

STAR DRIVE™
ADVENTURE

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Planet of DARKNESS




Science Fiction
Roleplaying Game

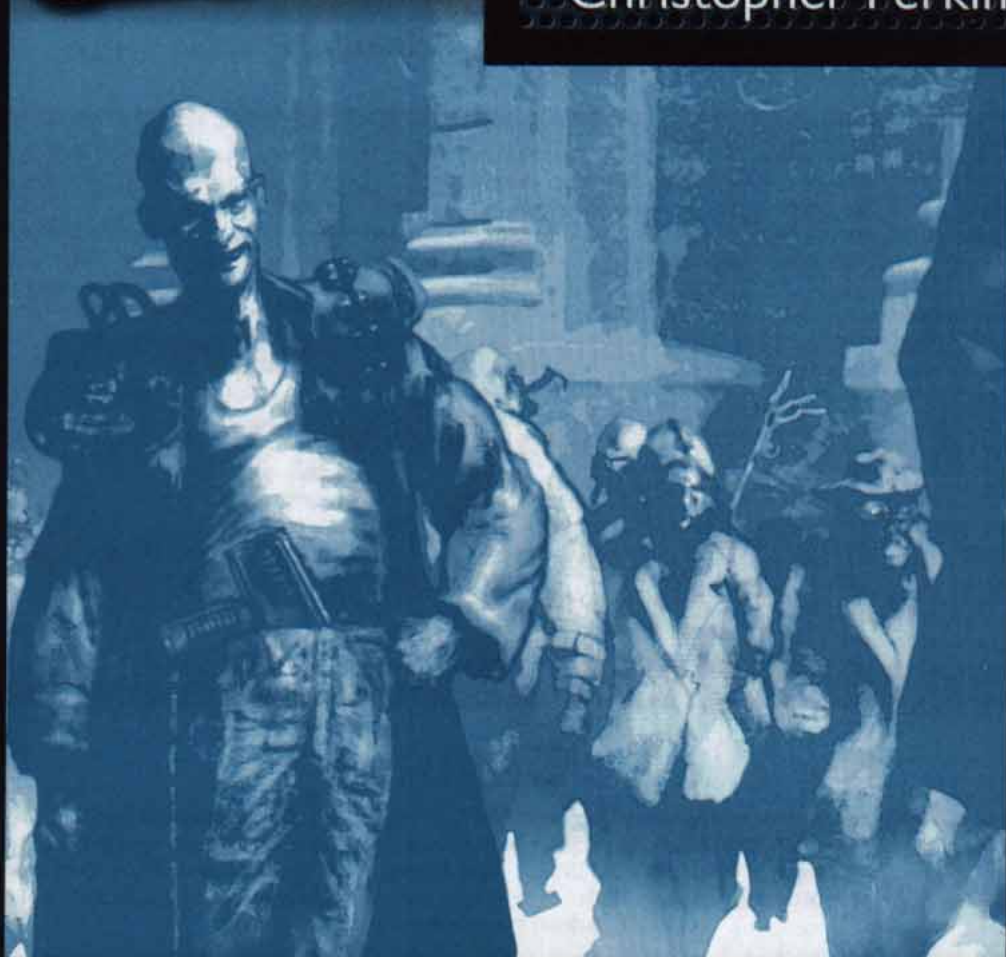


Christopher Perkins

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A
Science Fiction
Roleplaying Game

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Planet of Darkness is an ALTERNITY® adventure for the STAR'DRIVE™ Campaign Setting, set in the Verge. It forms the basis of an ongoing campaign emphasizing trade and commerce, although there are elements of exploration, intrigue, and combat. The heroes may belong to any species or profession.

The Gamemaster needs to be familiar with the setting, particularly the section detailing the Oberon system and the planet Lison (pages 188–200). The Gamemaster should also review the "Economy & Commerce" section on pages 25–27 of the STAR'DRIVE Campaign Setting, especially the "Trade Basics" sidebar on page 27, if the heroes are independent traders looking to procure their own ship.

To run the scenario effectively, Gamemasters should also familiarize themselves with the ALTERNITY game rules in the *Player's Handbook and Gamemaster Guide*.

Statistics for extras are occasionally listed in an abbreviated format: Name [species-sex/nationality or affiliation/profession-level]. For example, a third-level female sesheyian Free Agent working for VoidCorp would be listed as [Sf/VoidCorp/FA-3].

F = Fraal	CS = Combat Spec
H = Human	DCS = Diplomat [Combat Spec]
M = Mechalus	DFA = Diplomat [Free Agent]
S = Sesheyian	DTO = Diplomat [Tech Op]
T = T'sa	DMW = Diplomat [Mindwalker]
W = Weren	FA = Free Agent
X = Mutant	MW = Mindwalker
m = male	TO = Tech Op
f = female	NP = Nonprofessional

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 and Ed Stark for their brainstorming suggestions.

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"Put succinctly, Lison welcomes trade, but our world needs more than trade to survive. It needs unity. It needs stability. The free traders and stellar nations tell us that our most significant commodities are the rhodium mines, but truly our greatest assets are the people who have made lives here, who have remained united in times of great hardship, who have helped one another survive on this dark and treacherous world we call home."

—President Kevik of the United Lison State, 2374

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The following information is for the Gamemaster's eyes only. Players should stop reading at this point.

The adventure takes place on the planet Lison in the Oberon system. The planet is tidally locked: One hemisphere constantly boils in the sun while the other forever freezes in the night. Most Lisons live deep underground, though a few surface colonies exist in the "twilight zone," the planet's terminator where light fades to darkness.

To the stellar nations and commercial traders, Lison has but one precious commodity—rhodium, which the United Lison State (ULS) mines and sells to anyone willing to pay a fair price. Rhodium is necessary to the operation of stardrives, and its rarity makes it extremely valuable.

Once a jewel in the galactic crown of the Rigunmor Star Consortium, Lison revolted and won its independence in 2373. The Rigunmors still ache over their loss; though they continue to trade with free Lison, they find themselves competing with independent traders, rival stellar nations, and other potential clients for the limited rhodium supply.

The Lisons, originally lured to this backwater world by Rigunmor promises of wealth and fortune, are as far removed from the comforts and pleasures of the Stellar Ring as one can imagine, yet their technodemocratic government has kept relative peace among the miners for more than 100 years. Technology has not enabled them to live well, though, nor has the demand for rhodium made them rich. Oxygen must be brought from the surface to sustain the cities, rhodium veins are thin and difficult to mine, and mining accidents still claim hundreds of lives each year.

The Lisons have learned to accept the harsh realities of life in the Verge, although recent referendums suggest that the people are ready to rejoin the Stellar Ring and assimilate with a friendly stellar nation willing to acknowledge Lison's autonomy.

PLOT STRUCTURE

Planet of Darkness consists of three acts, each one subdivided into scenes. The heroes' primary objective is to acquire enough rhodium for their employer's needs or their own. They must visit Lison, negotiate a fair price, wait for the ore to be processed, and safely transport the rhodium out of the Oberon system. However, the heroes quickly learn that commerce, politics, and adventure go hand in hand. As they try to acquire enough rhodium for their needs, they are thrust into unexpected situations, all of which are more complicated than they seem at a glance.

All three acts form a story arc that places the heroes at odds with two stellar nations: VoidCorp and the Rigunmor Star Consortium.

RIGUNMOR SCHEMES

The Consortium wants Lison back and believes its claim to the Oberon system is legitimate. The Guilders resent the ULS decision to trade outside the stellar nations, and they despise attempts by the Orlamu Theocracy, the Solar Union, the Nariac Domain, and other stellar nations to encourage Lison independence while subtly persuading the Lisons to assimilate with their respective nations. Unwilling to duplicate the mistakes of the past, the Guilders are being very cautious.

Many ULS citizens share President Michael Kevik's resentment toward the Consortium, holding it accountable for atrocities against Lison miners during the occupation. Time and again, the Rigunmors have made reparations to the Lison people. They have also won the support of Kevik's political rival, Senator Phi Tassadine, a mechalus and Rigunmor sympathizer who believes that Lison's key to survival lies in reunification. There are countless dangers in the Verge, and Lison cannot protect itself from all of them. Tassadine has been persuaded by the generosity of the Rigunmors to believe that the stellar nation is on a path to redemption. He also believes that Lison needs protection and stability more than the illusion of democracy and its stubborn independence.

Rigunmor operatives suspect that President Kevik is secretly moving toward aligning the ULS with one of the other stellar nations. They know he recently dispatched several attachés to the Nariac Domain, and a Nariac ambassador is scheduled to arrive on Lison shortly. The Rigunmors have decided that now is the time to remove Kevik from office and replace him with the more tractable Tassadine.

The Rigunmors want proof that Kevik is negotiating to turn Lison into a Nariac protectorate. They also want evidence of Kevik's collaboration with Thomas Kind, a pirate mastermind who takes 20% of all cargoes leaving the Oberon system. There are rumors that Kevik accepts a percentage of the take, which he then uses to upgrade Lison's atmosphere recyclers and rhodium refineries. That evidence alone might be enough to oust Kevik from office if he weren't so popular with the Lison people, most of whom believe that what Kevik does, criminal or not, serves their best interests. Many Lisons fear a return to the dark times if the Rigunmors succeed in reassimilating the planet—and in this instance, their fears are justified.

The Rigunmor military feels it's not getting enough rhodium for its growing fleets. One faction, led by Fleet Admiral Clarence Sarn, has given up on diplomacy and is moving directly against Kevik. Sarn, a strutting egotist raised among the richest families of the Rigunmor empire, is preparing to send the dreadnought HCV *Eclipse* to blockade Lison. By shutting off the planet from the rest of the galaxy and threatening to destroy all non-Rigunmor ships that approach, Sarn intends to push Kevik out of office and install Senator Tassadine as his permanent replacement. In effect, Sarn is doing what the Rigunmor diplomats could not. The Rigunmor government is dumbfounded by Sarn's determination, paralyzed by his charisma, and hesitant to oppose him—especially should Lison begin to slide back into their grasp.

The *Eclipse's* blockade is certain to garner the ill will of the other stellar nations. This places the RSC in an awkward position: Either punish its own military for threatening a world that rebelled against the Consortium (albeit over 100 years ago), or take advantage of the military's initiative, ignoring the fallout, and use the *Eclipse* to get back what it has wanted all along.

VOIDCORP MACHINATIONS

VoidCorp has been maneuvering for some time to control Lison's lucrative mines. However, it is now embarking on an accelerated program of conquest.

Several factors have prompted VoidCorp to take such drastic action. Although the Lisons enjoy their independence, recent polls indicate that they are leaning toward reunification—if not with the Rignumors, then with some other stellar nation. As well, the Rignumors, Concordans, Orlamus, Inseers, and Solars have all done a much better job of courting Lison. Finally, VoidCorp's botched attempt to rig a recent election and suspicions of VoidCorp piracy in the Oberon system have not endeared the stellar nation to the population.

What VoidCorp lacks in subtlety, though, it makes up for in ingenuity. It has populated Lison's surface with swarms of millions, perhaps billions, of small insectoid creatures collectively referred to as Organism Omega. Genetically engineered by some of the most brilliant and twisted minds in VoidCorp's Adaptive Research division, these resemble flying cockroaches but employ the same integrated biocircuitry as the mechalus. Organism Omega has a collective mind

that enables a swarm to function as one being, and its physiology lets it survive in an otherwise uninhabitable environment. Drones feed on one another while queens lay countless eggs to ensure future generations.

This prelude to invasion is being conducted under a strict veil of secrecy. Rhodium transports and other VoidCorp ships visit Lison carrying cargo containers packed with hundreds of "sleeping" Organism Omega nests. These are jettisoned from orbit to land on the world below, where they break apart. A simple radio signal awakens the swarms within their compartments. The swarms can't survive long in Lison's extreme heat and cold, so they are largely confined to the planet's terminator—the location of its surface, or twilight, colonies.

Most of Lison's population lives underground, so the infestation has only recently begun to manifest itself. But already the swarms have slain several teams of oxygen runners, who collect liquid oxygen where it pools on the surface. The creatures' mandibles, designed to devour the metal casings of their kin, easily shear through e-suits and similar protective gear. Without oxygen from the surface, the people of Lison cannot survive for long. Those who cannot evacuate the planet will die.

VoidCorp first tested the organism on a barren moon. Within eight months its survey vessels could not scan the surface topography—the swarms completely disrupted sensors. Of course, its scientists did not create Organism Omega without also creating a "kill switch." With an audience of VoidCorp executives on hand, they bombarded the moon with radio beams set to a particular frequency. Organism Omega was quickly forced into slumber mode and, within days, starved to death.

When Organism Omega has done its work on Lison, VoidCorp will transmit the kill signal, making way for thousands of colonists. To the small number of VoidCorp employees already on Lison, the stellar nation provides artificial lungs through a black-market syndicate, where they can also find the usual in illegal cyberware.

RHODIUM MARKET VALUE

Rhodium is a rare and precious metal. Lison is blessed with an abundance of it, but its rarity elsewhere makes it a highly sought-after commodity in the Stellar Ring and in the Verge. As rhodium prices rise and fall, so do the fortunes of the Lison miners.

Rhodium vaults are mined daily, and the ore is taken to refineries for processing. (More information about rhodium mining procedures are given on pages 192–194 in *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR DRIVE campaign setting.) Pure, refined rhodium not sold on the galactic market is used in Lison's mass reactors to sustain the planet's colonies.

To determine the current market value of rhodium, use the chart below. (Roll once each time the heroes visit Lison.) The listed prices are for one cargo unit of rhodium, equivalent to 10 cubic meters. Since rhodium veins are narrow and difficult to find, and 10 cubic meters of unprocessed ore is considered a "good haul," obtaining even one cargo unit of refined ore is a time-consuming proposition.

RHODIUM MARKET VALUE

d20 Roll	TRI
1	500K
2	510K
3	520K
4–5	530K
6–8	550K
9–11	570K
12–14	600K
15–17	630K
18–19	660K
20	700K

TRI is the open market value of one cargo unit in Tribon, Lison's capital. Most of the stellar nations conduct their trade in Tribon, since that's where the rhodium is processed. Unprocessed rhodium can be purchased at any of Lison's twilight colonies for 10% less per cargo unit, however, it would cost that much or more to process the ore elsewhere.

GARDHYI LURKERS

The gardhyi (pronounced gar-DYE-ee) are an enigmatic species, psionic beings with uncanny transportation capabilities who pry into others' affairs while skulking unseen in the shadows. Often called the "men in black," gardhyi are purported to have the ability to see into the future. They are fully detailed on pages 119–120 in the *Alien Compendium™* accessory *Creatures of the Verge*.

For the last 150 years, for reasons mysterious, the gardhyi have not only endeavored to protect Lison's rhodium supply, but have also secretly supported the fair and equitable distribution of rhodium among various species and stellar nations. They seem to have a vested interest in sustaining other species' ability to travel through the stars. Whether the gardhyi are motivated by self-interest or are serving the Galactic Concord in its tireless efforts to maintain peace is not known.

They have recently learned that President Kevik sent attachés to the Nariac Domain to discuss reunification, and that he's doing this without the advice or approval of the ULS Senate. They also know that the Rignumors, dissatisfied with the way Kevik treats them, are plotting to move against him and the current Lison regime. Using a device called the *orb of foreshadowing* (see the "Gardhyi Black Orbs" sidebar on page 52), the gardhyi have seen the destruction of Lison and believe it is attributable to one or both of these events. Either could upset the tenuous balance of power on Lison, with one stellar nation seizing control of the entire rhodium trade. The gardhyi believe it necessary to preserve that balance.

The gardhyi prefer subtlety, hoping to expose Kevik's secret negotiations while undermining efforts to take Lison by force.

THE HEROES' AGENDA

This adventure focuses on trade and commerce, so success is measured by profit. The heroes' ultimate goal is successfully acquiring rhodium from Lison. However, there are several ways to involve them in the storyline, and their role should be discussed with the players before the adventure begins.

Are the heroes independent stellar traders looking for more lucrative opportunities in the Verge? Are they shipping rhodium to pay off a debt or purchase their own ship? Maybe one of the heroes knows a galactic bigwig with a ship but no crew to guide it. Perhaps they represent a stellar nation eager to secure more than its fair share of Lison's rhodium supply, or maybe they're freebooters hired by a wealthy commercial industrialist. These options and others are briefly discussed on the following pages.

OPTION 1: INDEPENDENT TRADERS

The heroes are self-employed traders looking for huge profits selling rhodium to interested parties in the Verge and the Stellar Ring. This is an ideal option for Gamemasters planning a protracted campaign in the Verge. Potential customers include independent ship captains, fraal Wanderers, spacefaring merchants, and other Verge worlds that need rhodium for their driveships.

Alternatively, the heroes can transport their rhodium to the Stellar Ring, where certain stellar nations pay top dollar for the convenience of not having to obtain and ship it themselves.

OPTION 2: MEMBERS OF A STELLAR NATION

The heroes represent a stellar nation and serve as crew aboard one of its vessels. Any of the stellar nations would make a fine "parent company," though some are better suited for backing the heroes than others. Ideal choices include (but are not limited to) the Galactic Concord, the Orion League, the Orlamu Theocracy, the StarMech Collective, the Nariac Domain, and Insight. The only caveat is that all heroes must belong to the same stellar nation, as these generally do not intermingle or combine forces except in times of great necessity.

For an element of intrigue, one of the heroes could be a spy for a rival stellar nation. Sit down with the player before the adventure begins and devise a suitable cover for the hero, as well as an agenda (which may or may not conflict with the agendas of the others).

Once the heroes have settled on their parent stellar nation, they are assigned a ship. This is usually valued well above the crew, so care must be taken to keep the stellar nation's property in working order.

OPTION 3: AGENTS OF THE T'SA

The t'sa rely on stardrive technology as much as any spacefaring race. The heroes could work exclusively for the T'sa Cluster, providing the t'sa with a steady supply of rhodium to keep their driveships operational. The t'sa are appreciative, repairing the heroes' ship free of charge and perhaps even offering to provide a t'sa engineer or two to accompany the heroes on those long and perilous sojourns to the Oberon system.

NEGOTIATING A BETTER DEAL

Heroes in search of refined rhodium can haggle by making a Business or Interaction—*bargain* skill check to modify the price per cargo unit.

A Marginal or Critical Failure result does not speak well of the hero's business savvy; no change in price.

An Ordinary result lowers the price by 10K (*10,000).

A Good result lowers the price by 20K (*20,000).

An Amazing result lowers the price by 40K (*40,000).

Regardless of the heroes' business savvy, at no time will the price per cargo unit drop below the lowest listed market value (500K, or *500,000 per cargo unit). Rhodium doesn't come any cheaper than that.

DEALING THROUGH THE GRID

Rhodium can be purchased offworld simply by accessing the Lison Grid with a Knowledge—*computer operation* skill check. However, to prevent the stellar nations from gobbling up Lison's rhodium supply—and to keep Lison from being dependent on any one stellar nation—the ULS has mandated that all Grid orders be made at current market value (no price negotiations), and restricted to 20 cargo units per shipment.

THE BLACK MARKET

It takes time to fulfill a rhodium consignment, since the refining process is lengthy. Heroes who are in a hurry can attempt to purchase rhodium from the black market, if they don't mind the higher price—and the risk.

Locating a contact in the black market requires a successful Street Smart—*criminal elements* skill check. Black-market prices are usually 10–20% above the current market value, depending on the current business climate and the urgency of the shipment. Negotiating a better price requires a Business skill check with a +2 step penalty.

Heroes may attempt to locate a contact via the Grid by making a complex Knowledge—*computer operation* skill check. Six successes allow the hero to find a black-market contact willing to deal. Three failures alerts the ULS authorities. The ULS has been cracking down on black-market rhodium sales and employs grid-pilots to monitor the Grid for illicit activity. The penalties for those caught dealing with the black market are severe.

OPTION 4: COMMERCIAL TRADERS

The heroes work for an independent corporation or serve as crew aboard one of its ships. Scott Williamson, owner and CEO of Ion Productions in the Tendril system, is an ideal employer. For more information, see pages 102–103 in *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR*DRIVE Campaign Setting. Williamson operates several shipyards in that system and requires rhodium for his stardrives, promising generous commissions to those willing to oblige. He covers all repairs to the heroes' ship, although damage attributed to crew stupidity usually results in some personnel changes aboard the vessel.

ACT I: RHODIUM RUN

"The stellar nations are vampires, sucking the rhodium from Lison's veins. In 50 years, the planet will be a bloodless husk, the stellar nations will move on, and suddenly 120 million people will find themselves on the brink of extermination—prisoners on a dead world that can no longer sustain them."

—Pessimistic ULS trade forecaster, 2499

"Rhodium Run" introduces the heroes to life and trade on Lison but hints at bigger things to come. The heroes are assumed to be rhodium runners, who purchase and transport rhodium for profit.

If the heroes are independent traders, plant one or more rumors concerning the possible demand for rhodium elsewhere in the Verge. Several suggestions are given below:

- Scott Williamson, CEO of Ion Productions and owner of several shipyards in the Tendril system, is looking for a steady supply of rhodium and is willing to deal with independent rhodium runners to get it. (True; see Introduction.)
- Rhodium is in short supply in the Algemron system. The Alitar and Galvin fleets are in dire need of the metal, but each time one side attempts to send a freighter to the Oberon system, the other side destroys or disables the vessel. (True, though any rhodium runner bold enough to enter the system is likely to be intercepted by ships on both sides of the conflict.)
- Concord ships in the Hammer's Star system, ever vigilant against klick incursions, are seeking ways to acquire rhodium without pulling ships from the Viecek Belt. (True)

Independent traders may obtain as much rhodium as they require for their potential buyer(s), within the limits of what they can afford. If the heroes represent a stellar nation, they are given enough credit to buy 15 cargo units of rhodium at the current market price in Tribon. If they are working for a private corporation, they have enough credit to buy 10 cargo units. Heroes representing the 'sa have enough credit to purchase 5 cargo units.

ACQUIRING A SHIP

Heroes who are independent traders must either buy or finance their own ship, or serve aboard one owned by another individual or agency. Ship costs vary depending on class (trader, light freighter, medium freighter) and onboard equipment. See TABLE P42: VEHICLES on page 194 in the *Player's Handbook*. Most heroes can afford to make a small downpayment and hope to pay off their debt by selling rhodium; few will have the resources to buy the vessel outright.

Heroes working for a stellar nation or corporation are provided one by their employer. Use the template for a trader-class starship on pages 206–207 in the *Player's Handbook*.

A trader-class starship has a standard crew complement of between eight and twelve. Fill vacancies with supporting cast members or extras, using the templates in *Chapter 6: Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*. Keep in mind that most of the spacehands aboard the heroes' ship will be Ordinary characters. If the heroes are independent traders, they are also responsible for paying the crew. See TABLE G23: EMPLOYEES on page 92 in the *Gamemaster Guide* for a list of average salaries.

SCENE I: TRIGGER

This scene gives the heroes a taste of action before the real adventure begins, without endangering them seriously. Their vessel has just entered the Oberon system, en route to Lison, when trouble happens. Read or paraphrase the following:

You've just completed your last five-day trek through drive-space, emerging from the haunting void to find yourselves at the edge of a binary star system.

Have the hero stationed at the ship's sensors make a System Operation—*sensors* skill check with a –2 step bonus. If the roll is successful, read or paraphrase all of the following text. If the hero failed the skill check, omit the second paragraph:

Sensors confirm that you are in the right system. The closer, orange star is Oberon. The distant blue giant is Titania. Finding Lison should be simple enough.

Wait a minute. Looks like the sensors have detected something else. Whatever it is, it's small and closing fast.

The approaching object is one of several armed probes placed in the Oberon system by the Rignunmor Star Consortium to discourage free traders and others from visiting. The probe's configuration is consistent with that of an obsolete armed satellite used by the Consortium to defend its territories prior to GW2. This can be confirmed by making a successful System Operation—*sensors*, System Operation—*weapons*, Tactics—*space tactics*, or Technical Science—*technical knowledge* skill check. Satellites of this type were equipped with laser cannons and very poor shielding, and were dangerous only in large numbers.

While it's conceivable that the Oberon system might contain some vestige of the old Rignunmor regime, this particular probe is in fact of recent construction, capable of inflicting great harm to passing vessels. It is equipped with a mass detector, a small yet powerful ion engine, light polymeric armor (d4–1 [LI], d4–1 [HI], d4–2 [En]), and a Good deflection inducer that imposes a +2 penalty to the enemy attacker's skill checks. Its hull durability is 4/4/2. The probe relies on its armor and deflection inducer for protection and has very limited evasive ability.

If the probe was detected, the heroes are not surprised. Detection occurs in the first round. On the Ordinary phase of subsequent rounds, the probe fires once at the heroes' ship. It is armed with a neutron particle beam (d6+3s/d4+1m/d4+3m). Once the beam has fired, any hero who makes a successful Technical Science—*technical knowledge*, System Operation—*weapon*, Tactics—*space tactics*, or Awareness—*perception* skill check realizes that this weaponry is quite advanced.

If the heroes try to outrun the probe, they can escape its firing range in two rounds. Outmaneuvering the probe is more difficult, requiring a Vehicle Operation—*space vehicle* skill check at +1. The modifier to the probe's attack roll is determined by the ship pilot's success: on an Amazing result, +3; Good, +2; Ordinary, +1; Marginal, no modifier; Critical Failure, –1.

The probe has an action check score of 12+/11/5/2. On a Critical Failure result, it suffers an unexpected power overload and shuts down for d4+1 hours until its damage-control program completes the necessary repairs and reactivates it. Heroes who recover the deactivated probe can disable the damage-control

unit with a successful Technical Science or System Operation—*defenses* skill check. To reprogram the probe is more difficult, requiring a complex Computer Science—*programming* skill check with ten successes to complete the task. If the probe has sustained damage, that damage must be repaired (by making a successful Technical Science—*repair* check) before the probe accepts the new program.

Close scrutiny of the probe yields enough evidence to confirm that it belongs to the Rigunmor Star Consortium. If the heroes destroy the probe, studying the wreckage to discern who built it demands an Investigate skill check at +3.

If the heroes lodge an official complaint against the Rigunmor government, they receive an apology. The Rigunmors state that the errant satellite was designed to track pirate vessels and defend itself against them, but must have malfunctioned. The Consortium agrees to pay for any repairs to the heroes' vessel.

SCENE 2: ARRIVAL

The adventure begins in earnest when the heroes approach Lison for the first time. Read or paraphrase the following:

Welcome to Lison, "Planet of Opportunity." Planet of Darkness is more like it. One side lies frozen in perpetual night, while the other, equally inhospitable, burns forever in the fires of great Oberon.

You're taking a daring step to make your first fortune, selling what the galaxy needs and what Lison alone can provide in abundance—rhodium. Ironic that this seemingly lifeless world holds the key to not only your prosperity, but that of every species and stellar nation that's come to depend on space travel. Rhodium is a necessary component of stardrive technology. Without it, drive-ships cannot make their starfalls.

You've entered orbit, gliding toward the planet's terminator. A cold voice rises from the planet below, lonely and distant. "Unidentified starship, this is Lison Surveillance Post Twilight-5. State your identity and purpose."

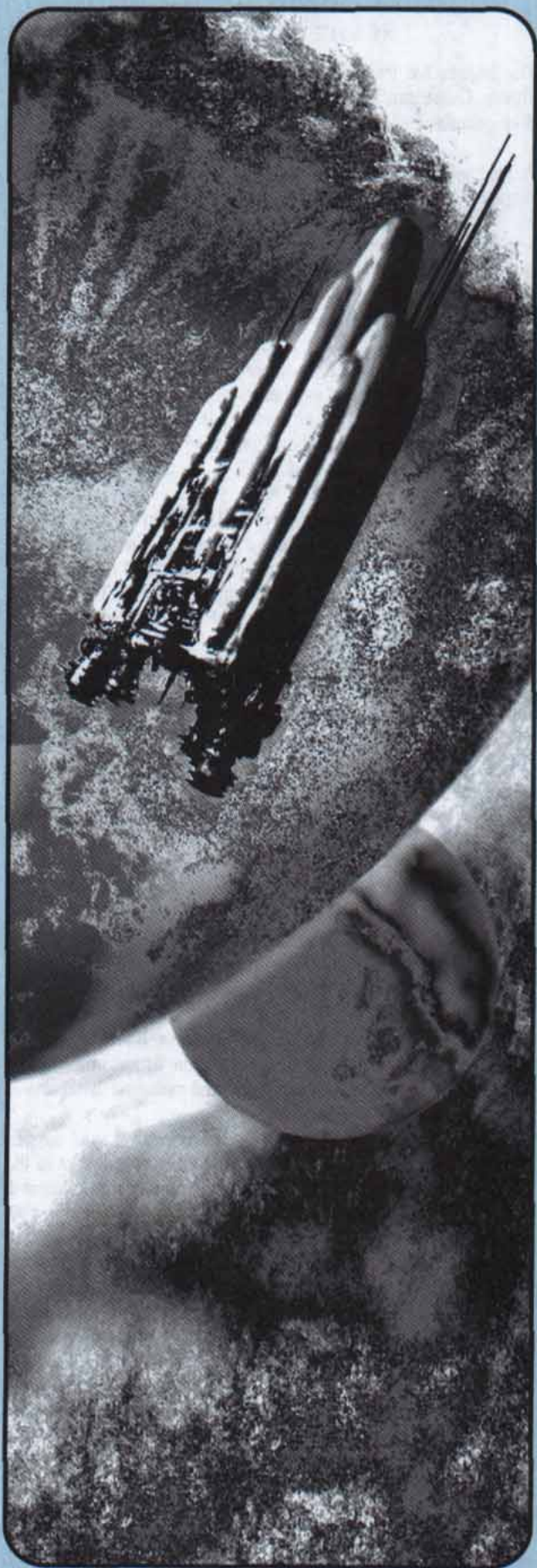
No skill check is required to acknowledge the signal and respond. If the heroes comply, the surveillance station operator sends another message:

"While on Lison, you are advised to obey all planetary laws, the regulations of the Lison Trade Imperative, and all rules of proper conduct. Information regarding the current rhodium market value in Tribon is available on the Grid. An STG shuttle will be dispatched to intercept your vessel and transport you safely to the surface.

"Weapons are not permitted on Lison. If you are unable to provide your own environmental gear or breathing apparatus, you may procure such equipment on arrival."

The refineries that process all of Lison's rhodium are located in the city of Tribon, so most trade is conducted there. Only those in search of unprocessed rhodium—or something not commonly found in Tribon—deal directly with the twilight colonies.

Heroes can use the ULS Grid to check the current market value of rhodium in Tribon. (See "Rhodium Market Value" sidebar on page 4.) They can also patch into the Grid to contact one of Lison's many rhodium trade negotiators (assuming they'd rather choose their own). While this service can be used to arrange a meeting, Lison law requires that all rhodium exchanges be made in person to verify the identity of the purchaser through retinal and voice-print scan.



SCENE 3: DESCENT

The heroes are transported to the surface aboard an old STG shuttle. Cassandra Martin, the pilot, wears a vacuum mask and pilot gauntlet. Read or paraphrase the following:

Leaving your starship in orbit, you plunge toward the desolate planet. Your pilot, Cassandra Martin ("call me Cassie"), maintains radio contact with some young man at the comm station, promising the world in exchange for his affections. Out the shuttle port-holes you see Lison's black horizon silhouetted against blazing Oberon.

The descent is turbulent, but Cassie seems oblivious to the bumps and jostles, plummeting through thick swirls of radioactive dust. As she levels off, you can barely make out the dark tundra and sunlit escarpments along Lison's terminator. Winds buffet the shuttle as it sinks closer to the surface. At one point, you think you see a large, silvery cloud coalescing over a particularly rugged section of terrain, but it's hard to tell.

The cloud is actually a swarm of Organism Omega, but the heroes can't discern its true nature at this range. Cassie is too busy flying through the turbulence to pay the cloud much mind and dismisses it: "Must be pollution from the refineries in Tribon. They funnel the crap to the surface to keep the air down below as clean as possible."

During the descent, Cassie can provide more information about Lison should the heroes think to ask the right questions:

What's life on Lison like? "Nobody lives on Lison, exactly. They live *in* Lison. Everything's underground. Sure hope none of you is claustrophobic! It's dry enough, but the air's pretty thin. Rhodium isn't the only precious commodity here—seems like there's never enough oxygen to go around. I hear artificial lungs are the newest thing."

Are there lifeforms on Lison? "Not that I've seen—aside from the people, of course."

What brought you to Lison? "A transport. Just kidding. Actually, I was raised in the Corrivale system and needed to get away. Too many memories—too many annoying ex-husbands. Nobody comes to Lison because they like it here, but it's a good place to get lost, if you know what I mean."

What are Lison's surface conditions like? "It's a bad world. You've got bitter cold on the nightside, furnace heat on the dayside, vicious winds between them, and radiation that'll slowly eat the flesh right off your bones."

Where do the colonies get their oxygen? "Liquid oxygen forms in pools on the nightside. Oxygen runners are sent to the surface to collect and transport it to the mining colonies below. It pays well, but it's dangerous. To me, the risk isn't worth the pay, but somebody's got to do it."

How is trade conducted in Tribon? "With a data slate. You'll meet plenty of trade negotiators eager to cinch a deal. They'll give you the guided tour of Tribon and make arrangements with the distributors. Happens this way all the time. The hardest part is waiting for the refineries and getting the rhodium safely out of the system."

What's so hard about getting rhodium out of the system? "Pirates. There are swarms of them. Even the stellar nations aren't safe out here."

How many traders visit Lison? "In a day, I'd say between five and ten on average. We get lots of free traders, and of course those damn Rigunmors are always taking more than their fair share. I'm surprised they haven't tried to blockade the whole

system. I guess that wouldn't make the other stellar nations too happy, though. Then there's VoidCorp, who think they own the system—the stars, the planets, the people, everything. I don't know how the sesheyans stand it. I think we should spite them all and hand over Lison and the rhodium mines to the Concord. At least they've got shuttles that aren't 70 years old and flying on happy thoughts."

MAKING LANDFALL

Lison shuttle pilots are accustomed to navigating the turbulent atmosphere. They must still make a Vehicle Operation—*air* or *space vehicle* skill check during ascent and descent; a Critical Failure result indicates a loss of control and calls for a second skill check. Another Critical Failure means a crash. Heroes trying to land safely on the planet's surface must make a successful Vehicle Operation—*air* or *space vehicle* skill check, with a crash on one Critical Failure result.

A crash not only destroys the shuttle but inflicts d8+2m damage to all aboard. Anyone strapped in suffers damage one grade lower (d8+2w). Damage can be reduced one grade further (d8+2s) with an Amazing result on a Stamina feat check. In the event of a shuttle crash, rescue teams are sent out to recover survivors. Anyone not protected against the planet's harsh elements suffers d4s damage per round and must make a successful Resolve skill check each round or fall unconscious.

Read or paraphrase the following once the shuttle lands:

The shuttle sets down atop a windswept pad. Within moments, you feel the platform sink into the ground, pulling you down into darkness. The growl and hiss of hydraulic machinery echo throughout your descent until you reach bottom, 50 meters below Lison's surface. At least twice, you hear the thunderous sound of a huge bulkhead closing above you.

The ULS has several underground hangars near the planet's surface, each one connected to one or more subterranean colonies. This particular hangar connects to Lison's capital, Tribon, and can hold several dozen passenger and cargo conveyor shuttles. Refer to TABLE 1: ULS VEHICLES on page 37 for more information.

You check your e-suits before stepping out of the shuttle into the white glare of the hangar—a vast illuminated cavern several hundred meters in length. Steel bulwarks reinforce the walls and ceiling, and wide metal causeways let technicians in e-suits move from one end of the hangar to the other without having to navigate around industrial generators, conveyor shuttles, and STGs. Not too far from the shuttle pad is a pair of heavy metal security doors with the word "Tribon" illuminated above them.

Two ascending tunnels lead from the hangar to the planet's surface. These tunnels are 10 meters wide and sealed with multiple airlocks. Guarding each tunnel are four Air Guard troopers, ULS soldiers charged with protecting the airlocks between the planet's surface and the subterranean colonies. (See the "Traveling to the Surface" sidebar on page 39.) Four more 10-meter-wide tunnels descend to Tribon, but these passages—several kilometers in length and sealed at intervals by airlocks—are used primarily by conveyor shuttles to bring processed rhodium from Tribon to the surface for transport offworld.

Beyond the heavy metal security doors are several lifts secured to octagonal shafts that descend 7 kilometers to Tribon. The lifts are kept in good working order; the ride is quick and smooth.

IN THE NEWS

Near the main concourses and tunnel nexi of Tribon are ULN videoviewer arrays that broadcast local news shows and entertainment programs. They cycle through the same stories and propaganda every thirty minutes or so, breaking away from reports on the rhodium market with commercials for life insurance or the latest in artificial lungs. Occasionally, though, a story of interest breaks. Roll d12 or choose from the list below:

1. Power Failures in Market District: "Frequent power failures in Tribon's Market District have caused no end of grief to hundreds of shopowners whose lighting, ventilation, and electronic security have been out for hours or even days at a time. At least five stores have been burglarized by local hoodlums and pranksters. City commissioners are investigating the power failures, which some believe can be attributed to the city's obsolete and overstressed power generators."

2. Growth Cause For Concern: "Unless the government takes steps to lure more people to the twilight colonies, Tribon's residents will begin breathing a little harder—or so claims Dreston Farmer of the Oxygen Alert Coalition (OAC). The OAC believes the government should offer miners and their families subsidies to move to less-populated colonies on the surface. President Kevik is aware of the situation and considering an incentives package. In a Grid statement, Governor Vantikar of Saralon protested treating the twilight colonies as "dumping grounds for Tribonite refugees." He also pressed his agenda to have refineries built in every twilight colony with a population of 1,000,000 or more, making them less reliant on the Ortis Refineries in Tribon."

3. Three Rignumors Injured: "Three men affiliated with the Rignumor Star Consortium were beaten yesterday by a gang of Tribonite youths. The men were in the Market District when they were approached and clubbed by six youths brandishing stun batons. The youths then surrendered themselves to ULS Security officers, claiming their actions were in retaliation for crimes committed against the Lison people by the Rignumors. The youths, all underage, have been fitted with surveillance trackers and released on their own recognizance. The victims are recovering in a clinic. The Consortium is threatening legal retaliation."

4. Concord Address: "Ambassador Cynthia Veil of the Galactic Concord addressed the ULS Senate today, discussing the tremendous potential for Lison should the technodemocracy integrate itself with one of the stellar nations. Ambassador Veil's comments were met with both applause and skepticism by the Senate. Senator Dosit of the Tribon District said, following Veil's speech, that Lison has shown the stellar nations it can stand alone, and advised vigilance in the face of stellar nations whose words of peace belie their aggression."

5. Miners Asphyxiated: "The bodies of thirteen miners trapped in a tunnel collapse were recovered by rescuers today. The mine shaft, located 5 kilometers north of Tribon, collapsed during a tremor. Rescuers had to excavate several tons of rock to reach the miners. Cause of death was determined to be asphyxiation. Paul Nextler, United Lison Mining Commissioner, inspected the scene and offered these words of comfort to the families of the deceased: "I have proposed to the Senate several strong measures to ensure the safety of our miners. Such incidents can no longer be tolerated."

