

SERENITY ROLE PLAYING GAME



LET THE
GAMES
BEGIN

A TALE
IN THREE ACTS

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LET THE GAMES BEGIN

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HERE'S HOW IT IS

Humanity has found no shortage of things to do to spend their all too limited free time. Some of these things are new, like the Verbena Wind Race, but some of them are very, very old dating all the way back to Earth-That-Was. One of these older events is the team sport known as cricket. Second only to soccer in popularity on mankind's home world, it is a matter of fierce debate in the 'Verse which of the two sports is number one and which plays second fiddle now. Regardless of standing, cricket possesses a massive and dedicated fan base that is devoted to their teams. The competition over what planet has the best team is hotly contested and every year, the betting venues of the 'Verse make billions of credits during the finals of the 'Verse Cup and this year is no different. The passions invoked by the 'Verse Cup run so deep that the sabotage of opposing teams is not uncommon. Just weeks before the multi-planet mega-event known as the 'Verse Cup is about to begin, the Crew stumbles on a shady plan that would prevent the star player for their favorite team, the Salisbury Salamanders, from being capable of making the playoffs. The Crew suddenly finds that they have stepped into a hornet's nest of trouble and making sure their star player makes the finals is just one step in making sure that final is only in game terms and not the final thing they ever do...

GM NOTES

Let the Games Begin is a Veteran Level adventure in three acts of two scenes each. The introductory Act One consists of *Tailgatin'*

and *A Fine How do ya do*. Act Two transitions to *What's in it for me?* and *Block That Kick*, concluding in Act Three with *Game Face* and *The Main Event*. This adventure can be run with either more or less experienced Crews, but the GM will have to adjust the task difficulties along with the skills and number of NPCs encountered to provide a fair challenge to their players.

A STICKY WICKET

Few things enflame passions like sports and where passions run high there is usually money to be made. However, wherever there is money to be made, there are shady individuals that will find a way to shift the odds in their favor. The 'Verse Cricket Cup is something that has all three of these elements, passion, money, and shady individuals. Cricket matches are overseen by the Trans 'Verse Gaming Commission that monitors games for cheating and to ensure fair play. The one thing the TVGC does not have control over is the actions of third parties. There are many ways that a third party could influence the outcome of a match, some are blatant such as sabotaging a team's ship so that the team forfeits a match by being unable to attend. Some outside influences are more subtle such as spiking an opposing team's food so they become too ill to play. Regardless of how the matches are influenced the teams, and the TVGC, take extensive precaution to prevent third parties from interfering with the games. Usually those precautions are enough, sometimes they are not. Let the Games Begin is an opportunity for the Crew to become involved when those precautions fail...

ACT 1

SCENE 1: TAILGATIN'

"There are many things that arouse passions among the citizens of the Alliance. However, there are few that inflame the citizenry like the game of cricket. This time honored game that survived the Exodus from Earth-That-Was, along with soccer, are the two most popular sports in the 'Verse. Every planet and moon in the 'Verse has a team with the prosperous Core Worlds able to field several each. Regardless of means each team has their eye on the same prize, the coveted 'Verse Cup awarded to the winner of the annual playoffs. This final match, in an homage to the two founding planet of the Alliance, is always played on either Sihnon or Londinum and this huge event is consistently the highest rated program on the Corvue."

– Article: Origins of the game - Cricket Sports Magazine Spring 2518 edition

The Crew is, as usual, looking for work and for a change, which is unusual, they find a job carrying a legal cargo without the difficulties they typically encounter when looking for work. The start point where they pick up their cargo does not matter to the plot, so the GM is free to begin this adventure from anyplace they choose. All that matters is the Crew is looking for work. This requires an AVERAGE (7) Willpower + *Influence / Bargain* or EASY (3) Intelligence + *Influence / Streetwise*. If a PC chooses to use Friends in High or Low places, it only takes one Plot Point to find the cargo of industrial clothing (Steel toed boots, coveralls, etc). The exact amount of cargo is variable based on the size of the Crew's ship and will

constitute three-quarters of the ship's maximum capacity. (IE A standard Firefly has a 400 ton cargo bay and in this case, the cargo would be 300 tons) and will pay €1 per ton. The Cargo is going to the planet Salisbury and plotting the course is an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Piloting / Astrogation* to arrive in 485 hours with a Speed Class 1 ship. A failure on this roll increases the travel time by 10% and a Botch by 50% with an Extraordinary Success reducing time by 20%. The start point is again immaterial to the plot, but the travel time is fixed, save for the Crew's ship speed. The shipper pays the Crew half their money up front, with the second half to be paid on delivery.

The GM can insert any small side plot, foreshadowing, plot hook, or any other additions during the trip or the GM can simply rule the Crew arrives without incident. On arrival and touching down in Stonehenge, the capital of Salisbury, the cargo is quickly unloaded and the PCs are paid the rest of their money.

The PCs can take some down time if they choose or immediately begin looking for work, either way, they soon hear the news that the Salisbury Salamanders, the local cricket team will be playing in a semi-final match against the Persephone Furies. The winner of this game will travel to Hera to compete in the finals for the 'Verse Cup. The GM will either have to have previously established, or for a reward of two Plot Points, that one of the Crew is a huge cricket fan and the chance to watch a semi-final match is a once in a lifetime opportunity for someone that loves the game of cricket.

As trade on Salisbury has almost come to a complete halt as the merchants are caught up in cricket fever. The GM can again take this time to insert any plot hook or foreshadowing they want to add for later in their campaign. However, as the big game is tomorrow and there isn't a pressing need to be anywhere, the match will be a fine opportunity to enjoy some much needed entertainment. Even at this late date, tickets are only €2 each for the cheapest seats, good tickets can be had for €20 each, and excellent seats for €50 each. Characters can attempt to haggle to get the tickets for the good or better seats for less with an Opposed Roll of Intelligence + *Influence / Persuasion* versus the ticket seller's Willpower + *Influence / Negotiation*. A success saves 10%, an Extraordinary Success by 25%, a failure does not change the price, but a Botch angers the seller and increases the ticket costs by 10%. Once the Crew has tickets, they find that all of Stonehenge is having one large party to celebrate their team's amazing performance in the quarter-finals and the name everybody credits for the team's advancement to this point is Chang Rogers, the Salamanders' star bowler. Captures of him are everywhere and it seems everyone is wearing his jersey with his renowned number 14. Opinions on how this rancher's son has rocketed to fame abound, but one thing everyone agrees on is Rogers is nothing less than a prodigy and everyone is certain the Salamanders will be going all the way to Londinum and are a sure bet to be taking home the 'Verse Cup for the first time in the team's history.

The big party is an opportunity for the Crew to engage in role playing with the locals and is an excellent chance to earn a few Plot Points. The

GM can add anything they want to this part of the adventure, but the following are suggestions of events that can happen during the extended block party atmosphere around the stadium.

Chili (or other hot food) eating contest: This is a series of Opposed Rolls pitting the PC's Vitality + Willpower versus five other contestants (Use Browncoat Ally P180) using the same skill. Highest roll wins with the top three moving on to second round Next round uses even hotter food and each member is a -1 step to Vitality penalty. The highest two rolls compete in finals, which uses the hottest food of all and has a -2 step penalty. The winner gets bragging rights and a pair of €20 tickets to the match.

