

ASHEN STARS

THE
JUSTICE TRADE

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Pelgrane Press

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INTRODUCTION

These days, what's left of the pan-species interstellar government called the Combine pays people like you to enforce the law among the scattered frontier planets out in the Bleed, while the bureaucrats back on the central worlds try to rebuild a semblance of the utopia they lost when the Mohilar attacked. Now the war's over, even if no one is quite sure how or why, and you and your crew of freelance effectuators patrol the edge of civilized space, trying to pay the bills while you keep the peace. But the competition in this line is fierce, and sometimes you have to cut corners—which makes you wonder if justice bought and paid for is any justice at all.

The adventure begins when the lasers receive a planetary distress call from a world that has detected a seemingly derelict spaceship moving toward it at relativistic velocities on a collision course. The impact will destroy the planet, and the lasers are the only ones who can prevent it. Their investigation brings them up against the political machinations and scientific manipulations devised by two powerful figures who each seek to shape the future of the Bleed. The decisions the laser crew makes will have powerful ramifications for the Seven Peoples of the Combine.

What Happened?

The “derelict” spaceship is the Windmere, a war-era cruiser now owned by a brilliant but unbalanced balla virologist and wealthy freelance diplomat named Ushir Windmere, who had been concerned about kch-thk fecundity as a threat to the solidarity of the Combine.

Having lost much of his original crew because of disagreements over how to deal with the kch-thk

“threat,” Windmere cloned himself many times over to replace his lost crew, and developed a viroweapon to neutralize kch-thk consciousness migration that will spread like a disease.

Windmere then confronted his old virological colleague and shipmate Krb on the kch-thk breeding planet Thrax, trying to get him to agree to additional restrictions on the kch-thk and threatening him with dire consequences should he refuse. Prt-Krb—unwilling to limit kch-thk prospects—ordered his confederate aboard the Windmere, a durugh named Pomix, to smuggle aboard a small incubation chamber designed to hatch a clutch of genetically modified insectoid predators before it left Thrax.

Windmere, in deep space after leaving planet Thrax, was forced to abandon ship by the emergence of Prt-Krb’s murderous pets—but not before loading his virological weapons aboard the Windmere’s interstellar assault boats. Pomix, meanwhile, found himself alone aboard the Windmere and, aghast at the implications of Windmere’s plan to nullify the kch-thk ability to migrate consciousness upon death but similarly convinced of its necessity, decided that the destruction of Windmere’s homeworld was the only way to avoid all-out interstellar war—a tit-for-tat move that he hopes will blunt kch-thk anger at Windmere’s solution.

He used a complicated space maneuver to accelerate the ship toward planet Cabochon and strapped himself in, ready to die for the cause of interstellar peace. Meanwhile, Windmere is making his way toward planet Thrax and a rendezvous with genocide.

It is at this point that the lasers enter the scene.



PLANETARY DISTRESS CALL!

The laser team will be aboard their ship, traveling in the Esquiline subsector on a routine “potboiler” mission to identify gaps in the hyperwave beacon network, when they receive an all-frequencies planetary distress call from planet Cabochon, a nearby world. Roll to determine downtime since last mission, and expend the appropriate number of bigcreds for upkeep.

History (Balla): Planet Cabochon is an idyllic garden-world settled by a contingent of balla elders seeking solitude from the travails of emotion; ironically, it has become a pilgrimage stop for those (balla and others) who revere and celebrate the unearthly beauty of the balla. Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt spend or +species, or **Data Retrieval**, 1 pt spend.

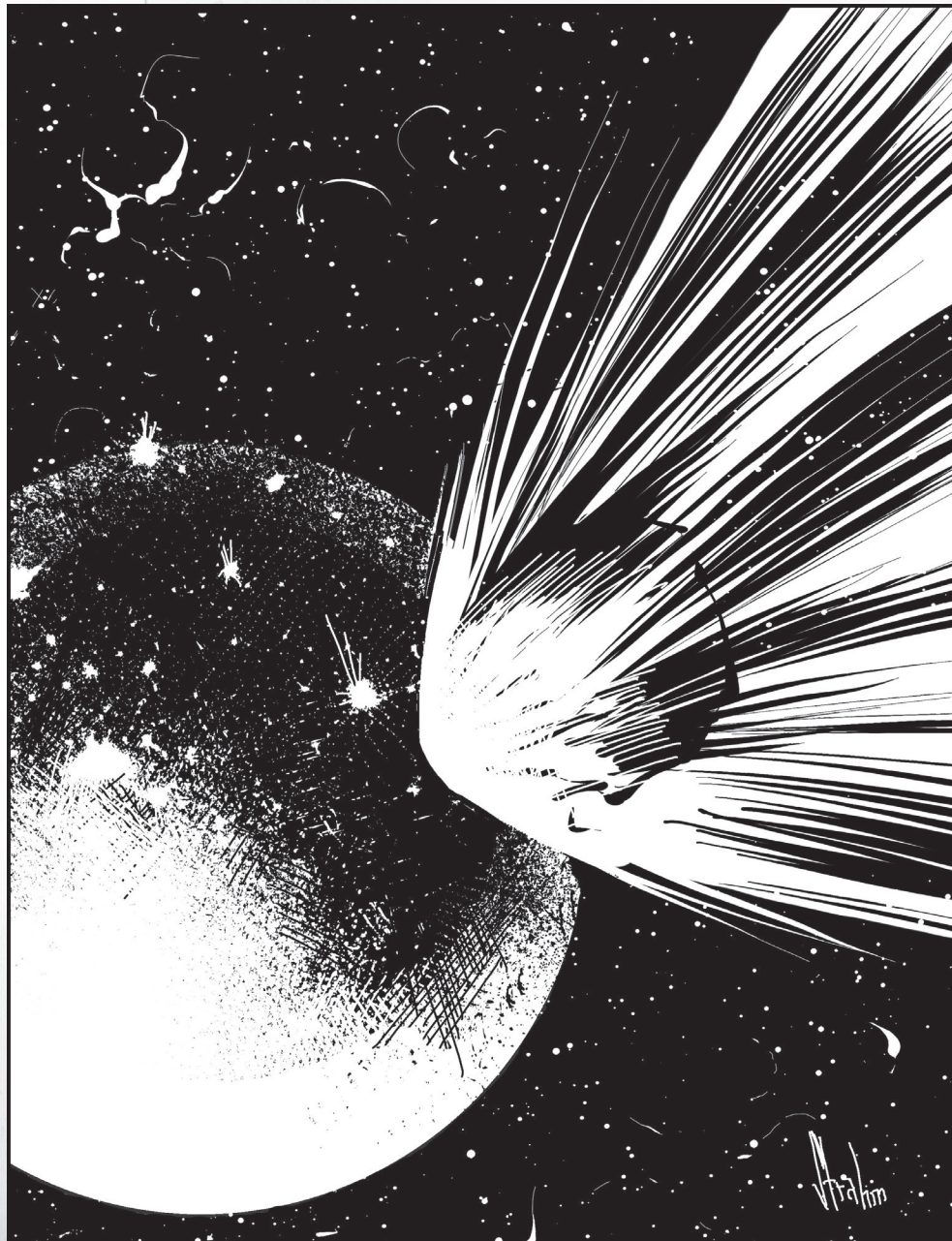
Note: “**History (Combine)**, 1 pt spend or +species” means that if the character has **History (Combine)** and is a member of the species mentioned in the header of the clue, you may give that player the clue without a spend.

Lasers who contact the Cabochon Starport Authority will be connected with a balla official, a slender and dignified low-level functionary named Tharin. He calmly but urgently informs the lasers that planetary sensors have detected an object moving at relativistic velocities heading on an impact trajectory toward the planet. It will strike in about a week.

The Cabochon Starport Authority is requesting all available ships to aid in evacuating balla cultural treasures from the planet. He asks that the ship make

its best speed toward planet Cabochon, and says that the ship’s Communications Officer should review the contract being sent via imager. He tries to end the call, saying that he has other callers to answer; he and his colleagues hope to organize dozens of ships to evacuate the planet’s most valued treasures and citizens over the next few days.

With no offensive capability, Cabochon’s planetary defenses are helpless, Tharin says, so they are relying on the good will of the interstellar community to save what can be saved.



Anthropology: The stress and uncertainty caused by the news of impending planetary doom will make it very difficult to arrange an orderly evacuation of the planet, the notorious rationality of the balla notwithstanding, even given the extremely limited basis of what they're proposing to do.

A Planetary Catastrophe

Tharin can provide astronomical coordinates for the object, enabling the laser crew to observe it for themselves. Their sensors and analysis can provide the following information:

Astronomy: The object is indeed moving at an appreciable fraction of the speed of light, and its course intercepts the orbit of Cabochon with a high degree of certainty. At that speed, hitting it with planetary artillery would be like giving Cabochon front-row seats at a supernova. The release of high-energy radiation resulting from particle impact would sterilize the entire planet.

Data Retrieval (leverage: it's a starship): The only ship large enough to be the unidentified object and currently unaccounted for in starport transit logs is the Starship Windmere, a space yacht belonging to Ushir Windmere, a ballan native of Cabochon.

Energy Signatures: The object seems to be a starship, based on the readings it's giving off. More precise information will require closer observation.

Forensic Engineering (leverage: it's a starship): One way that a starship could reach those velocities is by rapidly fluctuating the quantum chromodynamics of the translight engines on the leading edge of a serpentine [i.e., a high-speed translight corridor]. Tricky but doable.

Geology (leverage: relativistic velocity): The result of the impact at that speed would be devastation on a planetwide scale, tearing through the crust and sending pieces of the planet into orbit at escape velocity.

Forensic Engineering (leverage: it's a starship):

A starship moving at those speeds for that long must have extraordinary shielding; the armor arrays on this boat would burn out pretty quickly if we were to operate that close to lightspeed.

Law (leverage: it's a starship): The Combine Law of Space recognizes a right of salvage that applies to derelict vessels as well as vessels in distress. Space salvage is the process of rescuing a ship, its cargo and sometimes its crew from danger. The rescuer is entitled to a salvage award on the salvaged property from its owner; in circumstances like this, we could expect an award on the order of [no-haggle side deal; see rules p. 173] bigcreds.

The Contract

The contract offer by the balla functionary is just an opening bid, really, from you as GM to the players. Either the players will decide right away that participating in a faint-hearted and ultimately pointless evacuation is not for them, or they will come to realize (perhaps via their Drives) that they have a chance to do well by doing good—saving planet Cabochon, to be specific. Alternately, Ushir Windmere's daughter Ayesa (see below) can hire them to save what will be her ship if her father is dead, with a big payoff for the lasers when she assigns salvage rights to them. She may come aboard their ship as part of the retinue of the Heaven-Sent Jewel Zavira Starmaid.

Evacuation Orders

There are several nearby worlds in the Esquiline Cluster willing to take planetary refugees; they range from 4 to 12 hours away. The contract stipulates that the lasers will make as many runs as possible between Cabochon and a designated refugee planet between the time they sign the contract and the arrival of the relativistic projectile, for 1 bigcred per trip.

If needed, here are potential destination worlds. Balla will naturally prefer to go to the ones furthest away; they may need some convincing to be dumped off on the less pleasant albeit closer worlds.



- ▶ *Planet Abliss—(4 hours) a gas giant moon whose inhabitants live in spartan tunnels mining ore.*
- ▶ *Planet Borea—(6 hours) a dry rocky world occupied by the denizens of a barbaric nufaiith.*
- ▶ *Planet Chyne—(8 hours) a crowded city-planet with all Seven Peoples mixed cheek by jowl.*
- ▶ *Planet Darien—(8 hours) a cybe planet whose Integrationist leaders are making a political point.*
- ▶ *Planet Erred—(10 hours) a frontier planet with thinly scattered tavak agriculturalists.*
- ▶ *Planet Fosquith—(12 hours) a garden world of pastoral tranquility, inhabited by pacifists.*

Make the balla querulous and demanding, in their emotionlessly rational way, and require the PC laser crew to use their interpersonal abilities, with 1 or 2 points spent each trip, to avoid having an unpleasant emotional outburst or other scene on the part of a balla passenger.

Start a countdown clock once the crew begins their first trip, set at 175 hours. Assume 1d6 hours are needed at each end for embarking, debarking, checking, and otherwise taking care of business in orbit or on-planet. Allow the pilot to make **Helm Control** rolls at Difficulty 4 to halve the listed travel time—but failure increases it by fifty percent (so that an 8-hour trip takes 12). Similarly, allow tests of **Business Affairs** at Difficulty 4 to reduce the time needed at each terminus to 1 hour, whereas failure adds 1 hour per point by which the roll was failed to it. Test **Public Relations** for each trip at Difficulty 4 to avoid haughty balla passengers circulating cutting criticisms about the crew's performance on the Feed (a **Reputation** hit).

What If We Solve Your Problem for You?

The Cabochon Planetary Authority will be interested in laser proposals to save the world, but to them the technical obstacles seem insurmountable, and they will say so. To succeed, the lasers must find a serpentine, manipulate their translight engines to match velocities with the relativistic projectile while avoiding being destroyed by high-speed impact with cosmic dust, and then somehow alter its trajectory.

Nonetheless, Tharin will prove cooperative if treated with **Respect**, but if subjected to **Intimidation**, **Flirting**, or other emotion-laden interactions will stroke his *mor sohn* in an elaborate pattern in attempt to maintain his composure. Unless **Reassurance** (1 pt spend) is forthcoming, he will become visibly distracted and agitated, increasing the difficulty of successfully concluding the negotiation. Note that you may wish the haggling PC to explicitly indicate what Interpersonal ability he or she is employing in the interaction with the official, or simply judge based on what the player says and how she says it.

If the negotiation goes very well, the balla promise a success-only payment equal to a baseline contract plus generous bonus. The fate of an entire planet is at stake, after all. If the negotiation is awkward, the balla will promise only the baseline amount; if it goes poorly, they will subtract an amount equal to the standard bonus.

Test **Business Affairs** at Difficulty 8 (12 if the balla negotiator is upset) to see what sort of contract the lasers get; require beating the difficulty by 4 or more to give them the generous contract. Make a **Public Relations** roll based on the negotiation; it will look bad if the lasers seem like they're trying to extort money from a planet facing certain doom. Conversely, heroically volunteering to risk their ship and their lives to save an entire planet makes them look good.

PLANET CABOCHON

This is a well-developed world in the Esquiline Cluster; from orbit, its nightside is ablaze with the lights of many cities. On the surface, the architecture of those cities is exquisite: elegant gardens and pools set amid parabolic arches and domes of glistening marble, chrome, and glass.

Anthropology: Balla society here is organized around the celebration of beauty and so involves a constant stream of pageants, parades, shows, exhibitions, and other displays of fashion and beauty. Social status is garnered via careful and painstaking cultivation of the habits of beauty.

Downside: There are certain unsavory types all across the Bleed who pursue a fetish for amorous contact with the perfectly preserved corpses of the most beautiful balla elders known as the "Heaven-Sent Jewels." They are willing to pay through the nose to requite this desire.

One such Heaven-Sent Jewel is Zavira Starmaid, who died right at the end of the Mohilar War. Her demise notwithstanding, she is an exquisite corpse (whose story can be built on by the PCs) preserved through virological technology.

Her tomb is a crystal palace wherein she is regularly dressed in ornate and expensive clothing, animated via cybernetic enhancement, and presented in spectacular pageants for the delighted and awestruck admiration of her devotees.

Ayesa Windmere

Windmere's daughter is a young woman of extraordinary beauty; the lines of the exquisite creature she will become as she grows older can begin to be seen in her face. She resides in an elaborate complex called the Palace of Diadem, part of the retinue of a balla celebrity named Zavira Starmaid, one of a coterie of superannuated and defunct balla elders—known as the "Heaven-Sent Jewels"—whose unearthly loveliness has made them objects of reverence across the Bleed.

Ayesa has become estranged from her father since the end of the war; he grew increasingly un-balla in his attitudes and actions (recalling this will make the young balla woman stroke her mor sohn more fiercely; you would be justified in requiring **Respect** or **Reassurance** spends to calm her down sufficiently to continue).

He spoke to her of the threat caused by kch-thk immortality, and warned her that the presence of planet Thrax in the Viminal Cluster made Cabochon unsafe for her. In his last message to her, he said that she should be ready to go with him when he arrived in a few weeks. She knows that his mission to Thrax had something to do with the disappearance of kch-thk ships in the Kraken and Medusa Outzones.

Ayesa just wants to stay on Cabochon; her lifestyle is expensive and anything that would aid her in maintaining it would be welcome. She is not particularly sentimental about her father. If they are able to save the ship, she will sell it and give them an amount equal to half again their generous bonus (i.e., 30% of their baseline contract fee; allow a successful haggle roll to bump this up to 40%). She will stipulate that their contract with her only applies if she is in fact the owner of the Windmere, which is only the case if her father is dead.

Bullshit Detector: I am proposing nothing illegal. I am simply informing you that if my father is indeed dead and I am in fact owner of the Windmere, then I am prepared to reward you generously, beyond the stipulations of Combine aeronautical salvage laws, were you able to save the ship rather than destroy it.

If the PCs do not learn that the ship en route to Cabochon is the Windmere, or if their plan is just to push it off course with a tractor beam, Ayesa should approach them (either while she is their passenger, or via comm-link as the crew heads for what is to them an unknown ship), tell them that she suspects the ship is her father's, and negotiate a salvage contract with them.



Ayesa Windmere

Abilities: Athletics 4, Scuffling 4, Viro Manipulation 6
Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Fist -2, Tech: Headset [communicator]; Tether [displays Feed info], Rosetta Chip [translates talk].

Cybernetics: None

Vioware: Latency Suppression [prevent vioware act], Tiresias [change sex]

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +0

Savvy Modifier: +1

The Secrets of Ushir Windmere

The following information is available to the PCs at this stage; in addition to the suggested technical or empirical means of acquiring it first-hand, Balla and others who knew Ushir Windmere may provide it based on their knowledge.

Bureaucratics: There is a record of Ushir Windmere being approved by the Ministry of Settlement's Sub-Minister for Defense for the purchase of a war-surplus Combine Navy cruiser for the purpose of "informal diplomacy among such worlds of the Far Settlements as shall require external assistance falling short of the criteria for Combine action."

Data Retrieval: Ushir Windmere was born on planet Cabochon during the pre-War Utopian era and quickly discovered a talent for scientific investigation. He was trained in best academies of the Core Worlds, and grew rich from patents on innovations related to kch-thk consciousness migration. During the Mohilar War, Ushir Windmere worked as a Combine military researcher. Recordings of some of his conversations with his colleagues are available.

Forensic Psychology [leverage: Windmere recordings]: Windmere seems to have possessed a fierce loyalty to the Combine and its ideals, as well as a sense of the limits of Balla detachment. He was distressed by the retrenchment of the Combine toward the Core, especially in terms of what it said about panspecies unity.

History (Balla) [leverage: the name Windmere]: A scientist named Ushir Windmere who became

wealthy from virological patents during war obtained a Combine space vessel and has been using it to visit diplomatic "hot spots" in the Bleed to stave off potential interspecies conflicts among the Seven Peoples, without much success. Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt. spend or +species, or **Virology**, or **Data Retrieval**.

Note: The **Virology** spend implies that the PC knows Ushir Windmere personally or at least has met him in some context. You may use this connection to grant additional information via flashbacks, and you should play up the acquaintance when and if the PC encounters Windmere during the course of the adventure, with particular attention to how the Balla philanthropist has changed since that prior meeting. A PC who knew Windmere during the war may also have met Pomix and Prt-Krb.

History (Balla): Ushir Windmere gathered a crew drawn from across the Seven Peoples to symbolize his commitment to pan-species solidarity and the Combine. Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt. spend or +species, or **Data Retrieval**.

History (Combine): At the end of the Mohilar War, the Combine central government sought to gain both an infusion of cash and a proxy military by selling off early-model war-surplus starships to private individuals it thought would exert a positive influence in the Bleed as the Combine occupied itself with rebuilding the Core.

History (Combine) [leverage: Windmere recordings]: Windmere takes a strongly intervention-oriented Combinist position, arguing that the pan-species utopianism that had characterized the pre-War era can be rekindled by appropriate design and use of virologically-based behavioral interventions—i.e., by using virology to change a society's behavior. Also **Virology**.

History (Combine): The Windmere has been involved in several post-War crises, showing up in situations where interspecies conflict threatened to break out in the absence of Combine mediation. Its biggest success was arranging a ceasefire on an orbital habitat between cybe colonists and durugh refugees, who each agreed to a virological modification in which members of one group were invisible to members of the other, enabling

them to live in close proximity to each other peacefully. Its latest mission was to the kch-thk planet Thrax to discuss solutions to some grave kch-thk concerns about interstellar piracy.

History (Kch-Thk): Several ships crewed by kch-thk have gone missing in the Kraken Outzone over the past several years. Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt. spend or +species, or **Data Retrieval [leverage: interstellar piracy]**.

Virology: Ushir Windmere shares virological patents for applications relating to the biology and technological processes involved in kch-thk consciousness transfer with a kch-thk virologist named Prt-Krb of planet Thrax.

The Crew of the Windmere

Cybe Culture [leverage: pan-species crew]: The cybe on Windmere's ship was Dada, originally a vestigial named Pike Minar. As a side-effect of a botched neural rewiring, he suffered severe personality drift, adopted an evolver identity, and joined the crew of low-rep all-cybe freestriper ship called the Lonesome Dove. Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt. spend or +species, or **Data Retrieval**.

History (Durugh) [leverage: pan-species crew]: The durugh member of Windmere's crew was Pomix, one of the most skilled and deadly agents of martyred King Ukshqa (revered be his name!). Assigned to infiltrate Ushir Windmere's lab as a spy during the Mohilar War, he became instead Windmere's most devoted follower. As far as is known, he is still on the ship. Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt. spend or +species, or **Data Retrieval**.

History (Human) [leverage: pan-species crew]: The human member of Windmere's crew was Arla Zuki, an ace pilot who achieved fame during the Mohilar War for a space combat exploit whose details are lost in the Bogey Conundrum. She was killed on planet Hathor by dermoid infiltrators that Windmere thought were merely disgruntled ore miners; upon discovering the Class K entities in control of the colony, he sterilized the planet.

Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt. spend or +species, or **Data Retrieval**.

History (Kch-Thk) [leverage: pan-species crew]: The kch-thk member of Windmere's crew was Prt-Krb, a well-known virologist who worked with him during the war. A few years ago, he resigned from the crew and moved to planet Thrax, the kch-thk breeding world in the Viminal Cluster. He has since become a vocal advocate for the special role of the kch-thk as "vanguard of the Combine." Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt. spend or +species, or **Data Retrieval**.

History (Tavak) [leverage: pan-species crew]: The tavak member of Windmere's crew was Gedeg, an idealist even among tavak. She was instrumental in Windmere's greatest success, getting cybe colonists and durugh refugees to agree to a peaceful resolution to their conflict. As far as is known, she is still on the ship. Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt. spend or +species, or **Data Retrieval**.

Vas Mal Culture [leverage: pan-species crew]: The vas mal member of Windmere's crew was Ronald Gorbachev, reputed to have extraordinary farsight capabilities. At last report, however, he withdrew from active space-faring life and is now residing on planet Chyne working as an interspecies mediator. Also **History (Combine)**, 1 pt. spend or +species, or **Data Retrieval**.

The lasers may encounter Dada or Ronald Gorbachev in their travels, should the adventure turn in unexpected directions. Use them to suggest Ushir Windmere's gradual loss of faith in his mission and his conviction that kch-thk expansionism was the greatest threat to the Combine. Neither knows the full extent of his plan. They can also describe the falling out between Windmere and Prt-Krb, apparently over some virological experiments that Windmere had been conducting. Note that Gorbachev may use Dreamsight to contact one or more PC lasers, particularly if one is vas mal.

A DISH BEST SERVED COLD...

It may happen that your players are dutifully hauling balla cultural treasures to dismal refugee planets or otherwise waiting for something interesting to happen. In addition to forcing you to write off Planet Cabochon, this will also have the effect of making you worry about how to get things “back on track”—or, more precisely, how to make the adventure fun and interesting for the PCs.

In that case, confront them with the *Lonesome Dove*, a Runner-class starship crewed by a laser team of low repute—a team of bad-mother cybes with an attitude toward the law so cavalier it crosses over into the criminal.

Their criminal “mission” involves stealing a balla “Heaven-Sent Treasure” and delivering it to an obese kch-thk gourmand named Chk-Brp on Planet Thrax—since eating a corpse doesn’t violate the genetic prohibition against ingesting sentient species, it is possible for kch-thk to so indulge, although the act is regarded as somewhat pathological by kch-thk mental health experts. Obviously, therefore, they will strike when just such a treasure—i.e., Zavira Starmaid, along with Ayesa Windmere in her retinue—is being transported aboard their ship.

Regardless of the outcome, the game will start to move. If the cybes succeed in their robbery, the PC lasers will have to quickly repair their ship and figure out how to get the treasure back before their Reputation suffers; the trail leads to Planet Thrax. If the cybe crew fails, they may be captured (in which case interrogation reveals the connection to Thrax), or they may flee (in which case pursuit brings the PCs to Thrax). Either way, they will be in the neighborhood of planet Thrax when Ushir Windmere shows up in his assault craft ready to drop a bomb on those bugs. Ideally, they will be hot on the heels of the most obscenely obese kch-thk they have ever seen—Chk-Brp looks like she’s been poured into her exoskeleton and forgot to say when—when Thrax is revealed to be in peril. “So lasers—you can either capture me or save the world; which will it be?”

Note that the cybe Dada’s former identity as Pike Mizar, integrationist follower of Ushir Windmere, means that you can justify having the freestriper Lonesome Dove show up at need to provide last-minute, deus ex machina bacon-saving or force equalization so that the PC lasers can confront Ushir Windmere on more-or-less equal terms. “I told you when I left, Windmere,” Dada may say, “I’m going to keep my eye on you!” The cybes aboard the Dove make unruly allies, however.

The Lonesome Dove, a *Runner*-class ship

	Dishing It (Modifier Applies on Showdown Win)	Taking It (Modifier Applies on Showdown Loss)
Fire	0	0
Maneuver	0	0
Override	0	0
Trickbag	0	0

Output: 14; Datadrac (+2 skirmish points on first showdown win if datascraping)

The All-Cybe Crew of the Lonesome Dove.

Laser	Abilities	HT	Health
A-bomb	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 10, Naval Tactics 10, Battle Console 4	4	6
Bad-389	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 10, Comm Intercept 10, Battle Console 4	4	6
Catphish	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 10, Helm Control 10, Nav Tac 4, Shuttle 4	4	6
Dada	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 10, Battle Console 10, Helm 4, Grd Crft 4	4	6
Ekoterror	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 10, System Repair 10, Medic 4	4	6
Fotomoto	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 10, Medic 10, Comm Intercept 4	4	6

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Claws +2,

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1; Arc Zapper [excess dmg affects 2nd tgt], Aversionizer [tgt won't attack you directly], Beaconator [+1 to hit tgt], Crick-Cracker [burns out all poppers], Distractor Beam [tgt is -1 to attack], Stockholmer [KO'd tgt friendly when revived].

Tech: Personal Bluffer [scrambles surveillance], Transmit Modder [use to spoof comm feeds], Tether [displays Feed info], Rosetta Chip [translates talk].

Cybernetics: Amper [refresh any pool once; lose Health later], Autonomic Avenger [act once or twice after KO], Berserker [take 4+ Health hit, add amount to Scuffling], Handgun [built-in, concealed disruptor], Internal Headset [built-in, concealed communicator], Popclaws [+2 damage].

Vioware: Aggravator [provoke to violence], Chameleon [camouflage self], Mr. Grey [be a vague, dull memory], Regenerate [regain 2 Health per round], Snakehisser [induce flight], Thirdeye [old-school rearward-facing eye].

Alertness: +1

Stealth: +1

Savvy: +1.

Profiling Windmere

At some point—probably after they have found and investigated the Windmere—a PC laser will obtain enough information to successfully generate a personality profile for Ushir Windmere using Forensic Psychology. This profile should run along the following lines:

Forensic Psychology: Subject Ushir Windmere, a balla of about 60 years of age, has clearly rejected the balla way of emotional detachment, to the point of self-regarding vanity and emotional posturing. He seems to identify with the Combine as a whole, rather than with his own species in particular. He is very intelligent, clearly a virological genius, and capable of devising elegantly indirect solutions to complex and seemingly intractable problems.

He inspires fierce loyalty in his followers and subordinates, and believes himself important enough to enact sweeping programs on an interstellar scale. He is alienated from but still devoted to his daughter, who holds to conventional balla ways.

SPACESHIP WINDMERE

Once the PCs decide to head for the *Windmere*, they face a tough technical challenge. The principle to follow is that they *will* get there—failed rolls simply indicate complications, in the form of damage to their own ship.

Achieving Lightspeed!

Remind the players of how *Ashen Stars* describes the workings of its FTL technology: translight engines surround the ship in a bubble of “quantum energy” that oscillates the ship’s material state rapidly between particle and wave forms, creating a state of quantum indeterminacy that allows the ship to slide along shifting, naturally occurring “translight corridors” that thread through normal space.

Note that the ship doesn’t leave normal space while in a translight corridor, but instead takes on a “pseudo-velocity” as the result of its quantum indeterminacy. Normally, once a ship leaves the translight corridor, it slows to normal subliminal speeds which, while quite fast, are nowhere near lightspeed. The *Windmere*, on the other hand, is now speeding through normal space at .95 c, meaning that the lasers will have to figure out how to do the same, and fast!

Invite or encourage the player with the highest **Industrial Design** (or **Astronomy**) to come up with some sci-fi doubletalk to explain what *very difficult* technological manipulation is needed to take advantage of translight mechanics in order to match velocities with the *Windmere* in order to board it.

For example, if the players decide that altering the oscillation pattern so that when the ship returns from quantum state to normal it “bleeds off” space-time position in order to incrementally add velocity with each cycle, thus approaching c while simultaneously endangering the structural integrity of the ship, they are playing the game the way it is meant to be played.

In any case, the lasers’ plan must enable it to (a) reach relativistic velocities, (b) match heading and speed with the *Windmere* long enough to take whatever action they intend, and (c) protect their own ship from high-speed interstellar debris and the structural stresses of high velocities.



Require **Industrial Design**, **Forensic Engineering**, and possibly **Astronomy** spends to represent the planning and preparation necessary to ready their ship for high speed operations and come up with a flight path (involving both real space and transligh flight) to intercept the *Windmere*. Allow other spends to represent "good ideas" contributed by the crew, e.g., a **Geology** spend could be justified by a crew member noting that nearby asteroids can be affixed to the hull as shielding.

When the players are ready, tell the Stratco to go ahead and give the order. Play out the crew's actions, giving each a player to chance to get in on things. Go in order each round: Stratco, Wrench, Pilot/Hailer, Gunner, Doc.

The Stratco. The stratco should give orders and spend Naval Tactics as needed to help other players. Add the ship's Trickbag (Dishing It) modifier to the stratco's Naval Tactics pool.

The Wrench. Each round, roll Systems Design to accelerate or decelerate the ship to some fraction of lightspeed. The Difficulty of this roll is equal to 4 plus the difference (in increments of .1 c below .9 c and .01 c above it) between current and desired speed. So jumping right to the *Windmere's* current .95 c velocity would be a Difficulty 18 Systems Design roll. Use the following number line to calculate the Difficulty: .0 c, .10 c, .20 c, .30 c, .40 c, .50 c, .60 c, .70 c, .80 c, .90 c, .91 c, .92 c, .93 c, .94 c, .95 c.

