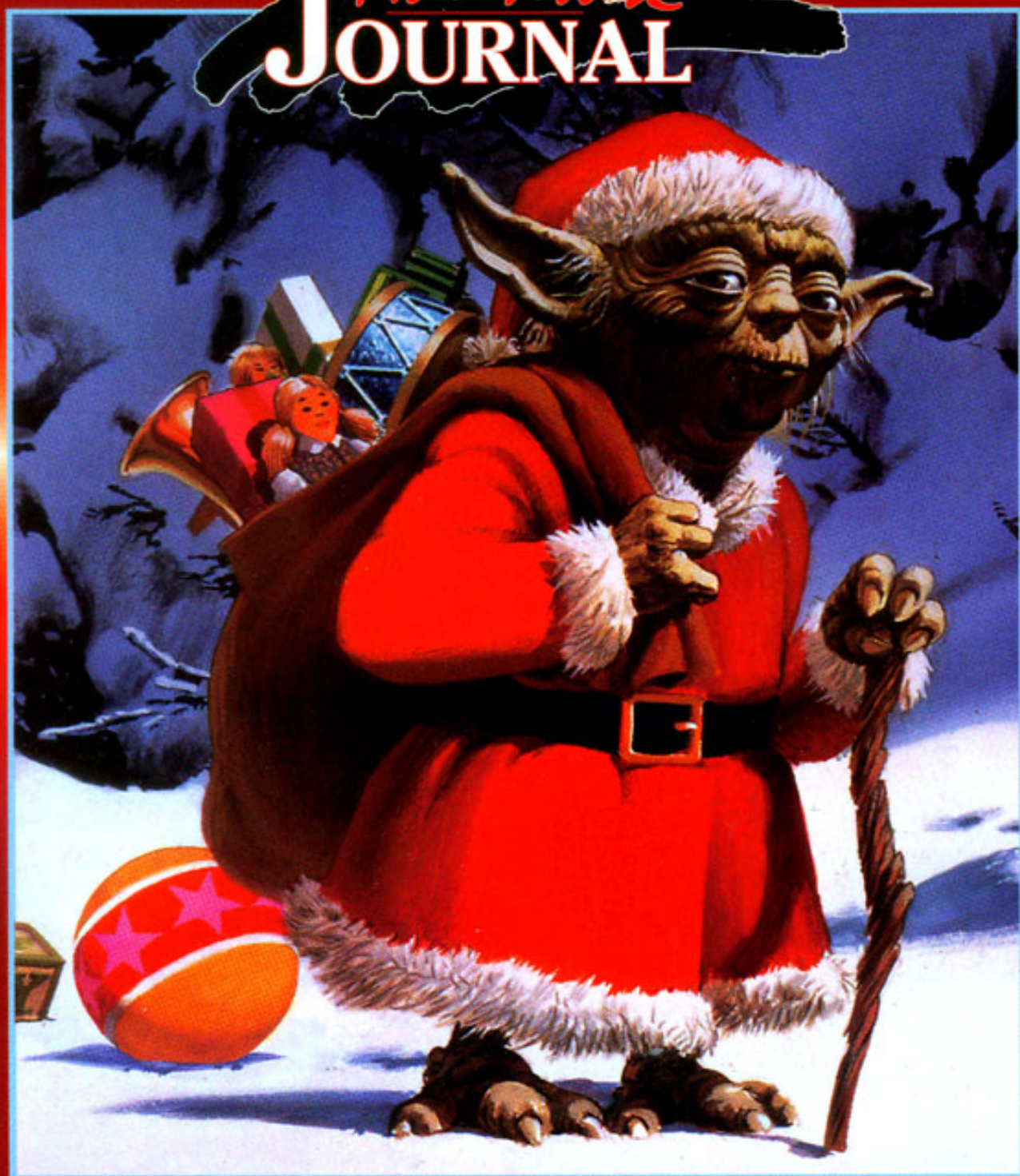


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All Over Again ...

I have a complete set of the original *Star Wars* movies that I used to watch on a regular basis. I had to, (like they forced me) because of where I work and what I work on. The films have never ceased to amaze me and I always seem to find something new in them. But let me make this clear. I will never watch them again!

Why?

Well, back in August, Fox Video in conjunction with Lucasfilm Ltd. re-released the *Star Wars* trilogy, completely re-digitized and with THX sound.

I, of course, immediately purchased the boxed set, took it home, ripped off the shrink wrap, slid *A New Hope* into the VCR, cranked up the sound till it hurt even my ears, and was once again swept away. It was almost like seeing the movies for the first time.

But that was back in August. Now, those great re-digitized films with the THX sound sit on my shelf, right next to the originals, never to be watched again.

Why?

They call it letterbox! Everything I missed on the "little" screen is now back. It was those little insignificant things, that were all over, that made the *Star Wars* trilogy real for me. And now they're back, and it's like being a kid, all over again!

General Richard Hawran
Alliance Special Forces

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Vol. 1, Issue 8

November, 1995

Adventure JOURNAL

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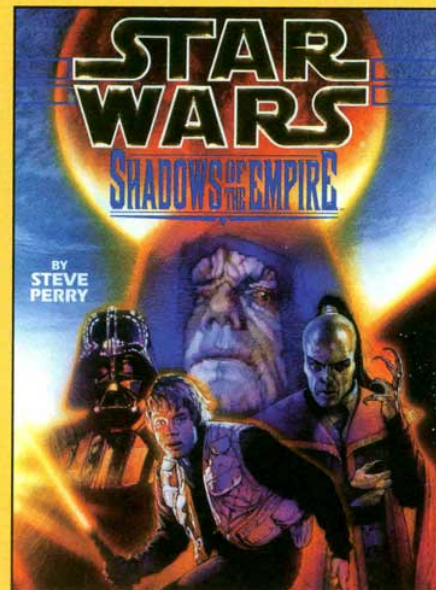
NEW HORIZONS

Shadows of the Empire Hits All Fronts

In the spring of 1996, Lucasfilm licensees will contribute to a monumental media and product blitz surrounding the release of *Shadows of the Empire*, a new novel by science fiction author Steve Perry. A new video game, trading cards, roleplaying game books, a comic book adaptation, and even a "making of" book will be released simultaneously with the novel.

Shadows of the Empire is the first of the recent *Star Wars* novels to be set during the time

of the original movie trilogy. The action takes place between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. Due to the nature of the story, all details are being held under



November, 1995

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wraps, other than the fact that *Shadows of the Empire* will deal in part with the Empire's ties to the criminal underworld.

The novel is just the beginning of this merchandising wave. *Shadows of the Empire* will be published by Bantam books. Author Steve Perry has written several works of science fiction and fantasy, including *Spindoc*, *The Forever Drug*, *The Stellar Rangers* series, and several bestselling *Aliens* books. He has also written numerous teleplays and shorts stories. All the subsequent products will be based directly on the *Shadows of the Empire* novel.

The *Shadows of the Empire* video game for Nintendo's upcoming new 64-bit system, Ultra-64, will be designed and programmed by an award-winning team from LucasArts Entertainment. The game's designers feature many key people who worked on such prior LucasArts *Star Wars* hits as *Rebel Assault*, *X-Wing* and *Dark Forces*.

The Hildebrandt brothers are working on an exclusive *Shadows of the Empire* card series for Topps. Greg and Tim Hildebrandt have won numerous awards for their science fiction and fantasy illustrations, including the coveted Gold Medal from the Society of Illustrators. They have illus-

trated everything from calendars of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* to *Star Wars* posters.

With the publishing of a new, ground-breaking *Star Wars* novel, West End Games is designing *The Shadows of the Empire Sourcebook* for use with *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*. West End author Peter Schweighofer is creating the sourcebook, which will provide insight into the characters, starships, locations and other elements found in the novel. While the sourcebook will provide *Star Wars* roleplaying gamers with new ideas and characters to integrate into their own games, it will also be a helpful guidebook to fans. Peter Schweighofer has written and contributed to several roleplaying game books, including the popular *Raiders of the Lost Ark Sourcebook* and *Platt's Starport Guide*. Plans are also underway for a *Shadows of the Empire* box set later in 1996.

Dark Horse Comics will be releasing a six-part *Shadows of the Empire* comic book series. John Wagner — the co-creator (with Carlos Ezquerro) of *Judge Dredd* — will be scripting the comics. Veteran *Star Wars* comic book artists Kilian Plunkett and Hugh Fleming will be rendering the interior and cover art respectively. Kilian

Plunkett's work has appeared on the covers of the *Classic Star Wars* and *Droids* comic series. Hugh Fleming's work has included cover paintings for the Dark Horse Comics miniseries *Indiana Jones and the Spear of Destiny* and *Star Wars: Tale of the Jedi*.

Shadows of the Empire will even have its own guidebook looking behind-the-scenes at production of all elements relating to the novel. *Star Wars:*

The Secrets of Shadows of the Empire will be written by Mark Cotta Vaz, author of *From Star Wars to Indiana Jones: The Best of the Lucasfilm Archives* and the upcoming *Industrial Light and Magic: Into the Digital Realm*. The guide book will be published by Ballantine Books.

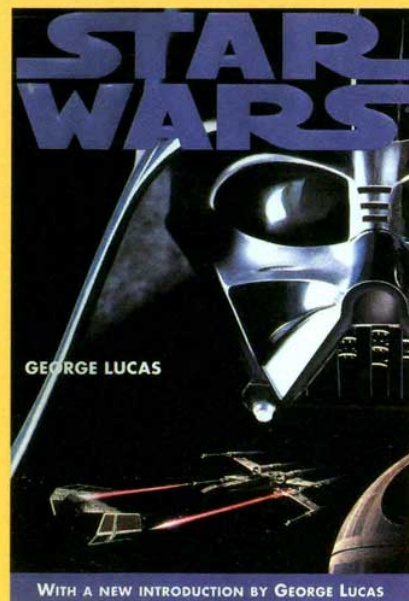
Watch for more exciting news about *Shadows of the Empire* developments in the next *Star Wars Adventure Journal*.

Star Wars Video Release Hits Markets

The release of the *Star Wars* trilogy with remastered THX sight and sound has heralded an onslaught of new *Star Wars* merchandise. The popular Darth Vader, Imperial stormtrooper and Yoda visual motifs found on the new video packaging are now seen on *Star Wars* apparel, books and gift items.

Among the new apparel fans can purchase are T-shirts, baseball caps and neck ties with Vader, the stormtrooper and Yoda. The baseball caps feature quotes from the characters on the front — Vader says, "Never underestimate the dark side," the stormtrooper

cap reads, "Freeze you Rebel scum," and Yoda says, "May the Force be with you."



Ballantine Books has re-released the original novelizations of all three films in hard-cover. For movie buffs, One Stop Publishing has released the *Star Wars* Trilogy script collection. Dark Horse Comics has released the comic book adaptations of the three films,

and a boxed set. All three have scripts by Archie Goodwin and artwork by Al Williamson.

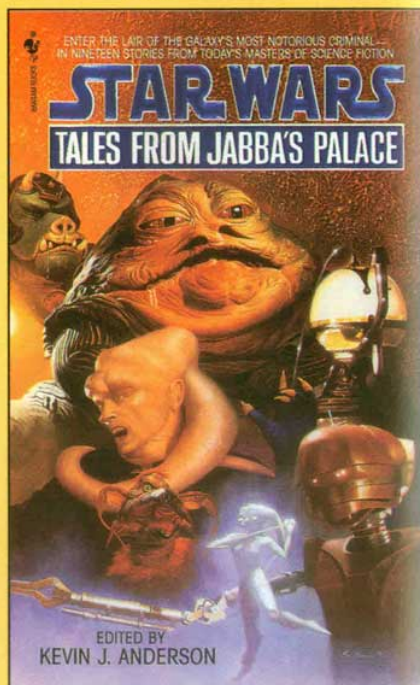
The images from the new video packaging are also available on posters from Western Graphics, and on chromium prints from Zanart Entertainment.

Bantam Releases Jabba's Palace Anthology, X-Wing Novel

Bantam is releasing two exciting new paperbacks, *Star Wars: Tales from Jabba's Palace* in December, and *Star Wars: X-Wing Rogue Squadron* in January.

Tales from Jabba's Palace is a short story anthology based around the events in Jabba's palace during *Return of the Jedi*. Jabba has assembled a cast of soldiers, spies, assassins, scoundrels, bounty hunters, and pleasure seekers — and every visitor to Jabba's grand palace has a story. The anthology features fiction by Kevin J. Anderson, M. Shayne Bell, John Gregory Betancourt, Mark Budz and Marina Fitch, A.C. Crispin,

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, George Alec Effinger, Kenneth C. Flint, Esther Friesner, Barbara

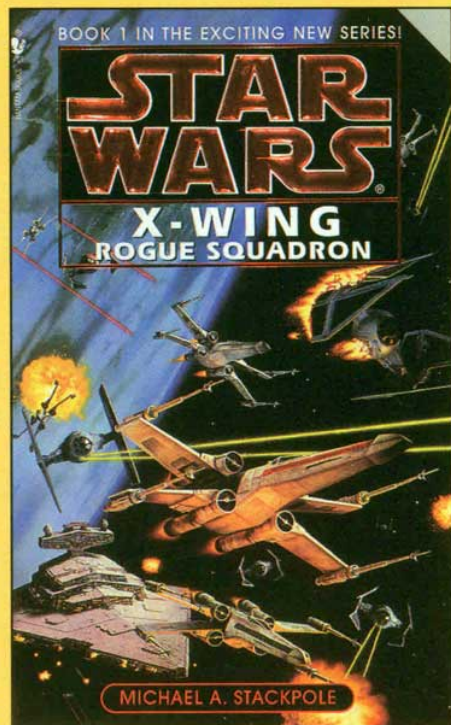


Hambly, Daryl F. Mallett, J.D. Montgomery, Judy and Gar Reeves-Stevens, Jennifer Roberson, Kathy Tyers, Deborah Wheeler, Dave Wolverton, William F. Wu, and Timothy Zahn. The anthology was edited by Kevin J. Anderson.

The first of a series of four X-Wing Rogue Squadron novels by Michael A. Stackpole premieres in January. *Star Wars: X-Wing Rogue Squadron* follows the exploits of Wedge Antilles and his hand-picked X-wing pilots. Rebuilding the legendary squadron, Wedge seeks only the best — the most skilled, the most daring X-wing pilots he can find. Through training and dangerous missions, he weeds out the weak from the strong, assembling a group of hard-bitten warriors willing to fight, ready to die. Even with the best X-wing jockeys in the galaxy, many will not survive their near-suicidal missions. But when Rogue Squadron is ordered to assist in the assault on the heavily fortified

Imperial stronghold of Black Moon, even the bravest must wonder if any at all will survive.

In addition to the familiar characters from the *Star Wars* films, the X-wing novel series introduces many original characters. For an exclusive preview story about one of Rogue Squadron's new pilots, check out "Missed Chance" in *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #7. The short story is followed by an insightful interview with author Michael A. Stackpole.



New Track in Dark Empire Collectors Set

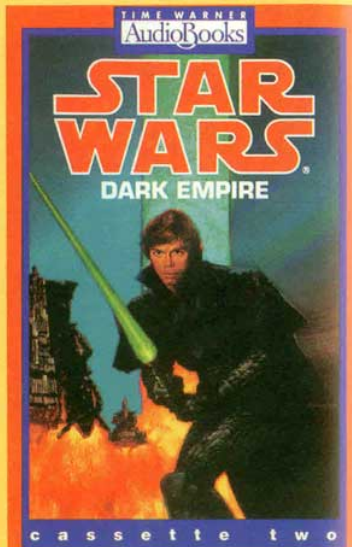
Time/Warner Audio is releasing the *Dark Empire* collectors set on compact disc. The set includes the audio dramatizations of Dark Horse Comics' *Dark Empire* and *Dark Empire II*, and features an exclusive bonus track, the audio dramatization of *Empire's End*, the wrap-up to the *Dark Empire* comic series.

In *Dark Empire*, Luke Skywalker discovers that the Emperor has somehow survived the second Death Star's destruction at the Battle of Endor. As Han and Leia struggle to defeat the Emperor's forces, Luke delves dangerously into the dark side of the Force in an effort to finally defeat the evil Emperor. The battle continues in *Dark Empire II*, as Luke discovers his plan has failed. The Emperor has once again cheated death, and his forces have the Rebels on the run. Luke must use all his Jedi powers to save the New Republic from utter defeat.

In the bonus track, *Empire's End*, Luke Skywalker and his friends face the Emperor and his dark side forces once and for all. Although the *Dark Empire* and *Dark Empire II* audio dramatizations were previously released on cassette

tape, the *Empire's End* audio version is only available in the *Dark Empire* collectors set.

Each program features a full cast of actors, Lucasfilm sound effects and selections of John Williams' *Star Wars* music.



John Whitman — who also wrote the audio adaptation for *Tales of the Jedi* — scripted the *Dark Empire* series for audio.