As the Crew wanders through the carnival like outdoor plaza, they encounter a scantily clad juggler that uses two daggers and a burning torch in her act. The juggler is her own barker and her shtick is an Opposed Roll of Intelligence + *Influence / Persuade* versus the PC's Willpower + *Perception*. If the woman succeeds, any PC that fails the roll is at a -1 step penalty to their Alertness against the woman's partner's Opposed Roll of Agility + *Covert / Sleight of Hand* pitted against the PC's Alertness + *Perception* to avoid being the victim of a pickpocket. Exactly what the PC loses depends on what they have on their person at the time of the theft, but should be limited in value unless the character is foolish enough to have high value items with them.

The extended block party has several simple games of chance, some dating back to Earth-That-Was, like popping balloons with darts and knocking over milk jugs with a ball to win stuffed animal prizes. Each chance costs one

platinum and will require a HARD (11) Agility + Athletics roll to win.

Once the GM has played out as many side plots as they want and the role playing has had a chance to run its course, go to the next scene.

ACT 1

SCENE 2: A FINE HOW DO YA DO

"You'd think with a government tryin' to squeeze every credit it can from the good citizens of the Alliance, they'd be more open to 'alternative' forms of makin' coin. Now since alternative can include all manner of shady schemes, I'm takin' specifically about gamblin'. Sure there is no shortage of places to make a friendly wager, but when it comes to sportin' events, they've got all sorts of rules about gamblin' establishments on the same grounds as the event itself. Why, is the question that comes to my way of thinkin' considerin' the convenience of bein' able to place a bet on a game while your standin' right there in the stadium. However, the hou zi de pi gu¹ what runs the Trans 'Verse Gaming Commission, just don't see things like regular folk, so makin' a coin or two on a game requires a trip to a casino or some creative means to relieve folk of cashy money what they want to hand right to ya."

– Frankie 'Twice Pipe' Whitaker, information broker, Persephone

On the morning of the big game, the weather is clear and the Crew joins the long file of fans entering the stadium. Based on the quality of the tickets the PCs purchased (or possibly won), they have either a short walk for the €20

¹ Monkey's butt

or €50 seats, a longer walk for the €2 seats. All seats have a good view of the playing field, but seeing anything on the pitch itself would be a challenge from the cheap seats if not for the huge Corvue monitors that give excellent coverage of the game.

The mood of the event and of the crowd is festive and the PCs are assaulted by a wide variety of sights and sounds as vendors hawk their various wares, consisting of programs, Salamander team merchandise, with Chang Rogers featuring prominently, and a bewildering array of foods. If a PC wishes to place a wager on the game, they will have to make an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Covert / Streetwise or Influence / Streetwise roll to locate a bookie that can take the bet. While betting on the game isn't technically legal, the police are more interested in the game and preventing pickpockets from working the crowd and will not interfere with PCs making a bet unless the character rolls a Botch and even then, it will be a stern warning to be more discrete.

Placing a bet requires a successful Intelligence + Perception / Gambling, Intelligence + Scientific Expertise / Mathematics, or Intelligence + Knowledge / Sports roll to win anything on the bet. The amount won is based on how the PC rolls. EASY (3) = Lose everything wagered, AVERAGE (7) = Break even, HARD (11) win 1.5 times amount bet, FORMIDABLE (15) double amount wagered, HEROIC (19) triple money, and increasing amount won by same progression for each level higher the PC rolls, up to multiplying by six for an IMPOSSIBLE roll.

The championship match proves to be every bit as exciting as the pre-game hype said it

would and the score seesaws back and forth as the two top rated teams battle it out. The home team is slightly outmatched as a whole by the Persephone Furies, but the Salamanders are more than compensated by the skill of their superstar player Chang Rogers and even the members of the Crew that are not really into sports get caught up in the exciting match. During the interval between the first and second innings, with the home team slightly ahead, the Crew rush to take restroom breaks and grab something quick to eat before making sure they are back in their seats in time to see how the game ends.

While the stadium is well designed, the capacity crowd is placing a strain on the restroom facilities closest to the PC's seats. Any PC that makes an AVERAGE (7) Recall roll (Intelligence + Willpower) remembers another restroom just off the beaten track they noticed on the way in. As the Crew near the restroom, they must make an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + Perception / Hearing roll to hear shouting coming from within. An EASY (3) Agility + Covert / Stealth will discretely approach the door and the shouting becomes more understandable. Two men are arguing and GM will read aloud what the Crew over hears.

First voice: "Now is the time, there's enough confusion during the intermission that we can make our move!"

Second voice: "Try not to be any dumber than you have to be fool! Don't you think Rogers' security will be on the lookout for just that sort of move?"

First: "Who are you calling a fool?"

Second: "If you have to ask that question, you've proven my point, now shut up and listen. Since Rogers' goons will be expecting trouble during intermission, we'll spike his water during the next inning."

First: "Like they won't see that coming."

Second: "Exactly, so when they spot the Mickey Finn, they'll think they are all manner of smart and will never expect that the real source will be in his towel."

First: "Which is where, as the humble team flunky, I come in."

Second: "Exactly, see you are learning. Now hurry up, the intermission is almost over and you've got to be in place before the inning starts."

First: "When do I make my move?"

Second: "I shudder to say this, but use your best judgment. My advice is to wait a good ten minutes after they've found the doctored water bottle."

First: "Okay Charles, this will fix those Sillymanders but good."

Second: "And make us a boatload of coin in the deal, now get!"

The PCs now realize they've got to move quickly if they are going to get out of sight. Avoiding detection is an AVERAGE (7) Agility + Athletics / Dodge or Agility + Covert / Stealth

roll to find cover. If this roll is failed, the PC(s) can attempt an AVERAGE (7) Willpower + *Influence / Persuade* to make a friendly "great game" sort of comment that is believable enough to prevent suspicion by the one stocky blonde man that exits the restroom. Failing this roll brings no immediate consequence, but when the Crew leaves the restroom, they will have to make an Opposed Roll of Alertness + *Perception* versus the Agility + *Covert / Stealth* of an unknown shadow. If the PCs succeed at this roll, they catch a glimpse of the blonde man, but before they can approach him, a crowd of fans rushing back to their seats gets in the way and the man vanishes in the crowd. The Crew is now aware of a plot to interfere with the results of the game by drugging the Salisbury Salamanders' star player Chang Rogers. The public announcement system breaks in at that moment informing the Crew that the intermission is over and the second inning is about to start. If the characters are going to do something, they will have to do soon. If the PCs seem reluctant to get involved, any PCs that received the Plot Point bonus to be Salamander fans can offer that there is a lot of money riding on this game and that there is bound to be a big reward for helping. Rushing to the Salamanders' sideline runs right into the extensive security that all cricket matches deploy. As keeping fans away from the team is a major portion of their job, the security is a stonewall of resistance to anything the PCs have to say, even if the Crew mentions a threat to Rogers, the security is supremely confident that they have the situation under control. Getting through to the obstinate guard is a HARD (11) Willpower + *Influence / Persuasion*

roll to get to speak to the head of security. If they fail the roll, the guards begin pushing the Crew away. As the Crew is talking with the security officers, they can see a flurry of activity on the sidelines and a water bottle being triumphantly shown to a beefy tank of a man that has got to be the head of security. If the PCs succeeded in the initial attempt, but even if they failed, since they now know who they need to get to, the PCs have a couple options. Obviously if they succeeded, they will be taken to the head of security. If they failed, they can either try one last frantic attempt to talk the guards into letting them speak to their boss. As they guards have already rejected the PCs once, this roll is a FORMIDABLE (15) Willpower + *Influence / Persuasion*. If this roll fails, the Crew has a more desperate option, namely, they can start a fight with the guards (initially there are twice as many guards as PCs with ten more guards arriving in ten combat rounds, use the Security Guards on P183) and use the confusion for one of them to reach the head of security. If the Crew doesn't want to try this option, they can also begin a pro Persephone Furies chant which will incense the nearby Salamanders fans and cause an even bigger disruption for the guards. Once the fight has started, if any PC can succeed in a HARD (11) Agility + *Athletics / Dodge* or Agility + *Unarmed Combat / Specialty* can slip through the guard's defenses and either speak directly with the head of security with a HARD (11) Willpower + *Influence / Persuasion* roll, or with an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Perception / Tactics* roll, they will think of grabbing a nearby water jug and tossing it over the towels.