On a failure, the ship takes damage equal to the difference between the roll and the target number; note that taking 3+ damage rocks the ship.

Remind the Wrench to direct Output as needed to the transligh engines (i.e., the Systems Design roll), maneuvering thrusters (i.e., the Helm Control roll), and the armor arrays (i.e., the Battle Console roll).

Any character with Systems Repair who is not acting as Stratco, Pilot, Hailer, or Doc this round may make a damage control attempt at Difficulty 4; success restores a point of damage. The wrench may scramble in this way if the Systems Design roll was a success; he or she acts against a Difficulty of 5, reflecting how hard it is to do two things at once. Damage control personnel may use the ship's Output at their discretion.

The Pilot

The pilot is rolling Helm Control to “achieve an intercept solution” for the laser ship and the *Windmere* by accumulating 20 points of success over as many rolls as necessary, one roll per round. The Difficulty of this roll is equal to the difference between the laser ship’s current speed and the *Windmere* in increments of .1 c with the *Windmere*’s .95 c speed treated as 10. The pilot must add the ship’s Maneuver (Dishing It) modifier to the roll. On a success, the pilot accumulates successes equal to the difference between the target number and the die roll. Keep track of the number of failed rolls. When the pilot gets to 20 points, the ship has matched position with the *Windmere*. Remember that the pilot is assumed to be making use of translight corridors while the *Windmere* is just traveling through real space. If it does not have the same velocity, call for more power and have the Wrench immediately roll for the translight engines as below to match speeds. Once the velocity is the same, the pilot must immediately make “final course corrections” by rolling Piloting one last time against a Difficulty of 4 plus the number of Piloting roll failures. Failure causes damage to the ship equal to the margin of failure. In either case, the two ships are now at rest with respect to each other, cruising along side-by-side at .95 c on a collision course with planet Cabochon.

The Hailer

The hailer may be reduced to repeating what the computer says. Alternately, you may allow the hailer to “get a current fix on the *Windmere*” by spending Communications Intercept (up to no more than half the amount the pilot is spending, rounded up) and adding that amount plus the ship’s Override (Dishing It) modifier minus 1 to the pilot’s roll. Once the pilot has accumulated more than 15 successes on his or her rolls, the hailer may “make initial scans”; at 20 successes, the hailer may “take detailed readings” and pass them on to other crew members for analysis (see below).

The Gunner

The gunner’s job is to protect the ship from high-speed particles and other deadly cosmic debris in interstellar space using Battle Console to operate the armor arrays. The Difficulty of this roll each round is equal to the ship’s velocity in increments of .1 c, with higher than .9 c treated as 10. The gunner may use the ship’s Fire (Taking It) modifier to reduce the

difficulty. The ship takes damage each round equal to the margin of failure; more than 3 points of damage rocks the ship. If the ship has a tractor beam, the gunner may use it to try to brake the *Windmere* or push it off course once the *Windmere* is in range; this will trigger a response from the *Windmere*.

The Doc

If anyone has been injured, the ship’s medic—flight surgeon, corpsman, or part-time band-aid dispenser—can use Medic to treat those injuries, as long as he or she takes no other action that round.

Relativistic Side Effects

Note that a side effect of moving at these speeds—specifically about .95 c—is that about thrice as much time will pass in the rest of the universe as passes aboard the relativistic ships. Use this primarily to add urgency to their efforts, making it so that very little time remains before impact when they finally get aboard the *Windmere*. It may also help you in justifying setting particular travel times or delays.

Additionally, if any of the laser crew is a durugh, once the ship reaches .9 c, require a Difficulty 3 test of Phasing; on a failure, the durugh begins to “phase-cycle” slowly at first and then more rapidly, sliding back and forth into insubstantiality each round until either he or she makes a roll (at +1 Difficulty each round), gives up, or runs out of Phasing, at which point the character has lost control of his or her phasing ability and is flickering in and out of phase with reality. This increases general ability Difficulties by one but renders him or her invulnerable to disruptor fire and reduces physical damage to 1 point per attack (except of course against someone who has spent Phasing to “match resonance frequencies” with the character). This condition will require sophisticated medical treatment to cure.

Furthermore, moving at relativistic speeds may be expected to have some sort of impact on vas mal psychic abilities. Once the ship reaches .9 c or above, require a vas mal to test Psychic Vitality at Difficulty 5 or suffer Psychic Depletion. Only require this roll once.



Closing In

Once the *Windmere* is close enough to make initial scans, the following clues become available.

Bio Signatures: There appear to be an indeterminate number of life signs aboard, but they are of no known sophont species. There is interference from high-velocity particles impacting our armor arrays.

Energy Signatures: The signal matches that of a Navy cruiser of pre-War construction, probably Diplomat-class. Its translight engines are offline, and it is moving through normal space at .95 lightspeed.

At close scanning (visual) range, detailed readings can be made. The *Windmere* is big, a tapered cone of sleek silver metal in the classic “rocket ship” design; lasers with Combine military experience recognize it as a *Diplomat*-class cruiser, workhorse of the early days of the Mohilar War. It is many times larger than the PCs’ vessel, capable of carrying several hundred crew and passengers for an extended time.

Bio Signatures: There are life signs aboard the ship, although they are difficult to localize because of the ship’s armor arrays. Additionally, a strong virological signature is present as well.

Energy Signatures: The ship’s power plant is active, and its armor arrays are engaged. The translight engines are powered down, possibly inoperative. Maneuvering thrusters are online. Its attack arrays are operational but powered down. Life support including artificial gravity is functioning.

Forensic Engineering: The ship has suffered visible damage from exposure to high-velocity particle impacts, even with its armor arrays active. Three of the ship’s four carrier bays are open and empty; the fourth is open but contains a heavily armed assault craft once capable of interstellar flight as well as orbital and sub-orbital denial operations, now clearly damaged. **Note:** Forensic Engineering also allows the lasers to see the schematic layout of the *Windmere*.

Virology: The virological signal is of no known type—meaning only that it can’t be associated with standard viroware functionalities. But it is powerful.

Continue to require Battle Console rolls to protect the laser’s ship while they scan the *Windmere*. Have the gunner make a new roll after each round of players using their investigative abilities or dealing with Pomix. Cease demanding the roll once they take action to obviate the danger—dock with the ship, maneuver into its shadow, and so forth.

Hailing the *Windmere*

The only surviving crew member currently aboard is Pomix, the durugh spy who joined *Windmere* at the end of the Mohilar War. When Prt-Krb left the ship, Pomix remained in contact with him and essentially became his spy aboard the *Windmere*. He unleashed the hivehoppers aboard the ship, and killed Gedeg and some of Ushir Windmere’s clones trying to escape aboard the assault craft, damaging it in the act. But he failed to stop *Windmere* himself, and so—knowing of *Windmere*’s plan and Prt-Krb’s penchant for vengeance—decided that the only option was to pre-eminently destroy something that *Windmere* loves so as to avoid interstellar war (at least he hopes). He will pretend to be Ushir *Windmere*, in the hopes that the association of *Windmere*’s name with the destruction of Cabochon will make him anathema among the balla, thus depriving him of a great deal of support. He knows it is a foolish plan, unlikely to succeed, but he feels he has to do *something*. He will respond to hails, but he is in pain because of his phase-sickness and not quite coherent. The flickering effect is quite visible on holo.

“Attention, Combine ship! This is Ushir Windmere, aboard the starship Windmere. Do not interfere with what I must do. Planet Cabochon must be destroyed, to save the Combine itself! Windmere out!”

Pomix, Durugh Spy

Abilities: Athletics 4, Battle Console 4, Communications Intercept 10, Helm Control 4, Naval Tactics 6, Phasing 0 (see below), Scuffle 4, Shoot 6, Systems Design 10, Systems Repair 10. Hit Threshold: 3, Health: 6

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Shooting Weapons/ Damage: Disruption Handgun +1; Aversionizer [tgt won’t attack you directly], Beaconator [+1 to hit tgt]. Tech: Personal Bluffer [scrambles surveillance], Tether [displays info].



Cybernetics: Episealant [built-in spacesuit, 20 min], Handgun [built-in disruptor pistol], Internal Headset [built-in communicator], Rebreather [scrub oxygen, 30 min], Nightvision [see in the dark], X-Gravs [levitation].

Vioware: Hivehopper Aversionicator [feral insects avoid him], Morphological Mimicry [impersonate other species], Scrambleface Ultra [impersonate specific others].

Special : The translight oscillation he used to bring the ship to near-lightspeed has played havoc with Pomix's phasing; he appears to be flickering rapidly. The effect is to render him immune to disruptor fire, and to reduce damage he suffers from physical weapons to 1 point—except from those who spend 2 points of phasing to “resonate in phase” with him for a round. Pomix is using vioware to disguise himself as Ushir Windmere.

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +2

Savvy Modifier: +0.

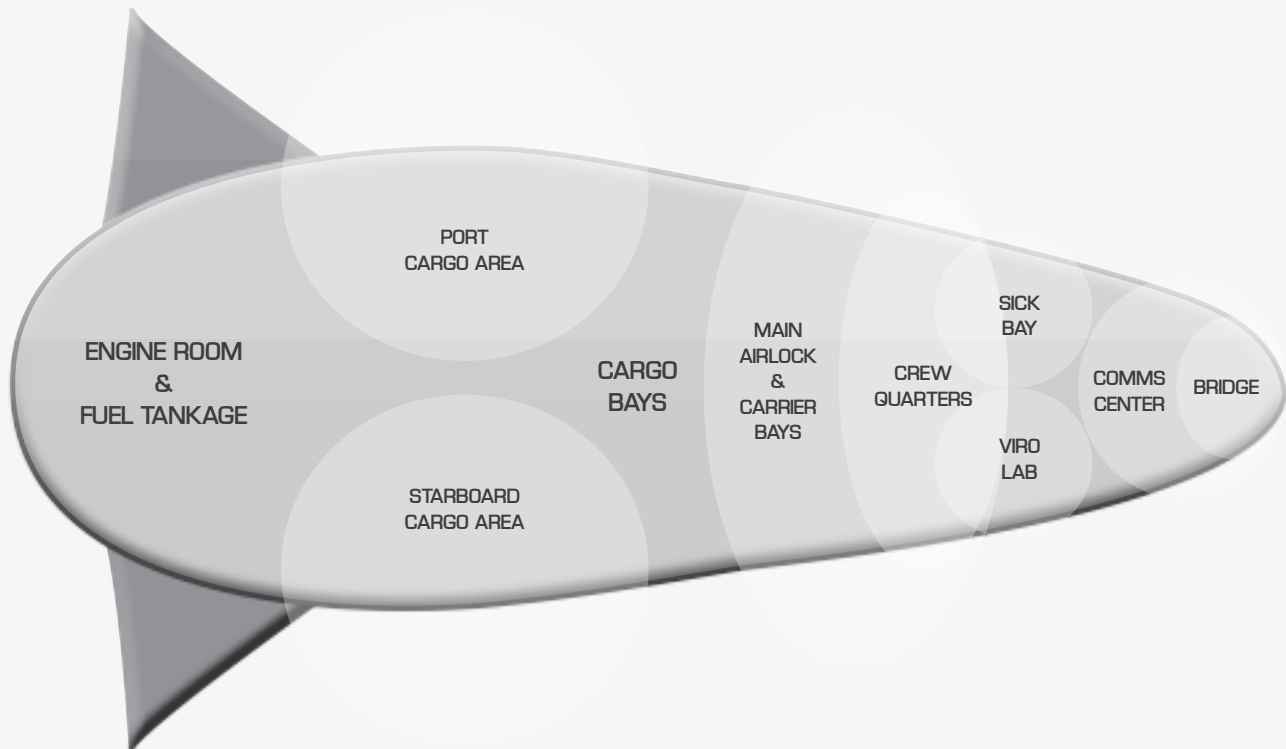
Bullshit Detector. He's not acting the way I'd expect Ushir Windmere to behave. What's wrong with him? Also **Forensic Psychology**.

Flattery. “Ushir Windmere was a great man once, yes. But now history will record this one final act—the balla will call it a betrayal, and all across the Bleed he will be reviled. But how else can I avert interstellar war?”

History (Balla). Given the highly charged nature of Windmere's declarations, he should be using a much more elaborate rhetorical style; his failure to do so is quite striking, even in one who's been said to have rejected balla traditions. Something is not right here. Also possibly **Forensic Psychology**.

Impersonate. “Ayesa? No! You have to be on planet Cabochon when it's destroyed—Prt-Krb will see that as a suitable penance, I am sure.”

SPACESHIP WINDMERE





Inspiration. "I believed those things once. But the fate of the entire Combine is at stake. It doesn't matter what I believe; all that matters is what the kch-thk believe."

Intimidation. "You're bluffing—Windmere out." Alternately: "Not the real Ushir Windmere, you say? Who can tell, these days? Ha ha, who can tell?"

Negotiation. "What can you offer me? There is nothing left for me. Everything I believed in is gone."

Respect. "Then record my final words. This is Ushir Windmere. I am going to destroy planet Cabochon, my homeworld, which I love more than any other place in the galaxy. I am doing it to atone for the great wrong I have done to the kch-thk people. May the Heaven-Sent Jewels forgive me!"

Using a Tractor Beam

The *Windmere's* active armor arrays are powerful enough to make disabling them unlikely to succeed before the cruiser hits the planet. They also make attempting to lock on with a tractor beam a tricky proposition.

When the ship attempts to use a tractor beam against the *Windmere*, roll a contest of Battle Console; allow Pomix to use the *Windmere's* remaining output of 20 as well as its -3 Fire (Taking It) modifier as a bonus to his roll. As the attacker, the PC must declare his spends firsts, and must use the ship's Fire (Dishing It) modifier. On a failure, the tractor beam is deflected; try again next round. On a success, the tractor beam has achieved a lock. The ship is too massive relative to the laser power plant to simply be pushed by the tractor beam alone, even without its relativistic mass increase; the ship must lock on and then use its own maneuvering thrusters to move both ships as a unit. But the *Windmere* still has its own thrusters; have the pilot make a Helm Control contest against Pomix, who may use the *Windmere's* -3 Maneuver (Taking It) modifier as a bonus but takes a 1 pt. penalty because he's also operating the armor arrays. The ship's pilot uses its Maneuver (Dishing It) modifier as well. The loser takes damage equal to the difference of the roll; the winner takes damage equal to half that amount. The winner also gets to alter the ships' joint course, either slowing it or accelerating up to one .1 or .01 c increment per point of difference, or

changing the ships' heading by up to 1 arc-second per point of difference. It takes a course change of 10 arc-seconds to make the *Windmere* miss Cabochon.

The lasers should quickly figure out that they are unlikely to succeed in this manner, but if they can make it work, more power to them.

Going Aboard

It's possible to fly into an open carrier bay; because of the *Windmere's* active armor arrays, however, this is not quite as routine as it would be otherwise. Require a Helm Control test at Difficulty 5 to avoid rocking the ship.

Lay out or sketch the deck plan of the *Windmere* to indicate its tapered, approximately conical configuration (see the Spaceship *Windmere* diagram). The PCs gain access amidships, via the main airlock and carrier bays; alternately, they may try to crawl up the disposal chute into the virolab.

These clues are also available via a two point **Holo Surveillance** spend to insert nanotechnological snails (i.e., bugs) into the *Windmere*. Data from the bridge is still spoofed by Pomix's personal bluffer.

Bio Signatures: There are definite life signs aboard the ship, several dozen animal life forms that read as kch-thk homeworld animal types. They are all around, although they are most heavily concentrated in the engine room. They seem to be moving around in the ship's life support ductwork. There is another signal of an indeterminate type, coming from the bridge. It is being deliberately masked, probably by a bluffer or some other kind of spoofing device. Virological signatures are present in the carrier bay at high strength and more weakly in the forward lab.

The Enemy Within

As the PCs move out of their point of entry they will be watched, stalked by hivehoppers who will scuttle out of air vents and into ductwork. Occasionally have the PCs **Sense Trouble** at Difficulty 6; if anyone fails, the group is attacked by 1d6 hivehoppers. Those who make the roll can get off a shot before the bugs are among them. If everyone succeeds, the hoppers visibly back off in the face of alert interlopers.

Hivehoppers.

Abilities: Hit Threshold 4, Athletics 8, Scuffling 6, Health 3

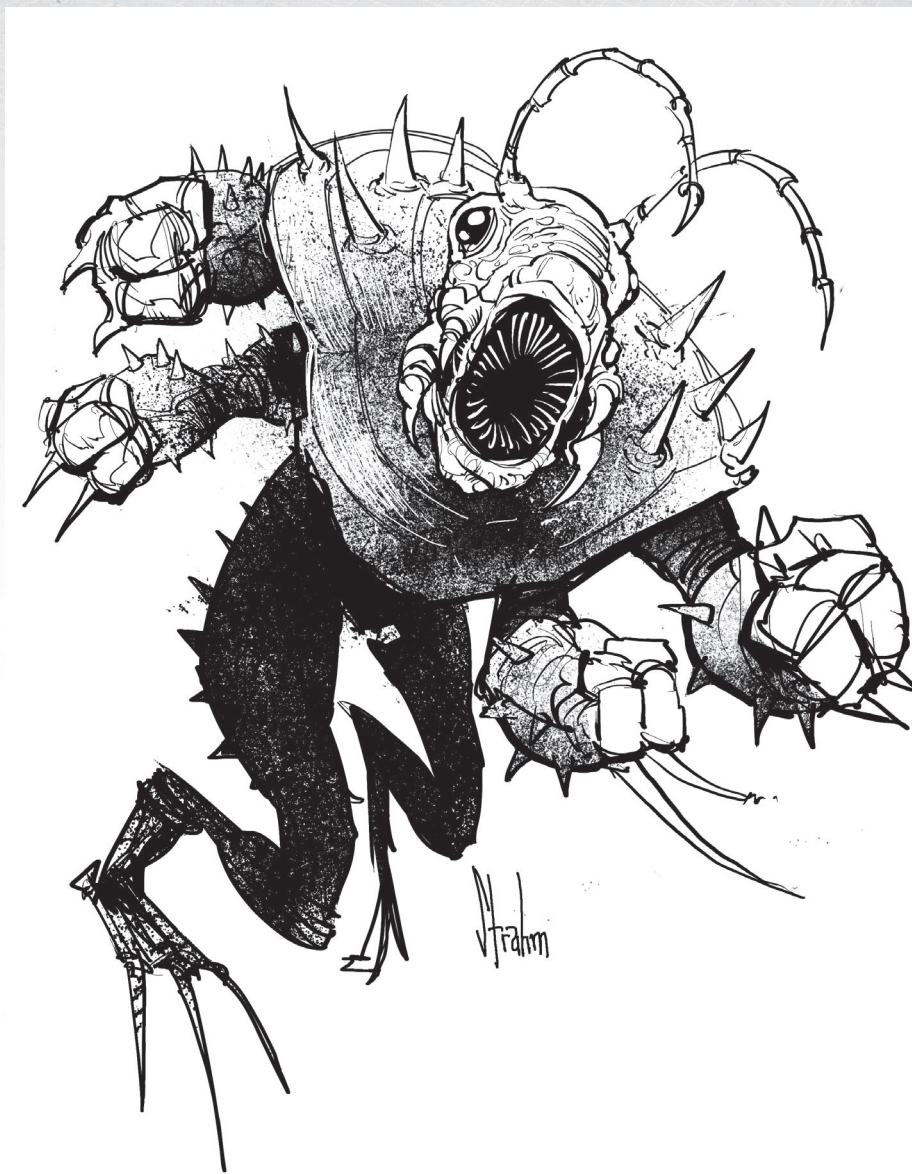
Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +3

Savvy Modifier: +0.

Special: On a hit, in addition to taking 1d6 damage, the victim must test **Health** or be subject to a paralytic poison that has the effect of imposing a 1 point **Athletics** levy on all physical actions for the rest of the interval. The effects are cumulative up to 3 points, at which point the victim is fully immobilized. There are about 24 of these creatures on board.

Keep track of time and movement aboard the ship using the Windmere ship diagram. In a round, a laser can easily move from one area to another. Faster movement requires an Athletics test at a Difficulty equal to 4 to cross two areas, 8 to cross three, 12 to cross four, and so on. Failure means that the laser only gets halfway; a roll of "1" on the face of the die means he or she also takes 1d6-3 damage from slamming into things, pulling something, or otherwise getting hurt.



Main Airlock and Carrier Bays

Each carrier bay operates as an airlock, closing its bay doors automatically when a craft enters and allowing entrance to a cylindrical central accessway about six meters in diameter; "down" is toward the outside of the cylinder thanks to artificial gravity.

There are signs of fighting in the accessway, including disruption burns on the bulkheads near the life support ducts. Control panels allow bay doors to be opened or closed manually.



Near one of the carrier bay hatches is a badly damaged body; it appears to be a balla crewman (who bears a strong resemblance to Ushir Windmere), with a nearly expended disruptor pistol in his grasp. Nearby is the disrupted corpse of a beetle-like creature about the size of a large dog, with a thick shell and vicious mandibles.

Evidence Collection. There are also parts of other insectoid creatures scattered around the deck, also with disruptor pistol damage.

Forensic Anthropology. The balla crewman died from blood loss caused by multiple wounds consistent with the mandibles of the insectoid creature found nearby. Some tissue damage to the victim's torso also occurred after death, as if he had been eaten away from the inside. His bloodstream contains a paralytic toxin.

Kinetics. The patterns of the disruption burns on the bulkheads suggests that about two dozen crew members fought their way into the carrier bays from aft, boarded the assault craft, and attempted to abandon ship. Three assault craft made it; the fourth failed for some reason.

Virology (leverage: hivehopper specimen). These hivehoppers have been genetically modified for increased aggressiveness and voracity—a kch-thk attack dog, as it were. The genetic modifications on these creatures bear the mark of a well-known kch-thk virologist named Prt-Krb.

Zoology. The disrupted creature looks a lot like a hive hopper, a species native to the kch-thk homeworld. It has rudimentary intelligence, equal to that perhaps of a dog, and is not particularly aggressive. Their one notable feature is their "distributed intelligence" or hivemind, which allows them to communicate over distances to coordinate their feeding activities. They are known to lay eggs in their victims. Kch-thk are supposed to regard them as a delicacy. Also **History (Kch-thk).**

The Assault Craft.

The remaining assault craft is easily accessible once the outer bay doors have been closed. It lies on the deck at an angle, clearly damaged and inoperable.

Explosive Devices. The missiles loaded into the launch tubes aboard the shuttles appear to be virological bombs, capable of contaminating a continent-sized region with a high-altitude airburst of a virological payload. Also **Forensic Engineering, Industrial Design, or Virology.**

Forensic Engineering. The assault craft seems to have crashed inside the bay during launch, having veered away from the opening and into a bulkhead.

Industrial Design. The assault craft in the bay is a top-of-the-line model, capable of interstellar travel for extended periods of time. It has launch tubes for military ordnance.

Virology. The viral payload on the bomb seems to be targeted at kch-thk. It's not quite clear what its function is, although it seems to be associated with the brain region equivalent to the human hippocampus, which plays an important role in memory functions.

The airlock of the assault craft is open at both ends, meaning that everyone aboard was exposed to vacuum. On the assault craft's bridge are corpses at their stations. One, in the pilot's chair, is a female tavak. The rest—a gunner, a wrench, and a hailer—are male balla who all look like Ushir Windmere. The stratco's station is unoccupied.

Forensic Anthropology. The balla were killed by sudden and violent explosive decompression. Some suffered injuries in the crash, but none sufficient to be fatal. The tavak was killed by a disruptor bolt to the head at close range; she was equipped with episealant, unlike the balla.

Kinetics. The tavak was taken by surprise, strapped into the pilot's seat and prepared to launch, shot by someone in or near the stratco's seat. Nonetheless, she counter-attacked with the only weapon at hand—running the assault craft into the bay wall. Her assassin seems to just have walked away, however.

Virology. These balla don't just look alike; they share the same genetic code to a high degree of similarity—they're clones of the same person! And it seems like that person is Ushir Windmere!

Crew Quarters

A cruiser of this size could accommodate hundreds of crew and passengers. The crew quarters were mostly unoccupied; only a small cluster of staterooms near the captain's cabin seem to have been in use. There are signs of violence in some areas—blood spatters, upset furnishings, smashed objects, disruptor burns on bulkheads.

The Captain's Cabin.

Evidence Collection. There are a number of holo-images here. One depicts a young balla woman, dressed in a set of fancy ornamental robes, walking with serene dignity along a crystalline balustrade, with a garden-like cityscape spread out behind her, to join a set of others similarly berobed. Another is a group photo, with a handsome balla in a captain's uniform (Ushir Windmere) standing amid his crew, consisting of a cybe male (now Dada of the *Lonesome Dove*), a durugh male (Pomix), a human female (the late Arla Zuki), a tavak female (Gedeg, the corpse in the assault craft), and a vas mal male (Ronald Gorbachev of Planet Chyme).

History (Balla). The design of the captain's quarters is out of keeping with typical balla cultural patterns, which emphasize serenity and simplicity of line. The room is cluttered and furnished eclectically with an emphasis on the baroque.

Industrial Design. The captain's quarters aboard the ship seems to have been redecorated recently: holographic battle scenes from throughout Combine history, reproductions of ancient weapons of all sorts (of all races—but not kch-thk), and a variety of ostentatious ornaments like crystal vases and filigreed furniture appointments.

Crew Staterooms.

Evidence Collection. In one cabin, furnished in the durugh manner, is an opened cargo container (about the size of a refrigerator) with kch-thk markings on it. Inside is some kind of organic residue.

Industrial Design. Based on the number of staterooms in use, only about a dozen crew members were on board. Most of these were balla, based on the decor, and showed striking uniformity of taste, even for balla.

Kinetics. Based on the bloodstains in a few of the occupied staterooms, it seems as if off-duty crew members were assaulted by some sort of animals. A few were able to flee, but at least one was dragged into the ductwork.

Sickbay

This is a typical medical facility for a ship of this size, except for some equipment in one compartment which is atypical.

Industrial Design. The equipment is a cloning creche. It is in working order, and appears to have been operated recently. I'm not sure what these mechanisms over here are for; perhaps they're neurological monitors? Also **Forensic Engineering.**

Neurosight. This mechanism contains a modified or simplified version of the brainwave pattern of Ushir Windmere. It can be used to imprint that pattern upon an empty mind. Only a vas mal could have designed such a device. Also **Consciousness Simulation.**

Viro Lab

The lab itself is large and extensively equipped. There is a virological administration chamber with restraints as well as another large object that looks something like a swampy high-tech aquarium (it is a grk-k'ka breeding chamber). A sophisticated monitoring system controls operations here.

Data Retrieval (leverage: lab records). Video records show repeated instances of kch-thk subjects being placed in the viro-chamber and receiving a dose before being executed by disruptor pistol. An egg is then quickened into larval form. In earlier runs, the brainwave pattern of the executed subject reappears when the larva becomes active; as time goes on, this happens less frequently and finally stops.



Evidence Collection. There is a large waste disposal tube that evacuates its contents to the exterior of the ship; it is large enough to hold a body.

Industrial Design. Part of the equipment in the lab looks similar in design to a grk-k'ka breeding chamber, although it is obviously not of kch-thk manufacture. It has been cleaned out, and no longer contains any eggs or larva. Also **History (Kch-Thk)** or **Forensic Engineering.**

Law. Based on the evidence here, Ushir Windmere is guilty of murder and conspiracy to commit unlawful virological tampering with a sentient species. Both are Class J felonies in the Combine penal code.

Neurosight. The lab is quantum-shielded so as to prevent psionic manifestations such as dreamsight, probability override, and kch-thk consciousness migration. Only a vas mal could have designed such a device. Also **Consciousness Simulation.**

Virology. The serum residue in the virological administration chamber is tailored to affect kch-thk and kch-thk only.

Communications Center

This room near the bridge contains translight communications equipment; it provides access to the ship's memory banks but not to any control functions, which are only available on the bridge.

Astronomy [leverage: ship's log]. The ship's flight logs show it criss-crossing the boundary between Esquiline and Viminal Clusters over the past five years, making numerous stops at planet Cabochon. Its last port of call was Thrax.

Data Retrieval. There's a file that Windmere accessed with some frequency, a simulation that he would tweak with different inputs and then run to see what would happen. It's a three-dimensional map of the Bleed showing colonization and development rates under certain parameters. One series, labeled as high-probability, shows the kch-thk overrunning most of the Bleed in less than a century.

Data Retrieval [leverage: faked log entries, missing kch-thk ships]. The dates of the faked log entries, all within the past two years, correspond with the disappearance of the kch-thk ships.

Decryption. The ship's logs are available for display. Ushir Windmere recounts his unsuccessful attempt on planet Thrax to convince his old comrade Prt-Krb to reduce kch-thk reproduction rates virologically. He announces that he is ready to act, once he returns to Cabochon and brings his daughter aboard "to safeguard her from the coming storm."

Forensic Accounting. The ship's ledgers show very low operating expenses for a ship this size, as if he'd been running it with a skeleton crew for years. Capital expenses include assault craft upgrades, virological equipment and supplies, cloning equipment, and payoffs to a cybe named Dada and a vas mal named Ronald Gorbachev.

Imaging [leverage: ship's log]. Some of the visual log entries uploaded from the assault craft carried by the *Windmere* to its main log during the past two years have been tampered with, altering the images of ships encountered in deep space.

The Bridge

The hatchway to the bridge is sealed; it will require a 1 point **Decryption** spend to defeat the seals. Pomix will be inside; interacting with the lasers via headset has beaten his Scrambleface Ultra, and he will be in durugh form, flickering from phase sickness.

Once the lasers enter, he will give up all pretense and try one last time to convince them to let things play out. "Windmere can't be stopped! He *shouldn't* be stopped—the fate of the Combine depends on it. But once the kch-thk realize what he's done, it will mean war! Destroying Cabochon is the only way to stop the war!" He doesn't want to explain further, because "you might try to stop him, and he shouldn't be stopped." Why shouldn't he be stopped? "Because of Prt-Krb—he's the real monster! He wants to eat us all!"

If confronted with his perfidy to Windmere—unleashing the hivehoppers, killing Gedeg and the Ushir clones—he will stammer and whine about having no choice, that he owed Prt-Krb *something*, and then activate

the self-destruct in a fit of self-loathing. "Then let the galaxy burn! Let it bleed!" See **Engine Room**, below. He will try to do the same if he seems to be losing control of the ship.

If the lasers can take control of the ship, they can use the *Windmere's* engines to brake the ship using the same procedures they used to accelerate their own ship. Use the *Windmere's* +3 Maneuver (Dishing It) modifier to the Systems Design roll each turn, and allow the lasers to draw upon the *Windmere's* remaining power plant.

If possible, add tension to the process by having the ship's computer sound a collision alert, counting down a warning to impact with planet Cabochon in 60 seconds, thus giving the lasers six rounds to brake the ship before the adventure ends in ignominious failure.

Cargo Bays

This is a sprawling area that occupies a great deal of the ship's internal space, with numerous hatches and specialized compartments. In addition to a large central access way with, it is divided into two main areas, port and starboard.