Each five-hour-long disc is stamped with full color original artwork by *Star Wars* comic book artist Dave Dorman. The set of five compact discs is available for \$60.00, and comes in special collector's edition packaging.

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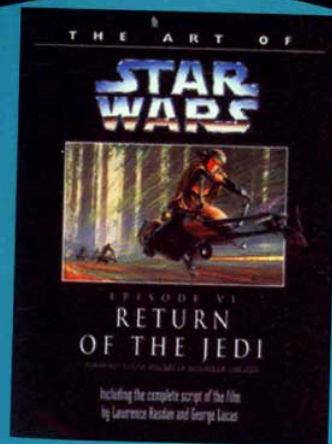
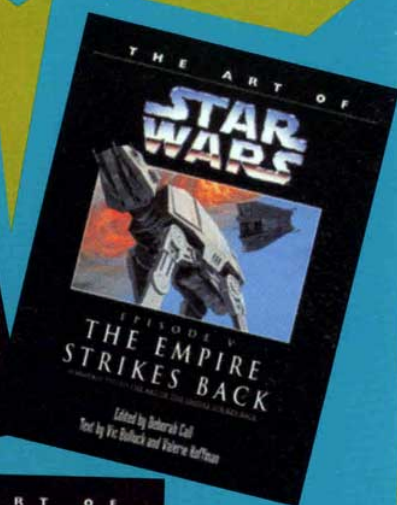
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PAPERBACK

A Certain Point of View

By Charlene Newcomb

Illustrations by Mike Vilardi

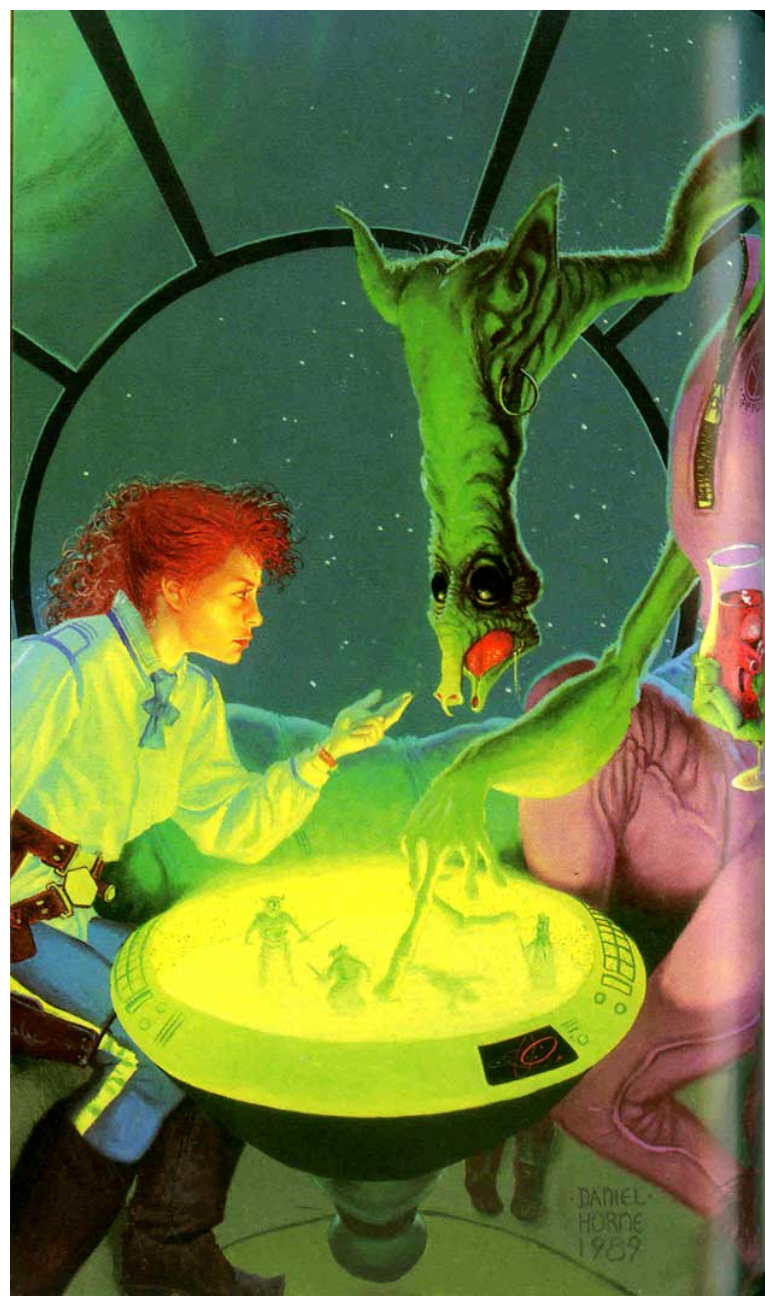
"Heh, heh, Lieutenant, I think he's got you this time!" engineer Dap Nechel chuckled.

Lieutenant Celia Durasha ran her hand along the barrel of her blaster and glanced at Nechel. She knew how much the short, bearded alien enjoyed these ritual match-ups between the *Kuari Princess'* navigator and Detien Kaileel, the security chief. Their banter enlivened the luxury liner's routine passage along the Relgim Run between Endoraan and Mantooine.

"Just wait a minute now, Dap," she said, holstering the blaster and leaning across the holo gameboard to study her farangs and waroots. Celia frowned, her emerald-green eyes narrowed. The chief's last move had indeed given him the advantage.

Seated across from her, Security Chief Kaileel wore a grin — at least Celia thought she detected a grin. The Kabieroun's long snout hid most of his mouth.

"Come now, my dear crimson-haired friend," Kaileel said, his



Basic heavily accented, "shall we try another game?" Dark intelligent eyes twinkled, reflecting the yellowish-green light of the gameboard. He sat back, his giant frame obscuring the overstuffed pillows that decorated the sofas on the *Kuari Princess*' observation deck.

Shaking her head, Celia rolled her eyes. "Why is it, Dap," she kidded the engineer, "that I seem to lose every time you're around?"

Dap smiled at her mischievously, then winked at Kaileel. "I bring the Chief good luck!"

"I don't think I'm going to invite you to any more games!" Celia laughed, falling back onto the sofa. Sighing, she stared out the viewport at the mottled lights of stars rushing past them as the ship travelled through hyperspace. "Wish I had time for another game, Chief. We'll be coming up on Mantooine soon, and I'm supposed to be on the bridge."

Chief Kaileel nodded, muscles rippling along his elongated neck. "I imagine the captain would appreciate the presence of his best officers at their respective duty stations."

"Indeed," Dap agreed.

"I'll have some free time after we make orbit. Shall we get together, say, at 1930?" Celia asked.

"No good," the Chief replied. "I have some things to take care of on Mantooine. I won't be back until much later."

"Things to take care of, eh?" Celia kidded him, picking up her nav-aid datapad from the seat. "All right, Chief, when do I get to meet this new girlfriend you've been harboring on Mantooine?"

"And what about the ones on Aris and Vykos?" Dap added.

Kaileel blushed a darker shade of green than normal and straightened in his seat. "No girlfriends," he told them, tugging at the earhoop hanging from his left lobe. "Just ... friends."

"Okay, if you say so," Celia replied, a sly smile tugging at the corner of her lip. Standing up, she brushed a stray red hair off the silky white sleeve of her uniform and carefully adjusted the blaster holstered around her hips. "Well, time for work, gentlebeings."

Dap took one last gulp of his drink and bounced down from the sofa. "Ah, yes," he said, "an engineer's work is never done. *Vetoosh*, friends."

"*Vetoosh*," Celia replied as Dap headed down the corridor. "Chief K?"

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Any progress on finding those missing blasters?"

Kaileel swung his massive head. "No," he said. "I'm afraid the captain will be unhappy with my report. I've been over this a dozen

times with my security people. It's hard to believe one of them might be lying. But this is the third incident. All those blasters were in secure lockers in our offices. I just don't see how anyone else could have taken them."

"And they haven't turned up anywhere on the ship?"

"I've had scanning teams searching every centimeter of the *Princess*, though I don't expect to find them here," he said. "No, I'm afraid this last batch may have been smuggled off the ship at one of our port stops and will turn up in Rebel hands like those the Imperials discovered on Mantooine."

"You sound worried, Chief," Celia observed.

"This will not look good on my record, Lieutenant," Kaileel reminded her.

"Chief, your record is impeccable!" she told him. "You've got the best security team this side of the Rim!"

"With a dozen weapons missing?" he grimaced. "Thank you for your vote of confidence, little Crimson."

Nodding, Celia watched him rise, his huge form towering far above hers. "I'll talk with you when you return from Mantooine." She started to walk away, then turned back to face him. "I want my rematch!" she called. "You're not going to win again!"

The decks were crowded with passengers boarding the *Kuari Princess* in Mantooine for the return trip through the Maelstrom Nebula to Endoraan. Celia nodded politely to a group of Ithorians and three Corellian businessmen. She smiled at a young couple, still dressed in their wedding finery. Obviously on their honeymoon, they didn't seem to notice anything around them, only each other.

"Ticket, please," hostess Kelsa Vilrein asked a very wealthy-looking female passenger.

"Miss," the woman asked, "can you tell me where the observation deck is? I don't want to miss our entry into the Maelstrom. I've heard so much about it."

"That's on the Lido deck," Kelsa told her. "The captain will announce our approach. Of course, you realize we won't enter the Maelstrom for 15 hours."

"Yes, thank you, my dear."

Kelsa tipped her head toward Celia. "Good evening, Lieutenant."

"How are you, Kelsa?" Celia asked the dark-haired woman.

"Ticket, please," she replied, glancing down to check another passenger's accommodations. "Homthor Deck. That's up two lev-

els." She winked at Celia. "I'm fine, Lieutenant."

"Has Chief Kaileel come back on board?" Celia asked.

"He returned about a half hour ago. Ticket, please."

"Thanks, Kelsa."

"Celia?"

The voice was familiar, but one she hadn't heard in a long time. Looking around, Celia stared wide-eyed. Her heart skipped a beat.

"Adion? How in the worlds —"

"I'd recognize that red mane anywhere!" he exclaimed reaching out to take her hand. "Celia Durasha. Good skies! What are you doing so far from Lankashiir?"

"I'm the *Kuari Princess*' navigator. And look at you —"

"What do you think?" he asked, tugging at his tunic to straighten any part of the uniform that might dare to be out of place.

"Lieutenant ... hm," she said, eyeing his tall muscular frame. Adion Lang looked more handsome than she remembered. Maybe it's the uniform, she thought. "I like it."

"Celia, you look absolutely ravishing," he told her.

"Shh!" she replied, turning her head as the heat rose in her cheeks. "You're not allowed to embarrass the ship's navigator."

"All right, I'll try not to."

"I'm good friends with the Security Chief, Lieutenant Lang. Any misbehavior and I'll have him throw you in the brig!"

"Yes, ma'am," he grinned. "You haven't changed at all, Celia."

"Not one little bit!" she laughed. "Now, c'mon. Let's get out of the line of traffic." Leading him through the ship's corridors toward the observation deck, Celia couldn't help but notice the two white-armored shadows that followed them at a discrete distance. "Friends of yours?" she asked.

Adion glanced back. "Oh, them? Don't worry about them. Just a couple of guards who were lucky enough to accompany me," he replied nonchalantly. "Tell me, Celia, how long has it been?"

She thought for a moment. "Seven years, I guess."

"A long time," he said. "Tell me about you, your family. I'm afraid I've lost touch with your brothers."

"Well, Jak is still in the Navy, stationed on board the *Relentless*. Bern is a lieutenant with an armored battalion in the Generis Sector, and I just spoke with Raine last week. His unit was preparing to ship out to Ralltiir — some kind of local trouble, I suppose. I miss them all terribly, but especially Raine."

"I guess that's natural — he is your twin brother, after all," Adion said. "But what happened to all your grand plans? I thought you

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would attend the Academy like your brothers."

Celia frowned, unable to ignore the incoming tide of emotions that were attached to that subject.

Adion stopped in the middle of the corridor, obviously aware that he'd touched on a sore spot. "I'm sorry," he told her, taking her hand into his. "I can tell something's wrong."

"It's okay," Celia said as old feelings of anger flooded her senses. "My application was never forwarded past Sector."

"What! Who would do such a thing?"

Celia Durasha



Type: Starship Navigator
DEXTERITY 3D
 Blaster 5D+2, dodge 5D, melee combat 5D+2
KNOWLEDGE 2D+2
 Alien species 5D, bureaucracy 4D, cultures 5D+1, languages 3D+1, planetary systems 6D+1
MECHANICAL 4D
 Astrogation 6D+1, capital ship piloting 4D+2, sensors 5D, space transports 6D
PERCEPTION 3D
 Bargain 4D, command 5D, gambling 5D
STRENGTH 2D+1
TECHNICAL 3D
 Computer programming/repair 4D
Force Points: 3
Character Points: 30
Move: 10
Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), knife (STR+1D), nav-aid datapads

Capsule: Ten generations of the Durasha family served in the military under the Empire and its predecessor, the Old Republic. Like her father and brothers, Celia Durasha had planned to continue that tradition. When her father blocked her application to the Academy, Celia broke all ties with him and left her homeworld embittered.

Undaunted, Celia was determined to sail the stars. A bright, highly ambitious young woman, she spent a year at Baylagon Technical Institute excelling in every aspect of starship systems. Hired by Galaxy Tours after her graduation, she served aboard a small passenger liner, the *Majestic*. Celia proved herself indispensable to the cruise line when she single-handedly guided the liner, damaged during an attack by pirates, safely back to port.

Rewarded for her efforts, Celia was promoted to lieutenant and assigned the job of navigator on board the luxury liner *Kuari Princess*. She is well respected by the ship's captain and crew. Her dearest friend and mentor on board is the ship's Chief of Security, who affectionately calls her Crimson because of her stunning red hair. They meet frequently during off-duty hours to play the holo gameboards.

Staring past Adion, her voice trembled, full of bitterness. "Commander Reise Durasha."

"Your father?"

Nodding, Celia walked away from Adion. She ran her hand along the gold handrail that lined the ornately-decorated corridor.

"But why?" Adion asked, taking two giant strides to catch up with her.

She stopped, planting her arms across her chest, and looked him straight in the eye. "I believe his words were, 'No daughter of mine is going to attend the Academy. It's no place for women,' or something to that effect."

Adion lowered his eyes, shuffling his feet on the ship's polished marble flooring. His silence stung louder than a thunderclap.

"You, too? You agree with him?" she asked, trying to temper her anger and hurt.

"Celia, you would have been remarkable at the Academy. But do you know where most women end up after graduation?"

She glared at him. She knew all right. Backwater worlds, crummy assignments, with little chance to prove yourself, or to ever see a promotion. But it never mattered to her. She had longed to wear the uniform, to proudly serve as others in her family had done for generations.

"Your father was only thinking of your well-being," Adion said.

"My well-being? Excuse me, why would he be so concerned about a daughter he barely knew?"

"And yet you wanted to follow in his footsteps! See your family every three or four years, if it was convenient? Celia," he admonished her gently, "how can you still be upset with him after all these years?"

"He interfered with my life, Adion. He had no right to make that decision for me."

"Perhaps you're right."

"Can we drop this subject?" she asked. "You haven't told me what you're doing on the *Kuari Princess*."

Adion looped his arm through hers. "Show me your ship," he said, "and I'll tell you about my assignment to Aris."

"Aris? Sector HQ, eh?" she smiled, leading him up the grand staircase to the Lido observation deck. "I'm impressed. A plush job, no doubt."

"You are looking at the new assistant to the Moff," he told her.

"Congratulations, Adion! That's wonderful," she stopped, turning to look out one of the viewports. Mantooine loomed ahead of them, the glare of sunlight illuminating the horizon as the ship's orbit took them across the terminator into day. "It's so beautiful up here," she sighed. "But just wait until we enter the Maelstrom Nebula."

"I've heard about it," he said, his voice softening. "But it can't be as spectacular as the lovely red hair I used to tug on from my seat in



physics classes." He pushed a loose curl away from her face then touched her lightly on the cheek. "I've missed you, Celia."

Celia blushed and looked away from him. Adion reached out to turn her face back toward his. Putting his arm around her waist, he pulled her close. Slowly, his lips met hers. For a brief moment neither one noticed the curious on-lookers who passed by.

Trembling, Celia pulled away from him. Old memories rushed in upon her senses. There may have been a time, years ago, when she would have followed him to the ends of the galaxy. But then he'd left their homeworld to attend Raithal Academy and she hadn't seen or heard from him in all these years. Did he expect to pick up right where they'd left off?

Her eyes fixed on his. There was something different about him, something in those piercing blue eyes that she couldn't quite put her finger on. "I've got to go, Adion. We'll be leaving orbit soon and I'm supposed to be on duty now."

"May I see you later?" he asked.

"I—I'll check with you in the morning," she said, turning to leave. Confused by emotions he'd stirred deep within her, emotions she

thought she'd left behind in the past, Celia hurried away. She needed time to think. Some safe harbor. And she knew exactly where to find it.