Note: As it is critical for the rest of the plot for the PCs to succeed in either of these tasks, it is strongly suggested that the GM encourage the use of Plot Points to succeed, especially for the PC(s) that is/are fans of the Salamanders.

Either way, once the guards, or a hoard of reinforcements, have detained the PCs, the head of security has the towels scanned and sure enough, one of them tests positive for the poison Kortine. As the game has been extremely gripping, none of the fans noticed the disruption caused by the Crew, but the owner of the team has been informed and shows up where the PCs are being held, bursting into the room with an unreadable expression. Let the Crew sweat for a moment and read the following aloud if they stopped the sabotage by talking:

“So I hear you guys stopped some *hundan*² from tanking my team? Had the nerve to jump down the throat of team security and damn near disrupted the game in spite of everything.” He rages, but then suddenly his expression warms and he continues. “And it was a damn good thing you did, turns out you were right. I’m Jonah Ringeisen and I own the Salamanders. I like people that can think on their feet and aren’t afraid to take the bull by the horns. Meet me in my hotel tonight at 7PM and we can talk about...possibilities.”

If the Crew had to start a fight to stop the sabotage read the following aloud:

² Jerk

“So I hear you guys stopped some *hundan* from tanking my team? Had the nerve to whump on my security to do it and damn near disrupted the game in spite of everything.” He rages, but then suddenly his expression warms and he continues. “And it was a damn good thing you did, turns out you were right. I’m Jonah Ringeisen and I own the Salamanders. I like people that are decisive when the situation calls for it, aren’t afraid to take the bull by the horns, and can handle themselves in a tussle. Meet me in my hotel tonight at 7PM and we can talk about...possibilities.”

Ringeisen orders the Crew released, but unfortunately, before they can return to their seats, there is a mighty roar and it is clear that the Salamanders have won. The monitors quickly confirms this and shows the captures of Chang Rogers retiring the last of the Furies’ strikers to end the match and catapult the Salamanders to the finals which will take place on Hera in two weeks.

At this point the PCs can depart the stadium and prepare for their meeting with Ringeisen. The GM should now award the PCs 3-5 Plot Points and go to the next scene.

ACT 2

SCENE 1: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

"Salisbury is a right fine planet, pleasant folk and weather, and fairly reliable work; just what the average spacer is lookin' for when droppin' into a new place. Well, work was common enough prior to the U-War and all. Things on Salisbury is just as hard as in the rest of the 'Verse now. Bein' largely able to supply their own needs puts them ahead of the game compared to other worlds, so even though times is hard, they still gots enough to trade that work is still to be had for them as what works to find it."

– Pops McMurty itinerant spacer, long time Rim resident

After meeting the owner of the Salisbury Salamanders and being invited to his hotel for a meeting, the Crew will probably want to check out Jonah Ringeisen. An EASY (3) Intelligence + *Knowledge* will clue the Crew that, since Ringeisen is a public figure, the Cortex should have plenty of information on him. Checking the Cortex reveals that he is a tycoon of only moderate wealth, gained from hard work and a reputation for dynamic leadership based on making bold decisions. He is the founder of Game On Inc, a company that produces the most popular line of sports gear in the 'Verse. However, the change of fortune brought by adding the gifted Chang Rogers to his beloved cricket team has netted the businessman millions of credits in just the last eighteen months.

In addition, the information they were given by Ringeisen tells them that his suite is in the posh *Hotel du Mont Royale*, where he stays

whenever he is in town, his estate being fifty miles distant in the countryside. The prohibition on firearms is also prominently announced with a €500 fine if caught with any unlicensed firearms. If PCs inquire about a license, they are only given in rare cases to citizens with proof of residence. Checking on their potential client learns that while the Crew can take either personal or public transport to reach the luxury hotel in the center of Stonehenge, the Cortex makes it obvious that they will have to wear their finest clothes to be admitted to the exclusive establishment and that NewTech Gun scanners are in place to ensure the security of their clientele.

If the Crew wishes to find additional information before their meeting, this will require a FORMIDABLE (15) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* roll to tap into the first level of Ringeisen's Game On Inc, corporate network. This portion of the database yields that the Salamanders' have earned, in ticket sales and merchandising, some three million credits, which represents a fifty percent increase in corporate earnings. Failing this first roll simply results in failing to get the information the PCs were trying to get. Trying to tap into the more secure files on Ringeisen himself, is a HEROIC (19) roll of Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking*. A success learns that Ringeisen has a side bank account beyond his official corporate account that is on its own network that the PCs can not access remotely. However, his primary personal account does show extensive deposits to this unlisted account, amounting to some five million credits. Failing the Hacking attempt on Ringeisen's account has the more serious result of an anti-intrusion software on the

network trying to trace the source of the break in. This is an Opposed Roll of the PC's Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* pitted against the program's *Technical Engineering / Hacking* skill of d12 + d4. If the PC loses this roll, the program notes which node the break in occurs, but if the PC Botches the roll, the program is able to identify the specific user.

Going on the assumption that the PCs have not been identified by corporate security, when they arrive at the hotel, any PC attempting to slip something past the gun scanner, will have to make an Opposed Roll of Agility + *Covert / Infiltration* versus the Alertness d8 + Perception d10 skill of the scanner. If the scanner wins, it activates a barrier field to prevent the character(s) from entering the hotel and security will graciously remind the guests that weapons are not allowed and that they may be checked with the concierge. However, the security will not report the PCs to the police for having weapons. The *Hotel du Mont Royale* is renowned for its discretion concerning its guests and visitors of guests. After any weapons issues are resolved, the PCs are allowed to enter the elevator to the penthouse suite and are met at the door by the man they know to be the head of the team security. Ringeisen rises to meet the Crew and greets each one warmly. Read aloud:

"Welcome to all of you, thank you again for your timely assistance today. I know you met my chief of security earlier today, but under less than optimal circumstances, so I'd like to introduce him formally now. This is Loren Jeffers. He has been with me for going on fifteen years

now, back when Game On was a start up company. We've gone over the stadium's security feeds for the entire match and we found nothing on who this 'humble team flunky' is and we couldn't get a clear image on that Charles character either. *Jen dao mei*³.

"Any way, no use crying about what we don't have and work on what we do. Loren here has tightened up the procedures on the team's support functions, but since whoever came up with using the towels is *zhen de shi tian cai*⁴, I want to add a new layer of defense, and that my friends, means you. After reviewing the security feeds, Loren has agreed that you did a top notch job and concurs that an 'off the books' backup security team is a good idea. There are two more games left in the season, the finals against the Hera Strikers held on Hera, and the 'Verse Cup, which is on Londinum this year.

"I want to hire you and your ship, under standard charter rates, for a month. In addition, if nothing happens to anyone on the team, I'll pay a two thousand credit bonus for the finals, and five thousand for the 'Verse Cup, all payment received at the end of the season. Are you in?"