Port Cargo Area

The central part of this bay is filled with open or smashed coffin-sized tubes attached to medical monitoring equipment, now inoperative. Inside many are half-eaten Ushir Windmere corpses. The charnel smell in this area is overwhelming; test Health at Difficulty 4 or suffer a -1 on all general tests and no investigative spends until after departing the area or donning protective tech or activating suitable cyber- or vioware. The place is crawling with bugs, who will dart in and out among the ducts and attack if the lasers are sufficiently incautious.

Forensic Anthropology. Many of the Windmere clones died from cell damage associated with uncontrolled cryonic thawing, turning the bodies into so much organic mush. Others were broken into while still operational and partially eaten by something, presumably these bugs. Some still have hivehopper eggs implanted in them.

Have a forensic anthropologist on the scene Sense Trouble to avoid being attacked by hivehopper larva during his or her examination of the bodies, taking 1d6-2 damage as a result.



The larva is no threat otherwise, although it will skitter off creepily into the darkness unless a quick thinking laser acts fast.

Forensic Engineering. It looks like the bugs chewed through the power cables on some of the chambers, causing rapid thawing. Others have been ripped open from the outside. A few seem to have cycled open normally—maybe about two dozen.

Industrial Design. The tubes are cryogenic stasis chambers. They are currently inoperative. Many have been damaged.

Starboard Cargo Area.

This side of the ship is quiet and mostly dark.

Forensic Engineering. One compartment in the starboard cargo bay has been refitted to serve as prisoners' quarters, with secure cells and guard posts. Some of the cells have some kind of medical equipment in them. The cells are now empty.

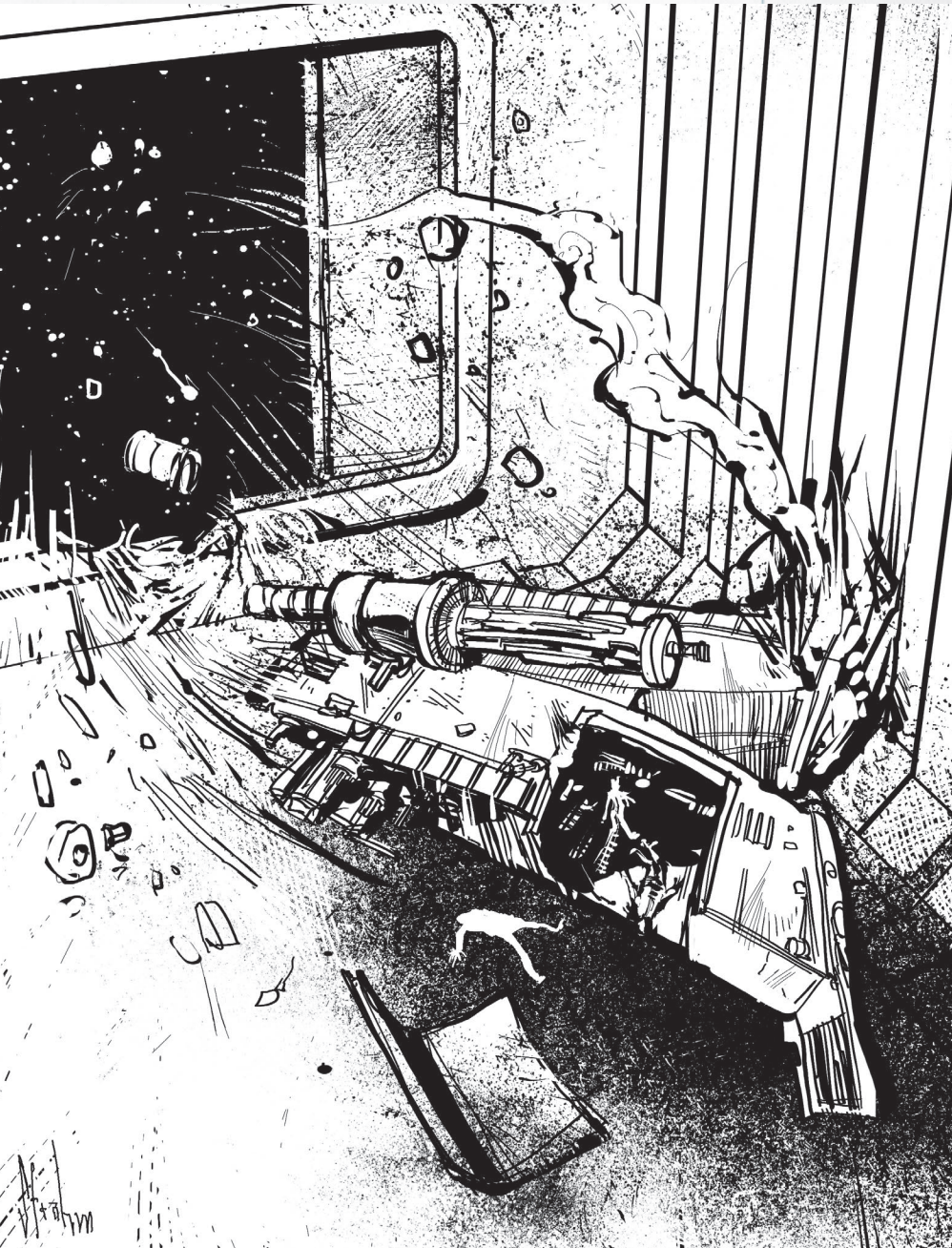
Industrial Design (leverage: on-board prison). The machinery with which some of the cells are equipped is a kch-thk egg harvesting device.

Neurosight. The on-board prison is quantum-shielded so as to prevent psionic manifestations such as dreamsight, probability override, and kch-thk consciousness migration. Only a vas mal could have designed such shielding.

Engine Room

This area is mostly empty. Lasers attempting to override bridge functions from the engine room will still have to contest with Pomix on the bridge to succeed.

Self-Destruct. The ship's self-destruct functions can be activated from here. Once it's activated, count down from 60 seconds by rounds with each round representing 10 seconds. Use the movement rules described above to see if the lasers can escape in time. If someone wants to stop the self-destruct process, contest Communications Intercept with whoever activated the self-destruct. Keep trying until you succeed or the ship blows up.



PLANET THRAX

The PCs will probably not visit planet Thrax until late in the adventure, when it becomes clear that it is ground zero for Windmere's quasi-genocidal program. As the laser's ship crosses from the Esquiline to the Viminal Cluster, allow a refresh of two general ability pools along with up to half the ship's Output.

Planet Thrax is an important kch-thk world in the Viminal Cluster. Describe its broad strokes: mottled brown streaked with veins of fiery red from orbit, hivelike kch-thk cities rising from the surface, crowded arcades and thoroughfares in the interior.

History (Combine). Planet Thrax was an important battleground during the Mohilar War, and as a result the entire Thrax system is the site of one of the most extensive meson shrapnel fields in the Bleed, making communications with and travel to planet Thrax quite hazardous. Also **Astronomy**.

History (Kch-Thk). Planet Thrax is a kch-thk breeding planet, known for its hot, volcanic climate, with plains of dried magma flows, ashen skies, and swampy lowlands. Also **History (Combine), 1 pt spend or +species**.

History (Kch-Thk). In the early days of the kch-thk, their hunger was best satisfied by the consumption of sentient or quasi-sentient species—they were highly xenophagous (i.e., they willingly ate sentient aliens). Only by a deliberate program of induced mutation, selection, and breeding was this attribute removed from modern kch-thk, enabling them to join the Seven Peoples of the Combine. Also **History (Combine)**.

Note for convention play: It may be necessary to fast-forward to a confrontation with Windmere. In that case, the meson shrapnel will merely be color, and Prt-Krb will respond to the lasers, answer their questions, and beg for their help.

Meson Shockwave!

As they approach Planet Thrax have the ship's hailer test **Communications Intercept** at Difficulty 8. On a success, the hailer recognizes the tell-tale signs of a

meson shrapnel wave forming, and can warn the rest of the crew, enabling preventive action to shield sensitive systems. Reduce the Difficulty of all subsequent tests by 2. On a failure, the hailer only has time to cry "Meson shrapnel!" before the wave hits. The rest of the crew may then act in the following order:

- ▶ The **stratco** can test **Naval Tactics** at Difficulty 6 (4 with warning) to bark out an effective series of commands. The stratco receives a pool of points equal to the margin of success that must be distributed immediately to the rest of the crew prior to any further roll.
- ▶ The **pilot** can test **Helm Control** Difficulty 6 (4 with warning) to maneuver to avoid the brunt of the wave; on a success, reduce the Difficulty of all subsequent tests by 2.
- ▶ The **gunner** can activate armor arrays to shield the ship, testing **Weapons Console** at Difficulty 8 (6 with warning or successful evasion, 4 with both). The potential damage to the ship is reduced by the gunner's margin of success.
- ▶ The **wrench** can scramble to lock down damaged systems and re-route power to avoid overloads and equipment failure, testing **Systems Repair** at Difficulty 8 (6 with warning or evasion, 4 with both). The potential damage to the ship is reduced by the wrench's margin of success.

The GM rolls 2d6 (keeping each die separate) and subtracts the gunner's margin of success from one die and the wrench's margin of success from the other (no result can be lower than zero). The result is the damage to the ship, whose precise nature is determined by the wrench. Damage can be taken as penalty points to the ship's Dishing It and Taking It numbers, by taking a bolt-on off-line (this absorbs damage equal to the bolt-on's Upkeep), or by reducing the ship's Output on a one-for-one basis.

Prt-Krb

Prt-Krb will be willing to be interviewed by lasers; he is a prosperous and well-fed kch-thk whose shell is mottled by age; he probably due for his next incarnation soon. He regrets what he regards as Ushir Windmere's descent into madness, since he was indeed a brilliant researcher and a good friend, but will not let sentiment prevent him from dealing with a clear threat to his species.



"Windmere must be stopped! He's a clear and present danger to the species!"

Prt-Krb's dark secret is that the hivehoppers he is modifying are essentially an end-run around the strictures of the kch-thk's genetic modification to eschew the flesh of sophonts. The hivehoppers, an animal species, have no such compunction—and the kch-thk find them delicious. So the solution is simple: feed opponents to the hivehoppers, and then eat the hivehoppers.

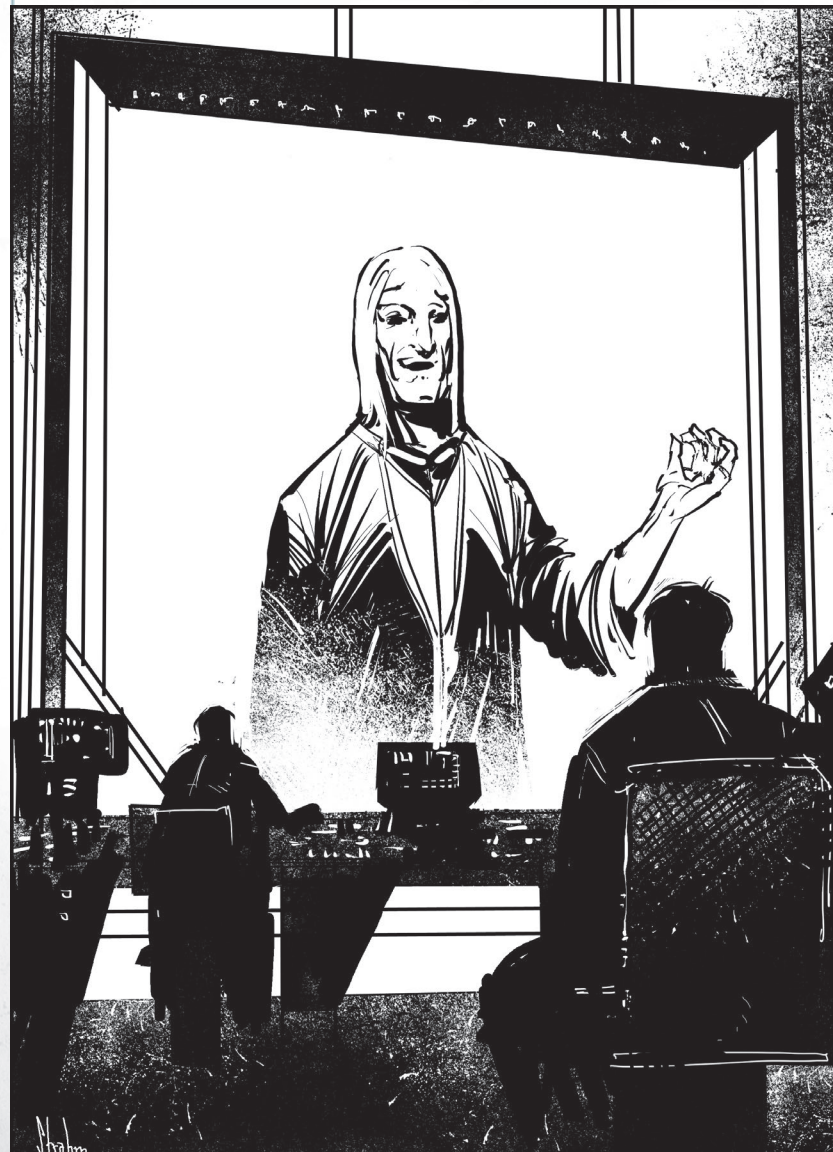
Bullshit Detector will enable lasers to see past Prt-Krb's facade; he hates and fears Ushir Windmere and wants him destroyed, no questions asked. **Intimidation** with the threat of letting Windmere do his worst might get him to confess—"Windmere knows! He won't admit it, but we saw enough after the war to realize that interspecies cooperation is a fable. It's survival of the fittest, and I know which side I'm on." **Flattery** or **Flirting** from a young kch-thk might get him to spill the beans in a conspiratorial way. "After Windmere is destroyed and we unleash the hivehoppers on planet Cabochon, there will be a most succulent feast. I'll be in a young body by then, and you might find it worth your while to come along with me." **Respect** will probably not have much effect, but **Negotiation** might get Prt-Krb to admit that there is more to the story, and that he will reveal it after Windmere is destroyed. **Reassurance** might get him to confess if they assure him that his crime will be covered up, especially if they soften him up with a **Law** or **Cop Talk** spend.

CONFRONTING WINDMERE

Eventually, Ushir Windmere will show up approaching planet Thrax aboard his assault craft *Ushir's Arrow* with his two wingers by his side. At some point during the confrontation, Ushir will reveal Prt-Krb's dark secret, trying to convince the lasers to help him or at least get out of his way. "Don't make me destroy you," he will say. "I'm trying to save the lives of all Seven Peoples." Clever lasers will figure out a way to profit from turning Prt-Krb over to the Combine authorities.

Law. If what Windmere says is true, Prt-Krb is guilty of conspiracy to commit genocide—worse than murder! If he's not brought to justice, the entire kch-thk species could be outlawed as Class-K entities!

He may be too powerful for a direct attack, requiring the lasers to be clever in their approach, or you may allow Thrax's planetary defenses to engage the wingers so that the lasers may take on *Ushir's Arrow* one-on-one. The meson shrapnel field may have caused damage to Windmere's craft and used up some of his crew's abilities, making the contest more nearly equal. Or the space fight may be merely color, its conclusion foregone unless the PCs are able to come up with some out-of-the-box solution: create a virological counter-agent for his mortality bomb (contest Viro Manipulation in the middle of the space battle, or on



its own. If Windmere loses, he surrenders, cursing the lasers as fools who've doomed the Combine; if he wins, he withdraws, chortling happily about having saved the galaxy despite their short-sightedness), for example. They may use their psychological profile of him to hit at his weak points (spend **Forensic Psychology** and/or **Inspiration** to remind Windmere of his devotion to the principles of the Combine or his love for his daughter and connect that to not), or they may produce a repentant Prt-Krb to plead with Windmere to be merciful, for the sake of their old friendship and the vision they once shared.

Ushir's Arrow

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

Output: 16

Ushir	Abilities	HT	Health
Ushir Prime	Athletics 6, Scuffle 6, Shoot 8, Nav Tac 8, Viro Manip 10	4	6
Ushir Agh (1)	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 8, Comm Int 8, Preparedness 8, Viro Manip 6	4	6
Ushir Ea (2)	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 8, Battle Con 8, Viro Manip 6	4	6
Ushir Ijku (3)	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 8, Helm 8, Shuttlecraft 8, Viro Manip 6	4	6
Ushir Oa (4)	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 8, Sys Rep 8, Viro Manip 6	4	6
Ushir Urri (5)	Athletics 8, Scuffle 6, Shoot 8, Medic 6, Viro Manip 6	4	6

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: Meglight Whacker +1
Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1, Crick-Cracker [burns out all poppers], Beaconater [tgt +1 to hit], Distractor Beam [tgt -1 to attack].

Tech: Personal Bluffer [spoofs surveillance], Headset [communicator], Tether [info display], Rosetta Chip [translator], Poppers (2) [neutralizes NLD fire], Spacesuit, Meglight Whacker.

Alertness Modifier: +0,

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: +1.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

End the adventure when the outcome of the confrontation with Windmere is clear. Since it is possible that not only did they save a planet or two, but may have even prevented one or two genocides and prevented a civil war in the Bleed, you may allow for the possibility that their Reputation increases by two, not one, should their overall PR effort have been successful.

If the Heroes Fail

It is possible that the PCs will lose the final confrontation. If so, the immediate effects of the kch-thk mortality serum will be dramatic but not all that consequential in the long run; kch-thk PCs will face higher Difficulty rolls when they attempt their consciousness transfers (perhaps high enough to be daunting), and the interspecies politics of the Bleed will be fraught with tension for a good long while. If Ushir Windmere escapes the Harrowing of Thrax, he will be a hunted man across the Bleed and beyond—worth a good bounty to the laser crew that brings him to face Combine justice.

If the PCs fail to detect Prt-Krb's plot, hivehopper infestations will become common, with hordes of kch-thk warriors descending upon the infested planets for a good old-fashioned feast. Tracking down the cause of the infestations and dealing with their aftermath would be a good follow-up adventure.

In either case, lay the failures at the PCs' feet and require them to make PR rolls to avoid taking a hit to their Reputation.





TARTARUS

In this scenario of exploration and confrontation in a devastatingly hostile environment, hard-bitten lasers who know enough not to touch the gooey stuff or take off their helmets in an untested biosphere investigate the demise of a survey crew doomed by the above mistakes, and more.

THE CONTRACT

The interstellar corporation Shrawley-Gosha Industries offers a contract for an extraction operation on a notorious Bad Planet called Tartarus. A recent SGI survey mission went awry there, with all hands presumed lost. The company seeks a crew to retrieve DNA samples from the dead team members, to see if they were exposed to an experimental vioware treatment, and, if so, whether it contributed to the mission's failure. As a secondary objective, the lasers are to gather enough evidence to reconstruct the sequence of events leading to whatever catastrophe destroyed the original team.

BACKSTORY

One of Shrawley-Gosha's founders, Charles Shrawley, launched the unauthorized mission to Tartarus. Based on previous, secret archaeological discoveries, Shrawley theorized that, by plumbing its secrets, he could achieve immortality.

Choosing Your Class-K Entity

Among the secrets of Tartarus is a large, genetically unstable population of a Class-K species (see *Ashen Stars* page 198). You might even decide that the planet served as its original spawning ground.

This scenario leaves open the choice of Class-K entity the team finds down on Tartarus. If you're setting up a Class-K entity as the main antagonist of your series, pick that, adjusting the scenario as necessary. That said, the Class-Ks who most fit the bill are: jaggar, klorn, lipovore and phyllax. The non-biological nanogons and shard require greater adjustment from the details given here, and the dermoids are a little too psychological a threat to provide the physical menace *Tartarus* assumes.

Each time you see [Class-K entity] in the text, read it as a placeholder for your chosen antagonist species.

THE TWIST

Knowing Tartarus crawled with [Class-K entities], and that any followers in their right minds would try to bug out as soon as they discovered this, Shrawley dosed them with a vioware enhancement, FOLLOW-ME. He perfected it himself, based on an experimental SGI project, keeping his results secret from the firm. Designed for the burgeoning military market, FOLLOW-ME was designed to ensure unquestioning loyalty in subordinates. Unfortunately for him, it suppresses not only independent judgment but risk assessment in general. Shrawley's treatment drove his hand-picked coterie of mission specialists to a series of suicidal blunders, killing them and leaving him trapped on Tartarus.

THE INVESTIGATION

The **Briefing Pack** contains what the corporation wants the lasers to know about their mission. Teams seeking the unofficial story before setting foot on a Bad Planet can go **Sniffing Around Shrawley-Gosha** or look into one of Shrawley's medical foundations, **Rescendence**.



Arriving at Tartarus, they will likely want to explore the survey team's ship, **The Crick**, before heading to the surface to check out the wrecked **Installation** or **The Trail** leading away from it. The final secrets lie at **The Complex**, in its variously sinister chambers the **Nursery**, the **Pod Bay**, and the **Incubator**.

COMPLICATIONS

Tartarus' deceptively unstable surface adds peril to the simple act of **Parking the Shuttle**. At various points the group faces the dire consequences of **Punctured Suits**. Depending on how quickly they've executed the mission to date, the team may face a climactic interaction between **Crust and Shuttle**.

THE CHOICE

That the lasers will want to finish off the Class-K version of Charles Shrawley goes without saying. But what will they do with the data his old corporation wants them to deliver—upload it in good faith, or in a way that ensures F0110W-ME is never perfected?

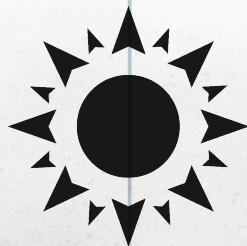
BAD PLANETS

In the argot of the original, Expansion-era space explorers, certain worlds proved so dangerous to survey crews that they were dubbed *bad planets*. This was not a scientific term arising from rigid criteria, but a folk reputation accrued through successive death tolls. Later, in the Combine era, the designation ULC (Unremittingly Life-Compromising) arose to replace it in official stellar mapping databases. The formula for ULC designation is too complicated to explain here but looks for the following characteristics:

- ▶ requires protective gear to safely explore
- ▶ subjects a crew to conditions or life-forms likely to compromise that protective gear
- ▶ life-forms comprise a hyper-predatory ecosystem (HPE), producing aggressive fauna (or flora) whose defenses and attacks make them a grave and constant threat even to trained, well-armed personnel
- ▶ features conditions likely to foster rapid psychological debilitation

During its heyday, the Combine legally forbade travel to ULC worlds and set up patrols and armed buoys to enforce quarantines.

Such measures may still be operative in the core worlds but have fallen away in the Bleed. Since the war, lasers have revived the original terminology. As aggressive contractors, you might not avoid a bad planet altogether, as Combine exploratory teams stayed away from ULCs. Still, you'll certainly take every possible precaution, knowing your crew faces highly life-threatening circumstances from the moment they land until their successful return to orbit.



SCENES

Briefing Pack

Scene Type: Intro

Lead-Outs: The Crick, Rescendence, Sniffing Around Shrawley-Gosha.

Shrawley-Gosha Industries expects the laser team accepting its contract to sign an ironclad non-disclosure agreement, with financial penalties ten times greater than the value of the contract in case of violation. They must sign before reading the rest of the briefing pack. This does not obligate them to accept the mission.

Law: Like any agreement in the lawless Bleed, this provision is essentially unenforceable.

Forensic Accounting: But if word gets out that the crew has broken it, their reputation among prospective clients will take a serious hit.

The briefing pack reveals the following:

- ▶ *36 days ago, Charles Shrawley, a board member of the corporation in perpetuity, launched a survey mission, to the third moon of the planet Lampeto, in search of readily harvested tungsten deposits.*
- ▶ *Other personnel, all recruited by Shrawley himself, were:*
 - *Alva Brin, crew services*
 - *Dorrie Haslett, xenanthropologist / hailer.*
 - *Brice Iler, epidemiologist.*
 - *Krd-Drk, xenobiologist.*
 - *Dion Kwong, logistics*
 - *Juana Jaxon, imaging technician*
 - *Sunny Roane, mining engineer / wrench.*
 - *Osh Stricker, security / stratco.*
 - *Vangel Snow, security / gunner*

- *Meris Vale, medic.*
 - **Combine History** (1 point spend) *Meris Vale won a Combine Meritorious Service medal for her role in turning back a [Class-K entity] invasion.*
- *Vatak, geologist / pilot.*

Twenty days ago, its ship, the *Francis Crick*, a Sherlock-class spacecraft modified with extra crew accommodations, sent an auto-ping through the interstellar communication relay network. Due to the degraded state of the network, it took five days to reach Shrawley-Gosha head office on Friedman's World. The automatically generated message indicates that the ship is in orbit around Tartarus, a "bad planet" given ULC status by the Combine. (In response to **Astronomy** / **Geology** questions, supply the material given in the "Bad Planets" sidebar, above.)

The crew is to go to Tartarus, examine the *Francis Crick* and proceed to execute the following mission objectives, in order of importance:

- ▶ *effect a rescue of any surviving Shrawley-Gosha personnel aboard the ship or on the planet.*
- ▶ *locate and take a DNA sample from the remains of any and all non-surviving members of the survey team. A crew manifest with DNA profiles will be supplied.*
- ▶ *gather sufficient information to reconstruct the sequence of events leading to the presumed demise of the survey team*

PC knowledge can supplement the briefing. In response to player questions, supply the following:

- ▶ **Astronomy:** *Lampeto is roughly the same distance from Friedman's World as Tartarus. One of its moons does fit the criteria for likely tungsten deposits.*



- ▶ **Bio Signatures: / Zoology:** *Tartarus owes its HLC designation to the hyper-adaptive DNA of its microbes and higher organisms. Many of its bioforms shift through various life-cycles, with widely diverse morphologies.*
 - (1-point spend) *They hybridize with one another so rapidly that the entire notion of a stable taxonomy becomes moot. In some sense, every living thing on Tartarus might be considered to be a member of the same infinitely diverse species.*
- ▶ **Cybe Culture:** *Shrawley became a cybe six years ago and is considered a hero of the evolver faction.*
- ▶ **Forensic Accounting:** *Charles Shrawley founded the Shrawley Corporation during the war, when the Combine was suddenly forced to rely on private enterprise to supply materiel and services for its war effort. Afterwards it merged with Gosha Industries, a research firm established by former Combine munitions researchers. The merged company has since diversified into a major supplier of ships, weapons, vehicles, and consultancy services to military organizations throughout the Bleed. Their slogan: Help Us Prevent Your Next War.*
 - (1-point spend) *Shrawley was kicked upstairs a few years ago, to a permanent board position. He wanted to diversify the company into medical research and lost a power struggle to colleagues preferring to maintain its focus as a defense contractor.*
- ▶ **Virology:** *In recent years Shrawley has endowed a number of virological research facilities.*
 - (1-point spend) *Many of these take their ideological cues from the evolver faction of cybes.*
- ▶ **Xenoculture:** *Nothing in the records suggests that Tartarus is inhabited by a sentient people. Nor, for that matter, is any other ULC planet, presumably because their life-forms are too hostile to support creatures with the precursor traits required for the evolution of intelligence as we know it.*

The briefing pack indicates that the situation on Tartarus may be time-sensitive, but does not explicitly discourage the contractors from performing additional legwork before journeying there.

Sniffing Around Shrawley-Gosha

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: Briefing Pack

Lead-Out: Rescendence, The Crick

Shrawley-Gosha Industries headquarters occupies a verdant campus the size of a small town outside the decentralized capital of Friedman's World, a center of finance and industry chosen for its natural beauty, tranquil climate, and proximity to major warp corridors. Monumental, animatronic statues of Adam Smith, Ayn Rand, and famed kch-thk founder of bioeconomics Grk-Grk tower over its shuttle port.

As soon as they start to ask around, the lasers sense that their inquiries here are unwelcome.

Forensic Accounting: Corporate clients are often more concerned with protecting proprietary business information than giving laser crews everything they might need to know to complete their mission.

By asking any employee willing to talk, they can glean the clues given in "Briefing Pack" under Forensic Accounting via any plausible interpersonal ability.

With a 1-point spend per bullet point, the crew gains unofficial background information. Depending on what Interpersonal abilities they choose to deploy, they might glean it from the supporting characters listed below.

Ability	Character
Bureaucracy or Reassurance	Jenise Bates, Harried Administrator of Effectuator Relations
Flattery	Celebrity board member and former Ø-ball champion Wilson Vender
Flirting	Hot to trot junior exec Terry (or Terri) Hix
Inspiration	Idealistic Junior Ethics Officer Pama Cerni
Negotiation	Gambling addict and Junior Information Officer Chan Garcia

- ▶ *The higher-ups are already preparing a memorial service for Shrawley. They talk as if everyone on the mission is presumed dead.*
- ▶ *Shrawley grew increasingly crazy after cybe-ing up, which is the real reason he was removed from his leadership role in the company.*
- ▶ *Shrawley was given permission to lead the Lampeto mission in the hope that he would discredit himself, allowing them to remove him from his "permanent" board position. That he'd get himself killed was more than his rivals could have hoped.*
- ▶ *Like most other evolver cybes, Shrawley is obsessed with achieving immortality.*
- ▶ *Though listed on the crew manifest as a mining engineer, Sunny Roane was actually qualified as a xenobiologist specializing in containment technologies.*
- ▶ *Likewise, Vatak' personnel profile doesn't match Shrawley's characterization of him in the crew manifest: he's an archaeologist and xenolinguist specializing in the hieroglyphs of extinct alien races.*
- ▶ *Shrawley's on-site computers have been sifted for any evidence relating to his real mission. They were thoroughly scrubbed prior to his departure.*

Rescendence

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: Briefing Pack

Lead-Out: Sniffing Around Shrawley-Gosha, The Crick

Data Retrieval reveals that Rescendence is a medical research foundation funded by wealthy donors, almost all of them cybes. It perates out of its own space station, also named Rescendence. Its current whereabouts is unknown.

Forensic Accounting: If an organization takes donations, it can be tracked through the electronic payment sub-system of the interstellar communications grid. This inquiry reveals that the station is currently parked near a brown dwarf named Nemeus-9.

Astronomy: A detour to Nemeus-9 will add only a day to the ship's journey to Tartarus.

The space station, once it appears on long-range scanners, reveals itself as forced, asymmetrical union between two or three once-derelict, now-reclaimed orbital installations.

Industrial Design: Though it looks unstable, the station is in fact a brilliant example of resourceful repurposing, its stresses and counter-stresses ingeniously balanced.

When the ship drops out of warp, a patrol vessel, a voodoo-class ship called the *Hohman*, launches and intercept course, hailing for the lasers to identify themselves.

The captain is a gruff cybe named Redoubtable. Her crew, like almost all of the space station personnel, is also cybe. If a cybe is present on the bridge, she addresses only that character, as if beings of other species are unworthy of consideration. After establishing her authority and satisfying herself that the crew means no harm to the station, she grants the ship permission to dock.

Without a cybe present, **Bureaucracy**, **Cop Talk**, or **Reassurance**, with a plausible-seeming request, gains that same permission.

Once aboard, **Cybe Culture** confirms that nearly all of the researchers aboard adorn themselves with symbols of the evolver movement. They see themselves as superior to non-cybes, but still in a pupal stage preceding ultimate immortality and interstellar supremacy.

Redoubtable escorts the crew's delegation to visit the assistant station manager, Promethea. Promethea is now more machine than man, leaving humanoid form behind to achieve oneness with the station's command console. She talks in a fast, erratic rhythm.