The door slid open into a modestly decorated office. A hologram on one wall displayed a cross section of the *Kuari Princess*. A dozen monitors occupied another wall to the right of a desk that was littered with a half dozen datacards.

Chief Kaileel was hunched over his computer terminal. He glanced up at Celia, a momentary look of annoyance vanished quickly, replaced by a gentler expression.

"Good evening, dear Crimson. May I help you with something?"

"I, uh, thought I'd get a brief update on those missing blasters, Chief," she said unconvincingly.

Kaileel's large dark eyes frowned at her over the top of the monitor. "I have nothing new to report, Lieutenant," he replied, eyeing her suspiciously. "Was there something else I might help you with?"

Celia's eyes wandered around the room. "I've got the bridge watch for another hour, then I'll be ready for our rematch."

Kaileel drummed his long green fingers on the desk. "It is rather late, you realize."

"You're not trying to get out of this game, are you?"

"Of course not, Lieutenant. I shall be off duty in two hours."

"Good," Celia replied, glad she'd have the game to keep her mind off a certain handsome Imperial lieutenant. "Then I'll expect you to meet me on the observation deck."

The edges of Kaileel's mouth curled upward behind his snout. "Oh, my dear little crimson-haired friend, I would not miss the chance to beat you again for all the spice on Kessel!"

"Beat me?" she smiled, her mood suddenly lighter. "Don't count on it, Chief!"

"Get to your bridge, little one. Drive your ship! Steer us a straight course!"

Leaning over the desk, Celia's face grew serious. "You look tired, Chief," she said. "Is everything all right?"

Kaileel leaned back into his chair. "Yes — well, no," he admitted when he saw the frown on her face. "I had some disturbing news on my visit to Mantooine."

"Chief?" another voice called from the doorway. "Sorry to interrupt, Lieutenant."

"What is it, Raban?" Kaileel asked the security officer as Celia



Detien Kaileel

Type: *Kuari Princess Security Chief*

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 5D+2, blaster: blaster rifle 4D, dodge 4D, melee combat 4D, melee parry 4D

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 4D, cultures 5D+1, languages 3D+2, law enforcement 7D, planetary systems 5D, streetwise 5D

MECHANICAL 2D

PERCEPTION 4D

Command 6D+1, gambling 7D, investigation 6D, persuasion 5D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 4D

TECHNICAL 3D

Computer programming/repair 4D+1, first aid 4D, security 5D

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 12

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, heavy blaster pistol (5D)

Capsule: Chief Kaileel is a native of the planet Kabieroun in the Outer Rim Territories. He was fortunate to have escaped the fate of many of his fellow Kabieroun. He left his homeworld years before the Empire began its enslavement of the population.

Kaileel studied police science at Balaidas Academy before the Empire closed that institution to non-Humans. After graduating with honors, he worked for more than two decades as a detective with the well known Mid-Rim Sentinel Agency. Wounded in the line of duty during an undercover operation against a notorious crime lord, Kaileel retired hoping to find a job less fraught with danger. But as Chief of Security on the luxury liner *Kuari Princess*, Kaileel could not ignore the growing injustices inflicted by the Empire in the Outer Rim Territories.

walked behind the desk to stare out the viewport.

"We've got a report of a fight between two passengers at the Galleria Shop."

"Who's on it?"

"Brankton. And we've sent in a backup."

"Keep me posted," Kaileel told the man, then turned to smile at Celia. "This may turn out to be an exciting cruise."

"We haven't even left orbit yet!" Celia marvelled.

"And you thought your job was interesting."

"Chief, what were you about to tell me — the news you got on

Mantooine?"

"Later, my dear. I'll tell you later."

Celia eyed her old friend. There was something bothering him. But before she could probe for more information the captain's voice sounded over the intercom. "Chief Kaileel, is Lieutenant Durasha with you?"

"Yes, Captain," Kaileel said.

"I was just on my way to the bridge, sir," Celia added.

"Lieutenant, I need to speak with you privately. Will you meet me in my office right away?"

"Of course, sir. On my way. I wonder what that's all about," she said as Kaileel clicked off the intercom. "I'll see you in a couple of hours, Chief."

"Captain Glidrick, you wanted to see me?"

"Please, Lieutenant, sit down," he said. Stenn Glidrick was a middle-aged man with brownish hair that was just beginning to streak with gray. Like Celia, he was dressed in blue trousers with a gold stripe down each leg. Medals decorated his white tunic — a reminder to everyone of his service in the Imperial Navy.

"What is it, sir? What's happened?"

"I received a message from your father —"

Celia stood up abruptly, her face reddening. "My father sent you a message?" she asked, the anger in her voice unmistakable.

"Please, Lieutenant —"

"I want nothing to do with him —"

"Lieutenant Durasha, sit down!" the captain ordered. He took a deep breath. "Your father sent word through me, because he knew what your reaction would be. It's about your brother —"

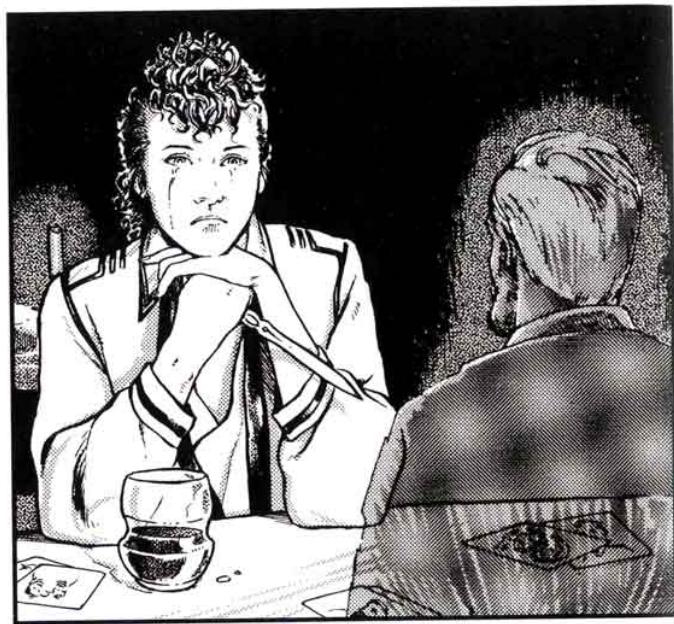
Celia paled. "What?" Her hands trembled as she grasped the edge of Glidrick's desk and collapsed into the chair.

"He's been killed," the captain told her. "I'm sorry."

Closing her eyes, Celia chewed on the inside of her lip, trying to force back the tears. "Captain, I have three brothers. Which one —"

Glidrick glanced down at the datapad. "It's Raine," he said. "Your father said there are more details on this holo that accompanied the message I received. Take all the time you need, Celia. I'm truly sorry."

"Thank you, sir," Celia replied numbly, taking the holo from him. She rose slowly from the chair and somehow managed to find her way to her quarters. Alone, Celia listened to the message. When it



ended, she paused it, staring at her father's frozen holo image. The small room seemed to close in around her.

Unconsciously, Celia ran her hand back and forth across her holster, then downward, brushing against her soft leather boot. She unsheathed the knife hidden there. It had been a special gift from Raine, one he had given to her the night before he'd left for his last term of service. Sitting beneath Lankashiir's star-filled skies, they had reminisced about the good times they'd had exploring the forests of their homeworld.

She turned the knife over several times. Light from the holo image touched the steel gray blade and cascaded across the desk. Her small hand melded perfectly around its handle which was carved from rare ebon. She studied the flaming red jewel embedded just above the blade, watched it sparkle brilliantly even in the dimly lit cabin.

Good memories seemed no more than a distant echo now. Celia set the knife down, rubbed her hand wearily across her brow and clicked on her father's message again.

"Your brother Raine has been killed by Rebel forces on the planet

Ralltiir," the figure in the holo said. Reise Durasha looked much older, and much thinner than when she'd seen him last. His gray-green Imperial Army uniform seemed to hang loosely on his bent frame. Dark shadows ringed his eyes. "I know how close you and Raine were ..."

Celia buried her face in her hands and burst into tears. Emotionally exhausted, numb with grief, sleep finally ended her pain. When the cabin intercom buzzed more than an hour later, she awoke suddenly. Slowly, she reached over and clicked it on.

"Durasha here," she said wearily.

"Celia, I thought we had a game this evening."

She stared blankly at the comm panel.

"Celia?" the Chief called again, more insistently.

"Oh, Chief," she finally said, "I forgot."

"Is everything all right?" he asked. "We don't have to play tonight —"

"No, just give me a few minutes."

When Celia arrived on the observation deck, the holo gameboard was darkened. A tall glass of some exotic beverage sat on the edge of the playing table.

"What's this?" Celia asked, pointing toward the drink.

"Zadarian brandy. You sounded like you could use a good stiff drink," Kaileel told her.

Celia blinked a tear from her eye. She picked up the brandy, swirled it around the glass thoughtfully, and finally took a long sip. The brew trickled down her throat, but its warmth did nothing to diminish the chill she felt. She could feel the Chief's eyes upon her.

"What has happened?" he asked.

Staring out at the stars blurring past them in hyperspace, Celia didn't seem to hear him.

"Celia?" He stood up, placing his hand lightly on her shoulder.

Trembling, Celia turned toward Kaileel and looked up into his eyes. "My brother —" she cried, burying her face in his chest.

Kaileel wrapped his long scaly arms around her. He held her tightly. "I'm so sorry, my dear little Crimson," he said.

When her tears dried, Celia told her old friend how Raine's unit had been ambushed by Rebels at the spaceport on Ralltiir.

Kaileel shook his head sadly. "So many will die," he said quietly. "On both sides."

Celia's eyes grew wide. "You don't support the Rebel cause, do you?"

"Let's just say I disagree with the Empire's methods of resolving this conflict," he told her.

Kuari Princess

Craft: Mon Calamari MC80 Star Cruiser

Type: Luxury Liner

Scale: Capital

Length: 500 meters

Skill: Capital ship piloting: Mon Cal cruiser

Crew: 840

Crew Skill: Astrogation 6D+1, capital ship gunnery 4D+1, starship piloting 6D+2, starship shields 4D, starship sensors 5D

Passengers: 3,500

Cargo Capacity: 5,000 metric tons

Consumables: 1 year

Hyperdrive Multiplier: x2

Hyperdrive Backup: x9

Nav Computer: Yes

Maneuverability: 1D

Space: 5

Hull: 5D

Shields: 2D

Sensors:

Passive: 30/1D

Scan: 50/2D

Search: 100/3D

Focus: 3/3D

Weapons:

10 Turbolaser Batteries

Fire Arc: 3 front, 2 left, 2 right, 3 back

Crew: 1 to 3

Skill: Capital ship gunnery

Fire Control: 2D

Space Range: 3-15/35/75

Damage: 3D

"What do you mean, Chief?"

Kaileel gazed out the viewport. "Think of the Maelstrom Nebula, Celia," he said.

"What about it?"

"From Mantooine — how does it appear?"

"It's barely a speck," she replied.

"True," he nodded. "What happens when we enter the Nebula?"

She threw him a puzzled look. "Is this a class in astrophysics, Chief?"

"Please, follow along with me," he said.

"All right. When we enter the Nebula our communications don't work well. And our sensors are blinded. But what does that have to do with —"

Kaileel held up one long green finger. "From a great distance we can only surmise the hazards the Nebula may present to us. Why is

it that until we're close, until it touches us, we don't recognize the danger?"

"The Empire is like that, little Crimson. From a distance, we may not feel the danger — we're too far removed from its touch. But once it is upon us, we will hear and see only what the Empire desires."

"My family serves that Empire, Chief. My brother died fighting for it, too," she reminded him. "You'd better not let others hear you speak like this. They might suspect you were the one who stole those —" she stopped mid-sentence, sitting up abruptly, and leaned over the holo gameboard.

Kaileel eyed her, then thoughtfully swirled the reddish liqueur in his own glass.

"You gave those blasters to Rebels on Mantooine?" she asked quietly. "Was *that* the business you had to attend to?"

Before the Chief could answer, Dap Nechel bounded into the room.

"Why didn't you tell me you were playing?" he asked, his voice filled with an exaggerated anguish.

Celia fell back onto the overstuffed pillows. She looked from Kaileel to Dap, then turned away. Kaileel straightened in his seat and took a long slow sip from his drink.

"I'm sorry," Dap said. "I seem to have interrupted a private conversation. I'll go now."

"No, it's okay, Dap," Celia said. "Stay. We were just setting up the board." She pressed a button on the side of the game table. A greenish glow lit their faces and a dozen warriors appeared, standing at attention, weapons held at right-shoulder arms, on each side of the holo board.

"Celia, we don't have to play —" Kaileel began.

"It's all right, Chief," she said. "Your move."

As Dap climbed onto the sofa next to Celia, Kaileel positioned his warroot. Celia moved one of her farangs. Chief countered by advancing another one his warriors.

Celia studied the gameboard. Sitting up, she pulled her blaster from its holster and rubbed her hand along the barrel contemplatively. "Hmm, Chief," she said, "that was not a wise move."

"Really? I believe it all depends on your point of view," he replied.

"My point of view?" she frowned.

"Open your eyes, dear Crimson. Look at what is happening all around you."

Dap eyed his two friends. "What are you two talking about?" he asked. "Will one of you please tell me?"

Celia looked away.

"Celia's brother was killed by Rebels on Ralltiir."

"Oh, dear. That's terrible, Lieutenant. I had heard about the insurrection there on the holo newsvid. But the Empire is dealing with those Rebels," he said. "And the ones on Alderaan. Yes, indeed. They won't be giving the Empire any more trouble."

"Alderaan?" the Chief asked.

"Good skies, have you not heard the news — well, no, I guess not if you've been sitting here the last hour."

"What has happened on Alderaan?" Celia repeated.

"The Emperor's servants discovered that several of the leaders of the Rebellion were from Alderaan — Bail Organa himself, and his daughter, the Princess Leia. Our forces have made an example of that world."

"What do you mean?"

"Alderaan has been destroyed."

"What!" Celia exclaimed.

Kaileel shook his head sadly. "Did I not tell you this?"

"The whole planet?"

"It's nothing but billions of particles of dust now," Dap said.

"Millions of people, like pawns," Kaileel said, pointing at the characters on their gameboard, "for the Emperor to do with what he will."

B'shingh

The holo boardgame B'shingh was invented by military strategist Crat Dakerno after studying local uprisings on the planet Ab'Bshingh. Dakerno had accompanied the Imperial troops who were sent in to quell the violence. He witnessed the ritualistic tribal customs of the two warring factions — the Farangs and the Waroots. Impressed by the natives' centuries-old tactics, Dakerno created the holo game.

Because familiarity with the ancient customs of the two species is necessary to play the game, it is rarely seen outside the more intellectual or military circles. The object of the game is to maim or kill your opponents and capture his base (the opposite side of the board) in a series of moves across the gameboard. A move may include a physical step in any direction (except for the tribal chiefs, who may only move forward), or a change of stance in preparation for attack or defense. Knowledge of tribal rituals helps the players anticipate the randomizer's move made every fifth turn.

"But, Chief —"

"I fear the game is up," Kaileel said softly.

Frowning, Celia leaned over the gameboard to check their warriors' positions. "You're not giving up that easily," she said, suddenly catching Dap's startled expression out of the corner of her eye.

Chief Kaileel exhaled deeply, letting out a big sigh. Celia looked up. Two stormtroopers had blaster rifles aimed at her friend.

"Indeed, Rebel spy," Adion Lang's voice rang out menacingly. He stepped out from behind the stormtroopers. "The game is up."

"Adion!" Celia exclaimed, carefully holstering her blaster. "What's the meaning of this?" She made a point of standing slowly, not wanting to alarm the stormtroopers. "Chief Kaileel is no spy."

"Please, Celia, don't try to defend this traitor. We know all about this," he paused, searching for the right description, "creature's activities. We have proof that he has supplied weapons to Rebel agents on Mantooine. And considering the conversation I've just overheard —"

"You've been spying on us!" Dap exclaimed.

"That is my job. I'm sorry, Celia, that this ... thing ... has cultivated your friendship. Just remember what *his* friends have done to your brother," Adion said. "Raine would still be alive if it weren't for traitors like him."

His cold words cut into Celia's heart like a vibroblade. She'd lost her brother to the Rebels. And now she was losing her best friend to the Empire. She looked at Kaileel — she would never blame him for Raine's death. She hoped he could see that in her eyes.

"It's all right, dear Crimson," Kaileel told her. "I am only one. But the Empire will soon learn that the ones will multiply by the hundreds of thousands. And one day, we shall not be put down."

"Take him away," Adion ordered the stormtroopers.

"Excuse me, Lieutenant," Dap said. "If you'll not be needing me, may I go?"

"Yes, Chief Nechel," Adion told him, "though I may ask for a statement from you later."

"I see," Dap replied. "Yes, indeed, whatever you require. You know where I'll be."