The charter money that Ringeisen is talking about varies based on the type of ship the PCs have, thus the exact amount is variable, but for a Firefly-Class ship, a month long charter amounts to €2,400 and the bonuses amount to

³ Just our luck

⁴ An absolute genius

a flat rate of €7,000, their benefactor is talking about a substantial amount of money and the PCs are probably trying to avoid drooling. Assuming the Crew agrees, Ringeisen taps a key on his desk and a well dressed woman enters from a side door.

“This is my solicitor Dolores Pettigrew. She has the standard agreement contract for your signatures. She will be on call tonight if you have any questions. These are the Alliance standard for sub-contractors and strictly a formality. I’ll give you until tomorrow evening to return them to the corporate office. Now my friends, you’ll have to excuse me, but I do have a victory celebration to attend. I expect to see you on the job as soon as you return with the contracts. Loren will see you out. Good evening.”

Note: However, it is up to the Crew, if they were and know they were shadowed if they choose to mention to Ringeisen that they are not completely off the books as he would like. If they do, There erstwhile employer nods with a new found respect and says:

“Not many people would risk an opportunity by being so honest. I can’t say that honesty is always the best policy, but since you are known to whoever is dogging my team, that means you are at a greater risk, so I’ll bump your pay by 20%.”

The Crew has the option of reading the contracts, but these are typical legal documents and very complex to understand.

Reading them and understanding them, is a Complex Action that will require some time to complete and obviously can not be done right now. If the Crew chooses to wave off reading the contracts and sign them now, have everyone roll an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Knowledge / Law to realize two things, one, they could be setting themselves up for all sorts of unknown liabilities, and two, entering into such an arrangement without looking at the contracts will not look good to a business man like Ringeisen. If the PCs all fail the roll or insist on signing them now, he won’t stop them, but they will suffer a -1 step penalty to any Persuasion rolls until they succeed in some dramatic fashion again.

When the PCs leave the hotel, have each PC present make an Opposed Roll of Alertness + Perception versus the Agility + Covert / Stealth of an unknown shadow. If anyone succeeds, they detect that they are being followed. The Crew has several options, but the two most obvious options are that they can choose to confront their pursuer immediately or let them continue to follow them into a more secluded area before attempting a confrontation. However, if the PCs all fail to notice their shadow, they will return to their ship and begin looking through the contract given to them by Ringeisen.

If the shadow is detected and the Crew chooses an immediate confrontation, since they have left the hotel, they have reclaimed any weapons they checked on entering the hotel, but as weapons are not allowed in the city, any open use of firearms will almost certainly result in arrest and a lost of the lucrative deal with Ringeisen. Turning to face their pursuer causes the person standing in the

shadows to bolt. In order to catch this person, the Crew will begin a HARD (55) Opposed Complex Roll using the Crew's Agility + *Athletics / Running* against the shadow's same skills with each roll taking one combat turn. Any female character wearing high heels is at a two step penalty to their skill, dropping to a one step penalty if they take an extra action to kick off and run barefoot (recovering their shoes would be an extra action).

The first to reach the threshold number wins, if the PC wins, they corner the shadow that immediately turns to fight. He is armed with a combat knife and fights without mercy and has to be beaten unconscious or killed to subdue. If the shadow wins, they lose the PC(s) in the alleyways. If both reach the target number in the same round, whoever has the highest total wins

Attempting to lure their pursuer into a trap is an Opposed Roll of Willpower + *Performance / Acting* or Intelligence + *Covert* to maintain the façade that the Crew is unaware they are being followed and to successfully trick the person following them into a secluded area. If the shadow wins this roll, the chase is on as above. If the PCs win, the shadow follows them into the ally and they will be unable to flee, which skips the pursuit sequence and goes immediately to the fight.

If the Crew defeated the shadow and didn't kill him in the process, if the fight was in public, the police arrive and take the man away before the PCs can question him. The more discrete fight gives the PC the chance to question their captive using an Opposed Roll of Willpower + *Influence / Interrogation* or Intelligence + *Discipline / Interrogation* versus the man's Willpower + *Discipline / Mental Resistance*. If

the man wins, he doesn't say anything useful, if the PCs win, He sneers contemptuously and says. "You are so out of your league, you won't even figure out how far before you die." Before he can say more, an arrow almost sprouts from his chest and he slumps over dead. The Crew has time to see a hover car peel away at high speed, but by the time they reach the mouth of the ally, all they see is the vehicle disappearing around the corner. The next thing they hear is an approaching police siren and as the PCs are standing over a body they have at least pummeled, explaining that they aren't responsible for the man's death is going to take longer than they have to return the contract to Ringeisen.

Assuming the PCs are smart enough to flee, they will reach their ship without further encounter and the only thing remaining for them to do is to read through the contract they were given and sign it if they feel it is fair. Understanding the confusing document is a HARD (55) Complex Action of Intelligence + *Knowledge / Law* with each roll taking ten minutes. Once the threshold is reached, the PC understand enough to know that the contract is generally fair, but has a very liberal escape clause that allows Game On to deny them payment and their very existence if the Crew is responsible for delays to the team arriving in time for the matches. Since the Crew is not responsible for transporting the team, this clause should not be so liberal and punitive to the Crew. As Ringeisen stated that Dolores Pettigrew was on stand by, if they call her, she answers on the second ring and admits that the indicated section is too liberal. She immediately sends a wave with a corrected copy for the Crew to sign.

If the PCs fail to read the contract and anything disastrous occurs later in the adventure, Ringeisen will not hesitate to use the escape clause to renege on paying the Crew. The GM is free to use this detail or not based on Crew actions and can now go to next scene.

ACT 2

SCENE 2: BLOCK THAT KICK

"The finals of the 'Verse Cup are each as big an event as the Cup Match itself. The four teams that make it to this level are the best of the two major leagues and the two winners of these matches will face off to claim the grandest prize of them all, the Trans 'Verse Championship Cricket Cup. This most coveted of trophies is patterned on the original design from Earth-That-Was held in the Londinum Museum. The 'Verse Cup is three silver columns (representing the three core competencies of Cricket: fielding, batting, and bowling) holding a globe of gold with a holographic projector that displays the names of the winning team members. This simple elegant trophy is a ticket to immortality and 'Verse Wide recognition."

– Article: Origins of the game - Cricket Sports Magazine Spring 2518 edition

The following morning at 0800, the Crew gets a wave from Jeffers. He wants to discuss security measures regarding travel plans to Hera and wants the Crew to come to his office in the local Game On corporate headquarters at 0900. The precautions the PCs take will be dependent on whether they are aware they are being followed, either from the encounter in

the stadium or the more violent incident of the previous night. If the Crew has their own means of transportation, that would be the best means of reaching the meeting. However, if the Crew must take public transportation, have the Crew make a couple Alertness + Perception rolls, but they will not spot anyone or encounter any trouble.

Once in Jeffers' office, who is, for once, not in the presence of Ringeisen while speaking to the Crew, his demeanor is completely different. His contempt for them almost radiates off of him and when he speaks his opinion is obvious. Read aloud:

"Mister Ringeisen said I had to meet with you today, so you can consider yourself met. We will be traveling in three identical Corazon-Class ships, but which one is carrying the team is secret and you're not on the list that gets to know which is which. All three ships will lift at the same time and will take different courses to Hera. We leave within the next seventy-two hours. I'll send a wave fifteen minutes before we lift and our travel time is six days. Be there when we get there or you're out of a job and if you get in my way and you're out of job too. I trust you can show yourselves out?"

Jeffers then turns to his Cortex terminal and ignores them, responding to any questions by snarling *"Have you forgotten what I told you about getting in the way already? Move out!"* The meeting is clearly over and exactly how the Crew is supposed to protect the Salamanders is now up to them to figure out on their own.