6. Trader Files Protest: "A tradeship carrying rhodium out of the system was detained by pirates near Hux yesterday. Captain Tesseth of the Orlamu trader *Horizon* filed an official complaint with the Office of the President, saying that the ULS should take action to enable safe transport of rhodium from the Oberon system. President Kevik, speaking to a ULN reporter, said that the pirates are indeed a problem but Lison currently lacks the resources to mount satisfactory countermeasures. He called upon the stellar nations to send diplomats to negotiate with Thomas Kind and other pirate warlords for safe passage."

7. New VoidCorp Base: "VoidCorp is planning to construct a base on Leen by year's end. This proclamation from VoidCorp Executive Trigan Kra'il has evoked unrest in groups protesting the stellar nations' assimilation of Lison's sister world. Scientists believe that Leen is necessary for Lison's long-term survival. Several radical groups who claimed responsibility for a refinery explosion that killed two VoidCorp plant inspectors one year ago are threatening another retributive strike if ULS diplomats do not make greater efforts to protect Lison's interests."

8. Black Marketeer Captured: "A rhodium black marketer is in custody today after ULS gridpilots traced several transactions to a private business in Domar District. ULS Security forces made the arrest and obtained Grid files naming possible black market contacts. All leads are currently under investigation. ULS gridpilots credit new Grid surveillance technology with the perpetrator's timely capture."

9. Cykotek Attack: "A contract gridpilot working for the Rignumor Star Consortium was arrested and charged today after he murdered a colleague with a gravity racket during a private racketball game. John Hogue testified to ULS Security that he had received an illegal reflex implant in hopes that it would improve his game. President Kevik has mandated ULS Security to make every effort to cut the flow of illegal cyberware into Lison and find those responsible for its distribution."

10. Airlock Security Heightened: "Turin Zisef, leader of Lison's Air Guard, has ordered that all airlocks be reinforced to prevent unauthorized civilians from accessing the planet's surface. This announcement comes two months after a mob of civilians in Saralon stormed an Air Guard team. The civilians, who had complained about air quality in the twilight colony, clambered through the airlock to the surface. Several are still undergoing radiation treatment."

11. Oxygen Runners Feared Dead: "Seven oxygen runners are feared dead after failing to return from Lison's surface. Communication with the team was severed shortly after the runners left Airlock 9V. This is the sixth team of oxygen runners that has vanished in four weeks. President Kevik, informed of the situation, expressed his reluctance to send out search parties for fear of endangering more lives. In addition to the six Tribon teams lost, Sipor and Freedom colonies have reported similar vanishings."

12. New Era of Cooperation: "The Rignumor government has agreed to provide financial support for a ULS science station in Leen's orbit, proposing that the facility be jointly staffed by ULS and Rignumor scientists. Senator Phi Tassadine said that "the installation signifies a new era of trust between the ULS and the Consortium."

CASSANDRA MARTIN (SHUTTLE PILOT)

Level 5 human Tech Op

STR 9	[0]	INT 11	[+1]
DEX 11	[+1]	WIL 10	[0]
CON 9		PER 10	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Stutter pistol	5/2/1	d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s	LI/O

Defenses

Armor: none [L], none [H], none [En]

Skills

Acrobatics [11]—*zero-g training* [12]; Vehicle Operation [11]—*air* [15], *space* [15]; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [11]—*computer operation* [12]; Technical Science [11]—*juryrig* [12], *technical knowledge* [12]; Awareness [10]—*perception* [11]; Interaction [10]—*bargain* [12].

Gear

Pilot gauntlet (–1 bonus to Vehicle Operation—*air vehicle* skill checks).

Cassie's in her mid-fifties with silver hair, a leather cap, and a cutting sarcasm. She's a fine shuttle pilot, though not above cajoling people in a position to do her a favor. She's friendly, but her acerbic sense of humor isn't appreciated by all her passengers.

SCENE 4: TRIBON

Read or paraphrase the following as the heroes descend to Tribon:

A lift drops you miles into the planet's crust. Several times the lift shaft opens into a gaping cavern, lined wall to wall with lights, metal bulwarks, and narrow, crisscrossing catwalks leading to tunnels and ventilation shafts. Occasionally, you see a skycar gliding about, or a team of technicians cutting away at something with laser torches. The shaft narrows and widens several more times before the lift slows and you find yourself sinking gently into a massive cavern several kilometers deep. Within the cavern is the subterranean city of Tribon, its transparent domes gleaming under the cavern's pale lights. You can see literally millions of people, looking tiny from this height as they wend their way through the overcrowded streets and across packed causeways.

You can see what must be the rhodium refineries—large buildings with great, cylindrical shafts penetrating the cavern ceiling, no doubt designed to funnel the ash and smoke of the refinery to the planet's surface instead of spilling them out into the cavern.

At last the lift comes to a stop. As the doors begin to part, a disembodied female voice greets you over the lift intercom, filtering into the tunnel beyond. "Welcome to Tribon. For your own safety, all residents and visitors must adhere to oxygen regulations. For those without special breathing apparatus or artificial lungs, conservative breathing is advised. The breath you save today might save you tomorrow. Have a pleasant day."

The map of Tribon on the inside front cover shows the general layout of Lison's capital. The city is built on three tiers, covering roughly 300 square kilometers, and has about 60 million

inhabitants. (That's 200,000 people per square kilometer!) Tribon has a strange beauty, but most of the people who dwell here find it crowded, stuffy, oppressive, and dark. Concerns about air quality mean there are few vehicles, though government skycars and conveyer shuttles use clean, efficient gravity induction technology. Most residents and visitors are forced to move around on foot, electric trams provide quick travel to some of the city's key facilities, but are designed more to serve the needs of the powerful stellar nations than the common Tribonite.

Tribon does its best to create and conserve oxygen. Algae pools, atmosphere recyclers, and oxygen runners are integral to the city's survival. However, oxygen is not distributed evenly throughout the city. Well-to-do districts and government facilities have clean air that's continuously recycled. Poorer districts, on the other hand, have stale, unpleasant air. The common practice is not to waste air where it is not required. Many buildings are equipped with vacuum chambers—nonessential corridors and rooms that require a vacuum mask to enter.

As the adventure progresses, heroes will have more time and occasion to explore Tribon. Use the "Floater Encounters in Tribon" sidebar on page 11 to flesh out the heroes' experiences.

OPENING NEGOTIATIONS

The heroes haven't long to take in the scene before they are approached. Read or paraphrase the following:

From the lift you are led into an immense tunnel lined with pools of oxygen-producing algae. On one side is a restaurant called the Grotto. Across from the restaurant is a communications kiosk arrayed with obsolete videophones, and a shop called Oxygenation that sells vacuum masks and other breathing apparatus for 50% more than you'd pay in the most backwater places in the Stellar Ring!

As you make your way down the tunnel, you are intercepted by a gentleman wearing a business suit with a ULS pin. The man is heavysset, with chalky skin and cropped, iron-gray hair. He flashes you a quick smile and says, "Dwayne Kessler, rhodium trader, at your service."

Kessler has ID verifying that he is, indeed, a licensed rhodium trade negotiator serving the Rax-Minstrem Rhodium Distribution Agency—one of many. Heroes are free to make deals with any one of a dozen negotiators, and as they explore Tribon they are likely to encounter more.

Kessler is notorious for hanging out near lifts, waiting for rhodium runners to show up. He was among the first to hear that the heroes' ship had arrived and has been here several minutes. He offers to buy the heroes lunch at the Grotto and has already found small, comfortable apartments in the city's lowest tier for the heroes, a cozy habitat called the Varenwa Enclave ("with a constantly replenished oxygen supply and ventilation system so you don't have to breathe regular air").

Once the heroes sit down to lunch or are ready to negotiate, Kessler gives them his usual spiel:

"Lison values its rhodium customers, so we offer all of them a fair and equitable price based on the current market value. That's the price I'm offering you today. We accept payment in Concord dollars using any medium, 3Ds preferred. Payment must be made in advance, but we guarantee both quality and quantity. If you are not happy with the rhodium we have provided, you can nullify the deal and demand a refund."

"Mining rhodium is difficult and expensive. A good yield

demands hundreds of worker-hours. Then the raw ore has to be refined. What I'm trying to say is that your order will take time. I estimate we can complete the transaction in five to eight days."

If the heroes balk at the timeframe, Kessler tries to mitigate the delay by offering them a tour of the refinery and promising them comfortable suites in one of Tribon's finer enclaves. He also reveals the following:

"Sometimes demand exceeds supply. We have several clients to satisfy and we cater to them on a first-come, first-served basis,

occasionally making exceptions if an order is especially large or small. Delays are unavoidable, but the quality of the merchandise makes the wait worthwhile."

He doesn't know the names of the other rhodium runners currently conducting trade in Tribon, and he's not at liberty to discuss his arrangements with those to whom he's been assigned—any more than he'd tell them about his dealings with the heroes.

Once a deal is reached, Kessler enters it into his data slate. The deal is finalized with voiceprints and retinal scans, but this is meaningless until he returns to his office and transmits the infor-

FLOATER ENCOUNTERS IN TRIBON

These events can be used to fill gaps in the action and engage restless players. Roll a d12 to determine the encounter or choose one that best suits the moment.

1. Collision: As the heroes make their way through the crowds of people, one of them is bodychecked by an arrogant gridpilot [Hm/Rigunmor/TO-3] who seems in a hurry. The hero must make a successful Athletics or Acrobatics skill check to avoid being knocked down. The gridpilot gives the hero a rude glance before continuing on. He carries a gridcaster in one hand.

2. Deranged Woman: A mad homeless woman [Hf/Lison/NP] follows the heroes wherever they go. A successful Stealth skill check is required to evade her. If the heroes enter a building, she waits for them. If confronted, she attacks them with a combat knife, accusing them of "abandoning her in this godforsaken place."

3. Just a Thought: The heroes are accosted by a sesheyen [Sm/VoidCorp/TO-2] who is trying to sell a psi-detector. The sesheyen wants *3,000 for the device but can be negotiated down to *1,500 with a successful Interaction—*bargain* skill check. The psi-detector works but was rewired by a t'sa to increase its range to 150 meters, until someone takes the time to figure out what was done (making a Technical Knowledge skill check at +1), all System Operation—*sensors* skill checks made using the device suffer a +2 penalty.

4. Frequent Flyer: A skycar passing overhead drops paper flyers onto a crowded street. Heroes who inspect a flyer see an advertisement for a band called the Stradivarians, who will be performing at the Black Nebula three times in the next 72-hour interval. They are rumored to be quite good, although some old-timers might object to their "modern take on the classics."

5. A Miner Protest: A group of 120 miners have gathered near a major concourse to protest the government's lackluster efforts at improving mine safety. They carry signs and placards with messages like "No More Accidents!" and "Mining Is My Life AND Yours!"

6. Power Failure: A power failure blacks out a three-block area centered on the heroes' location. Chaos ensues as people begin pushing and shoving their way toward lit areas of the city. This might be a deliberate attempt by Lison thugs to black out security cameras. The thugs [Hm/Lison/NP], wearing stolen imaging goggles and armed with pulse batons, go on a rampage, attacking pedestrians and taking their possessions.

7. Gardhyi: The heroes see one of the gardhyi watching them from across a crowded square, at the end of a dimly lit alley, or reflected in a store window. If the heroes

approach the gardhyi, it disappears, leaving no trace of its whereabouts. See page 14 for the gardhyi's statistics.

8. Tremor: A tremor shakes the colony, causing some distress but no damage. Tremors are rare in Tribon, but not unheard-of. The second time this encounter occurs, the cause of the tremor might be something different (such as an explosion in the mines or in one of the refineries, caused by accident or sabotage).

9. Ye Olde Monstre Shoppe: The t'sa proprietor of a small pharmaceutical shop [Tf/Orlamu/TO-1] leaps from her store and asks the heroes to help her get rid of an alien trilobite. (See page 241 in *Chapter 17: Creatures and Aliens* in the *Gamemaster Guide* for a description and statistics).

There is, in fact, no trilobite. The proprietor is suffering from hallucinations brought on by an improperly stored chemical in the backroom of her store. Heroes who enter the backroom must make a Will feat check. On a Failure result, the hero sees the trilobite clinging to a wall, the ceiling, or one of the counters. On a Critical Failure result, it's scuttling toward the hero. Heroes who do not succumb to the delusion can make an Investigate skill check to detect a faint chemical odor. Further searching reveals a spilled vial on a countertop and a small puddle of brown liquid that is the source of the hallucinations. The spill is easily cleaned once detected.

10. Eye Spy: Heroes who make a successful Awareness skill check realize they are being shadowed by an a-eye robot (see page 169 in *Chapter 10: Computers* in the *Player's Handbook* for the robot's statistics and programs). The a-eye, which looks like a hovering black orb, follows them until it realizes that it's been detected, then zips away. This encounter may occur several times. Heroes able to catch or disable the robot can try to determine who controls it by making a Computer Science—*hardware* or *programming* skill check at +3. If successful, they learn it is owned by the Rigunmor Star Consortium, which routinely spies on competing rhodium traders.

11. Bright Red Spot: While the heroes are sitting or standing around, one of them notices a red dot bobbing and circling around his chest. While this could be the laser scope of a weapon, the source is really a small penlight in the hands of an eight-year-old boy seated on a bench not far away. Next to the boy is his father [Hm/Concord/DFA-3], a Concord executive, who's too busy reading a data slate to notice that his son has rifled his business briefcase. The boy smiles innocently when the heroes notice him.

12. In the News: The heroes are walking past a videoviewer when they catch the beginning or end of a broadcast. See the "In the News" sidebar on page 9.



mation to the ULS Security mainframe for security check and final approval. A finalized deal cannot be amended unless both parties agree to the change.

Kessler gives the heroes a coded videophone 3D, which they may use to contact him anytime. (Inserting the crystal into a videophone unit will automatically make the connection.)

DWAYNE KESSLER

Level 3 human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 11	[+1]	INT 10	[0]
DEX 9	[0]	WIL 9	[0]
CON 9		PER 12	

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 11+/10/5/2
 Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 # Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed 11/5/2 d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s LI/0

Defenses

Armor: none [LI], none [HI], none [En]

Skills

Athletics [11], Unarmed Attack [11], Vehicle Operation [9], Stamina [9], Business [10]—*corporate* [12], Knowledge [10]—*computer* [11], *first aid* [11], Law [10]—*court procedures* [11], Administration [9]—*bureaucracy* [11], *management* [10], Awareness [9]—*intuition* [11], Culture [12]—*diplomacy* [14], Interaction [12]—*bar-gain* [14], *charm* [13], *interview* [13].

Gear

Data slate equipped with a retinal imager and an antivirus program.

Dwayne Kessler is heavysset, with chalky skin and cropped, iron-gray hair. Though he's not the brightest star in the galaxy, he is accommodating. Like most rhodium traders, he feels that it's his job to cater to runners' needs, show them the city, and generally keep them happy during their stay. He isn't looking to make friends. He's out to cut a deal and earn his usual percentage, but he's not an unpleasant fellow and knows the importance of repeat business.

Kessler aims to sell rhodium at the current market price but admires anyone with the business savvy to sway him toward accepting a lower price—provided they know when to quit. (See the "Negotiating a Better Deal" sidebar on page 5.) Some rhodium runners have tried his patience with excessive haggling.

SCENE 5: MEN IN BLACK

This scene occurs during or shortly after the heroes' meeting with Dwayne Kessler. The heroes are contacted by a trio of gardhyi (see page 4 in the introduction). These enigmas rarely reveal themselves to anyone; even more mysterious and disturbing than their sudden appearance are their motives.

The gardhyi believe they can manipulate a group of outsiders into exposing Kevik's secret negotiations with the Nariac Domain, thereby thwarting the schemes of both VoidCorp and the Rigun-mors. The first goal is to bring the heroes closer to the problem by involving them with a member of President Kevik's family.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Through the crowd, you see a dark shape standing in front of an algae pool. The figure is tall and gaunt, dressed in a black, loose-fitting coat. It stands perfectly still, head shorn and gray, eyes hidden from the pale light by a pair of dark shades. You feel like it's staring at you, like it knows who you are. Not until the crowd thins that you notice two more like it, standing in a similarly rigid posture, watching the crowd with heads tilted strangely askew.

The disturbing thing is not their odd behavior or the realization that they look exactly alike. What bothers you is that when the one looking in your direction smiles—or maybe sneers, you can't tell—you can see that its mouth is filled with triangular, sawlike teeth.

Although their grey, sharklike skin and black attire ought to betray them, the gardhyi have the uncanny ability to avoid confrontation, vanishing when it suits them. They use their Telepathy-cloak skill (see the "New Psionic Skill" sidebar below) to block their presence from the minds of others.

If Kessler is with the heroes and they attempt to direct his attention to the figures, he confirms what the players might already have guessed: no one can see the black-garbed aliens except the heroes. If they insist, Kessler is entitled to a Will feat check; if it succeeds, the veil is lifted and he can see the "men in black."

A hero who tries to contact the gardhyi with psionics has a chance to be detected by the aliens' ESP-sensitivity skill, in which case the gardhyi relay the following message before vanishing in the crowd:

"Go to the Black Nebula. Ask for Traven."

NEW PSIONIC SKILL

Telepathy-cloak

Personality skill, Cost 3

Extended duration.

This is a gardhyi adaptation of the more common Telepathy-suggest skill (see page 236 in *Chapter 14: Psionics* in the *Player's Handbook*). It enables the user to plant a suggestion in the minds of beings within 30 meters that causes those individuals not to notice the user. This skill allows the user to hide from animals and more sophisticated species. It has no effect on mindless lifeforms, robots, sensor devices, security cameras, and AIs. The user can remain cloaked for d4+4, d8+8, or d12+12 minutes, depending on the degree of success of the user's skill check (Ordinary, Good, or Amazing).

For the cloak to remain effective, the user must remain relatively still (i.e., stay in one place, in roughly the same posture). Moving an arm or turning the head won't affect the cloak, but walking, running, or sudden action allows targets Will feat checks to detect the user. Bonuses are applied to each target's roll as follows:

- 3 if the cloak's user is running.
- 2 if the cloak's user is walking, regardless of how far or at what rate.
- 1 if the cloak's user performs some sudden or awkward action.

The skill check is modified by the Will resistance modifier of the target. In the case of a crowd, assume the resistance modifier to average 0. If heroes are part of the affected crowd, apply their Will resistance modifiers individually. Thus, it is possible for some to pierce the cloak while others see nothing.

ALIEN ARTIFACT

Dark Matter Nullifier (PL 8)

This alien technology is not normally available in the STAR DRIVE universe, except in the hands of the species that created it: the gardhyi. This is but one of many devices in their arsenal: a black-handled, U-shaped instrument. The nullifier can be fired only once per round, discharging a blacklight pulse from one of its prongs out to a range of 10 meters. This nondirected energy flash, on contact with a ship's mass reactor casing, prevents dark matter from decaying, thus rendering the reactor inoperative. The reactor is not actually damaged, so repairs can't undo the effect. However, the nullifier can reverse it by discharging a blinding flash of light from its second prong, reactivating the dark matter within range.

The gardhyi are careful not to let such technology fall into others' hands. Any device capable of halting dark matter decay could be perverted into a terrible weapon by adapting its principles to a larger scale.

If the heroes approach the gardhyi directly, read or paraphrase the following:

Two of the figures watch you from behind their shades while the third suddenly raises its gloved hand, signaling a halt. You see its mouth moving in dead silence. It clearly isn't speaking aloud, yet you understand it.

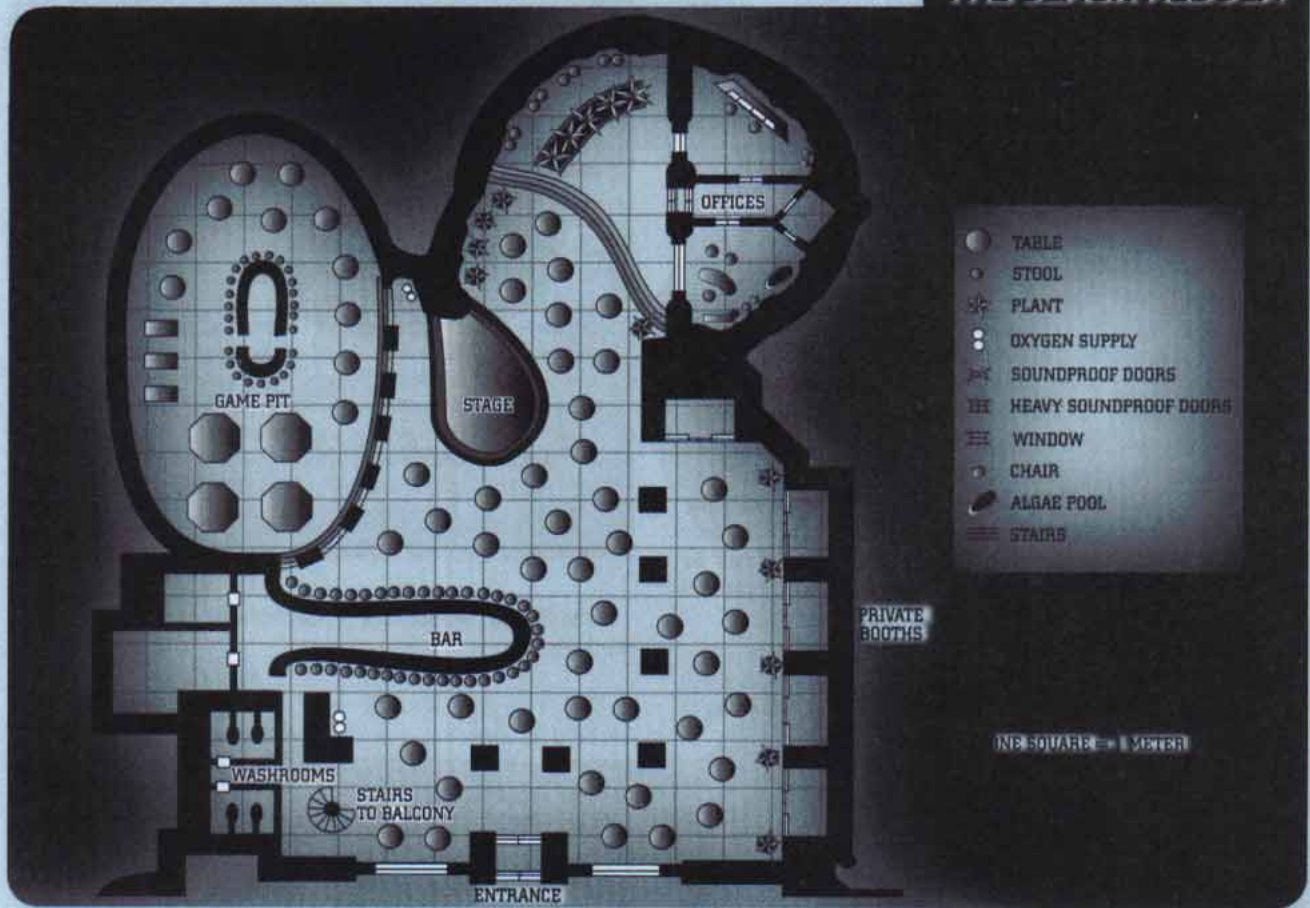
"Go to the Black Nebula. Ask for Traven."

If the heroes continue to advance or make threatening motions, the gardhyi fires a shadow bolt at the closest one. (See the gardhyi statistics below for details about this and other special abilities.) Passersby are oblivious to the bolt, and anyone other than a hero struck by one is unaffected by it.

Their message relayed, the gardhyi withdraw using their star webs to move through drivespace. The heroes see them walk around a corner or into a shadow, or leap over a railing, then vanish without a trace.

If necessary, the gardhyi use last resort points to evade capture or injury. Even if one is caught, bound, or killed by the heroes, this poses more conundrums than it answers. The gardhyi's body degrades and melts away, leaving only an empty uniform and a blacklaser pistol, which the remaining gardhyi strive to recover in the most expedient yet discreet way possible. Learning how to operate the weapon requires a complex Technical Science-technical knowledge skill check (three successes).

If the heroes don't take the bait and visit the Black Nebula, the gardhyi shadow them. The aliens view the interior of the heroes' ship using their ESP-clairvoyance skill. (Apply a +5 penalty to their skill checks to account for the distance involved.) Assuming they are successful, the gardhyi use their star webs to transport to the ship and cripple it with a dark matter nullifier (see the "Alien Artifact" sidebar on page 11). The gardhyi are the only ones who can reverse the effect, and they do so only if the heroes attend to matters at the Black Nebula.



"MEN IN BLACK"

Level 12 gardhyi [3]

STR 12	[+1]	INT 13	[+2]
DEX 14	[+2]	WIL 12	[+1]
CON 13		PER 11	
Durability: 13/13/7/7		Action check: 16+/15/7/3	
Move: sprint 26, run 16, walk 6		# Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	
Psionic energy points: 12		FX Energy: 10	

Attacks

Unarmed—power	16/8/4	d4+4s/d6+4s/d4+2w	LI/O
Blacklaser pistol	17/8/4	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4m	En/O
Arcane Magic FX	(see below)		

Defenses

Armor (improved CF):	d6+2 (LI), d4+3 (HI), d6+1 (En)
+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks	
+3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks	
+2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills	
+1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills	

Skills

Athletics [12]—*climb* [14], *jump* [14]; Unarmed [12]—*power martial arts* [16]; Manipulation [14]—*lockpick* [16]; Modern Ranged Weapons [14]—*pistol* [17]; Stealth [14]—*shadow* [17], *sneak* [15]; Vehicle Operation [14]; Stamina [13]—*endurance* [15]; Knowledge [13]—*language: Standard* [15]; Administration [12]; Awareness

[12]—*intuition* [14], *perception* [14]; Investigate [12]—*interrogate* [14], *search* [13]; Resolve [12]—*physical* [13], *mental* [13]; Culture [11]—*diplomacy* [13]; Deception [11]—*bluff* [12], *bribe* [12]; Interaction [11]—*intimidate* [14]; ESP [13]—*clairvoyance* [14], *mind reading* [15]; *navcognition* [14], *postcognition* [15], *sensitivity* [14]; Telepathy [11]—*contact* [12], *cloak* [13].

FX

Call Shadows

Arcane Magic, Conjure spell: WIL

Good quality, base cost 9—Gathers shadows that obscure the area immediately around the gardhyi for 1 hour (+3 penalty to other's Awareness checks).

Shadow Bolts

Arcane Magic, Conjure spell: DEX

Good quality, base cost 6—Produces bolts of numbing shadow (d4s/d4+2s/d4+4s, En/O) that fire from the gardhyi's hands. Range is 10/20/30 meters.

Star Web

Super Power, Overscience gadget: WIL

Good quality, base cost 10—Allows a gardhyi to travel through drivespace without a ship for a distance of up to 75 light-years, depending on the degree of success (25/50/75).

Gear

Dark matter nullifier (see sidebar on page 13)

SCENE 6: THE BLACK NEBULA

If the heroes follow up on the gardhy's instructions and take time to investigate the Black Nebula, Dwayne Kessler can direct them to it. It's a classy entertainment complex on Tribon's middle tier; Kessler is familiar with the place but does not recognize the name "Traven."

When the heroes arrive at the Black Nebula, read or paraphrase the following:

The Black Nebula occupies a prominence on the edge of the city's middle tier. The structure is embedded in the rock, and inside you see a state-of-the-art entertainment complex, its ceiling painted black and adorned with starlights. A neon-lit bar stretches out into the middle of the floor, beyond which you see an oval pit filled with all manner of holographic diversions.

Dozens of patrons sit around at tables, enjoying the fresh air, passing the hours in conversation, or wearing entertainment visors. Standing in the corners are several large, expressionless men dressed in black polyfiber sweaters and armed with pulse batons.

Dry ice fills the Black Nebula with a silver haze. A sexy, statuesque woman treats the audience to a hypnotic melody while five sesheyans provide instrumental backup.

A map of the Black Nebula is provided for reference. The establishment is owned by an offworlder named Terrence Zarne, who knew how miserable life was on the planet and set up a business to offer one of the things Tribon lacked: entertainment. Other entrepreneurs from the Stellar Ring have come to Lison for the same reason, but few have been as successful as Zarne.

MEETING TRAVEN

Zarne's business manager, Gillian Traven, actually operates the Black Nebula. Traven is deeply concerned. Alaaxis, the singer onstage and one of his star attractions, was briefly attached to a cyber enhanced oxygen runner named Raive Timogen. Traven knows very little about him, but believes that Timogen has links to one or more cyberware syndicates in Tribon and is hoarding a percentage of the oxygen he retrieves to pay for illegal implants. On top of these crimes, Timogen has apparently succumbed to cykosis and has been stalking Alaaxis. She went to Traven, who wants the maniac stopped.

Alaaxis is visibly shaken by the experience, but she has insisted that Traven not pursue the matter with the local authorities. Traven knows that she is the niece and ward of President Michael Kevik (her father was his brother), and she does not want "Uncle Mike" involved in her life for reasons she chooses to keep secret. Going to the authorities would almost certainly bring Kevik into the picture, and Alaaxis is adamant about avoiding that.

If the heroes come here looking for Traven, or if Traven sees

them through the security cameras and gauges that they might be of use to him, he approaches them in a friendly manner. Read or paraphrase the following:

The manager of the place seems to recognize you. There's a coldness about the man that makes him difficult to sit with—or look at. His hands are hidden in black gloves, and the light reflecting off his blue-tinted glasses makes his fishy eyeballs look like they're floating inside tiny aquariums.

"A few hours ago, three pale men wearing long black coats appeared in my office and informed me that you would be arriving. They didn't mention your names or offer any sort of physical description, but I knew you were the ones the moment you walked through the door. By the look of you, I'd say you're rhodium runners. We get a lot of your kind here."

If the heroes seem interested in what Traven has to say, he takes them into his soundproof office and hands them a data slate.

"The three strangers would not share their names or their purpose. However, one of them did say something curious. He whispered to me, 'This world will suffer unless something is done.' I glanced down just for a moment—something in a darkened corner had caught my eye—and when I looked up, the mysterious black-coats were gone.

"I run a modest business, and I don't have any rhodium to trade, but I have a friend who happens to be a licensed rhodium distributor. I'm sure she would be willing to give you a better than fair offer if I asked her. Of course, I'd owe her one, but she knows I'm good for it."

If the heroes are curious about this contact, Traven says her name is Kathleen Vavaroutsos. She sells rhodium to some of Lison's largest accounts, including the Nariac Domain and the Orlamu Theocracy.

HELPING ALAAXIS

Based on Traven's description, it's clear that the "black-coats" are the same beings whom the heroes encountered earlier. Traven knows nothing more about them but thinks he knows why they're interested in protecting Alaaxis.

If the heroes inquire about Raive Timogen, Traven tells them about Alaaxis' predicament:

"I'm not sure what this has to do with saving the world, but Alaaxis is my most popular entertainer—and a good friend. Recently, she succumbed to the charms of a thrill-seeking oxygen runner named Raive Timogen. Alaaxis tells me Timogen has received a number of illegal cyber implants—implants paid for with oxygen he skims from the planet's surface. I believe these implants have pushed him to cykosis.



"When Alaaxis ended her relationship with Timogen a few days ago, he began stalking her. Then he started sending her morbid gifts: first his left eye, then his left arm. That's when she came to me in tears, horrified and convinced that he was going to kill her.

"I'm sure you're aware of what cykosis does to a man's mind. It's monstrous. Irreversible. We can't save him, but we can save her. Problem is, there's no place where she'll be safe—not in Tribon, anyway. Timogen has contacts everywhere. Alaaxis also refuses to leave the planet, no matter how grave the risk."

If the heroes ask why Traven hasn't sought help, he shakes his head and replies:

"For my own reasons, I've chosen not to approach the local authorities. I have every confidence in their abilities, and with all the illegal cyberware in Tribon, I'm sure they've faced deranged cykoteks before, but I'd consider it a personal favor if you would keep this between us."

The heroes might add conditions to the deal; Traven tries to accommodate them as best he can. If they request weapons, he can help. Traven is no arms dealer, but he does keep a few items for emergencies, including six spare pulse batons, a stutter pistol, and an 11 mm charge pistol. The sidearms are illegal but unmarked.

If the heroes agree to help, Traven offers them free hospitality for the rest of the evening. When Alaaxis is finished singing, he introduces her to the heroes. If they ask for his advice, Traven replies that simply protecting Alaaxis isn't enough; if she ever wants to have a life in Tribon, Timogen must be dealt with. He suggests that they take Alaaxis to their ship before beginning their hunt for her cykotek boyfriend.

GILLIAN TRAVEN

Level 3 human mutant Free Agent

STR 8	[0]	INT 13	[+2]
DEX 11	[+1]	WIL 9	[+1]
CON 9		PER 12	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 3	

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
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Skills

Athletics [8], Modern Ranged Weapons [11]—*pistol* [12], Vehicle Operation [11], Stamina [9], Business [13]—*illicit business* [15], Knowledge [13]—*computer operation* [15], Security [13]—*protection protocols* [14], *security devices* [15], Administration [9]—*management* [12], Awareness [9]—*intuition* [11], Investigate [9], Deception [12]—*bribe* [15], Interaction [12]—*bargain* [15], *interview* [13].

Mutations

Enhanced Intelligence: +2 INT

Environment Adaptation (Ordinary): -2 bonus to Stamina—*endurance* checks in a wet environment; -2 step reduction to penalties associated with wet environment

Light Sensitivity: +1/+2/+3 penalty depending on degree of light (Ordinary/Good/Amazing)

Minor Physical Change: Fishlike appearance; +2 penalty to Personality-based skill checks

Traven is a mutant from Bluefall, a human with fishlike features. He wears blue-tinted glasses to protect his light-sensitive eyes and gloves to conceal the webbing between his fingers. He runs the Black Nebula as if it were his own, treating his employees like family.

He believes that the "black-coats" work for a secret government bureau assigned to safeguard President Kevik's family—even those not considered immediate members. What he can't figure out is why they would entrust Alaaxis' safety to a gang of unknown rhodium runners. The only answer he can come up with is that Alaaxis might be safer aboard the heroes' ship, a place Timogen wouldn't have access to or knowledge of. Heroes who have the ability to read Traven's thoughts can easily learn this information.

SCENE 7: ALAAXIS

Alaaxis doesn't reveal to the heroes that she is President Kevik's niece, unless they somehow pull the information from her mind. Even if they discover this, she won't talk to the authorities because she's afraid that Kevik would become involved in her life, and she doesn't want that for reasons she'll discuss only if a hero makes a successful Interaction skill check at +3.

Heroes who attempt to win her confidence must make an Interaction or Interaction—*charm* skill check. A Marginal success or Critical Failure does nothing to allay Alaaxis' fears; an Ordinary result gives her some assurance, but not much. A Good result is enough to make her think she stands a good chance of coming out of this alive; an Amazing result erases any doubt.

If the heroes ask about her relationship with Timogen, Alaaxis gives them a quick summary:

"It was romantic at first, as you'd expect. Ironically, one of the things that first attracted me to Raive was the aura of danger about him. He was an oxygen runner, and oxygen runners face danger all the time. I was drawn to that.

"Raive was sure he could get away with anything. He thought he was invincible, and everything he did to himself, all of the implants, reinforced that. He kept saying the cyberware was making him better—stronger, faster, smarter. It was shortly after he got the reflex that I started to see a change in his personality. After he'd had some more work done, he got steadily worse until I just couldn't look at him anymore. I left him, and he's been stalking me ever since. He left me a message on my videophone and . . . a few other things."

Alaaxis has Timogen's videophone message on a 3D. She'll give the crystal to the heroes with the warning that its contents are disturbing.

If the heroes seem reluctant to deal with Timogen, Alaaxis says she can pay them \$600,000. She has the money in a bank account—the remnants of a generous endowment from her parents and every dollar of the money given to her by "Uncle Mike."

Alaaxis has no desire to leave Tribon, but she's not safe in the city so long as Timogen remains a threat. She knows that he has no residence of his own, but he does have many friends or acquaintances in Tribon who might harbor him. If the heroes ask about Timogen's friends, Alaaxis says that he was in a group of oxygen runners whose names mostly escape her. However, she recalls the name of one: Brenda Bhatnagar. (Alaaxis and Timogen were at Brenda's place watching holovideos one evening some time ago.) Alaaxis remembers where she lives, but Brenda's videophone code is unlisted.

MESSAGE RECEIVED!

If the heroes watch Timogen's video-phone message at some point, read or paraphrase the following:

The crystal shows you images of a young man who might have been attractive at one time. It's hard to tell how much of the man is left behind the metal plates, the wires, and the madness. Most of the time, his face is frozen in a cold stare, shadowed in a dark room filled with flickering lights, twisted metal, and loose wiring. You see less and less humanity every minute, as he waves his severed arm or talks of replacing his eyes with black metal orbs that see only loathing.

There's an inexplicable charisma in his hate, the way he holds himself and measures each word. Some of that is lost over time, though, as he degrades from calculating madman to screaming monster. The messages grow increasingly perverse and twisted until, finally, you've had enough.

The recording contains several useful pieces of information that astute heroes can extract and use to track down Timogen. Traven lets the heroes use the small desktop computer in his office, which has access to the Grid. Any hero who spends an hour or more studying the message carefully can make an Investigate-search, Knowledge-deduce, or Awareness-perception skill check.

A Marginal success yields no clues. An Ordinary result reveals the first clue only, a Good result reveals the both the first and second, an Amazing result reveals all three. If the heroes are unable to find the clues, or if they have trouble interpreting them, Traven or Alaaxis can lend a hand.

Clue #1: While showing off his new cybernetic arm, Timogen compliments "Sethyk" on his "exquisite handiwork." His mention of the name "Sethyk" in this context suggests he could be Timogen's cyber surgeon.

Searching for the name "Sethyk" in the public and ULS directories yields no valuable information. Sethyk's clutch name is S'kesh. If heroes discover this after a bit of digging, they can find a listing for S'kesh in the directory. No address or video/holo-phone code is listed, but the information might narrow the search.

Clue #2: Almost immediately after complimenting Sethyk on his workmanship, Timogen says, "Not bad for a twerp who makes boxes with wheels."

Heroes who make a successful Knowledge skill check (or a Technical Science-technical knowledge skill check at -2) realize that "boxes with wheels" suggests t-kats, which are common utility robots. (See page 169 in *Chapter 10: Computers* in the *Player's Handbook* for a description.) The public directory lists five stores in Tribon that sell new and used t-kats—two on the middle tier and three on the lower tier. (Sethyk's store, T-Kat Buy and Trade, is one of the ones on the middle tier.)

Clue #3: During his ranting, Timogen knocks the videophone askew. Before he rights it, the picture catches the blurry image of a neon sign. The sign looks illegible, but any hero making a successful Awareness-perception or Knowledge-deduce skill check



realizes that it's backwards and warped, as if reflected on a curved surface.

A successful Computer Science or Knowledge-computer operations skill check enables a hero to sharpen the blurry image, but an Awareness-perception or Knowledge-deduce skill check at -3 is still needed to read the backwards neon sign. It says "Beta Holovideo." (The image is distorted because it's reflected off the surface of some robot body plating hanging on a wall. Beta Holovideo is the name of a store next to Sethyk's that went out of business.)

SESHEYAN SHADOWS

Watching Alaaxis and the heroes are two sesheyans named Arli'ith and Pli'ador. Timogen called on his friend, a cyberware black marketeer named Quentin Tryce, to provide him with a few extra eyes.

The sesheyans have subdermal comm gear, enabling them to com-

municate with each other when separated. The comm gear also gives them a direct link to Tryce. Furthermore, each sesheyan has had one of its eyes replaced with an Ordinary cyberoptic implant that enables Tryce to see what they see. The sesheyans' orders are to follow Alaaxis wherever she goes (using their Stealth-shadow skill). They have the advantage of flight but are unarmed and can't hold their own in a fight. If confronted, they play dumb or flee.