When asked about Shrawley, she initially refuses to share any information about any key donor. The suggestion that he might have led an expedition to a bad planet causes her to immediately revise her opinion of him. He's plainly a dangerous madman the foundation will want to distance itself from, lest it lose funding from other benefactors. (The players might come to this tactic on their own; if not, prompt someone with **Forensic Accounting**.)



Alternately, Promethea responds to plausible approaches via **Inspiration**, **Reassurance**, or **Respect**, or from a cybe character professing allegiance to evolverism.

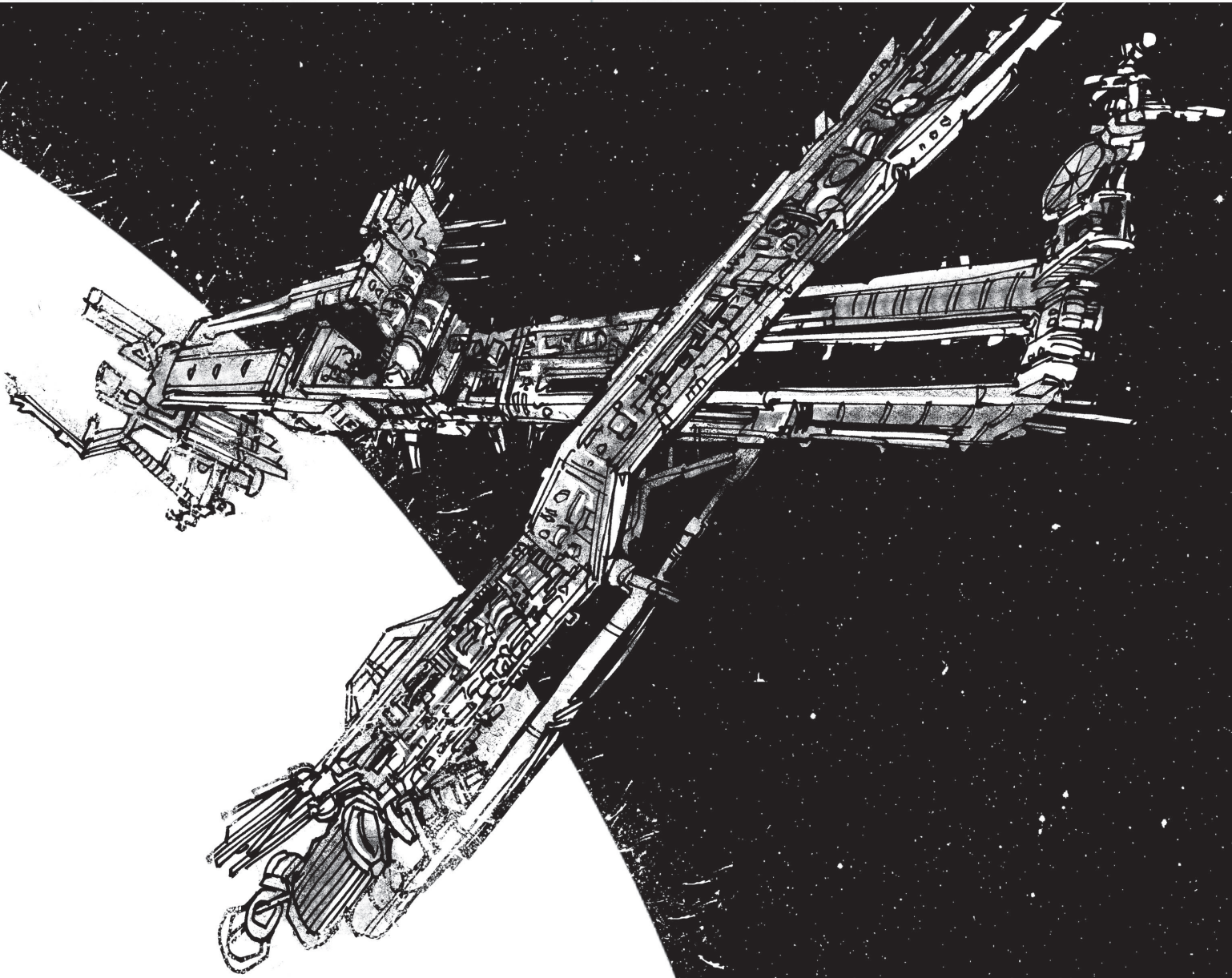
Shrawley gave the foundation a lot of money in its early days, but has cooled on it of late. Promethea deduces from this that he has found another route to his agenda.

He wants to become immortal in a hurry. Several years ago he was diagnosed with prion degradation, an incurable degenerative condition of the brain.

Rescendence's research into prion degradation shows promise but will not reach the clinical trial phase for at least a generation.

The last time they met, Shrawley asked her what she thought about using hyper-adaptive microbes as a delivery system for an immortality treatment. She told him it was too dangerous to attempt. After that, he broke off contact with her and Rescendence.

Promethea and her people reject the Fibrous Sacrament as anti-empirical superstition. Any suggestion that she might favor the doctrine sends the discussion on a frosty tangent.



The Crick

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: Briefing Pack, Sniffing Around Shrawley-Gosha, Rescendence

Lead-Out: The Installation, The Trail

The survey team's ship, *The Francis Crick*, has fallen into orbit around Tartarus.

Astronomy: The orbit is maintained by the planet's gravity, not the ship's engines.

Energy Signatures: The ship has gone into stand-by mode, drawing power only from back-up batteries.

- ▶ **Industrial Design:** *Assuming default settings, this means that there has been no activity on board for at least a week.*

Bio Signatures: There are no living creatures aboard the ship. (Only if players ask:) The mix of microbes includes only the expected mixture found on interstellar craft—no hyper-adaptive microbes.

Explosive Devices: The ship's security system, including explosives set to repel boarders, is disengaged.

Kinetics: A dent near the shuttle bay door indicates that a shuttle collided with the ship, most likely as the result of poor piloting.

- ▶ **Forensic Engineering:** *A company like Shrawley-Gosha would have repaired that had it occurred on a previous mission, so it must be recent.*

Getting to the *Crick* requires a routine shuttle flight, no test required.

Decryption permits access to its shuttle bay door system. Once the door is open, the pilot sees that there's no room in the bay: the *Crick's* shuttle is already there, slammed into one of the bay's walls.

Virology reveals an array of bio-sensors along the doorway from the shuttle bay into the ship's corridor.

- ▶ **Industrial Design:** *This is a nonstandard feature. As is the array of micro-nozzles, rigged to spray a liquid at high-pressure when triggered by the bio-sensors, fitted inside the doorway.*

A gelatinous, semi-translucent substance coats the doorway. The irregular spill occupies an area of approximately two square meters.

Though the lasers will likely go to great pains to avoid skin contact with the goo, it is not dangerous.

Forensic Anthropology reveals it as human remains. Damaged DNA inside the goo includes that of team medic Meris Vale.

- ▶ (1-point spend) *Also present in the goo are traces of hyper-adaptive microbial life, now killed and rendered safely inert.*
- ▶ (2-point spend) *Though clearly Vale's, the DNA profile differs from the supplied genome in one crucial way, suggesting that she underwent virological enhancement after giving the company her sample five weeks ago.*

Dismantling the nozzle unit requires a Difficulty 4 Systems Repair test; narrate this for suspense. After it is disassembled:

- ▶ **Chemistry** *analyzes the substance as a lethally effective decontaminant, capable of breaking down almost any life form into sub-cellular slop.*
- ▶ **Data Retrieval** *shows that it was triggered when the sensors detected hyper-adaptive microbes on the victim's person.*

A search inside the shuttle reveals a severed alien hand, claw or equivalent appendage. **Zoology** identifies it as belonging to a [Class-K creature.] **Forensic Anthropology** confirms that it must have been severed by the shuttle door, which closes hydraulically, and with considerable force.

Also present in the shuttle is Vale's tether.

Decryption shows that the ship's main computers reverted to factory settings, erasing all data accumulated since the *Francis Crick* was shipped to SGI two years ago. This appears to have been triggered by the microbe detection. Clearly someone didn't want to leave a data trail if the mission went awry.

When applied to Vale's tether, **Decryption** finds her last commands sent to the ship's computer. She was trying to spoof Shrawley's tether ID to activate a fail-safe. The ship is equipped with an orbit-to-surface missile topped by a neutron warhead.

Vale died trying to nuke something from orbit.

(**Core** – leads to *The Installation*) **Energy Signatures:** From their own ship, the crew can locate the partially sunken wreckage of the Installation on the planet below.



RECONSTRUCTION

Meris Vale, the only crew member to escape to a shuttle, managed to autoclose its door, severing the reaching hand of a pursuing [Class-K creature.] She arrived at the *Crick* already contaminated with the rapid-mutation microbes that make Tartarus a bad planet.

In accordance with a quarantine protocol she was too panicked to remember, the doorway destroyed the microbes—and, with them, the only survivor of the disaster on the planet's surface.

DECONTAMINATION TECH

The discovery of Meris Vale's gelatinous remains will likely prompt the group to consider its own decontamination preparations. A Difficulty 5 Systems Design test, on which at least 1 point of Medic must be spent (not necessarily by the main designer) cobbles together a targeted decontaminant that kills only microbes native to Tartarus. Let the players describe how it delivers its effect—via a liquid, an energy beam, or whatever. If the test margin is:

3 or less, the sole resulting device weighs about 50 kg and occupies a space about the size of a refrigerator.

4-6, the sole resulting device is the size of a flashlight and weighs 0.5 kg.

7 or more, the device is sized and weighted as per immediately above, and there are enough devices for each crew member.

Warn the players before making the test that the margin determines the portability of the device and how many of them they're able to assemble.

- **Data Retrieval:** *Logs aboard the Crick confirm that the Installation belongs to the Shrawley Expedition. The Crick crew built it by shuttling down pre-fab modules from the ship's cargo bay over a period of days.*

- *It includes none of the equipment needed to perform a mining survey.*
- *Instead its facilities consist mostly of instruments for xenobiological study, including gene-sequencing equipment.*
- *Not to mention heavy-duty containment units for dangerous xeno-fauna. These state-of-the-art units meet the most demanding specifications.*

(Core – leads to *The Trail*) Imaging: Also using their own ship's sensors, the lasers can also make out a circuitous trail, made by a convoy of vehicles, which peters out about five km from the installation.

Parking the Shuttle

Scene Type: Hazard

This transitional scene occurs when the team first descends to Tartarus. Depending on what they've decided to investigate first, this happens before either "The Installation" or "The Trail."

A 1-point **Astronomy** spend allows a character to predict troublesome atmospheric conditions that don't register on standard scans. Seemingly contiguous cloud banks contain pockets of alternately moist and hot air, creating extreme and unpredictable turbulence. With this spend, the crew can skip the otherwise required Difficulty 4 Shuttle Craft test to get safely to the surface. (The pilot programs in a special navigational subroutine to compensate for the obscured turbulence.)

If that test is taken and fails, the pilot still makes an emergency landing, and no one is hurt. However, the craft plunges through the hard outer crust of the planet and into the primordial ooze hidden just below the surface.

Geology: The ooze is a mixture of organic matter and particulate mineral, maintaining the consistency of molten rock, but at the comparatively low temperature of 90°C. The mineral matter rises slowly to the surface, where it coheres into a crusty shelf mimicking solid rock. The ooze below constantly churns, periodically breaking up the shelf, creating the particulates that restart the cycle of formation and destruction. The entire planet is best thought of as the temperate equivalent of an ice cap.

On a Difficulty (5 + margin of previous failure) Shuttle Craft test, the pilot can immediately extricate the craft from the ooze and park it on a thicker section of rocky crust.

If this test fails or is not undertaken, the shuttle sinks deeper into the ooze, with chunks of detached rock slamming its hull.

The crew must perform an emergency exit, in environmental suits. This requires a Difficulty 4 Athletics test. Characters failing the test make it to the surface, but puncture their environmental suits. See Punctured Suits, p 38.

Then, to save the shuttle, one or more characters must clear the ooze choking the engine exhaust ports, with a Difficulty 6 Systems Repair test.

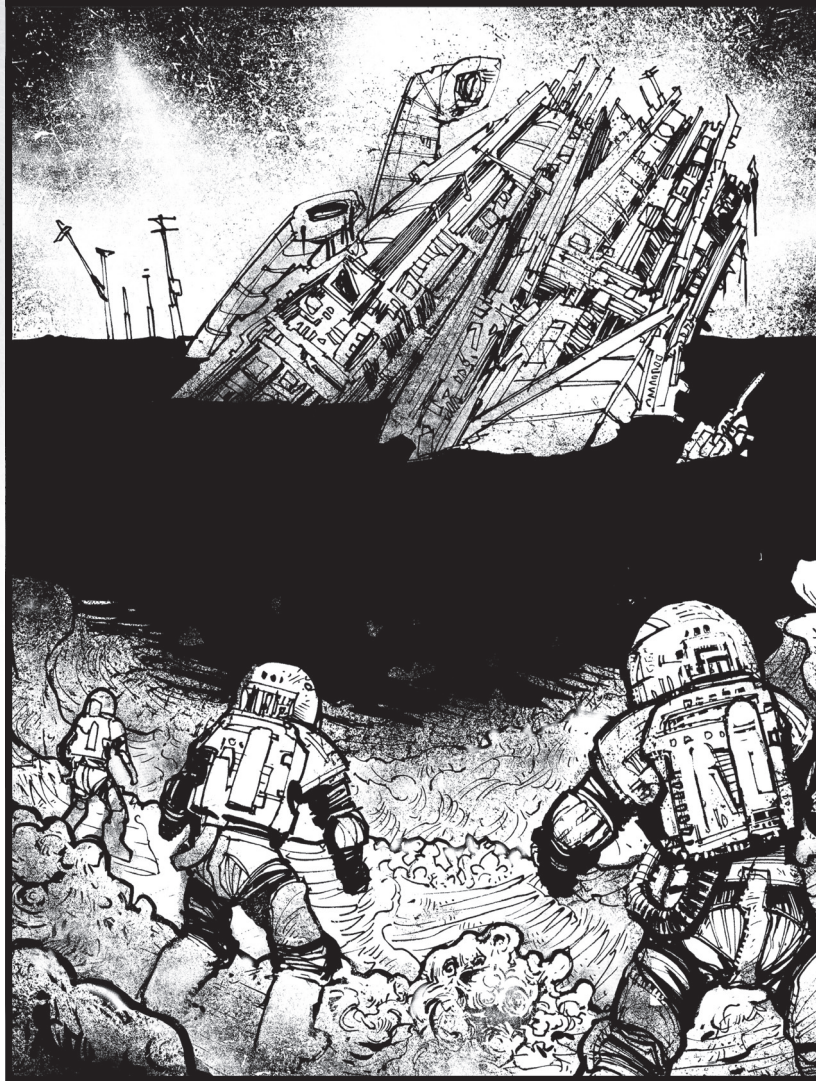
Each character making or cooperating in this test must make another Athletics test, at Difficulty 5 in this instance, to avoid puncturing their suits.

Should the Systems Repair test succeed, the pilot can then automatically kick the engines back in and fly to a safer spot.

Geology: That's "safer", not "safe." The entire surface structure is inherently unstable. The longer the craft remains parked in one spot, the more likely it is that the crust beneath it will crumble, plunging it back into the ooze.

If the Systems Repair tests fails, the shuttle sinks deeper into the mire. Anyone inside at the time must make an Athletics test to escape the ship and swim up to the surface, or face suffocation (*Ashen Stars* p. 81.) An immediate attempt, while the ship is sinking, occurs at Difficulty 6. Waiting until it reaches a stable float point half a mile down into the ooze incurs a Difficulty of 4, but depletes an oxygen tank (p. 38.)

A lost shuttle would seem to spell certain doom. If the lasers explored *The Crick*, they know its shuttle is no longer on Tartarus. However, as seen on p. 40, all is not lost: it is possible to jury-rig an Installation pod into a temporary shuttle.



Time Count

When the shuttle is safely parked, the time count to a crust break-up begins. It starts at 0 and goes up with certain time expenditures, called out in the text, occur. When these occur, increase the Break-Up Count by that value. Each up-tick increases the chance of the shuttle plunging into the ooze just as the crew returns to it at the scenario's conclusion (p. 48.) Add to the count when the crew undertakes other time-consuming actions it doesn't address.

When the shuttle pilot is picking a new spot, a **Geology** spend can guide the craft to a comparatively stable spot in the crust. Make a note of this spend, to take into account when they return to the shuttle.



The time count allows you to make other determinations, too, including the rate at which the crew uses up its oxygen.

Each time the count ticks up, remind the character with the highest Geology rating that time is ticking away on the crust's stability.

Punctured Suits

Scene Type: Hazard

A punctured suit exposes the wearer to the planet's gene-splicing microbes. On first exposure, the character loses 2 Health. Exposed characters also lose 2 points of Health each time the Time Count increases by 1.

After a Health loss from exposure takes characters to 0 Health or below, they are not just exposed, they're infected. Infected characters mutate into a new form the next time the Time Count ticks up. The nature of the mutation depends on the scene, as per the Mutation Events appendix on p. 51.

Forensic Anthropology detects the presence of microbes, and whether the character is infected or has only been exposed.

Use of decontamination tech ends the exposure, stopping future Health point loss without refreshing lost points.

It does not cure full-blown infection: that requires a Difficulty 6 Medic test, which does not restore any Health points lost to exposure.

Neither decontamination nor cure protects the subject from later exposures to the microbes.

Notes on treatment of mutated individuals appear in the aforementioned appendix.

Spent, Lost or Compromised: Oxygen Tanks and You

Tartarus' surface atmosphere consists of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and methane. Though not a vacuum, it isn't breathable without oxygen tanks. Without an oxygen tank, characters face suffocation.

Each suit includes two oxygen tanks, each of which will last for 4 points worth of Time Count. On a Preparedness test, characters may have 1 (Difficulty 4) or 2 (Difficulty 7) extra tanks on them.

Tanks can be found in the Installation and Complex. Some might be compromised by hyper-adaptive microbes.

The Installation

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: The Crick, The Trail, The Complex

Lead-Out: The Trail, The Complex

As seen from space, the Installation consists of a series of prefab modules flown down from the *Crick* and assembled on the planet's surface. The crust beneath several sections has collapsed, sinking the structure into the ooze. Of its twelve modules, eight are now immersed in the suffocating ooze. Four jut up into the air at a roughly forty-five degree angle.

Kinetics: Any movement inside the extant modules could dislodge the crust still holding them in place, sending the entire structure below the surface—taking its explorers with it.

Geology: Putting weight directly on the surrounding crust also speeds its inevitable collapse.

On a Difficulty 5 Preparedness test, the crew has in its possession the rig of stabilizing wires needed to stabilize the Installation. A Difficulty 4 Systems Design test allows a character to install these. Once in place, the crust groans and shifts, but remains in place as they explore the installation. Time Cost: 2 (1 if the margin of the Systems Design test exceeds 3.)

(If the group has already investigated the Complex when they leave the Installation for the last time, it sinks dramatically into the ooze, guy wires snapping.)

The players might come up with another plausible-seeming way to keep the Installation stable. Allow it, making it about as difficult and time-consuming as above, with adjustments depending on the ingenuity of the described solution.

If the installation is left unstabilized, entering the facility, and moving from one pod to another within

it, all require Difficulty 4 Athletics checks, either per individual or piggybacked. On a first failure, the structure sinks somewhat, immersing the Bio Lab. On a second failure, the whole thing plunges rapidly. Lasers must escape through hatches and swim up through the ooze without getting hit by falling debris or the main structure itself. This requires a Difficulty 6 Athletics test; on a failure, characters heave themselves up to the surface after taking damage +1. Those with margins less than 2 also suffer suit punctures.

Loading Bay

Entry to the Installation occurs through the Loading Bay. Its ramp now dangles from the lip of the pod. An airlock connects it to the rest of the structure. Damaged vehicles lie in a heap around it.

Forensic Engineering: Two three-wheeled heavy transport bikes in the heap are salvageable. Getting them safely out of the bay will be harder than fixing them.

Industrial Design: Each can carry up to four people and a cargo of up to 200 kg.

Zoology: Claw marks on one of the bikes suggests that it ran into something nasty out there.

Getting the bikes out requires a Difficulty 5 Systems Design test and adds 2 to the Time Count, and (if the installation has not been stabilized) requires Athletics tests, as above, to see if the entire structure sinks.)

Conference Room

Utilitarian furnishings, including a table and chairs, lie at the bottom of his tilted chamber. From here it is possible to access the computer mainframe.

Industrial Design: This room unit is a KX988, which can be repurposed into a short-range emergency shuttle.

Data Retrieval: The installation mainframe must be in one of the immersed pods. Much data has been lost but it's possible to boot it up in limited mode and extract some information from it.

(core) When booted, a map of the planet's surface appears, marking the precise location of the Complex.

Provide information from the mainframe in response to player requests. Each query requires the computer techie to laboriously reconstruct bits of a dying system, which takes time. Every third question ticks the Time Count up by 1.

- ▶ *The medical records of all personnel remain on the system. All get clean bills of health, except Shrawley. **Forensic Anthropology:** He's suffering from advanced prion degradation. Without a cure—which does not exist—he has six months to live, at most.*
- ▶ *Dr. Vale carried out unusually comprehensive medical monitoring of the entire crew, including herself but not Shrawley. At first her notes question the point of this. Then the complaints and personal notes give way to a flat listing of medical readings.*
- ▶ *Another medical file lists immunization procedures for the crew. All of the injected substances were standard, except for one, named only as CSS-1.*
 - *One section shows Iler in a strange complex, its walls carved with bizarre and sinister shapes. Checking his suit's readout, he announces: "Hey, the air down here is breathable!" As his companions scream at him to stop, he pulls his helmet off, sucking in deep, reckless gulps of microbe-infested oxygen.*
 - *One bit of footage jumps out: a crewman matching the briefing pack photo of Brice Iler screaming "I'm infected! I'm infected!" until Snow and Stricker restrain and sedate him.*

A main corridor leading from the conference room grants access to the remaining two extant pods, identified with door labels. The Containment Chamber lies on the left, the Bio Lab on the right.

Containment Chamber

Filling this room is an advanced containment chamber for the housing and observation of highly dangerous alien life forms. Its door hangs from its hinges.

Forensic Engineering: It was blown open—from the inside!



Zoology: Its settings are tuned for the incarceration of a [Class-K species.] It's unclear whether the inhabitant overcame the unit—not possible unless it was an unusual specimen—or if it escaped when the sinking of the installation damaged it.

(alternate core) **Bio Signatures:** A scan for [Class-K species] bio signatures reveals a cluster of them below the distant coordinates of the Complex.

A *huge* cluster of them.

Bio Lab

Inside the bio lab lurk mutated creatures that used to be Brice Iler and Osh Stricker—or portions thereof. They launch themselves at anyone coming through the door.

Iler is now a bloated head, a meter in diameter, attacked to bony, spider-like legs. Stricker is missing his head entirely, and attacks with prehensile appendages that burst from his abdomen—these are reconfigured intestines.

Iler Creature

Abilities: Athletics 4, Health 4, Scuffling 8

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: bite +1; anyone bitten is exposed to hyper-adaptive microbes

Attack Pattern: (Scuffling) +4/+4

Hit Threshold: 2

Armor: 0; immune to NLD fire

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Stricker Creature

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 12, Scuffling 16

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: pseudopod +0; when it hits, the victim will automatically take damage next round, without the creature having to make a successful attack, unless the creature has lost Health during the intervening round. The creature can make up to four separate attacks, only against separate opponents, per round.

Attack Pattern: (Scuffling) +3/+3/+3/+3

Hit Threshold: 2

Armor: 0; immune to NLD fire

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

If the group went immediately to Tartarus, skipping the legwork scenes “Sniffing Around Shrawley-Gosha” and “Rescendence”, the creatures have only recently mutated and are not quite as dangerous as above. Iler’s damage is +0; Stricker’s, -1.

If they took part in only one of the above scenes, damages are as listed above.

If they ran through both, or took an equivalent amount of extra time on player-prompted scenes before coming to Tartarus, their damage increases to +3 for Iler and +2 for Stricker.

After the creatures are killed or otherwise neutralized, DNA testing reveals:

Forensic Anthropology: Their DNA is a partial match for Iler and Stricker.

- ▶ **Virology:** (1-point spend) *Their human DNA was altered by a recent virological enhancement. (If they spotted the change in Meris Vale’s DNA, they can affirm that this is the same unknown enhancement.)*

Zoology: Their DNA is also, however, a partial match for [Class-K entities!]

If the Zoologist has also tested the the hyper-adaptive microbes: These seem to have been knit together and recombined by exposure to the microbes. They appear to replicate DNA of organisms they infect, saving them to later infuse into other lifeforms.

From Pod to Shuttle

Detaching the conference pod safely from the rest of the installation and getting it onto comparatively solid ground takes one Difficulty 4 Systems Design test, and two Difficulty 5 Athletics tests. On a failed Athletics check, roll a die.

1-2: character falls, taking damage -1.

3-4: character’s suit punctures

5-6: character drops an oxygen tank irretrievably into the ooze

Refitting it to shuttle mode requires a Difficulty 4 Systems Repair test.

The attempt to detach it adds 1 to the Time Count; the refit adds 2.

This makeshift shuttle is no replacement for the genuine article. Buying a new, proper shuttle costs 15 megacredits—an expenditure taking place during downtime.

The Trail

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: The Installation, The Crick¹

Lead-Out: The Complex

From space, a faint trail can be discerned, leaving the Installation, and gradually petering out several miles off. From this endpoint, a study of the shifting crust floes allows a character with **Geology** or **Kinetics** to calculate the likely destination of the original party.

On foot, the full journey from Installation to Complex on foot increases the Time Count by 3. Travel by transport bike increases it by 1.

¹ If the group arrives at the trailhead from the Crick, the "Parking the Shuttle" sequence (p. 36) occurs as a prelude to this scene.

Geology: The crust around the trail is especially unstable. Hopping from point to point with the shuttle is insupportably dangerous. Better to leave it where it is and only take off once, when the mission is done.

Crust Break-Up

Choosing bike transport over travel on foot introduces the danger of a crust break-up that sends one or both vehicles plunging into the goo.

Characters driving bikes make Difficulty 4 Ground Craft tests to avoid a sudden gap in the crust. On a failure, everyone on the bike plunges into the ooze, taking -2 damage. Those in the ooze make a Difficulty 4 Athletics test to avoid suit puncture as they clamber out.

At the outset of a bike journey, a character volunteering to spend **Geology** to navigate drivers onto safer ground reduces the Difficulty of the Ground Craft test by 1 per point spent.

Up to six people can cram onto one vehicle. But this ensures at least one additional crust break (after "Finding Dorrie", below), and a +2 increase to the Difficulties of all Ground Craft tests to avoid them.

Groups defaulting to foot here add 2 to the trip's Time Count.

Those going on foot after "Finding Dorrie" add 1.

Finding Dorrie

During the first leg of the journey, to the spot where the trail vanishes, the crew spots a body lying immobile on a floating chunk of crust. Since she is not wearing an environmental suit and has no oxygen source, it's a good bet that she's dead.

On closer inspection, this turns out to be Dorrie Haslett. Her head has been twisted around 180 degrees, so that her face stares up even though she's lying on her front. Haslett's skin is blackened and covered with insect-like bristles, her feet distended into claw-like constructions.

Then she opens her eyes and screams. Her hair whips up all around her, moving as if of its own accord.





Forensic Anthropology: Her hair is drawing in something from the air—nitrogen or carbon dioxide! *Is her respiration no longer oxygen-based?*

Dorrie answers player questions, but always with a bizarre loyalty to Charles Shrawley, despite his responsibility for her awful fate. Answers that trigger Bullshit Detector are marked with an asterisk.

- ▶ *[Class-K creatures]? No, of course there are none of them here!**
- ▶ *Shrawley is a good man, determined to help the entire Bleed with his wise, self-sacrificing leadership.**
- ▶ *Any mistakes made during the mission can be blamed on the recklessness of others.*
- ▶ *Shrawley is searching for the fountain of eternal life.*
- ▶ *Some of the others went crazy and attacked her.*
- ▶ *She is certainly willing to give them a DNA sample. But she's perfectly fine, perfectly healthy, and perfectly normal. She just needs to rest a little. [Though by no means true, she believes this, so it doesn't set off Bullshit Detector.]*

Forensic Psychology: You get the impression that she wants to reply honestly to questions about Shrawley, but is prevented from doing so on the neurological level.

- ▶ **Virology:** *This effect may be caused by virological experimentation.*

Forensic Anthropology: Her DNA is that of Dorrie Haslett, but also of a [Class-K] entity, several unidentified and presumably local organisms, plus strands of genetic material from the hyper-adaptive microbes.

- ▶ *Her bones have been pulverized, but seem to be slowly reknitting. It might take her days, or weeks, but she'll become ambulatory again.*
- ▶ *Her bristles drip with a high-concentration microbial cocktail. She would make one terrifying disease vector if taken back to an inhabited world.*
- **Law:** *Arguably, given her DNA profile, she could be considered a Class-K entity. Under that interpretation, the group is not only permitted, but obligated, to destroy her.*

If she senses that the lasers are considering killing her, she pleads movingly for her life, promising never to hurt anyone.

Do they kill her, or leave her be?

Second Leg

At some point between zeroing in on, and arriving at, the complex, the group is attacked by a mutated combination of several crewmen: Alva Brin, Dion Kwong, Krd-Drk, and Vatak. The creature leaps up from a pool of ooze and is suddenly upon them, scuttling on eight fast-moving legs. From multiple mouths, it shrieks weird slogans at them as it attacks:

"All hail the god-king Shrawley!"

"No longer will we be contained!"

"We are in you! You are in us!"

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 12, Scuffling 30

Attack Pattern: (Scuffling)

+5/+5/+5/+5/+2/+2/+2/+2/+2

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: -+0 punch/kick

Hit Threshold: 3; immune to NLD fire

Armor: 0

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

If the group went immediately to Tartarus, skipping the legwork scenes "Sniffing Around Shrawley-Gosha" and "Rescendence", the creature has only recently mutated and is not quite as dangerous as above, with a damage value of -2.

If they ran through both, or took an equivalent amount of extra time on player-prompted scenes before coming to Tartarus, its damage increases to +2.

A player who, at any point in this scene prior to the attack, asks to perform a **Bio Signatures** sweep can spend 1 point of it to gain advance warning of it. This gives all PCs initiative over the creature.

The Complex

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Installation², The Trail

Lead-Outs: Incubator, Nursery, Pod Bay

From a distance, the Complex rises from the plain of surface crust as an irregular rocky dome about two stories high at its apex.

Geology: Given prevailing conditions, that dome shouldn't be able to support itself.

Bio Signatures: There are life forms inside, but they're hard to read. (1-point) Down below the dome, there are an awful lot of life signs. [Class-K] life signs.

Energy Signatures: The dome emits enough energy to power several small starships. The output centers around a ring at the dome's base and bounces between frequencies according to a complex pattern.

- ▶ **Archaeology:** *Similar unexplained energy patterns have been found in conjunction with the archaeological sites of ancient, presumably extinct interstellar sentients. The patterns sustain themselves by unknown means. If this matches those sites, it could be thousands of years old.*
 - **Kinetics:** *Self-sustaining, constant energy sources of course violate the basic principles of known physics.*
 - **Geology:** *The energy could well be preserving and solidifying the dome against the erosive force of the continually shifting crust layer.*
 - **Industrial Design:** *Without such a foundation, there's no way to erect a permanent structure on a surface like this.*

By circling around it, they find a cavernous opening on the dome's far side.