The PCs have a couple options to figure out what's going on. If the Crew has a hacker, they can tap into the Cortex to pick up some information. Use the rules from the previous scene to access the Game On network with a success revealing the location of the corporate transports the team will be using. If the PCs push for the more secure details of the trip and succeed, they find out which ship is carrying the team and thus by default will learn the course the team will be taking. The consequences of failure are also as in the previous scene with failing the first roll just failing to gain any information, while the second forces the hacker to deal with the tracer program.

If the Crew chooses to tap into their network of contacts using Friends in High or Low places, they will have to spend three Plot Points to find where the Game On transport are kept and six to have someone on the inside that will reveal which ship the Salamanders will be on. Finding the word on the street will take some leg work which is represented with a HARD (55) Complex Action of Intelligence + *Covert / Streetwise* or Willpower + *Influence / Streetwise* with each roll taking fifteen minutes to discover where the corporation transports are parked. It will take a second Complex Action of the same skills and time, but this one is HEROIC (95) to learn which ship is carrying the team and thus by default will learn the course the team will be taking. A Botch on the first roll of either action increases the task by one level of difficulty, while a second Botch picks up a shadow. This person is as skilled as the one outside the hotel and the PCs have the same chance to detect him and will face the same results if they do.

If the PCs did not get the specific information, regardless of how they obtained the information, the Crew knows where the Game On corporate transports are parked. However, an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* or HARD (11) Intelligence + *Knowledge* to realize that if they plant trackers on the ships they can get more than the fifteen minutes lead time for the team's departure Jeffers will give them. Building a tracker is a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Communications* roll for each device and €20 worth of components. As Jeffers mentioned earlier that the team uses Corazon-Class freighters as transports for the team, which have the 'Everybody Has One' complication, it is only an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* roll to find the best location to emplace the trackers. If the Crew chooses to approach these ships, they have the options of doing so openly or covertly. An open approach to the row of massive hangers quickly spots the multiple guards and heavy security making it immediately clear that getting any closer is going to require a disguise or covert means. Using a disguise to enter the hanger is going to require the uniform of a maintenance worker to have any chance of entering the hangers. The Crew can use Friends in Low places by spending three Plot Points or with an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Covert / Streetwise* and €3 credits per uniform. Getting past the guards will require believable documents and making these will again require three Plot Points with Friends in Low Places or a skill roll of Intelligence + *Artistry / Forgery*, the character's roll becoming the Opposed Action target number against the guard's Alertness +

Perception roll. The target number will be set at 13 if the Crew uses documents from the forger obtained through Friends in Low Places. Bluffing their way past the guards who are on alert for just this sort of ploy is going to be very difficult. Fooling the guard is an AVERAGE (7) roll of Willpower + *Performance / Acting* or a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Influence / Conversation* increasing the difficulty of the roll by one level for each additional person trying to gain entry.

If the guards detect the forged papers or the roll to bluff them fails, the guards will immediately draw their stun batons and attempt to subdue the PCs trying to gain entry. The supervisor will also sound an alarm which will both bring in a five man quick reaction force and alert the local police. The reinforcements will arrive in five minutes, the police within ten. It should be very clear that use of deadly force against the guards will only result in their immediate arrest and even hand to hand combat is a bad idea. There are two guards that greeted the PCs and the shift leader inside the armored (Armor 5 Life 8) guard shack. Fleeing is an option, but escaping the area will take a FORMIDABLE (15) Agility + *Covert / Stealth or Infiltration* roll.

If the PCs are detained, they are brought before a nearly apoplectic Loren Jeffers. He rages at them and accuses them of being spies. He is about to have them escorted from the building, when a clearly agitated Ringeisen arrives. He fixes the PCs with a look that could melt steel before speaking.

“I told you I like people with initiative, but I can’t abide fools. Consider this your one freebie. You screw up again and

deal’s off and just in case you don’t get how serious I am, I’m cutting your charter in half. Now get out of here before I let Loren fire you.”

As this is clearly not a two way conversation, the PCs would be wise to leave immediately and wait for their fifteen minute warning that the team is about to depart. They have also earned a one step penalty with any Persuasion rolls with Ringeisen and a four step penalty with Jeffers.

Attempting to sneak into the hangers poses a series of challenges for the Crew. First, they will need a printout of the maintenance access tunnels. This will require Friends in Low Places and two Plot Points or a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* roll to obtain. Entering the tunnels will take an AVERAGE (7) Agility + *Covert / Stealth* roll to successfully reach an entry point without drawing attention and a HARD (11) Agility + *Covert / Open Locks* with a set of regular lockpicks to enter the tunnel. Finally, it is a FORMIDABLE (15) Agility + *Covert / Open Locks* with a set of electronic lockpicks to enter the hanger complex. The one advantage of sneaking into the hangers is that if the PCs fail any of the above rolls, they just need an AVERAGE (7) Agility + *Covert / Stealth or Infiltration* roll to escape unrecognized, which will avoid the unpleasant encounter above with Jeffers and Ringeisen.

Once the Crew has successfully gained access to the hangers, they will have to work quickly to plant their trackers and escape. Moving to the ships and planting the trackers is an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Covert* or Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* to secure

to the ship's hull. However, when the PCs go to plant the tracker on the first ship, they see an unknown device already in place. An AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Covert* or Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* recognizes this device as a tracker and one of substantially better quality than the ones the PCs have built. Since the team ships are Corazon-Class freighters have the "Everybody Has One" complication, it seems someone else has had the same idea! At this point the characters in the hanger each has to make an Opposed Roll of Alertness + *Perception / Hearing* against Agility + *Covert / Stealth*. Each PC that wins this contest gets to make a normal Initiative roll against their assailant, any PC that fails is attacked by complete surprise and only gets their basic (3) defense. The number of attacks is equal (up to three) to the number of PCs. The attackers are armed with combat knives and fight without mercy, only fleeing after they have rendered their opponent unconscious. These men will not surrender and have to be killed or knocked out to subdued. However, the burst of frantic activity quickly draws attention and guards arrive within ten Combat Turns to help subdue the attackers.

If the PCs got the detailed information on which ship is actually carrying the Salamanders, the Crew has free time to purchase additional equipment they might want or anything else they want to do with their time. However, they will only have fifteen minutes notice of departure and will have to remain close to their ship to be able to depart on time. An AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge* roll will know that the ship should be kept in hot standby mode, which will allow the ship to lift in one minute. The departure

notice occurs 42 hours after talking to Jeffers and that will be at 0300 in the morning nearly two days after speaking to the security chief. While the Crew waits for the word, an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Discipline / Tactics* or an Intelligence + *Perception / Deduction* roll will figure out that if they could find out the departure time for the Salamanders' that there is a strong possibility that others could as well. The logical course of this thought is to check out the transports themselves. The Crew can then use the above rules to approach the hangers and verify that the ships are secure. Regardless of how the PCs learned of the team's ships, after the attackers are defeated, there won't be time to revive any of them that survived before Jeffers arrives with a ten man squad of heavily armed guards. Jeffers is livid that the PCs have intruded and that clouds his judgment for several seconds as he harangues the Crew for being near the ships. Only when one of the technicians interrupts and points out the tracker does Jeffers calm down and realize that the Crew has done him a service. He is so surprised, that the PCs are not searched and their own trackers are not detected. Before Jeffers can reply to the technician, his radio beeps; he answers, then reluctantly put the device on speaker function.