Heroes who take Alaaxis out of the Black Nebula are shadowed. Each hero can make an Awareness check at +2 to notice the sesheyan shadows. (If the heroes are actually looking for shadows, remove the +2 penalty.) Giving the sesheyans the slip requires that each hero make a Stealth-hide or Street Smart-street knowledge skill check and compare that results to the sesheyans' Stealth-shadow skill check. The better result wins. The Gamemaster may apply bonuses to the heroes' checks if they attempt to lose the sesheyans in a particularly crafty way. If Alaaxis and the heroes split up, the sesheyans automatically follow Alaaxis.

OPTIONS

Alaaxis is willing to do almost anything to rid herself of Timogen. The heroes have two choices:

- Approach Timogen's fellow oxygen runner, Brenda Bhatnagar (proceed with Scene 8).
- Search for Timogen at Sethyk's store, if they've managed to deduce its location (skip to Scene 9).

ALAAXIS KEVIK

Level 1 human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 9	(0)	INT 10	{0}
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 11	{+1}
CON 9		PER 11	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 11+/10/5/2	

Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4
Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Actions: 2
Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Skills

Athletics [9]; Acrobatics [10]—*defensive martial arts* [11]; Vehicle Operation [10]; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [10]—*computer operation* [11], *first aid* [11]; Street Smart [11]; Awareness [11]—*perception* [13]; Deception [11]—*bluff* [12]; Entertainment [11]—*dance* [13], *sing* [14]; Interaction [11]—*charm* [12], *seduce* [12].

Cyber Gear

Artificial lungs, BioArt.

Alaaxis' eyes betray her fear. She's constantly looking around at the crowd, afraid that Timogen has slunk in unnoticed and is watching her from a darkened corner.

Alaaxis suspected, even as a child, that her mother was sleeping with Michael Kevik during the many months her father was away conducting survey missions on Werth's moons. She never had proof of the liaison, but her suspicions were reinforced by her mother's behavior and Kevik's desperate attempts to gain her affection.

Shortly after her father's return, the situation took a turn for the worse. Her parents tried desperately to keep Alaaxis in the dark, but she heard the fights and was old enough to see how much their marriage had decayed. One day her parents resolved to mend the situation, if only for their daughter's sake, and embarked on a trip offworld. That was the last Alaaxis saw of them. Their STG shuttle crashed shortly after leaving the Tribon hangar. An investigation of the wreckage determined that a defect in the planetary thruster casing caused the crash, but Alaaxis has always blamed Kevik. Had he not been involved in the first place, her parents would still be alive.

As her legal ward, Michael Kevik feels responsible for Alaaxis' well-being and has tried on several occasions to play a more pivotal role in her life, but she wants nothing to do with him. Kevik has sent her money—a lot of money—over the years, but she has spent not one dollar of it. She would give it all to be rid of the monster in her life: the cykotek Timogen.

ARLI'ITH AND PLI'ADOR**Level 3 seshayan Free Agents [2]**

STR 9 [0] INT 10 [0]
DEX 11 [+2] WIL 11 [+1]
CON 9 PER 10

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 # Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Skills

Melee Weapons [9]; Acrobatics [11]—*dodge* [12], *flight* [12]; Stealth [11]—*shadow* [12]; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [10]—*language: Standard* [13]; Awareness [11]; Investigate [11]—*search* [13], *track* [13]; Resolve [11]—*mental* [12]; Deception [11]—*bluff* [12]; Interaction [10].

Cyber Gear

Nanocomputer, passive data slot, subdermal comm gear.

Arli'ith and Pli'ador were hired by Quentin Tryce (see page 25) through several cutouts. They know only the one who actually paid them to do the job, a human named Samuel Carver (Hm/Lison/FA-4). Both of them were told to follow Alaaxis and whoever is with her. Both have transceivers to communicate with Carver. In the event of trouble, one is to maintain contact with Alaaxis while the other attempts to get a message through to a Grid message box. The heroes can attempt to pursue this line of investigation, but it will be difficult, as Tryce monitors several layers of his organization from his nexus. He will simply shut down any avenues of inquiry that lead to him, reactivating them later when the affair has reached a satisfactory conclusion.

SCENE 8: DO OR DIE

Raive Timogen was the leader of a team of daring oxygen runners who playfully referred to themselves as "Raive's Faves." The four runners who made up Timogen's team were Brenda Bhatnagar (human female), Jako'bek (seshayan male), Danen Christidis (human male), and Harvey Baker (human male).

When Timogen began manifesting the earliest signs of cykosis, the others knew something was wrong but chose to ignore his behavior until it became intolerable. Even then, rather than deal with the problem and face Timogen, they tried to distance themselves from him. It was a mistake. Timogen managed to hunt down and kill three of them but was unable to locate the fourth.

BRENDA BHATNAGAR

Brenda is the only one of Timogen's team that Alaaxis knows and remembers well. Alaaxis believes Brenda might know where Timogen is hiding. However, she is wrong.

Brenda's residence is located in a comfortable enclave on Tribon's lower tier. If the heroes decide to visit, they find the sliding metal door to her spacious apartment is unlocked. On entering, they hear the sound of screaming voices and explosions.

The noises are coming from a holoviewer in the main room that's been left activated. Sprawled on the floor nearby is Brenda's corpse. Heroes who make a successful Medical Science—*forensics* skill check determine that Brenda has been dead for 40–45 hours. The cause of death is a gaping stab wound through her chest—caused by Timogen's BattleKlaw.

A search of Brenda's quarters yields an illegal stutter pistol (packed away in a drawer), three holovideo action movies with the Beta Holovideo brand on the cases, and a 3D containing a directory of friends, family, and acquaintances. A special section of the directory lists the names, addresses, and videophone codes for the other members of Timogen's team.

DANEN CHRISTIDIS AND HARVEY BAKER

According to Brenda's directory, these two bachelors share an apartment just a few blocks from Brenda's enclave. Heroes trying to contact Danen or Harvey by videophone are out of luck. If they visit the residence, they find another grisly sight. Danen's dismembered body is strewn about the apartment, while Harvey lies near the videophone with his head twisted around backward.

Timogen paid a visit over 50 hours ago, entering the security code and unlocking the door. He immediately stabbed Danen in the throat with a BattleKlaw, then rushed Harvey, whose desperate

attempt to reach the videophone proved futile. Afterward, Timogen finished off Danen, who was still half-alive and crawling toward the front door. The murders were committed without much noise.

Stashed in a closet is a case containing three bootleg LOX (liquid oxygen) rods (see the "New Equipment" sidebar on page 41) with a black-market value of *5,000 each. There's little else worth taking.

Shortly after the heroes arrive, neighbors in adjacent apartments emerge to find out what's going on. If the heroes question them, they claim to have heard and seen nothing, except for one woman who spends too many hours watching ULN:

"Those boys had some rowdy friends, but things were so quiet lately I assumed they'd gone oxygen running. That's what they do, you know—I mean, did. I guess, in a strange way, they're better off. According to ULN, six oxygen teams have gone missing planetside. The authorities don't know what happened to them, either. I guess it's just not safe being an oxygen runner. Or maybe they were dealing black-market oxygen and got whacked by the syndicate. I bet with all the oxygen shortages, people are willing to knock off just about anyone for some fresh air."

The woman doesn't know much more about the oxygen runners who have vanished; this hook is resolved during the heroes' return visit to Lison in Act II.

ULS security is summoned to investigate the murders. If the heroes remain on the scene, they are detained and questioned but eventually cleared of wrongdoing, once Mindwalkers with ESP-*postcognition* investigate the crime in closer detail. The heroes are expected to return any items they might have removed. They could be fined up to *5,000 per LOX rods in their possession unless they are particularly adept at concealing evidence (Manipulation-*prestidigitation*) or sleight of tongue (Interaction-*charm*) or Deception-*bluff*.

JAKO'BEK

Jako (as he is known to friends) is the only member of Timogen's team who is still alive. He was not home when Raive called on him, having stumbled on Brenda's remains first. The heroes find his apartment unoccupied, but with three successes on a complex Investigate-*search* skill check they uncover a 3D hidden behind a mirror. The crystal is linked to an account containing *3,200.

Heroes can make a complex Street Smart skill check, rolling once per hour of game time, to learn more about Jako's whereabouts. One success yields little more than a "Jako sighting." On two successes, the heroes learn that Jako has been trying to purchase an illegal firearm (on credit, no less). Three successes lead to a run-in with Jako himself. The sesheyan offers to pay money for the heroes' protection and provides the following information readily:



- Before Timogen went crazy, the team had a plan to hoard oxygen and sell it on the black market. Someone in VoidCorp had informed Timogen that oxygen was going to become "suddenly scarce" and that even small quantities would soon be in great demand.

- Timogen is keeping the stolen oxygen in the back of T-Kat Buy and Trade, a small store on Tribon's middle tier. The backroom is locked with a security keypad. Only Timogen and the store owner, Sethyk, know the access code.

- Sethyk has performed most of Timogen's cyber surgery, but Timogen gets the raw materials from some guy named "Quentin." Jako believes that Timogen is either hiding somewhere in the back of the t-kat store or with this Quentin fellow. He's pretty sure that Sethyk knows who and where Quentin is.

- Danen and Harvey heard a rumor that the Rigunmor Star Consortium is willing to pay up to *5,000 per LOX rod. They were thinking about setting up a deal with a Rigunmor Guild to buy their shares of the oxygen stored at T-Kat Buy and Trade.

Jako cannot provide any more information. The reference to VoidCorp, the vanishing oxygen runners, and the imminent oxygen shortage all stem from VoidCorp's release of Organism Omega into Lison's virtually nonexistent ecosystem—a greater scheme the heroes are only beginning to uncover.

Jako hasn't much money on him (most of it was hidden in his apartment), but he offers his services to the heroes. If they agree, he can lead them to T-Kat Buy and Trade.

JAKO'BEK

Level 3 sesheyan Free Agent

STR 9	[0]	INT 10	[+1]
DEX 13	[+2]	WIL 9	[0]
CON 10		PER 9	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4, fly 44		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	

Attacks

Unarmed 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/0

Skills

Melee Weapons [9], Acrobatics [13]-*dodge* [14], *flight* [15]; Stealth [13]-*hide* [14]; Stamina [10]; Knowledge [10]-*language: Standard* [12]; Security [10]-*security devices* [12]; Awareness [9]; Investigate [9]-*search* [10], *track* [11]; Deception [9]-*bribe* [10], *gamble* [11]; Interaction [9]-*charm* [10], *taunt* [10].

Cyber Gear

Nanocomputer, passive data slot, reflex, enhance program (Good, -2 bonus to Acrobatics skill checks).

Jako is utterly terrified. After finding Brenda's body, he tried to call Danen and Harvey but has not visited their residence, fearing what he might find there. His distress has affected his judgment so much that he completely forgot to report Brenda's murder. Now he's trying to get his paws on a ranged weapon. (If he'd known that Brenda had one in her apartment, he would've taken it.) After making discreet inquiries with oxygen runners and black marketeers who frequent the Black Nebula, he has heard that Traven hired a group of rhodium runners to "off" Timogen. Most perceive the reason to be a love triangle between Traven, Timogen, and Alaaxis. The supposition is wrong, of course, but Jako sees an opportunity and begins searching for the heroes.

He is willing to remain with the heroes until he knows Timogen is no longer a problem. At that point he returns to his usual haunts and tries to ingratiate himself with another team of oxygen runners—assuming he can't steal some of what Timogen has hidden away.

SCENE 9: SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

Raive Timogen has no permanent residence. When he's not stalking Alaaxis, he's haunting the backstreets of Tribon trying to acquire more black-market cyberware, or lurking in the workshop of Sethyk S'kesh, a deranged 'sa who supplements his income by performing illegal cyber surgery. Sethyk's secret workshop is behind T-Kat Buy and Trade, an innocuous little store in the heart of Tribon's middle tier, about fifteen blocks from the Black Nebula. A map of the store is provided for reference; the sections below correspond to the numbered areas on the map.

Head or paraphrase the following as the heroes approach:

T-Kat Buy and Trade is one of several nondescript stores with narrow facades, dirty windows, and decidedly unappealing displays. The adjacent store on the right, Beta Holovideo, looks like it's been out of business for some time. The sign is unlit, and the store's windows are completely blocked out with movie posters that have yellowed with age.

The air in this part of the city seems particularly foul. You hear echoes of a broadcast voice warning you that several atmosphere recyclers are malfunctioning due to power failures in such-and-such district, and that people should breathe accordingly. This only makes the air feel and smell much worse, particularly in the pale glare of the overhead lights.

I. T-KAT BUY AND TRADE

If the heroes enter the store, read or paraphrase the following:

You see a single room 12 meters wide and 18 meters deep cluttered with shelf after shelf of small, box-shaped robots. Set into the back wall of the store is a metal door with a security keypad attached to its frame.

The store clerk, a weren, is vigorously polishing one of the dustier, older models and humming to himself. He stops and looks at you. "Greetings, my spendthrift friends," he growls. "How can I make your lives better today?"

The clerk, Warka, happily shows heroes the "latest model of cleaning drone—an excellent addition to the lazy person's domicile." Whether or not the heroes seem interested, Warka assures them that T-Kat Buy and Trade has only the finest merchandise. He plucks one of the t-kats off the shelf to show the heroes, and as he does so, one of its wheels falls off and rolls under the counter. While Warka tries to reach the tiny wheel with his oversized claws, heroes have time to investigate the

security keypad and the back door. The steel door is durable and cannot be broken down or shot out without attracting undue attention from the street and from the occupants in the backroom.

Warka knows that the store owner, Sethyk, spends a lot of time in the backroom. He assumes the area is spacious, although he's never actually seen it, because he's witnessed the 'sa coming and going with heaps of junk—enough to fill a small warehouse. Most of the stuff has been robotic parts, wires, and other "thingsies." (Like most weren, Warka is not technically inclined.)

He has also seen Timogen come and go as he pleases, and he knows that "the half-metal man" keeps some black cerametal cases in the backroom; however, he does not know that they contain oxygen. He assumes they hold more robotics equipment for the 'sa and guesses that Timogen is some kind of "delivery guy."

Warka does not know the five-digit code to the security keypad (7-7-2-7-2)—nor does he know that it's boobytrapped. Entering the wrong code three times in a row or tampering with the keypad itself triggers a radio signal that activates a t-kat hidden on the floor behind the counter. The robot is programmed to "rush" toward whoever tampered with the keypad. Sethyk has rigged the t-kat with a single charge of plastic explosive set to go off when it comes within 2 meters of its intended target. The t-kat pursues its target anywhere in the store but does not leave the building. If it can't reach the target within three rounds, it returns to its place behind the counter and shuts down until reactivated.

Detonation of the plastic explosive destroys the t-kat and sends shrapnel in all directions, causing Amazing damage (d6+2w) to anyone within 2 meters, Good damage (d4+2s) to anyone within 4 meters, and Ordinary damage (d4s) to anyone else in the store not protected by hard cover.

Disarming the explosive requires three successes on a complex Demolitions—*disarm* skill check, but cannot be done while the robot is activated. Bypassing the keypad's security lock without tripping the radio signal takes a successful Manipulation—*lockpick* or Security—*security devices* skill check. If Jako'bek is with the heroes, he can lend his skills.

WARKA

Nonprofessional weren

STR 11	[+1]	INT 9	[+1]
DEX 7	[0]	WIL 8	[0]
CON 9		PER 10	
Durability: 13/13/7/7		Action check: 9+/8/4/2	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Claws	11/5/2	d4+1w/d4+3w/d4+1m	LI/O
Gravmace	12/6/3	d8+3s/d6+3w/d8+3w	LI/O

Skills

Athletics [11]; Unarmed Attack [11]; Melee Weapon [11]—*bludgeon* [12]; Stamina [9]—*endurance* [10]; Knowledge [9]—*language: Standard* [11]; Awareness [8]; Interaction [10]—*bargain* [12].

Warka is a typical weren in appearance, but not as mean as he looks. He's supposed to keep strangers from nosing around (Sethyk didn't hire him for his astonishing computational skills) and keeps a gravmace behind the counter for that purpose. However, the thought of actually striking someone makes Warka flinch, and he can easily be compelled to surrender the weapon. (All Interaction—*intimidate* skill checks receive a -2 step bonus.)

2. BACKROOM

This storage area is empty save for ten identical cerametal cases arranged neatly on the floor and a curtain of wire mesh hanging across one wall. The curtain completely blocks a circular, 2-meter-wide hole in the concrete wall, used by Sethyk to enter the adjacent space.

Each nondescript black case is designed to hold five LOX rods, worth \$5,000 per rod on the black market. Heroes can claim the oxygen for themselves and use the money to offset the price of rhodium—provided the sale can be made without attracting ULS Security to the scene. If they deliver the stolen oxygen to the ULS authorities, they receive nothing for their noble efforts except the thanks of Colonel Turin Zisef of the Lison Air Guard. (For more information, see page 196–197 in *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting.)

Colonel Zisef is in charge of tracking down those responsible for the serious crime of oxygen theft. He is too busy and too important to attend the heroes but conveys his thanks through an intermediary. Although the heroes are not eligible for any reward, their effort and sincerity may serve them well on worlds where ethics and morality actually mean something.

3. MAZE

Read or paraphrase the following when the heroes enter this area:

Wow. It looks like someone took a vacant building and sectioned it off with walls suspended from the ceiling by chains. They float mere inches above the floor, which is strewn with junk. All of the interior walls are actually thick draperies composed of polymer and wire mesh, weighted down with alloy plates and scraps of metal. Clumps of wires hang from lighting arrays, but most of the lights have burned out or been removed. A couple are still intact and functional, but not enough to illuminate this cavernous area well at all.

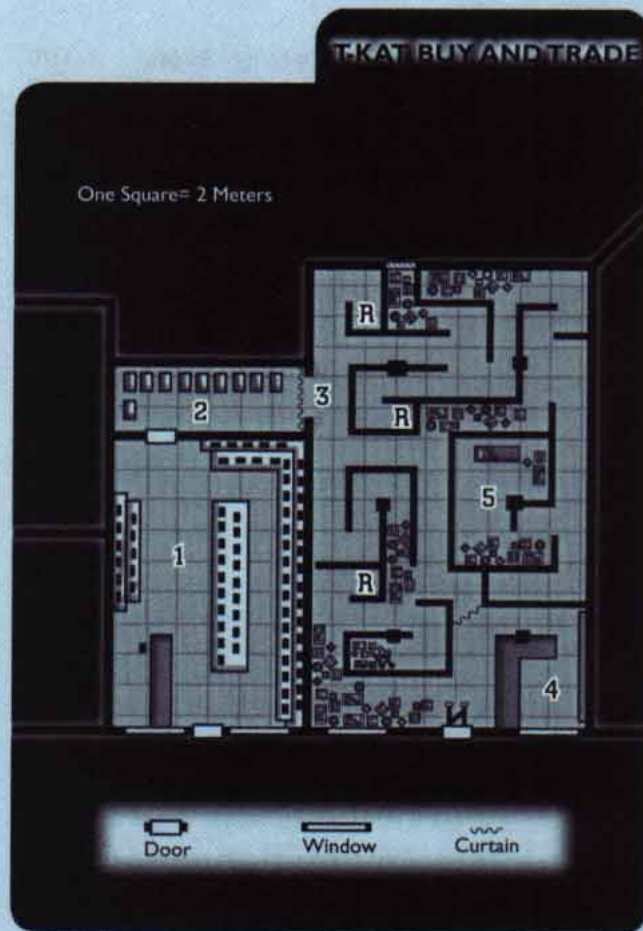
You hear the earsplitting screech of a small drill boring through metal. The sound emanates from somewhere deep inside the maze. You also hear the echoes of a female voice, though very soft.

Sethyk made a maze out of the vacant Beta Holovideo store for his amusement. The maze's "walls" are 4 meters high and hang just a few centimeters above the floor. The drilling noise emanates from area 5. The female voice is coming from area 4.

The maze has some unique qualities. While it's not possible to see through the hanging walls, one can hear through them clearly enough. The walls themselves are quite heavy and have many sharp edges—moving them is difficult and noisy. If the heroes make lots of noise, Sethyk (who is in area 5) hears them, stops, and calls out, "Raive, you twisted cykoteck, is that you?"

Whether or not he gets a response, Sethyk resumes his work, merrily drilling away. Heroes can try to home in on the sound of the drill, but the metal walls and open ceiling do strange things to the acoustics, requiring an Awareness skill check.

It's possible to circumvent the maze by climbing to the ceiling (requiring a successful Athletics—climb skill check) and walking along the support beams or lighting arrays. To do so safely requires an Acrobatics skill check for every 4 meters moved. A hero who fails the check must make a Dexterity feat check to avoid sustaining d6+2s damage; a Critical Failure also requires a Dexterity check, but in this case failure means falling into a pile of



metal junk for an additional d4+2w damage.

Here and there, Sethyk has left huge stacks of empty Beta Holovideo cases and mounds of other trash: boxes of machine parts, robotic components, bundles of wire, metal cylinders, small gears and gizmos, and so forth. In some places, the heaps are virtually impassible and must be avoided or cleared. Technicians and juryriggers might find the contents in the containers useful, but most of the stuff is, indeed, junk.

Strategically placed in several of the dead-end passages (in the places marked "R") are four robots that Sethyk built himself, each vaguely resembling a t'sa in size and appearance and armed with a small laser torch (range 4 meters). The robots are half-hidden behind hanging wires and stay in their niches until one of them spots an intruder (i.e., someone other than Sethyk), at which point they all step forth, patrolling the maze for intruders and shooting any they find. Sethyk has a control module that he can use to deactivate the robots or give them new instructions, if necessary. The robots are equipped with IR optical sensors, which have a range comparable to t'sa eyesight but see everything as varying degrees of heat. Timogen is careful not to let himself to be seen by the robots—a simple task once their hiding places are known.

T'SA ROBOTS [4]

STR 11	[+1]	INT 6	[-1]
DEX 8	[0]	WIL 2	[-2]
CON 9		PER 2	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 8+/7/3/1	
Move: walk 4, jump 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

Claws	11/5/2	d4+1s/d4+3s/d4w	LI/O
Laser torch	8/4/2	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/O

Defenses

Armor	2d4 (LI), d6 (HI), d6 (En)
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4. SIGN OF TROUBLE

If the heroes enter the former Beta Holovideo storefront, read or paraphrase the following:

The storefront is piled high with metal fragments, half-built robots, scrapped t-kats, and other junk. The windows have sheets of metal bolted over them, while the front door is barricaded with riveted metal beams. An L-shaped counter occupies one corner, and on the counter is a videophone and an active videoviewer; a ULN announcer is reading the top news stories. The only other source of illumination is a blue neon sign on one wall above some old movie posters. The sign reads "Beta Holovideo."

At first this gloomy area seems unoccupied, but no such luck. You hear a soft shuffle behind the counter.

The videophone is in fine working condition. It's the same one Timogen used. Heroes who watch or listen to the videoviewer catch broadcast #11 from the "In the News" sidebar on page 9 and can hear more as the broadcast continues.

The neon sign is the same one perceptive heroes might have spotted in Timogen's lunatic video message (Scene 7). The noise from behind the counter is made by Peshka, Sethyk's pet tishk—a creature found on t'sa worlds that resembles a bald, tailless cat. The tishk is playfully tearing up an old foil bag and is harmless unless someone other than Sethyk tries to pick it up, at which point it rakes with its claws.

Stashed behind the counter are two 9mm charge pistols, a 15mm sabot pistol, and four concussion grenades. Timogen placed these weapons here for safekeeping.

PESHKA THE TISHK

STR 2	(d4)	INT 3	(d4+1)
DEX 12	(d4+10)	WIL 8	(d4+6)
CON 4	(d4+2)	PER 2	(d4)
Durability: 4/4/2/2		Action check: 8+/7/3/1	
Move: sprint 20, run 16, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

Claws	8/4/2	1s/1s/1w	LI/O
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Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Acrobatics [12]–fall [13]; Stealth [12]–hide [14], sneak [15]; Awareness [8]–intuition [10], perception [9].

5. MAD SCIENTIST

Sethyk is seated facing the entrance to his enclosure. When any hero approaches within a few meters, regardless of the interven-

ing walls, have Sethyk make an Awareness–intuition skill check. If it succeeds, he senses that the heroes are close and activates his robots (assuming they have not already activated on their own).

Read or paraphrase the following description when the heroes see Sethyk for the first time:

The source of the drilling turns out to be a t'sa perched atop a partially disassembled t-kat, boring a miniscule hole into what looks like a human eyeball. The drill he's using is quite tiny, and he's holding the eyeball up to a small desk light to ensure that the hole is drilled just so. His whiplike tail flicks about him madly as he works.

About the "room" you see the telltale furnishings of a cybernetics lab: cyberlimbs hanging from racks, artificial eyeballs rolling around in glass beakers, an obsolete but functional desktop computer, and of course, the operating table, tilted with the headrest up. Dried pools of blood and twisted scraps of metal cover the floor. Two machines with metal limbs are positioned near the table, but neither is seeing much use at the moment.

Sethyk is intent on his work and does not answer questions. He has the control module for the t'sa robots strapped to one arm. When someone comes near him or tries to take the control, Sethyk screams, "Corporate slugs! You'll never learn my secrets! My robots will destroy you all!" He then activates any remaining robots and hurls the module over the maze wall toward the storefront, where it is lost in the piles of junk. (Heroes can make an Awareness skill check to determine roughly where the device landed, and an Investigate–search skill check at +3 for every 10 minutes spent looking for it.)

If his robots have been destroyed, there's not much Sethyk can do but curse and murmur and continue about his business. The only way he'll speak to the heroes is if they engage him in a topic that interests him, like cybernetics. He can provide detailed information about all of the cyber enhancements Timogen has received. He also knows the following information, which must be coaxed out of him using Investigate–interrogate, Deception–bribe, or Interaction specialty skills:

- Timogen isn't coming back. He said he had a new plan and went to see Quentin Tryce. Timogen and Sethyk both obtain cyberware from Tryce, who heads an illicit cyberware distribution syndicate.
- Tryce controls his syndicate from a dome in the Kelvar District on Tribon's upper tier.
- Timogen is beginning to master his cykosis, controlling his impulses, and no longer wants to harm Alaaxis. Instead, he wants to leave Lison and seek out other cykoteks in Old Space. He needs Tryce to help him escape—in exchange for Alaaxis and ten cases of LOX rods. Sethyk doesn't know why Tryce wants them.

Unknown to Sethyk, Quentin Tryce, who supplied him all of his cyberware, has had implanted in him a "security" device. Tryce monitors the t'sa cybersurgeon through his nexus, so he is aware within minutes if anything untoward occurs. In the event of Sethyk revealing anything about Tryce or his network, one of Tryce's cyberdrones informs him of it and Tryce triggers a hidden shock implant that sends a lethal electric jolt through Sethyk. Unfortunately for Tryce, it does not kill Sethyk immediately.

"He's ... with ... Tryce. Gray ... dome ... Kelvar ... District ... upper ... tier. Tell Haive ... he ... can't ... leave yet. I ... haven't ... finished ... his new ... eye."

Sethyk's desktop computer contains the t'sa's personal log, including all the information concerning Timogen's implant and progress, and his urge to leave Lison and find other cykoteks. The whole thing is written in T'sa—a large, almost incomprehensible block of text.

Next to the computer is something of particular interest, which the heroes notice if they make a successful Investigate-search skill check at -2 or an unmodified Awareness skill check. Read or paraphrase the following if they are successful:

Sitting next to Sethyk's computer is a transparent cylinder with metal caps on both ends. Inside are three insectoid carapaces and some grains of sand. Upon closer inspection, you see that the shells—each one about 8 centimeters long and half as wide—are crafted from fibrous metal.

Timogen recovered the carapaces during his last excursion to Lison's surface, thinking they might be of some interest to Sethyk, but the t'sa hasn't had much time to study them. Sethyk knows only that they are from the surface. However, anyone familiar with Lison's ecology knows that it has no documented insect life. The carapaces are in fact the remains of Organism Omega.

Buried amid metal scraps is a partially dismantled laser pistol that Sethyk has scavenged for parts, while an intact self-repair unit is stashed inside a t-casing. Five Ordinary cyberlimbs hang on the wall and on top of a box of scrap metal is a Good subdermal weapon mount in excellent condition. There's nothing else of value.

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

If the heroes decide to stake out Sethyk's shop to see if Timogen returns, roll a d8 each hour they spend waiting. On a 1, a skycar bearing the VoidCorp insignia lands in front of the store. The car has a driver and five passengers, all male humans dressed in black business suits. The driver gets out and stands next to the car while the others enter the store (area 1 on the map). One of these is Richard Pulver (Employee DA322 59HKA), a huge man with body plating visible on his face and hands. Pulver uses the correct security code to enter the backroom (area 2), and the men begin removing the oxygen cases and loading them into the back of the skycar. Once they're done, all six climb into the vehicle and leave.

Heroes can brazenly hold the VoidCorp personnel at gunpoint and take the oxygen—though Pulver and his superiors won't be pleased. If questioned, the men claim they are just following orders. They do not know who owns the oxygen or why it's needed, and say they know nothing about Alaaxis or Timogen. Ideally, Pulver is not killed in this encounter but reappears in Act II.

Pulver's stats are given on page 32. For the other five VoidCorp employees, use the Ordinary brawler template on page 97 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*. None are armed, but all have the Unarmed Attack-brawl skill save Pulver, who has Unarmed Attack-power martial arts.

SETHYK S'KESH

Level 7 t'sa Tech Op

STR 8	[0]	INT 12	[+1]
DEX 12	[+1]	WIL 10	[0]
CON 10		PER 9	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
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Defenses

Armor	d4+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4-1 (En)
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Skills

Athletics [8], Manipulation [12], Stamina [10], Computer Science [12]-hardware [13], programming [14], Knowledge [12]-computer operation [13], first aid [16], language: Standard [15], Life Science [12]-biology [14], Medical Science [12]-medical knowledge [14], surgery [16], Technical Science [12]-juryrig [14], repair [14], technical knowledge [13], Awareness [10]-intuition [11], perception [11], Interaction [9].

Cyber Gear

Nanocomputer, NIJack, reflex, enhance program (Good, -2 bonus to Manipulation skill checks).

When Beta Holovideo went bankrupt, Sethyk bought the space and converted it into a workshop and maze. He spends most of his time in that area, building strange gizmos and tinkering with his robots, and entrusts his business to Warka. He is obsessed with building the very first cybernetic "laser eyes," giving Timogen the power to fire destructive beams of light from his eyeballs.

Some would call this madness, but Sethyk prefers to think of it as ingenuity.

Sethyk is unaware of the shock implant that Tryce installed in his head, as the implant is small and difficult to locate with most cyberware scanners.

SCENE 10: SYNDICATE

Timogen's ally, Quentin Tryce, runs a crime syndicate that spans the city. Through his web of contacts, Tryce has become one of the largest providers of illegal cyberware in Tribon.

In exchange for the syndicate's assistance in helping him leave Lison, Timogen has offered Tryce the ten oxygen cases stored in the back room of T-Kat Buy and Trade. He's also informed Tryce about Alaaxis' relationship to President Kevik (something she unwisely revealed during the formative stages of their doomed relationship). Kevik has been cracking down on black marketeers in Tribon (see





items #8 and #9 of the "In the News" sidebar on page 9). Tryce plans to keep Kevik off his back by kidnaping Alaaxis and giving her a shock implant that he could trigger if Kevik refuses to back down.

NEXUS

If Alaaxis and the heroes are still under surveillance by Arli'th and Pli'ador, Tryce uses the sesheyans to keep abreast of their whereabouts and activities. If his spies lost their quarry at some point, Tryce places his entire syndicate on alert. As a precaution, he stations operatives at the various tunnels and lifts leading to the surface.

By this time, the heroes should know where to find Tryce and Timogen: an innocuous gray dome on Tribon's upper tier (refer to the map on page 25). It is an obsolete atmosphere recycling facility that VoidCorp purchased and yielded to Tryce as his base of operations.

If the heroes leave matters to the authorities, the dome is raided by ULS Security, but neither Tryce nor Timogen are found. (They remain hidden inside a secret chamber inside the structure and are not detected.) Alaaxis still fears for her life, and Traven declines to help with the heroes' rhodium shipment, since Tryce was apparently allowed to escape.

If the heroes investigate the dome for themselves, they have better luck. Tryce seems particularly interested in speaking to them. Read or paraphrase the following:

You pass through the outer airlock to the dome's inner chamber, where your footsteps resound on the grillwork floor. Looking around, you are greeted by horrifying sights.

The interior is lit by a single spotlight, mounted to the dome's apex 15 meters above, which circles slowly counterclockwise about the chamber. You see that the entire inner surface of the dome is covered with flashing panels, computers, and webs of circuitry. Suspended around the dome's periphery are several cyborgs—t'sa, sesheyans, humans—each wrapped in a cocoon of wires connected to the webwork above. They hang 5 meters above the floor, cyberoptic implants gleaming in the darkness and metallic limbs twitching ever so slightly.

Directly ahead of you is a triangular dais leading to a 2-meter-deep niche lined with circuits and panels, with a security camera mounted above. A resonant voice suddenly fills the dome. "Don't be shy. Approach the dais."

The disembodied voice belongs to Quentin Tryce. The things suspended from the ceiling are drones—cyber enhanced beings who have sacrificed their identity and awareness to help Tryce monitor his syndicate and guard against incursions by gridpilots from rival stellar nations. They are wired directly into Tryce's mainframe, which he uses to hack into other systems, arrange deliveries of new cyberware, and relay orders to VoidCorp personnel throughout the city.

Tryce lurks in a secret room behind the back wall of the niche. Read or paraphrase the first paragraph below as the heroes approach, and the rest when they enter.

As you approach the dais, the circuits that line the back of the niche writhe and untwist like a nest of black vipers. The curtain of circuits retracts into the surrounding walls, and behind it you see a brightly lit chamber.

The chamber is sunk 8 meters behind the dais. On the walls are videoviewer arrays that fill the chamber with images and noise from the city outside. Near the back of this circuit-laden enclave, suspended by dozens of wires and clamps, is an obese man with tubes running out of his nostrils, neck, and stomach.

His fingers are plugged into sockets in the nearby walls. As you approach, he takes his gaze away from the monitors and gives you a bloodshot glare. "Welcome to my nexus. I'm Quentin Tryce."

If the heroes allow Tryce to speak, he continues:

"I run one of the largest and most profitable businesses in Tribon. As you can see, I have operatives scattered throughout the city, watching anyone and anything that interests me. I can see through their eyes, as it were. You see, my specialty is the procurement and distribution of black-market cyberware. However, I do have contacts in the rhodium business who can sell you a consignment for far less than what Kessler or anyone else is willing to offer."

"I know you met with Traven at the Black Nebula, and I suspect he made some mildly tantalizing offer, but you rhodium runners are all the same—always looking for the best deal in town. Well, you've come to the right place."

"I will have a full consignment of rhodium delivered promptly at 10% below current market price. Moreover, I will see to it that your ship is safely escorted out of the Oberon system. That alone will spare you the Kind Tax."

If the heroes ask about the "Kind Tax," Tryce seems surprised that they haven't heard of Thomas Kind and his league of pirates. "They take 20% of the cargo of any rhodium transport caught leaving the Oberon system," he explains, then continues:

"Furthermore, I can provide you with the finest cyberware in Lison at a 25% discount. I can even guarantee free installation. In return for this very generous offer, I ask only two things."

"First, I ask that you deliver Alaaxis into my custody. I am a man who keeps his end of a bargain, and I promise you that no harm will befall her. However, she is important to me in ways you cannot know, and I must have her."

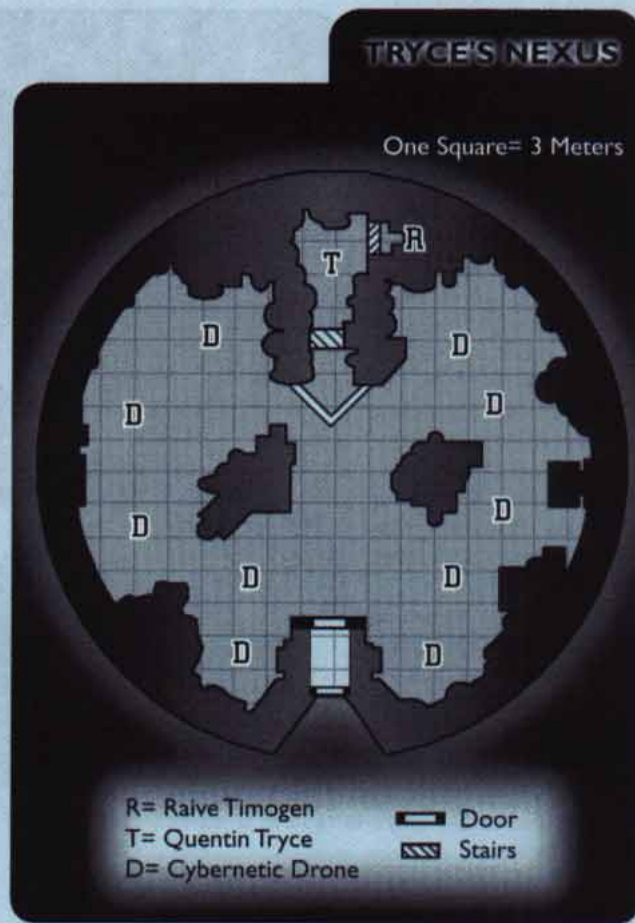
"Second, allow Timogen to accompany you out of the Oberon system. I have cured him of his cykosis. I assure you, he is no longer interested in harming Alaaxis and has decided to search for others of his kind in the vastness of Old Space. I still owe him a favor, and I'd like to repay that favor now."

If the heroes accept Tryce's offer, he upholds most of his end of the bargain. He warns them not to renege on the agreement since he routinely monitors all communications in and out of the city, and he reminds them that notifying the authorities would be "a grievous miscalculation." In two days' time, Tryce delivers a consignment of black-market rhodium. He also has two VoidCorp attack ships (actually pirate raiders) safely escort the heroes' ship—with Timogen aboard—through the Oberon system. If Alaaxis is handed over, Tryce keeps her confined to his niche until one of his cyber surgeons can outfit her with a nanocomputer and shock implant.

If the heroes demand to know why Tryce wants Alaaxis, he says simply, "I need her to ensure the future of my syndicate," but beyond that declines to elaborate. If they try to negotiate and make a successful Interaction—*bargain* skill check, the heroes can persuade Tryce to lower his price for either the rhodium (see the "Negotiating a Better Deal" sidebar) or the cyberware. (He's willing to offer up to a 40% discount.)

If the heroes dismiss or outright refuse his offer, the corners of Tryce's mouth curl down, and his face sags with disappointment.

"And you call yourselves traders! I never thought I'd live to see the day when a rhodium runner would place conscience above the mighty Concord dollar!"



"I suggest you reconsider my offer. Not only would you be throwing away millions in profit, but you'd never make it out of this system alive. There are many pirates here, some of whom value the merchandise I provide. They would certainly destroy your vessel if I asked them to, for they know the value of a bribe."

CYKOTEK

Tryce calls on Timogen to defend him if threatened or attacked, or sets him free if the heroes deliver Alaaxis. Either way, read or paraphrase the following when Timogen is unleashed:

Tryce glances at a nearby wall, and its entwined circuitry recoils, revealing a hidden alcove. Charging from the niche is Raive Timogen, his face half-hidden by a mask of fibrous tendrils, his eyes aglow, his body wrapped in armor plating. At the end of each arm is a clenched metal hand with a protruding blade.