Celia watched them put binders on Kaileel's wrists. His strong muscular arms twitched nervously as he stood up. Towering above them, he would have been an intimidating sight if it weren't for the blaster rifles they had trained on him.

"Move it," one stormtrooper ordered Kaileel, shoving his rifle into

Adion Lang

**Type:** Imperial Lieutenant**DEXTERITY 4D**

Blaster 6D+2, dodge 5D.

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 4D, bureaucracy 5D+2, cultures 4D, intimidation 4D, law enforcement 7D, planetary systems 4D+1, streetwise 6D

MECHANICAL 2D

Communications 4D+2, repulsorlift operation 3D+2

PERCEPTION 4D

Command 6D, con 5D, investigation 6D+1, persuasion 4D+1, search 6D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 3D**TECHNICAL 2D**

Computer programming/repair 3D, security 4D

Force Points: 1**Character Points:** 8**Move:** 10**Equipment:** Blaster pistol (4D)

Capsule: Adion Lang is 26 years old, with piercing blue eyes and muscular good looks. An ambitious lieutenant in the Imperial Army, Adion has always had the desire to succeed, a desire that had its roots in his childhood. His father was a strict taskmaster who demanded the very best from his son. But Adion discovered at an early age that there was little he could do to please the elder Lang. Inspired by Reise Durasha's tales of life in the military, Adion decided to pursue a career in the Imperial Army. Like Durasha's four sons, his best friends while growing up, he entered the Academy.

Not surprisingly, Adion found life in the army similar to life with his father. And perhaps, because of his upbringing, he adjusted well to the military regimen. He discovered that he enjoyed the status and the respect the uniform provided. An excellent student, Adion was chosen for special training with the Imperial Security Bureau after his graduation from Raithal Academy. He takes great pride in his work in the Outer Rim, viewing the tracking of Rebel sympathizers as a unique opportunity to serve his Emperor.

the chief's chest.

"Take him to ship's security and keep a close eye on him. Sergeant," Adion ordered. "Remember, he knows that place better than anyone on this ship."

"Yes, sir."

As they led Kaileel away, Celia stared after them. "What will happen to him, Adion?"

"Dear Celia, don't concern yourself with these details," he replied, reaching out to take her hand.

"I don't understand this, Adion. I thought you were an administrative aide."

He shook his head. "I'm sorry I had to lie to you, Celia. I'm with the Imperial Security Bureau. We've been watching your security chief for several months now."

"I thought I knew him so well. I never suspected —" she said, covering her face with her hands.

Adion took Celia into his arms. "There, now," he said, "everything will be all right. Come, sit down with me."

"Gentlebeings," a voice rang out over the ship's intercom. "This is Captain Glidrick. In approximately 30 minutes, the *Kuari Princess* will emerge from hyperspace to enter the Maelstrom Nebula. You won't want to miss the spectacular view from the Lido Deck's observation ports. It will be a sight you will never forget."

"The Nebula —" Celia sighed. Kaileel's comparison of the Empire and the nebula filled her mind ... *until it touches you, you may not realize the danger it presents.*

"Forget what that old creature said to you, Celia. His thoughts are dangerous."

Celia looked up into Adion's blue eyes. They seemed cold and vacant. Who was right? Empire? Rebel? She'd been hurt by both of them. Could she ever embrace one or the other? She didn't know what to think anymore. "I've got to talk to him, Adion."

"That's not a good idea, Celia."

"Please — just for a few minutes."

"I will have to question him first, but before we reach Aris I'll let you see him."

Nodding weakly, she rested her head on Adion's shoulder.

The cell door slid shut behind her. Celia stood rigidly, staring at Kaileel. After more than 10 hours, she was finally able to talk to him, just as Adion Lang had promised.

Shaking her head, she placed her nav-aid datapads on the chest just inside the door and began pacing back and forth across Kaileel's cell. Her hand nervously fingered her empty holster.

"You admitted it!" she finally shouted at Kaileel.

"What else was I to do, Lieutenant?" he asked her.

Stopping dead in her tracks in front of him, Celia rolled her eyes in disgust. "Lie!"

Kaileel stared past her as if looking out some nonexistent viewport. "To what end? My dear little Crimson," he said, turning to look into her eyes, "I know you are not that naive."

Celia clenched her fists and pounded Kaileel's muscular chest. "I just don't understand, Chief!" she cried. "What has the Empire done to you?"

"Nothing."

"Then why did you get yourself mixed up with these Rebels?"

"What the Empire is doing is wrong," he told her, "it's immoral. Remember what I told you — that certain point of view — stop looking at the Empire from a distance. Take a look up close, Celia. You will see. All freedom-loving beings know this is true." He took her hand into his, pressing it closely to his chest. "And I know, deep in my heart, that one day you will understand."

Staring up into his huge black eyes, Celia pushed down the lump in her throat. "I just don't know, Chief —"

The door into the cell slid open.

"Time's up, Lieutenant. I'm afraid you'll have to leave."

"But it's only been a couple of minutes. Can't I stay a little while longer, Sergeant?"

"I've got my orders, Lieutenant."

The stormtrooper motioned her toward the door. Celia frowned at Kaileel. She finally walked away from him, stopping to glance back one last time.

"I still want my rematch with you, Chief!" she told him, reaching for the datapads on the chest. "I won't let them take you off this ship until I get a rematch!"

The datapads slipped from Celia's hands, clattering to the floor. She bent down to retrieve them, inconspicuously withdrawing the knife from her boot. Standing abruptly, she drove the knife under the stormtrooper's helmet and into his neck. He screamed in pain as she forcefully pulled him out of the doorway, bashing his head against the wall. Her hands shaking, she twisted the blade one last time as the trooper collapsed to the floor.

"C'mon, Chief," she said, re-sheathing the knife in her boot, "we've got to get out of here!"

A second stormtrooper appeared in the doorway. Diving to the floor, Celia recovered the fallen trooper's blaster rifle and opened fire. Her shot nicked the wall as the stormtrooper backed away from the door. Jumping to her feet, Celia scrambled to the doorway and blasted him as he ran down the corridor.

"Let's go, Chief!" she shouted, throwing the blaster rifle back to

him.

Following her, Kaileel stepped over the two dead stormtroopers. "Tell me, dear Crimson, do you really expect us to get out of here alive?" he asked. "Where's the rest of our security people?"

"Dap arranged for a little problem on the Bazaar Deck," she said, retrieving the second blaster rifle.

"Good old Dap. You think the turbolift's the best way down to the hangar bay?"

"Should be all clear, Chief."

"Amazing."

"You've got a lot of friends on board the *Princess*, old man!"

"Is there a barge —"

"Already prepped. I disconnected the robot pilot and did a little rewiring job so I could fly it out of here."

"And into the Maelstrom," the Chief added.

"We'll be safe there."

Thirty seconds later the turbolift doors opened onto the luxury liner's dimly lit hangar. Two barges which were used for piloting passengers to and from the ship occupied the high-ceilinged room. Peering into the bay, Celia motioned for Kaileel to follow her.

They were halfway across the bay when Adion Lang walked down the ramp of the nearest barge. His blaster was pointed toward Chief Kaileel, but his eyes were transfixed on Celia.

"Put your blasters down," he ordered them.

Celia stared at the blaster in her hand. "Adion, please," she said, her voice trembling, "let Kaileel go."

"I was afraid you'd try something like this, Celia. You always were rather impetuous. But I think you know I can't let him go," he told her. "Now, please, put your blaster down. You don't want to kill me."

Celia searched Adion's eyes. There was no emotion there, no spark of life. It can't end like this, she thought. *There's got to be something I can do.*

Chief Kaileel moved slowly to lower his blaster. "I'm sorry, little Crimson," he said, suddenly jerking the rifle up to fire at Adion. His first shot went wide. Half a heartbeat later, a blast from Adion's rifle caught him across the chest. Kaileel managed to get off a second shot, but it ricocheted wildly, bouncing off the hull of the barge. Kaileel collapsed, mortally wounded, onto the cold metallic floor of the hangar bay.

Celia dropped her blaster rifle and rushed toward her fallen friend. "You didn't have to kill him!" she screamed at Adion. Tears threatened to blur her vision. But she forced them away as she knelt

beside Kaileel's body.

Adion approached her cautiously, kicking both blaster rifles across the hangar floor. "Why, Celia? Why were you helping him escape?" he asked her. "You're no Rebel."

"He was my friend," she said quietly, ignoring the contempt she heard in Adion's voice. She wondered what had happened to the young man she'd once admired, the man she had loved.

"You'll have to come with me, Celia," Adion said.

"Don't make me, Adion," she told him, her eyes still fixed on Kaileel's body for fear they might betray her true feelings. "Won't you let me leave?"

"It's my duty, Celia," he said coldly, his blaster trained on the back of her head. "You're under arrest for treasonous acts against the Empire."

Celia picked up Kaileel's limp hand, tenderly running her fingers across it. "Looks like this game's going nowhere, Chief," she told him. "How will I ever get my rematch?"

Adion moved a step closer, his tall frame casting a dark shadow

Kuari Princess Barge

Craft: Sienar Fleet Systems Shuttle

Type: Intra-system shuttle

Scale: Starfighter

Length: 30 meters

Crew: 1 Droid pilot

Crew Skill: Communications 3D, sensors 3D, space transports 4D+2

Passengers: 40

Cargo Capacity: 100 metric tons

Maneuverability: 1D

Space: 4

Atmosphere: 480; 800 kmh

Hull: 3D

Shields: 1D

Sensors:

Passive: 10/0D

Scan: 25/1D

Search: 40/1D+1

Focus: 1/1D+2

Capsule: Two barges, manufactured by Sienar Fleet Systems, are docked in the *Kuari Princess* hangar bay. They are similar in design to that company's *Lambda*-class shuttles. The barges operate on automatic droid pilot, their courses and schedules locked into the small craft's computer systems. They are used exclusively for transporting passengers to and from starports. Each barge has room for 40 passengers and includes a holding area for droids.



across Kaileel's face. His leg brushed up against Celia's back and she cringed at his touch.

"Get up, Celia."

A tear trickled down her cheek. Slowly, she turned and looked back at Adion. Her hand slipped unnoticeably toward her boot. Her fingers clamped around the handle of the knife.

"Get up," Adion repeated, grabbing her left arm, dragging her up so that their faces were barely centimeters apart. He shook his head, and for one brief moment Celia thought she detected a hint of regret. Then his blue eyes narrowed. Blinded by his own hatred, Adion never noticed the flash of steel until Celia slashed him across the arm.

His eyes grew wild as he cried out in pain. The blaster slipped from his hand and skittered across the floor as Celia lashed out again. Trying to protect himself from the attack, Adion lost his grip on her. She fled across the hangar and up the ramp of the barge.

As the hatch slid shut she could hear Adion shouting her name. "Celia, don't do this!"

Adventure Ideas

The characters are Rebel operatives who are supposed to meet with Chief Kaileel to receive a shipment of weapons at one of the *Kuari Princess*' ports of call. Arriving at the contact point, they discover Imperial Security Bureau agents have already exposed Chief Kaileel, confiscated the weapons and have been alerted to the meeting. The characters must escape from the Empire's agents, try to discover Kaileel's fate, and recover the weapons Kaileel was supposed to give them.

Seconds later, the barge lifted off the floor of the hangar bay. The small transport slipped quietly outside into the swirling Maelstrom Nebula.

From the viewport, Celia watched the *Kuari Princess* fade as the barge moved away from the luxury liner and deeper into the nebula.

"Stalemate, Chief," she nodded to herself. A bitterness crept into her voice. "Nobody wins this round."

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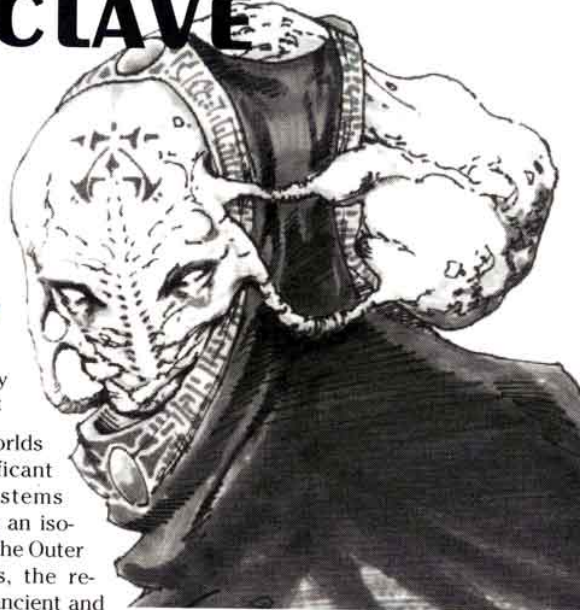
The Gree
Enclave

By Timothy
O'Brien

Illustrations by
Chris Gossett

The Gree worlds are an insignificant handful of systems tucked away in an isolated corner of the Outer Rim Territories, the remainder of an ancient and once highly advanced civilization. Few are certain how old this alien society is—the secret of Gree origins is lost even in the collective Gree memory. It flourished so long ago that Gree historians refer to the high point of their civilization as the “most ancient and forgotten days.”

The Gree themselves are a species of cephalopods, six-tentacled creatures with gray skin, large, sad-looking eyes, and tall foreheads supporting the immense brain sacs which flop oddly behind their head. Gree decorate their large foreheads with hieroglyphic tattoos which indicate rank and caste. No mouth is visible in their faces, although it is thought the multiple fleshy folds beneath the eyes serve the Grees' vocal communication needs. Since they evolved in the Type II atmosphere of their homeworld, Gree, these aliens are most comfortable in that atmosphere. They find Type I atmospheres



unpleasant, and often cover their communication folds with odd spungy devices when in such environments.

Much of their bodies are hidden beneath fanciful robes, although slots allow the head to poke through and provide means for tentacles to emerge. One pair of the Gree tentacles functions as fine manipulators, another as heavier grippers, and the third pair as ambulators, which help the Gree shuffle around like large, shambling mounds of flesh. Gree rarely grow greater than a meter and a half.

Thousands of years ago the Gree developed a technology which is extremely alien from anything known today. Much of the technology has been forgotten, although Gree can still manufacture and operate certain mundane items, and Gree Masters can operate the more mysterious Gree devices. Most Gree technology consists of devices which emit musical notes when used — instruments that must be “played” to be used properly. This technology is attuned to the Gree physiology — devices are operated using complex systems of levers, foot pedals and switches designed for manipulation by the suckers coating the underside of Gree tentacles. Conversely, Gree are extremely inept at using Imperial-standard technology from the rest of the galaxy.

Today the Gree are an apathetic species and their once unimaginably grand civilization has declined to near ruin. They are mostly concerned with maintaining what few technological wonders they still understand, and keeping their cultural identity pure and their technology safe from the outside galaxy.

Gree

Attribute Dice: 12D
DEXTERITY: 2D/3D
KNOWLEDGE: 2D/4D
MECHANICAL: 3D/5D
PERCEPTION: 1D/3D
STRENGTH: 1D/3D
TECHNICAL: 2D/5D

Special Skills:

Mechanical skills:

Device Operation: This skill allows Gree to manipulate their odd devices. Gree technology is different enough from Imperial-standard technology that a different skill must be used for Gree devices. *Device operation* is used for native Gree technical objects. Humans (and similar species) are unlikely to have this skill and Gree are only a little more likely to have developed Imperial-standard *Mechanical* skills. Humans using Gree devices and Gree using Imperial-standard devices suffer a +5 modifier to difficulty numbers.

Technical skills:

Device Repair: This skill allows Gree to repair their ancient devices. However, only masters of a device would have its corresponding repair skill. Even so, few masters excel at maintaining their deteriorating devices.

Story Factors:

Gree Masters: Gree place great value on individual skills. Those Gree most proficient at operating their ancient technology are known as “masters.” These masters are respected, honored and praised for their skills, and often take on students who study the ancient devices and learn to operate them.

Droid Stigma: Gree ignore and look down on droids, and consider droids and autonomous computers an unimportant technology. To the Gree, devices are to be mastered and manipulated — they shouldn’t be rolling around on their own, operating unsupervised. Gree don’t hate droids, but avoid interacting with them whenever possible.

Move: 5/7

Size: 0.8-1.2 meters

Gree History

Gree history is shrouded in mystery — even the Gree know little of their past, since their civilization’s greatest era ended well before the formation of the Old Republic. Much of Gree history is locked away, perfectly safe and recorded but inaccessible because the Gree themselves have lost mastery of their own information storage technology.

Most scholars believe the Gree species originated on their homeworld — itself called Gree — hundreds of thousands of years ago. After a long period of evolution, it is thought they developed some form of hyperspace technology and struck out to explore the stars.

The Gree found themselves far more advanced than most of the other civilizations of the era they encountered, few of whom had even entered an industrial age. The Gree alternately traded on and ruled some of these worlds, but developed a policy of not granting a developing civilization any technology they could not theoretically develop themselves. The size and reach of the Gree civilization is unknown, and few clues have been discovered to indicate whether their influence was galaxy-spanning or restricted to a few neighboring sectors.

