy Signatures
Evidence Collection	1	.....
Explosive Devices	1	.....
Forensic Anthropology
Forensic Engineering	1	.....
Holo Surveillance	1	.....
Imaging	1	.....
Industrial Design	1	.....
Kinetics	1	.....
Virology	1	.....

INTERPERSONAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	2	.....
Bureaucracy
Cop Talk	2	.....
Downside	1	.....
Flattery
Flirting
Impersonate
Inspiration	1	.....
Interrogation	1	.....
Intimidation
Negotiation	1	.....
Reassurance
Respect

SPECIAL (VAS MAL)	POOL	RATING
Consciousness Simulation
Dreamsight
Neurosight
Timesight

PERSONAL ARC

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- 2/
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GENERAL ABILITIES

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Athletics	3
Battle Console	6
Business Affairs
Communications Intercept
Emotion Suppression (Balla)
Enhancement Integration (Cybe)
Farsight (Vas Mal)
Filch
Ground Craft
Health	8
Helm Control
Infiltration	4
Medic
Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk)
Naval Tactics
Neural Rewiring (Cybe)
Resist Battle Frenzy

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Pathway Amplification (Vas Mal)
Probability Override (Vas Mal)
Phase (Durugh)
Preparedness
Psychic Vitality (Vas Mal)
Public Relations
Scuffling	4
Sense Trouble	4
Shooting	4
Shuttle Craft
Surveillance	2
Systems Design	2
Systems Repair	6
Viro Manipulation
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TOTAL UPKEEP

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WHAT YOU DID DURING THE WAR

PLAYER



ASHEN STARS



NAME : Dr. Fairfax **SPECIES :** Human

DRIVE : Pursued **GROUND SIDE POST :** Mapper

HIT THRESHOLD : **WARPSIDE POST :** Medic

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Anthropology
Archaeology
Botany	1	.....
Cybe Culture
Forensic Accounting	1	.....
Forensic Psychology	1	.....
Geology
History, Balla
History, Combine	1	.....
History, Durugh
History, Human	1	.....
History, Kch-Thk
History, Tavak
Law	1	.....
Linguistics	1	.....
Vas Mal Culture
Xenoculture
Zoology

TECHNICAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Astronomy
Bio Signatures	1	.....
Chemistry	1	.....
Data Retrieval
Decryption
Energy Signatures
Evidence Collection
Explosive Devices
Forensic Anthropology	2	.....
Forensic Engineering
Holo Surveillance
Imaging
Industrial Design
Kinetics
Virology	1	.....

INTERPERSONAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	1	.....
Bureaucracy	1	.....
Cop Talk
Downside	2	.....
Flattery
Flirting
Impersonate	1	.....
Inspiration
Interrogation	1	.....
Intimidation	1	.....
Negotiation	1	.....
Reassurance	1	.....
Respect

SPECIAL [VAS MAL]	POOL	RATING
Consciousness Simulation
Dreamsight
Neurosight
Timesight

PERSONAL ARC

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- 2/
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- 3/
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GENERAL ABILITIES

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Athletics
Battle Console
Business Affairs
Communications Intercept
Emotion Suppression (Balla)
Enhancement Integration (Cybe)
Farsight (Vas Mal)
Filch	3
Ground Craft
Health	8
Helm Control
Infiltration	3
Medic	6
Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk)
Naval Tactics
Neural Rewiring (Cybe)
Resist Battle Frenzy

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Pathway Amplification (Vas Mal)
Probability Override (Vas Mal)
Phase (Durugh)
Preparedness	4
Psychic Vitality (Vas Mal)
Public Relations	2
Scuffling	4
Sense Trouble	3
Shooting	2
Shuttle Craft
Surveillance	4
Systems Design
Systems Repair
Viro Manipulation	2
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VIROWARE ENHANCEMENTS

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TOTAL UPKEEP

2

WHAT YOU DID DURING THE WAR

PLAYER



ASHEN STARS



NAME : Volith **SPECIES :** Durugh

DRIVE : Scientific Inquiry **GROUND SIDE POST :** Chopper

HIT THRESHOLD : **WARPSIDE POST :** Hailer

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Anthropology
Archaeology	1	.....
Botany
Cybe Culture
Forensic Accounting
Forensic Psychology	1	.....
Geology
History, Balla
History, Combine
History, Durugh	1	.....
History, Human
History, Kch-Thk
History, Tavak
Law
Linguistics	1	.....
Vas Mal Culture
Xenoculture
Zoology

TECHNICAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Astronomy
Bio Signatures
Chemistry	1	.....
Data Retrieval	1	.....
Decryption	2	.....
Energy Signatures
Evidence Collection	1	.....
Explosive Devices
Forensic Anthropology	1	.....
Forensic Engineering	1	.....
Holo Surveillance
Imaging
Industrial Design
Kinetics	1	.....
Virology	1	.....

INTERPERSONAL	POOL	RATING	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	1	.....
Bureaucracy	1	.....
Cop Talk	1	.....
Downside	1	.....
Flattery	1	.....
Flirting
Impersonate	1	.....
Inspiration
Interrogation	1	.....
Intimidation
Negotiation
Reassurance	1	.....
Respect

SPECIAL [VAS MAL]	POOL	RATING
Consciousness Simulation
Dreamsight
Neurosight
Timesight

PERSONAL ARC

1/

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2/

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3/

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GENERAL ABILITIES

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Athletics	4
Battle Console
Business Affairs	2
Communications Intercept	2
Emotion Suppression (Balla)
Enhancement Integration (Cybe)
Farsight (Vas Mal)
Filch
Ground Craft
Health	6
Helm Control
Infiltration
Medic
Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk)
Naval Tactics
Neural Rewiring (Cybe)
Resist Battle Frenzy

ABILITIES	POOL	RATING
Pathway Amplification (Vas Mal)
Probability Override (Vas Mal)
Phase (Durugh)	5
Preparedness
Psychic Vitality (Vas Mal)
Public Relations	4
Scuffling	4
Sense Trouble	4
Shooting	4
Shuttle Craft
Surveillance	4
Systems Design
Systems Repair
Viro Manipulation	2
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VIROWARE ENHANCEMENTS

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TOTAL UPKEEP

2

WHAT YOU DID DURING THE WAR