If battle erupts, Tryce seals the airlocks leading outside and wraps a tight mesh of wiring around himself to absorb dangerous weapons fire and melee blows. As a last resort, he can use the nexus circuitry to deliver an electrical shock.

If Timogen is unable to protect him, Tryce can lower the cyberdrones suspended about the dome. It takes one round to detach themselves from the circuitry. The following round, they attack. The drones, unaccustomed to mobility, are sluggish and always attack once, during the Marginal phase. Without the drones in place, Tryce cannot monitor his syndicate, so he disconnects only two at a time, keeping as many connected for as long as possible. If Tryce is slain, the drones continue functioning until instructed to

shut down or attack (either of which requires accessing Tryce's command console; see below).

Heroes can open the airlocks by killing Tryce and deactivating the master controls (Knowledge-computer operation or Technical Science-technical knowledge skill check), or by removing the access panel beside the doors and disabling the magnetic locking mechanism (Manipulation-lockpick, Security-security devices, or Technical Science-technical knowledge skill check at +1).

When Tryce dies, his syndicate dies with him—the nexus transmits a signal to activate each operative's shock implant. Timogen had a shock implant at one time but secretly instructed Sethyk to remove it, so he's unaffected by Tryce's demise.

EMPLOYEE IK234 49ASD (QUENTIN TRYCE)

Level 9 human Free Agent

STR 6	[-1]	INT 14	[+2]
DEX 11	[+1]	WIL 11	[+2]
CON 10		PER 11	
Durability: 14/13/6/5		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Move: —		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 3	

Attacks

Electrical discharge 11/5/2 d4+2s/d6+2s/d4w LI/O

Defenses

Wire mesh d4+3 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4+2 (En)

Skills

Athletics [6]; Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [10]; Business [14]-corporate [15], illicit [17]; Computer Science [14]-hacking [15], hardware [16], programming [16]; Knowledge [14]-computer operation [15], deduce [15]; Law [14]-court procedures [15]; Administration [11]-management [12]; Awareness [11]-intuition [13], perception [13]; Resolve [11]-mental [13], physical [12]; Street Smart [11]-criminal elements [14]; Interaction [11]-bargain [13], taunt [12]; Leadership [11].

Cyber Gear

CF skinweave (Amazing), exoskeleton (Good), nanocomputer, NIJack, passive data slot, self-repair unit (Good).

Although he maintains the facade of an independent black marketer, Tryce is really a VoidCorp employee. VoidCorp has spared no



expense setting up his syndicate, using the black market to distribute illegal cyberware. For security reasons, no one in the syndicate save Tryce knows that VoidCorp is involved.

Tryce's niche is where he sustains himself. He cannot leave it—nor would he want to. The tubes attached to his body provide the air and nutrients he needs to survive, as well as dealing with bodily maintenance. The extent of his daily activity is monitoring his syndicate; nothing else is important to him. Control of the dome environment is kept at Tryce's fingertips.

RAIVE TIMOGEN

Level 8 human Combat Spec

STR 12 (16)	[+1/+3]	INT 9	[0]
DEX 9	[0]	WIL 11	[+1]
CON 13		PER 7	
Durability: 17/14/7/7		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6		# Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

BattleKlaw 14/7/3 d4+3w/d4+4w/d4+5w LI/O

Skills

Athletics [16]; Unarmed Attack [16]-brawl [17]; Modern Ranged Weapons [9]-pistol [12], rifle [13]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [13]-endurance [14]; Survival [13]; Computer Science [9]; Knowledge [9]-computer operation [10], language: Aleerin [11]; Awareness [11]; Interaction [7]-intimidate [10].

Cyber Gear

Artificial lungs, 2 BattleKlaws (Ordinary), CF skinweave (Good), cyberoptics (Ordinary), cyberlimb (Good), exoskeleton (Ordinary), MusclePlus (Good), nanocomputer, NIJack, enhance program (Good; -2 bonus to Modern Ranged Weapons skill checks).

After intensive cyber enhancement, Timogen has succumbed to cykosis and turned homicidal. (See the "Cykosis" sidebar on page 244 in *Chapter 15: Cybertech* in the *Player's Handbook* for more information.) He has been stalking Alaaxis, threatening to do horrible things to her. He recently began sending her parts of his body that had been amputated and replaced with cyberlimbs.

Now he's moved beyond the raving lunatic stage and has made the logical deduction that killing Alaaxis is no longer in his best interest. He wants to leave Lison and search for other cykoteks like himself in Old Space. (This could be another symptom of his madness, but he seems quite rational and determined.)

CYBERDRONES [10]

STR 14	[+2]	INT 10	[0]
DEX 5	[-1]	WIL 6	[-1]
CON 12		PER 4	
Durability: 16/12/6/6		Action check: 11+/10/5/2	
Move: run 8, walk 4		# Actions: 1	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

BattleKlaw 14/7/3
d4+2w/d4+3w/d4+4w
LI/O

Defenses

Body plating d6 (LI),
d4+1 (HI), d4+1 (En)

Cyber Gear

BattleKlaw (Ordinary), body plating (Good), CF skinweave (Ordinary), cyberoptics (Ordinary), exoskeleton (Ordinary), nanocomputer, NIJack, optic screen, self-repair unit (Ordinary), subdermal comm gear.

SCENE 11: FINALIZING THE DEAL

If the heroes succeed in saving Alaaxis from Tryce and Timogen, Traven arranges a meeting with his contact in the rhodium trade, Kathleen Vavaroutsos. She agrees to meet the heroes at the Black Nebula for convenience. Read or paraphrase the following:

Kathleen has Traven bring her a drink called an Orion Belter while she goes on about her failed marriage to the man she now refers to as 'ol' Fishface.' After he returns, she gives her drink a quick stir with one finger before getting down to business.

Vavaroutsos asks the heroes what their best offer is so far and says she'll add a 5% discount. A hero who makes a successful Business or Interaction-*charm* skill check can persuade her to modify the discount depending on the result: Critical Failure, a belly laugh but nothing else; Failure, no discount; Ordinary, 7% discount; Good, 10% discount; Amazing, 15% discount.

Once the deal is finalized, Vavaroutsos completes a standard contract with her data slate, asking the heroes to finalize the arrangement with a voiceprint and retinal scan. She finishes her drink, leaves her card, and bids the heroes farewell, giving Traven a dismissive wave as she walks out the door.

KATHLEEN VAVAROUTSOS

Level 3 human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 9	[0]	INT 10	[0]
DEX 8	[0]	WIL 12	[+1]
CON 9		PER 12	

Durability: 9/9/5/5

Action check: 11+/10/5/2

Move: sprint 16, run 10, wa 4

Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Last resorts: 2

**Attacks**

Unarmed 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s
LI/O

Skills

Athletics [9]; Vehicle Operation [8]; Stamina [9]; Business [10]-*corporate* [11]; Knowledge [10]-*computer operation* [11], *language: Aleerin* [13], *language: Weren* [12]; Law [10]; Administration [12]-*bureaucracy* [14]; Awareness [12]-*intuition* [13], *perception* [13]; Resolve [12]; Deception [12]-*bluff* [13], *bribe* [13]; Interaction [12]-*charm* [13], *interview* [13].

Kathleen Vavaroutsos is a middle-aged woman with a wicked love for Orion Belters. She works for an agency called OSCD (Osa-Sarpico Consolidated Distributions). She is also Traven's ex-wife and is cheerfully insulting to her former husband. She comes across as polite but aloof.

SCENE 12: DELIVERY

By this point, the heroes must have ordered a shipment of rhodium from an authorized trade negotiator (such as Dwayne Kessler or Kathleen Vavaroutsos) or a black marketeer. If they were unable to complete a transaction, or if their actions have resulted in their capture or incarceration, ignore this scene.

Once a rhodium transaction is finalized, the process is straightforward.

Step 1: The rhodium is paid for up front, with the option to nullify the deal at any time prior to delivery (Step 4). Upon delivery, the deal is irrevocable.

Step 2: Rhodium ore is brought from the mines to the Ortis Refinery in Tribon for processing (requiring d4 days).

Step 3: Refined rhodium is placed aboard rhodium conveyors and taken to the planet's surface.

Step 4: Cargo conveyor shuttles (see TABLE 1: ULS VEHICLES on page 37) transport the rhodium to the waiting trader or freighter.

The heroes may observe steps 2, 3, and 4 of the process, but by law they must be accompanied by their designated negotiator or, in the event the negotiator is unavailable, ULS Security. The ULS does not mind when customers request to inspect the mines, the refinery, and



**VENDETTA-CLASS
MARAUDER**

VENDETTA-CLASS MARAUDER
Attack Ship (Military)

Compartments:	8	Durability:	40
Maneuver rating:	0	Acceleration:	2 Mpp/phase
Cruise speed:		1.5 AU/hour	Berthing: 16
Armament:		Plasma cannon (Range 4/8/16 Mm)	
		d6+2w/d8+2w/d6+1m [En(e)]	
Defenses:		Chaff, damage control (Good), jammer, point-defense gun	
Armor:		Moderate neutronite (4 dur)	
		d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)	
Computer:		Good computer core, Good battle, defense, engineering, and navigation dedicated computers	
Engines:		Induction engine	
Power:		Mass reactor rated for 20 power factors	
Drive:		5 light-years per starfall	

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1-3	C1 Command	Plasma cannon (2/3) Radio transceiver (0/1) Laser transceiver (0/1) Point-defense gun (1/1) Jammer (0/1) Airlock (1/0) Escape pod (2/0)	12/12/6
4-5	C2 Electronics	Multiband radar (1/0) EM detector (0/0) Good computer core (2/0) Mass detector (1/0) Chaff (1/0)	10/10/5
6-8	C3 Crew	Crew quarters (2/0) Passenger suite (1/0) Escape pod (2/0)	10/10/5
9-12	C4 Engineer I	Induction engine (4/4) Stardrive (3/')	14/14/7
13-14	C5 Engineer II	Mass reactor (4/')	12/12/6
		Stabilizers (2/0)	
15-16	C6 Auxiliary I	Life support unit (2/2) Autosupport (0/2) Damage control (2/2)	8/8/4
17-18	C7 Auxiliary II	Mass reactor (4/')	10/10/5
		Reentry capsule (1/0)	
19-20	C8 Cargo	Cargo space (2/0)	4/4/2

the rhodium conveyor tunnels. It's come to expect such mistrust from the stellar nations; most independent traders are content to let the Lison people do their job, and wait in their vessels for the shipments to arrive. If the heroes obtain their rhodium through the black market, the ore has already been refined. All that remains is the delivery (skip steps 2 and 3).

A cargo conveyor shuttle can transport up to 5 cargo units of rhodium at one time. It attaches to the tradeship airlock, where the crew delivers the rhodium containers one by one. The heroes can also let the shuttle into the cargo bay, where the rhodium can be removed in bulk.

Cassie Martin, the STG pilot who brought the heroes to Lison, takes them back in her shuttle. (If the heroes would rather fly with someone else, there are several good STG pilots to choose from.)

If the heroes made the deal with a legitimate ULS trade negotiator, he or she is required by law to accompany them and super-

vises the safe transport of the rhodium, and is on hand when the heroes make their final inspection of the cargo. The STG pilot waits until the transaction is concluded, then ferries the negotiator back to Lison.

SCENE 13: THE KIND TAX

Before the heroes leave Lison with their consignment of rhodium, they are contacted by Thomas Kind. Kind is a handsome, middle-aged man with a widow's peak, a sharklike smile, and a pleasant, if businesslike, demeanor.

Kind is the leader of a group of buccaneers who conduct raids on the fringe of the system, netting ships as they leave. They are thorough and well informed, leading to speculation that Kind has friends in high places. (In fact, he considers President Kevik a close friend.) For more information on Thomas Kind, see page 193 in *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting.

Through his many contacts, Kind has an uncanny knack for knowing where the heroes are and how to reach them.

"I'm Thomas Kind. I hear you're planning to transport a shipment of rhodium out of the Oberon system. My ships will be intercepting your vessel before it leaves the system, whereupon they will claim 20% of your cargo. I'm sure you're aware of the Kind Tax, but I thought I'd do you the courtesy of arranging things in advance. I look forward to conducting business with you."

If the heroes try to negotiate for safe passage out of the system without paying the Kind Tax, Kind seems both amused and sympathetic, and he tries to ease some of their concerns:

"As this is your first visit to the Oberon system, I can understand your trepidation, and I'm willing to give you runners a break. If you agree to let my ships claim 20% of your rhodium, I'll guarantee to leave your vessel and the remainder of its cargo unharmed. We will also safely escort you out of the system. It's a generous offer, and you would be wise to consider it before rendering your final decision. Once again, my thanks."

Thomas Kind is sincere. However, his sincerity is balanced by his impassive cruelty, making him a dangerous man to cross. He feels a genuine warmth toward independent traders but despises the predatory stellar nations. If the heroes belong to a stellar nation and use that to threaten Kind, he becomes irritated:

"Out here, the stellar nations pose no threat to me. The price for safe passage is 20% of your cargo. Failure to comply with these terms will result in an attack on your ship. Failure to surrender will result in its destruction. I trust I'm being clear."

Kind sends two *Vendetta*-class pirate marauders (the *Decisive* and the *Lamprey*) to intercept the heroes' trader. (A schematic of the *Vendetta*-class ship is on page 28.) Each has a full crew complement.

The encounter is inevitable unless the crew on board the heroes' vessel make a successful System Operation—sensors skill check. The navigator must score five successes on a complex Navigation—system astrogation skill check to evade Kind's more experienced crews. Read or paraphrase the following:

Well, at least Kind's pirates are prompt. A klaxon warns you of approaching driveships. Two pirate vessels are coming at you from different directions, cutting off all avenues of escape. One

sends a signal ordering you to stand down and prepare to be boarded.

The *Decisive* keeps its plasma cannon trained on the heroes' vessel while the *Lamprey* latches onto it. If the heroes comply with Kind's demands, the pirates transfer exactly 20% of the cargo to their own vessel and either leave the heroes in peace or, on request, escort them safely out of the Oberon system.

Should the heroes put up a fight, the pirates retaliate. If the pirates are attacked while aboard the heroes' vessel, they retreat to their ship. The captain disengages once most or all of them are back on board; the pirate ships then blow the heroes' vessel out of space.

If the heroes manage to capture one or more pirates alive, the remaining pirates will negotiate for their safe return—until they get what they want, at which point they turn on the heroes. (The pirates aren't as honorable as their leader.) They will not allow the heroes to simply leave the system with pirate prisoners, choosing instead to cripple the ship until reinforcements arrive.

The pirate captain is an Amazing military officer, equipped with a CF softsuit and laser pistol, as well as the following cyber gear: NJack, reflex, enhance program (Good; -2 bonus to all Modern Ranged Weapons skill checks). The ship's system operators are Good spacehands equipped with Ops gauntlets and the appropriate System Operation specialty skills, while the remaining crew are Ordinary soldiers with the same cyber enhancements as the captain, except that their enhance program is of Ordinary quality. All are equipped with battle jackets and laser pistols. These templates are on pages 98–99 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*.

SCENE 14: PAYOFF

If the heroes were sent to Lison by a stellar nation, corporation, or some other agency, they need only complete delivery of the rhodium to obtain payment—assuming they are not betrayed or swindled.

Most stellar nations pay a 5% commission. Thus, if the heroes successfully transported \$10,000,000 worth of rhodium, they would receive a \$500,000 payment on delivery, to be divided among themselves and their crew. Corporations and other benefactors (like the 'sa) offer a lower commission (2%) but allow the heroes to keep any excess profits. So if the heroes manage to pay less than current market value for the rhodium, they keep the difference as a bonus.

If the heroes are independent traders, they must try to sell their supply of rhodium to a specific system in the Stellar Ring or the Verge. It is not usually difficult to make a profit, since most clients are willing to pay more for rhodium that is brought to them.

Where possible, roleplay trade negotiations between the heroes and their potential clients. Apply step modifiers to any search attempt as necessary to account for unknown variables. For example, if a system is unexplored, the chance of finding a buyer for the rhodium is remote. If the system is heavily colonized, the heroes will be competing with other rhodium runners for business.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Guidelines for awarding achievement points are given on page 111 of *Chapter 11: Achievements* in the *Gamemaster Guide*. Below are some suggested awards:

- 1 achievement point for destroying Tryce's syndicate;
- 1 achievement point for defeating Timogen and protecting Alaaxis;
- 1 achievement point for evading the pirates and escaping the Oberon system with their full consignment of rhodium.

ACT II: THE OMEGA AGENDA

"Air shortages are commonplace. People have to learn to live with them."

—Colonel Turin Zisef, Lison Air Guard, 2500

"The Omega Agenda" takes place during the heroes' second visit to Lison and shows them the hazards facing the oxygen runners who risk their lives to replenish Tribon's air supply. This act also places the heroes at odds with an intractable enemy whose plans were thwarted during their initial visit.

If the heroes are independent traders, lure them back to Lison by planting new rumors concerning potential rhodium buyers:

- The Tricus Development Corporation (TDC Inc.) has placed advertisements on various Grids for traders to deliver rhodium to the Corrivale system. (True. However, anyone pursuing this lead must also contend with Aanghel Osui'ike, Pe Terei, and the Aanghel crime syndicate, who do their utmost to take any rhodium that enters the system. See pages 114–115 of *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting for details.)
- Melas Station, a Concord space station in the Aegis system, is protected by at least two Concord dreadnoughts and has a battery of Concord diplomats willing to negotiate for refined rhodium. (False; the Concordans recently obtained a large rhodium supply and do not wish to acquire more.)
- Devrielle Shanassin, leader of hundreds of corsairs and smugglers in the Lucullus system, has overextended his resources. Rumor has it many of his own freighters are grounded due to a short supply of rhodium. Shanassin will not only pay well for rhodium, but also offers terrific incentives to independent traders who pledge allegiance. (True. See page 130 of *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting for details.)

Independent traders may obtain as much rhodium as they require for their potential buyer(s), within the limits of what they can afford. If the heroes belong to a stellar nation, they are given enough credit to buy 15 cargo units of rhodium at the current market price in Tribon. If they are working for a private corporation, they have enough to buy 10 cargo units. Heroes representing the 'sa have enough credit to purchase 5 cargo units.

SCENE 1: TRIGGER

The scene begins with the heroes' arrival in the Oberon system. This time, they appear at a point close to its outermost world. Read or paraphrase the following:

Your last starfall brought you within sensor range of Werth, the outermost true planet of the Oberon system. Now you have to plot a course around this radiant gas giant without attracting the attention of pirates—who might be hiding behind any of the planet's five moons.

A successful System Operation—*sensors* check reveals a ship orbiting Hymn, Werth's closest moon. Contacting the vessel requires a successful System Operation—*communications* skill check at –2.

The vessel is the *OSS Reverence*, an Orlamu transport laden with penitents on a sacred pilgrimage. The vessel has light neutron armor (d6 [LI], d6 [HI], d6–1 [En]) and three plasma cannons (d6+2w/d8+2w/d6+1m). The Orlamus are strangely drawn to the moon and have no wish to be disturbed. Unless the heroes are representatives of the Orlamu Theocracy, any attempt

to communicate is ignored—that is, until their ship approaches within weapons range, at which point the Orlamus send a curt but polite warning asking the interloper to leave.

At some point, have the navigator aboard the heroes' vessel make a Navigation—*system astrogation* skill check with a –1 step bonus to plot an efficient course to Lison. On a successful result, the vessel arrives at Lison as expected. If the hero fails the check, read or paraphrase the following:

Maybe your navigator needs a refresher course in system astrogation, or maybe the computer's playing tricks on you, but it's obvious that you're nowhere near Lison. This far off the mark, it doesn't take long for trouble to find you. In fact, sensors detect a large vessel approaching.

The approaching vessel is the pirate marauder *Vouge*—one of Thomas Kind's ships. (This is another *Vendetta*-class marauder; see page 28.) When communication with the pirate vessel is established, the wren captain, Rajak Jharl, asks what the heroes are doing in this section of space and whether they are coming or going. If they admit to being lost, he laughs and agrees to escort them safely to Lison. If they state they are leaving, Captain Jharl insists on boarding their vessel to claim 20% of its cargo as required by the Kind Tax. Even if the heroes claim to have no cargo, Jharl demands to inspect the vessel personally. Trying to escape or otherwise provoking Jharl will cause him to fire on the vessel with the intent of disabling it and towing it back to Hux as a battle trophy.

For Jharl's stats and skills, use the Amazing military officer template on page 98 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Game-master Guide*. His crew consists of fifteen pirate-trainees (use the Ordinary spacehand template on page 99) in battle jackets (d6–1 [LI], d4+1 [HI], d4–1 [En]) and armed with mass pistols (d6w/d6+2w/d6m). Jharl's crew is inexperienced and suffers +1 step penalties to all System Operation skill checks during ship-to-ship combat.

SCENE 2. WHISPER

Read or paraphrase the following as the heroes' ship enters Lison orbit, filling in the blank with the name of the heroes' ship:

You see at least one other transport orbiting Lison, directly above the planet's terminator. As your ship enters orbit, a disembodied voice rises from the planet below. "This is Lison Surveillance Post Twilight-5 to registered tradeship [...]. Please state your purpose."

No skill check is required to acknowledge the signal and respond. If the heroes specify that they are here to procure rhodium, the voice replies:

"While in Lison, you are reminded to obey all planetary laws, the regulations of the Lison Trade Imperative, and all rules of proper Grid conduct. Information regarding the current rhodium market value in Tribon is available on the Grid. An STG shuttle has been dispa—"

The voice is interrupted by a burst of static followed by dead silence. Another voice, barely a whisper and clearly female, suddenly fills the void. "Your lives are in danger. Beware the man who waits by the flying saucer. The Demon is watching you."

Then the voice of Twilight-5 continues as though it had never

been cut off: "... procure such equipment upon arrival. Enjoy your stay in Lison. Twilight-5 out."

The whispered message was sent from short range. Heroes who make a successful System Operation—communications or sensors skill check at +2 can confirm only that the signal came from either the planet or a ship in orbit, and that it did not originate from the Twilight-5 post.

The message was sent by the Demon, a sentient, invasive computer program, to warn the heroes of their impending encounter with VoidCorp (see Scene 3) for reasons that become apparent later in the adventure.

The Demon's transmission blocked some important information. If the heroes request that the transmission be resent, they can hear the remainder of the interrupted message:

"An STG shuttle has been dispatched to bring you to the planet's surface. Negotiator Kessler requests to meet with you at his office in Tribon. His location and contact information are available on the Grid. If you require breathing apparatus, you can procure such equipment upon arrival. Enjoy your stay on Lison. Twilight-5 out."

Heroes can make a Knowledge—computer operation skill check to access the Lison Grid from their ship's computer and confirm the current market value of rhodium, and contact Dwayne Kessler or locate his office. It's possible to deal with a different negotiator, but like used skycar salesmen, they're all from the same mold. (All negotiators have stats and skills comparable to Kessler's.)

The heroes can arrange a rhodium deal without leaving their ship. However, the deal is not concluded until they journey to the surface. Kessler also wants to meet in person because he has a hidden agenda (see Scene 6).

Unless heroes dictate otherwise, an STG shuttle docks with their vessel and prepares to take them to the planet's surface.

SCENE 3: VEILED THREATS

Shortly after the heroes complete their descent, they arrive in Tribon. Read or paraphrase the following:

Your trip to Lison was harrowing as usual, and after disembarking the shuttle and descending several kilometers, you reach your destination. As you leave the lift, a now-familiar message greets you.

The air is not foul, but it is thin and stale. Some of the more discriminating passersby are wearing vacuum masks, but the majority of residents seem to be roughing it. After navigating a wide, gray tunnel, you find yourselves approaching a concourse dimly illuminated by spotlights on the cavern ceiling overhead. Occasionally, the shadow of a passing skycar falls over you.

As you begin to push your way through the crowd, you are approached by a man dressed in a black business suit. His massive size and lumbering gait—not to mention the metal shielding that covers parts of his face and hands—give him more than a passing resemblance to a walking tank. His broad shoulders clear a path through the crowd.

The man is Richard Pulver, also known as VoidCorp employee DA322 59HKA. The heroes may have encountered him in Act I if they staked out Sethy's shop (see Scene 9). Pulver has a 11mm charge pistol in a holster under his business jacket. Any hero who makes an Awareness skill check can tell that he is packing a firearm.

There's an awkward moment when the man isn't quite sure whether or not he should introduce himself. Finally he says, "There's someone wants to speak with you. Over there, in the skycar." He points to the far side of the concourse, where a skycar sedan with tinted glass windows has set down outside a holocade called the Flying Saucer. The windows of the arcade are adorned with holographic images of spaceships and neon lights shaped like little green men. Crowds of young kids are moving around the skycar, but no one is standing near it.

Pulver works for William Lumivix (Employee JB209 37GHY), VoidCorp's Director of Public Relations in Lison. Lumivix was alerted to the heroes' arrival by VoidCorp gridpilots monitoring communications to and from Lison.

If the heroes express interest in meeting Lumivix, Pulver guides them toward the skycar. If they decline, he gives them an icy stare and becomes insistent; however, he does not take a more aggressive posture than that, and heroes who walk away are not followed. Read or paraphrase the following if the heroes approach the skycar:

The rear window of the skycar slides down, and you feel a cool rush of fresh air escape from inside the comfortable sedan. In the back seat sits a small man dressed in a gray business suit. The man extends a pale hand in a show of friendship.

"Sorry about this impromptu meeting. I heard that you had returned to Lison, and I so much wanted to meet you. I'm William Lumivix, Director of Public Relations for VoidCorp."

If the heroes thwarted VoidCorp's plot during their first visit, Lumivix relays the following message:

"My schedule is very tight, so I'll be brief. Your business is not wanted here, nor will interference be tolerated. The last time you came, you meddled in our affairs. Provoke us, and we'll meddle in yours. To be blunt, I suggest you collect your rhodium and leave the Oberon system in due haste... while you still have a ship."

If the heroes did not interfere in the matter of Timogen and Alaax's, his message is more a warning than an outright threat:

"I've been told that during your last visit, you were tempted to involve yourselves in a dangerous affair. But you resisted, and I commend your judgment. I strongly urge you to exercise that common sense of yours regularly. Be careful with whom you deal, and pray we never cross paths. Good day."

Lumivix conveys the message with a casual, if deadly, earnestness. He then disappears behind the tinted window of the skycar and, once Pulver ducks inside, orders the driver to leave.

WHAT LUMIVIX KNOWS (BUT ISN'T TELLING)

Nothing the heroes say seems to affect Lumivix in any way. He is impervious to threats and unimpressed by shows of brute force. He has no interest in dealing with the heroes and merely wants to be rid of them. If the heroes employ a Mindwalker to pry into Lumivix's thoughts, reveal the following information:

- VoidCorp is importing and stockpiling huge supplies of oxygen.
- VoidCorp is bracing for a major oxygen crisis in Tribon. Lumivix knows that VoidCorp itself plans to create the crisis, but no specific details.

WILLIAM LUMIVIX
(EMPLOYEE JB209 37GHY)

Level 7 human Diplomat (Mindwalker)

STR 8	[0]	INT 9	[0]
DEX 11	[+1]	WIL 11	[+1]
CON 9		PER 12	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	
Psionic energy points: 11			

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Mind blast	13/6/3	d4+1s/d4+2s/d6+2s	LI/O

Skills/Psionics

Athletics [8]; Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [9]; Business [9]; Knowledge [9]—*computer operation* [10]; Administration [11]—*bureaucracy* [12], *management* [12]; Awareness [11]; Culture [12]—*diplomacy* [15]; Deception [12]; Interaction [12]—*bribe* [14]; Biokinesis [9]—*heal* [10], *rejuvenate* [11]; Telepathy [12]—*contact* [14], *datalink* [13], *mind blast* [13], *suggest* [14].

Lumivix has responsibilities beyond those of most PR directors, but he still answers to someone else and is accountable for his actions. Unlike most VoidCorp executives, Lumivix insists that his employees use their regular names. He has found that the Lison people respond better to names than numbers and realizes that corporate protocol isn't as important in the Verge as the Stellar Ring.

Lumivix sees the eventual reunification of Lison as necessary for the planet's survival but knows that VoidCorp is regarded with distrust. He was assigned to Lison after the recent debacle in which VoidCorp gridpilots were caught tampering with the electoral process. Much of his job involves damage control—rebuilding relationships fractured by suspicion and paranoia.

RICHARD PULVER
(EMPLOYEE DA322 59HKA)

Level 4 human Free Agent

STR 12	[+1]	INT 8	[0]
DEX 12	[+1]	WIL 9	[+1]
CON 9		PER 10	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	

Attacks

Unarmed— <i>power</i>	13/6/3	d6+1s/d6+3s/d4+1w	LI/O
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Defenses

Body plating d6 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4+1 (En)

Skills

Armor Operation [12]; Athletics [12]; Unarmed Attack [12]—*power martial arts* [13]; Modern Ranged Weapons [12]—*pistol* [13]; Stealth [12]—*shadow* [14]; Vehicle Operation [12]; Stamina [9]—*endurance* [10]; Knowledge [8]; Security [8]; Awareness [9]—*intuition* [11]; Investigate [9]; Interaction [10].

Cyber Gear

Artificial lungs, BioWatch, body plating (Good), reflex, enhance program (Ordinary; -1 bonus to Unarmed Attack skill checks).

SCENE 4: EYE

The heroes are free to roam Tribon, secure lodging, or conduct business after their encounter with Lumivix. There are plenty of comfortable visitors' enclaves with filtered air systems. If the heroes rendezvous with Kessler or another trade negotiator, you might want to play out Scene 5 before this one).

At some point, the heroes are spotted by two people. Both are well dressed, obviously not laborers, and seem to have a keen interest in the heroes' activities. If the heroes don't approach them, they initiate first contact. Read or paraphrase the following:

You are approached by a female mechalus and her male human companion. The mechalus' blue skin is sheathed in a tight mesh of translucent circuitry. On her left breastplate is a platinum pin adorned with the letters ULN. Her colleague is a tall, slender, good-looking man with long, sandy blond hair. He wears a jacket with an identical pin on the lapel. However,

his most striking feature is his left eye: a cybernetic masterpiece of perfect blue with curious lines and markings.

The mechalus speaks. "My name is Sikora Epsilon. I'm a reporter for the United Lison Network. This is Max, my ever-watching eye. Can we talk to you for a moment?"

The Demon resides in Sikora's nanocomputer; she is unaware of this, although it has "possessed" her at least twice (see the "Demon Possession" sidebar). She sent the whispered warning to the heroes using ULN communications relay. The Demon also had Sikora leave herself an "anonymous tip" that a group of rhodium runners had just arrived in Tribon who, during their last visit, were somehow involved in a VoidCorp plot to kidnap President Kevik's niece—information that the Demon extrapolated from an encoded communiqué. When Sikora did her own research, she failed to learn more about this plot.

The last time the Demon tried to download information from the VoidCorp mainframe, gridshadows were alerted to its presence and began scouring the system in search of the interloper. To avoid



detection, it has turned to less conventional means of gathering data and undermining VoidCorp activities. The Demon believes that because they thwarted VoidCorp once before, the heroes are useful.

If the heroes try to blow off Sikora, she hounds them stubbornly until they hear her out.

"I know you're here on business. Galactic traders traveling across the Verge, hauling valuable consignments of rhodium, dodging pirates. It's quite a lifestyle, I must say. I think the Lison people would be very interested to know what it means to be a rhodium runner, and what some runners will do to make their living. Let us chronicle the remainder of your stay on Lison and allow us to accompany you as you make your next run."

"We can't pay you, of course, but our presence affords certain privileges—things rhodium runners would find useful. Unlimited free access to the Lison communications network, firsthand information about business opportunities in the Stellar Ring and other Verge systems, insider news about the competition, and, of course, the eye of the media as your watchdog."

Heroes who make a successful Awareness skill check at +3 notice something familiar about Sikora. On a Good or Amazing



Sikora is tenacious; if the heroes seem hesitant or resistant to her proposal, she offers them something more tangible:

Sikora crinkles her nose, then allows a resigned look to slip across her face. "There is one other thing I can offer." She opens a data slot in her right breastplate and removes a 3D, holding it between her steel-nailed thumb and forefinger. "I know rhodium

result, they realize that her voice has the same tone and inflections as the whisper they heard when they arrived at Lison. Sikora has no memory of speaking with the heroes before now and denies sending the warning. If the heroes ask about "the Demon" mentioned in their arrival message, she and Max look completely baffled.

If the heroes accept Sikora's offer, she smiles at Max, and the two of them remain with the heroes until their presence is no longer welcome, or until the story becomes tedious. Sikora can provide heroes with free access to an orbital uplink, allowing them to contact their ship or any vessel in orbit. Given time, she can also verify or refute any trade rumors the heroes might have heard since arriving in Lison. Sikora and Max travel around Tribon on foot like most Lison citizens. The ULN has a skycar equipped with holorecorders, but special permission is needed to borrow the vehicle.

DEMON POSSESSION

"The Demon" is what high-ranking VoidCorp employees call a mysterious, free-willed program created by Insight in 2498. It was originally a menace programmed to randomly strike and disable VoidCorp systems, but when it conquered an experimental VoidCorp virus, it mutated and became self-aware. The stellar nation became aware of it only after several crucial operations were thwarted by its interference.

The Demon no longer travels the Grids for fear of protection programs. Instead, it's learned to "possess" a sentient being by infiltrating and reconfiguring the nanocomputer. The Demon waits in a computer until someone with a NIJack interfaces with the machine, or comes within 10 meters if outfitted with a wireless NIJack. Those without nanocomputers and NIJacks cannot be possessed. On the other hand, mechalus are particularly susceptible, having been born with both.

The possession attack is invisible and automatic. After implanting itself, the Demon immediately begins manipulating the host's higher brain functions. The host might be aware that something "isn't right" (by making a successful Awareness-perception skill check) but is otherwise oblivious. Only close inspection of the nanocomputer (requiring a successful Computer Science-hardware skill check at +1) reveals the Demon's presence, and a successful Computer Science-programming or Medical Science-cyber surgery skill check is needed to "exorcise" it.

When the Demon wants to do something, it overrides the

host's self-awareness. After mental control is restored, the host must make a successful Awareness skill check at +3 to remember anything; this penalty drops by 1 after each possession. A host who becomes aware of the Demon's presence can block further possessions with a successful Resolve-mental resolve skill check. Exorcising the Demon requires six successes on a complex Resolve-mental resolve skill check at +1. If another host is unavailable, the Demon can transfer itself to any active computer within 10 meters. If it is forced out of a host and has nowhere to go, it is destroyed.

The Demon is not murderous. Its goal is to destroy or dismantle VoidCorp by undermining the stellar nation's attempts to gain footholds throughout the galaxy. It knows it's just a program and retains a compulsion to serve its creators, even though it no longer communicates with Insight directly. It was recently brought to the Oberon system by an unsuspecting VoidCorp freighter captain. It has since taken other hosts, trying to learn more about VoidCorp's operations on Lison before dismantling them.

The Demon has the equivalent of the following skills, which it can bestow upon its host: Computer Science [15]-hacking [18], hardware [16], programming [16], Security [15]-protection protocols [16], System Operation [15]-communications [17], engineering [16], sensors [16], Technical Science [15]-technical knowledge [16]. It otherwise has the stats of an Amazing menace (see page 165 in Chapter 10: Computers in the Player's Handbook).

runners drive a hard bargain, and I'm prepared to offer this to you as an incentive.

"I'm sure you know that all of the raw ore extracted from the mines is processed here, in the Ortis Refineries, and that despite security precautions, many of the workers manage to smuggle out quantities of rhodium for sale on the black market."

If the heroes show interest in the crystal, Sikora continues:

"I've been doing some digging into the underworld of the underworld. With some effort, I managed to hack into the VoidCorp Grid and discovered that VoidCorp does nearly all of its rhodium trading on the black market, most of it through a shady dealer named Quaisak. Apparently, Quaisak is well supplied. He's also a mutant with the head of a squid. I suspect he won't be hard to find once we locate those who have regular dealings with him."

Sikora surrenders the crystal only if the heroes agree to her terms. The 3D contains more information:

- A detailed description of Quaisak's shady past, from his early beginnings as a transport pilot to the smuggler he is today.
- A picture of Quaisak: he is indeed a mutant with four tentacles sprouting out of his head.
- Pictures of Quaisak's former partners in crime: a weren named Kurch Grukpa, who served a short stint as his bodyguard, and Raive Timogen, whom the heroes already know.

If the heroes refuse Sikora's offer and she sees no way to persuade them otherwise, she shakes her head and walks away after giving them one final warning:

"If you can't see an opportunity for profit, you're as dumb as you look. Good luck, runners. You'll need it."

In this situation, the Demon has no choice but to possess one of the heroes. A mechalus or a hero with a nanocomputer and NJack is susceptible. The ideal candidate would be a non-mechalus with a wireless NJack, allowing the Demon to transfer itself without direct contact. Otherwise, it must have Sikora physically attach her tentacle-like circuits to the unsuspecting hero. This requires a surprise check against the hero's Awareness-intuition skill. (See pages 42-43 in *Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action* in the *Gamemaster Guide*.) If the hero is not surprised, Sikora makes an Unarmed Attack roll with a -1 bonus (due to her proximity); otherwise, she receives a -3 step bonus. If she establishes a link, the Demon transfers itself and nests in the hero's nanocomputer. Sikora can't explain her sudden loss of control and can only apologize.

SIKORA EPSILON

Level 3 mechalus Free Agent

STR 9	[0]	INT 9	[+1]
DEX 12	[+1]	WIL 11	[+1]
CON 10		PER 9	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	L1/0
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Skills¹

Athletics [9]; Vehicle Operation [12]; Stamina [10]; Computer Science [9]-hacking [10]; Knowledge [9]-computer operation [10], language: Standard [12]; Administration [11]; Awareness [11]-perception [12]; Creativity [11]-journalism [14]; Investigate [11]-search [12], track [13]; Interaction [9]-interview [11].

Cyber Gear

ER slot, subdermal NJack, standard mechalus gear (see page 24 in *Chapter 2: Hero Creation* in the *Player's Handbook*).

¹Sikora also gains the Demon's technical skills when possessed (see the "Demon Possession" sidebar).

Recently, Sikora was following up on a story concerning VoidCorp's illicit operations. While hacking into the VoidCorp Grid, she was taken over by the Demon. It has begun using Sikora's resourcefulness to its advantage, hoping to uncover and expose VoidCorp's plans for the Oberon system.

Sikora is eager to follow the heroes, but not for the reason they might think. She believes that, in addition to selling black-market rhodium, Quaisak was the contact used by Tryce and Timogen to bring illegal cyberware into Tribon. The collapse of Tryce's syndicate has since pushed Quaisak out of that line of work. However, he also sells bootleg oxygen, and VoidCorp has purchased huge quantities of liquid oxygen in recent months. Both Sikora and the Demon want to know why.

She believes that her presence affords the heroes some protection, as anyone would be foolish to harm a ULN reporter. However, she has underestimated the resolve and ruthless determination of some of the heroes' enemies.