Ancient Gree technology surpassed modern Imperial technology millennia ago. At the peak of their civilization the Gree had mastered stellar engineering, quanta-technology, and dimensional engineering. Technology made the Gree masters of their empire and became the basis for their society.

This was their downfall — the Gree came to value the ability to use the technology they had above the ability to improve it. Improvement of skill replaced creative ability, and the Gree civilization slowly slid into ruin. Devices were developed that allowed single operators to perform tasks that had previously taken dozens of experts. The creation of new devices became the province of a small section of the operator caste of highly trained experts — the ancient masters — who independently honed their skills and came to pass

those skills on only to a small number of students, who served long, arduous apprenticeships for the chance to become a master.

The masters were extremely protective of their knowledge. In time, the jealous masters allowed knowledge of the ancient devices to fade as masters died before passing the secrets of their most advanced tools to their students. The researcher and creator castes declined and vanished in this process. Gradually, the administration caste slowly gave up its power to the few remaining masters, the only ones left capable of operating the great and complex Gree devices.

The Gree population declined and specialized, aided by the development of life-extending devices. Over thousands of years even the fabulously engineered Gree devices began to fail, and though the maintenance of the artifacts was within their ability, repair was not. The Gree civilization slowly withdrew and pockets of Gree became cut off as the government and key devices failed. In time the Gree actively turned their back on the galaxy, seeking only to indulge in the technological achievements remaining near their homeworld.

Gree Society

Formerly, Gree society had four roughly equal castes. Crafters produced devices, and researchers created new technologies. Operator knew how to "play" the devices, and administrators functioned as the Gree government. Each caste had several subgroups or guilds responsible for individual functions within the caste. As their technology reached its apex, the operator caste came to dominate the other castes, and eventually eclipsed them. Now the researcher and crafter castes are no longer produced in the spawning beds — partially because they are no longer needed in the dying Gree civilization, and partly because it is believed the Gree have forgotten the proper bio-engineering processes to create those castes.

Each of the few worlds in the Gree Enclave are controlled by a grand council, with a representative from each of the local guilds attending. Grand councils meet at need, and answer to the grandmaster council on the Gree homeworld.

Guilds are the local regulating bodies of a caste subgroup; constructors, synthesors, textmasters, and so on. Each master on a planet holds a seat on the council of his guild. There are a limited number of seats on a guild council — if there are no empty seats there can be no new masters in that guild. A seat cannot be taken

from a living master, but a dead master's seat can be eliminated — a rare practice — preventing his senior assistants from gaining a master's position. Seats can be added if an assistant is noted as a profound expert in his field, but this means the guild council has almost certainly added a permanent seat. Some guilds always vote a seat to superior assistants, others hold the number of seats rigid.

The principal structures of the great Gree cities are cavernous halls, often operated by a guild and governed by a guildmaster. Gree halls are monolithic block-like buildings with several built-in habitats. Some Gree halls remain mostly functional and feature advanced food production and preparation systems, microclimate control, adjustable internal architecture, information systems, and powerful defensive devices. The most fully functional halls are under the control of the most influential guilds and masters. Lesser halls are governed by less important masters, and the hulks of non-functioning halls shelter the remaining Gree masses. Each hall needs a hallmaster to function. Hallmasters are fairly common. Satikan, a large city on Asation, has about a dozen hallmasters.

Gree Hierarchy

The masters dominate society. A master has a seat on the local guild of their profession, and need respect only the local guild council, guildmaster, and grandmasters. A guildmaster is the head of a local guild, while grandmasters are those recognized as the preeminent master of their field on a planet. A master is greatly respected by Gree, and expects to have preference over any lesser creature, Gree or not. Masters operate the ancient devices which keep Gree civilization functioning, and are given tribute in return for their services and knowledge. Most of the tribute given to the masters is in bartered goods. Gree masters have little use for credits.

Senior assistants are masters-in-waiting. Some have not yet achieved mastery in their particular field, but most have and are simply waiting for an empty guild seat. The seniors are professionals in their field, and perform much of the master's petty work or assist the master in operating devices.

Students serve and learn. Students are numerous, although few advance to senior assistant, spending much of their apprenticeship skulking about a master's workshop, aiding the senior assistants or performing menial tasks for the masters.

The Gree masses are the rabble of society. Most Gree never even try to enter the operator professions and are quite willing to perform

the minimal services needed to justify a master keeping them fed and clothed. The masses include those Gree with few skills, but who are still attached to a master by caste and guild. The Gree masses are listless and near mindless, having short attention spans and being prone to brief bursts of energy to acquire food or wealth. Some members of the masses find employment with Gree traders, putting their meager skills and low energy to some use.

Gree traders are considered part of the Gree masses, but are on the top level of the rabble. Traders aren't new to Gree society. They challenge the position of the masters in that they trade goods for goods, or goods for services of a lesser sort than the masters provide. Masters look down on this, but need the traders to bring them clients and goods from outside the Gree Enclave.

A relatively new and unusual kind of trader has recently developed. These *sevarks* translate and bargain with masters on behalf of alien clients, and generally assist visitors to the Gree Enclave as guides. Sevarks are still rare, although they cluster in those starports open to alien spacefarers. They command large fees for their services, but are often the only way outsiders can interact with the Gree masters. A sevark's expertise can cut the cost of dealing with a master significantly, and can make a visit to the Gree Enclave much safer, profitable and interesting.

Gree Economy

The Gree economy is different from the economy of many other worlds. Gree do not generally accept credits and prefer to trade goods or services. This applies to most transactions, from the most humble trader to the most lauded master. Gree goods vary widely. Some are individually made, others are made by crude industrial processes, and a few are precision crafted to extremely high standards.

The value of something to a Gree depends on a variety of things — how much the Gree needs what's offered in a trade, whether the Gree thinks she's making a profit, whether she likes your species, the time of the day, and how business has been lately.

Gree masters trade their services and expertise for a high price, generally considered tribute to the master for his importance and skill. Suggesting that the master is selling his services would be very rude. The Gree consider those who operate the ancient devices the most important members of their society. A Gree master considers herself a lord, while those seeking a master's services are seen as pleading peons (or "supplicants," the official term). These Gree

masters are to be respected and rewarded well for their services. Most Gree masters can expect to become very rich regardless of profession and without being called on to operate their devices every day. The price of a Gree master depends on his interest in your traded items or services, his mood and attitude, and his opinion of your species.

As a rough minimum, a Gree master requires an opening tribute of at least a hundred credits worth of goods, just to meet a supplicant. After complimenting the master on her skill and importance, a supplicant can broach the idea that the master might be able to grant a favor. The master usually declares that her time and skill are most valuable and that she should not be disturbed at this time. The supplicant may offer further tribute. The master often voices a variant on the "too busy and important" theme until a proper amount of goods or services has been offered. If the supplicant runs out of tribute or patience, he may withdraw to fetch more tribute, or just give up. Note that the tribute is not refundable, and that asking a master to return tribute is extremely rude. Savvy masters do not milk their supplicants dry, since poverty stricken supplicants have a harder time coming up with tribute in the future.

Masters of the more rare technology or large devices can expect thousands or tens of thousands of credits worth of tribute per service. Masters of lesser technologies expect less, only hundreds or thousands of credits worth. The more ordinary the tribute, the lower the value of the tribute; a hundred thousand credits of bantha hides isn't impressive, but a thousand credits worth of gems is. Unusual and exotic trade goods — alien art, odd delicacies, unusual devices — can cut the tribute considerably as almost all masters are collectors of one sort or another.

Gree Technology

The oldest Gree technology still in existence is the most advanced. It is assumed that the most ancient artifacts are examples of the absolute peak of Gree technology and that more recent technology was less advanced. This is difficult to confirm since no known devices from before the "most ancient and forgotten days" of Gree technology exist. This level of technology is as far beyond Imperial standard as Imperial technology is beyond feudal level, although the technology was never as widely spread and available to the average Gree as modern Imperial technology is to the average Imperial citizen.

What high technology remains is still very advanced. The Gree

have been known to synthesize simple technological devices on almost no notice, to produce large amounts of simple elements with little difficulty, and to quickly transport huge amounts of material across vast distances. What advanced levels the Gree have fallen from, and what prevents them from controlling a larger area of space given their current technology, is subject to debate.

In the modern era Gree technology is highly varied and queerly anachronistic. Many of the oldest devices are slowly breaking down and are not repaired or replaced. Gree society is so focused on these elder devices that they consider any other technology to be unimpressive. An ancient device capable of impressive feats apparently violating known physics might be the center of a shanty village where Gree warm their one-room shacks by burning dead plants. A Gree city might be lit by primitive electric lights and provide beast-drawn carriages for mass transit, but be defended by a powerful force field. A Gree master might operate his material synthesizer by torchlight.

Material synthesis is a basic Gree technology, and a comparatively less exalted mastery than other fields. Material synthesizers don't actually create matter, they reconfigure it. The process requantifies the nuclear structure of matter, allowing for the transformation of commonly available elements (silicon, carbon, or hydrogen, for example) into rare and valuable elements, isotopes, or chemicals. There is some entropy in the process and a small percentage of the original material is lost. Master synthesizers are relatively common — perhaps a dozen exist on each Gree world.

Another common mastery is that of the constructor. A master of a constructor device can assemble any sort of equipment the operator wishes using basic materials and an example of the item to be made. While considered useful by visitors to the Gree Enclave, the ability to produce less advanced, non-Gree technology is not highly valued (Gree cultural biases are often not what Humans might consider practical). Constructors are about as common as synthesizers, with whom they work closely. Master constructors produce several nearly identical copies of an item, but the traditional limit is seven (the Gree number system is based on 14, the number of suckers on two main sucker-pads). More than seven is a separate project, and much more expensive, perhaps twice as much — masters get bored with making the same item over and over. A third project would be very difficult to arrange and would require vast tribute, at least four times the value of the original favor.

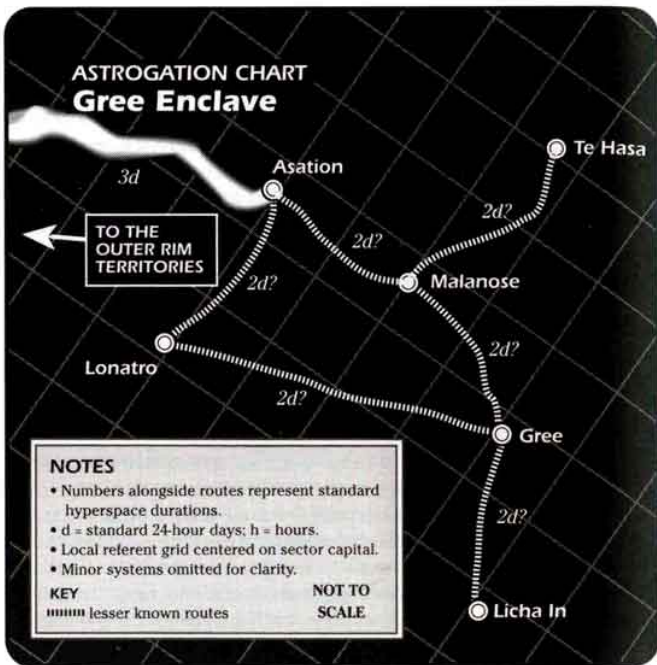
A vast amount of information has piled up over the hundreds of

millennia of Gree history. In previous eras the Gree libraries had decillions of files on each specialized subject — not only technology, but also philosophy, science, art, history, politics, xenology, and literature. Today these files exist in nearly indestructible memory rods, but have been stockpiled in storage, to allow easier access to the manuals of operation, the main interest of current Gree society. The nearest Gree equivalent to a sage is a textmaster, a master of the esoteric and arcane information systems and communication devices. There are fairly few textmasters — one in an average Gree city, three or four in a major city — and their services are mostly requested by other masters searching for scraps of documentation. Te Hasa has the greatest concentration of textmasters — perhaps a dozen — working in the Great Library of Manuals.

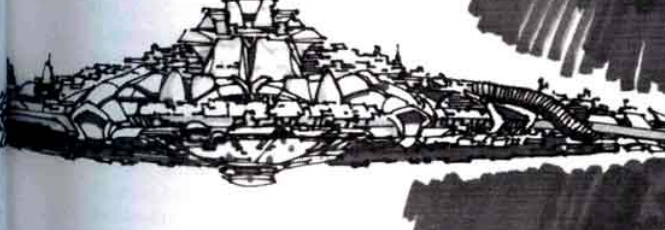
Lesser technology is available to the Gree through the constructors. A wide variety of lesser Gree devices (with functions equivalent to Imperial standard items) can be produced via a constructor. Additionally, any technological item of a less-advanced technology — from A-wing to blaster — can be roughly duplicated by a properly operated constructor as long as the master constructor has access to the proper materials and an example to work from. Most often, the item duplicated is a lesser Gree device of some sort — a blastrod or transport pod or other simple and common devices. Gree are duplicating Imperial standard devices more and more in recent years. Droids are a curious exception to this. Gree as a whole regard droids as an unworthy technology, since the existence of droids flies in the face of the Gree exaltation of personal expertise.

In theory, the constructors may be able to duplicate the achievements of the ancient Gree, if the master has the proper manual, material and example, but this thought has never occurred to the Gree due to a cultural block. The elder devices are individual works of art, and Gree masters find the concept of duplicating such artwork offensive in the extreme.

The hypergates are just one of these lost, artistic technologies the Gree refuse to duplicate. Hypergates were a significant development of Gree technology. Hypergates looked like freestanding accessways of some sort, usually a large door, arch, or gateway. When properly activated by a gatmaster they transported anyone crossing their threshold through hyperspace to its terminus point, another hypergate. The receiving hypergate could be elsewhere on the planet of origin, or on another planet entirely. Although starships were used for many centuries after the hypergates were developed, the gates made other forms of personal interplanetary travel obsolete.



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November, 1995

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Star Wars Adventure Journal • 51

The Gree hold a handful of worlds in their small Outer Rim enclave. Access to these worlds is strongly discouraged by the Gree who look down on the "low civilizations" of the galaxy. Members of similarly old species — Bith or Columi, for example — have less trouble gaining access to the Gree worlds. The Gree are slowly losing the ability to use the advanced technology of their ancestors, and are slowly opening their borders to trade. Those visiting the

tween the Gree worlds has various astrographical hazards, including nebulae and asteroid fields. The Gree do not reveal what routes their Baran takes to the other Gree worlds — if visitors knew the routes to jump to whatever worlds they pleased, the Baran would be obsolete and the Gree would have little control over travel in their enclave. At this time, the other Gree worlds do not have extensive starport facilities, and can often be dangerous to land on. Each system has its own port for the Rokak'k Baran's passenger launches.

The Rokak'k Baran

The Rokak'k Baran is the main method of travelling through the Gree Enclave. The vessel is more like a traveling city than a starship, a disk five kilometers in diameter. Nearly 5,000 Gree, including several masters, operate this vessel and make the Baran their permanent home.

The Gree dislike alien ships travelling through their worlds and expect all aliens to use the Baran. This ancient vessel keeps a regular schedule, visiting each world in the Gree circuit in turn. The Baran stops at Asation, Lonatro, Gree, Malanose, and Te Hasa — it stops for two days at each port, and takes two days to reach the next port. The Baran stops at Licha In for one day every year.

The tribute for transport on the Baran is fairly small for Gree, and only about 1,500 credits for aliens (round trip). Tribute is paid to Master Rokak'k, who runs this artifact ship with a team of lesser masters, senior assistants and students. Rokak'k's assistants collect the fee as visitors board the small launches used to bring passengers to the Baran. The Baran has cargo facilities — visitors can bring fairly large cargoes with them (up to 100 metric tons), but this requires additional tribute proportional to the size of cargo.

The Baran itself has no traditional sensors, weapons or defensive systems, although some of the masters on board have devices which approximate sensors, weapons and shields. The Karkak'k Marek is a sensor-like device, and the Varat'k Snarap is a powerful weapon, both used to aid the Baran community. The Varat'k Snarap is not a blaster weapon. It seems to generate a field that can be manipulated into wind-like energy bolts that rake across attacking ships. Fifteen years ago a pirate ship decided to raid the Baran while it was approaching Asation. The ship opened fire and inflicted minor damage on the Baran before Master Varat'k reached the Snarap. The pirate ship, a frigate, was immediately vaporized in a single sweep of energy issued from the Snarap. The patrolling Imperial cruiser that had been maneuvering to assist the Baran quickly halted and returned to its orbit around Asation.