If the group skipped The Trail, its "Finding Dorrie" element occurs now, with Dorrie lying on the threshold of the dome's opening. (This lets them glean the scene's information without exposure to its risks.)

² Groups skipping The Trail travel along a straighter path to the Complex. If they go on transport bikes, the Travel Count is 0; on foot, it's 1. There is no risk of bikes breaking through the crust.

Once inside the opening, readings on their environmental suits inform the lasers that the air inside the cavern is breathable, both in its oxygen content and medium pressure.

Strange sculptural elements cover the walls. Alarming motifs cover its decorative buttresses and writhing bas-reliefs, intertwining the biological and the mechanical to monstrous effect. Cables turn into penises penetrating serrated orifices, which disgorge nightmarish medical instruments piercing grotesque fetuses, whose umbilical cords transform into cables...

Zoology: Although all of the forms seen in the artwork are distressing and distorted, several clearly resemble the [Class-K entity].

Archaeology: Expeditions have found tiny bits and pieces of this art style before, but never has so complete an example been discovered.

Similar designs adorn a stone tile floor. On the floor lies a spilled medkit.

Forensic Anthropology: The remaining medicines inside are all standard for a first-aid kit.

Chemistry: (testing process adds 1 to the Time Count, except on a 1-point spend) They've all been adulterated by a complex chemical.

Virology: It's neucleasotene, a substance used to boost the effect of recently installed vioware enhancements, especially those that alter the neurological pathways. It's an unsafe treatment used mostly by back-alley geneticists.

Mounted on the walls are the sculpted images of three silently moaning helmeted warriors with tentacles where a human's jaws would be, each of them two meters high. Their tongues are shaped like levers. To manipulate the levers one must reach in through the jaws.

Inside one of the jaws is a human arm, severed above the elbow—judging from the shape of the hand, a woman's.

Forensic Anthropology: The DNA matches Vangel Snow.



Industrial Design: It's hard to spot amid the baroque decoration, but the jaws are hinged, as if able to snap shut.

Energy Signatures: Sensors in the jaws emit a beam outside the visible spectrum. Its frequency resembles a bio signatures scan. (2-point spend) It is scanning for a particular DNA profile.

- **Biology:** *That profile matches no known lifeform.*

Moving the levers with an inanimate object accomplishes nothing. A living arm must be thrust into the jaws to activate them for their intended purpose. If that arm does not belong to a member of long-dead species called the Ur, the lever activates, but the jaws snap shut, dealing +6 damage. (Several such arms, one of them

still living, can be found in the Pod Bay, though not without danger. Rigging one of them into a grasping implement takes a Difficulty 4 Systems Design test.)

A Difficulty 4 Systems Repair test disables the jaws on as many of the three units as the character desires, at a Time Cost of 1 per unit after the first. Subtract any Industrial Design spend from the Time Cost (can't be reduced below 0)

Alternately, a 2-point **Bio Signatures** spend spoofs the sensors into thinking they're scanning Ur DNA.

(core) When pulled, each lever reveals an exit to another chamber:

the floor irises open into a hole 3.33m in diameter. (Leads to the Nursery.)

Another piece of statuary swivels aside into a chamber on the same level. (Leads to the Incubator.)

The ceiling irises open to reveal a hole 3.33m in diameter. Metal cables drop from it, ready for climbing. (Leads to the Pod Bay.)

Bio Signatures: One very faint life signature can be read from the Pod Bay and a diffuse and unreadable but powerful life signature or signatures from the Nursery. (From earlier scans of the area, the group might already surmise that this is a huge nest of [Class-K]s.)

Nursery

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-Ins: The Complex, Pod Bay, Incubator

Lead-Outs: Pod Bay, Incubator

Industrial Design: The iris mechanism revealing the passageway to the Nursery, comprised of a super-hard alloy, achieves a perfect seal when closed.

Bio Signatures: A device in the iris emits a sophisticated bio-sensor beam, pointed down into the passageway below.

Industrial Design: The sensor beam reacts with the mechanism, as if it is set to slam shut when creatures giving off a particular bio-signature approach within a certain distance.

A vertical alloy tube, 5m in diameter, connects the Complex entrance with a cavernous chamber below. Ladder-like rungs, spaced far apart as if for a freakishly large humanoid frame, appear along all 33m of it.

To reach the threshold of the cavernous chamber, one must climb down using either the rungs (Difficulty 5 Athletics test) or some other plausible means (set Difficulties in response to the players' description.)

By the time they're within 10m of the threshold, the explorers detect disturbing sounds, smells or other indications that your Class-K entity of choice is present.

Zooming in their tether cams: they see it: a roiling, writhing mass of the creatures, in both standard and alarmingly reconfigured forms. There are thousands of them. Perhaps tens of thousands. Enough of them to wipe out a planet.

And then they notice the exploring PCs. Although the gap between the tube and the Nursery floor is 100m, the entities start to pile up on top of one another, forming a living ladder, reaching for them, determined to attack.

Zoology: There's too many of them to fight. Even a nuke wouldn't take them out.

Industrial Design: (if they investigated the iris mechanism) The only thing to do is to get on the other side of that door and close it before they get through.

The Difficulty of getting back up the tube in time matches that for getting down, assuming the group uses the same method.

If a laser fails, a teammate still in the tube can rescue them with a Difficulty 6 Athletics test.

Failing characters who are not rescued are torn to shreds, dead instantly.

Pod Bay

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Complex, Nursery, Incubator

Lead-Outs: Nursery, Incubator

The circular Pod Bay resembles the entryway immediately below it. More disturbing sculptures cover its walls, all the way to the top of its domed ceiling.

Linguistics: Unlike the friezes below, these include a series of ideograms at the bottom, and may lay out a narrative.

Vangel Snow, minus her right arm, sprawls dead in the middle of the floor. Her tether is still fixed to her helmet, which lies beside her.

Arranged around the circular room are six alien suspended animation chambers, laid out like coffins, toes pointed inwards.

For ease of reference, the chamber's three avenues of investigation appear under separate sub-headers. Your group might tackle them in any order, or in haphazard parallel.

The Tale of the Friezes

Sequential images tell an enigmatic tale.

Xenoculture: Among other creatures, the friezes depict the beings in the pods and were probably made by them.

One image shows a ship landing on what might be Tartarus. Another shows the pod-beings experimenting on [Class-K entities.] Another, on a verdant world very much unlike Tartarus, seems to show them studying members of [yet another Class-K species of your choice.]

Archaeology: These pod-beings could easily be the legendary Ur, referred to in the hieroglyphs of other ancient species, also known only from their ruined sites.

Linguistics: The ideograms describe their makers as explorers who came here in the name of science, and left this shrine for the edification of species that would come after them.



(1-point spend) The pod-beings/Ur first reached the stars a hundred thousand years ago, coming to interstellar travel long after perfecting the art of genetic manipulation. Their civilization took as its goal the understanding of life in all its variegated forms. The pod-being ideogram for “understanding” also means “transform/improve/manipulate.”

(2-point spend; adds 1 to the Time Cost) The Ur came to believe in the supremacy of the genetic helix. Recognizing that evolution favored strong believers, they replaced outmoded faiths with a fervent scientific materialism. If the helix was all, and the point of existence to perpetuate one’s DNA over time, the only worthy goal of a civilization would be to ensure that its genetic material spread throughout the galaxy for the duration of its existence. The Ur engineered out all qualities that might interfere with this crusade, such as empathy, nonconformism, and the pursuit of pleasure. Spreading through the galaxy, they encountered highly adaptable and aggressive lifeforms, which their calculations told them had a greater potential for long-term survival than they did. In order to ensure the furtherance of their DNA, they modified these beings to carry the genetic heritage of the Ur. The discovery of Tartarus, with its gene-splicing microbes, allowed them to perfect this technology.

Among the altered were the [Class-K entities.] Though nothing like the Ur in body or mind, they carry bits of their genetic code as unused “junk DNA.” By yoking themselves to persistent, unkillable species, the Ur achieved ultimate evolutionary victory.

The frieze’s central text carries the guiding motto of Ur ideology:

*To transform a new species, you must first understand it.
To understand it, you must first learn to kill it.*

The Remains of Vangel Snow

If the PCs specify that they’re engaged in visual inspection only, **Forensic Anthropology** suggests, given her position, that she bled out from her grievous injury, thus causing her death. (1-point spend) But there’s something wrong about the body. Something happened to it post-mortem.

On any attempt to sample her DNA or otherwise inspect her body, she comes apart from the inside,

her hollowed-out corpse spilling out a swarm of sleek, carnivorous beetle-like creatures. A Difficulty 6 Shooting test with any laser weapon fries them all before they spread out. If this misses, they split into two columns, each requiring a Difficulty 6 shooting test to eliminate. For each missed shot another column appears, and so on.

After the first shot, each other laser can act, presumably trying to destroy the swarms. Any hit against Difficulty 6 destroys a column. Each surviving column then swarms onto a laser, infecting him or her with the hyper-adaptive microbes (p. 38) The columns then dissipate, the individual insects disappearing into cracks and crannies in the walls.

If any specimen is captured and analyzed with **Biology**: the insects are rapidly evolved creatures borrowing elements from the original hyper-adaptive microbes, from the microbial and parasitic life on Snow’s body, and from Snow herself. They’re a spontaneously created species, the result of her infection by the Tartarus microbes.

Though damaged, Snow’s tether can be accessed via **Data Retrieval** (Time Cost: 1; can be bought off with a 1-point Data Retrieval spend) which finds the following audio recording in its buffer.

“We’ve done everything wrong. Made every mistake. I thought Shrawley had recruited the galaxy’s biggest complement of cretins and fools. Then I started to do it, too. Why did I touch that slime? Why did I stick my arm in that face? He dosed us, that’s why. He changed our brains. Made us more obedient—more reckless. He hired a team of experts, then turned us into a pack of idiots.”

Suspended Animation Pods

Each chamber is 4.2m long and made of the same materials as the rest of the installation. Windows on the tops of the chambers allow the lasers to view their occupants: 4m tall humanoids wearing protective suits, connected to the pods by a tangle of wires, tubes and cables. These do not cover their faces.

The inhabitants of all but one of the chambers are clearly dead, in naturally mummified condition. Desiccated skin stretches across noseless skulls, with high cheekbones, flat foreheads, extremely large eye-sockets, and neither ears nor a visible nose structure.

Forensic Anthropology: Tiny pinholes along the jawline probably serve as combination olfactory/auditory organs.

Zoology: This is a previously unknown sentient species.

History: It might well be the Ur! (see above)

The pods housing the dead aliens emit neither light nor sound. But the sixth hums softly and is lit from within in slowly cycling pulses of blue.

Its inhabitant breathes shallowly, closed eyes twitching in a slow-motion version of REM sleep. The survivor's skin is partially translucent, with nerves, blood vessels and bones visible beneath the surface. These lack pigment and are difficult to differentiate—even its blood seems to be a milky, almost clear liquid.

Linguistics: The ideograms inscribed on the pod follow an intuitive pattern. The eerily glowing button near the pod's foot is probably the one you push to wake its occupant.

Forensic Engineering: Though still functioning, the pod has badly degraded over inestimable centuries. One shot to that button with a beam weapon and the whole thing will go up in flames, immolating the creature inside it.

As a full translation of the ideograms heavily suggests, there is little to be gained from awakening and interacting with a being who believes in nothing except the genetic perpetuation of its species. If the lasers do wake it up, it follows the motto of the Ur and tries to understand them—by attempting to kill them.

Ur Survivor

Abilities: Athletics 24, Health 48, Scuffling 48

Attack Pattern: +3/+3/+3/+3/+3 etc.

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: arm smash +4, throttle +6; can make 2 arm smash attacks per round, against two separate targets

Hit Threshold: 4

Armor: immune to NLD

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Savvy Modifier: +3

Halting communication with the Ur is possible through the use of **Linguistics**. If defeated and somehow subdued, it, in response to questions, tells a contemptuous version of the same history that appears on the friezes.

If the Ur is killed, **Forensic Anthropology** realizes that its brain might be reactivated by cannibalizing parts from the suspended animation pod. This requires a Difficulty 4 Medic test, on which Systems Design or Virology points may also be spent.

The head then awakens, the Ur, as above, answers questions about its peoples' history. When the group starts to run out of questions, the head explodes, doing an instance of Damage to anyone in the room who has not explicitly shielded herself against such an eventuality.

Should the players gleefully destroy the pod without waking the Ur, they've taken advantage of the very opportunity this scene is structured to deliver.

Incubator

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Complex, Nursery, Pod Bay

Lead-Outs: Nursery, Incubator

This chamber, black walls incised by the usual distressing friezes, contains a humming, jumping, sparking array of biological laboratory equipment, both contemporary and Ur. Flailing from its central med bay is the now-transformed figure of Charles Shrawley—part man, part machine, part Class-K, part Ur, and completely crazy. He demands that the group extract him and take him back to company headquarters, in order that he may immediately commence the reordering of all organic matter in the known universe. Struggling to enunciate through a goopy, still-mutating jaw-slash-mandible, he holds up a viro-injector and demands that they "bow down and take the sacrament of Shrawley."

As long as he, in his megalomania, believes that these new arrivals might help him get off planet, he refrains from attacking them. Thinking he's winning them over, he answers whatever questions they ask of him, honestly, but distorted through several layers of delusion and neurological rewiring:



He is dying of a terminal disease and intends to not only to live but to become immortal, as a blessing to a universe that needs him more than ever.

Based on secret archaeological finds he commissioned Shrawley-Gosha teams to make, he concluded that he would find the Ur, or at least their secret of immortality, here.

(core) To ensure their loyalty, he dosed his handpicked crew with FOLLOW-ME, a new virological treatment designed to reward obedience and suppress critical thought.

As an unfortunate side-effect it made them heedless to the point of self-destruction. But that's science for you! Shrawley can now learn from these informative mistakes.

Designed for military use by SGI and perfected by him, the only complete genetic formula for FOLLOW-ME is on a data storage unit on his person. (He holds it up; the unit has grown into his hand.)

He did not know that immortality to the Ur meant transmission of genetic material through the galaxy, without continuity of individual consciousness. But that doesn't matter. He's sure his new form, once it stabilizes, will live forever.

The microbes started to change him when he was wounded in the Complex. But he will master the process and come out stronger.

Lying dead at his feet are the corpses of Juana Jaxon and Sunny Roane. Appendages stretch out from his body to suck nutrients from their bodies.

Law: The clause in the contract requiring the crew to bring back survivors includes an out: they have to be safely returnable to civilization. Basic quarantine protocols suggest that no attempt to save the monstrously mutated Shrawley need be made here.

If the lasers make a move for Shrawley, or the data storage unit, he attacks. By separating from the med bay, he injures himself, sending ichor spewing through the chamber. He loses 6 Health per round, over and above whatever damage the crew does to him.

Charles Shrawley

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 24, Scuffling 12

Attack Pattern: +2/+2/+3/+3/+2/+2

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: weird appendage +0

Hit Threshold: 3

Armor: immune to NLD

Alertness Modifier: -1

Stealth Modifier: -2

Savvy Modifier: -1

If the group went immediately to Tartarus, skipping the legwork scenes "Sniffing Around Shrawley-Gosha" and "Rescendence", Shrawley's damage is -1.

If they ran through both scenes, or took an equivalent amount of extra time on player-prompted scenes before coming to Tartarus, the damage value of his weird appendage is +3, and he loses only 3 Health per round from his self-inflicted wound.

The sole copy of the formula remains intact on the storage device, which can, after he has been killed or neutralized, be pried from his warm, still-mutating flesh.

Now the group must decide whether something that so threatens the free will of sentient beings can be trusted to their corporate client.

Coda: Crust and Shuttle

Scene Type: Hazard

Shifting crust floes alter the terrain for the group's return to their shuttle. The more direct the path, the more dangerous the trip.

A trip that adds 3 to the Time Count circumvents all potential crust breaks.

A trip that adds 2 to the Time Count confronts the group with one crust break.

A trip that adds 1 to the Time Count confronts them with two crust breaks.

Crust breaks encountered on foot require each member of the group to make a Difficulty 4 Athletics test or fall into the primordial ooze. Each plunge requires a Difficulty 6 Athletics test; on a failure, characters heave themselves up to the surface after taking damage



+1. Those with margins less than 2 also suffer suit punctures.

Crust breaks encountered on vehicles can be avoided with Ground Craft tests, as described in "The Trail."

If, as the group approaches the shuttle, the Time Count exceeds 6, roll a die and add the difference between the Time Count and 6. If that number exceeds 12, the crust around the cracks breaks just as the shuttle heaves into view. They then must make appropriate tests of Athletics, Shuttle Craft and (depending on player description) perhaps other abilities to get on board and airborne before it sinks into the mire, marooning them on a Bad Planet.

Remember that, assuming they haven't already plunged it into the ooze, too, that one of the pods from the Installation can be converted into an emergency shuttle.

APPENDICES

I. Handout

Give a copy of this handout to the players when they ask for the crew manifest.





SHRAWLEY-GOSHA INDUSTRIES

HELP US PREVENT YOUR NEXT WAR

CONFIDENTIAL, PROPRIETARY

Survey Mission 2295

Destination: ThermoDon, third moon of Lampeto, Hippolyte System,

Crew Manifest, *The Crick*

Alva Brin, crew services

Dorrie Haslett, xenanthropologist / hailer

Brice Iler, epidemiologist

Krd-Drk, xenobiologist

Dion Kwong, logistics

Juana Jaxon, imaging technician

Sunny Roane, mining engineer / wrench

Charles Shrawley, team leader

Osh Stricker, security / stratco

Vangel Snow, security / gunner

Meris Vale, medic

Vatak, geologist / pilot

II. Mutation Events

Characters infected by the hyper-adaptive microbes, as per "Punctured Suits", p. 38, suffer mutations of varying descriptions (though similar mechanical effect) depending on which scene the initial exposure occurs in.

For each mutation, Forensic Anthropology allows a vivid guess at the horrible eventual end state if the infection is not arrested.

The Installation: Limbs begin to shrink; head and torso bloat. Hard tumors jut from the abdomen.

Forensic Anthropology: The victim will eventually wind up in a spider-shaped configuration, as a blob of central body mass supported by cartilaginous pseudopods.

The Trail: The neck and head stiffen; eventually the neck begins to twist around. Skin forms hairy, insect-like projections.

- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology:** *The victim is turning into a beetle-like humanoid, developing a gland that secretes a solution filled with the infectious microbes, which it will deliver through the hairy projections.*

The Complex: Legs start to fuse together; torso elongates, skin covers facial organs and orifices.

- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology:** *Final state: a sightless, worm-like creature.*

The Pod Bay: Spine curves, forcing victim into quadrupedal posture. Skin becomes translucent. Victim gains mass by feeding on microscopic creatures through its epidermis.

- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology:** *The victim is turning into a cross between an Ur and a creature resembling a formidable alien guard dog.*

Nursery: Victim is turning into a Class-K entity; describe symptoms accordingly.

Incubator: Jaw develops into segmented mandible. Bones soften; skin hardens.

- ▶ **Forensic Anthropology:** *The victim is becoming a cross between a human and a crustacean.*

Keep track of the Time Count when infection occurs.

The infection can be arrested by sedating the victim into unconsciousness (automatically possible with Medic) or shooting him with NLD fire.

Back on the crew's ship, with access to its medical bay, a Medic test, with a Difficulty of 4:

- ▶ *plus the Time Count since infection*
- ▶ *minus any Time Count upticks that occurred while the infection was arrested*

...stops the infection and reverses the mutation. A lengthy recuperation occurs in the window between this episode and the next.



TERRA NOVA



INTRODUCTION

Terra Nova is a scenario for a Laser crew of 3 to 5 people, set on what remains of an old Combine-era luxury liner that's now adrift in space due to sabotage. It relies mainly on the use of Technical and Interpersonal abilities. There are at least three significant action sequences which all take place groundside; ship-to-ship action isn't as central to this scenario as some others.

THE CONTRACT

The Lasers are to travel to the Terra Nova's last known position, ascertain its status, investigate the cause of the disaster, and provide a full report to the company. They also want any survivors evacuated if possible. The contract is a private one, served by Tiara Cruise Lines, the owner of the vessel. No salvage rights are given.

THE TWIST

The vessel is not all that it appears to be. It's secretly housing a doomsday weapon of immense power; designed to shred space-time and render a whole region of space uninhabitable. One of the surviving crewmembers is actually a saboteur who wishes to kill the rescue party and use their ship to tow the technology away. The culprit could be any of the survivors; see *Playing GUMSHOE with Variable Suspects* on page 55 for more details.

THE BACKSTORY

As a measure of desperation in the darkest parts of the Mohilar War, the Combine government created a terrible weapon of mass destruction: a quantum singularity generator that would destroy everything within the reach of a star system. They planted it on a luxury liner, the Terra Nova, with the consent of Tiara Cruise Lines, flying under heavy escort in a show of open defiance. They hoped that the Mohilar would consider it an irresistible target and attack it with one of their primary fleets.

The War ended before that attack came. Tiara could not disassemble the weapon without also disabling the vessel, and it was in dire financial straits, spending all its operating capital simply on maintaining what remained of its fleet. In addition, the memory-damping effect of the War created a new problem: even the scientists who'd worked on the device could barely remember what they'd done, let alone how to safely dismantle it. So they merely left it there, a dark secret buried in the Nova's engine core.

One of the guests has discovered the truth of the Terra Nova and wishes to steal the weapon. Which character ends up as the culprit also determines the motive for the theft; see the individual write-ups for details starting on page 57. The plan is to stage a catastrophic accident, kill the inevitable rescue party, and take their vessel with the doomsday weapon in tow.

The culprit brought a specially constructed nanovirus on board to infiltrate the ship's computer system - once inside, it allowed access to the navigational data, allowing the culprit to plant false star charts. Then it infiltrated the security system, putting the ship's entire compliment of security drones under the saboteur's control. Finally, it created nanomolecular stress points at strategic locations in the Terra Nova's hull.



The culprit also poisoned the one person who might catch the sabotage in time to stop it - the ship's hailer, a human named Nolan Seif - by tainting his pre-shift meal.

Everything went exactly as planned. The pilot used the false data and slammed the Terra Nova right into a dense meson shrapnel cloud. The ship was thrown out of warp, and the sabotage to the hull ensured that a vast majority of the crew and passengers were killed when the hull breached just so.

The only hitch was that the weapon partially activated in the disaster. Now, parts of the vessel have turned into a death trap, suffused with small rips in space-time that consume anything in their path.

The secret of the Terra Nova is laid bare, and the rescue party is on its way. All the culprit has to do is survive them.

THE INVESTIGATION

The crew starts with the *Contract Briefing* (page 58). They attempt to navigate the meson shrapnel cloud surrounding the ship in *A Bumpy Approach* (page 59). They explore the wreckage in *Navigating the Terra Nova* (page 60), where they begin to learn just how wrong things on the ship are - the strange nature of the ship's engine core, the hailer's murder, and the depths of the computer sabotage.

Their suspicions of wrongdoing are further confirmed when things try to kill them. Reprogrammed security drones come after them in *Attack of the Drones* (page 67), revealing the nanobots as the chief mechanism used to create all the havoc on board.

During their exploration of the ship, they'll also meet the five survivors. Eventually, interactions with them lead to a suspicion that one of more of them is the saboteur - see the *Playing GUMSHOE with Variable Suspects* (page 55) to see how this goes down.

As soon as they discover which of the survivors is the culprit, it comes down to a confrontation to see if they can stop the saboteur from stealing their ship and escaping with the doomsday weapon in *This Ain't a Rescue, It's an Arms Race* (page 70).

COMPLICATIONS

As previously mentioned, the doomsday weapon has partly activated. PCs run into the lethal space-time shredder in *Death Fields Galore* (page 69).

If the security drones don't get to the PCs, the nanobots have another plan up their not-actually sleeves - dropping the containment field protecting the hull breaches and trying to suck the PCs out into space! See *Avoid the Void* (page 70).

THE CHOICE

Depending on how things roll out in the concluding scene, the culprit might attempt to engage the PCs in a side deal to let them profit from allowing the culprit to get away with the doomsday weapon.

If they decide to take down the culprit, the weapon is theirs to do with as they please. The obviously moral thing to do is destroy it, but there's a lot of potential profit to be had from selling it, not to mention power to be had by keeping it.

PLAYING GUMSHOE WITH VARIABLE SUSPECTS

This scenario also introduces a new idea for how to handle the culprit in your GUMSHOE games. Even though this is an *Ashen Stars* module, you could do this with any of the games in the system.

In most GUMSHOE cases, you define the culprit and his or her (or its, in the case of this game) motives as part of the preliminary work of crafting the case, usually when you make up the Twist. In *Terra Nova*, any one of the NPCs in the scenario could be the culprit - you decide which one of them it's going to be when you play it through by gauging the reactions of the Laser crew.

THE SUSPECT ROLES

Each of the NPCs comes with a writeup that defines the three major roles they play in *Terra Nova*: the innocent, the red herring, and the culprit.

The innocent is the default state of any character when the PCs first meet them. The notes include a general personality sketch, as well as all the non-incriminating clues they have to offer the PCs when encountered.

The red herring is a character who arouses suspicion, but is not the actual culprit. Usually, the red herrings in modern procedurals are interesting characters in their own right, hiding a secret, engaging in scandal, or attempting some other crime that is not relevant to the case currently under investigation. The notes include a floating clue that you plant in order to direct suspicion to that character, as well as companion clues which eventually absolve him or her of guilt.

The culprit is, of course, the one responsible for the sabotage of the Terra Nova and the deaths of a majority of her passengers and crew. The smoking gun

that identifies the culprit is a nanovirus infection that allows him or her to remotely control what remains of the ship's operational systems. Each suspect has a different means by which the PCs discover their control of the nanobots. The notes also include information on motive, similar to the red herring, to show how that NPC developed the will and drive to commit such a heinous act.

HOW IT WORKS IN PLAY

The PCs run into the NPCs at certain points during the section called *Navigating the Terra Nova*, on page 60. It's their mission to find survivors, and some of the existing clues point toward the NPCs, so the players might decide to go looking for one of them. This automatically succeeds; don't hesitate to bring them in as soon as possible.

If the crewmembers don't go looking, have them run into one of the NPCs by coincidence every other location or so that they check.

Start by playing each NPC according to the notes given for them in the innocent role and gauge how the crew reacts to them. Each of them has a strong personality, which hopefully brings out some sort of favorable or unfavorable reaction from the crew members. At some point, the players might even start making direct accusations.

As soon as you have a clear idea of where the group stands with the suspects, you can "lock" the NPCs into the roles they're going to have for the rest of the scenario and start adding the special clues.

How are you supposed to know which role to assign each NPC? Follow these guidelines:



- ▶ *If the players seem disinterested in a certain NPC, keep them as an innocent. You only want to use NPCs that generate a polarized reaction.*
- ▶ *If the players have a mixed opinion about a certain NPC, consider them as a red herring and drop their initial clue. This allows you to play up the tension between the PCs as they consider the question of the suspect's guilt.*
- ▶ *If the players have a unilateral opinion about a certain NPC, consider them as a red herring and drop their first clue. It will either make them think a bit (if they like the NPC) or spur them to action as they're convinced they're right (if they don't like the NPC).*

One of your two potential red herrings is going to be the culprit. Modern procedurals generally fall into two patterns of handling this:

- ▶ *The first suspect accused takes most of the focus and turns out to be the red herring; the investigators quickly discover the real culprit late in the case.*
- ▶ *The second suspect accused takes the investigators' focus away from the first suspect, but a sudden reveal indicates that their original instincts were right all along.*

The general rule of thumb is that the true culprit is the one who carries the weaker level of suspicion. If you know that the PCs are biased toward one suspect, make that person the red herring and the other one the culprit.

Once you know who the red herring is, drop the subsequent clues for that section and lock them into place. Obviously, for the culprit, drop the smoking gun and get the adventure moving to the final scene.

It's important to stick to your guns once you've "locked" a suspect into a role - don't drop both red herring clues and then decide you wanted that person as the culprit after all. You want to maintain consistency in the investigation, even though you have some wiggle room as to the results.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Some player groups might choose not to react to any of the NPCs, because they're so focused on getting the "right" outcome to the case - they simply want to follow the clues and let those determine whom they suspect. Eventually, this leads them into a dead-end - the core clues in the scenario that aren't attached to a suspect are not directly incriminating; it's only when you add the additional layer of the suspect clues that they point to a single individual.

If this happens, encourage the players by asking them leading questions to turn them onto a particular suspect. Review what they know about the suspects so far and make suggestions until they throw out a couple of names so that you can start dropping the other clues. If they staunchly refuse to settle on a preference, just pick the two characters you enjoy playing the most and use them.

Some player groups might lock hard onto a suspect, refusing to believe that he or she couldn't have done it, even after they're revealed as the red herring. If their insistence is strong enough, you might have to go back on my previous recommendation and make that person the culprit anyway - often, if the players really have it in for a suspect, it really means they think that's the most fun suggestion. Go with that.

UNUSUAL AMOUNTS OF AWESOME

In rare cases, you may find that the PCs have uncovered the nature of the Terra Nova's weapon and know about the nanobots before they start questioning any NPCs, and pretty much restrict their lines of inquiry to those two things. If that happens, lock in the first two survivors they question as innocents right away, and find a convenient reason to have the third person on their list be missing.

During their search, pick the initial red herring clue for one of the remaining NPCs and float it to them, then have them find that NPC. Let that NPC be the red herring, and then choose the next NPC under their radar as the culprit. This lets you draw out the adventure a little, without hosing them for being awesome.

ADAPTING THE SCENARIO FOR SUBPLOTS

If you want, tailor the adventure so that one of the NPCs is a character mentioned in one of the PCs' subplots instead. This requires a little more work on your part as the GM, because you're going to have to come up with a new set of clues for that character.

For the innocent role, borrow as much of the information from whichever NPC you're replacing - most of those details are ancillary anyway, covering where they were at the time of the accident, what they saw, how they survived. The PC whose subplot you're using probably has enough other things to talk to this character about anyway.

For the red herring, you may need to lay a little more groundwork. The trick to keeping this from being boring is to give the NPC a reason to be withholding information that isn't related to the crime, but that he or she still considers a personal threat. The most interesting red herring is up to something, just not the case at hand. Look to the current write-ups for examples, and try to tailor the mischief toward whatever the relevant PC's subplot theme is.

For the culprit, establish some previous antagonism between the PC and the NPC. In this way, the case is the "big showdown" of the PC's subplot, and the NPC's motives for the crime reflect whatever theme the PC is dealing with.

ONE COOL RED HERRING TRICK

If the PC's have at least a positive relationship with the recurring NPC, use a popular trick from procedural TV shows and have the other survivors openly accuse that NPC of sabotage, leaving the PCs with the task of proving his or her innocence.

THE SUSPECTS

Of the forty or so people that the Terra Nova originally carried, only five have survived the disaster and are presented here for use as variable suspects. Their full write-ups, detailing how each of them works as a variable suspect in each role, start on page 75. In addition, you can find a reference to the initial clue which identifies them as either the red herring or the culprit in the individual room descriptions starting on page 60.