"Outstanding work people, I knew I made the right call adding you to the team. Obviously things here on Salisbury are no longer safe, so we are going to bug out sooner than I planned. I'll get the team to the hangers immediately. 'Crew', you'll go with the team. Loren, load up the team ship with the coordinates and escort the 'Crew' to their ship and load them up as

well. I want you on point with a half hour lead on their flight path. Move out."

Jeffers looks mad enough to bite through hull plating, but acknowledges Ringeisen's instructions and quickly boards one of the transports, barking for the technicians to sweep every inch of all three ships inside and out. When he exits the ship the team limousines are already arriving. He glares at the PCs before speaking.

"Okay, you heard the boss. Simon, your fire team will stand fast. Lee, you'll go with me to Delta Team's ship and escort me back to the hangers. We don't have much time."

The trip to the PC's ship is in awkward silence as Jeffers refuses to acknowledge the Crew's existence. However, the trip is without incident. The security chief orders a technician to sweep their ship for trackers and then boards their ship to load the coordinates into their navigation computer. As soon as he's ready he glowers one last time.

"It will take six minutes to reach the team ship. We lift one minute after that. I don't know how you knew, but I know it was luck, nothing more. Screw Mister Ringeisen and I swear before god and all the apostles, you won't live to collect who ever is paying you."

Jeffers and his team return to their vehicle and move out at high speed.

Getting their ship moving in six minutes is going to be a challenge that the pilot and

mechanic know all too well. Unless the PCs specifically mentioned that they were keeping their ship on hot standby, they will have to hustle to get their ship ready. This will require a Complex Action by both the Crew's pilot and mechanic. Each roll is a HARD (55) task using *Agility + Pilot* and *Agility + Mechanical Engineering* with each roll taking 45 seconds. Crew can use Indirect Assistance and Plot Points are recommended to make sure the PC's ship is ready.

As soon as they signal they are ready, all four ships lift together and once they've reached the Black, they get a terse tight-beam signal to go to Hard Burn. Since their course is locked in, it only takes an AVERAGE (7) *Intelligence + Piloting* to deduce that the course is 616 hours for a Speed Class 1 ship. Once on their way, the GM should award 3-5 Plot Points plus or minus points based on character actions and go to the next scene.

ACT 3

SCENE 1: GAME FACE

"Ya sees all sort of fei wu⁵ on the Corvue these days, most bein' spouted by the bloated gas bags what call themselves Members of Parliament about the evils of the Tongs and how they are corruptin' the youths of the 'Verse to a life of crime and all. But, if you spend any time in the less savory parts of our fine Alliance, ya soon find the Tongs ain't what them as know about the underworld fear. The name what makes real scoundrels sweat is as old as and hails from Earth-That-Was and them as what calls themselves smart never even talk about them out loud and since I consider

⁵ junk

myself part of the smart crowd, I'll just tell ya the Tongs ain't them."

– Frankie 'Twice Pipe' Whitaker, information broker, Persephone

The trip to Hera is tense the entire way, but no attacks or threats materialize. During the six days at Hard Burn from Salisbury, the Crew is free to check the Cortex for information on Jonah Ringeisen, Game On Inc, Loren Jeffers, the Salamanders, Chang Rogers, or anything else they can think of to check. However, due to communications lag, they PCs are limited to the ship's own database and there isn't anything to be found beyond the basic descriptions of each of the above topics except for Loren Jeffers who does not have a listing at all. If the Crew jumps to the conclusion that he has "Cortex Specter" the GM should let them run with this assumption, but this is only a Red Herring. Jeffers simply isn't famous enough to have an entry.

The four ships arrive at Hera at the same time despite taking different paths, just as the courses were designed to do. The PC's ship is still on point as they approach the planet when the pilot has to make an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Piloting* / *Sensors* or *Technical Engineering* / *Sensors* roll to pick up a Chariot-class courier closing at high speed. If the Crew thinks to contact the other ship, this only requires an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* / *Communications* roll, but the ship, the *Zephyr* by name, only replies with a terse "Stand aside, coming through" for a response. The PCs are welcome to take whatever precautions they want to make. However a second Intelligence + *Piloting* / *Sensors* or *Technical Engineering* / *Sensors* roll

at a HARD (11) difficulty will detect that while the ship appears to be on an intercept course, it is in fact just passing close by. This is another Red Herring to keep nervous Crews on edge.

The ships all land without further incident and the Salamanders along with their attendant gear and support staff are whisked to their hotel. The Crew and the rest of security, once Ringeisen and the team are safely in their rooms finally begin to relax. Again the night passes quietly as do all the practices in the three days before the match. The Crew, and Jeffers as well, are sure something is going to happen, but whoever attempted to track the team and poison Rogers is keeping out of sight.

On the fourth day after arriving on Hera is the finals match. Jeffers continues to be overbearing and assigns the Crew only the most menial of tasks, typically involving guarding the team's equipment, which they ride with on the way to the stadium and escort into the visiting team's locker. Once the gear is secured, Ringeisen calls the PCs over to the security center to look at a portable computer monitor that Jeffers has set up. Read Aloud:

"This fine slice of technology is what every security detail wishes it had. Loren, you can explain it better than I can."

"Right, this is the central command unit for the security perimeter." Jeffers replies, obviously not happy to have to share any more information than he has to with the Crew. "Whenever and wherever we set up, we have total visibility on our surrounding. Nothing and no one-"

Jeffers is interrupting by an alert from the command unit. The security checks the read outs and immediately barks out a string of commands.

“Intruder section Green 014 West! The rats are below us. Probably trying to hit us from where we least expect it. Quick reaction force deploy!”

There is a flurry of activity and if the PCs think to ask what they can do, Jeffers growls, they are to secure the team equipment room before he rushes out the door. If they appeal to Ringeisen, he only snarls. *“Do what the chief says.”* If the Crew fails to ask what they are to do, Jeffers orders them to secure the equipment room anyway.

As the Crew moves to exit the security center, the technician observing the command unit emits a strangled sound. *“LOOK!”* He gasps, pointing helplessly at the monitor, which is displaying a view from a camera mounted on Jeffers’ helmet. The camera shows the corridor partially obscured by some sort of mist, before the view tilts sideways and hits the floor, revealing several bodies when the image finally stabilizes.

**“Chem agent. Y-you l-losers are u-up.”
Jeffers manages to choke before losing consciousness.**

The Crew looks at each other in horror when they realize that there are only eight of the twenty man detail, all of them technicians, plus the PCs to protect the team and the forty members of the coaching and medical staff.

The Salamanders are already suited up and first pitch is in less than ten minutes.

Stadium security and medical personnel respond to the scene of the disabled quick reaction force and if the Crew has a medic, that character can respond as well. By the time any PC arrives, the chemical agent has been decontaminated by stadium security. However, enough of the agent lingers for someone not in a full NBC suit that they have to make an AVERAGE (7) Resistance roll (*Vitality + Vitality*) a failure indicates that the PCs feel giddy and are at a -1 Attribute step, a Botch means that they’re somehow particularly susceptible to the agent and are on the brink of falling unconscious, suffering a -2 step Attribute penalty.

On examining the QRF members, it takes a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Medical Expertise / Pharmaceuticals* roll to realize that the stricken security team is suffering from Kortine poisoning, which was the same compound found on the towel meant for Chang Rogers. As the Crew is digesting this piece of information, the stadium officials call in the five minute warning, which indicates the team has to take the field now or forfeit the match. The Crew is stretched far too thin to secure the security center, equipment, Ringeisen plus the rest of the team’s staff, and escort the team down to the pitch. In a further complication, Chang Rogers, as team captain, enters the room wanting to know why they haven’t taken the field.