The Rokak'k Baran

Craft: Gree Starship Artifact
Type: Unique transportation habitat
Scale: Capital
Length: 5,000 meters
Skill: Device operation: Rokak'k Baran
Crew: 5,000
Crew Skill: See Master Rokak'k
Passengers: 10,000
Cargo Capacity: 250,000 metric tons
Consumables: 6 months
Hyperdrive Multiplier: x3
Space: 5
Hull: 8D
Shields: 4D
Sensors:

Passive: 100/2D

Scan: 200/2D+2

Search: 400/3D

Focus: 10/3D+2

Weapons:

The Varat'k Snarap

Fire Arc: Turret

Crew: 1

Skill: Device operation: Varat'k Snarap

Fire Control: 4D

Space Range: 3-15/40/75

Damage: 10D

Rokak'k

Type: Gree Master

DEXTERITY 3D

Blastrod 4D

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Bureaucracy: Gree 5D, intimidation 4D+2, languages 4D, planetary systems: Gree Enclave 9D, willpower 7D

MECHANICAL 5D

Device operation: Rokak'k Baran 9D

PERCEPTION 2D+1

Bargain 5D, command 7D, persuasion 4D

STRENGTH 2D

TECHNICAL 3D

Device repair: Rokak'k Baran 5D+2

Force Points: 2

Character Points: 12

Move: 6

Equipment: Blastrod (4D), ceremonial whistle

Capsule: Rokak'k is the current master of the Baran — the main transport between Gree worlds — and is perhaps the most influential and respected master alive today. He commands the 5,000 Gree who help operate the immense starship, and personally oversees many of the ship's vital operations.

Rokak'k is more concerned with keeping the Baran's schedule than fretting about Gree guild politics and prestige. The Baran is the Gree's only means of travel within their enclave, and thus seems to be their only

way to transfer messages, news and trade goods. Rokak'k believes it is his personal duty to maintain the Baran's schedule to keep the Gree Enclave from slipping further into a decrepit and helpless state.

Rokak'k bustles everywhere he goes and has little time for dawdling with aliens. He shuffles around the Baran's corridors, overseeing lesser masters and students, vocalizing orders and operating the more important starship devices himself. Although his ship is often filled with aliens visiting the other Gree worlds for trade and tourism, Rokak'k tolerates them as a necessary evil. When guests aboard the Baran approach him, he often rudely huffs and shuffles along on his way.

Asation

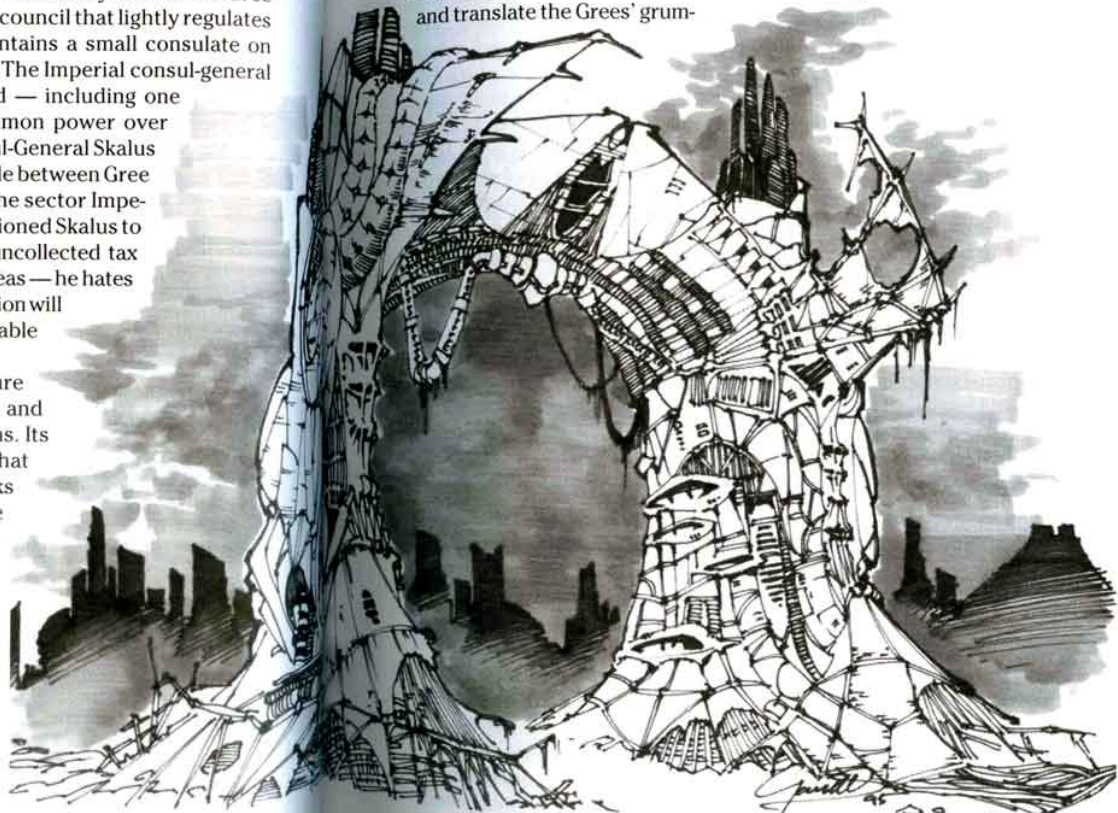
Asation is the main trading post and access system to the Gree Enclave. Asation is governed by a guild council that lightly regulates trade with non-Gree. The Empire maintains a small consulate on Gree, but has no governor or garrison. The Imperial consul-general has a small force under his command — including one Carrack cruiser — and wields uncommon power over Imperial activities in the system. Consul-General Skalus has so far maintained a low profile. Trade between Gree and non-Gree flows with little check. The sector Imperial Customs office has repeatedly petitioned Skalus to crack down on this trade and gather uncollected tax revenue. Skalus has been deaf to their pleas — he hates his latest assignment and hopes his inaction will get him a demotion to a more hospitable world.

Asation is a wet, gray, high pressure world with extensive slimy wetlands and jungle, and relatively primitive lifeforms. Its atmosphere is so thick and humid that most travelers prefer to use breath masks while outdoors. Rumors say that the Gree completely terraformed this formerly uninhabitable world millennia ago, populating it with lifeforms left over from Gree genetic experiments. Native Asation Gree are shorter than other Gree, and wear dark colored robes outside, but brighter robes indoors. Some of the Gree have become shrewd traders in their own right, but are rarely found on other worlds.

Satikan is the largest city on Asation,

housing the starport, consulate, guild chambers, several marketplaces, and thousands of alien traders — including Humans, Devaronians, Squibbs, Aggorons, and Nalroni. The starport is managed by a Gree master, and the main passenger port for transfer to the Rokak'k Baran is actually his guild hall. The rest of the city is seething with visitors and Gree engaged in trade.

Gree from all over the enclave are found here, pursuing trade in the interests of their guilds and masters. Satikan boasts the greatest concentration of sevarks in the Gree Enclave — most swarm the starport, seeking visitors to guide and merchants to trade with. These sevarks use odd translation devices which hang around their heads and translate the Grees' grum-



Adventure Idea: Corellia Antilles and the Ancient Khoz'zhak

The characters have come to Asation for some trading venture. After concluding their deal-making with a local Gree trader living on the edge of the city, they see a ragged woman stumble out of the forbidden jungle and collapse at their feet. The woman mumbles about "finding the Khoz'zhak," then passes out.

After the characters nurse her back to health, Corellia explains that she is an archaeologist who uncovered what she claims is an ancient Gree device (gamemasters can choose this device's nature—weapon, information recorder, miracle healer). She and her survey team crept into the jungle to explore the ruins, and found the device among a tribe of feral Gree living deep in the wilderness. As the group made a mad dash back to Satikan, they were attacked by savage jungle beasts and hostile Gree tribes. Corellia hid the device in an abandoned Gree structure two days from the city, then made her way back to the city. She has only just escaped from an expedition of Gree from Te Hasa who were intent on either stealing the device from Corellia or capturing her.

Corellia is determined to return to the ruins and retrieve the Khoz'zhak device and smuggle it off of Asation. But she has to do this before the Te Hasan Gree find her. These artifact-keepers are obsessed with finding the Khoz'zhak, too, but could be willing to kill Corellia to keep its location safe from foreigners.

Corellia offers the characters 7,500 credits to help her retrieve the artifact. To help them, she shares her data map with them,

bling language of low moans and gurgles into a tinny Basic voice. Although most sevarks still require bartered goods or services for their assistance as guides or intermediaries to the guilds, more and more are accepting credits to more easily trade with visitors.

Most trade in Satikan starport is in ordinary mercantile goods, but some trade with the Gree is in illegal goods — including contraband weapons and spice. Although the Gree do not keep slaves for apparent cultural reasons, they have not restricted the alien slave market in Satikan.

Trade in Gree artifacts is restricted to lower technology items: nothing any more advanced than the Imperial standard may be traded to non-Gree, although certain Gree have been known to illicitly trade

and her notes on the device and feral tribe of Gree. The characters can hide Corellia on their ship while they gather supplies for the jungle expedition.

At a dramatically appropriate moment, a contingent of Te Hasan Gree show up at the characters' ship (or hideout) searching for the archaeologist. The Te Hasans don't explain themselves, except to mention that the woman stole something valuable. They don't conduct a very thorough search. But if the characters haven't hidden her, these Gree might find Corellia and drag her off to some nameless fate — leaving the characters to find the artifact on their own, with only her notes and map to help them.

To retrieve the Khoz'zhak from its hiding place, the characters must venture into the forbidden jungle, fighting off voracious carnivores and savage Gree tribes. When they finally find the ruins where Corellia hid the device, they see that the artifact's hiding place has collapsed — to retrieve it, the characters must delve into an underground labyrinth of ancient Gree passages, complete with traps, unstable ceilings and dangerous obstacles. Eventually they find the artifact and trek out of the jungle.

But just as they emerge from the jungle with the Khoz'zhak, the characters are surrounded by Te Hasan Gree — they want to negotiate to acquire the device, since the characters have proven their right to ownership by retrieving this artifact. The characters can get up to 10,000 credits in trade goods for the device, and possibly a lesser Gree device as well. Under no circumstances will the Te Hasans allow the characters to leave with the Khoz'zhak.

higher level devices for other alien artifacts or foreign artwork. A contingent of Gree from Te Hasa keep an eye on the artifact trade, and are empowered to interfere with the trade of highly advanced devices.

Perhaps Asation's greatest monument of the "most ancient and forgotten days" is the Grand Hypergate located in the ruins of Satikan. The Grand Hypergate appears to be a circle of seven triumphal arches — the obelisk in the circle's center seems to be the gates' control device. The gatmaster of Asation doesn't know how to activate the hypergates, although he regularly tries in what seems to be a weekly ceremony. It is unknown how many, if any, of the gates are functional at all. The master knows the termination points for five gates — two to Gree, and one each to Te Hasa, Malanose and Licha In. The termination

points for the remaining two gates are unknown. The gatemaster has three senior assistants, each convinced they have deduced the secret of opening the gate, if they only had the chance to try. The gatemaster is the only Gree allowed to operate the control obelisk. It is said that when the Grand Hypergate is functional, the obelisk blasts a sonorous bass melody over the city. The hypergate has not sounded a note in several hundred years.

Satikan's starport and alien district sprawls along the edge of a large ruined city forbidden to non-Gree. The ruins are partially covered by thick jungle growth, and no paths leading into the area can be seen. When asked about this region, most Gree explain that it is the remains of a greater city which fell prey to some kind of disaster. Some Gree have been overheard saying that the jungle is filled with bioengineered predators who are somehow confined to the ruins. Others whisper of lost chemical vats and ancient devices which now belch out poisonous gases. Trespassers rarely return. Alien visitors generally stay in Satikan and do not venture far into the jungle ruins.

Asation

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Hot
Atmosphere: Type II (breath mask suggested)
Hydrosphere: Moist
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Wetlands, jungle
Length of Day: 18 standard hours
Length of Year: 380 local days
Sentient Species: Gree (N), Humans, various aliens
Starport: Standard
Population: 1 million Gree, 200,000 Humans, 500,000 aliens
Planet Function: Trading post, Gree Enclave entry world
Government: Guild council
Tech Level: Information
Major Exports: Raw material, lesser Gree artifacts
Major Imports: High technology

Lonatro

Lonatro supplies the Gree Enclave with food. Today the planet is mostly wilderness, but once the whole world was cultivated to feed the teeming Gree masses. Now only 10 percent of the planet is used for food production, with smaller preserves used for botanical gardens and an interplanetary zoo.

Lonatro's original purpose was to provide a secure food production facility in the Gree heartspace against the possibility of a large-scale disaster. The world has always unfailingly performed that function, but demand has steadily declined for centuries and the production facilities have been scaled back accordingly. Each Gree

world produces its own staple foods, of course, but Lonatro supplies the variety foods — especially meats and fruits.

The Lonatran Gardens would be the 778th wonder of the galaxy if known to the botanists of the Empire. The Gree cultivate samples of rare and otherwise extinct plant life to maintain the genetic line. Exotic botanical species like the Alderaanian flame-rose, the Duran feather lily and the silver koanwood are perpetuated here.

The Lonatran Zoo covers huge areas of Lonatro. Small colonies of land animals from species across the galaxy have been maintained here for millennia. Many species collected by the Gree have since vanished on their homeworlds, either from normal extinction or from sentient species pressure. Most of the species have evolved slightly through natural selection, but overall the zoo animals are the same as their original ancestors.

Lonatro's "starport" consists of a landing area for Baran passenger launches and a small alien quarter. Most Lonatro Gree are experts in caring for the various lifeforms cultivated in the gardens and zoo, and are proficient at manipulating the harvesting devices which slowly shuffle over the few croplands remaining. Lonatro sees little alien traffic, since it has little of value to the average free-trader. Some scholars, however, travel there to study Lonatro's ancient plants and animals.

Lonatro

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Moderate
Atmosphere: Type II (breath mask suggested)
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Mixed terraformed
Length of Day: 22 standard hours
Length of Year: 340 local days
Sentient Species: Gree (N)
Starport: Landing field
Population: 3 million
Planet Function: Agriculture
Government: Foodmaker guild
Tech Level: Atomic
Major Exports: Foodstuffs, rare plants
Major Imports: Rare botanical specimens

Gree

Gree is the mother world of the Gree. Little is known of it in the Empire, as very few non-Gree are allowed onto the planet. Even Captain Marrix, who made first contact with the Gree during his scout expeditions through this sector — and was apparently highly respected by the Gree — was only allowed to visit Gree once.

The Gree homeworld has a special place in Gree mythos. It is the center of their culture. Even those Gree who have never visited the system consider it a sacred, revered world. Visitors are allowed on Gree only at the pleasure of the guild council, often when conducting large-scale business on Asation is not acceptable to the Gree. It is rumored that Consul-General Skalus' predecessor was one of the handful of Imperials allowed on Gree when he conducted diplomatic talks regarding the annexation of Asation. Other visitors have been allowed for scholarly, trade, and diplomatic reasons, but at a seemingly capricious Gree whim.

Those few travelers to Gree report a harsh, barren planet, covered in wasteland and ruins. All visitors agree that they were required to land on the top of a huge slab of what resembled black grainy metal in the center of a sprawling city. The city splays out across a vast plain and has hundreds of gigantic halls and skyscraping towers of assorted designs and materials. There is no starport as such, and thus no facilities for repair or restocking ships, although supplies and fuel were made available by the hosting Gree when requested. Much of the city seems abandoned, but visitors were not allowed to explore on their own, and were warned that wandering off would be dangerous.

The Gree capital city seems to be the only inhabited one, although ruins of other gigantic cities are visible on approach. Even less is known about the regions outside the city, although the observed countryside is entirely bleak and appears to be uninhabitable wasteland. Visitors also report that the oddities of Gree technology are more visible here. Advanced technology equal or greater than Imperial standard is common, and highly advanced technology is in evidence, although anachronistic technology has been observed here as well.

Gree

Type: Terrestrial

Temperature: Temperate

Atmosphere: Type II (breath mask suggested)

Hydrosphere: Moist

Gravity: Standard

Terrain: Wasteland

Length of Day: 27 standard hours

Length of Year: 360 local days

Sentient Species: Gree (N)

Starport: Landing field

Population: 60 million

Planet Function: Homeworld

Government: Guild high council

Tech Level: Space

Malanose

Malanose was once a colony for the now extinct crafter and researcher castes. In the "most ancient and forgotten days" the planet was famous for its vast halls of Gree researching and constructing new and fantastic devices. While many new devices were distributed among other Gree worlds, prototypes and replicas were kept in the researcher vaults beneath Malanose city. Thousands of years later, after the last of the Gree researchers and crafters had died out, many common Gree devices began to run down, malfunction and fall apart. When the other Gree worlds realized how much ancient technology they were losing, Malanose's ancient vaults were emptied and all their portable artifacts were distributed among the handful of Gree worlds left.

However, the larger, immobile artifacts remained. The operators and would-be masters of these devices traveled to Malanose to study and run them. Today Malanose has a larger collection of functional large artifacts than the other Gree worlds. The remaining Malanosian cities are inhabited not because of their comfortable climate or fine buildings, but because they are the homes of the largest Gree artifacts.

Much of the Malanosian economy is based on tribute received from Gree masters traveling from other worlds to research and use these artifacts. Malanosian Gree are extremely protective of their monolithic devices — a bitter attitude left over from the days when the artifact vaults were emptied. Alien visitors to the Gree Enclave are not permitted to use or study these artifacts, although on extremely rare occasions a prestigious alien scholar has been allowed to briefly watch a particular artifact in operation.