They are:

- ▶ *Cody Mason, the ship's chief systems engineer (page 75)*
- ▶ *Aime Antla, an entertainer in the twilight of her career (page 76)*
- ▶ *Theodora Simon, a vas mal physician and research scientist (page 78)*
- ▶ *Cheshire-U, a cybe programmer and idle billionaire (page 79)*
- ▶ *Enha Riverwend, a former crewmember now working as a diplomat (page 81)*



SCENES

Contract Briefing

Scene Type: Intro

The briefing happens while in translight, en route to the source of the Terra Nova's distress call. Tell the players that they're reviewing the notes of the contract before going to lowshift, and let them play it out however they choose - try to make the scene as interactive as possible and not just an infodump. If need be, have a suitably stuffy and officious representative from Tiara Cruise Lines on hand to interact with via translight communication.

- ▶ *(Players get this information automatically)* Two days ago, the Terra Nova luxury liner sent out a distress call, claiming that it was dead in space after a sudden dropout from warp and required evacuation of the remaining crew and passengers. The contract for the rescue operation comes directly from Tiara Cruise Lines and also stipulates a full investigation into the nature and cause of the disaster.

History (Combine): The Terra Nova is the last of the operating luxury liners for Tiara Cruise Lines, which was the premier company for pleasure cruising during the Combine's heyday. Many of the liners were attacked by the Mohilar during the War, and other simply succumbed to the ravages of age.

- ▶ *Booking passage on one of the vessels was considered a sign of status, and they were often hangouts for celebrities, businesspeople, and political figures - the social elite of the Combine.*

Forensic Accounting: Tiara's financial picture has been looking grimmer and grimmer since the War, and some of their business practices have been questionable as of late - namely, the cutting of employee wages and other benefits to pay the huge maintenance costs it takes to keep the Terra Nova running. In addition, they've been gradually lowering their safety standards

for a number of years, leaving the Terra Nova without a lot of the emergency and backup systems that would have been commonplace before the War. Because there's no central authority to complain about it now, no one's done anything to change that.

Industrial Design: The Terra Nova was a marvel of automation in its time, allowing the passengers unprecedented amounts of both privacy and space. Most of the systems are run by service robots, and it operates with a full crew compliment of only ten. It has a passenger compliment of thirty, which is very few people for its size - the ship was designed to feel like a personal, intimate getaway, and the low supply of "slots" on each voyage kept prices high.

Astronomy: If anyone asks about what's in the section of space where the Nova went down, the answer is nothing - it's not anywhere near any major planets or habitable systems. Current star charts show that the translight corridor they were on was labeled as a no-fly zone, due to an unusually dense cloud of meson shrapnel intersecting the warp tunnel. This is the likeliest explanation for the crash.

- ▶ *Obviously, by implication, they must navigate the cloud to reach the vessel.*
- ▶ *(2 pt.) If someone suggests spending to optimize their approach, allow it and say that doing so reduces the difficulty of passing through the cloud next scene.*

A Bumpy Approach

Scene Type: Hazard/Core

Once the crew drops into lowshift, meson shrapnel bombards their ship, requiring them to navigate the cloud to reach the Terra Nova.

The purpose of this scene is not, obviously, to prevent the crew from getting there - it's just to provide additional tension in the form of damage to the ship, as well as reminding them of a significant obstacle to the evacuation.

Navigating the cloud undamaged requires a Difficulty 6 **Helm Control** test (Difficulty 4 if they spent **Astronomy** points last scene); consult the rules for navigational hazards in the *Ashen Stars* core rulebook, page 119.

Regardless of their condition when they make it through, they must attach a tractor beam to the vessel before boarding. Don't worry about a second **Helm Control** test unless the PCs handily succeeded at bypassing the cloud - in which case, make it Difficulty 4.

- (Auto) *The Terra Nova looks like it has literally been cracked open, as though giant hands grabbed it and bent it in several places until it snapped. Where the rooms open up to space, corpses and furniture merely drift in the black, looking like so much dust against the backdrop of stars.*

Examining the ship's exterior allows them to obtain the following clues:

Forensic Engineering: The fractures on the hull are consistent with a sudden "fall" from translight - the ship simply wasn't a match for the abrupt change in momentum.

(Core) Industrial Design: There's something unusual about the pattern of the fractures - they correspond precisely to what would have been the most populated areas of the ship. Normally, ship hulls are designed to break away in the least vital sections, rather than the most.

Bio Signatures: The crew member identifies positive life signs for two humans, a vas mal, a balla, and a cybe. Of the forty people on the Nova, five have survived. Vitals are strong for all five of them, but the meson shrapnel cloud hides their exact locations on the ship.

Energy Signatures: The containment fields are working and stable, so the chambers that were opened to space are safe to be in now. Artificial gravity is spotty, however, with only a few areas of the ship showing consistent gravity fields.

- (Core) *The engine core gives off unusual readings of an unfamiliar kind. The core is not in any danger of detonation or anything like that, but it's definitely not reading like a starship engine should read. The meson shrapnel cloud prevents a more in-depth analysis from this far out.*





Decryption: The internal communication system is out, but the ship's computer is still sending intermittent internal transmissions. As with the engine readings, the meson shrapnel is interfering with an in-depth analysis.

The shuttle and cargo bay airlock is completely blown open, and the containment field would prevent the crew's shuttle from getting into the bay. The players must either choose to spacewalk to an auxiliary airlock or hack the bay's computer to let down the field so they can land. The latter requires a Difficulty 4 **Communications Intercept** test. The former requires no tests, but make a note of their method of entry for the concluding scene (see page 70).

Navigating the Terra Nova

Scene Type: Core/Alternate/Sub-Plot

There is no set order in which the crew is required to investigate the wreckage of the Terra Nova. They can proceed to any one of a number of discreet locales, including:

- ▶ *The cargo bay*
- ▶ *The bridge*
- ▶ *The guest suites*
- ▶ *The Grand Design, ship's main lounge and bar*
- ▶ *The engine room and reactor core*
- ▶ *The medical suite*
- ▶ *The security wing*
- ▶ *Ship's stores*

Of these, only the guest suites, the medical suite, and the security wing have stable gravity. A Difficulty 4 **Systems Design** or **Preparedness** test allows for the rigging of magnetic boots or something like them in order to assist with movement in the zero-G environments.

GMs are encouraged to have encounters from *Attack of the Drones* (page 67), *Avoid the Void* (page 70), or *Death Fields Galore* (see page 69) occur any time the PCs are in transition from one locale to another, or in a zero-G environment.

Of course, the Nova has more than just these rooms - in her prime, the ship had vast mazes of entertainment facilities, restaurants, holoentertainment pods, concert halls, gymnasiums, sports arenas, gardens and nature

walks, etc. If the crew insists on going to these places, be more than happy to oblige - but all they find are gaudy mausoleums, images of opulence twisted by the presence of the floating dead. Don't spend too much time with these areas, as there's nothing to find that's relevant to the case.

The crew encounters any of the NPCs in whichever locale you deem dramatically appropriate. Guidelines for playing them start on page 55. They're actively engaged in scavenging what remains of the ship's resources to survive, and have no way of knowing a rescue operation is coming, so feel free to play up the tension of the first encounter - moving figures in the dark, people trying to sneak around each other, etc.

WHO'S MET WHOM?

For your reference, here what the NPCs are up to when the scenario starts and where you're most likely to find them.

- ▶ Cody Mason rescued Aime Antla from the Grand Design, has checked on all the other guests at least once, and has been trying to preserve habitable space on the ship. He's likely to be in any of the stable gravity areas or walking in the corridors.
- ▶ Aime Antla sticks to her suite, where she knows it's safe. Although, you might also decide she's brave enough to raid what remains of the Grand Design for liquor.
- ▶ Theodora Simon is probably in the medical suite, but she might also be in any of the unstable gravity areas, looking for survivors.
- ▶ Cheshire-U is trying to rebuild the computer core. It might be in the engine room, the security suite, its own guest suite, or the bridge.
- ▶ ha Riverwend has been assisting Cody with emergency repairs and is likely roaming the corridors in the middle of an errand. The PCs might encounter the two of them as a pair, if you want to hurry with the introductions.

MAPPING THE TERRA NOVA

There's no detailed deckplan for the Terra Nova. The ship is enormous, despite its small passenger capacity, and the majority of the ship is irrelevant to the investigation. However, that isn't going to stop your players from wanting a map, so here's an abstract diagram of where the major plot-relevant rooms on the ship are relevant to one another. Presume that between each node in the diagram, there are other rooms and passages.

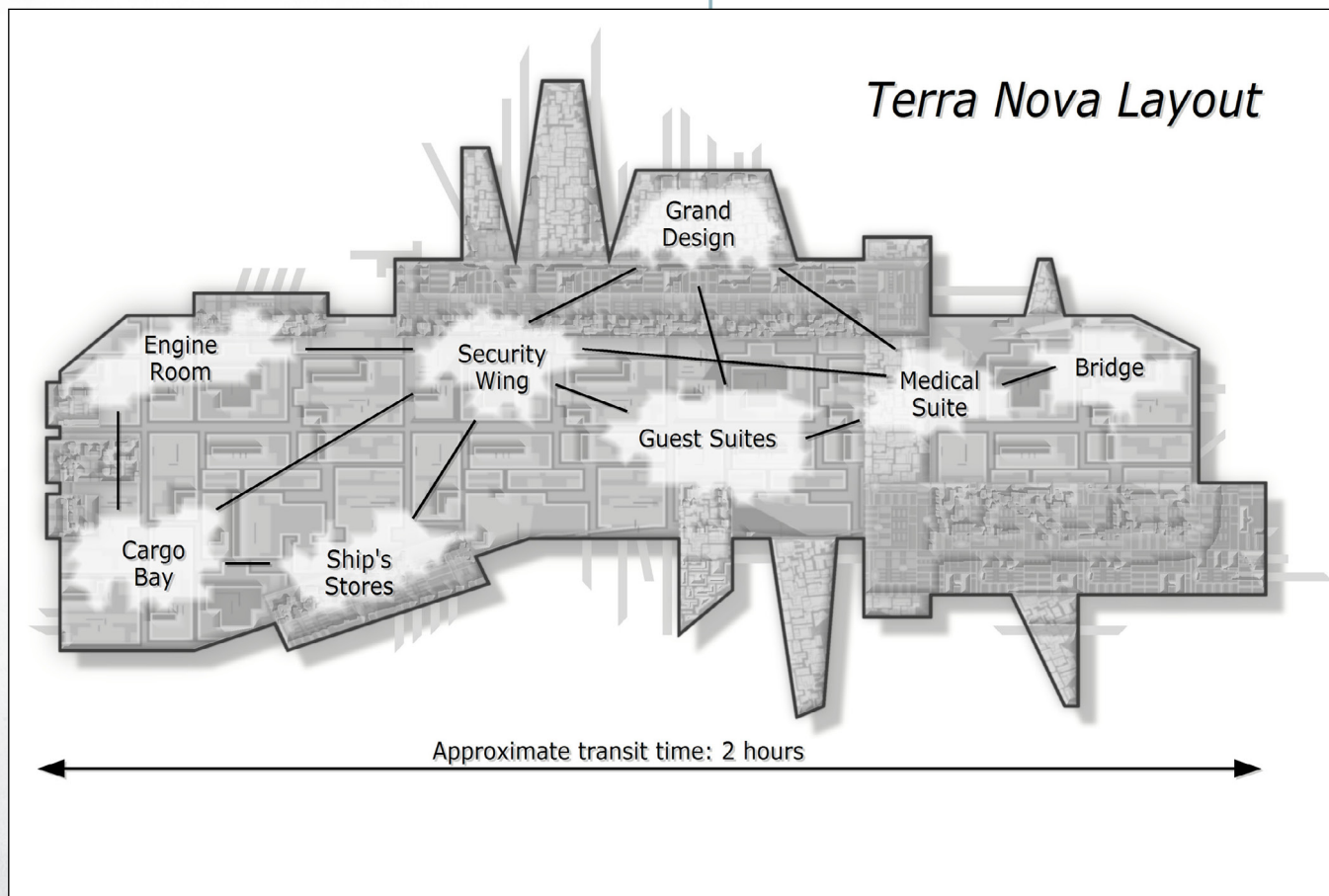
Going all the way from one end of the ship to the other probably takes at least two hours, given the general state of disrepair the ship is in and the lack of a working lift or tram system. Use that to ballpark transit times between the major locations.

The following clues are available in any of the corridors:

Data Retrieval or Decryption: The central computer core has fragmented, and none of the corridor terminals seem able to access the mainframe. The terminals are continually trying and failing to ping different parts of the ship.

Industrial Design: This is part of a failsafe mechanism that was popular in Combine ship designs from a few decades ago. In the event of an emergency, computer control decentralizes, giving each individual area control over its own systems and data, and nothing more. That way, a potential intruder or saboteur could not gain total computer control from one location.

Also, if any of the PCs ask about lifeboats, **Industrial Design** reveals that they're supposed to be placed at strategic locations along the ship's corridors, thus giving all passengers and crew equivalent walking distance to a lifeboat from any location on the ship. However, Forensic Engineering reveals that these





A MOOD-SETTING TRICK

If you want to emphasize the crew's isolation, consider telling the crew that any clues requiring the analysis of material take one or two whole intervals to fully process when found, given the meson interference on their tethers and their distance from any major communications buoys. This requires additional bookkeeping on your part, because you'll have to keep track of what clues go into analysis when, but if you think it'll effectively reinforce the mood or help you with pacing, go for it.

FLOATING CLUES

Here's a reference for the variable suspect clues in this location:

- ▶ ***Cody Mason as the Culprit:*** Decryption reveals that an anonymous crate labeled "herbs and spices" is falsely registered and is currently empty. Evidence Collection recovers a purchase order from it, revealing that Cody bought a shipment of the nanovirus for transport at the ship's last supply stop. The obvious conclusion is that he transported it to the ship in this crate.
- ▶ ***Enha Riverwend as the Culprit:*** All his supplies are being kept in a secure lockbox in the cargo bay, in a hidden compartment. Evidence Collection or Forensic Engineering uncovers the secret cache, which contains an initial programming sample of the nanobots, a copy of the falsified navigational data, and a sample of the poison used to kill the hailer.

Accounting clue from the opening scene, or allow them **Data Retrieval** to find a budget in the ship's computer showing Tiara's cost-cutting measures.

The Cargo Bay

The main bay airlock doors have been fractured beyond repair, a near mirror of a larger gap in the outer hull. Rows upon rows of cargo crates line the deck, magnetically locked to it by a standard failsafe mechanism, keeping the amount of floating debris at a minimum. The loading and unloading machinery lie still, giant metal scarecrows seeming to loom over a field of valuables.

Forensic Engineering: The airlock's fracturing is inconsistent with the damage that the outer hull suffered - under normal circumstances, there should be no reason why the airlock would also have cracked.

(Core) Evidence Collection: Examining the airlock damage more closely allows the collection of a fine white dust along the fracture lines.

(Core) Chemistry: Analyzing the dust shows it to be the material from the ship's hull and bulkheads, but a certain chemical component of the alloy has literally been "eaten" out of it at the nanomolecular level, rendering it brittle and structurally unsound.

Data Retrieval: Nearly everyone on the ship has at least one cargo crate registered under their name, both guests and staff. The crew can access which crates belong to whom, in case they have to investigate a specific person later.

- ▶ *The last cargo crate to be accessed belongs to a balla passenger named Enha Riverwend, twenty minutes before the approximate time of the crash.*
- ▶ *(1 pt.) That name also comes up in the database as a former employee of Tiara Cruise Lines.*

lifeboats have all been dismantled or sealed. This is not sabotage, but the result of neglect on the part of Tiara Cruise Lines. Remind the PCs of the **Forensic**

The Bridge

Compared to most of the rooms on the Terra Nova, the bridge is a small and modest affair, as crew comforts were clearly a secondary priority in its design. Little more than a pod jutting out of a blister on the fore end of the vessel, it seats six crewmembers semi-comfortably, with stations for the captain, hailer, pilot, and wrench. The ship has no defenses, so the final crew positions are filled by an environmental systems monitor (assistant wrench) and an event coordinator for the various shipboard activities.

Now, like so many other rooms on board, it lies open to space, its dome cracked like an egg.

FLOATING CLUES

Here's a reference for the variable suspect clues in this location:

- ▶ *Enha Riverwend as the Red Herring:* Decryption used to analyze the captain's log shows that Enha sent an encrypted diplomatic request to have the ship drop from warp and change course before the accident. The captain agreed and brought the ship to the spot Enha designated, and when it resumed warp, it followed the false navigational data right into the meson shrapnel cloud.

(Core) Astronomy: The ship's navigational databanks are out of sync with the real galactic maps. The ship's records show the warp tunnel through this area clear, whereas the real maps show the meson shrapnel cloud and the no-fly designation.

(Core) Data Retrieval: The pilot made a course change in response to the falsified data, cruising in lowshift to a new warp tunnel that took them right through the meson cloud.

- ▶ *(Core) The emergency containment systems were hacked into an hour before the crash. It did not happen from the bridge, but from remote access.*

(Core) Decryption: The communication data from the navigational satellites was hacked and altered in

the middle of download, an hour before the crash. It's likely that this is what prompted the course change. This did not occur on the bridge, but through remote access.

(Core) Evidence Collection: The fracture lines on the bridge contain more traces of that same white powder from the cargo bay clue. If the crew goes here first, put that clue here instead.

(Core) Holo Surveillance: A crew member can use the security footage to reconstruct the events on the bridge prior to the crash.

- ▶ *The hailer began to show signs of stomach discomfort during his shift, and eventually logged out of his console approximately two hours before the crash to report to medical. He set the communication system onto an automated routine.*
- ▶ *No one was aware of any of the computer sabotage that occurred during this time.*
- ▶ *The wrench, Cody Mason, was not present during this shift.*
- ▶ *When they were thrown out of warp, the bridge cracked open and the containment fields did not immediately come on. Everyone was either sucked into space, died from vacuum exposure, or was killed from forceful collision with a bulkhead. The containment fields activated after a one-minute delay.*

The Guest Suites

Almost a self-contained hotel in the aft starboard section of the ship, the guest suites were designed to create the sense of having a private condo in space. Each of the forty suites are made for individuals or couples, and contain a broad array of amenities so as to be indistinguishable from a luxury flat on most civilized worlds. Holo displays allow for the viewports to show a variety of sceneries and vistas from across the galaxy; there's even an option to "open the window" and let in a variety of scents and sounds in, artificially created by the environmental system.

Forensic Engineering: The evidence of structural sabotage is most prominent here. Some of the rooms have a hull breach and some do not, and the groupings are too selective to be random - the crash should have compromised the whole wing.



(Core) Evidence Collection: The white powder on hull breaches mentioned in previous scenes is also here.

Industrial Design: The mandate for customer privacy has kept monitoring devices limited to flat video and only in corridors - there is no monitoring of individual rooms. However, the staff does monitor access to the suites, so that they know when the guests are in and out of their rooms.

FLOATING CLUES

Here's a reference for the variable suspect clues in this location:

- ▶ ***Aime Antla as the Culprit:*** In her suite, Forensic Engineering reveals that a panel has been hastily cut out of a corner of the floor. Inside it, a small device is plugged into the computer cabling, which Downside reveals as a standard delivery mechanism for network sabotage, usually from the delivery of hostile nanomachines.
- ▶ ***Theodora Simon as the Red Herring:*** Evidence Collection reveals that among her personal belongings, she has a sample of a toxic substance that proves, upon testing with Chemistry, to be the exact same one that was used on the hailer.
- ▶ ***Cheshire-U as the Red Herring and the Culprit:*** In this case, both Cheshire-U's clues are either in its suite or on its person.
- ▶ ***Red Herring:*** The same trace element that the nanobots left behind in the ship's hull (see page 62), is also embedded in the structure of Cheshire-U's cybernetics, which the crew discovers on any cursory examination using Bio Signatures. They also find samples collected in his suite with Evidence Collection.
- ▶ ***Culprit:*** The nanobot technology is literally already a part of Cheshire-U - once the crew knows what to look for, discovering this is almost trivial if the PCs re-examine Cheshire-U itself or anything that it has come into electronic contact with, like the computer systems in its suite. Any relevant use of Bio Signatures, Energy Signatures, Decryption, Forensic Anthropology, or Forensic Engineering reveals this.

(Core) Data Retrieval: The last access to the computer system was a routine check on the status of the passengers; the hull breaches correspond precisely to occupied rooms. The intent to kill is clear.

- ▶ *There is one exception to the above clue; the suite belonging to Cheshire-U (page 79) managed to survive, for unknown reasons.*
- ▶ *The crew can also access, from here, which suite belongs to which passenger. This may become important as the PCs investigate the survivors more thoroughly.*

Cybe Culture: Cheshire-U is one of the oldest known cybe units still active. It (no longer identifying with a gender) is responsible for the creation of a balancing algorithm for economic markets that helped the Combine partially stabilize the economy in the wake of the War.

The Grand Design

The ship's main lounge is mostly decked out in dark woods and elegant, marble-esque tiling, with the seating mostly sectioned off into private nooks. This creates an intimate, inviting atmosphere that belies the size of the room. A vaulted ceiling shows off an artistic display of beams that create a fractal across the length of it. A generous bar anchors one end of the room, opposite a performing arts stage and dance floor.

Gravity is not functioning, creating a kaleidoscope of floating debris - silverware, cocktail glasses, bottles, napkins, etc. The hull has not been breached, however.

Anthropology: A dominant design methodology from each one of the Seven Peoples (except the cybes and vas mal) has been incorporated into the architecture of the lounge, in order to provide a broad sense of familiarity.

FLOATING CLUES

Here's a reference for the variable suspect clues in this location:

- ▶ ***Aime Antla as the Red Herring:*** Holo Surveillance tells the PCs that Aime was the last person to see the hailer before he went on shift, according to piecemeal security footage. They shared a meal and drinks. She is clearly trying to seduce him during the meal.

Data Retrieval: Every other passenger left the bar sometime before the crash, except one - Aime Antla. She was present in the Grand Design when the crash occurred. Her current whereabouts are unknown.

History (Human): Aime Antla is a famous entertainer from the pre-War era, dominating almost every popular medium. Her career declined during the War, and she has not made a significant comeback since.

The Engine Room and Core

A spindly assortment of maintenance hallways and gangplanks surrounding the central core assembly, the engine room is now one of the hardest areas of the ship to traverse, given the lack of artificial gravity. In addition, this section has one of the largest breaches in the hull, making it look like the whole bay was butterflied open to space.

Moving about without catching the edge of a platform is extremely difficult - ask for Difficulty 4 **Athletics** tests to get from the entry to the core assembly uninjured, or make any other significant distance movement. Failure takes a die of damage. If the PCs have prepared some countermeasure (such as magnetic boots), then ignore this test.

In addition, if something dangerous occurs in this room, increase any movement-related difficulties by 2.

(Core) Evidence Collection: The white powder noted in previous scenes is also here.

Energy Signatures: The crew can examine the engine core readings in more detail now. It appears to be generating an energy bubble that is currently blanketing the Terra Nova. This field resembles the quantum energy bubble that the engine would normally create for warp travel, but it resonates on a different frequency.

- *If the crew has already encountered the "death fields" (page 69), give them additional information - the fields "piggyback" off this energy bubble to cut into space-time.*

Industrial Design: The machinery that's generating the bubble is intrinsically bound to the normal engine workings - there's no disabling one without disabling the other, which would pretty much kill everyone on board, including the crew.

Explosive Devices: The bubble generator seems to have a trigger mechanism, not unlike that of a detonator, only larger. This would suggest that the engine core itself has somehow been weaponized. You cannot determine from here what would trigger the device.

Data Retrieval: The only person logged in here at the time of the accident was the wrench, Cory Mason. According to the terminal data, he was monitoring his bridge station from here. His whereabouts are unknown.

If a player asks about using **Systems Repair** to muck about with the bubble generator, say that once they start working on it, they quickly realize that they'll need a schematic to make any headway with it, given that the technology is wholly unfamiliar.

The Medical Suite

The Nova's medical facilities have been extremely well-maintained, remaining state-of-the-art and able to easily cater to the needs of all the Seven Peoples. Recent additions include full cybernetics and virology stations, as well as monitoring beds programmed with vas mal physiology. Forcefields and holographic/auditory privacy screens can hide each bed from the others, allowing complete patient isolation while maintaining an open layout.

The medical suite has a hull breach, but one that's too small to have pulled anyone out into space, and the equipment is still fully functional.

One of the beds has the corpse of the hailer strapped to it, confined beneath a stasis field.

(Core) Evidence Collection: The crew can collect the white powder from the hull breach, as in previous scenes.

- *After the crew has uncovered the toxin that killed the hailer (see below), they can use this ability to isolate a sample from the victim's blood for later reference.*

Data Retrieval: The chief medic's report has two notable pieces of information - the diagnosis of the hailer, and a duty roster that gives clearance for passenger Theodora Simon to be working in the clinic, despite the fact that she is a guest and not



an actual staff member. She is limited to working on administrative tasks, such as records organization.

- ▶ *The official diagnosis for the hailer is death from natural causes, due to a previously undiagnosed gastrointestinal condition.*
- ▶ *Theodora was logged in to the clinic computer when the disaster occurred. Her whereabouts are unknown.*

Vas Mal Culture: Theodora is a medical researcher who came into galactic prominence recently because of her work on maintaining quarantine conditions in the field.

(Core) Forensic Anthropology: A more thorough examination of the hailer reveals the following details.

- ▶ *The medic's diagnosis is wrong. A very carefully concealed toxin is in the victim's tissues and bloodstream, designed to emulate the condition from the official diagnosis. This toxin is the actual cause of death.*
- ▶ *Time of death was approximately an hour before the crash.*
- ▶ *The hailer still has undigested food in his system, as well as evidence of light alcohol consumption.*

(Core) Chemistry: The toxin that killed the hailer requires ingestion, most likely delivered through tainted food or drink. It can be created by altering the chemical structure of a common inoculation pack given to Combine children, which nearly all medical facilities carry standard.

Downside: The ease of the toxin's construction and the difficulty in tracing its effects conspire to make it popular among criminals.

The Security Wing

Another utilitarian, modest layout like the bridge, the security offices are wedged into a small L-shaped hallway, with a front desk, armory closet, computer terminal, and brig cells. The hull is not breached and gravity remains stable.

- ▶ *(Auto) The armory closet is open and missing a single disruptor pistol. No signs of forced entry are detected.*

FLOATING CLUES

Here's a reference for the variable suspect clues in this location:

- ▶ ***Cody Mason as the Red Herring:*** Decryption tells the PCs that a strange backdoor has been hacked into the computer system, which they trace to Cody's login ID.

History (Combine): This area is considered to be more of a necessary backup than anything else - most of the security needs on the ship are handled by security drones that are computer-controlled. Each of the cruise liners only carried a small contingent of security personnel.

Industrial Design: The drones would be manufactured as needed from 3D printing templates in the ship's stores.

Decryption: The security computer normally sends an encrypted command routine to the drones as standard procedure, but the entire network has been taken off-line.

- ▶ *(2 pt.) If a player wants to reactivate the security network, ask for a spend. Once that happens, it becomes patently obvious that some kind of strange virus has infected the system and messed up the command protocols, rewriting them in real-time. This signals the nanobots to defend themselves; immediately go to an instance of Attack of the Drones on page 67.*

Data Retrieval: Given the current state of the computer system, protected security data is easier to access.

- ▶ *(1 pt.) There is a hidden file buried behind what look like schematics for the Terra Nova, which show that the "official" blueprints are concealing several features of the vessel. A network of hidden access tunnels allows quick movement between all areas of the ship, and the real schematics contain the full scope of the engine core modifications.*
- ▶ *(1 pt.) The bubble generator is, in fact, weaponized, triggered to start a chain-reaction as a response to hostile attack. At full strength, it*

would create a dense, scattered field of space-time disruptions that would destroy the ship and any significant objects of mass within 100 AU. Random "death fields" would continue out to a light-year, making the entire region effectively uninhabitable and impassable in sublight or warp.

- ▶ If the players have already had a "death field" encounter (page 69), then explain that this would be a much larger version of what they've seen, making the ship into the cosmic equivalent of a nuclear bomb.
- ▶ Armed with this information, a player could theoretically try and disarm the bubble generator in the engine room. Doing so is a Difficulty 10 Systems Repair attempt, failure at which results in taking the main engine offline as well, killing off life support and containment. Warn the player of the incredibly high difficulty of this roll and the potential consequences of failure.
 - Succeeding at this test effectively shuts down the "death fields", as well as any last-ditch self-destruct plans the culprit might enact in *This Ain't a Rescue, It's an Arms Race* (page 70).

Ship's Stores

A 3D printing emporium decked out like a boutique shopping mall, the ship's stores offer a variety of souvenirs, artwork, designer clothing, and other luxury goods for discerning passengers who want a memento or two of their trip. A smaller bay shunted off to the back of the main printing kiosks handle the practical needs of the ship, creating uniforms, table settings, service drones, and the like.

Though the hull is not breached here, gravity is out. The civilian kiosks are not functioning, but the staff kiosks seem to be running at full tilt.

FLOATING CLUES

Here's a reference for the variable suspect clues in this location:

- ▶ **Theodora Simon as the Culprit:** She created the nanobots herself, from scratch. After the PCs encounter them for the first time and study them, they discover a material match to one of the 3D printers in Ship's Stores, which was accessed with Theodora's login ID.

Data Retrieval: The databanks from the operational kiosks show that the ship is auto-constructing several more security drones than normal, possibly as a distress response to the crash.

Decryption: (2 pt.) For a spend, one of the crew can hack into the command terminal to investigate further - this reveals the same nanovirus as in the security office and generate the same response.

Communications Intercept: One of the crew can attempt to shut down the production of the security drones. This is a Difficulty 10 test, failure at which results in an attack similar to the Decryption spend above, and locking out the terminal from further intrusion.

- ▶ Succeeding at this leaves the culprit with no drones available to personally confront the crew with in *This Ain't a Rescue, It's an Arms Race* (page 70).

Attack of the Drones

Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction/Core

One unique feature of the Terra Nova is its use of security drones rather than armed personnel. The drones are little more than elliptical pods with disruptor ports sticking out of them, which float about via localized thrusters which allow them movement in any direction. Normally they use disruptors only, but are programmed to collide with opponents in a fight if need be (hence, the **Scuffling** rating).

Drones like these are extremely rare, as the costs in material and maintenance to deploy drones over time quickly outstrips the expense of simply paying a guard. It is a testament to the opulence of Tiara's operations during the heyday of the Combine that they were able to implement such a system.

The saboteur is using the nanovirus to reprogram these drones. They are now hostile to the PCs.

At any time when you deem it dramatically appropriate, spring a security drone attack on the PCs. Here are some guidelines for when that's a good idea:

- ▶ *When the PCs are transitioning from area to area in Navigating the Terra Nova, and the pace is lagging.*



- ▶ After the PCs have encountered and interviewed a majority of the NPCs at least once.
- ▶ Whenever the PCs discover one of the clues that "locks" in a suspect as a red herring (see page 55), or discovers any clue associated with the culprit.
- ▶ Whenever the PCs are in a zero-G room (basically, anywhere that isn't the guest suites, the medical suites, or the security wing). This creates a -2 Hit Threshold penalty for PCs, because their movement is unreliable.
- ▶ When text in the previous scene calls for it.
- ▶ Whenever the PCs are hanging out with a survivor you've already locked in as an innocent (see page 56), whom the drones will also target during the battle.