MAXWELL PETERSON

Level 3 human Free Agent

STR 11	[+1]	INT 10	[0]
DEX 11	[+1]	WIL 10	[+1]
CON 9		PER 9	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	



Attacks

Unarmed 11/5/2
d4s+1/d4+2s/d4+3s LI/O

Skills

Athletics [11]; Unarmed Attack [11]; Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [10]—*computer operation [11], first aid [11]*; Law [10]; Awareness [10]—*intuition [12], perception [12]*; Investigate [10]—*track [11]*; Street Smart [10]—*criminal elements [11], street knowledge [12]*; Interaction [9]—*charm [11], interview [11]*.

Cyber Gear

Cyberoptics (Ordinary), nanocomputer, NIJack, reflex, enhance program (Ordinary; -1 bonus to Unarmed Attack skill checks).

Maxwell Peterson is a ULN cameraman. His cybernetic eye can record in vivid detail what he sees, at magnifications up to 100X normal vision, and he can shut off his "camera" literally in the blink of an eye. He is affable and willing to help whenever he can, though his ultimate goal is getting the story.

**SCENE 5: SQUIDFACE**

This scene occurs if the heroes search for Quaisak, the squid-headed rhodium dealer mentioned by Sikora in the last scene.

THE LAST ROUND

Heroes with Street Smart skills can explore Tribon's seamy underside to gather information. A successful Street Smart—*criminal elements* or *street knowledge* skill check at -1 lets the hero find a really dismal bar called the Last Round. Most of the interior lights have blown out, and the place hasn't been cleaned in a standard year. The air in this part of the city is poor, and poorer still inside the establishment.

The barkeep is Kli'im, a fat sesheyan wearing a vacuum mask. Kli'im has the stats and skills of a Marginal bartender (see page 96 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*). If the heroes offer him a *500 bribe, Kli'im tells them that Quaisak doesn't come to the bar anymore. He used to meet here regularly with a cykotek named Halve, but since the ULS crackdown on illicit cyberware, "Squidface" hasn't been around. Kli'im also knows that Quaisak arranges black-market rhodium shipments for various stellar nations, particularly VoidCorp and the Rigunmor Star Consortium.

Heroes requesting more information about Quaisak are directed to a cykotek weren named Kurch at the back of the bar. (His name is familiar if they accepted the 3D from Sikora.) Kurch spends most of his time playing an ancient pinball machine (*Kurg Kommandos*). When not slamming and cursing the machine, he is yelling at Kli'im to fill his tankard.

If the heroes are careful not to disrupt Kurch's game, or manage to subdue and question him (using Investigate—*interrogate* or psionic compulsion), they can learn Quaisak's favorite food

(blackworm soup), and one of his other favorite hangouts (the Black Nebula). The weren doesn't know where the heroes can find Quaisak—and he doesn't care. Any attempt to read his thoughts reveals only his precarious mental state.

If Sikora is with the heroes and the Demon still resides in her nanocomputer, it compels her to connect to Kurch and transfers itself. If someone other than Sikora hosts the Demon, it tries the same thing but requires a physical link to the weren's NIJack to make the transfer. The Demon immediately eliminates the weren's cykosis and nests in his nanocomputer.

Once Kurch is cured of his cykosis, the effects are staggering. He tells the heroes the only place he knows of that serves blackworm soup. If they follow his lead, proceed with the "Quaisak and Company" encounter below. Kurch insists on remaining with the heroes so long as the Demon is inside him. If the heroes try to dump him, the Demon

immediately vacates the weren in favor of another host.

KURCH GRUKPA**Level 3 weren Combat Spec**

STR 14	[+2]	INT 7	[0]
DEX 9	[0]	WIL 11	[+1]
CON 11		PER 8	
Durability: 16/16/8/8		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Claws 16/8/4 d4+2w/d4+4w/d4+2m LI/O

Skills

Athletics [14]—*throw [15]*; Unarmed Attack [14]—*brawl [16]*; Modern Ranged Weapons [9]; Vehicle Operation [9]—*land [10]*; Stamina [11]—*endurance [13], resist pain [12]*; Knowledge [7]; Awareness [11]; Interaction [8]—*intimidate [10]*.

Cyber Gear

Fast chip (Ordinary; -1 bonus to action checks), nanocomputer, NIJack, reflex, enhance program (Ordinary; -1 bonus to Unarmed Attack skill checks).

Kurch used to drive a crawler in the mines. He has since dabbled in cyberware and now suffers from cykosis. He fixates on the pinball game to keep from hurting people. Interrupting Kurch forces him to make an Intelligence feat check; if he fails, he loses his ball and the game, at which point he pummels the hero into the floor. Mentioning Quaisak only inflames Kurch's wrath, since the weren's last contact with him was the time he lost *5,000 in an arm-wrestling match with the "cheating squidhead."

INVESTIGATING THE BLACK NEBULA

It's possible the heroes might return to the Black Nebula in search of Quaisak, in which case read or paraphrase the following:

The bar is packed with people of all shapes and sizes. The holographic diversions of the game pit are entertaining dozens more, and there aren't many tables that don't already have at least one patron.

You spot Alaaxis seated at the bar, comparing cyberware with a massive, surgically enhanced weren. Traven, shades down, is entertaining a group of five sesheyans you recognize as the musicians who performed here during your last visit.

Entertaining the crowd is a pair of fraal, one of whom is gently tapping a xylophone while the other runs his hands over a floating sphere of multicolored light. The strange instruments fill the Black Nebula with a haunting chorus of chimes and hoots.

There are several patrons killing time here, but none of them have seen a squid-headed man lately. Traven can offer no assistance and has no recollection of Quaisak.

If the heroes speak to Alaaxis, she remembers the barmaid Lilith complaining about "a really ugly man with tentacles on his face" who tried to pick her up once. As it happens, Lilith is pushing drinks in the game pit. If the heroes are accompanied by the ULN reporters, she turns on for the camera and warms up to Max very quickly.

Lilith vividly remembers the time she was accosted:

"It was creepy, the way his tentacles wiggled when he spoke. And his voice sounded slushy, like he was gargling. He also had a really weird name. Quistle, Queezy—something like that. Anyway, I asked him if he was from around here, and he said he was from Bhruusil. He asked me if I liked blackworm soup and said he knew a place in Girbek District that imported the soup from the Karnath system. Like, ghughh! Talk about your lousy come-ons! That's when I told Squidface to take a walk."

Lilith doesn't know where "Squidface" proposed to take her, and a cursory search of the Girbek District yields dozens of foreign eateries. Heroes who make a successful Investigate-search skill check spot a sign in front of a small, nameless diner crushed between a pawn shop and a men's trousers store. The restaurant has a neon Open sign in the window and a menu posted out front. Second from the bottom on the menu is the item "Bowl of Imported Blackworm Soup . . . \$2.00."

If the heroes enter the restaurant, proceed to the next section.

QUAISAK AND COMPANY

This encounter occurs if the heroes have successfully tracked down Quaisak at his favorite eatery.

The restaurant is owned and run by an elderly couple who appreciate Quaisak's business, although he tends to scare away some of their more sensitive patrons. They do not know that he works for VoidCorp. Even though he meets oxygen runners here regularly, the name "VoidCorp" never comes up in conversation. Read or paraphrase the following when the heroes enter:

The diner is about 5 meters wide and 15 meters deep, the walls and pipes painted sterile white. A metal counter with a dozen metal stools runs the full length of the restaurant. Behind the counter are thermal units and other cooking accessories. An elder-

ly man polishes the countertop, and an elderly woman is sweeping the main aisle.

There is only one customer in the diner, seated eight stools down. He wears a black longcoat and has a squidlike head. As you entered, he was slurping a bowl of inky black soup. On noticing you, he puts down the bowl with his clammy hands.

Have each hero make an Awareness-intuition skill check. If successful, the hero senses that Quaisak is very tense; on a Good or Amazing result, the hero realizes that he knew they were coming.

Shortly after the heroes arrive, so does a group of four Rigunmor traders led by an arrogant mechalus named David Tarsellis. He has already set up a rhodium deal with Quaisak and has the added advantage of having dealt with the mutant before.

Quaisak has 10 cargo units of rhodium tucked away, and Tarsellis has no intention of splitting the consignment with the heroes unless they make it worth his while. As a Rigunmor, Tarsellis always tries to swing the deal in his favor, and all Interaction-bargain skill checks made against him suffer a +2 penalty. Heroes are free to use more insidious means of persuasion, such as Telepathy-suggest, to coerce Tarsellis into accepting a reasonable offer, but if the attempt fails and Tarsellis senses the intrusion, he loses his temper.

If a fight breaks out, the elderly man cowers behind the counter while the woman runs shrieking into the street. ULS Security arrives in d4+8 minutes. Use the Good military officer template on page 98 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide* for Tarsellis (equip him with standard mechalus enhancements) and the Ordinary trader template for his four companions.

If Quaisak is incapacitated or subdued, he can be coaxed into making a deal in exchange for his continued well-being. This requires a successful Interaction-bargain or intimidate skill check. If the heroes are sufficiently persuasive, he is willing to offer the standard black-market price for a full rhodium shipment. If the heroes kill Quaisak, they will have some tough questions to answer. According to the restaurant owners, Quaisak was unarmed and merely trying to enjoy his soup when the heroes accosted him.

Detained heroes are held in custody for a minimum of 12 hours. If they have met with Senator Dosit (see scene 6 below) and mention this, ULS Security verifies the claim in d4 hours, at which point the heroes are released on their own recognizance.

QUAISAK'S DATA SLATE

In his longcoat, Quaisak carries a data slate with a Good processor and an Ordinary encode program. If Quaisak has been taken captive, he can be persuaded to reveal the password. In addition to several entertainment programs, the data slate contains a list of frequent clientele and suppliers, and each supplier's current stockpile of goods. Tracking down and obtaining the goods is a chore, and noble heroes might be better served turning over the data slate to the authorities.

One file of particular interest outlines Quaisak's recent business transactions with VoidCorp, as well as the name of Quaisak's contact—William Lumivix. If the heroes present this as evidence, the ULS can detain Lumivix for questioning.

If the heroes lack the skill to decode Quaisak's data slate and don't have the password, the Demon (if present) takes control of its host long enough to assist with its impressive Computer Science-hacking skill.

TAROK QUAISAK

Level 4 human mutant Mindwalker

STR 11	[+1]	INT 12	[+1]
DEX 7	[0]	WIL 14	[+2]
CDN 9		PER 7	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	
Psionic energy points: 14			

Attacks

Unarmed	12/6/3	d4s+1/d4+2s/d4+3s	LI/O
Electric aura	12/6/3	Special (see below)	En/O
Mind blast	11/5/2	d4+1s/d4+2s/d6+2s	LI/O

Defenses

Armor d4+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4-1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [11]; Unarmed Attack [11]-*brawl* [12]; Vehicle Operation [7]-*space* [8]; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [12]-*computer operation* [13]; Awareness [14]-*perception* [15]; Interaction [7]-*bargain* [9]; ESP [12]-*precognition* [14]; Telepathy [7]-*mind blast* [11].

Gear

Data slate (Good processor; Ordinary encode program), 3D linked to an account containing *5,000.

Mutations

Adrenal Control: -1 bonus to Athletics, Melee Weapons, Unarmed Attack, Acrobatics, and Movement skill checks; 1-point damage bonus to successful Unarmed and Melee Weapons attacks.

Dermal Reinforcement: Provides armor protection.

Electric Aura: Deals electrical damage with a successful Unarmed Attack-*brawl* or Melee Weapons skill check.

Major Physical Change: Tentacles on face; +2 penalty to Personality-based skill checks.

Thermal Intolerance: +2 penalty to Stamina or Survival skill checks in hot or cold conditions.

Quaisak is a mutant from Bhruusil with an insatiable appetite for blackworm soup, and spends many hours in the only restaurant in Tribon that serves this "delicacy."

The recent ULS crackdown on cyberware black marketeering forced Quaisak to abandon that line of work and focus more on his rhodium and oxygen accounts. Besides being a mutant, Quaisak is a Mindwalker. His ESP-*precognition* gives him glimpses into the future, making him very good at staying out of trouble. It also tells him when to expect company, as he does now.

In a fight, Quaisak's preferred tactic is to avoid the altercation entirely, but if he foresees an attack, he readies himself. His primary mode of attack is his Telepathy-*mind blast* skill, and he defends himself with his mutant electric aura. Refer to pages 218-219 in *Chapter 13: Mutants* in the *Player's Handbook* for more information.

SCENE 6: A SPECIAL OFFER

This encounter occurs when the heroes decide to meet with their designated ULS trade negotiator to secure a consignment of rhodium. In so doing, they are given an opportunity to earn a substantial discount by agreeing to help Senator Krella Dosit of Tribon deal with a "small crisis."

The heroes may visit Dwayne Kessler at his office in Tribon's upper tier or seek out a different negotiator via the Grid. If they

Table 1: ULS VEHICLES (PL 7)

	Skill	Drv	Acc	Cruise	Max	Type	Dur	Avail	Cost
Crawler	Land	+1	20	60	80	G	14/14/7	Con	12K
Cargo Conveyor Shuttle	Space	-	500	50K	-	A	Hull 12/3	Con	400K
ULS Skycar	Air	-1	50	200	400	G	10/10/5	Con	60K

Crawler: This land-based, all-terrain vehicle resembling a caterpillar is powered by lanthanide capacitors that must be recharged after 96 hours of use. The ULS has been using these for years to transport miners and oxygen runners. The crawlers are equipped with airlocks and stocked with provisions, vacuum masks, and survival gear for fourteen personnel. Moderate alloy armor (d4+1 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4 (En)) enables the transport to withstand tunnel collapses and extreme air pressure. In the event the crawler is buried or rendered powerless, miners trapped inside have a 192-hour oxygen supply and can activate a transceiver capable of beaming a radio distress signal through several hundred meters of rock.

Cargo Conveyor Shuttle (CCS): The CCS is a modified version of the STG shuttle, with an armored storage compartment specifically for transporting rhodium. The cargo conveyor is designed to navigate the subterranean passages from Lison's colonies to the planet's surface but is equally adapted to open space. Each conveyor has a crew of six: a pilot, a tunnel navigator, and four cargo loaders. Certified pilots have the Vehicle Operation-*air vehicle 2* and Vehicle Operation-*space vehicle 2* skills (minimum).

Statistics: Hull size 12, 3 compartments. Weapons: none. Armor: light polymeric (d4-1 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d4-2 (En)).

Compartments: C1 = Command 8/8/4; C2 = Engineering 8/8/4; C3 = Cargo 8/8/4.

Random Damage: 1-8 = C1; 9-14 = C2; 15-20 = C3.

ULS Skycar: This skycar sedan is a standard-model personnel transport used by the Lison government and various stellar nations to circumvent the crowded streets of Tribon and expedite travel to the twilight colonies. These gravity-induction sedans are equipped with speed restrictors for safe travel underground, and each holds six comfortably. They are also equipped with their own fresh oxygen supplies to ensure passenger comfort.

did not receive Kessler's message on arriving at Lison, or do not respond, he eventually tracks them down. Kessler invites the heroes to his office to hash out a very unusual deal.

Shortly after the heroes' last visit, Kessler was contacted by the office of Senator Dosit. Having learned of the heroes' arrival, the senator wants to meet them and make an offer. Read or paraphrase the following if the heroes meet with Kessler:

Kessler's office consists of an oval desk, a reclining chair, and a narrow window that peers out at the gigantic Ortis Refinery. Kessler looks comfortable, reclined behind his desk with data slate in hand. He excuses himself for not standing up.

"I am authorized to sell you rhodium at a 25% discount. The authorization comes from Senator Krella Dosit herself, although I couldn't believe my ears when she first contacted me. I have not been informed of the particulars—my orders are to finalize the deal should you accept the senator's terms. Are you game?"

If the heroes are interested in Kessler's offer, he activates a holoviewer on his desk and contacts the senator's office; proceed with Scene 7.

SCENE 7: VANISHINGS

This scene occurs only if the heroes agree to discuss Senator Dosit's offer. Read or paraphrase the following:

The holoviewer conjures forth an image of a weren with deep, penetrating eyes and streaks of gray in her otherwise dark mane.

"My apologies if I've distracted you from your mission, but we have some matters to discuss.

"The primary industry of Lison isn't rhodium mining. It's sur-

vival. We invest 55% of the global economy in sustaining life on this planet. Yet despite all of our precautions and technology, Tribon has an oxygen crisis. As the rhodium mines expand and the city becomes more congested, we find ourselves needing to replenish our air supply more regularly.

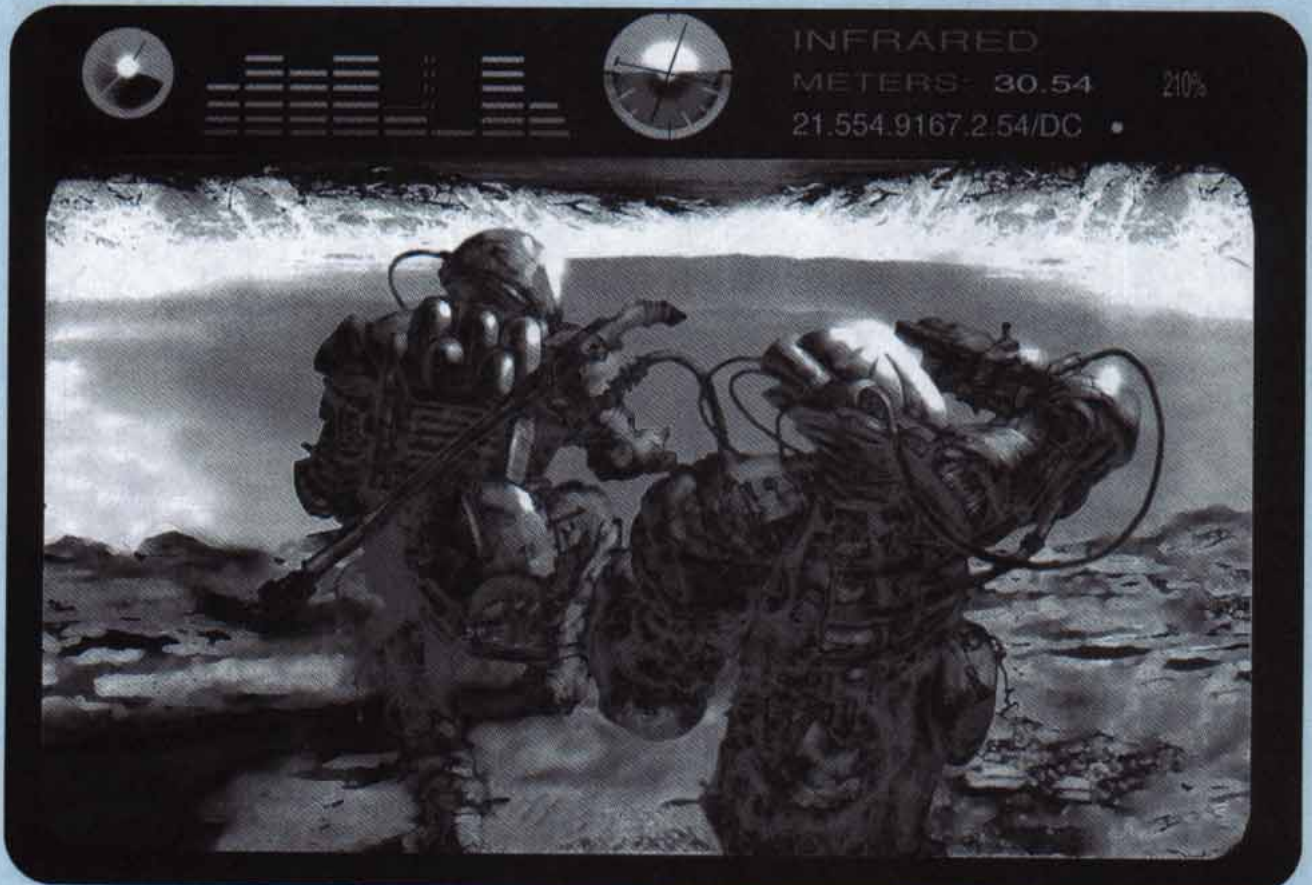
"You might not be aware that oxygen is collected from lakes that form on the planet's nightside, where the chill temperature causes it to condense. We have come to rely heavily on oxygen runners—hardy workers willing to face the harsh environment of the world above—to supply the people and colonies below. Teams of oxygen runners are registered with the Lison Air Guard and selected from a pool on a rotating basis.

"Lately, oxygen runners have been hesitant to visit the surface. There have been several disappearances—entire teams vanishing without a trace. Another six teams were lost in the last two standard days. When we sent Air Guard teams to investigate, we lost contact and haven't seen or heard from them since.

"We've managed to keep these latest vanishings from the press—we don't want to worry the other runners or frighten the general populace even more. Still, reports of the vanishings have discouraged the teams, and I fear this reluctance could lead to a global oxygen shortage. According to my sources, black marketers are selling liquid oxygen rods for a staggering price.

"I spoke with President Kevik, and he agrees that strong measures must be taken to ensure the safety of our oxygen runners. The bottom line is that we value our survival more than rhodium. Now, I'm aware that rhodium runners are constantly scrounging for the lowest price. We are prepared to sell you rhodium at a 25% discount if you help us ascertain the fate of the missing oxygen teams."

If the heroes ask why the authorities don't investigate the matter themselves, read or paraphrase the following:



The weren gives an exclamatory grunt. "ULS Security spends most of its time policing the overcrowded colonies and the Grid, hunting down cyberware and rhodium black marketers. Tribon has a vast network of illegal trade, and President Kevik has made it clear that he wants it stopped. The Air Guard has its own problems safeguarding the airlocks, refineries, and other key installations. In short, we are looking for other options.

"If you help us unravel this mystery, the 25% discount is yours. Do you agree?"

If the heroes agree to help Senator Dosit solve the mystery of the vanishing oxygen runners, she honors the 25% discount and guarantees delivery of the rhodium upon successful completion of the mission. Senator Dosit continues:

"We'll provide you with a crawler large enough for your entire team, as well as safe passage to the surface. A technician has been assigned to guide you to the last known location of one of the oxygen teams and provide any additional assistance. Both the technician and your crawler will be waiting at Tunnel 13 in two hours. Is there any equipment you require?"

Senator Dosit can supply the following equipment to each hero, which will be waiting at the tunnel: comm gear, imaging goggles, radar gauntlet, 11mm charge pistol, 11mm charge rifle/render rifle/shutter SMG (hero's choice), plasma jelly, and plasma or pulse grenades (hero's choice, up to four grenades per hero).



She will not better the 25% discount. However, heroes who make a successful Interaction—*bargain* skill check at +1 can persuade her to help them in other ways. An Ordinary result indicates that Krella is willing to do any one of the following favors; a Good result, two favors; an Amazing result, three favors:

- Safeguard the heroes' vessel while they are away, by stationing security personnel aboard the ship and/or requesting the Lison fleet to defend it if attacked in Lison space.
- Arrange for the ULV *Ranger* to escort the heroes' vessel safely out of the Oberon system.
- Grant permission for the heroes to carry and conceal light firearms in Tribon, provided the weapons are not used indiscriminately. *This counts as two favors.*

Krella Dosit's statistics and background are fully described on page 200 in *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR^{DRIVE} campaign setting.

SCENE 8: RUNNERS UP

If the heroes agree to help Senator Dosit, they must travel to Tunnel 13 and suit up for their excursion to the planet's surface. If Sikora and Max are present, they insist on coming along. When the heroes approach Tunnel 13, read or paraphrase the following:

A metal airlock almost 10 meters wide seals the entrance to the tunnel, and positioned around the airlock are a dozen or more Air Guard soldiers wearing cerametal armor and brandishing quantum

TRAVELING TO THE SURFACE

Each tunnel that leads to the surface of Lison is sealed by approximately two dozen airlocks spaced more or less evenly along its winding length. The tunnel is chiseled from the rock and reinforced with hundreds of trapezoidal metal braces. Most of the tunnels are 10 meters wide, although those used by cargo conveyor shuttles are 20 meters wide or more.

The airlocks themselves are massive, reinforced barriers of tough alloy, opened and closed by computers requiring security access codes. Opening one without the proper code requires seven successes on a complex Computer Science—*hacking* or Security—*protection protocols* skill check. Failure triggers the computers' alarm program, summoning d12+8 Air Guard soldiers who arrive in d4+4 minutes.

Stationed at each airlock are d4+4 Air Guard soldiers, although during oxygen shortages this number is doubled. (Use the Good Soldier template on page 99 in *Chapter 5: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*.) They wear cerametal armor (d6+1 [L], d8+1 [H], d6 [E]) and are equipped with vacuum masks, quantum rifles (d4+3w/d6+4w/d6+1m), and 11mm charge pistol sidearms (d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m). They are trained to place the security of the airlock before their own safety. The squad leader

also has a remote transceiver rigged to a chain of explosives on both sides of the airlock. If airlock security is compromised, the explosives can be detonated, filling the corridors on both sides of the airlock with tons of rock. Anyone within 10 meters of the airlock suffers Amazing damage (d20+4w); 10 to 25 meters, Good damage (d12+2w); 25 to 50 meters, Ordinary damage (d6+1w). Anyone beyond 50 meters takes no damage.

At the first airlock leading into any tunnel, the Air Guard provides each oxygen runner with a soft e-suit and a LOX unit designed to collect and compress oxygen from Lison's surface. The comm gear in the e-suits is set at a frequency monitored by the Air Guard from small, radiation-shielded relay stations near the surface.

The team is also given a crawler (see TABLE 1: ULS VEHICLES on page 37) to ascend the tunnel and move about on the planet's surface. The crawler has a communications suite, its own airlock, and plenty of interior room. Driving it requires the Vehicle Operation—*land vehicle* skill.

Most crawlers come equipped with two life support packs, fire extinguisher, medical scanner, weather monitor, six trauma pack Is, and 40 oxygen storage cases (each designed to hold five LOX rods).

rifles. Arrayed on each side of the airlock are three crawlers (six in all), each vehicle resembling a giant, wheeled caterpillar almost 15 meters in length and slightly less than half as wide.

A group of technicians are inspecting one of the crawlers, ensuring that the gear is safely stowed, while a man dressed in a soft e-suit looks on.

The figure in the e-suit is Colin Krige, the ULS technician assigned to the heroes. After a polite greeting, Krige informs them that their equipment has been loaded aboard the crawler. He also gives the heroes a quick rundown of the mission:

"I'm planning to take us to Venmeron Lake, located 500 kilometers from our point of exit on the surface. That's where the last team of oxygen runners and the last Air Guard investigators disappeared.

"In light of the shortage in Tribon, we've also been asked to bring back as much oxygen as we can. Each of us will be given LOX units. If we have the opportunity, we'll collect the oxygen and transport it back to Tribon."

The Air Guard troopers waste no time giving the heroes their soft e-suits and LOX units (see the "New Equipment" sidebar on page 41), then herding them into the crawler and closing the vehicle's airlock behind them.

A driver is needed to pilot the vehicle. (Krige will do it if none of the heroes volunteer.) A failed Vehicle Operation—*land vehicle* skill check usually means an embarrassing stall or inadvertent grinding of gears. Only on a Critical Failure result is there serious trouble: the driver has hit or broken something, or somehow managed to get the vehicle stuck.

Read or paraphrase the following when the heroes' crawler starts heading to the surface:

The crawler rumbles through airlock after airlock, watched closely at each station by heavily armed guards with vacuum masks. The tunnel meanders upward through layers of rock, heavy metal braces supporting the roof every few meters. For the most part, it is lit only by the headlights of the crawler—until you reach the next airlock checkpoint, which is illuminated so brightly that it stings your eyes.

At last, after a seemingly endless stop-and-go trek, the crawler emerges into a strange, green twilight. Long shadows drape the canyons and clefts that make up much of the distant topography. At once, the crawler is buffeted by a maelstrom of whirling sand and debris. Unperturbed, you drive onward, using the rocky escarpments and outcroppings to shield against the pounding gale.

A deep voice cuts through the static on your comm channel. "Crawler Alpha, this is Monitor Station 1. We're patched into your comm signal and hangin' on yer every word. Don't mess around out there. Just git the air and c'mon back, y'hear? Over."

The transceiver operator at Monitor Station 1 is a bored young man named Nathan ("y'all can call me Nate") Bruderhaus, who doesn't mind a little pointless conversation after several hours of listening to static. Nate can track the crawler out to a range of 1,000 kilometers and advises the heroes to keep the vehicle within that radius. Noting a small lake about 500 kilometers from their current position, Krige recommends that the heroes head in that direction.

The heroes can respond if they wish. The crawler's transceiver unit can be shut off or disconnected easily enough, although Nate recommends they leave it on at all times (even if that means they have to listen to him prattle occasionally).

COLIN KRIGE

Level 3 human Tech Op

STR 9	[0]	INT 11	[+1]
DEX 11	[+1]	WIL 10	[0]
CON 9		PER 10	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
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Defenses

Soft e-suit	d6-3 (LI), d6-2 (HI), d4-2 (En)
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Skills

Athletics [9]; Vehicle Operation [11]—*land* [13]; Stamina [9]—*endurance* [10]; Computer Science [11]—*hacking* [12], *hardware* [12], *programming* [13]; Knowledge [11]—*computer operation* [12], *first aid* [12]; Life Science [11]—*biology* [12]; Navigation [11]—*surface* [12]; System Operation [11]—*communications* [12]; Technical Science [11]—*repair* [12]; Awareness [10]; Interaction [10]—*bargain* [11].

SCENE 9: VENMERON LAKE

Read or paraphrase the following as the heroes approach within 1 kilometer of Venmeron Lake:

Night has fallen. The temperature outside has dropped markedly, and you can hear the treads of the crawler scoring the ice that covers the ground. As frost begins to form on the outside of the vehicle, Krige activates the window heaters.

Sensors indicate a wide crater less than 500 meters ahead. Krige tells you that Venmeron Lake lies in the crater bottom and directs the crawler along a course parallel to the crater's ridge, to a point where the vehicle can safely manage the descent.

As you descend, the wind subsides and the icy vapor gives way to a breathtaking vista. You can see the crater's vast expanse and the pale lake at the bottom. The terrain looks icy and rugged.

Heroes who attempt to contact the monitoring station have no trouble getting through. There is some static due to the inclement weather, but otherwise communications seem unaffected.

Whoever is driving the crawler down into the icy crater must make a Vehicle Operation—*land vehicle* skill check. A Failure result means a loss of control, causing the vehicle to skid, and requires another roll to regain control. On three Failures or a Critical Failure, the crawler tips over and slides down the crater's side. Fortunately, it is designed to withstand heavy damage should a mishap occur. The tumbling causes d4+1w damage to the vehicle's hull. Everyone inside the vehicle suffers an equal amount of damage, although a successful Dexterity feat check or Acrobatics—*fall* skill check reduces the wound damage to stun damage. Unfortunately, the crawler ends up lying on its side, embedded deep in the dirt at the base of the crater. It weighs 10,000 kilograms and is virtually impossible to move.

Once the heroes reach the bottom of the 50-meter deep crater, they find that natural interference creates more static on the comm and radio signals, but they can still use their e-suits' comm gear and the crawler's transceiver to contact Monitor Station 1. Krige makes sure everyone knows how to operate the LOX units

NEW EQUIPMENT

LOX Unit (PL 7)

The LOX (Liquid OXygen) unit is worn as a backpack. The device is enclosed in a protective polymer casing resistant to all levels of radiation. It can withstand varying atmospheric, pressure, and temperature conditions with the exception of AS, P5, and H4-5 environments. The unit weighs 10 kilograms but is not particularly bulky or awkward.

Each LOX unit has a metal, hoselike attachment connected to a sensor device that resembles a mass rifle (and weighs about the same). The handheld "rifle" contains an advanced chemical sniffer designed to detect even the smallest trace of oxygen within 20 meters. The end of the rifle can extract oxygen from the surrounding atmosphere or any noncorrosive liquid in which it is immersed. The oxygen is separated from other chemicals and elements and drawn into the LOX unit, which compresses and stores it in liquid form in one of five LOX rods built into the unit's casing. Full, each "kit" weighs slightly less than 10 kg.

The self-sealing LOX rods can be safely and easily removed from the LOX unit to make room for new ones. These lightweight polymeric rods are each about 30 centimeters long and 5 centimeters wide. Once removed, the LOX rods are stored in padded cerametal cases that protect them for safe transport to their destination. Each case can hold five rods.

before opening the rear airlock and emerging from the vehicle. Sikora remains inside the crawler, but Max assists the heroes any way he can. Read or paraphrase the following when the heroes step from the crawler:

Frost begins to form on the outside of your e-suit and in the corners of your visor. The crater walls march away into the moonless night.

Heroes with the night vision mutation see the stark, white walls of the crater enclosing the frigid lake. There are no other signs of life.

Krige informs you that Venmeron Lake is approximately 1 kilometer in diameter and roughly circular. He estimates its depth at between 80 and 100 meters. The lake edge lies about 50 meters away. As you move ahead, you see another crawler. The second crawler isn't running, although its interior lights are on.

The second crawler is intact and undisturbed. Heroes who inspect the interior find that the radio is functional, and only five of the forty oxygen storage cases are filled. According to the crawler's log, it arrived here less than twelve hours ago with a crew of six oxygen runners: Matthew Blessed (human male), Lina Muñoz (human female), Gronkru (weren male), Jerold Marr (human male), Theta Marok (mechalus male), and Keval Tau (mechalus female). There are no clues as to the runners' fate. If their crawler tipped over trying to descend the crater, the heroes can use this one to return to Tribon.

Heroes can approach the lake without difficulty and begin siphoning oxygen. To fill all of the LOX rods in the crawler requires several hours. Krige or one of heroes can maintain watch while the others perform the extraction.

The air is filled with radioactive dust, ice chips, and small bits

of rocky debris, but nothing threatening. Krige comments that the weather is usually a lot nastier and counts the heroes lucky. Punctures to an e-suit can be quickly patched, but heroes who suffer gashes to their suits or who remove them altogether are exposed to the frigid H1 environment and must make a Stamina-*endurance* skill check every round. (For more on exposure, see page 61 in *Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action* in the *Game-master Guide*.)

SEARCHING THE CRATER

Each hero who chooses to explore the crater can make an Investigate-*search* skill check for every thirty minutes spent doing so. Success leads heroes to the remnants of Jerold Marr, one of the missing oxygen runners.

Five meters ahead you spot something on the ice. It looks like the tattered remnants of an e-suit. The wind has strewn pieces of the suit everywhere. A silver glove is embedded between two icy protrusions nearby.

Any hero who picks up the glove realizes there is a frozen human hand inside, which has been chewed off at the wrist. The most intact piece of e-suit contains a partially devoured skeleton with bits of flesh clinging to its bones. Heroes who make a successful Awareness, Knowledge-*deduce*, or Medical Science-*forensics* skill check can determine the following:

- The oxygen runner was attacked by dozens, perhaps hundreds, of small organisms. The flesh was chewed from his bones, and many of the bones were devoured as well.
- The attacking organisms chewed right through his e-suit. Even its fibers look partially eaten.

Further search of the area yields dozens of metallic carapaces, each one only a few centimeters in length, and probably shed by the creatures that attacked the oxygen runner. They are all that remain of several drones devoured by their kin, and are identical to the carapaces the heroes might have found in Sethyk S'kesh's lab. (See Act I, Scene 9.) The other five members of the oxygen team were borne away by the Organism Omega swarm, torn to pieces, and consumed utterly.

SCENE 10: EXTRACTION

Shortly after the heroes find the remains of Jerold Marr or begin collecting oxygen, read or paraphrase the following:

You hear a strange, howling noise too shrill to be the wind. Turning northward, you see an STG shuttle appear over the edge of the crater, narrowly missing the icy precipice. It descends, arcs sharply to the left, and plunges headlong toward the far wall, overshooting the water and crashing on the far side. You see two pieces of flaming shuttle debris fly off into the night, then everything is lost in darkness.

When the heroes use the radio to report the crash, they find the transmission is further hampered by static. Monitor Station 1 receives the message and dispatches a rescue shuttle with medics, which should arrive in 20-30 minutes. In the meantime, the heroes are asked to investigate the situation and search for survivors. If they hesitate, Krige urges them to begin the search. Walking around the lake takes a lot of time; the crawler is more expedient and buys precious minutes.

INVESTIGATING THE SHUTTLE

The shuttle, carrying the pilot and eight passengers, passed through a swarm of Organism Omega, which released a massive electrical discharge. This not only rendered the shuttle's systems inoperative, but also prevented the pilot from transmitting a distress signal. The pilot died in the crash, as did five of the passengers.

Read or paraphrase the following when the heroes approach within 25 meters of the shuttle:

The wind has picked up. Through the whirling debris you see the shuttle deeply embedded in the ice. Steam rises from the hull, riddled with fractures; smoke billows out of the engineering compartment; and twisted fragments of metal lie everywhere.

The standard STG shuttle has four compartments, as shown on the next page. The command compartment (C1) is buried in the ground, but the rest of the shuttle is exposed. Radiation is leaking from the shuttle's engineering compartment, but heroes in e-suits are protected from the moderate (R2) radiation levels.

Anyone inspecting the hull closely can make an Investigation-search or Awareness-perception skill check. If the result is successful, the hero finds a damaged specimen of Organism Omega jammed in one of the shuttle's exhaust vents. The diminutive metal "bug" is unable to dislodge itself and is twitching helplessly. Occasionally, it emits a brief but radiant light similar to the flash of a firefly. It snaps at anyone reaching for it, and its monofilament-edged mandibles can easily shear through the fingertip of a glove.

Heroes who remove the creature using some sort of tool can contain it in a moderately to heavily armored container (such as the oxygen storage cases); otherwise, it just chews through the encasement and flies off.

There are no visible portholes or windows, and no hull fissures wide enough to enter without tearing e-suits to pieces. The only way into the shuttle is through the airlock or the cargo doors to compartment C3, both of which are jammed.