Hypergates were among these immense artifacts. The hypergates on Malanose were maintained for thousands of years after those on other worlds had collapsed. Although the Malanosian hypergates may still be functional, the operating knowledge has been lost. Part of the planet's earlier economy was based on charging tolls on the gate traffic between Gree worlds. This economy disappeared with the collapse of the gate network, but the old fees are still remembered — if a working gate were found, the Malanosian Gree would be pleased to start accepting tolls again.

Malanose's most famous artifact device is the Totth'k Lotos. This device extends a patient's life by repairing the stresses and damages inflicted on the body in the course of normal living. Although it is reputed to youthen the body, it only maximizes the body's structural integrity — a fragile and ill 80 year-old Gree treated will become a healthy 80 year-old. Many Gree masters travel to Malanose to

partake of the Lotos' rejuvenating qualities.

The Lotos is a pool enclosed in a vaulted chamber, deep in the heart of a semi-functioning guild hall. An altar-like main control desk dominates one end of the chamber, and controls and gauges are irregularly spaced on the walls. The pool is filled with a warm, thick, slowly roiling green gel. The treatment appears to be a communal ritual in which supplicants of the same species are immersed in the pool while Master Totth'k and his assistants hurry from control to control, tensely manipulating them and carefully monitoring gauges and indicators. Most supplicants require an hour of immersion for the Lotos' treatment to work.

While this ancient device is attuned to the Gree physiology, some visitors to the Gree Enclave have been allowed immersion in the Lotos. These privileged aliens pay exorbitant tribute to Master Totth'k, even when the Lotos has unexpected effects on their alien physiology.

Game Notes: Aliens immersed in the Lotos must successfully

make a Very Difficult *stamina* roll to endure the treatment. A successful use cures chronic and acute illness and soothes the pains and stresses of age. A failed roll offers no benefits, and might result in a complication with unexpected side effects.

■ Malanose

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type II (breath mask suggested)
Hydrosphere: Moist
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Wetlands, jungle, mountains
Length of Day: 18 standard hours
Length of Year: 320 local days
Sentient Species: Gree
Starport: Landing field
Population: 150 million
Planet Function: Artifact world
Government: Local guilds
Tech Level: Atomic
Major Exports: Artifact information
Major Imports: Services, trade goods

Te Hasa

Te Hasa is the fabled hidden world of the Gree. It is a secret treasure house of ancient Gree technology and knowledge, housing hundreds of ancient, unique, and useless devices. For thousands of years the Gree have deposited devices they have forgotten how to use on Te Hasa. They are catalogued and warehoused here in the vague hope that one day an enterprising Gree will uncover the secrets of their use. Each year dozens of hopeful Gree make a pilgrimage to Te Hasa to study these artifacts. Occasionally a Gree stumbles across the correct activation sequences for a device, or decrypts the relevant instructions from the vast Library of Manuals, and is catapulted into the ranks of mastery for a long-forgotten device.

The Te Hasan Gree seem to be the closest the species has to a priesthood. These Gree wear dark colored robes ornamented and embroidered with hieroglyphs. Student-pilgrims wear their traditional bright robes, and are specially tattooed to indicate they studied on Te Hasa. The Te Hasan Gree are a closely knit community — they carefully guard their artifacts, but acknowledge that they need the help of other Gree to unlock the secret to their operation. Gree



who figure out how to operate an ancient device are often rewarded with the artifact — the Te Hasa Gree gain knowledge to operate duplicates of the device kept in their vaults.

Te Hasa was terraformed to be formidable to any alien species that might stumble across the planet. The native carnivores were bioengineered to be aggressive and deadly, their prey engineered to sustain the predators. The native desert was extended over large swaths of the surface by routing some of the planet's water to underground cisterns at oasis valleys and transporting the rest of the water to other Gree worlds.

The main storehouses of Te Hasa are located in or near the valley oasis. Some of these warehouses, the older ones, are carved into the rock, while newer ones were constructed as longhouses which seem like temples rising above the planet's surface. The artifacts judged most valuable or dangerous are transported to a restricted and secret warehouse deep in the planet's largest desert, called *Sik'ark'kuck*, "the Swallower."

Te Hasa

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type II (breath mask suggested)
Hydrosphere: Dry
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Desert, oasis, canyons
Length of Day: 29 standard hours
Length of Year: 296 local days
Sentient Species: Gree
Starport: Landing field
Population: 10,000
Planet Function: Hidden treasure world
Government: Librarian guild
Tech Level: Information

Licha In

Licha In was one of the first of the Gree home systems to degenerate. In the "most ancient and forgotten days" it was a major gateworld, a nexus for long-range hypergates. Trade moved briskly and several sentient species from across the galaxy set up merchant outposts on the world. The long-range gateways collapsed early in the degeneration of the Gree (thousands of years before the birth of the Old Republic), stranding the alien merchants who had come to Licha In. The few cyclopean hypergates still standing are non-functional. Some Lichan Gree masters believe the gates will activate under specific astronomical alignments and under the manipulation of a prophet gatemaster, but this theory has not yet been proven.

The native Gree have since become localized into competing city-

states. Lichan Gree have come to view their technology in a pseudo-mystical fashion, and see their masters as magician-priests of sorts. The masters use what few artifacts are left to rule their city-states. Occasionally masters incite their shambling armies of Gree masses to war with other city-states for food, resources or slaves. The Lichan Gree seldom leave their homeworld, although they have contact with other Gree during the Rokak'k Baran's annual one-day visit. Other Gree consider the Lichans to be rather backward examples of their culture — they're often mentioned as examples of the degeneration of Gree civilization.

Although they are considered lower than other Gree, the the Lichan Gree believe they are the rightful rulers of the "lesser" species on Licha In — the ancestors of the alien traders who came here millennia ago. Roaming aliens are enslaved and used as primitive work forces to build Gree stronghold-cities and harvest crops. Aliens visiting the Gree Enclave are discouraged from visiting Licha In without a Gree escort. Unauthorized visitors are often mistaken for escaped slaves and are either executed or put back to work.

A handful of alien city-states exist far from the Gree cities. These primitives included Devaronians, Duros, Humans and near-Humans.

Adventure Idea: Stranded on Licha In

The characters are somehow transported to Licha In. They might arrive through an astrogation or hyperdrive error, might have walked through an unknown yet active hypergate on another Gree world, or might have arrived on the Baran during one its annual stop there. The only way off Licha In is the Baran, which comes by once every year — and it just left.

Licha In is barbaric in many ways and the characters find everyday life here is an adventure. Many of the aliens they encounter are familiar but have developed a little differently, the dialects are hard to understand, the Gree are even weirder and harder to approach, and their credits are worthless. The characters could even be mistaken for escaped alien slaves and might be captured and hauled off to labor in one of the Gree city-states. The characters could spend their time adventuring through the exotic barbarian-science society, or they could try to find a functioning hypergate off the planet (although where the hypergate actually sends them is a different question).

They have long since formed and broken alliances, become friends and enemies, fought wars, founded a variety of political structures and cycled through technological levels. When any alien city-state advances far enough that the Gree masters consider them a threat, those masters use their ancient war devices and their shambling armies to conquer the city and enslave the aliens there.

Licha In

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type I
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Island continents, mountains, plains, forests
Length of Day: 24 standard hours
Length of Year: 364 local days
Sentient Species: Gree, Humans, various aliens
Starport: Landing field
Population: 500 million
Planet Function: Degenerated civilization
Government: Local city-states
Tech Level: Feudal

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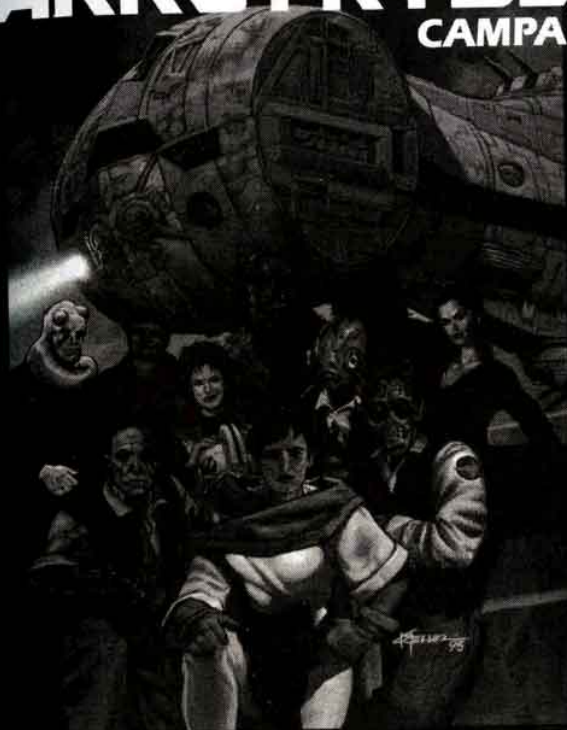
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By Patricia A. Jackson

Illustrated by Chris Gossett

Twin tridents of lightning surged across the low-lying skies of Iscera. The congested atmosphere bled through in clotted tones of red and orange, as volatile gases reacted with the charged violence of the storm. Torrential gusts of wind and wet snow buffeted the hull of the *Prodigal*, layering the freighter with a secondary armor plate of thick ice. Bearing no exterior signature or running lights, the YT-1300 sat alone on an exposed pad, isolated from the main traffic of the Isцерian spaceport.

Lightning briefly illuminated the interior of the *Prodigal's* bridge. Fable Astin sat tentatively, contemplating the storm. Exhausted and sickened, the young Jedi ran her fingers through the matted tangle of her hair, draping the unruly mane over her shoulders. The tapered waistline of her flight jacket accentuated her slender waist and the lengthy lines of her legs and thighs. She winced irritably,

UHL EHARL KHOEHNG

shifting position to relieve the pinch of her gray pirate leggings, which had gathered in the backs of her knees. The slight motion rattled the heavy blaster at her hip and caused the lightsaber to fall into the cushion beside her.

Fable flipped the comm switch for the tenth time, waiting for the computer to bring up the stored message from the ship's logs. The featureless image emerged from the mini-holovid, realigning itself into the face and upper torso of a woman. Prematurely gray with the burden of command, auburn hair curled at the shoulders of her uniform, which bore the insignia of a Rebel Alliance officer. "Greetings Captain Astin and to your Harrier Infiltration team. This is Commander Beatonn of the Rebel frigate, *V'nuk'rk*." Beatonn paused briefly, interrupted by the distant blare of a proximity alarm. "Your objective is very clear, captain. The Empire has begun construction on a communications bunker on Nysza III. Your orders are to destroy the bunker before it can be completed. Good luck, captain, and may the Force be with you." The holo-communication ended amid static discharge and interference.

Fable toggled the erasure switch, deleting the transmission. It was a duty long overdue. Nearly 17 hours had passed since the completion of their objective, which had resulted in the untimely death of her technical officer, Arecelis Acosta. "Did you know that he was half Human?"

"I'd heard rumors," Deke Holman replied. The auxiliary control lights cast a surreal aura over his handsome but grim face and the shock of fiery, red hair crowning his cumbersome head. A Socorran, he was dark-skinned and rugged, wearing the traditional gold hoop in his left ear lobe. Still damp from their misadventure on Nysza III, he leaned forward and stared into the holographic etching secured on the viewscreen. He recognized his own stout figure, framed on each side by his companions. On the right, his captain and friend, Fable Astin, smiled as he tickled her neck. To the left, Arecelis Acosta was playfully feigning a punch.

The Coynite was nearly 2.2 meters tall, powerfully built at the chest and shoulders. His body was covered with a fine blanket of blue-black fur, which was intricately braided around his neck and ears. In the etching, his thick fingers grasped at Deke's forearm, easily making the circumference of his flesh. Arecelis' other hand was balled into a fist as the Coynite feigned an incoming punch.

Deke shook his head, thoughtfully pursing his thick lips. "I'm really going to miss him." He sniffed disdainfully, slumping against the back of the acceleration chair. "No wonder there was no security in that bunker. Who would have thought a Jedi would be there?" Rubbing his forehead, he sighed, "At least you were with us."

"Didn't do Arecelis much good," Fable scoffed. Her body was bruised from her momentary encounter with Vialco, a dark Jedi assigned to the garrison. One feint and one block was all he needed to launch her across the width of the construction corridor. Trembling with rage, all Fable could do was stare up at him, as his mocking laughter echoed through the empty ceiling tiles above the complex. Her limited skills were no challenge to him and she had undermined herself by drawing her lightsaber in anger, opening herself to the dark side.

"Smells like a gundark crawled into the nav computer and died. It reeks in here!" The exasperated Jedi threw her gloves onto the console, acutely aware of the stench permeating the bridge. During their escape from the bunker, they had been forced to dive into a construction tunnel full of stagnant water. The scent was prolific. "We need to get out of here. Is there a bar or something in town?"

"This is pretty much a dry world, capt'n," Deke replied. "But when

Fable Astin



Type: Young Jedi

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 5D, dodge 4D+2, lightsaber 6D, running 4D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Alien species 3D, languages 3D, planetary systems 3D+1, survival 3D, willpower 4D+1

MECHANICAL 2D

Astrigation 3D, space transports 5D+1, starship shields 3D+1

PERCEPTION 4D

Command 6D, search 5D+1, sneak 5D+1

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 3D+2, climbing/jumping 3D, stamina 3D

TECHNICAL 2D

Blaster repair 2D+1, first aid 2D+1, security 3D+2

Special Abilities:

Force Skills: Control 2D+1, Sense 3D+2, Alter 1D+2

Control: Control pain, enhance attribute

Sense: Combat sense, life detection, life sense, receptive telepathy, sense Force

Control and Sense: Lightsaber combat, projective telepathy

This character is Force Sensitive.

Force Points: 4

Dark Side Points: 1

Character Points: 7

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, heavy blaster pistol (5D), lightsaber (5D), 300 credits

Capsule: Fable Astin serves as one of the youngest infiltration operatives in the Rebel Alliance. Her youth and motivation has made her an invaluable resource, particularly when coupled with her fledgling Jedi skills. However, at 19, Fable remains impetuous and overtly reckless. While this is something of an asset in her occupation, it is a great distraction for the young Jedi. Fable respects the code of the Jedi, but is often misled by the accessibility of the dark side. Overconfident and undisciplined, she regularly flirts with disaster because of her need to compensate for the tragedy in her life.

Fable is quite tall, making her slender figure intimidating, even in rough company. She often hides her brooding eyes beneath the strands of red hair which frame her severe face.

I went to pick up those rations, I passed a little theater on the boulevard. Evidently, it's the last show before the winter break and the owners are giving away tickets."

"Did you get any?"

"Didn't have much of a choice. The kid nearly knocked me down trying to give the last two away."

"What's it called?"

Posing valiantly, Deke stood up and put his hand over his chest. In a deep voice, he declared, "For the Want of an Empire."

"Wonderful," Fable grumbled, leading the way out of the flight cabin. "I can't wait to see this."



Against the elaborate backdrop of the stage, the clashing of swords echoed from the inner recesses of the set. The dual ended abruptly, with the edge of one prop sword slicing cleanly through the other, detonating the small charge inside to provide the dramatic effect of a lightsaber exploding through metal. Panting and fatigued, the actors separated, retreating to the far edges of the mock cave.

Fable focused on the mesmerizing movements of the lead actor. A subtle trick in the theater lighting enhanced the malevolence of his character, a tragic hero bent on destroying his one-time friend and companion. Captivated by the last moments of the scene, she sat on the edge of her seat, waiting for him to speak.

The audience gasped as the sword sliced the air only millimeters from one actor's face, feigning the dreaded death blow. As his rival died at his feet, the hero turned toward the audience. "Come my good fellows," he announced in a clear, resonating tone, "let us part this sad scene, and through our good company, make the journey shorter." The curtain closed as the stage hands emerged to reset for the final act.

Fable sat back in her chair. "Did you see that?" She covered her mouth, laughing anxiously into her hand. "His technique is almost flawless." Scanning the glossy holo-program, she whispered, "What's his name?"

"Jaalib Brandl."

"I want to meet him." Turning on the wary Socorran, she squeezed his knees tightly. "You speak Iscerian, don't you? Talk to the owner."

Grumbling under his breath, Deke moved away from his seat and toward the aisle. "I'll see what I can do."

Through most of the final act, Fable sat with the actor's image across her lap, comparing the picture with every minute expression of his youthful, almost adolescent face. The Force was with him and she felt it, moving through the audience with a tangible presence.

She marveled at the dangerous parallel dimensions of reality and the play, where a young councilman began a slow rise into the inner circles of high government, only to discover corruption in every facet of its existence. In act two, he initiated a campaign to end the deterioration of the bureaucracy. But as his vision expanded in the third act, it became a ruthless autocracy, bent on exterminating its enemies and all who opposed it.