There is at least one drone per PC; if that seems not to be tough enough, add as many more as is necessary to create a real challenge. Security drones always go down for the count after going to 0 Health.

The security drones have the following relevant stats:

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

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: -1

Shooting Weapons/Damage: Disruption Pistol +1

Hit Threshold: 4

Typical Tech: none

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: 0

Savvy Modifier: irrelevant

They are programmed to spend 2 points on all attacks until they run out of points. They have been reprogrammed to use lethal fire only - under normal circumstances, they would default to non-lethal disruption fire.

Presuming the Laser crew prevails against this attack, they can examine the remains of any of the wrecked drones.

(Core) Forensic Engineering: The drones are infected with nanobots that are being used to reprogram their friend-foe recognition software.

(Core) Evidence Collection: The crew can collect a sample of these nanobots, now deactivated, for further examination.

(Core) Decryption: Hacking into the nanobots' programming reveals that they are responsible for eating the trace materials in the hull to weaken it at strategic points, and for reprogramming the emergency containment fields to delay their activation during the hull breaches. For all practical intents and purposes, they are the "murder weapon" used on the Terra Nova.

- ▶ (1 pt.) *They are also infecting the computer systems in the security wing and ship's stores to create a small army.*
- ▶ (2 pts.) *They are also engaged in weakening the hull around the engine core. Forensic Engineering follows up on this clue if the crew has the schematics from the security wing, to show that once finished, the whole engine block could be "popped out" of the bay with a minimum of effort.*

Reprogramming the nanobots requires a Difficulty 10 **Communications Intercept** or **Systems Repair** test. The PC only gets one shot at this; failure causes the nanobot sample to self-destruct. If successfully hacked, the nanobots provide a free pool of 4 points for any General Ability use that involves computer systems or electronic devices.

Death Fields Galore

Scene Type: Hazard / Sub-Plot

The secret anti-Mohilar weapon hidden in the engine core has partly, but incompletely activated as a result of the crash. Thus, the entire ship is blanketed in a quantum bubble that weakens the bounds of space-time. At random intervals, the weapon sends out a secondary pulse that triggers a localized version of its normal effect - sudden distortions of space-time that utterly annihilate anything caught inside them.

As with the security drones, this is another way for you to add suspense and tension to the investigation, as well as to clue the crew in that not everything on the Nova is as it seems. Look to the guidelines in Attack of the Drones for when to spring this on the PCs.

Give a chance warning for when one of the events is going to occur. Ask for a 1-pt. **Energy Signatures** spend, or allow anyone with **Sense Danger** to make a Difficulty 4 test. Either one detects something foreign in the area, a quantum instability that is Not Right, or a general feeling of wrongness in the environment, tingling at the skin.

Then hit them with the phenomenon - there's an electromagnetic hum, and then something literally seems to claw into reality and leave coruscating blue gashes in it that consume everything in their path. If they were forewarned, avoiding a run-in with the death fields is a Difficulty 4 **Athletics** test, Difficulty 6 if not. Failure inflicts a die +2 of damage.

The only option is to escape, which requires another Difficulty 6 **Athletics** test, with the same consequences for failure.

Once they've escaped, they can collect the following information about what happened:

Energy Signatures: Some sort of odd resonance field is blanketing the ship, weaker in parts and stronger in others. The energy pulses "piggyback" on this field to cut holes into space-time.

- ▶ *They also correlate that the engine core is generating this resonance field when they examine it more closely in the engine room (see page 65).*



Kinetics: The damage left behind from the “death fields” is far superior to any disruption technology currently possessed by the Seven Peoples - what they touch simply ceases to exist in our universe, as though it had never been, leaving no burn marks or trauma.

Avoid the Void

Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

The murderous nanobots have another way to try and kill PCs - by dropping the containment fields in any of the rooms that have a hull breach (see page 63), venting the atmosphere and sucking anyone within into space.

A Difficulty 4 **Athletics** or **Sense Danger** test is required to brace oneself against something to prevent getting sucked out of the room. Failure throws the hapless PC into the gaping jaws of deep space. The rules for vacuum are in *Ashen Stars*, page 81.

Because all of the rooms on the vessel have their own isolated computer controls, a PC can bring containment back up using a Difficulty 4 **Communications Intercept** test. A PC can make this test provided s/he has previously passed the test required above. If this test fails, everyone in the room has to make another Athletics test against the suction force.

After five rounds of this, the suction force stops, but everyone is now exposed to vacuum. Again, a Difficulty 4 **Communications Intercept** test allows everyone to escape the room and dive back into a corridor with atmosphere.

If they escape, they pick up a clue.

Decryption: The command protocols of this console were remotely overwritten just a few moments before containment shut down. On its face, this seems impossible, given that the computer access is now decentralized. No evidence in the system remains as to what could have sent the computer commands now.

- *Unless, of course, the PCs have already encountered the nanobots in a previous scene. Then, the culprit is obvious.*

This Ain't a Rescue, It's an Arms Race

Scene Type: Conclusion

Eventually, if all goes well, you'll have created a nice passel of danger for the PCs, gotten them into some interesting interactions with the cast of potential suspects, and locked in a culprit. Now you're ready to conclude the scenario.

In every case, the culprit's plan is to use the nanovirus to literally carve out the engine core from the Terra Nova, hack into the crew's ship, steal it, and tow the engine core away. Don't waste time between finding the last clue and starting this scene - one follows up on the other in suitably dramatic fashion.

Depending on how the PCs got on board, the scene starts in one of two ways: either the nanovirus tries to hack into the control systems of the crew's shuttle and attempt to fly it out of the bay, or the nanovirus rides the tractor beam all the way back to the ship and tries to disable the auto-destruct mechanism.

Either way, the crew is going to get a blaring headset warning about this. Seconds later, the Nova's alert sirens start to peal like mad, and any nearby computer shows that the ship is registering another hull breach in engineering. The crew has only minutes to act.

Dealing with the Nanovirus

Any crewmember with **Communications Intercept** can attempt to go into battle with the nanovirus to keep it from taking control of everything. Getting to the shuttle for this battle is a matter of getting down to the bay. If they space-walked over, a crewmember is going to literally have to do a space jump out of the airlock to get back onto the ship - this is a Difficulty 4 **Athletics** test by default, though someone might come up with a creative way to allow testing another skill.

(**Note:** Clever PCs might ask to try and jury-rig the comm system on their ship to do this remotely; allow this with a Difficulty 6 **Communications Intercept** test.)

Once situated, the crew enters hacker-to-hacker combat. Use the full default value of the PC's **Communications Intercept** as the equivalent of his or her “**Health**” for

the purposes of the conflict. The players attack with either **Communications Intercept** or **Systems Repair** (by temporarily shutting down systems infected by the nanites and trapping them there). More than one PC can participate in the conflict but all incoming attacks always target the "lead" character (i.e. the one with the highest **Communications Intercept** score).

The nanites attack with a pool of 14 points and have a "**Health**" of 15. Any successful attacks from either party inflict a die of damage on the other.

If the PCs go to -12 "**Health**", the nanites succeed in locking them out of the system. If the PCs push the nanites to 0 "**Health**", they manage to render the nanovirus inert.

If the nanites have taken over the shuttle, they immediately launch (sealing any PCs inside) and use its command protocols to bypass ship's security. Once there, they'll leap into the ship and hack into it, diverting the tractor beam to the engine core. If the battle takes place on the ship, the nanites simply lock the PCs out of all consoles and divert the tractor beam.

No doubt, the PCs are not going to put up with being trapped in their own shuttle. Feel free to indulge any escape plans they come up with, and if they are willing to physically disable their own ship to stop the nanites, let them - just remind them that whatever damage they do now, they'll have to fix before they can safely leave.

Dealing with the Culprit

Some of the crew are going to have to go down to the engine room to deal with the culprit's attempted extraction of the core.

The first part of this scene is an action sequence, where the final round of reprogrammed security drones tries to make things hell on the crew on their way to the core. Earlier in the scenario (page 67), the PCs had an opportunity to shut down the production of new drones for the culprit's little army. If that's the case, then they only have to worry about two drones. If not, a whole squad appears, at least one per crew member if not a few more.

The news is not all bad, however - ignore any Difficulty penalties the characters face for being in a zero-G environment. Because the area is suffused with gangplanks and walkways, everyone is considered

AND SOMETHING YOU DIDN'T THINK OF...

Of course, players are a clever bunch and may come up with some other desperate plan. Be accepting of these ideas, and model them after the scenario given here - whatever they do, give them a risk of injury, but allow the plan to work automatically if successful. The point is not necessarily to kill all the PCs in the endgame, but make the challenge of getting to the culprit tangible.

to have significant enough cover to negate any movement penalties. In addition, these drones are hastily constructed; allow any PC who gets a margin of 4 or better on a successful hit an "insta-kill" on one of the drones, as they disrupt the interface between the drone and the nanites.

If things are going badly for the PCs, let them know that there is a last-ditch option that might allow them to secure victory - bringing down the containment field in the bay and tossing all the drones into space. This requires the PCs to either hack into the local computer system using **Communications Intercept** (Difficulty 4), or to simply bring down the containment field with concentrated disruptor fire (2 pt. **Kinetics** spend to know where to strike, and accumulate 20 points of damage - just have them roll damage every round, as the difficulty is negligible).

If they choose to do this, the plan automatically gets rid of the drones, leaving the PCs to worry only about getting sucked into space themselves. See *Avoid the Void* (page 70) for guidelines on how to handle this.

Finally, after all that trouble, they confront the culprit at the engine console. The culprit is wearing a pressure suit, ready to literally ride the engine core up to the ship and get away, presuming that the other nanite attack is successful. As a precaution, s/he is also holding a detonator trigger that Explosive Devices confirms will unlock the failsafe mechanisms on the weapon, allowing it to operate at full capacity, which will kill everyone.

Resolving this standoff depends on who the culprit is. The PCs can talk any of them down, usually on the provision of some promise from the crew.



A 1 pt. **Forensic Psychology** spend reveals the ideal path to take with each culprit if need be. Of course, the PCs are not obligated to handle this with talking, see *The Violent Solution* (page 74) below if need be.

Cody Mason

Cody's main interest is in seeing profit from the sale of the weapon technology. He has no ideological axe to grind - this act has already given him the revenge he wanted against Tiara Cruise Lines and the so-called privileged fools that have kept him down all his life.

If the PCs try to parley with him, he first demands their unconditional surrender. It won't take much to convince him that his position is more precarious than he thinks, however, especially if the PCs have managed to thwart the takeover of their ship.

Then he'll backtrack, offering the crew a side deal, cutting them in for 50/50 for the sale of the device. All he really wants is to be able to retire in peace on some backwater, knowing he has the bigcreds to live out the rest of his days. He also isn't particular as to the buyer, and will accept money from the Combine government, the black market, or even Tiara itself.

If the PCs accept this bargain, he takes every precaution to ensure he is not double-crossed, but he makes good on his word and allow the PCs to evacuate the remaining survivors.

A PC with **Inspiration** might come up with the idea of trying to convince him to turn himself in and get him to acknowledge the reality of all the deaths he's caused. A 3 pt. **Inspiration** spend gets Cody to see that the people he killed really didn't deserve it, and this has more to do with one man's pride than it is about justice. Broken and horrified, he'll stand down.

Aime Antla

Aime's story is perhaps the most tragic of the culprits. She was forced into these actions by unscrupulous people willing to use her as a tool and then a scapegoat. Just the fact that the crew has made it all the way to her has her panicked.

Any conversation with her quickly devolves into her protesting that she had no choice, and she explains the situation with her corrupt agent and whomever is

behind him. A combined 3 pt. spend from **Reassurance** and/or **Cop Talk** convinces her to stand down, on the condition that she can immediately hire the Lasers to go after the people who put her up to this and they accept the contract.

Under no circumstances does she accept being turned over to the authorities for her crimes, or any other alternative that does not allow her to go back to her life as a celebrity. She would rather die in a blaze of glory than be forced to live any other life but the glamorous one that has shaped her identity. If this stalemate occurs, the PCs need to enact *The Violent Solution* (page 74).

Theodora Simon

The vas mal doctor firmly, truly believes that this technology will yield concrete answers about the devolution of her species, and that her research can benefit thousands around the galaxy besides. For her, it is a question of simple mathematics - forty lives now compared to saving many others later.

That said, she's bluffing about her willingness to deploy the weapon. She values it and her own life too much to activate the detonator. A 1 pt. **Bullshit Detector** spend reveals this. She accepts any reasonable offer that allows her to study the device, even if it means resubmitting to Combine authority. She only took these desperate measures because she believed the Combine to be in active opposition to her research.

It takes a 3 pt. Negotiation spend to convince her that the PCs are genuine.

Cheshire-U

As the culprit, Cheshire-U is a religious fanatic. Make this apparent right away - it spouts the dogma of its nufait with fervor and energy and demand that the PCs stand down or be consumed by the primal forces of the universe. Unlike Theodora, thumbing the detonator is totally in keeping with its faith - the Artificers want to hasten the destruction of this corrupt universe, and while this would have less impact than it would like, it still counts as progress toward the goal.

The only way to get Cheshire-U to stand down is by convincing it that one of the characters agrees with its religious mission. This requires the character to be a cybe or have a significant amount of cybernetics

such that they could be mistaken for a cybe. Then, a 3 pt. Impersonate spend cements the act, to take on the demeanor of a devoted follower. This has to be the same character, however - another PC can't speak for the cybe character, or else the ruse won't work.

Other than that, only *The Violent Solution* (page 74) will do.

Enha Riverwend

Enha is the only culprit whose interest in the weapon is conventional - he has people he wants to use it on, namely, the tyrannical government of his homeland. He is completely desperate, and did this because he felt as though he was out of options. The rebellion doesn't have the resources to keep fighting, and the Combine authorities will not help him.

He doesn't fully understand the destructive potential of the weapon, however, and that using it anywhere near his homeland will also destroy the people he's trying to save. Any PC with **Industrial Design** knows this; convincing Enha of it requires a 2 pt. **Inspiration** spend.

Another tactic would be to try and get him to lose control of his emotion suppression, thereby making him an easy, unbalanced target. Goading him would require belittling the importance of his cause and the plight of his people, or insulting anything about his actions and choices. Valid choices for a 3 pt. spend are **Bureaucracy**, **Cop Talk**, or **Intimidation**. When he loses control, he'll make a stupid mistake, such as throwing the control device in a fit of rage or leaping over the console and charging the offending PC, allowing him to be dealt with easily.



The Violent Solution

In the event that the PCs declare their clear intent to destroy the device, or if the parley goes badly, they have no choice but to become violent.

The first thing the culprit does is activate the detonator. With a searing electric thrum, the doomsday weapon begins coming to life.

The culprit is not a terribly difficult combatant to subdue, especially with multiple Lasers in the fight. None of the suspects have any reason to have extensive combat training. Give the culprit **Shooting** 5 and **Health** 8, as well as three Poppers (*Ashen Stars*, page 134). The culprit is armed with the disruption pistol (+1 damage) stolen from the security closet (page 66), and takes the shortcut of NLD fire to put people down quickly, given that everyone's going to die anyway.

(If you really want to bring in one or two security drones, you can, but it's likely that plot device has overstayed its welcome at this point.)

Once the culprit is down, the PCs have to try and stop the weapon from detonating.

Any of **Systems Repair**, **Communications Intercept**, or **Battle Console** is sufficient for the test. The Difficulty is 8, but the crew can cooperate. They only get one shot at this.

- ▶ *Failure gives them time to get to their ship and get to warp before the weapon detonates. Any survivors who are not with the PCs die.*
- ▶ *Success gives them time to get to their ship, evacuate the survivors, and get to warp before the weapon detonates.*
- ▶ *Success by a margin of 2 or more allows them to shut down the weapon completely.*

Denouement

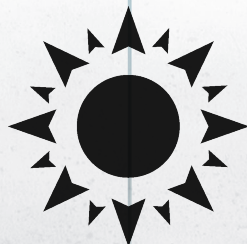
If the PCs enter any side deals to sell the weapon, they automatically succeed at the haggle and take the maximum value for the side deal. However, they also suffer an automatic 2 points of **Reputation** loss (roll the normal PR check afterward as well) as word gets around - almost no one would consider it conscionable to take personal profit from the sale of such a horrific weapon, regardless of background.

Tiara Cruise Lines pays the baseline on the contract for the incident report itself and hold the PCs harmless for any damages caused. Leaving with survivors qualifies for a bonus, and saving the vessel itself qualifies for a second bonus.

It is possible that the PCs want to keep the weapon for themselves or destroy it. Destroying it will result in an automatic Reputation gain of 1, before any PR rolls are made.

Keeping the weapon is an automatic Reputation loss of 1. It's also very likely to create future troubles, basically the equivalent of painting a bull's-eye on their foreheads. Its operational costs are beyond the Upkeep system's scope, and they would have to find extraordinary means of keeping it operational. GMs are encouraged to make having it as much of an enormous pain in the ass as desired.

Turning it over to the Combine authorities is considered a negative PR move in the Bleed; the general public consensus is that no one is capable of responsibly holding onto power of that magnitude.



APPENDIX A: SUSPECT WRITE-UPS

Cody Mason, Systems Engineer

Human, early 50's. Stocky build, short cropped red hair, blue eyes.

Background

Cody has been the systems engineer of the Terra Nova for almost his entire warpside life. He signed on with Tiara Cruise Lines from a technical internship right out of school, and has stayed with the ship ever since, ensuring her smooth running during the War. While he did not agree with how the company changed in the years following the War's conclusion, he found that he simply could not let go of his conduit to the stars. The ship is his life, and he knows her more intimately than even her original designers.

As the Innocent

Cody takes the sabotage of the Nova very personally, both because of his long relationship with her and because he feels guilty for not being able to stop what happened. He is potentially the most shaken of all the suspects, and reacts the most viscerally to any clue the PCs find.

He also carries a significant disdain for the guests, considering them privileged fools who don't deserve the level of service that they receive from the Nova's staff. This resentment has built up from decades of being treated as a non-entity, and he makes no bones about holding onto his blue-collar ethic. In the presence of any other suspect, he is mouthy and accusative.

A 1-pt. **Forensic Psychology** spend reveals that his attitude is largely a part of his overcompensating for his guilt. If confronted with that observation, he still mutters his protests, but otherwise simmers down.

He reveals the following information when interviewed:

- ▶ *He was in the engine room when the ship came out of warp. Because he had received no word from the bridge that anything was out of the ordinary, he wasn't monitoring the communications traffic and was caught totally unprepared.*
- ▶ *It was ship's night when the accident happened, so he technically wasn't supposed to be on duty. He's a chronic insomniac, however, and traded in the official duty schedule for one of his own making many years ago - it's common for him to be doing maintenance long after everyone else is asleep.*
- ▶ *He was almost killed when the engine room hull cracked open, but managed to duck into and seal off a supply closet to keep himself from getting sucked out.*
- ▶ *He is the one who managed to patch enough of the communication system back together to send the distress call. He's spent the time since the accident securing the few habitable areas left on the ship, a fact he takes pleasure in reminding the guests about.*

As the Red Herring

In the red herring role, his disdain for the guests turns into something more destructive - an active desire to get the payoff he believes he so richly deserves for putting up with their crap for his entire career. He knows that if he were caught stealing from the guests, he would be out of a job, and in the unpredictable environment of the drifting Nova, he isn't sure if they would retaliate.

- ▶ *Place the initial clue in the security wing (page 66). Decryption tells the PCs that a strange backdoor has been hacked into the computer system, which they trace to Cody's login ID.*



- ▶ *He claims that this is simply one of the security measures he conceived to protect the ship from attack. Bullshit Detector reveals that this is not the whole truth.*
- ▶ *His real purpose for using the backdoor is to hack into the financial accounts of the guests and siphon bigcreds from them, a small enough number from each to keep them from noticing until it was too late. He didn't touch the communications or navigation systems at all. A 1 pt. spend from either Downside or Reassurance reveals this; the crewmember in question manages to convince Cody that s/he sympathizes with his "blue-collar" status.*
- ▶ *The PCs can scan the engine room records with Data Retrieval to confirm this story - when the nav records were being falsified, Cody was deep into his heist. He couldn't have been working on both projects simultaneously.*

As the Culprit

Cody discovered the true nature of the Terra Nova after noticing discrepancies between the engine configuration and the blueprints. His bosses suppressed his inquiries, but this only convinced him that he needed to do more digging in the corporate network, and eventually he found the truth.

The nature of the cover-up appalled him, and his espionage put him at risk of termination. Gradually he came to feel as though Tiara didn't deserve to hold onto this technology, and that he was the only one who had a right to it - the guests have always been decadent, clueless fops, and the staff was just as bad as he had been, blindly selling out for a pittance. He intends to make off with the technology himself and use it to fund a healthy retirement, and then get out of the spacing life forever.

His shock at what happened to the Terra Nova is genuine at the beginning - though he knew intellectually that he would have to destroy the ship to enact his plan, the reality of her demise hit him harder than expected. Still, if she had to die, at least she died his way and not at the hands of a faceless company... that's how he justifies it, anyway.

- ▶ *These clues are in the cargo bay computers. Decryption reveals that an anonymous crate labeled "herbs and spices" is falsely registered*

and is currently empty. Evidence Collection recovers a purchase order from it, revealing that Cody bought a shipment of the nanovirus for transport at the ship's last supply stop. The obvious conclusion is that he transported it to the ship in this crate.

- ▶ *Once the nanovirus is discovered after a security drone attack (see page 67), the PCs find additional evidence in ship's stores (see page 67). Data Retrieval reveals that the hailer asked for a server bot (kind of an automated, rolling tray cart) to bring him a meal before the beginning of his shift. The unit was dispatched, but it did not go directly to the hailer's quarters - rather, it stopped off at engineering for a significant length of time first. This was the only opportunity for someone to have poisoned the hailer's food.*

Pertinent Abilities

Communications Intercept 12, Infiltration 4, Preparedness 5, Systems Design 6, Systems Repair 12

Aime Antla,

Washed-Up Entertainer

Human, mid-40s, long black hair, brown eyes, model's figure.

Background

When the Mohilar War broke out, Aime Antla was one of the most highly regarded figures in holoentertainment, having the kind of career that spanned mediums - she was an actress, a pop musician, a dancer, a poet, and a novelist. The War destroyed her career almost overnight as public attention turned away from more frivolous pursuits, and she was never able to recover. She's tried to resurrect herself through various media endeavors several times to no avail.

As the Innocent

Aime's concerns are almost wholly self-involved; she displays a shocking lack of awareness about the reality of the incident. Most of what she's interested in talking about is herself and her career, and she views the disaster as a mere annoyance. She seems disinterested

in anything to do with the case and wishes to be as little involved with the crew's gallivanting as possible, though she'll make a great show of this detachment.

A 1 pt. **Forensic Psychology** spend reveals she's doing this because she does not want to face the enormity of the death around her - a particularly cruel PC could force her to face it, but that causes her to melt down as her fragile exterior crumbles.

She reveals the following information when interviewed:

- ▶ *When the accident occurred, she was in the Grand Design, the ship's opulent bar and lounge. She had closed out the place, and claims to have been alone at the time. She claims she was working out a few numbers for her next stage show; Bullshit Detector reveals this is a lie. Flattery gets her to admit that she was drinking, and wasn't quite done with the evening after everyone else had left.*
- ▶ *The Grand Design was one of the few places that did not open to space during the disaster, so she survived mainly by accident. She stayed put until Cody found her and guided her back to the suites, where she's remained ever since.*
- ▶ *She claims she's here on her "grand comeback tour" at the behest of several investors who are interested in resurrecting her career. Bullshit Detector reveals that this is a lie, but she sticks to her guns on the story no matter what.*
- ▶ *In her suite, Forensic Accounting reveals that she actually purchased her own ticket and is not contracted for any performances on the ship whatsoever; this has not prevented her from putting them on anyway.*

As the Red Herring

Her desire to re-ignite her career has put her on a morally dubious path. Not only was she here on her own dime trying to be seen among the galaxy's luminaries, but she also had a publicity stunt in mind - she wanted to flood the interplanetary media network with news of her "grand comeback tour" starting on the deck of the Terra Nova, a lie convincing enough to put her once again at the center of the galactic stage.

To do that, she started a clandestine relationship with the ship's hailer, the only person with the resources and

training to make this kind of fakery seem real. She's an incredibly good actor when not under duress and had him eating out of her hand, drawing on his nostalgic fondness for her past glories.

- ▶ *Place the initial clue in The Grand Design (see page 64). Holo Surveillance tells the PCs that Aime was the last person to see the hailer before he went on shift, according to piecemeal security footage. They shared a meal and drinks. She is clearly trying to seduce him during the meal.*
- ▶ *She claims it was merely fan adoration, reminding the PCs once again about her extensive career. Again, Bullshit Detector shows this is a lie.*
- ▶ *If they search her suite, Evidence Collection reveals a data storage device that has the prototype for the false media campaign on it, co-engineered by her and the hailer.*
- ▶ *The above clue is leveraged; if she's presented with the device, she admits her real plan. She had no real affection for the hailer, but she was dependent on his expertise to do this media blitz and therefore needed him alive.*

As the Culprit

Aime discovered years ago that the Terra Nova was hiding secret technology from an old media contact, a former manager who booked tours with Tiara Cruise Lines. They dreamed up a plan to hijack the ship and steal it, and it sounded like the plot of a rousing caper holofilm - fake your way on, take over the ship's computer with nanobots, create a disaster, and make your escape with the secret tech in tow while everyone's distracted. They had a good laugh and she promptly forgot about the conversation.

Then her contact sent her the Nova's schematics, a list of black market tech dealers, instructions on what to do with the nanobots, and a contract.

She refused. This was crazy, and people could die. Would die.

Then her career went promptly to rock bottom. It had been bad since the War, but never this bad. Clients would simply cancel events with no explanation. Agents would blacklist her whenever she arrived at a new world. When she realized she'd drained her accounts enough to prevent her from getting back home to the Proper, she sent in the damned contract and used her last funds to book passage on the Nova.



She received the materials promptly thereafter.

Part of her hates what she's doing. But the alternative is having to live as someone other than Aime Antla, Star of Stars. No one is going to take that away from her.

- ▶ *In her suite, Forensic Engineering reveals that a panel has been hastily cut out of a corner of the floor. Inside it, a small device is plugged into the computer cabling, which Downside reveals as a standard delivery mechanism for network sabotage, usually from the delivery of hostile nanomachines.*
- ▶ *Holo Surveillance reconstructs the gaps in the footage from the Grand Design and shows Aime slipping something into the hailer's drink.*

Relevant Abilities

Business Affairs 4, Communications Intercept 5, Public Relations 10, Sense Trouble 10

Theodora Simon, Vas Mal Physician

Vas mal, age indeterminate, white hair, black eyes, looks like a Grey

Background

Like most vas mal, Theodora's ascent through what remains of the professional strata of Combine society came very quickly, almost as a formality - medical school in six months, fully licensed within the same year. She is a tireless and relentless researcher, and her work on controlling disease pathways in technologically disadvantaged situations is considered to be groundbreaking. She displays little interest beyond professional concerns, but this is not due to any kind of self-repression - she simply does not make an internal distinction between recreational and professional thought.

As the Innocent

Theodora pays attention to little else besides her work; she firmly believes that the key to understanding the devolution of the vas mal lies in xenobiological pursuits, and she finds the exploration of mortal limitations fascinating, if sobering. She only came onto the ship

in the first place because one of her human colleagues gifted her the tickets and she thought it might be rude to refuse. She has spent most of her time on the ship in the company of the medical staff, helping them out with menial tasks that she nevertheless finds utterly engaging.

- ▶ *She was in the medical bay when the disaster occurred, but became aware of the imminent danger via Timesight and made her way instinctively to a corridor that did not get exposed to vacuum.*
- ▶ *She considered her immediate objective the saving of lives, and thus wandered the ship in search of survivors. She was not able to save anyone beyond the five listed here, but has been on hand to provide first aid.*
- ▶ *If locked in as the innocent, she also provides any clues the team might need regarding the hailer's death, essentially substituting as a medic if the team needs one.*

As the Red Herring

Over time, her research proposals have gotten more outlandish and dangerous, at least in the eyes of the Combine government. She is determined to discover the nature of the vas mal's devolution through medical study, which includes applications of genetic manipulation and singularity creation, to understand the effect of exposure to multi-dimensional states on organic forms. Though she promised that her research would also create groundbreaking advances in the creation of stasis fields to quarantine highly contagious patients in an epidemic, the Combine refused to fund her research, and her battle with the bureaucracy resulted in the stripping of her medical license six months ago.

This has not stopped her from practicing medicine on the sly, however.

- ▶ *Place the initial clue in the guest suites (see page 63). Evidence Collection reveals that among her personal belongings, she has a sample of a toxic substance that proves, upon testing with Chemistry, to be the exact same one that was used on the hailer.*
- ▶ *She claims when pressed that she was independently investigating the hailer's sudden illness, suspecting it wasn't a gastrointestinal condition like the ship's medic thought. Bullshit*

Detector won't work (she's telling the truth, but don't say that - say it doesn't detect anything), and no other Interpersonal ability use gets her to change her story.

- ▶ *On the bridge, Data Retrieval used on the captain's log recorder shows that the captain received an independent diagnosis from Theodora about the hailer, but recommended it be ignored due to the fact that she is no longer licensed to practice medicine in the Combine.*
- ▶ *The above clue is leveraged; she'll tell her story when confronted with the evidence. The sample she has was resynthesized with samples from the hailer's blood; the PCs can confirm this with a simple use of Forensic Anthropology.*

As the Culprit

Theodora discovered the Terra Nova's secret in perhaps the most unlikely way: she saw it in a vision and knew immediately what it was. She does not know if it was some freakish accident of her Timesight or a sliver of her previous omniscience, but the impact of what she saw was undeniable - she knew instinctively that the Terra Nova had answers to questions that have plagued her relatively short mortality. She had to find it, study it, research it.

She never intended to deceive her colleagues. In fact, it was a shock to her that her inquiries to the government were so quickly repressed. A singularity generator of that magnitude could throw open the barriers between dimensions in a heretofore unsurpassed way, opening up undreamed fields of scientific progress.

When the government stripped her of her license and title to suppress her, she realized an uncomfortable truth: the Combine was her enemy. She booked passage on the Nova immediately and devised her plan during the journey. What she needed to do would cost lives, yes, but only the lives of the short-sighted.

- ▶ *She created the nanobots herself, from scratch. After the PCs encounter them for the first time and study them, they discover a material match to one of the 3D printers in Ship's Stores (page 67), which was accessed with Theodora's login ID.*
- ▶ *Similarly, once they've identified the poison used on the hailer, a search of the medical bay with Evidence Collection shows that the components*

used to make it were taken from their stock. Data Retrieval shows that they were signed out by Theodora using her medical credentials. (The staff didn't double check them.)

Relevant Abilities

Communications Intercept 5, Farsight 10, Medic 12, Preparedness 4, Psychic Vitality 10, Sense Danger 6, Systems Design 6

Cheshire-U, Independently Wealthy Cybe Coder

Cybe, 38 human years old, rapidly shifting multichromatic eyes and hair.