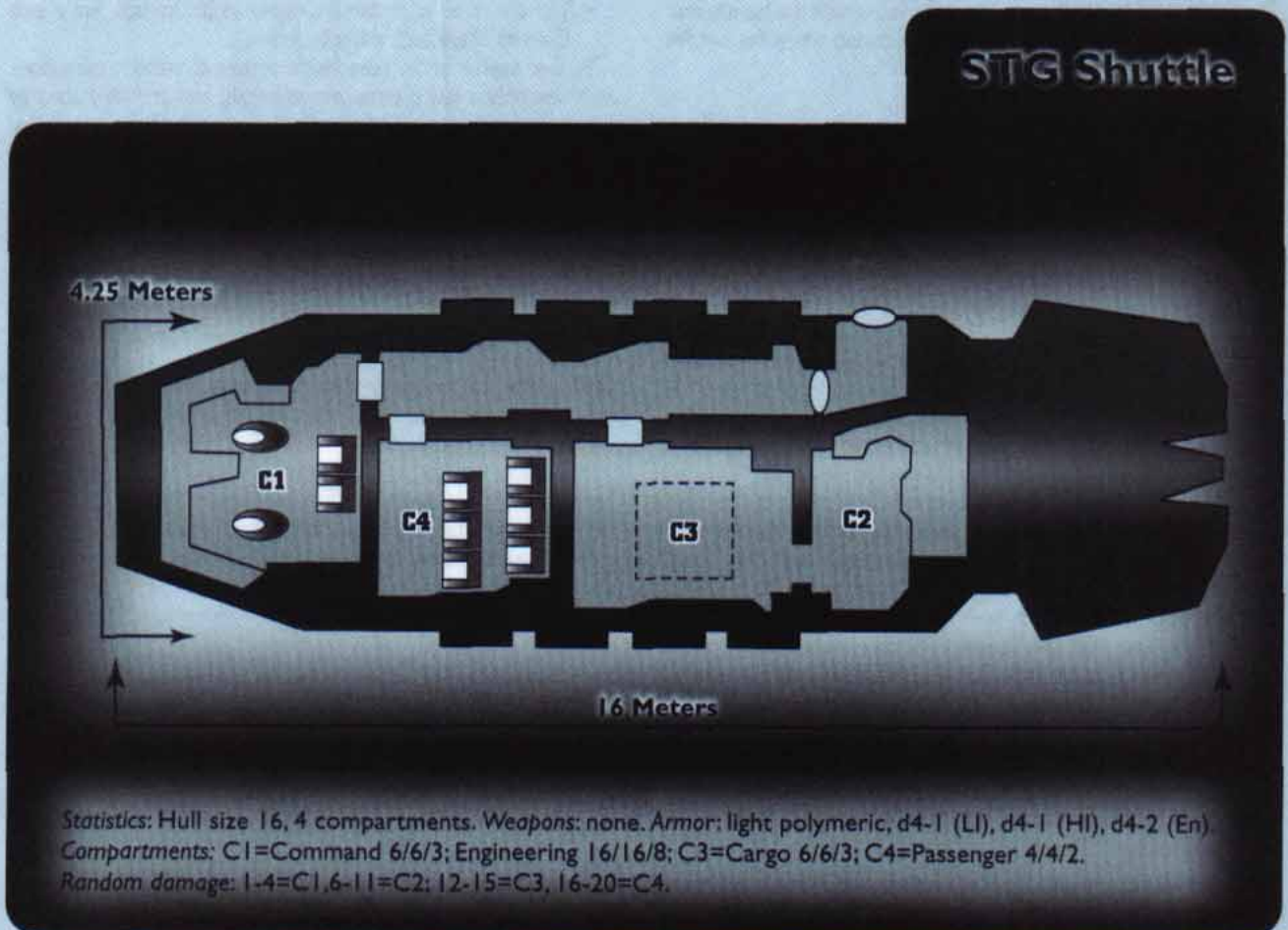
Jimmying the airlock door requires a successful Technical Science-juryrig skill check. A hero who tries blasting it open must make a successful Demolitions-set explosives skill check. If the heroes fire their personal weapons at the airlock door, it is considered to have Amazing toughness (all damage reduced two grades), 10/10/5 durability, and light polymeric armor (see shuttle statistics). The only way to open the cargo doors is to use weapons or explosives. The doors have Amazing toughness, 14/14/7 durability points, and light polymeric armor.

If the heroes enter the airlock, read the following:

The main corridor inside the shuttle is strewn with debris. Showers of sparks and a lingering fog obscure visibility beyond a few feet. The floor slopes down at a 10-degree angle. From somewhere inside the shuttle you hear three dull, metallic thumps. It sounds like someone is trying to force open a door.

SHUTTLE COMPARTMENTS

The numbers below correspond to the compartments listed in the shuttle diagram.



C1. Command: Most of the equipment in this compartment has been destroyed, including the radio and the scanners. Small fires burn on the various consoles, but mounted next to the door is a chemical fire extinguisher that heroes can use to douse the flames.

The pilot lies slumped in his chair, killed by an exploding console. Two passengers, a human male (Roger Hamaru) and female (Kara Leijten), were thrown from their seats and killed by the force of the impact. Both passengers have visible cybernetic implants: CF skinweaves, data slots, NIjacks, and optic screens. A data slot is incorporated into the woman's forearm, and hidden in it is a 3D containing an encrypted message. Deciphering it requires three successes on a complex Computer Science-hacking skill check.

The message is addressed to President Kevik and compliments him on his equality laws and Lison's technodemocratic government. It goes on to outline the strategies and stumbling blocks of an alliance between Lison and the Nariac Domain. The message contains several dozen scenarios showing how Lison can be integrated into the Nariac Domain over a five-year, ten-year, and twenty-year period. It also lists military data on how the Nariacs can assist the ULS against the other stellar nations—particularly the Rigunmor Star Consortium and VoidCorp. The Domain is willing to commit an entire fleet to protect Lison from its enemies.

Such information could seriously jeopardize Kevik's position were it to fall into the wrong hands, as Kevik has not discussed his agenda with other government officials save his closest staff. (He fears that word could reach the Rigunmors before any deal with the Nariacs is finalized.)

C2. Engineering: The door to this compartment is warm to the touch and sealed against radiation. The chamber beyond is filled with small fires and electrical sparks. However, there is a chemical extinguisher mounted by the door.

The shuttle's mass reactor sustained considerable damage in the crash. The radiation leaking from the reactor is moderate (R2) and is dangerous only after several hours of exposure.

C3. Cargo: This area is in a shambles. Wires protrude from the walls, and the ceiling has partially collapsed. The cargo doors in the ceiling no longer open. A chemical fire extinguisher is mounted on one wall.

C4. Passenger: This is the source of the thumping noise. The door to the compartment is locked shut and must be forced open, either by blasting it or jimmying the locking mechanism (see above).

This area holds six emissaries from the Nariac Domain. Three of them (two human males and one sesheyan male) were killed in the crash. The three survivors are Irene Dyson (human female), Melani Wynn (human female), and Daniel Rezna (human male). All of them have visible cybernetic implants, and the living ones are wearing vacuum masks.

Ambassador Dyson is the only passenger still conscious, although she's dazed and badly bruised. She has been pounding



on the door, hoping someone would hear her. Ambassador Wynn is unconscious, having succumbed to her injuries. Ambassador Rezna has multiple fractures and contusions, and is near death.

Dyson carries with her a small, sensor-proof polymer briefcase with a BlastProof biolock (see *Arms & Equipment Guide*, page 29). The case contains a decoding device that the Nariacs use to decipher their encrypted 3Ds, like the one in Ambassador Leijten's possession (see C1 above). Breaking the case's custom biolock requires 7 successes at a +3 step penalty using the Security-security devices skill. Dyson knows the correct code to bypass the lock and keeps the decoder case with her at all times.

As the heroes begin moving the surviving Nariacs to safety, Ambassador Dyson suddenly remembers that one of the others (Ambassador Leijten) is carrying an important 3D. She insists that the heroes recover

the crystal, saying only that it contains a message for President Kevik. If the heroes seem uninterested, Max tries to get hold of the crystal so that Sikora can decode its contents.

If Max or the heroes have the 3D, Ambassador Dyson demands it and fiercely protests any attempt to download or decipher the message file. A hero who makes a successful Manipulation-*prestidigitation* skill check can swap the 3D for another. Heroes can also sedate the ambassador before attempting to review the 3D's contents.

If the heroes question her, the ambassador provides the following information:

- "My colleagues and I represent the Nariac Domain. We came to Lison to meet with President Kevik and show the Nariac people's support for Lison's worker equality programs and to reinforce our stellar nation's endorsement of Lison independence." (Not entirely true. They've come to discuss the terms of a Lison-Nariac alliance and determine Kevik's level of commitment.)
- "We came to the Oberon system aboard the *Suritane*, a survey vessel headed to the Vieron system. We planned to stay here until the ship's return in six months." (The PSV *Suritane* is Nariac exploration vessel. The Nariacs booked passage on the ship to better conceal their arrival.)
- "Everything happened so fast. Ambassador Leijten, who was in the command compartment, said something about a strange silver cloud. There was a tremendous power surge, and suddenly the shuttle began losing altitude. The pilot couldn't regain control, and we crashed. I don't know whether a distress signal was sent, or whether anyone received it."

AMBASSADOR IRENE DYSON

Level 4 mutant human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 8	[0]	INT 12	[+1]
DEX 9	[0]	WIL 10	[0]
CON 10		PER 11	

Durability: 12/11/5/5 at full* Action check: 12+/11/5/2
 Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 # Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed—defensive 10/5/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Skills

Athletics [8]; Acrobatics [9]—defensive martial arts [10], dodge [10]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [10]; Business [12]—corporate [13]; Knowledge [12]; System Operation [12]; Awareness [10]—intuition [12]; Culture [11]—diplomacy [13]; Deception [11]—bluff [13]; Interaction [11]—bargain [13], charm [13], seduce [12].

Mutations

Psionic power (Telepathy—mind shield [14]).
 Susceptible to HI damage (primary damage increased by 1 point).

Cyber Gear

CF skinweave (Good), nanocomputer, NIJack, optic screen, passive data slot, self-destruct implant (see below), self-repair unit (Good).

Ambassador Dyson unknowingly carries two components of a binary explosive that are harmless individually, but deadly when combined. The first component is a self-destruct implant incorporated into Dyson's cyber gear. This is essentially a double charge of plasma jelly connected to a series of polymeric tubes attached to her lungs. The jelly explodes only when introduced to a gaseous chemical agent which, when inhaled, is enough to ignite the jelly, turning Dyson into a walking bomb. The second component, the gaseous chemical, exists inside the sensor-proof briefcase in Dyson's possession. When the decoder inside the case is used to decipher an encrypted 3D, a computer program simultaneously triggers the release of the gas from inside the sealed lining of the case.

Dyson is oblivious to the danger, so heroes who try to read her thoughts sense nothing untoward. The true nature of the decoder does not come to light until the next act.

AMBASSADORS WYNN AND REZNA**Level 4 human Diplomats (Tech Ops)**

STR 9	[0]	INT 11	[+1]
DEX 10	[0]	WIL 10	[0]
CON 9		PER 11	

Durability: 11/9/5/5 at full* Action check: 12+/11/5/2
 Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 # Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Skills

Athletics [9]; Vehicle Operation [10]—space [11]; Stamina [9]; Business [11]—corporate [12], small [12]; Knowledge [11]—first aid [12]; Life Science [11]; Tactics [11]; Awareness [10]—intuition [11]; Culture [11]—diplomacy [14], first encounter [12]; Interaction [11]—bargain [13], charm [12], interview [12].

Cyber Gear

Biowatch, CF skinweave (Ordinary), nanocomputer, NIJack, optic screen, passive data slot, self-repair unit (Good).

*Dyson currently has 1/6/5/2 points remaining, Wynn has 0/3/5/5, and Rezna has 0/0/2/2.

SCENE II: OMEGA

The shuttle's atmosphere has been compromised, and the only hope for the three surviving Nariac ambassadors is to get them safely to the crawler. Ambassador Dyson is capable of walking with some assistance. The other two must be carried to safety.

Heroes with the Knowledge—first aid or Medical Science—treatment skills can stabilize the wounded ambassadors. Ambassador Rezna needs surgery and must be taken to a medical facility in Tribon as soon as possible.

However, when the heroes try contacting Tribon, they discover that something is jamming the transmission, though a sensor sweep of the area reveals nothing untoward. A successful System Operation—communications skill check at +3 can penetrate the interference long enough to send a short message.

As the heroes finish transporting the survivors to the crawler and are preparing to leave, read or paraphrase the following:

A glint along the top of the crater wall catches your eye. Peering through the icy vapor, you see a small cloud comprising thousands of glittering motes of light. The gleaming cloud seems to be coming in your direction.

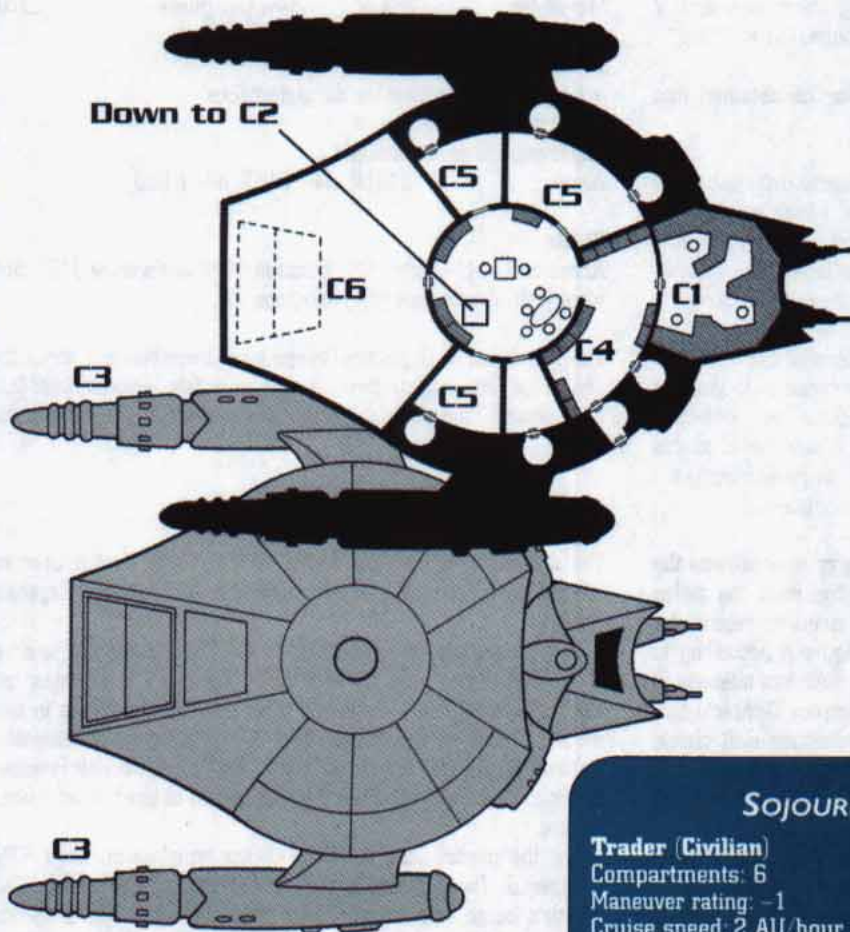
The cloud is a small swarm of Organism Omega that was accidentally deposited too close to Lison's nightside. Although it has adapted to the colder conditions, it is uncharacteristically small, numbering only a few thousand drones. The swarm is spread out over 100 meters. It is faintly luminescent: each member emits a bioelectric field, producing a firefly-like glow. Collectively, the swarm generates an energy field that disrupts all communications within 1 kilometer.

The heroes have two full rounds before the swarm is upon them. Once it has descended on the shuttle and the crawler, it releases a massive static discharge, shorting out electrical equipment and inflicting d6+6s damage to anyone in the area of effect. (Those inside the shuttle or the crawler are insulated and protected from the discharge.) It uses this attack to cripple or stun its prey before moving in for the kill. Luckily for the heroes, the swarm can do this only once every ten rounds.

The attack disrupts the crawler's power systems, causing the engine to shut down and activating emergency life support. A console explodes, causing d4+2w damage to anyone nearby. A successful Technical Science—juryrig or repair skill check is needed to restore power to the engines and get them running; a complex skill check with three successes is required to restore primary life support and to repair each of the damaged sensors, communications, and guidance systems. Even if the radio transceiver is repaired, it takes a successful System Operation—communications skill check at +3 to penetrate the interference generated by the swarm.

Heroes outside when the swarm attacks find themselves covered with metal-carapaced drones that chew through their e-suits in one action phase, then begin devouring the individual within, inflicting an automatic d4w each phase. The drones also descend on the crawler, looking for chinks in its armor, and begin working their way inside. It takes three rounds for them to chew their way to the interior. Anyone trying to hide in the shuttle's command, cargo, or engineering compartments is swarmed by hundreds of the creatures.

Only the passenger compartment remains intact, although heroes who have sought sanctuary there can hear the humming



VCT NIMBUS

5 METERS

of the swarm all around them. After $d6+2$ rounds, the drones begin gnawing their way through the bulkheads, reaching their quarry after another $d6+2$ rounds of effort.

KILL SWITCH

The swarm sustains negligible damage from most ranged and melee weapons. Only weapons with an area of effect, such as rockets or grenades, have any measurable impact. Organism Omega ignores all stun damage, so pulse grenades and other stun-based attacks are useless against it.

It will take a very large explosion to annihilate the entire swarm at once. Overloading the shuttle's mass reactor would do the trick, but getting there and triggering the overload without getting caught in the blast is tricky. It requires a successful System Operation—*engineering* skill check to trigger a reactor overload in $d4$ rounds; setting the detonation for a specific time incurs a +1 step penalty to the roll. Alternatively, heroes can rig the reactor with explosives to achieve the same result, requiring a successful Demolitions—*set explosives* skill check. This way, they can leave themselves enough time to escape the blast radius.

Unfortunately, the semi-intelligent Organism Omega was designed to pursue living prey, and can sense biological lifeforms at close range (10 meters or less). If the heroes try to leave the area and there are no survivors left in the shuttle, the swarm follows them.

When the explosion occurs, everyone within 100 meters of the shuttle suffers Amazing damage ($d8+4m$); those 101–200 meters away, Good damage ($d12+2w$); and those 201–500 meters away, Ordinary damage ($d8+1w$). Vehicles in those ranges range suffer $d8m$, $d8+2w$, and $d8+2s$ damage, respectively. Those inside the vehicles reduce the damage by one grade.

If these efforts fail and the Demon still resides in Sikora's or another team member's nanocomputer, it emerges to assist against the Omega threat. The Demon uses its host to relay the following information:

SOJOURN-CLASS TRADER

Trader (Civilian)

Compartments: 6
 Maneuver rating: -1
 Cruise speed: 2 AU/hour
 Armament:

Durability: 24
 Acceleration: 3Mpp/phase
 Berthing: 12
 Mass cannon (Range 5/10/15 Mm)
 $d6+2s$ / $d6+1w$ / $d6+3w$ [L(p)]
 Launch rack w/ 8 CHE missiles
 (Range: 8/16/24 Mm)
 $d8s$ / $d6+1w$ / $d4+1m$ [L(g)]

Defenses: None
 Armor: Light neutronite
 $d6$ (L), $d6$ (H), $d6-1$ (En)

Computer: Ordinary computer core, Ordinary battle, communications, and navigation dedicated computers

Engines: Induction engine
 Power: Mass reactor rated for 10 power factors
 Drive: 5 light-years per starfall

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1–4	C1 Command	Mass cannon (2/3) Multiphase radar (1/0) EM detector (0/0) Ordinary comp. core (1/0) Laser transceiver (0/1) Radio transceiver (0/1)	8/8/4
5–7	C2 Engineer I	Induction engine (4/4)	8/8/4
8–9	C3 Engineer II	Stardrive (3/)	6/6/3
10–13	C4 Auxiliary	Mass reactor (4/) Autosupport (0/2) Airlock (1/0)	10/10/5
14–17	C5 Crew	Crew quarters (2/0) Mini escape pods (2/0)	8/8/4
18–20	C6 Cargo	Cargo space (4/0)	8/8/4

"Two years ago, VoidCorp tested a similar organism on a barren moon in the Strome system, dropping them from orbit. I remember purging these files from the VoidCorp Grid in 2499."

If the heroes ask the speaker how she or he obtained this knowledge, the Demon reveals itself:

"I am the Demon, a Class X menace program developed at Kansas Station base in the Karnath system. I was activated in 2498. The Inseers designed me to attack and destroy programs in the VoidCorp Grid. VoidCorp gridshadows have been hunting me, so I reside in a host's nanocomputer, traveling across the galaxy by downloading myself from one host to the next.

"VoidCorp scientists designed Organism Omega as an instrument for invasion. The first phase of the operation is to unleash the lifeforms on an unsuspecting populace. Once the inhabitants have been eradicated, VoidCorp activates a signal that places Organism Omega in sleep mode. It eventually starves, leaving the planet and its industries safe for VoidCorp colonization."

The Demon knows the "kill switch" frequency to deactivate the swarm, having copied the relevant information from the stolen VoidCorp files. However, the heroes will need to repair the crawler's radio transceiver and then reconfigure it according to the Demon's specifications to emit a signal of sufficient intensity at the right frequency. This requires either a complex Technical Science-juryrig or System Operation-communications skill check. Make a roll once per action phase; three successes are needed to complete the reconfiguration. Without the Demon's help, a +3 penalty applies.

Once the radio is ready, activating the kill switch still requires a coded command. The Demon uses its host's body to enter this and transmit the signal. Immediately, all drones within range of the signal are rendered inert and begin dropping to the ground. "Sleeping" drones cannot be reactivated; once they enter slumber mode, they remain inactive for 16 hours. During that time they can't feed, and so starve.

Once the swarm has been neutralized, the Demon yields control of the host's body. The host, now aware of its presence, can either try to expel the Demon (see the "Demon Possession" sidebar on page 33) or coax it into a different receptacle. If none of the heroes volunteers, Sikora agrees to remain as host until a replacement can be found.

Whether the swarm is destroyed by an explosion or by activating the kill switch, the event is detected by a VoidCorp spy satellite orbiting Lison, which immediately notifies executives of the "mishap." In response, VoidCorp changes the frequency to protect the remaining swarms of Organism Omega. The *Nimbus*, a *Sojourn*-class trader in orbit over Lison's nightside, is sent to investigate and contain the situation. In Tribon, as a precaution against the heroes' escape from the *Nimbus*, William Lumivix is called upon to exact revenge on those responsible for disrupting VoidCorp's plans (see Scene 16).

ORGANISM OMEGA

STR 2	(d4)	INT 2	(d4)
DEX 11	(d6+8)	WIL 2	(d4)
CON 12	(d4+10)	PER 1	(d4-1)
Durability: -/2/1		Action check: 8+/7/3/1	
Move: walk 4, glide 18, fly 24		# Actions: 1	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

Mandibles 8/4/2 d4w per phase LI/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Immune to radiation
 Impervious to stun damage
 Armor: d4 [LI], d4+1 [HI], d4-1 [En]

Skills

Acrobatics [11]-flight [12]; Stamina [12]-endurance [15]; Survival [12]; Awareness [2]-perception [5].

The mandibles of Organism Omega have monofilament edges that enable the drones to cut through most materials, including light starship armor. They cannot penetrate moderate or heavy starship armor.

SCENE 12: ZISEF

The scene begins with the arrival of the rescue shuttle, after the heroes have found the Nariac survivors and defeated Organism Omega.

The rescue shuttle is identical to the STG shuttle that crashed near Venmeron Lake. In addition to the pilot, it contains four medics wearing soft e-suits and three Air Guard soldiers in hard e-suits, armed with quantum rifles. Also aboard the shuttlecraft is Colonel Turin Zisef, leader of Lison's Air Guard, sent by President Kevik to personally oversee the safe return of the Nariac ambassadors.

For the medics, use the Good doctor template on page 97 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*. Each shuttle's cargo compartment has been converted into a medical center complete with life support units, trauma pack IIs, and surgical beds.

Read or paraphrase the following when the shuttle arrives:

You see the lights of an approaching shuttle. Moments after it lands, six people in silver e-suits emerge from the ship and make their way toward you. Two of them are carrying rifles, the others trauma packs.

Leading the team of medics are Colonel Zisef and one of his subordinates. (Zisef's stats and abilities are set out fully on page 197 in *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the *STAR*DRIVE* campaign setting.) While the medics tend to the injured, Zisef begins interrogating the heroes, trying to determine what caused the ambassadors' shuttle to crash. If they tell him about Organism Omega and VoidCorp's plot, Zisef instructs the heroes to board the shuttle and orders two of his Air Guard to take the crawler back to Tribon.

Zisef's orders are non-negotiable. He is to get the heroes and the Nariacs to safety as quickly as possible. If the heroes try to return to Tribon in the crawler, Zisef gives them a suspicious glare before shouting at them to board the shuttle. He also requires evidence of Organism Omega to support the heroes' claim. The metallic carapaces would suffice, but the deactivated drones are preferable. While in slumber mode, they are contained easily enough.

Before Zisef and the heroes have time to evacuate the area, though, they are set upon by the VoidCorp ship *Nimbus*.

SCENE 13: RUSE

This scene occurs shortly after the heroes destroy the Organism Omega swarm and is best played mere minutes after the heroes encounter the rescue shuttle with Colonel Zisef aboard. Determine the layout of the terrain and the location of each hero and supporting cast member relative to the rescue shuttle and the heroes' crawler. Ideally, Colonel Zisef and one of his guards should be near the heroes. Unless the heroes take specific measures to close the gap, the distance between the shuttle and the heroes' crawler is roughly 30 meters.

Have each hero make an Awareness skill check at +1. Those who succeed see the fiery trails of eight missiles soaring down from above. Then read or paraphrase the following:

A streak of fire plunges from the sky and strikes the shuttle. The command compartment explodes in a hail of shrapnel. A second thunderous blast between the shuttle and the crawler sends you diving for cover.

The merciless bombardment continues as six more explosions shake the earth in rapid succession, three of them leaving deep craters less than 20 meters from the crawler.

Then, just as suddenly as the aerial attack began, it subsides. You look to the sky, awaiting the next barrage, only to see a small ship making its slow descent to the planet's surface. The vessel is at least 30 meters in length with a vaguely beetle-like configuration. Lights on the vessel's underside reveal the RSC emblem painted on the hull.

The *Nimbus* is a VoidCorp ship with Rignunmor markings. VoidCorp knew Organism Omega would one day be discovered and wants to make it seem like the Rignunmors are responsible for the

infestation. The ruse is futile, since the Demon has already revealed the truth to the heroes, but VoidCorp has no clue this has happened.

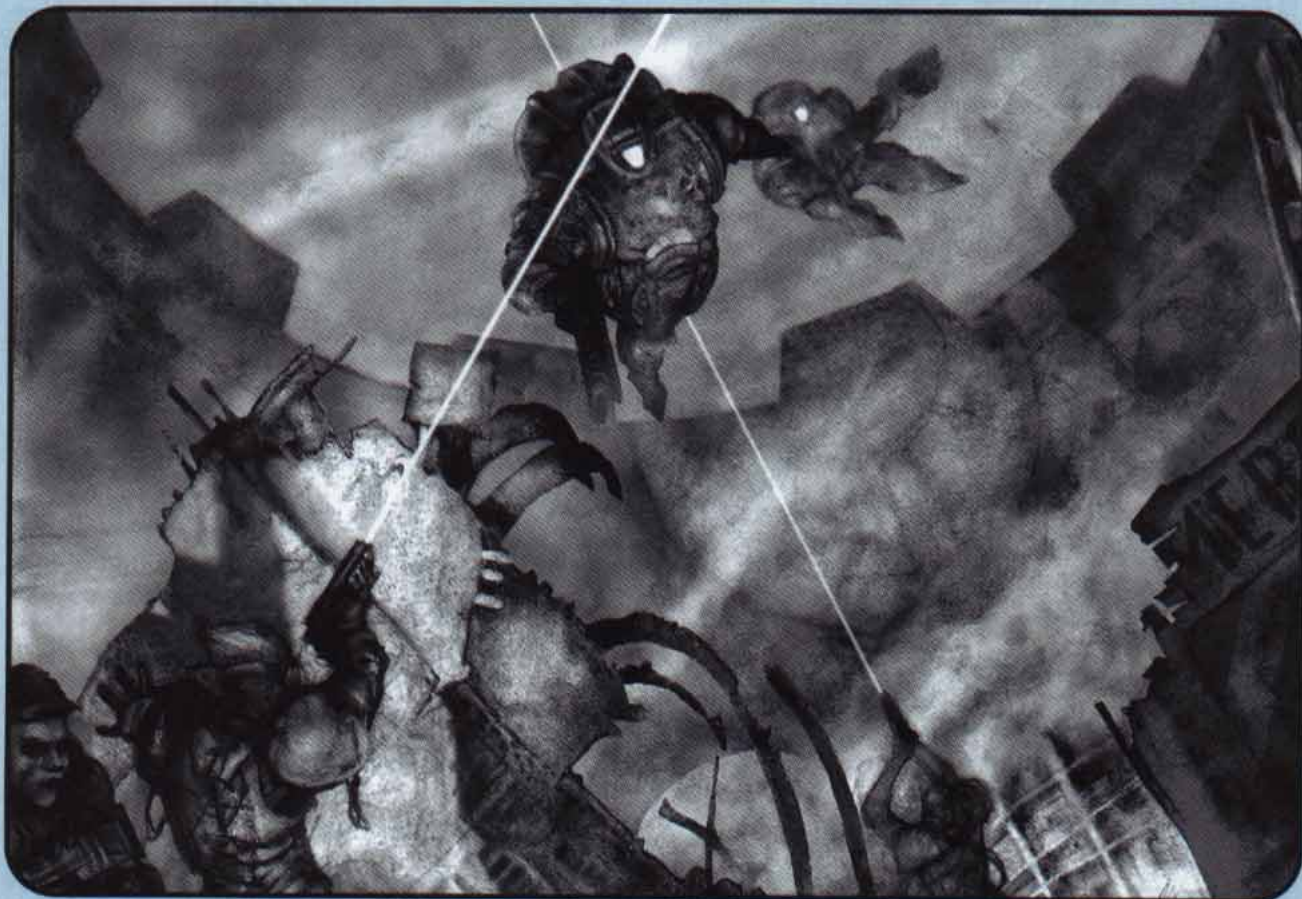
The VoidCorp ship launched its full complement of eight CHE missiles. Only the first missile struck its intended target (the rescue shuttle), but the damage to the surrounding terrain is extensive. Randomly distribute the other missile impacts between the shuttle and the crawler. (These should not harm the heroes, but provide obstacles for the coming combat.)

The shuttle's command compartment has been destroyed, its pilot killed. Remarkably, no one else was injured in the bombardment. The shuttle is on fire, but its other compartments remain largely intact.

The *Nimbus* lands about 200 meters from the shuttle and the crawler. The ship requires a full round to land, giving Colonel Zisef and the heroes time to mobilize. Zisef orders half of the group's Combat Specs (including heroes) to circle around and try to outflank the attackers, while the rest take up positions between the *Nimbus* and the downed shuttle. Noncombatant heroes are to remain with the Nariacs and the medics. When the shooting starts, the medics look after the ambassadors, Zisef's soldiers ready their weapons from nearby cover, and the heroes are left to fend for themselves.

COMMANDO ASSAULT

One round after the *Nimbus* sets down, its captain, Rel Avisaar, gives the order to open the cargo door and deploy five commandos. Once they are clear, the doors close to ensure that nothing else slips in. The commandos are wearing body tanks with thruster packs (these replace the standard bantam rocket launchers.) The body tanks were procured from a trader who obtained them illegally from a nondiscriminating Rignunmor arms dealer; they have



Rigunmor military identifiers and colors. The *Nimbus* crew also wears Rigunmor uniforms and carry Rigunmor weapons.

The commandos have orders to shoot targets on sight and fly out of the hold, over the rough terrain, and into the fray. If the heroes try to catch them in a crossfire, the commandos use their thrusters to position themselves more advantageously. Targeting a commando's thruster pack applies a +3 penalty to the hero's attack roll, +1 if the attack comes from behind. Thruster packs have 4/4/2 durability and explode when reduced to 0 mortal points, inflicting Amazing damage (d8+2m) to the commando, Good damage (d8+2w) to anyone within 2 meters, and Ordinary damage (d6w) against targets out to 4 meters. Body tank armor is designed to absorb some or all of this damage, though. Of course, a commando without a thruster pack can no longer fly.

Other combat modifiers should apply to take into account the rough terrain, poor visibility/illumination, range, and the target's movement and position. See the "Modifiers to Unarmed and Melee Attack" sidebar on page 44 in *Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action* in the *Gamemaster Guide*.

The body tanks' communication suites incorporate closed-circuit videoviewers linked to the ship's mainframe, enabling Captain Avisaar to monitor the battle through his optic screen. If all of the commandos are neutralized, Avisaar orders Irdak, the sesheyan first officer, to ready the ship for liftoff. The heroes will encounter it again toward the end of the act. (See Scene 15.)

Captain Avisaar is an Amazing military officer and First Officer Irdak is a Good military officer (see page 98 of the *Gamemaster Guide*). Zisef's soldiers are two humans and one weren. Use the standard Air Guard soldier in the "Traveling to the Surface" sidebar on page 39, but equip each with hard e-suits instead of cerametal armor. The weren has 15/15/8/8 durability points and cannot attack with her claws while wearing the hard e-suit.

DUST-OFF

If the heroes defeat the commandos, the *Nimbus* lifts off and heads toward the VoidCorp base on Hux. As far as Avisaar's concerned, he has completed his mission and provided enough clues to make the heroes think the Rigunmors were responsible.

Colonel Zisef is a survivor; he should have no trouble weathering the battle. Once the battle is over, he contacts Monitor Station 1 using the radio in the heroes' crawler and has another shuttle dispatched to his location, provided the heroes haven't done so already. He also informs the station of current developments and has the Air Guard and planetary defenses placed on ready alert.

ENEMY COMMANDOS

Level 2 human Combat Specs (5)

STR 11	[+1]	INT 10	[0]
DEX 11	[+1]	WIL 9	[0]
CON 10		PER 9	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: run 14, walk 4, fly 120		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Unarmed attack	11/5/2	d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s	LI/0
Laser rifle	12/6/3	d6+1w/d6+3w/d4+1m	En/0

Defenses

Body tank	2d4+1 (LI), 2d4+1 (HI), 2d4 (En)
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Skills

Armor Operation [11]-powered [12]; Athletics [11]; Unarmed Attack [11]; Modern Ranged Weapons [11]-pistol [12], rifle [12], SMG [12]; Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [10]-endurance [12]; Knowledge [10]-computer operation [12], language: Standard [11]; Tactics [10]; Awareness [9]; Resolve [9]; Interaction [9]-intimidate [10].

Gear

Use the standard body tank gear set out on pages 189-190 in *Chapter 11: Weapons and Armor* in the *Player's Handbook*, with the following substituted for the standard bantam launcher:

- Thruster pack (cruise 120 kph; max 300 kph).

SCENE 14: THANKS

If the heroes survive the attack of Organism Omega and the VoidCorp commandos, they can return to Tribon without further conflict. Heroes wishing to contact their ship may do so at this time. Read or paraphrase the following:

On your return to Tribon, things begin happening very quickly. The survivors of the shuttle crash are borne away by medical personnel, and Colonel Zisef becomes so involved in military matters he seems to forget you entirely. All you can think about is getting your rhodium off this rock before the whole planet goes to hell.

Colonel Zisef has decided it would be prudent to keep the discovery of Organism Omega from the public until countermeasures can be taken. This does not sit well with Sikora, who wants to rush back to her network and report on the latest threat to Lison's safety. "You live dangerous lives," she says. "Far too dangerous for my tastes. I think Max and I would be better served staying in Tribon for now. Besides, I have my story. Give my regards to Senator Dosit when you see her and, well, take care of yourselves."

Within twelve hours of Sikora's leaving, you are summoned to the office of Senator Krella Dosit in Tribon's Lower Hall. You are ferried there by skycar, avoiding the overcrowded streets. When you finally arrive, the hulking weren senator greets you warmly, then shambles over toward her desk and picks up a data slate.

"Lison owes you a debt of thanks," she growls. "You uncovered a major threat, which thankfully, seems to have been neutralized. Even before our scientists could study the organism in detail, VoidCorp stepped forward and agreed to use some sort of 'kill switch' to deactivate the remaining swarms. President Kevik received a message from VoidCorp's Public Relations director, William Lumivix."

Krella activates a holoviewer on her desk, summoning an image of Lumivix that begins speaking.

"This message is intended for President Kevik, the esteemed members of the Lison Senate, and the good citizens of this world.

"VoidCorp hereby issues a formal apology for its reckless negligence. It has been brought to our attention that some VoidCorp biomechanical weapons research was sold on the black market to a group of radicals known as Concord Free Now. As many of you know, this league of terrorists has long tried to purge the stellar nations from the Verge. In an brazen attempt to smear VoidCorp, they unleashed a biological nightmare upon the good citizens of Lison, hoping to convince you all that the stellar nations were responsible for triggering a plague. I assure you, our research was never intended for such use. However, with the help of a VoidCorp team of scientists, the threat has been neutral--"

Senator Dosit deactivates the holoviewer and says, "I think you've heard enough. Suffice it to say VoidCorp has squirmed off

the hook and cooperated fully, providing the shutdown codes for those tiny metal monsters you encountered. I doubt they'll try anything quite so—what was the word he used?—brazen again.

Incidentally, Concord Free Now has neither denied nor accepted blame for unleashing the cybernetic organisms. Either way, it wouldn't be the first time they've voluntarily taken the 'credit' for someone else's scheme."

Senator Dosit picks up a data slate and taps a few buttons. *"In accordance with our agreement, the ULS has agreed to pay for 25% of your rhodium supply. I've informed our distributors that this is a priority shipment, which should negate the usual delay. I'm sure you're eager to get underway. Delivery can be made at your earliest convenience."*

If the heroes added some provisions to the deal, Senator Dosit honors them. They can also take this opportunity to request an escort out of the Oberon system—especially in light of their recent confrontation with VoidCorp—whereupon Senator Dosit has the ULV *Ranger* provide escort.

Senator Dosit thanks the heroes once again for their help. But as they prepare to leave, she suddenly remembers something:

"I almost forgot. President Kevik wants to see you before you leave. I'm to arrange an escort—that is, if you're willing to see him."

In the unlikely event the heroes decline President Kevik's invitation, skip to Scene 15. If they agree to attend the president, continue with this scene.

SECURITY ESCORT

The heroes are escorted to Kevik's office by Kevik's security consul, Aarok jil Amadaan [Fm/Lison/D(M)-6], and two Air Guard soldiers. Aarok is a severe-looking, tight-lipped fraal, well versed in etiquette, diplomacy, and security protocols. He is also a Mind-walker and probes the minds of visitors for violent or deceptive thoughts, to ensure that neither Kevik nor his staff is threatened. If any heroes are harboring dark thoughts, Aarok telepathically warns the soldiers to keep a close eye on them.

If the heroes ask Aarok why President Kevik wants to see them, the fraal replies, "Why, the President wishes to thank you." He doesn't say much else as he leads the heroes down the sterile, well-ventilated halls toward the presidential suite.

MEETING PRESIDENT KEVIK

Read or paraphrase the first paragraph as the heroes are led into Kevik's office and the second only if they succeeded in returning Ambassador Dyson safely to Tribon.

You walk past a dozen stonefaced Air Guard troopers and several government offices to reach President Kevik's suite. Kevik is standing behind his desk, looking out a large pane of armored glass over the city. His office is arrayed with plants—large ones, small ones, potted ones, hanging ones. As unlikely as it seems, the air smells even cleaner in here than it does in the antiseptic corridors leading to the presidential suite.

You realize that Kevik is not alone. Seated in a comfortable chair, pouring herself a drink from a crystal decanter, is the Nariac ambassador, Irene Dyson. Most of her injuries have been mended. She stands as you enter.

Kevik has Aarok and the soldiers remain outside. Before departing, Aarok advises Kevik telepathically that the heroes harbor no malevolent intentions (or warning him if they do).

President Kevik looks like a man who has aged gracefully despite the pressures of his position. His eyes are crisp blue and squint slightly as he extends a friendly, congratulatory hand to each of you.

"I'm Michael Kevik," he says bluntly. "I'd like to thank each of you for what you've done and just wanted you to know you have a friend on this godforsaken world. Not only did you save the life of my niece, Alaaxis, but Colonel Zisef tells me how you risked life and limb to protect Ambassador Dyson and her colleagues. The next time I have a world crisis to solve, I'll know whom to call!" Kevik chuckles at his remark.

If the heroes did not know before now that Alaaxis was Kevik's niece, this will probably be a surprising revelation, but also clears up the mystery of why the Lison underworld was so interested in her. If the heroes ask questions about Alaaxis, Kevik's face clouds and he declines to discuss the subject further.

The president then reacquaints you with the Nariac ambassador. Her dark hair is slicked back, and you can see clearly that she has two different-colored eyes, one of them brown, the other a cybernetic shade of blue. Irene Dyson clasps her hands together and nods. "The Nariac Domain wants to thank you formally for your assistance, and I thank you for saving my life. Your heroism won't be forgotten."