Doctor Richard Jameson, the team’s doctor steps forward at this point, looking grim and taking a deep breath before addressing the Crew.

“I don’t tell everyone this due to the mad memories involved, but I was a medic during the Unification War and know my way around weapons. I can take charge of the techs and watch these Sillymanders while you establish your escort positions.”

Just in case the players miss this clue, have the PCs make an AVERAGE (7) Recall (*Intelligence + Willpower*) roll to remember that Sillymanders is the same term that the unseen ‘humble team flunky’ used on Salisbury! As soon as he uses the word, Doctor Jamison realizes that he has been discovered and lunges to grab Rogers while producing an auto-injector from the folds of his team jacket.

The PCs have a chance to intervene, but due to Rogers close proximity firearms or melee weapons are too dangerous to use. However, if the PCs insist on taking a shot, hitting Jamison requires a called shot against a minuscule target with anything but a success indicating that Rogers is hit. If they can win an Opposed Roll of *Agility + Athletics / Appropriate Specialty* versus Jamison’s same skill to either tackle Jamison or knock Rogers into the clear. The Crew should realize that they need to take Jamison alive, but if any of the PCs act trigger happy, the GM can nudge the players of this detail with an AVERAGE (7) *Intelligence + Knowledge* roll.

Note: As it is critical for the rest of the plot for the PCs to succeed in this task, it is strongly suggested that the GM encourage the use of Plot Points to succeed, especially for the PC(s) that is/are fans of the Salamanders.

Assuming that the PCs have saved the day, at least for the moment, they are now facing the traitorous doctor, who, on realizing his plan has failed, he attempts to flee if there is any avenue of retreat or will turn to fight. However, the doctor is neither fast nor much of a fighter. He does resist until he has sustained 50% Stun damage or taken any wound caused by a firearm or edged melee weapon.

Once subdued, he begs for his life and swears it’s not his fault, Charles made him do it.

Rogers speaks up to say that the Crew has to either escort the team to the field or allow them to go on their own right now to prevent a forfeiture of the match. Jamison is so completely distraught, that no interrogation rolls are needed and he freely goes with the PCs if they choose to escort the team to the field. Whether the story is told in the security center or on the way to the field, the story is the same. Read Aloud:

“I didn’t have a choice, hell I still don’t. Charles poisoned me while I was at a conference several weeks ago. He’s been close by ever since, giving me the antidote to make me co-operate. I’m sure I could crack the antidote myself if I had access to a lab, but Charles has kept me watched and I haven’t been allowed to get to anywhere near a laboratory to try. You’ve got to help me, I beg you. He told me to meet him in sector Red 019 South. You’ve got to catch him and get the antidote so I can duplicate it and break this hold he has on me!”

Now that the Crew has a location on Charles, they have got to act quickly as the roar of the

crowd announces the start of the match. The location Jamison gave them is in the sub basement, but the PCs still have the responsibility for the security of the team. However, as the Crew faces this new conflict in priorities, they are either called by Ringeisen if they escorted the team to the field or told by him if they are still in the security center that he's just gotten a call from Jeffers. About half the QRF has responded to the Kortine antidote and while they aren't up to strenuous activity, they can handle the sideline security of the team, freeing the PCs to go after Charles. Now armed with a firm location on the mysterious individual known as Charles, the Crew can go to the next scene.

ACT 3

SCENE 2: THE MAIN EVENT

"As storied as the game of cricket can be and all the promises of immortality of everyone that competes, the reality is the 'Verse Cup, only brings fleeting notoriety for the vast majority of players. Only a select few players achieve the sort of true immortality that is the dream of every contestant. However, for those few, instant name recognition will follow them for the rest of their lives. Regardless whether the fame is fleeting or permanent, for the time that it lasts, there is no greater feeling than that of being the Trans 'Verse Gaming Commission Cricket Champion."

– Article: Origins of the game - Cricket Sports Magazine Spring 2518 edition

The sub basement is fairly well lit and the sector markings are clearly posted making navigation easier than what would be expected

for a maintenance area not intended for spectators. The Crew quickly locates Sector Red 019, but when after they have entered the South corridor and are thirty feet past the intersection, each PC must make an Opposed Roll of Alertness + *Perception / Sight* against an, as yet undetected, opponent's Agility + *Covert / Hide*. Any PC that wins the roll gets to make a normal Initiative Roll; anyone that fails is caught by complete surprise. The assailant is armed with a rifle and fires one shot at each visible PC, up to a total of three shots and is perched 150 feet away. The sniper was not expecting multiple targets and thus does not take called shots. The alcove they are firing from provides Medium Cover with an Armor Rating of 6 and Life Points of 4. Note: The sniper's perch is beyond a pistol's range increment and thus all pistols will automatically be at a -1 step penalty.

The sniper is in a very defensible position and the Crew will have to advance down a straight corridor without cover to close on their firing position. The Crew can use any means to escape the ambush or attempt an Intelligence + *Discipline / Tactics* roll devise an escape or attack plan, but there isn't an associated difficulty with the roll as it is up to the GM to develop specifics based on how well the PCs roll. However, if any PC can make an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + *Perception / Sight*, they will see there is a high pressure water pipe located above and behind the sniper. Hitting this pipe is a called shot, but the pipe is fairly large and is thus only a -1 step penalty target, but is a HARD (11) task.

A successful hit on this pipe will result in a powerful jet of water dousing the sniper's position providing the equivalent of Thick Fog

and increasing the difficulty to hit the PCs by +8. An unintentional benefit from hitting the pipe is one Combat Turn after the pipe bursts the water causes an electrical panel to short out, tripping a circuit breaker, and plunging the corridor into complete darkness. This makes it impossible for the sniper to hit the Crew, but also provides the same benefit to their assailant. The sniper's startled gasp and the loud clattering of something being knocked over is clear to hear even over the confusion. It takes only a few seconds for the breakers to reset, but it is long enough for the sniper to flee.

On reaching the sniper's nest, the PCs find that the loud clattering was from a can of paint their attacker knocked over while fleeing and there is a vivid trail of yellow foot prints for the Crew to pursue. This trail is so obvious that the PCs do not have to roll to follow and easily leads them out of the sub basement and into the stadium proper. As the Crew returns to the ground floor, they can hear the roar of the crowd as the pivotal game proceeds, so far unimpeded. Following the sniper's trail becomes more difficult as the paint is obviously starting to wear off, but when they turn a corner they see a stocky blonde man not twenty feet away.

What happens next depends on character actions, but it should be blaringly obvious that gunplay will cause a stampede and lead to the deaths of dozens. If the PCs rush the man, attacking or just grabbing him, he does not fight and, in fact, looks completely terrified. Pressed about his shoes, the man stammers that he was given €100 credits to switch shoes with another guy that vanished into the crowd; Charles has given them the slip!

The GM should allow the Crew to feel hopeless for as long as seems appropriate before they receive a signal from Jeffers. He's located Charles via checking the security feeds and found the capture of Charles swapping shoes with his fan look-alike. Now that Jeffers knows what Charles actually looks like, he is able to describe him, what he is wearing and is able to provide continuous directions to vector the PCs to their target. Fortunately for the Crew, the short power outage caused by the tripped breaker, while it did not disrupt the game, it did cause the elevators to reset and Charles has been slowed by the huge crowd on the stairs, which has delayed whatever Charles is trying to accomplish.