Background

Cheshire-U took on its (technically male, but so cybernetically enhanced now that it considers gender meaningless) mantle primarily because of its insatiable curiosity, and unlike many other cybes, has not changed it throughout its life. During the War it served as an electronic warfare specialist.

Shortly after the War, it was idly browsing the highly volatile state of Combine financial markets and realized that there was a fairly simple way to balance the Virtual Exchange. It wrote the program with the calculations overnight and released it to the interplanetary data network, along with some small investments as a test case.

The Combine immediately adopted the new exchange system. Cheshire-U's work was nearly flawless, and it became one of the wealthiest beings in Combine space in a matter of months. This has not really influenced it much. Wealth is, after all, just another data point among many, though it does value the freedom to travel the galaxy and study technology unhindered by practical concerns.

As the Innocent

Cheshire-U came aboard the Terra Nova for only one real purpose: to get its hyper-curious nose into everything regarding the ship's inner workings.



Though it is cordial enough to the other organic guests, it considers and refers to the ship as a person, consistently using the female pronoun in conversation, and talking about the damage in biological terms (the hull didn't crack, rather she was "cut open"; she was not "damaged", but "wounded", and so on). The moment that the PCs key it into the fact that the crash was not an accident, it becomes nearly obsessive about finding the culprit - to Cheshire-U, this act of "murder" resonates far more than the death of the hailer.

- ▶ *It was in the suites when the crash happened, recharging its cybernetics. It interfaced with the ship's computer and determined the safest place for it was its room, so it stayed there until Cody came by to check on it.*
- ▶ *It has spent nearly all its time since the crash trying to rebuild the computer core, which is the reason that the fragmentary evidence from databases and security logs is even available.*
- ▶ *If locked in as the innocent, it is likely that it demands to join the crew in the hunt for the culprit.*

As the Red Herring

In the red herring role, Cheshire-U's curiosity has a deeper motive - it is a staunch adherent of the Fibrous Sacrament, and it feels a religious obligation to "adopt" (read: steal) technology from wherever it can and engineer the tech into cybernetic enhancements that will bring it closer to its desired transcendence. It does not particularly care for many of the splinter groups in the faith, and its actions are relatively benign, but it has had several misunderstandings with authorities in the past over its blatantly criminal actions.

The Terra Nova represented too rich a target for it to pass up, but it knows now that its faith is not going to win it any supporters if it gets caught.

- ▶ *The same trace element that the nanobots left behind in the ship's hull (see page 62), is also embedded in the structure of Cheshire-U's cybernetics, which the crew discovers on any cursory examination using Bio Signatures. They also find samples collected in his suite with Evidence Collection.*
- ▶ *The right combination of Interpersonal and Academic abilities convinces Cheshire-U to confide in a single crew member. It clams up when confronted, though a 1-pt. Forensic*

Psychology spend reveals that this is mainly because of the group setting, and the trick is to get it alone with someone.

- ▶ *Gaining its confidence requires a 1 pt. Reassurance or Respect spend, after which it admits to stealing ship technologies, but confess that it had nothing to do with the sabotage. It found the trace element already embedded in the ship's hull around its room, and found that to be a curious structural defect, so it reversed the damage. The compound was usable as insulation, so it incorporated some into its most heat-producing implants.*
- ▶ *Barring that, Forensic Engineering uncovers that it cut a small secret compartment into the wall of its suite to hide fragments of tech. This includes a sample of the inner hull material which has already been "treated" by the nanobots - it is clear that Cheshire-U absorbed the material when he assimilated technology from the hull.*

As the Culprit

As with the red herring background, Cheshire-U is a follower of the Fibrous Sacrament. However, it doesn't end there - it is also a radical member of the Artificer subgroup (see *Ashen Stars*, page 155). It is using the wealth it gained from its revaluing of the financial markets as a means to covertly fund terrorist organizations and espionage acts across the Bleed and the Proper, fomenting chaos to hasten the destruction of the current universe.

One of its vast intelligence networks told it about the weapon inside the Terra Nova, and it knew that a milestone had been reached in its efforts - the power to unravel space-time itself would surely hasten the end of days. It could trust this mission to no mere agent, and seeks nothing less than to interface with the technology personally, so as to spread this cosmic power among the other members of its faith.

- ▶ *The nanobot technology is literally already a part of Cheshire-U - once the crew knows what to look for, discovering this is almost trivial if the PCs re-examine Cheshire-U itself or anything that it has come into electronic contact with, like the computer systems in its suite. Any relevant use of Bio Signatures, Energy Signatures, Decryption, Forensic Anthropology, or Forensic Engineering reveals this.*

- ▶ *Part of the nanobots' programming was to change the molecular structure of the hailer's last beverage in order to create the toxin that killed him; they hacked the server bot to allow them access. Decryption reveals evidence of this programming if used in ship's stores (see page 67).*

Relevant Abilities

Communications Intercept 5, Enhancement Integration 5, Neural Rewiring 12, Surveillance 8, Systems Design 8, Systems Repair 8

Enha Riverwend, Balla Diplomat

Balla, mid-20s, reddish-brown hair, green eyes, tall and lithe

Background

Enha was born and raised on the planet of Justicar, one of the most deeply immersive synthworlds from the Combine's golden age. The inhabitants are balla who originally wished to hearken back to a simpler time in their history, when they did not have to engage in the deep emotional suppression of the present. The reality turned out to be harsh, as balla emotions run rampant quickly created a planet of savage, feuding nation-states. The ravages of the War isolated the planet, cutting it off from any hope of Combine restoration.

One of these nations recently managed to conquer most of the world, garnering enough resources to create a small space fleet and send people to the stars. Enha, an up and coming noble, was chosen as Justicar's representative. He managed to get a service internship with Tiara to serve as a crewmember on the Terra Nova; after two tours, he was finally allowed to journey as a guest and fulfill his diplomatic mandate.

As the Innocent

Enha is still getting accustomed to the ways of the Bleed - the best way to describe him is careful. He wants to engage other cultures and species, but he takes great care in telegraphing his intent and asking for the same, to the point of speaking his subtext aloud ("That dress looks extremely flattering against your figure, but you

should know I'm only telling you this as an aesthetic note and not to indicate carnal attraction."). He does have his own mor sohn now, and is fully trained in balla emotion suppression techniques.

- ▶ *He was in the cargo bay during the crash, trying to find an appropriate outfit to wear to Aime's next concert - because he's been on the ship so long, he's outgrown the closet in his suite.*
- ▶ *The cargo crates are programmed to magnetically lock to the floor in case of containment failure, so he survived by literally popping one open and climbing in. In retrospect, he considers it a poor decision, because if the fields had not come on eventually, he would have run out of air very fast.*
- ▶ *He has spent his time since the accident helping the engineer double-check the safety of what areas they could contain life support and artificial gravity for.*

As the Red Herring

Enha's surface naiveté hides something deeper - he is actually an operative for a small rebellion that wishes to return the planet to the ideals of the Combine. The nation that has taken over the planet is ruthless and totalitarian, a reflection of the Balla's darkest impulses, and they are slowly grinding the planet's environment into dust. There had always been a small group of people wishing to close the synthworld down, but they are now a full-fledged network of freedom fighters. Enha is one of their most highly placed agents, and he has managed to ride the coattails of nobility to get him into space, where he searches constantly for the resources to help his homeworld.

- ▶ *Place the initial clue on the bridge (see page 63). Decryption used to analyze the captain's log shows that Enha sent an encrypted diplomatic request to have the ship drop from warp and change course before the accident. The captain agreed and brought the ship to the spot Enha designated, and when it resumed warp, it followed the false navigational data right into the meson shrapnel cloud.*
- ▶ *Enha claims this was for a routine diplomatic communique, to put the ship in an ideal position to transmit a two-way signal. Bullshit Detector reveals this to be only part of the story. However, he refuses to cooperate if the Lasers have no other evidence against him; no other Interpersonal abilities get him to budge.*



- ▶ *If the transmission is traced from the computer in his suite using Decryption, it was sent to Justicar, but not to any royal channels. Instead, the transmission was targeting a small receiver on the outskirts of the dominant nation, something Downside reveals is much more suited for clandestine messages.*
- ▶ *One of the crates in the cargo bay is registered to him. It bears the seal of his world, and Evidence Collection finds a hidden compartment within it that contains details of the rebel cell network he is a part of.*
- ▶ *These clues are leveraged; when presented with either of the two clues above, he admits his participation in the rebel network and the reason for the rebellion. However, he has no knowledge or information about the sabotage attempt - the fact that the disaster occurred after his transmission is purely coincidental. Bullshit Detector confirms he's telling the truth this time.*

As the Culprit

During his internship as a crewmember aboard the Nova, Enha began searching for data that might be useful to aid the cause of Justicar's rebellion. He knew the Combine government's resources were stretched thin, and it was no surprise that a direct appeal to Ossa One for aid fell on deaf ears, caught up in committee. Every time the ship made port, he started reaching out to less scrupulous contacts, using the skills the rebellion had taught him to go Downside.

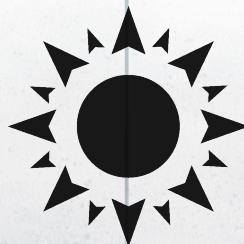
One info merchant seemed surprised when he asked about getting a hold of ships and weaponry, and told him that everything he needed was right under his nose.

He burned out all his finances for the information. Once he had the schematics, he realized that there was no way that anyone was going to just let him have the weapon. The price is terrible, but his planet is in anguish. There is no other way.

- ▶ *All his supplies are being kept in a secure lockbox in the cargo bay, in a hidden compartment. Evidence Collection or Forensic Engineering uncovers the secret cache, which contains an initial programming sample of the nanobots, a copy of the falsified navigational data, and a sample of the poison used to kill the hailer.*

Relevant Abilities

Communications Intercept 4, Emotion Suppression 10, Medic 4, Preparedness 5, Public Relations 8, Surveillance 8





STOWAWAY

&

PRE-GENS



STOWAWAY

DEMO GOAL

Your job is to give new players a fast 20 minute experience that feels like the best part of Star Trek, Firefly and Aliens put together. This requires a cinematic demo that stays rules-light, even as it explores the game's major mechanics and themes. A quick game like this gives the player the cinematic feel of *'holy crap we're all going to die,'* lets them save the day against high stakes, and lets them see how general and investigative skills work. Just be sure to split up the tasks between different PCs, and have only 1-2 PCs on any given task. Ignore all extraneous rules and skills and only focus on the relevant ones. Don't explain any rule until it actually becomes necessary in the demo.

DEMO SUMMARY

A jaggar serf (p. 198 of the *Ashen Stars* core book) has been sent from its mothership on a suicide mission to infiltrate and disable the players' ship. It has crashed its small shuttlecraft through the bulkhead, slipped inside and ripped apart wiring for the ship's propulsion and life support systems. It has also set a bio-explosive that will render the ship completely inoperable for hours, long enough for the jaggars to attack them without fear of resistance.

Ask the players to name their ship. The demo starts in media res with the sabotaged ship spiraling down towards a planet's surface. In 15 minutes the PCs have to **(a)** diagnose the sabotage, **(b)** save the ship, **(c)** kill or capture the Class-K alien entity, **(d)** disarm the alien's explosive bioweapon. One or two of the PCs are in the cockpit and piloting the ship, with the rest of the PCs in the engine room fixing the sabotage and killing the alien saboteur.

Players use their investigation skills to quickly diagnose the sabotage (with the GM saying flat-out *'you know how this*

skill works, so you see the problem immediately.) The players spend skills from their pools to fix the sabotage and quickly combat the alien. This combat is complicated by the shuddering of the ship and requires athletic rolls. Meanwhile, the pilot uses his skills to try and pull the ship out of its fatal dive, with successes buying time, and can influence the fight through technology on the bridge. As soon as the sabotage is fixed and the alien is defeated, the alien's explosives must be vented to space or disarmed. Once that occurs the crew is saved. If the explosive is not disarmed 10 rounds after the scenario starts, the ship is destroyed along with all life aboard it.

Action will proceed in rounds. All characters start in the correct locations. Explain how the mechanic works: d6, aiming for a normal target number of 4, with each spent point from a skill pool adding +1 to the roll. Other factors (such as the jostling of the ship) may raise the target number. Move quickly around the table, asking what the characters want to do and only explaining rules as necessary.

THE ALIEN MENACE

The Class-K creature is a jaggar serf (p. 198 of the *Ashen Stars* core book). Already injured from crashing its shuttle into the side of the ship, it now wishes to disable the ship for several hours, long enough for its horrible brethren to approach in another spacecraft and seize the ship. Having just successfully sabotaged power and propulsion systems, the jaggar has set an organic explosive device to explode in mere minutes. If it succeeds the ship will be helpless.

Jaggar Serfs

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

Scuffling Weapons/Damage: chatak +1 (a multi-bladed short sword made of chitin)

Shooting Weapons/Damage: disruption pistol +1 (non-lethal setting deactivated)

Hit Threshold: 3 (+1 if fully behind cover, +1 if in the dark)

Tech: Personal Bluffer (pixelates and jams surveillance tech and headsets), Tether, Rosetta Chip

Alertness Modifier: -1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: -2

The jaggar serf will scuttle through the dark beneath the engine bay, striking out at the characters to distract them until the bomb explodes. It will largely ignore the weapons officer and will focus on killing the engineer who is trying to fix the sabotage damage. This creates a secondary goal for the PCs as the weapons officer tries to keep the engineer alive.

The goal of this demo is to make the players excited about the game. If the players take down the jaggar easily and anti-climactically (unlikely due to the dark and plentiful cover, but possible), and you have enough time, that's an ideal moment for a second unexpected jaggar serf to rise up directly behind a PC. Use your best judgment on this and err on the side of a shorter demo.

SETUP

- ▶ 2 players: The Wrench and the Gunner are in the crowded, confusing space beneath the engine room. Assume a NPC Pilot who stays off-camera.
- ▶ 3 players: The Pilot is in the cockpit. The Wrench and the Gunner are in the crowded, confusing space beneath the engine room.
- ▶ 4 players: As 3 players, and add the Stratco to the engine room area. He has some skill as a medic.
- ▶ 5 players: As 4 players, and add the Hailer to the bridge.

No miniatures or battlemat are needed for combat. Instead, describe the space and make up any detail needed. All PCs have disruption pistols (page 143 of *Ashen Stars*)

Read Aloud

Your ensign looks worried. 'Sir, it's worse than we thought. The alien shuttle pierced the side of the ship. We've locked off oxygen loss, but something alive is

loose down there. It's in the engine room, and...! The ship shudders from explosions somewhere aft, alarms start blaring, and all the cockpit lights flicker off. '... and I think it's trying to sabotage us.'

You're aboard your ship [ship name]. You're now in a rapidly decaying orbit around planet Chan-3 and the ship can't survive entry into the atmosphere. Your crew has at least three goals in the next few minutes before everybody dies: diagnose and fix the sabotage. Capture or destroy the Class-K alien threat, and find out if he left behind any surprises. Pilot the ship out of danger.

Go.

The Cockpit

The cockpit is cramped and slightly grungy. When the demo begins only emergency lighting and backup systems are working. The sensor screen that dominates the forward wall flickers with static as it shows the swirling tornado clouds of Chan-3. Sensor alarms indicate that the ship is in a deadly spiral down towards the planet.

While the cockpit begins with audio and visual contact with **Engineering**, the alien's Personal Bluffer will quickly disrupt this unless someone in the cockpit takes steps to override and restore communication.

The Pilot, and possibly the Hailer if there are five or more players, begin in the cockpit.

Cockpit Goals

- ▶ Slow the ship's out of control dive, giving the others time to restore power to engines and life support. The ship will hit the atmosphere and rip apart in 5 rounds if not maneuvered towards safety. **Astronomy** is used to understand that it's possible to skip the ship across the top of the atmosphere like a stone off the surface of a lake. A difficulty 5 **Helm Control** success is required to achieve this, giving an additional 10 rounds (i.e. the rest of the demo) of safety.
- ▶ Steady the ship to reduce shuddering and bouncing that is making every other task more difficult. A difficulty 4 **Helm Control** success allows normal difficulty targets for the rest of the demo. If the ship is not steadied, everyone on the ship must make difficulty 4 **Athletics** checks each round or have their difficulty targets for that round increased by +1.



Example: *The pilot decides not to steady the ship. Down in Engineering the Wrench must make a difficulty 4 athletics check or have his difficulty targets for fixing the sabotage increased from 4 to 5. If he's clumsy, he better spend those points!*

- ▶ Identify the threat. **Bio Signatures** can be used from the cockpit to identify the alien species and give its location. If the jaggar serf is using its Personal bluffer, a 1 point spend is required to overcome the interference. If this is not attempted, the Pilot can not reasonably affect the fight (unless the player comes up with something else clever.)
- ▶ Understand the alien. A PC with **Xenoculture** who asks about jaggars should be told a bit about them, such as that they occasionally use bio-explosives to disable hostile ships and that there is probably a very large ship full of hostile ones nearby. If disabled, the ship will be invaded within the hour.

- ▶ Help during the fight. Once sensors are used to locate the jaggar serf, ship systems (including minor force fields or robotic fuel maneuvering arms, whatever you like) can be used to corral or trap the alien. This requires a difficulty 4 **Systems Design** roll each round it is attempted; success will move the alien a meaningful distance or prevent it from moving for one round.
- ▶ Identify the bio-explosive. Once the alien's little present is discovered by PCs, the pilot can use **Explosive Devices** to identify it as incredibly dangerous. It can then be safely moved to an airlock or (for a 1 point spend) remotely disarmed.

Beneath Engineering

After physically crashing a shuttle through the ship's bulkheads - briefly describe the wreckage, sealed-off behind shimmering emergency force shields - the jaggar serf headed straight to the engine room. There it ripped apart the controls for life support and propulsion.



The area beneath the ship engines is dark, cramped and crowded. Flashing lights cast unlikely shadows. across bulky equipment, and wiring panels are ripped open, their exposed wiring sparking and sizzling in the darkness. PCs beneath Engineering start in audio contact with the cockpit, but this quickly cuts out due to the alien's Personal Bluffer. As described above, the Pilot or Hailer will need to override this interference.

The Wrench and Gunner begin beneath Engineering; they may be accompanied by the Medic and the Stratco if there are many players.

Goals

- ▶ **Identify the Problem:** A PC with **Forensic Engineering** understands that the sabotage isn't sophisticated; it is clear that something ripped open a wiring conduit and ripped apart data and power cables to the engines and life support systems. Given enough time it can easily be repaired; since the crew doesn't have much time, it can probably be quickly jury-rigged.

Assuming, of course, that the hiding alien doesn't kill the Wrench while he's working.

- ▶ **Fix Life Support and the Engines:** Temporarily repairing life support and the engines takes 1 success for each, at a Difficulty Number of 4; however, the PCs suffer a +1 penalty due to darkness until life support is turned back on, and (depending on athletics checks) possibly an additional +1 unless the Pilot can hold the ship steady. Meanwhile, the alien will be attempting to kill the PC doing the work. Do not tell the PCs the difficulty, but do describe how it is difficult to work while menaced by an alien monstrosity in the bumpy dark.

Fixing Life Support will restore lights, making the alien easier to see. Fixing the engines will allow the Pilot to steer the ship out of immediate danger, removing the need for constant athletics checks.

- ▶ **Find the Alien:** The jaggar serf is sly, but not intelligent. It hides in the darkness above the ripped apart wiring, waiting for prey. A Difficulty 6 **Sense Trouble** (due to the darkness and the jaggar's natural stealth) will alert the PCs to danger seconds before the alien attacks. See page 77 of the core book for Surprise and Cover rules.

- ▶ **Fight the alien:** The jaggar already knows it is on a suicide mission, but will try to stay alive long enough for the bio-explosive bomb to detonate. It will try to scuffle against armed opponents if it thinks it can get close enough, and it will snipe from darkness against an opponent who excels at hand-to-hand combat.

After the initial assault the jaggar will dart into darkness and use the ship's engine as cover as he shoots at the Wrench making repairs. It will also try to circle around and attack again. As the GM, make the player feel stressed and harassed as they try to fix the engines despite being attacked. The jaggar can be brought down in only two shots from a sidearm; try to make sure it dies with style, allowing the PCs to feel heroic.

As always, allow clever PC tactics the chance to succeed. for instance, the Pilot may be able to locate the alien on internal sensors and use the ship's systems to help neutralize it. If so, let the player describe how it works.

- ▶ **Find the explosive:** Hidden in the corner of the room is a bio-explosive that looks like a crackling, bubbling seed made from chitin. This chitinous pod is a mixture of virulent chemicals and bio-poisons that reacts explosively with air. It will explode 10 rounds after the scenario begins, taking out the engine room and everyone in it if it is not already disarmed.

A difficulty 3 **Sense Trouble** will alert a PC to its presence. Any PC with **Explosive Devices** skill can determine that it is very close to detonating. A 1 point spend from **Explosive Devices** will delay it long enough to get it safely to an airlock; a 2 point spend will safely disarm it.

WRAPPING UP

The scenario is over when:

- ▶ The PCs have successfully killed the alien, fixed the sabotage and neutralized the bio-explosive
- ▶ The ship plunges into the atmosphere (5 rounds after scenario start if not corrected by the Pilot)
- ▶ The bio-explosive explodes (10 rounds after scenario start)
- ▶ The demo runs out of time

When the demo finishes, answer any questions for the players. The Ashen Stars core rulebook is available to buy on the Pelgrane Press website - www.pelgranepress.com

PLAYER



ASHEN STARS



NAME : SPECIES : Human

DRIVE : GROUNDSIDE POST :

HIT THRESHOLD : 4 WARPSIDE POST : Wrench (Systems Officer)

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Botany	...1...	.....	.....
History, Combine	...1...	.....	.....
Linguistics	...1...	.....	.....

INTERPERSONAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	...3...	.....	.....
Bureaucracy	...1...	.....	.....
Downside	...1...	.....	.....
Reassurance	...3...	.....	.....

TECHNICAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Astronomy	...1...	.....	.....
Bio Signatures	...1...	.....	.....
Chemistry	...1...	.....	.....
Data Retrieval	...1...	.....	.....
Decryption	...1...	.....	.....
Energy Signatures	...1...	.....	.....
Explosive Devices	...1...	.....	.....
Forensic Engineering	...2...	.....	.....
Holo Surveillance	...1...	.....	.....
Imaging	...1...	.....	.....
Industrial Design	...1...	.....	.....
Kinetics	...1...	.....	.....

GENERAL ABILITIES	RATING	POOL
Athletics	...8...	.....
Business Affairs	...2...	.....
Ground Craft	...6...	.....
Health	..10..	.....
Infiltration	...3...	.....
Preparedness	...4...	.....
Scuffling	...6...	.....
Sense Trouble	...4...	.....
Shooting	..10..	.....
Systems Design	..10..	.....
Systems Repair	..12..	.....

You're absurdly protective of your ship. You know you don't need to, but she's your responsibility to keep running smoothly. The last time someone stowed away on board and tried to hurt her, you responded... badly.

WEAPONRY

You have a disruption pistol.

PERSONAL ARC

1/

2/

3/

PLAYER



ASHEN STARS



NAME : **SPECIES :** Human

DRIVE : **GROUND SIDE POST :**

HIT THRESHOLD : 3 **WARPSIDE POST :** Pilot

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Anthropology	...1...	.....	.....
Archaeology	...1...	.....	.....
Botany	...1...	.....	.....
Geology	...1...	.....	.....
History, Human	...1...	.....	.....
History, Kch-Thk	...1...	.....	.....
Vas Mal Culture	...1...	.....	.....
Xenoculture	...2...	.....	.....
Zoology	...1...	.....	.....

INTERPERSONAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	...1...	.....	.....
Flirting	...1...	.....	.....
Inspiration	...1...	.....	.....

TECHNICAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Astronomy	...2...	.....	.....
Bio Signatures	...2...	.....	.....
Chemistry	...1...	.....	.....
Energy Signatures	...1...	.....	.....
Explosive Devices	...1...	.....	.....
Holo Surveillance	...1...	.....	.....
Imaging	...1...	.....	.....
Industrial Design	...1...	.....	.....
Kinetics	...1...	.....	.....

GENERAL ABILITIES	RATING	POOL
Athletics	...6...	.....
Ground Craft	...5...	.....
Health	..10..	.....
Helm Control	..10..	.....
Preparedness	...2...	.....
Scuffling	..10..	.....
Sense Trouble	...6...	.....
Shooting	..10..	.....
Shuttle Craft	...4...	.....
Surveillance	...4...	.....
Systems Design	...3...	.....
Systems Repair	...5...	.....

You're a hotshot pilot who loves to show off. No one has more confidence in your abilities than you do, and it's justified; you know this ship like the back of your hand. You know what she can do. Anyone who damages it is in for a world of trouble.

WEAPONRY

You have a disruption pistol.

PERSONAL ARC

- 1/
-
- 2/
-
- 3/
-

PLAYER



ASHEN STARS



NAME :

SPECIES : Kch-Thk

DRIVE :

GROUND SIDE POST :

HIT THRESHOLD : 4

WARPSIDE POST : Gunner (Weapons Officer)

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC

History, Kch-Thk ...1...

INTERPERSONAL

Bullshit Detector ...2...

Cop Talk ...3...

Interrogation ...4...

Intimidation ...5...

TECHNICAL

Evidence Collection ...3...

Explosive Devices ...3...

Kinetics ...3...

GENERAL ABILITIES

Athletics ...9...

Battle Console ..10..

Health ..12..

Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk) ...6...

Preparedness ...3...

Scuffling ..12..

Sense Trouble ...6...

Shooting ..13..

Surveillance ...4...

You are effectively a 7 foot tall battle-trained locust, and you are the ship's troubleshooter. That means that when there's trouble, you shoot it. Or rip it apart with your claws. You aren't particularly picky.

WEAPONRY

You have a disruption pistol.

PERSONAL ARC

1/

2/

3/

PLAYER



ASHEN STARS



NAME : **SPECIES :** Human

DRIVE : **GROUND SIDE POST :**

HIT THRESHOLD : 3 **WARPSIDE POST :** Hailer (Communications Officer)

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Anthropology	...2...	.....	.....
Archaeology	...1...	.....	.....
History, Combine	...1...	.....	.....
History, Human	...1...	.....	.....
Linguistics	...1...	.....	.....
Xenoculture	...2...	.....	.....

INTERPERSONAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	...1...	.....	.....
Downside	...1...	.....	.....
Flattery	...3...	.....	.....
Flirting	...3...	.....	.....
Impersonate	...1...	.....	.....
Reassurance	...1...	.....	.....
Respect	...2...	.....	.....

TECHNICAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bio Signatures	...1...	.....	.....
Data Retrieval	...1...	.....	.....
Decryption	...1...	.....	.....
Explosive Devices	...1...	.....	.....

GENERAL ABILITIES	RATING	POOL
Athletics	...5...	.....
Communications Intercept	...9...	.....
Filch	...5...	.....
Health	...9...	.....
Helm Control	...2...	.....
Infiltration	...5...	.....
Medic	...2...	.....
Preparedness	...5...	.....
Public Relations	...5...	.....
Scuffling	...5...	.....
Sense Trouble	...4...	.....
Shooting	...9...	.....
Surveillance	...6...	.....
Systems Design	...2...	.....
Systems Repair	...2...	.....

Your friends love you and strangers call you sleazy but that's only when you've beaten them out of something they want. You're smart, fast, and brutally competitive. For you, every interaction is a competition... even if the other person doesn't know it.

WEAPONRY

You have a disruption pistol.

PERSONAL ARC

1/

2/

3/



ASHEN STARS



NAME : **SPECIES :** Human

DRIVE : **GROUND SIDE POST :**

HIT THRESHOLD : 3 **WARPSIDE POST :** Stratco (Strategic Coordinator)

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Forensic Accounting	...2...	.....	.....
Forensic Psychology	...1...	.....	.....
History, Combine	...1...	.....	.....
Law	...1...	.....	.....
Linguistics	...1...	.....	.....
Xenoculture	...1...	.....	.....

INTERPERSONAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	...1...	.....	.....
Bureaucracy	...1...	.....	.....
Cop Talk	...1...	.....	.....
Downside	...1...	.....	.....
Impersonate	...1...	.....	.....
Inspiration	...1...	.....	.....
Negotiation	...3...	.....	.....
Reassurance	...1...	.....	.....
Respect	...1...	.....	.....

TECHNICAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bio Signatures	...1...	.....	.....
Decryption	...1...	.....	.....
Explosive Devices	...1...	.....	.....
Forensic Anthropology	...1...	.....	.....
Imaging	...1...	.....	.....
Kinetics	...1...	.....	.....

GENERAL ABILITIES	RATING	POOL
Athletics	...6...	.....
Business Affairs	...5...	.....
Ground Craft	...2...	.....
Health	..10..	.....
Medic	...7...	.....
Naval Tactics	...6...	.....
Preparedness	...6...	.....
Public Relations	...8...	.....
Scuffling	...9...	.....
Sense Trouble	...6...	.....
Shooting	..10..	.....

You're the ship's business manager, medic, and the closest thing to a captain it has. You're a two-fisted lawman who isn't afraid to talk his way out of trouble. But if that doesn't work, you're usually the one who starts swinging first. You've ruined more than one investigation contract that way...

WEAPONRY

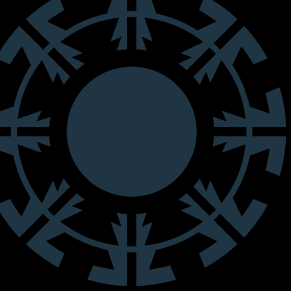
You have a disruption pistol fitted with a Gun Nanny (page 145 of Ashen Stars). When you turn your gun to lethal mode, the Gun Nanny warns you if taking the shot and destroying the enemy will damage your reputation.

PERSONAL ARC

1/

2/

3/



PELGA07

ASHEN STARS



THE JUSTICE TRADE

Now the war's over and you and your crew of freelance effectuators patrol the edge of civilized space, trying to pay the bills while you keep the peace.

But the competition in this line is fierce and sometimes you have to cut corners — which makes you wonder if justice bought and paid for is any justice at all...

The Justice Trade contains three adventures for Ashen Stars - The Justice Trade, Terra Nova and Tartarus. Written by Leonard Balsera, author of Profane Miracles and co-author of the smash hit Dresden Files; GUMSHOE designer and gaming luminary Robin D. Laws, and Bill White, author of The Big Hoodoo. It also includes a bonus twenty-minute demo game by Kevin Kulp.

- ▶ **The Justice Trade** When the PCs answer a distress call from the planet Cabochon, they become embroiled in the political machinations of two powerful figures who each seek to shape the future of the Bleed. Will they choose to do good and make the Bleed a better place - or to do well for themselves?
- ▶ **Tartarus** — In a devastatingly hostile environment, hard-bitten lasers - who know enough not to touch the gooey stuff or take off their helmets in an untested biosphere - investigate the demise of a survey crew doomed by the above mistakes.
- ▶ **Terra Nova** - The Terra Nova, last of the great luxury liners from the Combine's heyday, is dead, a victim of disaster now drifting in the space between worlds. The last of the survivors clutch desperately to life, waiting for rescue. All but one; who waits only for a chance to finish the job, uncovering a secret which the Terra Nova has kept hidden for decades.
- ▶ **Stowaway** — A twenty-minute demo, which is a great introduction to Ashen Stars and includes six pre-generated characters.



\$19.95