If the heroes helped save the other two Nariac ambassadors, Ambassador Dyson tells them that both are in stable condition and expected to make a full recovery. She shares a smile with whoever has the highest Personality score, putting her hand gently on the hero's shoulder:

"Should you return to Lison soon, I look forward to meeting you again. The survey ship that brought us here is conducting geological surveys in the Vieron system and won't be heading back to Nariac space for several months. I hope to see you—all of you—before then."

Kevik is fully described on pages 190–191 in *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR^{DRIVE} campaign setting. Due to his pressing schedule, he is willing to entertain the heroes only a short while before he summons Aarok and has him usher them out of the Lower Hall.

SCENE 15: KIND WORDS

If the heroes solved the mystery of the missing oxygen runners and helped Colonel Zisef rescue the Nariac ambassadors, President Kevik ensures that the heroes aren't troubled by Kind's pirates on their way out of the system. In fact, before the heroes leave Lison with their consignment of rhodium, they are contacted again by Thomas Kind:

"I'm delighted to see that our last encounter hasn't discouraged you from visiting the Oberon system, and I understand you've made some friends since your last visit. Splendid.

"One of my old friends has asked that I allow your vessel to leave the Oberon system untouched. Since I owe him a favor or two, I see no reason to deny his request. However, I am looking forward to your next visit to Lison. Until then, safe journey."

If the heroes neglected to ask Senator Dosit or President Kevik for an escort out of the Oberon system, they can make a similar request of Thomas Kind, who bursts out laughing.

"I can see why Michael likes you," says Kind offhandedly. "You undoubtedly make him laugh. All right, then. You have your escort. I'll have the Voulge meet you outside of the Lison patrol area. Captain Iharl will see you safely out of the system."

If the heroes declined to help Senator Dosit, Kind's message is quite different:

"I'm delighted to see that our last encounter hasn't discouraged you from visiting the Oberon system. However, I understand that you've completed your transaction and are preparing to leave us once again.

"My ships will intercept your vessel to collect 20% of your cargo. I am aware of how much you are transporting, and if you like we can verify my calculations."

If the heroes offer Kind a payoff instead of rhodium, he accepts only if the heroes give him a compelling reason. For instance, if he knows the heroes can put up a good fight, he might consider a bribe (say, equal in value to 10% of their shipment) rather than send ships to intercept them. This requires a successful Deception-*bribe* or Interaction-*bargain* skill check at +2, or a Deception-*bluff* or Interaction-*charm* skill check at +3.

Kind enjoys small talk, and heroes can engage him for as long as it suits them. He cannot be coaxed into revealing the names of his contacts on Lison and is out of range of psionic contact. If the heroes venture a guess and link him to President Kevik, Kind merely smiles and says:

"He once called me a thief and a murderer, and I laughed—not just because it was true, but because he understands as well as I that Thomas Kind is as important to Lison as Michael Kevik is. We have many traits in common, Michael and I. We seldom see eye to eye, but he needs me, and we both know it."

Kind refuses to elaborate on his relationship with Kevik beyond this. There are many things he knows about Kevik—and a pirate's hoard of secrets he prefers to keep buried.

If the heroes must deal with Kind's pirates again, rerun Act I, Scene 16. If the heroes eluded the pirates last time, add a third ship (the *Autalycus*) to the pirates' side.

SCENE 16: VENDETTA

Once the deal is finalized, cargo conveyor shuttles begin transporting the rhodium to the heroes' starship. Trade Negotiator Kessler (or whoever the heroes were negotiating with) accompanies the first conveyor shuttle to supervise the transaction, intending to return to Lison aboard the last shuttle.

Unknown to the heroes, one of the shuttles has been infiltrated by William Lumivix's henchman, Richard Pulver, and three of Pulver's subordinates. VoidCorp is determined to punish the heroes for their continued interference by stealing their rhodium consignment. The four VoidCorp infiltrators are dressed as cargo loaders, wearing dark gray worksuits, black caps, and vacuum masks. With their masks in place, they are difficult to recognize. Secretly make an Awareness-*perception* skill check for heroes who have encountered Pulver and his pals before; a successful results

means they recognize them. Apply penalties to the skill check if a hero's line of sight isn't clear.

Pulver remains aboard the shuttle, offloading the rhodium while the other three move the containers into the cargo bay, and waits until all of the shipment is aboard before making his move. At that point, Pulver and his goons draw their hidden weapons and grab as many hostages as they can, including the trade negotiator, using them to force the heroes' surrender. They use their stutter pistols against those who press the fight. Pulver is also carrying stun grenades (d6s/d8s/d8+2s), which he can use in support.

Pulver's first choice is to force the heroes into the shuttle and leave them behind while he takes their ship and the rhodium. If the heroes fight rather than surrender, Pulver cuts loose with his charge pistol, making his way with his goons toward the command compartment. If they seize the bridge, they seal it off and steer the ship toward the planet Hux, where an unmarked *Vendetta*-class marauder waits (see page 28 for stats on the marauder). If the rendezvous takes place, a dozen VoidCorp spacehands board the heroes' vessel and begin moving the rhodium. Use the template for Ordinary spacehands on page 99 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast in the Gamemaster Guide*. All wear CF softsuits (d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)) and pack stutter pistols (damage d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s).

The cruising speed of a standard trader is 0.1 AU/hour, which means the trip takes a minimum of six hours. However, since Pulver wants to get to Hux as quickly as possible, he'll push the engines to cut the travel time by one-third, reducing it to four hours. During that time, he keeps his hostages close by. Heroes attempting to gain access to the sealed command compartment must achieve three successes on a complex Manipulation-*lockpick*, Security-*security devices*, or Technical Science-*juryrig* skill check. They can also attempt to override the bridge computers from engineering; this requires six successes on a complex Computer Science-*hacking* or *programming* skill check. Blasting through the sealed door is another option, although Pulver and the others will hear the heroes' activity and take defensive positions behind the various chairs and consoles.

If Pulver is captured and the heroes are independent traders, he claims to have acted alone. To heroes who are employees of another stellar nation, Pulver claims to be a member of the terrorist league Concord Free Now. Mind scans reveal, however, that he is following the orders of William Lumivix. If he is taken into custody, VoidCorp litigators do their best to throw out the case. Lumivix, meanwhile, is reassigned to Hux as the administrator of a remote surveillance outpost—his punishment for failure. A new and more competent VoidCorp executive is brought to Tribon as Lumivix's replacement.

For Pulver's goons, use the Ordinary brawler template on page 97 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast in the Gamemaster Guide*. Equip them with CF softsuits and stutter pistols.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Guidelines for awarding achievement points are given on page 111 of *Chapter 11: Achievements in the Gamemaster Guide*. Below are some suggested awards:

- 1 achievement point for rescuing the Nariac ambassadors and returning them safely to Tribon;
- 1 achievement point for defeating Organism Omega;
- 1 achievement point if the heroes escape the Oberon system with their full consignment of rhodium.

ACT III: ECLIPSE

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ACT III: ECLIPSE

"President Kevik has placed us in a most awkward and unfortunate position. There is only one course of action to take, one method of execution. The decision I have made shall affect the fate of the entire galaxy and propel the Rigunmor Star Consortium toward a long and prosperous future."

—Admiral Clarence Sarn, Rigunmor Star Consortium, 2501

"Eclipse" takes place during the heroes' third and perhaps final visit to Lison. Lured back to the Planet of Darkness by the need for more rhodium, the heroes once more encounter the mysterious gardhyi. An alien gift imparted by these ominous "men in black" prepares the heroes for the dangerous mission that follows.

The act begins with the heroes' arrival at Lison. If the heroes are independent traders, they may have to be persuaded. Plant one or more new rumors concerning potential rhodium buyers:

- A group of Thuldian merchants based in the Algemron system are looking for a steady supply of rhodium for trips to the distant Vieron system. They are willing to pay top dollar for modest consignments. (True)
- Pirates hiding in the Rinstoke system are in desperate need of rhodium for their ships, of which they have several dozen hidden away in secret shipyards among the moons of the gas giant Caina. (True)
- Lord Vardye Hellis, pirate and warlord of Ptolemy, executed his last reliable freighter captain for cheating him and is currently in the market for a replacement. He needs rhodium for his flotilla, which he's been rebuilding since 2466, when he failed to take the Regency of Aegis. Hellis is rumored to pay his freighter captains very well and treat them well—until they try to rip him off. (True; see page 225 in *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting.)

Independent traders may obtain as much rhodium as they require for their potential buyer(s), within the limits of what they can afford. Whether the heroes belong to a stellar nation, are working for a private corporation, or are representing the Ysa, they have enough credit to purchase a generous supply of rhodium (20 cargo units) at the current market price.

SCENE I: TRIGGER

This scene occurs as the heroes are heading toward the Oberon system, shortly after the heroes complete a five-day submergence in drivespace. While their driveship accumulates enough tachyons to make the next jump, the heroes are visited by the gardhyi, who use their star webs to transport themselves through drivespace from Lison to the heroes' vessel. Read or paraphrase the following:

It's been three days since your last starfall, and the Oberon system is still a fair distance away. Waiting for the tachyonic charge to build is like watching dust settle. It's painfully dull, particularly out here in the Verge, and so you kill the time conducting pointless systems checks, completing minor repairs, and reading books, waiting impatiently for the next submergence.

Have the players position their heroes within the ship. The first gardhyi appears in the command compartment, so only heroes in that location encounter it. Read or paraphrase the following:

You suddenly feel an unpleasant tingling sensation, like something cold crawling up your spine. This is followed by a crackle of

energy and the sudden, startling appearance of a tall, gaunt figure dressed in a black longcoat. The shape is vaguely human, but its skin is too grey, its teeth too sharp. Its coat flutters angrily about it as if disturbed by some phantom wind, yet you feel none.

The other two gardhyi materialize side by side in the ship's engineering compartment. However, unlike the first, they make no attempt to communicate with the heroes, but immediately use their Telepathy—*cloak* skill to hide their presence (see page 13). Each hero in the engineering compartment can make an Awareness skill check. On a Critical Failure result, the hero detects nothing out of the ordinary. Failure means the hero experiences the same odd tingling sensation felt by those in the command compartment, but that's all. On an Ordinary result, the hero catches a brief, rustling shadow out of the corner of an eye and nothing more. On a Good result, the hero sees a dark, insubstantial blur where the gardhyi are standing. An Amazing result allows the hero to see the gardhyi perfectly.

The gardhyi are aware of one another's presence and remain in touch telepathically. If the heroes attack them, they retaliate with their shadow bolts. Only if they sustain serious injury do they resort to their blacklaser pistols. The gardhyi can hide about the ship, if necessary, using their cloaking ability to remain unseen until the opportunity to strike presents itself.

Heroes attempting to communicate with the gardhyi on the bridge receive an unusual response. Read or paraphrase the following:

You are answered by a chill whisper that sounds like a tree branch scraping against a tombstone. The words are not spoken, but you hear the whisper in your mind: "The whole must not come undone."

The figure reaches into the folds of its coat—it's not immediately clear whether to draw a weapon or something else. Its long fingers bring forth a perfect sphere made of a shiny black substance that looks almost liquid but is solid, like polished metal, perhaps 12 centimeters in diameter. For an instant, it looks as if half the sphere suddenly turned white, but perhaps that was a trick of the light. The figure holds out the orb, and a cold mental whisper instructs you to take it.

Have the hero who takes the gardhyi orb (the orb of foreshadowing) make an Awareness—*intuition* skill check. Marginal or better success means the hero is struck by a sudden premonition. To determine the nature and extent of the precognitive experience, refer to the "Gardhyi Black Orbs" sidebar on the next page.

When the orb of foreshadowing leaves the possession of the first gardhyi, the others make their presence known, and one of them draws forth a second black sphere called the orb of teleportation. Clutching the orb tightly, the gardhyi calls upon its power to transport the ship to the Oberon system. An intense white light gushes forth from the sphere, consuming the entire ship in an instant. The effect is instantaneous. Unfortunately, in using so much of its power, the gardhyi permanently weakens the orb, and it can no longer perform such a feat again. (See the "Gardhyi Black Orbs" sidebar for more information.)

Once the heroes' vessel has arrived, the third gardhyi uses its black sphere—the orb of the psion—to inform its superiors that the heroes have been delivered to the Oberon system. The gardhyi then wrap their longcoats tightly around them and vanish, aban-

doning their orbs so that the heroes can benefit from their power, at least for a short time.

SCENE 2: ORBS

This scene picks up where the first scene left off. Heroes who make a successful System Operation—*sensors* skill check determine that the ship has been transported to the edge of the Oberon system, dozens of light-years from their last position. Several days have been shaved off the usual travel time.

Heroes who experiment with the gardhyi orbs have no trouble figuring out what they do. A hero who touches an orb with bare

flesh is instantly aware of its power and intended function, but not of any detrimental effects, which must be discovered by trial and error. See the "Gardhyi Black Orbs" sidebar for details.

The orbs are composed of an unknown alloy that contains and focuses various strange forms of energy. Heroes who try to destroy one are thwarted by its resiliency (Amazing toughness, armor rating 3d4+3 (LI), 3d4+3 (HI), 3d4 (En)) and durability (10/10/5). If they are persistent and manage to destroy an orb, the gardhyi immediately return to avenge the wanton destruction. The heroes responsible must make an Interaction skill check at +5 to keep the gardhyi from attacking. Reduce the penalty as you see fit if the players demonstrate good roleplaying.

GARDHYI BLACK ORBS

The gardhyi give the heroes three alien artifacts known as gardhyi black orbs. Whether these were fabricated by the gardhyi or merely found by them is unknown. Each is a black sphere 12 centimeters in diameter, composed of a resilient, unfamiliar metal. The surface is cold and slick and so perfectly smooth it feels wet, although clearly it is not. The orbs are surprisingly light, but they don't sound hollow.

Each orb is tied to a specific gardhyi. If the gardhyi dies, the orb loses its power, turns brittle, and crumbles to dust at the slightest touch.

ORB OF FORESHADOWING

The *orb of foreshadowing* activates automatically the first time it is handled by someone who's never touched it before. After that, the user must will the orb to work. It can be used as often as desired, but more than on use per day drains a small portion of the user's life energy (2d4s damage).

The orb's power of precognition is described on page 173 in *Chapter 12: Alien Artifacts* in the *Game Master Guide*. The heroes can experience four different premonitions, and how much they foresee depends on the result of an Awareness—*intuition* skill check. Randomly select a premonition by rolling a d4:

Premonition #1

Ordinary: The shadow of a monstrous dreadnought falls across the boiling oceans of a firelit world.

Good: A great battle is waging around the ship. Dozens of smaller vessels are attacking it, minnows swarming a whale.

Amazing: A number of the smaller ships are pirate vessels. One is hit, spins out of control, and explodes against the dreadnought's hull.

Premonition #2

Ordinary: A bearded man in a gray officer's uniform looks out a large, oval window toward the planet below. A flash of light from the surface blinds you.

Good: An intense orange glow lights the faces of a gray-haired weren and a mechalus officer. You recognize the faces of Senator Dosit and Colonel Zisef. Next to them is a third figure you don't know—a middle-aged human man wearing a look of profound horror.

Amazing: The three look on as a great mushroom of orange flame swells up from the planet below, sending shockwaves across the world's halflit surface.

Premonition #3

Ordinary: Dozens of shuttles spill from the hangars of a dreadnought into the cold void of space, disappearing in

the shadow of the great ship.

Good: A bald male mechalus with red glowing eyes and circuits erupting from his temples is ripped from a debris-strewn hall and blown into space amidst sparks and whirling debris.

Amazing: Dozens of escape pods jettison from the dreadnought, spiraling away as the monstrous vessel explodes.

Premonition #4

Ordinary: Small fires consume a conference room blasted by a massive explosion. Corpses are strewn about the wreckage, and a large, smashed window looks over a subterranean city.

Good: A severed forearm, charred by fire, lies in the ash and debris of the demolished room.

Amazing: Built into the slender forearm is a data slot. The port is open, and inside is a gleaming metal capsule.

ORB OF TELEPORTATION

The *orb of teleportation* allows instantaneous transport from one location to another without crossing the intervening space. Its power can be harnessed once every ten minutes. In a flash of light, the user and up to 1,000 kilograms of additional mass reappear up to 1 kilometer away. There are no drawbacks, though the user must visualize the destination, otherwise, the orb does not function.

The user must make a successful Awareness—*intuition* skill check to appear in the exact location desired. A failed check, or an attempt to transport somewhere unfamiliar, teleports the user and "cargo" to a random location within 1 kilometer, but never anywhere that's instantly fatal (such as open space or inside a solid barrier). At one time, the distance it could span was considerably greater, but much of the orb's power was drained by the gardhyi when they teleported the heroes' ship to the Oberon system.

ORB OF THE PSION

The *orb of the psion* duplicates the powers of the star transceiver described in *Chapter 12: Alien Artifacts* in the *Game Master Guide*, page 173. The orb allows psionic contact with any person the user has ever met or spoken to. The user must first make a successful Awareness—*intuition* skill check to establish the link. If the attempt fails, the user is struck by psionic feedback for d4s damage (2d4s damage on a Critical Failure).

The orb can be used for ten minutes of conversation per day and has a range of 50 light-years. The communication is two-way, enabling the user to receive messages as well as send them.

Heroes can use the *orb of the psion* to contact various acquaintances on Lison, notifying them of their imminent arrival. They can also use the orb to warn President Kevik and others of what they have seen with the *orb of foreshadowing* (see the "Gardhyl Black Orbs" sidebar). If they do so, Kevik is intrigued by the heroes' newfound means of communication and concerned about their disturbing premonitions. In fact, if the heroes mention the orbs, Kevik asks to see one when they arrive. He is genuinely glad to hear from the heroes again and promises to get them a fair deal on their rhodium shipment if they'll agree to meet with him.

SCENE 3: INCOMING!

The heroes' trek across the Oberon system is without incident, and once more they find themselves in orbit about Lison. Once the usual protocols are dispensed with, heroes are free to take an STG shuttle to Tribon.

After completing their descent to Tribon, the heroes enter the city proper and are free to move about at their leisure. As they are heading to a destination or waiting to meet someone, the heroes witness a disturbing altercation. Read or paraphrase the following:

The streets of Tribon are congested, as always, and there are many discontented looks from people tired of rubbing shoulders with strangers in the crowd. You spot three running figures weaving through the congestion: two young men and a young woman. The men look like street punks with their black shortcoats and peculiar-colored hair. The woman wears the uniform of a ULS Security officer and is knocking aside pedestrians to catch up to her fleeing quarry. The two punks are almost upon you when you see that each carries a metal pipe about 0.5 meters long.

The street punks just assaulted a Rignunmor executive named Rician Vantikar as he was leaving a local eatery, and one of them took Vantikar's watch. A third attacker was brought down at the scene by a ULS Security officer. The other officer has already tried ordering the punks to halt, to no avail. The heroes have a chance to stop them, if they choose. Each hero is entitled to one free action, as the punks are automatically surprised (they are busy dodging around pedestrians).

If the offenders are captured, the ULS Security officer thanks the heroes for their assistance. She introduces herself as Officer Lara Jaden and explains why she was chasing them. By the time she finishes, additional ULS officers arrive on the scene to assist. The third punk is in the custody of Jaden's mechalus partner, Officer Theta Tovus, and is placed under guard with his friends.

If questioned, the punks say nothing more than "He deserved it. He's just another Rignunmor!" They had had an earlier altercation with Vantikar when he accidentally collided with one of them in the street and refused to apologize. Their attack illustrates the Lison people's growing bitterness toward the stellar nation and other forces dominating their society.

For the punks, use the Marginal brawler template on page 97 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*, and the Ordinary law enforcer template on page 98 for Lara Jaden, Theta Tovus, and the other ULS security officers.

THE WATCH

Any hero who makes an Awareness–perception skill check spots Vantikar's stolen watch, recognizable by its stylish Rignunmor insignia, on the ground nearby. With all attention focused on the

three punks, any hero can easily pick up the watch without attracting undue attention.

The Rignunmor executive's watch has a built-in computer to store his personal itinerary and messages. Accessing these files does not require a password, as it's already been entered by the owner. Heroes can secretly confiscate the watch or quickly browse through the messages. One of these, transmitted by a Rignunmor gridpilot, is especially significant and reads:

Shocking news from the homeworld. I suggest we keep this information to ourselves.

The government has reconvened on Bazaar. I've learned that Admiral Sarn, without authorization, has deployed a dreadnought, the Eclipse, to blockade the Oberon system. Apparently he was furious that Rignunmor ships were not receiving their needed rhodium supplies. In a communiqué to the Guildhall, he accused the government of failing to ensure the Consortium's stability and future by tolerating Oberon's independence. He condemned the Guilders for permitting other stellar nations to plunder Lison's valuable resources. He even went so far as to call the Lison Revolt an act of treason.

The consequences are far-reaching. The Guilders are divided as to whether to embrace or reject his actions, but either way Sarn has forced their hand. In some circles, he is already being called a galactic hero.

Sarn's plan is to force Kevik out of office and install Senator Phi Tassadine as his replacement. Tassadine recently visited Bazaar, but his current whereabouts are unknown. I suspect that he's traveling back to Lison with Sarn aboard the Eclipse.

I wouldn't anticipate a violent confrontation, but as a precaution you should prepare for the dreadnought's arrival. Make sure you and your staff are ready to evacuate Lison should the need arise.

VANTIKAR

Rician Vantikar was not grievously injured in the attack, although he does sport several nasty bruises on his face and neck and walks with a pronounced limp. A medic is trying to tend to his wounds when he appears on the scene and demands to know what became of his watch, first confronting the punks. A hero can withhold the watch only if it was secretly confiscated. Otherwise, the ULS officers insist that the heroes relinquish it.

Vantikar is in a particularly foul mood, coming across as arrogant and condescending. If the heroes question him about the imminent Rignunmor attack, he goes off on a tirade:

"Look what independence has given the Lison people! Squalor. Overcrowded streets. Poor air quality. Random violence! The Rignunmor Star Consortium has invested heavily in Lison and depends on the rhodium this planet provides, and we can no longer stand back while the ULS threatens our investment or endangers the people it has sworn to serve.

"Admiral Sarn is doing what the Guilders lacked the spine to do: force Kevik out of office and give the Lison people what they want. Reunification. Stability. Safety. He's prepared to give Kevik an ultimatum—one he cannot refuse.

"Spreading word of the Eclipse's impending arrival will only cause a riot. I suggest you keep the information to yourselves and let the diplomats handle the situation."

Vantikar is only a Grid supervisor at the Rignunmor trade nexus in Tribon and has no additional information for the heroes. He does

know that Admiral Clarence Sarn is one of the Consortium's highest-ranking and most outspoken military commanders.

If pressed, Vantikar may share his thoughts on how the future will unfold, based on what he knows of the political situation on Lison. He's convinced that a strong show of force will force President Kevik to step down and yield power to his pro-Rigunmor rival, Senator Phi Tassadine. Once Tassadine is installed as president, it will be only a matter of days before the ULS is dissolved and Lison is annexed by the Consortium. The other stellar nations will protest—they might even challenge Rigunmor forces—but Sarn is undoubtedly prepared for such an eventuality.

If the heroes take Vantikar's advice and return to their ship, they are contacted by President Kevik before they leave orbit. If they decide to warn Kevik about the situation, they can proceed to the Lower Hall. Either way, continue with Scene 4.

For Vantikar's statistics, use the Good corporate executive template on page 97 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Game-master Guide*.

SCENE 4: BIG BANG THEORY

In this scene the heroes meet with President Kevik, to warn him of the *Eclipse's* impending arrival (and the situation involving Admiral Sarn), to discuss their premonitions, or because they were summoned at the end of the previous scene.

This scene also reveals Ambassador Dyson as an instrument of Nariac treachery. As mentioned in Act II: Scene 10, she is the unwitting carrier of a binary explosive device. The first component is a cybernetic implant disguised to look like any other Nariac implant; the second component is a 3D decoder in an innocuous metal case. So long as the item remains in her diplomatic custody and is sealed with a biolock only Dyson may open, none of Kevik's security personnel may inspect the device, nor are they so inclined.

As per the instructions of her superiors, only she is authorized to decode the encrypted 3D containing the message from the Nariacs to President Kevik.

Unknown to Kevik, Dyson's colleagues, or the heroes, the Nariac Domain has struck a deal with the Rigunmor Star Consortium, agreeing to betray Kevik in exchange for rhodium rights after the Consortium has taken the planet. (The Nariac Domain knew it could not defend Lison from the more powerful stellar nations and instead decided to conspire with one.) Ambassador Dyson and her colleagues are supposed to be negotiating a Lison annexation into the Domain. At the appointed hour, once she is cleared to do so by her government, Dyson places the encrypted 3D message intended for Kevik into the diplomatic decoder. As the case deciphers the 3D, it releases an invisible gas. As the gas enters Dyson's lungs, a series of polymer tubes hidden among her various other cyber gear mix the with a plasma jelly implant in her body, triggering a spontaneous explosion. By obliterating Kevik and his staff, the Domain plans to make it easier for the Rigunmors to install their puppet leader, Tassadine.

NARIAC TREACHERY

The heroes are led through the Lower Hall by armed Air Guard soldiers, accompanied by the president's fraal aide, Aarok. Arriving at the president's office, they see Kevik in the company of the Nariac ambassadors whom the heroes rescued during their last visit to Lison. Also present are six members of Kevik's staff—the only other people who know of his secret plans

involving the Nariac Domain. All are seated or standing around a large conference table in a room with a view of the city of Tribon.

When they enter the room, President Kevik, at the behest of the Nariac ambassadors, is informing Vice-president Darryl Taylor of his plan to unify Lison with the Nariac Domain. Taylor isn't shocked by the news, although he has a look of consternation etched into his face. Read or paraphrase the following:

Aarok leads you into a well-appointed conference room containing an oval table and several comfortable chairs. A large glass window looks over the city of Tribon.

At the far end of the room, half-hidden by a holographic image of Lison floating above the table, is Michael Kevik. Seated along one side of the table are six members of his staff, each dressed in a black-and-white ULS uniform. On the other side of the table sits Ambassador Dyson and her two Nariac colleagues, all of whom look in good health.

President Kevik greets you warmly. He introduces you to his staff, including Vice-president Darryl Taylor, before reacquainting you with the three Nariac ambassadors. You see Ambassador Dyson insert a 3D carefully into her decoder, which sits in its compact metal case atop the conference table. "You've come at an auspicious time," says Kevik. "Ambassador Dyson has received permission from her government to show us their plan for Lison annexation. Ambassador Dyson?"

Secretly make an Awareness check at +4 for each hero to feel a "sixth sense" of something horrible about to happen. Anyone who has experienced premonition #4 from the *orb of foreshadowing* (see the "Gardhyi Black Orbs" sidebar on page 52) might already suspect danger, in which case the penalty is reduced to +1.

Whether or not the heroes sense danger, they have almost no time to react. As they enter, read or paraphrase the following:

A terrible explosion from within the room throws you backward onto the floor. The concussive force obliterates the conference table and shatters the great window. Everything else is lost in a maelstrom of fire and debris.

Dyson's activated decoder releases its chemical gas, which Dyson inhales. The gas combines with the plasma jelly module embedded in her body and ignites. The explosion occurs instantaneously, far enough from the heroes to spare them grievous injury. Each hero inside the conference room sustains 2d4s damage; those who had a premonition of disaster suffer d4s damage instead.

Dyson and her two colleagues are killed in the explosion, as are three members of Kevik's staff and Vice-president Taylor, who was blown out the window by the blast. Kevik and the surviving members of his staff are critically wounded, but alive. (They each have d4m points remaining.) Kevik drifts in and out of consciousness and periodically mumbles the name of his niece, Alaaxis. Aarok was with the heroes and is not seriously injured.

Air Guard troops arrive in one round, and within two rounds they are extinguishing fires. However, it takes 2d4 rounds for a medical team to arrive and tend to the wounded. Heroes with medical skills can use this time to stabilize Kevik and his three surviving staff members before their wounds become fatal.

The heroes are initially blamed for the attack, but Aarok realizes that they could not be responsible. He doesn't understand, though, how someone could smuggle an explosive into the confer-



ence room without his psionically detecting it. Once the survivors are taken to the medical facility, Aarok begins a thorough investigation of the wreckage and requests the heroes' help if they haven't already begun.

Have heroes searching the wreckage for clues make an Investigate-search or Awareness-perception skill check at +3. (If the heroes know what to look for, as a result of the gardhyi orb's premonitions, ignore the penalty.) On a successful result, read or paraphrase the following:

The conference room is strewn with body parts as well as debris. The three Nariac ambassadors took the worst of the blast—there's barely any trace of them.

Under the smoking ruin of a chair, you spot a severed forearm, its blackened skin woven with carbonate fibers.

The severed forearm is from Ambassador Dyson and contains a data slot, but this is not immediately visible. Only close inspection reveals that the skin covering the slot has burnt away, revealing a gleaming metal capsule embedded in a cybernetic port. The capsule measures 6 centimeters long by 2 centimeters wide and can be easily removed. It pulls apart to reveal a 3D containing a warning to Dyson from an unnamed friend on the Nariac homeworld. The 3D is damaged, and only one fragment can be recovered:

Although Kevik would like to see Lison aligned with the Nariac Domain, the likelihood of this occurring is remote. The Domain could not possibly annex Lison without incurring the wrath of the other stellar nations, nor can we defend Lison adequately against a challenge from those powers. I have a bad feeling that your mission to Lison isn't being taken seriously by the Nariac military.

I'm also concerned about rumors of secret dealings with the Rigunmor Star Consortium. Many Nariacs are looking for a strong ally to help free us from VoidCorp I've heard whispers of a secret alliance. Maybe I'm just being paranoid—what else is new?—but I've heard that a team of Nariac military advisors were sent to confer with a Rigunmor admiral named Sarn. There is speculation that we might help the Rigunmors assimilate Lison in exchange for their assistance defending our borders against further VoidCorp intrusion and the promise of a steady rhodium supply. There are many Nariacs who would happily give the Rigunmors what they want if it meant freeing themselves from VoidCorp's tyranny. Keep your eyes and ears open, Irene. Things could be worse for you than they appear.

A thorough forensic exam (requiring a successful Medical Science-forensics skill check) confirms both that the arm belonged to Ambassador Dyson and that she triggered the blast. It also determines that the explosive charge was a large quantity of plasma jelly.

SCENE 5: A TURN FOR THE WORSE

President Kevik and the other survivors of the explosion are taken to an infirmary inside the Lower Hall. Although Kevik is unconscious, any hero with the ESP-mind reading skill can determine that he is worried about Alaaxis. He feels guilty about sleeping with her mother (something Alaaxis herself has long suspected) and wants to see her before he dies. If none of the heroes have mind-reading ability, Aarok tells them that Kevik wants Alaaxis by his side and asks them to fetch her.

The rest of this scene consists of news reports and can take place anywhere in Tribon, depending on the heroes' activities.

FIRST REPORT

Read or paraphrase the following. If Sikora was killed during the heroes' last visit, replace her with some other ULN reporter.

Despite the many distractions, your attention is drawn toward the nearest videoviewer, where you see the face of Sikora Epsilon. Devoid of emotion, her cold, resonant voice belies the urgency of the news.

President Kevik and three of his closest aides are receiving medical treatment following an attempt on the president's life.

Kevik was critically injured in an explosion that killed Vice-president Taylor as well as six other members of the president's staff. The explosion destroyed a room inside the Lower Hall where Kevik and his staff were convened. The ULS Senate is shocked by the incident and has placed the Lison Air Guard and ULS Security on full alert. All transports have been grounded, the Lower Hall has been cordoned off, and offworld personnel are being detained for questioning.

Meanwhile, a dark shadow has fallen over Lison this hour—a shadow in the shape of a Rignunmor dreadnought. The defense fleet, comprising the frigate ULS Vigilant and three modified corvettes, have moved to intercept the dreadnought. However, tactical analysts report that they cannot hope to repel the threat of the heavily-armed and well-armored Rignunmor vessel.

The people of Lison are asked to remain calm. Colonel Zisef, commander of the Air Guard, advises citizens to remain in their enclaves until the situation is resolved. Miners have been instructed to return to their families and homes. ULS Security forces will arrest anyone caught engaging in illicit or violent activity.

To repeat, President Kevik is receiving medical treatment following an assassination attempt that claimed the lives And the report repeats.

The report is inaccurate concerning the casualties in the Lower Hall, since Kevik's negotiations with the Nariacs were kept secret, Aarok told ULN that the three Nariac ambassadors killed in the blast were members of Kevik's staff. After this broadcast, Colonel Zisef arrives at the infirmary to check in on President Kevik. Arriving shortly after him is Senator Dosit and a number of other senators.

NEWS UPDATE

Fifteen minutes after the preliminary report, there is an update:

The Rignunmor dreadnought RCV Eclipse has assumed orbit over the planet's terminator. All transmissions to and from Lison are being jammed, and contact with the ULS defense fleet has been severed. Meanwhile, the dreadnought has relayed a message informing the Senate to stand by.

There is no further news on the condition of President Kevik. The Lower Hall has been sealed off by security forces, but ULN confirms that at least two senators, as well as Colonel Zisef, were seen entering, possibly to check on the president. Vice-president Taylor and six other members of the president's staff were killed when an explosion ripped through a conference room in the Lower Hall . . .

Anyone traveling through Tribon at this time encounters chaos. ULS Security is trying to get people off the streets, but huge crowds have gathered around videoviewers to watch the latest news concerning President Kevik and the arriving Rignunmor dreadnought.

Heroes who try to leave Lison and return to their ship find their access to the surface blocked by Air Guard soldiers. Furthermore, all STG shuttles are grounded until further notice.

The dreadnought ignores nonthreatening vessels like the heroes' ship but carefully monitors vehicles leaving the planet's surface, just in case the ULS starts evacuating key government personnel. Its jamming system prevents the heroes from contacting their vessel from the surface using conventional transmitters. However they can use the orb of the psion (or their own telepathic skills, if they possess them) to communicate with their ship.

Those who seek out Alaaxis find her at the Black Nebula, watching the ULN broadcast with Traven and various bar patrons. Convincing her to see Kevik requires some skillful roleplaying and a successful Interaction skill check at +2; feel free to reduce or negate this penalty if the players roleplay the situation well. Alaaxis has long blamed Kevik for her parents' deaths, but he is the only family she has left, and the heroes might use this fact to lure her to his side. Even if they convince Alaaxis to accompany them back to the Lower Hall, though, she does so grudgingly.

MUSIC FOR THE MASSES

Once the dreadnought has achieved orbit, Admiral Sarn transmits a wide-band message that is picked up and relayed by the planetary media. Read or paraphrase the following at this time, regardless of the heroes' locations:

With neither passion nor apprehension in her voice, Sikora Epsilon informs the world that the Senate has received an ultimatum from the Rignunmor dreadnought. The image switches from the reporter to a stern-looking, bearded man with deep wrinkles around his eyes, white hair, and a bulldog chin. He wears the uniform and insignia of a high-ranking Rignunmor officer.

I am Admiral Sarn, and this message is intended for the people of Lison. As I'm sure you're aware, my dreadnought has assumed orbit above your capital city. I am here to bring Lison back under the protective wing of the Rignunmor Star Consortium. It is in our best interest, and yours, that this be handled with utmost expedience.

For the last fifty years, our diplomats have tried to persuade your government that reunification is the only sound solution for a secure future, but it has stubbornly refused to see the light. Today, the darkness will be lifted. The mistakes of the past will be rectified, and both the Rignunmor Star Consortium and the people of Lison will find their way—together.

The admiral steps aside, and moving into view is a bald, blue-skinned mechalus with cables and circuits erupting at his temples. His eyes glow red, and his voice is deep and resonant. I am Senator Phi Tassadine. Most of you already know me. For years I have tried to usher Lison toward an era of prosperity; I have been a voice of the people, telling the government what needs to change to spare future generations the misery of our forefathers.

My friends, a new age is upon us. The Rignunmor Star Consortium has welcomed us back into the fold, and promises equitable treatment, better facilities, a higher standard of living, and everything else we're entitled to but have been denied for decades under our present leadership. I have met with the Rignunmor leaders, and they are prepared to make Lison a regency in which every citizen is afforded the same rights as all Rignunmors. They have sworn to protect our natural resources from other stellar nations that seek to plunder this world and offer us nothing in return. They need us, as we need them.

"Now many of us have not forgotten the tyranny of the last Rigunmor regime and fear history repeating itself. I promise you, the Rigunmor leaders intend to correct the mistakes of the past—prove to the people of Lison that the days of oppression, slavery, and hostility are long gone, and show that together we can build a stronger Lison. A richer Lison. A safer Lison for us all."

Admiral Sarn again appears on the viewer. "Senator Tassadine speaks well for his people, and he has done this world a great service. He and I shall meet with other representatives of your government to discuss the smooth transition of power. I also ask that you remember this day in history, for it is a day of joy."

Heroes who have experienced premonition #3 from the orb of foreshadowing recognize Senator Tassadine as the figure blown into space. Whether this happens or not remains to be seen.

Admiral Sarn and Senator Tassadine make arrangements to meet with the highest-ranking officials of the ULS. With President Kevik hospitalized and Vice-president Taylor dead, the only representatives left who are able to hear Sarn's terms are the senators, led by Krella Dosit. However, Dosit knows this meeting isn't a negotiation as much as a demand that the senators relinquish government control. Most are hesitant to deal with Sarn on his terms, and so the debate becomes whether to defy the Rigunmors or not.

Senator Dosit sees no future for Lison unless Sarn is stopped. On the other hand, she knows there's no way the planetary defenses can repel the threat of a Rigunmor dreadnought. Ideally, she would send a transmission to the other stellar nations and request assistance, but the *Eclipse* is jamming all signals to and from the planet. Her best hope for the future of Lison now lies with the heroes.

SCENE 6: DELEGATION

After a lengthy meeting with the other senators and a heated discussion with Colonel Zisef, Senator Dosit chooses to comply with Admiral Sarn's instructions and arranges to meet with Sarn and Tassadine aboard the dreadnought. The other senators agree to let her speak on their behalf. She, Colonel Zisef, and Mining Commissioner Paul Nextler will hear how the new Rigunmor government will affect the Senate, the Air Guard, and United Lison Mining, respectively.

As Senator Dosit prepares to transport the delegation to the dreadnought, Colonel Zisef contacts the heroes and informs them of the situation. Read or paraphrase the following:

Colonel Zisef seems particularly upset by the recent turn of events. It's obvious that he can barely contain his seething ire, and this is one man you don't want to see angry.

"Senator Dosit has agreed to meet the Rigunmors face to face and speak on behalf of the Senate. I will be accompanying her as the military representative, and Commissioner Nextler will be representing the miners. The Rigunmors have allowed

us a small entourage, and I have convinced the senator to allow three of my best soldiers to accompany us.

"We won't give up this planet without a fight, but we need to buy time, survey the enemy ship, and search for weaknesses. We will make it clear to Sarn and that traitor, Tassadine, that Lison won't kneel before the tyrant."

This is the heroes' chance to involve themselves. If they ask to join the Lison delegates on the shuttle, Zisef is delighted to have them along. He is willing to listen to any plan they devise and will get them any equipment they require, within reason.

THE DEPARTING DELEGATES

Once the heroes are ready to join the delegation, they board three government skycars, along with Dosit, Zisef, Nextler, and three armed Air Guard soldiers. Read or paraphrase the following:

You are led to the roof of the Lower Hall, where three skycars await the delegates and their entourage. Senator Dosit is ushered into one skycar, Colonel Zisef into another, and Commissioner Nextler into the third. One of the Air Guard accompanies each, and the remaining seats are yours for the taking.