The PCs finally catch sight of Charles in the distance climbing the stairs that lead to the upper balcony of the stadium. An AVERAGE (7) Alertness + *Perception* roll to notice he is carrying what looks like a folding chair case and is almost certainly the rifle he used during the ambush. In order to catch up to Charles, the PCs will have to make FORMIDABLE (15) Agility + *Athletics / Running* roll to reach him before he can set up his rifle. Roll Initiative as normal, if Charles wins, he will manage a single shot at the closest PC. A result of HARD (11) will arrive in time to make one final wild attempt to knock the weapon aside as it fires with a HARD (11) Agility + *Unarmed Combat / Specialty* roll, while any lesser roll arrives too late and Chang Rogers crumples to the ground causing unmitigated chaos in the stadium. If the PCs stop Charles before he can shoot Rogers since his rifle is silenced, between the roar of the crowd and the riveting nature of the match, the fight to subdue the intruder goes unnoticed.

Note: Once again, it is critical for the PCs to succeed and it is strongly suggested that the GM encourage the use of Plot Points, especially for the fans of the Salamanders.

Once Charles is subdued, he can be turned over to stadium security or to a very pale Jeffers. On searching the man, they find a couple vials in his equipment, which Jamison identifies as the antidote for the poison he was given and he or the PCs can analyze to find a means to find a cure. Regardless if Charles is capable of speaking following being defeated, he flat refuses to speak to anyone, going so far as to refuse to even admit his name. Alliance Marshalls arrive shortly afterwards and take the man or his remains into their custody. If the PCs think to ask Jamison if he knows who Charles is working for, the doctor pales and goes very quiet. He pulls the leader of the PCs to the side and whispers a single word "Syndicate". But refuses to repeat this out loud and denies having even said it the first time, if pressed by the Crew.

Ringeisen is ecstatic that the leader of the attacks on his team has been captured and he fetes the team as homecoming heroes allowing the team to enjoy the game from his luxurious sky box. The game is a nail biter from start to finish, but the Salamanders manage to win and earn a place in the `Verse Cup on Londinum. For their part in making the win possible, Ringeisen invites the team to attend the match as his guests of honor. Since they have been so useful to him, he decides to keep their identities hidden from the press as he might have use for the quick thinking Crew at a later date. If the Crew chooses not to attend the game, he is a little disappointed, but pays

them the full bonus he promised when he hired them. If they do attend the game, he pays them the bonus at the end of the game. How the game ends is up to the GM, but this adventure has the Salamanders' make a very strong showing, but finally losing to the Sihnon *Zhongguo*⁶ in a very close and memorable match. Despite losing, the fact that the first Rim team to reach the `Verse Cup competed against the best of the Core World teams on even terms establishes Chang Rogers and the Salamanders as cricket legends.

Depending on if the Crew has saved the day or not will determine the amount of Plot Points awarded. A success, in addition to the full amount Ringeisen promised to pay (One month charter (which for a Firefly-Class equals €2,400), plus €7,000 in bonuses. The Crew could also earn a trip to the `Verse Cup and will have made a major contact with the affluent Ringeisen. In addition the Crew will earn six Plot Points, modified for overly violent actions, plus good or bad role playing.

Failing to save the day will limit the Crew to the one month charter with bonuses depending on if the Salamanders make it through the Finals or not. They will not be attending the `Verse Cup or will they have made a contact and finally the Plot Points will be reduced to three, modified by behavior and role playing.

THE END

⁶ Literally `Middle Kingdom or Central Kingdom and is what the Chinese on Earth-That-Was called China

FOLKS AND RASCALS

Charles

Agi d8, Str d6, Vit d10, Ale d8, Int d8, Wil d8,
Life Points 18, Initiative d8 + d8.

Traits: Cortex Specter (Major Asset), Fightin' Type (Major Asset), Friends in Low Places (Minor Asset), Deadly Enemy: Law Enforcement (Minor Complication), Forked Tongue (Minor Complication), Greedy (Minor Complication), Sadistic (Major Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6 / Dodge d8 / Running d8, Guns d6 / Rifles d10, Covert d6 / Hide d8 / Open Locks d8 / Stealth d8, Knowledge d6 / Poisons d8, Influence d6 / Persuasion d10, Melee Weapon Combat d6, Perception d6, Unarmed Combat d6.

Description: The enigmatic agent that claims to represent the Syndicate. Regardless of whom he works for, if anyone, he is completely ruthless and is more than capable for his assigned task.

Shadows

Agi d6, Str d10, Vit d10, Ale d6, Int d4, Wil d6;
Life Points 20; Initiative d6 + d6.

Traits: Tough as Nails (Major Asset), Hooked: Antidote (Major Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6 / Dodge d8 / Running d8, Guns d4, Covert d6 / Stealth d8 Melee Weapon Combat d6 / Knives d8 Unarmed Combat d6 / Brawling d8.

Description More unwilling pawns in the Syndicate's scheme to reshape the outcome of the 'Verse Cup. Already used to a life of crime, they were nonetheless coerced into helping Charles.

Jamison

Agi d8, Str d6, Vit d6, Ale d8, Int d10, Wil d6;
Life Points 12; Initiative d8 + d8.

Traits: Friends in High Places, (Minor Asset), Highly Educated (Minor Asset), Hooked: Antidote (Major Complication).

Skills: Athletics d4, Discipline d6/Concentration d8, Guns d4, Influence d4, Knowledge d6, Perception d6, Medical Expertise d6/Internal Medicine d10/Physiology d10/Orthopedics d12, Unarmed Combat d4.

Description: The reluctant accomplice to the scheme to thwart the Salisbury Salamanders' bid to be the first Rim team to compete in the 'Verse Cup. He is a competent doctor and is in fact a big fan of the team, having to sabotage the team is breaking his heart.

Pickpocket

Agi d8, Str d6, Vit d8, Ale d6, Int d6, Wil d4;
Life Points 12; Initiative d8 + d6.

Traits: Talented: Covert / Sleight of Hand (Minor Asset), Greedy (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6, Covert d6 / Sleight of Hand d8, Influence d4, Perception d6, Unarmed Combat d4.

Description: A generic pickpocket more than talented enough to relief an incautious character from their wallet.

SHIPS

Corazon-Class freighter

Dimensions (LxBxH): 225 x 90 x 40 feet.

Tonnage: 8,100 tons.

Speed Class: 4 cruise/6 hard-burn

Crew Complement: 16

Crew Quarters: six double cabins, four single cabins

Fuel Capacity: 250 ton tank 1,250 tons of fuel (1,200 hours)

Cargo Capacity: 320 tons.

Passenger Capacity: 25 - 16 ton single cabins, 30 - 16 ton double cabins.

Gear: Two 20-ton passenger shuttles, eight 20-ton lifeboat shuttles, an infirmary with three beds, extensive gym and training facilities.

Price: €320,000

Agi d6, Str d6, Vit d6, Ale d8, Int d6, Wil d6;

Initiative d6+d8, Life Points 12.

Traits: Everybody Has One (Minor Complication).

Skills: Aerial Transport Operations/Transport d4, Space Transport Operations/Transport d4, Perception d4

Complexity: Average. Maintenance costs: New €16,000 (€1,333 per month)

Description: A rock solid dependable freighter very popular for the Core to Border Planet cargo runs and is a common sight on those lucrative routes. The three team ships are the Victory, Triumph, and Conquest. The normal cargo capacity of these ships is 1,200 tons, no passengers, and normally only carry two shuttles. The Triumph is the ship configured to actually carry the team and has reconfigured the cargo bay into cabin space to accommodate the team and support staff. The Victory and the Conquest are normally cargo haulers in the Game On fleet and are used as decoys only during the Cricket season.