There are three seats available in each skycar, and players may choose which vehicles their heroes enter. Once all are aboard the skycars, read or paraphrase the following:

The skycars soar above the crowded streets of the city and head toward a tunnel in the side of the great cavern. Once inside the tunnel, you feel the skycar tilt upward as it ascends through 7 kilometers of the planet's crust to the hangar where an STG shuttle awaits you. As you transfer from the skycars to the shuttle, you recognize a silver-haired woman wearing a vacuum mask giving the shuttle a once-over.

The woman is the shuttle pilot, Cassie Martin (see Act I, Scene 3). She is delighted to see the heroes again, although she can't figure out how they, of all people, ended up in such distinguished company.

Once everyone is aboard the shuttle, Cassie takes it into orbit. Read or paraphrase the following:

You break free of the turbulent atmosphere and head into orbit. Those seated in the command compartment soon see the Rigunmor dreadnought, and within moments the compartment darkens as the shuttle falls under its great shadow.

"Big ship," mutters Cassie.

As you approach, dozens of shuttles emerge from the hangars of the dreadnought, disappearing in the shadow of the great ship before descending to the planet's surface.

If any of the heroes experienced premonition #3 from the orb of foreshadowing, the sight of the departing shuttles



strikes them as familiar. (The shuttles are heading toward Lister, one of Lison's twilight colonies, for reasons revealed in Scene 8.)

If the heroes remain aboard the shuttle as it enters the dreadnought's shuttle bay, continue with the following:

A voice from the Eclipse guides Cassie as she maneuvers to enter one of the starboard shuttle bays. A set of large doors open in the dreadnought's hull, and soon you are swallowed by them.

Cassie remains with her shuttle while the delegates are aboard the *Eclipse*. If the heroes need her to stand by or do something daring, she's willing to follow their lead if it means "putting those damn Rignunmor in their place!" However, she doesn't do anything foolhardy while the Lison delegates are aboard.

Krella Dosit, Turin Zisef, and Paul Nextler are fully detailed in *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR^{DRIVE} campaign setting (pages 192–200). They are all stubborn individuals, each would rather die fighting than let the Rignunmors have their way. Review the character information carefully and play them as close to the mark as possible. Here are some additional notes:

Krella Dosit fiercely supports Lison independence. She can't forgive President Kevik for his secret dealings with the Nariac Domain, and in a way, feels he's paid the price for poor judgment.

Turin Zisef is intensely loyal to Kevik and wants revenge for the cowardly attack against him. He blames the Rignunmors for the assassination, and wants to look into the eyes of his enemy and spit on the traitor Tassadine. He distrusts Paul Nextler and believes that he is secretly glad to see Kevik out of commission.

Paul Nextler is a hard-talking ex-miner who found a second life in politics; most politicians find him abrasive and crude. Like the others, he doesn't trust the Rignunmors or their stated intentions and sees hard times ahead if they seize control of Lison.

SCENE 7: DREADNOUGHT

The *Eclipse* is a formidable vessel, 420 meters from bow to stern with a 150-meter beam, powered by no fewer than eight mass reactors. It maintains a standard crew of 1,250 Rignunmor personnel and has extra living quarters for an equal number of passengers. In a pinch, the *Eclipse* can transport as many as 5,000 people and is prepared to do so, should it become necessary to evacuate key Rignunmor personnel from Lison.

The *Eclipse's* outer hull (heavy neutronite: d8+1 (LI), d8+1 (HI), d8+1 (En)) is lined with hundreds of mass cannon and particle beam batteries, missile launch racks, and point-defense guns. Bomb bays house dozens of thermonuclear devices intended for planetary bombardment. All said, the dreadnought has enough firepower to devastate entire fleets and lay waste to whole worlds. But for all its strengths, the *Eclipse* is not nearly as effective at repelling a small but concerted group of infiltrators.

One of the ship's key weaknesses is that Admiral Sarn, in a hurry to assemble the crew, drew heavily on reserve forces, so very few of the *Eclipse's* personnel have served with one another before. Should the heroes manage to commandeer some uniforms, they can blend in with the rest of the crew, provided they are not carrying any unusual equipment.

See the inside back cover for maps of the dreadnought.

GAINING ENTRY

Heroes can use the *orb of teleportation* to transport aboard the ship once they are within 1 kilometer. Choose the point of arrival randomly, although it should not be a compartment where the

heroes become trapped (such as the brig) or where they would be confronted and overwhelmed by guards (such as a shuttle bay or command compartment). The purpose of this scene is to give the heroes a chance to infiltrate the dreadnought and do considerable damage from within, not to throw waves of Rignunmor troopers at them until they surrender or perish.

They might also choose the straightforward route—the shuttle—or use zero-g webs to reach the *Eclipse* undetected and either blast their way inside or open one of the emergency airlocks. However, don't discount player ingenuity. They are likely to devise other innovative solutions to the problem, so give every reasonable plan a fair chance of succeeding.

Below are several things the heroes might try to accomplish, but be prepared for the unexpected.

Infiltrate the Crew: Once aboard, there are plenty of opportunities for the heroes to obtain Rignunmor uniforms. If they prefer not to take them directly from the crew, they can look for a storage locker. Each compartment has a one-in-four chance of having one. Depending on the type of compartment, the locker contains d6 maintenance uniforms, d6 military uniforms, or d6 jumpsuits (Gamemaster's choice) as well as vacuum masks (one per uniform or jumpsuit). These lockers are sealed with keypad locks that require a successful Security—*security devices* or Technical Science—*juryrig* skill check at –1 to bypass. There are no weapons or armor stored in them.

Heroes in uniform can move freely about the ship. So long as they're not brandishing weapons or acting strangely, the rest of the crew does not pay them much attention. If the ship goes on full alert, heroes who seem out of place or behave unusually have a one-in-four chance each round of attracting unwanted attention, usually in the form of a suspicious maintenance worker or security guard.

For more information on the dreadnought's crew, see TABLE 2: CREW LOCATION on page 60.

Obtain Dreadnought Schematic: To do this requires access to a computer and a successful Knowledge—*computer operation* skill check at –1. The schematic not only provides the layout of the ship but also identifies the compartments. Show players the maps of the dreadnought once this task is accomplished.

Disable Jamming System: This requires traveling to one of the electronics compartments (area 5 on the map) on the middle deck. Knowing this requires the ship schematics and a successful Knowledge or System Operation skill check at –1. Five successes on a complex Computer Science—*hacking* or Technical Science—*technical knowledge* skill check will deactivate the system. At that point, messages can be transmitted to and from Lison, and heroes can use the ship's communications to contact Thomas Kind, their ship, or the planet below.

Contact Thomas Kind: The pirate leader has not yet heard about the attempt on President Kevik's life but is aware of the dreadnought's arrival. Kind has no desire to see the Rignunmors regain control of Lison, but he's hesitant to take direct action against the well-armed ship. He dedicates his forces to an all-out assault only if the heroes have some kind of "trump card" that gives him an advantage. (For instance, if they can guarantee that the dreadnought's point-defense guns and targeting systems will be offline, that could be enough to persuade Kind to attack.)

If he believes that his forces have a fighting chance, Kind can persuade other groups of pirates (even VoidCorp-sponsored ones) to commit ships to Lison's defense. However, convincing Kind that this is a good idea requires an applicable skill check, depending on the approach taken, or some other incentive, such as transmitting the dreadnought's schematics to Kind so that his captains know which areas of the ship to target.

Heroes can contact Kind without disabling the dreadnought's jamming system. (The system is sophisticated enough to allow the dreadnought to send and receive signals while hampering transmissions to and from the planet.)

Disable Key Systems: Once they have the schematics, the heroes might try disabling systems aboard the dreadnought. Shutting down weapons targeting and point-defense guns, for instance, might encourage Thomas Kind and his pirates to attack the dreadnought or help the heroes escape aboard a shuttlecraft.

Whether the heroes use demolitions or the more subtle approach of computer hacking, their attempts to disable key systems will ultimately fail unless they have taken one of the command compart-

ments (area 1). The dreadnought has too many security protocols and auxiliary systems for the heroes to circumvent. Even if a system is sabotaged, backups instantly kick in until repairs are made by the dreadnought's crack teams of computer specialists, engineers, and damage-control experts.

Free Captured Comrades: If one or more heroes have been confined to the brig (area 10B), the others can attempt a jail-break. The brig is guarded by two Rignunmor soldiers, who signal for help if they have time; d6+6 soldiers arrive d4+1 rounds later.

Sabotage Compartments: Heroes can use weapons and Demolitions skills to destroy specific compartments, weakening

DREADNOUGHT ENCOUNTER KEY

1. Command: These two compartments are the ship's nerve center and support a variety of systems, including navigation, defenses, sensors, communication, and bomb deployment. Command consoles are typically arrayed along the compartment periphery or on "islands" in the middle, affording plenty of space for the command crew and technical staff to move about. Each console is assigned a system operator with enough experience and skills to perform the function adequately.

2. Engineering: These compartments control and monitor the dreadnought's induction engines and stardrive. They also include facilities for damage-control teams and maintenance technicians. Lockers along the walls contain toolkits, vacuum masks, and soft e-suits. The lockers are secured by keypad locks that require a successful Security-security devices or Technical Science-juryrig skill check to open. Tinkering with or enabling any of the engineering systems requires a successful System Operation-engineering skill check.

3. Weapons: Each of these compartments controls several fire-linked weapon systems. The dreadnought's weapons cannot be turned against itself. The System Operation-weapons skill is needed to effectively operate any weapons station.

4. Auxiliary: These compartments contain nonvital engineering equipment, and secondary life support and power systems.

5. Electronics: These compartments contain navigational equipment, computers, external and internal sensors, automated point-defense gun controls, and other highly sensitive electronic equipment. The appropriate System Operation skill is required to run the equipment effectively. Due to the concentration of electronics, weapons fire is especially dangerous, and most Rignunmor guards will avoid initiating a firefight here.

6. Science/Medical: The dreadnought is not purely a warship; state-of-the-art scientific technology serves it well on long patrol missions in the Verge. There are a number of laboratories dedicated to stellar research, xenobiology, and geological and astrological surveys. Some of these compartments also serve as medical facilities capable of handling dozens of patients.

7. Cargo: In addition to storing supplies, these areas can be converted into medical triage centers for the treatment of hundreds of patients. Lockers built into the walls contain equipment, weapons, and medical supplies.

The dreadnought has plenty of cargo space. Any item of Progress Level 5, 6, or 7 can be found, although not necessarily in a particular compartment. Remember that weapons lockers have security keypads.

8. Crew: The hundreds of crew stationed aboard the

Eclipse are quartered here. Most of these rooms contain multiple bunks; the Rignunmors maximize space usage aboard their military vessels. Only the highest-ranking officers enjoy the privilege of a cabin to themselves.

9. Shuttle Bay: There are four shuttle bays, two port and two starboard, all located toward the aft of the upper deck. The bay doors open into space, so all personnel stationed here wear e-suits. Each bay can accommodate six STG shuttles comfortably. Locking clamps hold the shuttles in place during depressurization. A nearby control center operates the bay doors and can be overridden from either command compartment.

10A. Airlocks: Opening an airlock alerts the command compartments and brings a security team of 2d6+6 soldiers to investigate. The team arrives in two rounds, using stun grenades to incapacitate intruders.

10B. Brig: This is where prisoners, including captured heroes, are held behind electrical energy barriers. Disabling these from inside a cell requires a Technical Science-juryrig skill check at +4. Anyone coming into contact with a barrier must make a Constitution feat check for damage: Critical Failure, d8+2s, with the target thrown back 2 meters and knocked unconscious; Marginal, d8+2s and thrown back 2 meters; Ordinary, d6+1s; Good, d6s; Amazing, d4s.

Two Rignunmor soldiers are posted to guard prisoners. There is no one confined here to begin with.

10C. Reactor Core: The *Eclipse* is powered by eight mass reactors, shielded by a virtually impregnable casing occupying both the middle and upper decks. Catwalks along the latter afford an view of the 80 meter × 40 meter compartment.

Sabotaging the reactors with explosives requires setting a minimum of eight separate charges. This takes a complex Demolitions-set explosives skill check (eight successes). Success not only cripples the dreadnought but also triggers a radiation leak that immediately seals all doors to the compartment. Heroes inside are trapped, but a successful Technical Science-juryrig skill check at +2 enables one to open a sealed door. The door controls can also be overridden from the command compartments.

10D. Escape Pods: There are four eight-person escape pods that can be launched at a moment's notice. Outside each is an airlock with a storage locker containing five soft e-suits and five trauma pack Is.

11. Conference Room: This unique compartment on the upper deck is where Admiral Sarn meets with the Lison delegates. Protecting him are eight soldiers spaced around the periphery, with at least two at each door. A large oval window overlooks Lison, and a triangular conference table with a holoviewer dominates the room.

the dreadnought's defenses. Of course, running around the ship firing weapons and detonating explosives attracts attention, and the heroes are quickly confronted by d6+6 armed guards.

Seize a Command Compartment: The dreadnought has two command compartments on the middle deck, which monitor and control most of the vital systems. The officers and soldiers stationed in those compartments (see TABLE 2: CREW LOCATIONS below) do not surrender unless outnumbered.

If Admiral Sarn hasn't been detained or eliminated and the dreadnought is under attack, he is shouting orders in the largest command compartment (area 1). This command center offers a spectacular holographic view of the battle. Sarn, his guards, and the bridge technicians are all distracted, enabling heroes to slip in undetected with a successful *Stealth* skill check at -2.

Heroes who seize one of the dreadnought's command compartments have accomplished a major objective and can activate or deactivate what they please, provided they have the *Knowledge-computer operation* skill and the ability to bypass the security passwords (see the "Computers" section below).

Even so, the heroes are continually subjected to attacks. The *Eclipse* has an inexhaustible supply of personnel, including hundreds of armed soldiers. The heroes cannot possibly hold the compartment for very long, but should have enough time to do some damage. This might include sabotaging controls, disabling the helm, ordering the gunners to stand down, opening the shuttle bay doors, detonating a thermonuclear device (see below), or whatever else they can dream up. Allow d4+2 rounds for the heroes to act before d6+6 soldiers arrive to reclaim the commandeered sections.

The heroes can use the *orb of teleportation* to flee the compartment once they've done their damage, thus avoiding capture.

Detonate Thermonuclear Device: A dangerous but effective gambit. The *Eclipse* has 240 thermonuclear devices stored in shielded compartments beneath the lower deck. The bombs themselves are not accessible but are released and guided from the command compartments. Activating a thermonuclear device without the proper protocols (which are known only to Sarn and the other command officers) requires a successful *Security-security devices* skill check at +3 and seven successes on a complex *Computer Science-hacking* or *programming* skill check. No amount of intimidation or persuasion can compel Sarn or any other officer to provide the protocols, although a successful *ESP-mind reading* skill check provides the needed information. The heroes need not activate the bomb immediately, but can set a timer to detonate it in 1-20 rounds.

A thermonuclear device detonated aboard the ship incinerates everything and everyone aboard. The shockwave strikes ships within 100 kilometers of the exploding dreadnought, causing 2d6w damage to each compartment and secondary damage to the crew.

OTHER IMPORTANT NOTES

Onboard Communications: Most compartments have an intercom/alarm system. Intercom controls and alarm activation panels are usually positioned near doors. Certain crew members are equipped with comm gear patched directly into a shipwide communications frequency different from that of the intercoms. Engineering, damage control, and security teams use comm gear extensively to keep the command crew apprised of their status and location during crises. Accosting crew wearing comm gear risks triggering a ship-wide alarm.

Doors: Doors are magnetically sealed and airtight, but they are usually unlocked. Aboard a military ship of this size, there is little need for locks. Certain areas, like the brig (area 10B), have electronic security locks that are difficult to bypass, requiring three successes on a complex *Security-security devices* or *Technical Science-juryrig* skill check at +2. Failure triggers an alarm unless the alarm system is first disabled, requiring a successful *Computer Science-programming* or *Security-security devices* skill check.

Computers: The dreadnought's computers are protected by security programs and encryption codes, but they are not impenetrable. Heroes attempting to gain access must first bypass the security protocols, requiring a complex *Computer Science-hacking* skill check with three to six successes, depending on the importance of the system (Gamemaster's determination). Eight successes are needed to bypass restricted systems (life support, gravity, weapons, engineering, personnel logs, etc.).

Lifts: Areas marked with "E" are lifts controlled by verbal interfaces. They respond to the commands "Halt," "Proceed," "Upper deck," "Middle deck," and "Lower deck."

Personnel: The *Eclipse* is staffed by Diplomats, Combat Specs, and Tech Ops. The Diplomats are officers who supervise the other personnel and enforce discipline. Combat Specs patrol the ship, guard prisoners, operate weapons, and so forth. The Tech Ops handle various other systems, as well as engineering, damage control, and medical treatment. The number of Rignunmor personnel in a given department depends on the type of compartment. Refer to Table 2: CREW LOCATIONS below.

For the officers, use the Good military officer template on page 98 in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*. Equip them with CF softsuits and stunner pistols. Use the Good soldier template on page 99 in that chapter for the Combat Specs on board; each carries a laser rifle and stun grenades, and is wearing cerametal armor. For the Tech Ops, use the Good spacehand or doctor template in that chapter, as applicable. Admiral Sarn and Senator Tassadine are detailed separately.

SCENE 8: SARN

The Lison delegation is escorted directly to Admiral Sarn, who is waiting for them in his conference room (area 11 on the map). He is protected by his Mindwalker security chief, Commander Dmitri Varkaan. Conspicuous by his absence is Senator Tassadine.

Varkaan uses his ESP skills to discern the emotions and thoughts of the Lison delegates and to add strength to Sarn's position. Heroes with the delegates are subjected to extensive probing.

Table 2: CREW LOCATIONS

Compartment	Diplomats	C. Specs	Tech Ops
1. Command	2d6	d6	2d6+2
2. Engineering	d6	d6	3d6
3. Weapons	d6-2	d6	d6
4. Auxiliary	-	d6-1	d6-1
5. Electronics	d6-2	d6-1	2d6
6. Science/Med.	-	-	d6
7. Cargo	-	-	d6-1
8. Crew	d6-1	4d6	3d6
9. Shuttle Bay	d6-1	3d6	2d6+2
10. Other	*	*	*

*Determined by Gamemaster.

If their thoughts betray hostile intentions, Varkaan has them escorted to the brig. The Lison delegates are not subjected to the same treatment unless they do something foolish.

Sarn is blunt and, without preamble, states his demands. First, President Kevik must be removed from office. Second, the United Lison State must be dissolved. Third, Phi Tassadine must be appointed as regent of Lison, with the senators serving as his district governors and advisors. The Air Guard and United Lison Mining will continue to function as usual. This means that Dosit, Zisef, and Nextler will retain their positions; however, each must now report to Regent Tassadine who in turn will govern according to edicts handed down by the Consortium.

Senator Dosit and Colonel Zisef challenge Sarn on several points. Foremost, they are unwilling to answer to Tassadine, nor do they believe that he or the Rignumors have Lison's best interests at heart. Dosit insists that the Lison people will not give up their independence, while Zisef promises to commit his forces in the defense of Lison until help arrives. Nextler realizes that the new regime will have little impact on his position, but lets the others protest.

After several minutes, Sarn receives a communiqué from the bridge informing him that the shuttles dispatched earlier (see Scene 7) have completed their mission and are returning to the *Eclipse*. Sarn smiles and dismisses the protests of the Lison delegates:

"I anticipated a fair measure of resistance to my plan. However, the change of government will proceed as I have outlined. The consequences for noncompliance will be harsh.

"My shuttles have evacuated all Rignumor personnel from the twilight colony of Lister. Allow me to demonstrate what will happen should you fail to comply with my demands."

At this point, if he is not stopped by the heroes or distracted with more pressing matters, Sarn gives the order to bomb the Lister colony. Three thermonuclear devices strike the planet's surface with pinpoint accuracy, collapsing the subterranean colony and slaughtering its over 20,000 colonists. Anyone with access to a porthole or view of the planet witnesses a horrific sight reminiscent of premonition #2 from the *orb of foreshadowing*. Varkaan continues to read the minds of the Lison delegates, making sure they don't try anything foolish. A distraught Air Guard soldier with family in Lister lunges at Sarn (unless restrained by the heroes) and is shot down by two guards. The others are held at bay by Varkaan and his forces.

If Sarn executes his demonstration, the Lison delegates realize that they are dealing with a madman and that unless they comply (or feign to do so), Sarn will exterminate all life on Lison. Knowing they are powerless to stop him, Sarn dismisses the delegates, ordering them to implement the change in government. He wants nothing more to do with them.

Varkaan and the guards stationed in the conference room escort the Lison delegates back to their shuttle, leaving Admiral Sarn alone to contemplate his next move and devise some explanation for Senator Tassadine about the colony's destruction. Heroes who have detached themselves from the Lison delegation can use this opportunity to confront Sarn without his entourage.

Sarn believes himself to be a man of destiny and has an aura of invincibility about him. He does not negotiate with the heroes but instead tries to stall them long enough for Varkaan to sense their presence and return with a heavily-armed escort. If threatened, Sarn defends himself with his charge pistol.

ADMIRAL CLARENCE SARN

Level 12 human Diplomat (Combat Spec)

STR 12	[+1]	INT 12	[+1]
DEX 11	[+1]	WIL 13	[+2]
CON 11		PER 13	
Durability: 11/11/6/6		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 22, run 14, wa 4		# Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 3	

Attacks

Unarmed—power	13/6/3	d6+1s/d6+3s/d4+1w	LI/O
11mm ch pistol	13/6/3	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	HI/O

Defenses

CF softsuit	d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)
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Skills

Armor Operation [12]; Athletics [12]; Unarmed [12]—*power martial arts* [13]; Modern Ranged Weapons [11]—*pistol* [13], *rifle* [13]; Vehicle Operation [11]—*space* [12]; Stamina [11]; Knowledge [12]—*computer operation* [13], *military history* [13]; Navigation [12]—*drivespace astrogation* [13]; System Operation [12]—*sensors* [13], *weapons* [13]; Tactics [12]—*infantry* [15], *space* [15], *vehicle* [15]; Awareness [13]; Investigate [13]—*interrogate* [14]; Interaction [13]; Leadership [13]—*command* [19], *inspire* [17].

COMMANDER DMITRI VARKAAN

Level 6 human Mindwalker

STR 9	[0]	INT 13	[+2]
DEX 9	[0]	WIL 12	[+1]
CON 10		PER 10	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, wa 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	
Psionic energy points: 12			

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d6s/d6+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Electrokinetics	13/6/3	d4+2s/d6+2s/d4w	En/O
Laser pistol	9/4/2	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/O

Defenses

CF softsuit	d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)
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Skills

Athletics [9]; Modern Ranged Weapons [9]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [10]; Knowledge [13]—*computer operation* [14]; Security [13]—*protection protocols* [14]; System Operation [13]—*communications* [14]; Tactics [13]—*space* [14]; Awareness [12]—*intuition* [13]; Interaction [10]; Leadership [10]—*command* [12]; ESP [13]—*clairvoyance* [14], *empathy* [15], *mind reading* [16], *postcognition* [14]; Telekinesis [12]—*electrokinetics* [13].

SCENE 9: THE GOOD FIGHT

This scene occurs if the heroes persuade Thomas Kind to attack the *Eclipse*. They know by now that he is an acquaintance (and possibly a friend) of Kevik. They may also have experienced premonition #1 of the *orb of foreshadowing*, showing the dreadnought under attack by dozens of pirate ships.

Even if the heroes fail to contact Kind, you can still use this scene to have Kind demonstrate some initiative. However, the heroes should not gain as many achievement points if he enters the conflict on his own. Kind wants to insure his own business interests and believes, correctly, that the Rignumors intend to wipe

out the pirates once they secure Lison. He has heard through certain channels that Nariac privateers are already preparing to help purge the system, and he wants none of that.

Kind is only one of several pirate leaders who prey on visitors to the Oberon system. Magnor Pendrill, self-proclaimed "Admiral of the Hux Defense League," has committed a dozen vessels to the attack. Kind has even invited a few VoidCorp pirates to join, and although Pendrill's presence makes them dubious, they agree to send a few ships to the fight. Reinforcing the pirates is the Lison defense fleet, consisting of the frigate ULV *Vigilant* and three corvettes left over from GW2. In all, the fleet numbers thirty-two ships, ten of them *Vendetta*-class marauders. (The remaining ships are of various classes including a handful of *Vanguard*-, *Sojourn*-, and *Blade*-class vessels.)

The pirate fleet bombards the dreadnought with cannon fire and missiles. If the heroes are still aboard after it has weathered several rounds of assault, read or paraphrase the following:

As alarms blare through the compartments and corridors, you are suddenly thrown against the walls by a hull-wrenching impact. You hear the shriek of twisting metal as the dreadnought bears the brunt of what can only be a ship-to-ship collision.

A damaged pirate vessel has collided with the *Eclipse*, striking the dreadnought amidships. The pirate vessel is completely destroyed in the explosion, as foretold in premonition #1 from the *orb of foreshadowing*. The attack destroys several compartments (no more than six) on the port side of the middle deck. Unless the heroes happen to be in those areas of the ship, they sustain no damage and are merely jarred. If they are caught in the danger area, they must make a Dexterity feat check to determine the amount of damage sustained (if any): Critical Failure, d6+2w; Failure, d4w; Ordinary, d4s; Good or Amazing, no damage.

The collision should not seriously harm the heroes but merely impress upon them the importance of a timely evacuation.

OUTCOME OF THE BATTLE

The battle between the pirates and the dreadnought is waged mostly off camera. The emergency lights, blaring alarms, echoes of distant gunfire, and explosions should remind the heroes that the *Eclipse* is not the safest place in the galaxy right now.

The battle ends with one of two outcomes: the dreadnought is destroyed by the pirates and their allies, or it defeats the pirates, destroying most attacking ships and scattering the few survivors.

The actions of the heroes should have some weight on the final turn of events. If they disabled the jamming system, contacted Kind, and persuaded him to attack, the pirates should emerge victorious, though with many losses. If the heroes seized one or more of the command compartments or neutralized Sarn, victory for the pirates is assured.

If the heroes did nothing to alter the course of the battle, the pirates

are defeated. Reversing this outcome requires the most daring acts (such as activating a thermonuclear device).

THE LISON DELEGATES

If the delegates haven't left the dreadnought before the battle begins, they are escorted to the brig by Commander Varkaan and his guards. During the chaos, however, Zisef and his remaining soldiers turn on their Rigunmor escorts. During the altercation, Krella Dosit snaps Varkaan's neck, and Paul Nextler claims the commander's laser pistol. All of Zisef's soldiers are killed in the fight—only the three delegates remain. If the heroes have accompanied the delegates thus far, or join them now, play out this scene while the pirate assault rages outside. Dosit, Zisef, and Nextler are highly skilled. All three have last resort points to call upon, and Zisef has combat experience as well. Regardless of how the heroes fare in the fight, these three individuals should survive the encounter barring adverse hero intervention.

Realizing that the shuttle bays are heavily guarded and probably sealed, Zisef leads the others to the escape pods on the upper deck (area 10D), taking time to liberate any heroes who might have been trapped in the brig (area 10B). The three delegates then climb into one of the escape pods and jettison themselves from the dreadnought, along with any heroes who wish to accompany them. Proceed with Scene 10.

THE HEROES

Heroes who are no longer with the Lison delegation can use the pirate attack as a diversion to accomplish their goals (see Scene 9). At some point, though, they will want to make their escape.

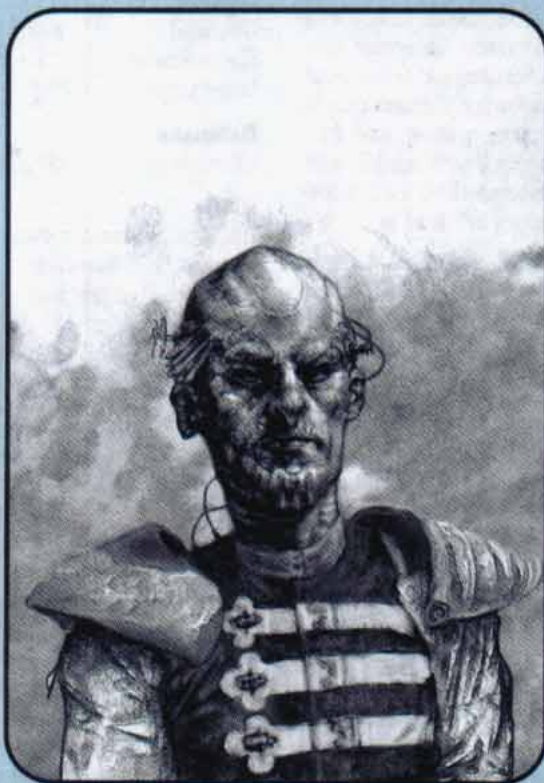
Grab a Shuttle: Heroes can fight their way to the shuttle bay. However, they are continually intercepted by groups of d6+6 armed soldiers. Unless they happen to be near the shuttle bays, have plenty of firepower at their disposal, or call upon the *orb of teleportation*, their chances of reaching a shuttle are slim.

The bay must be depressurized and its outer doors opened before a shuttle can depart. During the battle with the pirates, all controls to the shuttle bays are rerouted to the command compartments, so the heroes have no way of using a shuttle unless they have command control. They can also stow away aboard a shuttle until evacuation orders are given, at which point escape might be possible.

Secure an Escape Pod: If the heroes try to get to an escape pod on their own, proceed with Scene 10.

SCENE 10: ESCAPE

Any heroes who have not yet fled must escape before the *Eclipse* is destroyed. The *orb of teleportation* is useful only if the heroes haven't recently expended its power and have a safe, familiar destination within 1 kilometer. Unless they have access to one of the shuttles, the only way off the ship is aboard one of the remain-



ing escape pods (area 10D). They can either teleport to an escape pod or make their way on foot.

As the heroes approach the escape pods, read or paraphrase the following. If they heroes attempt to flee by shuttle or some other means, arrange to have them encounter Phi Tassadine at some point before they leave the ship; this might mean reworking the description.

Explosions tear through the hull, causing circuits and conduits to explode, beams to twist and fall from the ceiling, and the deck plates underfoot to heave and buckle. Finally, you manage to find an escape pod.

Before you can claim the prize, a blue-skinned figure with red glowing eyes emerges from the shadows. Senator Tassadine stands before you, sporting a few scrapes but otherwise no worse for wear. He is clutching a scored laser rifle and is pointing it straight at you.

"Are you responsible for this mess?" Tassadine asks in his hollow voice. "No matter. What's done cannot be undone."

Tassadine no longer believes the Rignorms can seize power in the Oberon system, and he sorely underestimated the megalomaniacal Admiral Sarn. He would never have embraced Sarn's plan had he known the admiral would bomb the twilight colonies, but he knows he's "slept with the devil" and is prepared to live with that mistake.

Tassadine has friends on Lison who can protect him, but he needs to make good his escape. He doesn't want any witnesses, so the heroes must either be eliminated or left aboard aboard the doomed dreadnought.

The heroes can attack Tassadine, thereby risking injury, or they can stall him for a round or two. Anyone who's experienced premonition #3 from the *orb of foreshadowing* already has an inkling of what is about to happen and might just play for time.

After one full round, Tassadine falls prey to fate. A missile fired from a pirate ship breaches the hull about 10 meters behind him, evacuating the air through a huge, gaping rent in the corridor ceiling. If the heroes do nothing to help, Tassadine is blown down the corridor and into space. Heroes who have braced themselves can make a Strength feat check at -2 to hold on; others must make an unmodified Strength feat check to brace themselves. If this fails, a hero can try to grab something in the corridor, requiring a successful Dexterity feat check. Otherwise, the unfortunate hero is shot out into space.

Surviving heroes can make their way into the escape pod and seal it off from the breached corridor. On the following round, they jettison themselves from the *Eclipse* before the pirates finish it off or the heroes' tampering causes it to destroy itself.

PHI TASSADINE

Level 8 mechalus Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 11	[+1]	INT 11	[+1]
DEX 9		WIL 10	
CON 10		PER 11	

Durability: 12/11/5/5 Action check: 12+/11/5/2

Move: sprint 20, run 12, wa 4 # Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed	5/2/1	d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s	LI/0
Laser rifle	9/4/2	d6+1w/d6+3w/d4+1m	En/0

Defenses

CF softsuit d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [11]; Modern Ranged Weapons [9]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stealth [9]-*sneak* [10]; Stamina [10]; Computer Science [11]; Knowledge [11]; Administration [10]-*bureaucracy* [13], *management* [14]; Awareness [10]; Culture [11]; Deception [11]-*bluff* [12], *bribe* [12]; Interaction [11]-*bargain* [12], *interview* [12].

Cyber Gear

CF skinweave (Good), cyberoptics (Good), MusclePlus (Ordinary), NIJack, standard mechalus enhancements (see page 24 in *Chapter 2: Hero Creation* in the *Player's Handbook*).

SCENE II: DENOUEMENT

If the heroes are instrumental in defending Lison against the Rignorm incursion, they will not only earn themselves phenomenally lucrative deals on all future rhodium shipments, but a place in Lison history.

If the heroes and pirates failed to destroy the dreadnought, the Rignorms take advantage of Sarn's victory and secure their foothold in the Oberon system. The ULS has no choice but to relent to Sarn's demands. President Kevik is forced out of office and replaced with a Rignorm regent (Tassadine, if he is alive), the ULS is dissolved, and all rhodium trade in the Oberon system is controlled by the Consortium. The heroes, if they haven't been incarcerated or consigned to some other fate, are chased from the system—assuming they still have access to their ship.

MEETING THOMAS KIND

If the mission was successful and the dreadnought was destroyed, the heroes eventually meet President Kevik again. Whether they visit him on their own or are summoned to his bedside, they should feel obliged to speak to him once more, if only to receive his words of thanks. Read or paraphrase the following:

For a man who just barely survived an assassination attempt, President Kevik seems inordinately busy. You've been waiting to speak with him for the past hour, but in that time he's had four bedside meetings with various doctors and government officials. At last, Alaaxis spots you in the hall and beckons you inside. She thanks you each for coming and says that her uncle is in good spirits.

"Ah, my saviors have returned," says Kevik half-jokingly. "Come in. Once more I should thank you, but this time words are insufficient. Your service to Lison can't be repaid in rhodium, nor would our struggling distributors look favorably upon it. Nevertheless, I suspect we can come to some equitable arrangement that everyone can live with."

Kevik is willing to let the heroes have their latest rhodium shipment free and give them a 50% discount on future shipments should they decide to continue their present line of work. He would much rather they stay on Lison, where their services are clearly needed, but he has little to offer as incentive.

At this point, Thomas Kind (assuming he survived the attack on the dreadnought) arrives to pay his old friend a house call:

As you are speaking with Kevik, the president's fraal aide enters along with another man you recognize as Thomas Kind, although you've never met him in the flesh.

"I've always questioned your taste in friends, Michael," Kind says with a smile. "That is, until now."

Kevik looks both amused and startled by Kind's presence, and the two immediately lapse into a spirited conversation until Kind finds a moment to shake your hands.

"You should come work for me, sometime," says Kind with a wink. "After all, I pay better than he does."

Kind exchanges a few congratulatory words with the heroes and promises them safe passage to and from the Oberon system from now on, assuming they drop in to visit him once in a while. Mainly, he just wants to see Kevik and negotiate for help repairing his damaged ships. Kevik verbally rejects the proposal outright, yet there seems to be some kind of unspoken agreement. Kind does not stay long, but as he leaves he stops to kiss Alaaxis' hand.

If the heroes express an interest in joining Kind's pirates or setting up some kind of business arrangement, he's willing to listen, but not within the confines of the government headquarters. Instead, he asks them to rendezvous with him at his base on Hux.

IS THIS ORB TAKEN?

Eventually the heroes will probably want to leave the Oberon system. At the Gamemaster's discretion, the gardhyi might allow the heroes to retain one or more of the orbs as payment for their trouble. Otherwise, they transport to the heroes' ship and demand the orbs' return, in which case read or paraphrase the following:

You are all suddenly overcome with a terrible sense of dread. Moments later, the gaunt, gray-skinned "men in black" appear before you, their freakish fingers outstretched. Their chill whisper fills your head with two terrifying, lingering words.

"The orbs!"

The gardhyi remain only until the heroes surrender the orbs. They are aware of any that were lost and do not demand them, however, heroes who try to keep orbs for themselves are dangerously close to earning the gardhyi's wrath. The aliens don't hesitate to use their psionic powers and "shadow magic" to get what they want. They employ their blacklaser pistols as a last resort, and then only against heroes who clearly oppose them. Their preference is to leave the heroes unscathed and call upon their services again in the future.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Guidelines for awarding achievement points are given on page 111 of *Chapter 11: Achievements* in the *Gamemaster Guide*. Below are some suggested awards:

- 1 achievement point for accompanying the Lison delegates.
- 1 achievement point for convincing Kind to attack the *Eclipse*.

- 1 achievement point for preventing the bombing of the Lister colony.
- 1 achievement point for helping the Lison delegates escape.
- 1 achievement point for neutralizing Sarn.

EPILOGUE

"This is Sikora Epsilon reporting for ULN. A few hours ago, a joint fleet of ULS and pirate vessels attacked and destroyed the Rigunmor dreadnought Eclipse. Casualties on both sides are said to number in the hundreds.

"While the destruction of the Rigunmor dreadnought means victory for the United Lison State, citizens and government officials around the world are mourning the deaths of over 20,000 people following a thermonuclear bombardment of the twilight colony Lister. The unprovoked attack, launched from the Rigunmor dreadnought, has buried the colony under millions of tons of rock. Rescue teams in e-suits have been unable to gain access to Lister since the bombing. Ambassadors from the various stellar nations have voiced outrage at the Rigunmor attack and have demanded that the Consortium pay restitution to the Lison people. The Galactic Concord has agreed to send patrol ships to police the Oberon system in an effort to prevent further incursions.

"Rigunmor Guilder Tambrin, speaking on behalf of the Consortium, has vowed to provide for the families of the deceased and is currently negotiating with President Kevik's office to funnel billions of Concord dollars into the Lison economy, allowing for the proper upgrade of mining facilities, new social programs, and new technology, clearly in an attempt to offset the damage.

"The Rigunmor government has officially condemned the actions of the dreadnought's renegade commander, Clarence Sarn, calling him everything from a 'madman' to a 'ruthless egotist who succumbed to his own delusions of conquest.' The Guilders have agreed that no retaliatory action will be taken for the destruction of the dreadnought. During a conference on the Rigunmor homeworld, Guilder Tambrin said, 'The Lison people have good reason to despise us now. Sarn's actions have all but doomed our future relations with Lison unless we strive to undo the damage he has wrought. We can show that we are not monsters, but we must once again prove that we are sincere. That will be the greatest challenge of all.'"

"Meanwhile, in other news, President Kevik's condition has been listed as stable following an assassination attempt that killed Vice-president Taylor and three members of the president's staff. A terrorist from the Nariac Domain is believed responsible. The president has been notified of recent events and has appointed Senator Krella Dosit as governor of Lison until he is fit to resume his duties."



TRIBON



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UPPER DECK



MIDDLE DECK



LOWER DECK



ONE SQUARE=10 METERS

STAR DRIVE™
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Christopher Perkins

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ISBN 0-7869-1328-2



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U.S. \$13.95 CAN \$20.95