For the final scene, the hero stood alone in a splintered universe of his creation, devoid of hope, life, family, or friends. In a final affirmation, gazing out over the audience, he briefly met her eyes and held her captive. On his dying breath, he gasped, "For the want of an empire ... all humanity was lost."

Collapsing to the stage floor, the hero perished amid a thunderous echo of applause. Fable was one of the first to stand, eagerly applauding the performance, and joined the audience's shouted accolades as the minor characters returned to the stage to take their bows. From the side wall, she spotted Deke waving for her to join him in the aisle.

"Come on," Deke whispered, leading her out of a side door. "Most of the actors stay and hobnob with the audience; but a stage hand told me that Brandl's already heading back to his quarters."

"There he is!" Fable shouted, as the door slammed shut behind them. "That's him!" she gushed, recognizing the actor's costume robes. "Brandl!" she shouted, sliding down the icy stairwell. "Jaalib Brandl?"

The actor hesitated as the young woman scampered across the ice toward him. She was moving too rapidly for the footing, sliding precariously with every stride. Dropping his bag, Jaalib stepped forward as her legs slipped from beneath her, anchoring the young woman in his arms. "That was quite an entrance," he teased.

"That was quite a performance!" Fable countered. Flushing crimson with embarrassment, she stepped away from him and laughed nervously, covering her reaction with a smile. "Where did you learn to use a sword like that?"

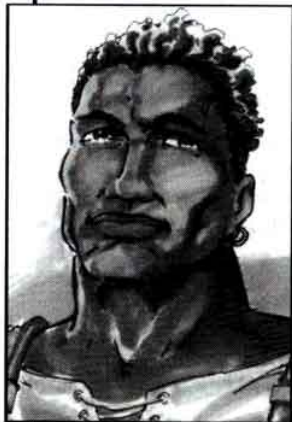
"An actor needs a variety of exotic skills," Jaalib replied with a grin. "It's the only way to insure longevity in this profession." Retrieving his bag, he whispered, "Now if you'll excuse me, I have a long flight ahead of me tomorrow. Good night, Miss ... Miss ..."

"Fable. Fable Astin."

"Good night, Miss Astin." His smile deepened. "Fable."

"Good night," Fable sighed, watching the outline of his robes vanish in the shadows of the theater courtyard. Teeth chattering,

Deke Holman



Type: Socorran Mercenary
DEXTERITY 3D+1
 Blaster 5D, dodge 4D+1, grenade 4D, melee combat 3D+2
KNOWLEDGE 2D+1
 Alien species 4D, languages 4D+2, planetary systems 5D+1, streetwise 4D
MECHANICAL 3D+2
 Astrogation 5D, sensors 4D, space transports 5D+2, starship gunnery 4D, starship shields 4D
PERCEPTION 3D
 Con 3D+2, gambling 4D+2, persuasion 3D+2, search 5D
STRENGTH 3D
 Brawling 5D, climbing/jumping 4D, lifting 4D+2
TECHNICAL 2D+2
 Blaster repair 3D+1, computer programming/repair 5D+2, first aid 3D, space transport repair 4D+1
Force Points: 2

Character Points: 5**Move:** 10

Equipment: Comlink, heavy blaster pistol (5D), YT-1300 light freighter, 250 credits

Capsule: Deke Holman is a 45-year old thrill-seeker. As a young man, he made good on his Socorran heritage and left his home-world early to pursue an exciting career as a pirate. Solemn and reflective, Deke appears and generally behaves as if he were much older than his years. When smuggling failed to satisfy his dangerous ambitions, he went mercenary and fought in several historic confrontations against the Empire before officially joining the Rebel Alliance.

she stared into the darkness for a long moment.

"Come on, Fable!" Deke complained. "It's freezing out here. Let's get back to the ship."



The pressure in Fable's lungs was building rapidly. Trapped by stormtroopers in the construction tube, she was desperate to find a quick escape for her infiltration team. They were 15 minutes off schedule with a load of thermal detonators on their backs, each timed to go off in less than 40 minutes, regardless of their safety. If

they did not reach the objective site soon, no one would be alive to complete their mission.

Fable reached in front of her, tapping Arcelis on the shoulder. As the Coynite turned, his features began to distend and shift, blending into the harsh, angular jaw of Vialco, the dark Jedi they would later encounter in the command station. "Had you given yourself to the passion, he might still be alive," he taunted. "Your feelings can do little for him now."

Yanking the lightsaber from her belt, Fable lunged savagely. She faked a left feint, deftly bringing the lightsaber down and across to the right.

"That's it, girl! Anger is the control. Your fear is the power. And your fear is great, little one." His voice reverberated through the darkness, washing over her consciousness. "You have taken your first small steps toward the ultimate ecstasy. Now awake and open yourself to the true power."

He's in my room! Fable thought frantically, struggling with the nightmare. The lightsaber flared in her grip, burning her hand, and she dropped it to the floor. As the weapon clanked against the deck plates, Fable woke frantically to find herself standing in the center of her cabin. She recoiled in horror when she saw her seared palm. Dropping to the floor, Fable curled into a fetal ball on the floor and rocked from side to side, desperate to quell the pain. The young Jedi called on the power of the Force to control the injury; but the throbbing wound's anger did not subside, nor did she feel the sense of inner peace that came with the summoning of the Force.

Fumbling with the light control beside her bunk, Fable cradled her injured hand against her. She snatched the lightsaber from the deck and threw it into the mirror, shattering glass fragments across the small personal gear locker. Stumbling to the sink unit, she tripped the sensor, stifling a scream as the jets blew cool, moist air over the cauterized wound. As the soothing jets blew over her and her tears, she slumped to the floor. In one moment of grief, one step from the path of light, she had changed the course of her future, betraying herself, her love of the Jedi, and the teachings of her mother.

On the table beside her bunk, the holo-image of her mother grinned inanely at her. In the fragmented remains of the mirror, Fable saw that same face, younger and smoother; but there was something noticeably sinister about the features — her features.

"Fable!" She heard the frantic pitch in Deke's voice as the Socorran hurried through the cabin hatch. Pulling herself up from the floor,

she slowly moved along with him as he guided her to the bunk. "What happened?" he gasped, examining the ugly wound carved into her flesh.

"It was him," Fable whispered. "He was here."

"Who?" the Socorran demanded, wrapping the burn in sterile gauze.

"Vialco. At least that's what he calls himself." She winced as the burn pulled at the tender skin. "He's coming for me. To turn me to the dark side. And there's nothing I can do to stop him!"

Ignorant of the Jedi's true troubles, Deke snarled, "You know I'll go down with you, capt'n. What do you need me to do?"

Hiding her frightened face beneath the shadow of her long hair, she whispered, "Deke, I need you to run a background check on Jaalib Brandl. Do you have access to the civilian database?"

"Having access and getting access is the same thing to me. But how's that going to help, Fable?"

"Please Deke, I can't explain it right now," she whispered, perceiving the jealous glint in his eyes.

Deke nodded, rising to his feet. "I'm on it."

Heavy snow blanketed the exterior lots of the Iscera spaceport, throwing layer upon downy layer over the hulls of the freighters docked in the outer arena. The steady flow of large, cumbersome flakes cut visibility nearly in half, hampering Fable's efforts to see through the viewscreen into the internal docking bays nearby. "What have you found?" she asked, sitting down in the co-pilot's chair. A cup of soup warmed her good hand, bringing a small measure of strength to her exhausted body.

"Nothing out of the ordinary," Deke sighed. Staring into the terminal, he watched the information scroll across the screen. "The civilian logs don't show very much. Jaalib Brandl, 17 years old, orphaned at age 12. No known relatives within the Imperial sectors. Lived with a family friend, Otias Atori, and then left to pursue a career in theater. There were no records of him even existing before the age of 12." He sat back in the chair. "That's when I got suspicious."

"Suspicious?" Fable probed. "Why?"

"The Imperials have a sneaky practice of creating people, swapping records to implant operatives among the populace. The only way to trace them is through their records. If you look hard enough, every once in a while," he smirked confidently, "you'll find a hole."

"Like no records before a certain age?"

"Uh-huh. So I started cross-referencing in that Imperial database

we intercepted. Only I forgot to use his first name. Look what came up." The image of an older man appeared on the screen. There was a brooding, sinister edge to his handsome face, a piercing glare and an arrogant smirk that gave the impression that he was posing. "See any family resemblance?"

"Lord Adalric Brandl," Fable read the information. "An actor?"

"And this was his biggest and best role yet." Deke tapped the control panel. A restricted information bar flashed across the screen as he accessed the code.

Fable set her cup aside, afraid that her trembling hands might spill the hot liquid into her lap. "An Imperial Inquisitor? Brandl's father is a Jedi-killer?"

"The Alliance has official notices about this maniac all over the network. Avoid at all costs, executive order 2354. This guy was bad news."

"Was?"

"Evidently Brandl went rogue and took off, prompting a galaxy-wide manhunt. They found him," Deke shuddered, "following a string of corpses that he left from one sector to the next. And when they finally caught him, he went berserk and committed suicide." The status line scrolled over the image of Brandl's face, flashing the word "deceased" across the screen.

"What's that?" Fable pointed to the corner of the terminal.

"It's an Imperial code about notifying next of kin. This one means the body was never recovered."

"Never recovered? Never recovered by the family or never found?"

"Can't tell you, capt'n. Wasn't there."

Fable strummed her fingers lightly against her thigh, feeling the lightsaber's slight weight against her hip.

"I've seen that look before," Deke grumbled pensively. Fumbling with the control panel, he reached into the mass confusion of the circuitry boards beneath the shield generator controls and retrieved a dusty bottle of Socorran raava. "Here," he gave it to her. Then removing the earring from his lobe, he handed the golden hoop to her as well. "I noticed the port manager is Socorran. Give him the earring and tell him you need a ship. Then give him the bottle and let him know that he can discuss the terms with me."

Fable wiped at her cheek, feeling the moisture beneath her fingertips. "You're a good friend, Deke."

"A thief? A liar? A pawn? Are these not the greatest virtues of any good king?"

"That's what they tell me," he sighed, propping his legs against the console. "Now go on," he fussed, "before I change my mind."

Quietly, Fable walked into the corridor beyond the flight bridge. "Fable?" Deke whispered, as she hesitated, lingering beneath the bulkhead. "If Brandl's alive, he's got nothing to lose."

"At this point, Deke, neither do I."



The hyperdrive cue pulsed, startling Fable to consciousness. She rubbed at the bruise swelling on her forehead where she had knocked it soundly against the canopy of the X-wing. "No bad dreams?" she sighed with a half smile. From above, an abrupt movement distracted her and before she could utter one sound, the body of Arcelis came crashing through the cockpit shield, bringing the icy grasp of space. As the air was drawn from her lungs, Vialco stood over her, straddling the cockpit and mocking her with his deep, throaty laughter.

Fable shrieked, slapping hysterically at the mutilated corpse cradled in her lap; but there was nothing there. Frantically craning her neck to get a full view of the outside canopy, she saw nothing but the brilliant lines and colors of hyperspace, as they began to retract into the tell-tale pinpoints of distant planets and stars. Reeling from the traumatic nightmare, she collapsed against the acceleration chair.

The emerald-gold face of Trulalis emerged before her as the X-wing materialized from hyperspace. Quickly engaging the engines, she braced for the atmospheric entry. Scanning her sensors, Fable checked the data screens, which were inundated with immediate life sign readings. The sensors began tracing the ion signature, automatically pinpointing the trace of a light shuttle. Setting a similar course, she eventually landed outside the perimeter of a small settlement.

From the ground, Trulalis was breathtaking and majestic. Fable found herself captivated by the noble black trees whose leaves radiated a green hue when struck by direct sunlight. With massive, arching branches, the trees formed a shaded corridor above the overgrown trail. Enjoying the quiet walk, Fable rechecked her sensor information, confirming that the life signs she had received were mostly animal in nature. The settlement structures the computer had uncovered were void of any life. As she came closer, it was apparent why.

Strewn about the outskirts of the common, she found the remains of stormtrooper armor. There were no bodies inside, but the unmistakable blast scoring across the chests were disturbing evidence of a failed retaliation against the Empire, as were the skeletal remains of their victims, which were half-buried in the loose top soil nearby. At the settlement gates, she stared into the desolate streets where wreckage and debris were scattered from one end of the broad avenue to the next.

The body of a small bantha lay in the doorway of a narrow shelter. Shrunken and thin, its thick hide had been preserved by the nurturing Trulalis soil. Manicured gardens had gone to seed, spreading erratically over the front lawns and the dilapidated remains of the abandoned cottages. In one shelter, Fable found the transport shuttle, which had been assigned to Jaalib — she knew she was on the right track.

Trulalis

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Forests, grasslands, lakes, mountains and oceans
Length of Day: 23 standard hours
Length of Year: 310 local days
Sapient Species: Human (N)
Starport: Landing field
Population: 1 million
Planet Function: Homeworld, theatrical training/entertainment
Government: Participatory democracy
Tech Level: Information (remains largely agricultural and communal)
Major Exports: Mid technology, entertainers
Major Imports: None

Capsule: While the system's core planets, Issor and Cadezia, have become thriving centers of technology and commerce, Trulalis remains isolated and remote. Sanctioned as a low-tech world, Trulalis is protected by Issori laws forbidding middle or high technology, which is generally shunned by the communal inhabitants. However, the planet is not closely monitored and many infractions go unmentioned.

In the Republic's golden age, before the Clone Wars, Trulalis boasted one of the finest schools of liberal arts education. Lavish theater productions, dramatic, tragic performances, and other fine arts made this now rural, backwater world a thriving center of cultural literacy. All that remains now is the theater itself, with a few dusty classrooms, a dilapidated stage, and a few holos advertising faded glory.

The only true survivor of the Imperial onslaught sat in the center of the settlement. Its shadow stood over her in silent testament of its endurance. Fable stared up and up, until her eyes could take in the enormity of the ancient theater. Blast scoring had scarred the pristine limestone obelisk, leaving a blemish of tragedy etched into the elaborate design. Hemmed in by stone fences and gates, the gardens were immaculately trimmed and manicured, tapered back from the winding garden paths, which wound and curved into the enormous entrance. Two stone pillars framed the central portal, casting grotesque, disembodied shadows over the archway.

Mustering her courage, she stepped into the immense antechamber. Her eyes took in the magnificence of tapestries and display cases, each showing the relics of prop swords, ornate jewelry, and costumes used in the various stage productions. She heard voices echoing from the right wing and followed instinctively, attuned to the familiar strength of Jaalib's voice.

"You are a thief, a liar, and a pawn!" Jaalib spat in a frantic voice. Fable hesitated in the doorway, staring across the darkened auditorium.

"A thief? A liar? A pawn?" another voice commented. "Are these not the greatest virtues of any good king?"

"Virtue —" Jaalib broke off, his face contorted in an uncharacteristic mask of rage.

"Your concentration is off," the stranger whispered. "Perhaps we're moving too quickly."

"No, it's me!" The despondent sound of his voice echoed in the dusty spaces above the stage. "I keep seeing you, hearing you play the part and then," he stumbled, "I see my own clumsy attempts." Anxiously brushing a hand through his dark hair, he managed a weak smile. "Perfection is never easy, Father, especially when it's your perfection."

From his throne, in the shadowed backset of the stage, Adalric Brandl chuckled softly. The rustling of his cumbersome, black robes sent whispering vibrations over the front rows as he stepped down from the raised dais. "Of all the tragedies ever conceived, *Uhl Eharl Khoehng* is the greatest," Brandl said with conviction. "The role of the Edjian-Prince is the most difficult and the actor who plays it," he paused, "is assured greatness."

"How old were you? The first time you performed it?"

"I was nearly 30 before Otias would even permit me to read for the part." Brandl snorted with warm pleasure. "You are a young man, Jaalib." Placing a comforting hand on Jaalib's shoulders, he whis-

pered, "You were born for this part. Give yourself time to grow into it."

Recognizing Brandl's profile, Fable slowly walked down the center aisle toward the stage. Hands crossed shamefully in front of her, she met Brandl's curious eyes as his gaze fell over her. "Lord Brandl ... " she faltered, staring into the shadows.

"Fable!" Jaalib hissed. Jumping down from the platform, he charged her, robes billowing from his shoulders. "What are you doing here?"

Fable could hear his voice, but only distantly. She could feel the harsh pinch of his fingers on her wrists, but felt no pain. Caught in Brandl's intense gaze, she could not move. His presence was overpowering and Fable found herself deeply intrigued by the somber charm and magnificence of this strange man, himself a tragic hero, trapped in the torrent of some inconceivable drama.

Here eyes cautiously traced the noble angle of his forehead and brow, noting the gentle curvature of his nose, his mouth, and the regal set of his chin. Faint laugh lines framed thin, pale lips, fading into the surrounding tautness of his cheekbones. Waves of black hair betrayed streaks of silver running through the closely cropped sides, shadowing Brandl's solemn face. At his right temple, obtuse veins of scar tissue erupted from the otherwise smooth skin, winding a cruel path around the outer edges of his eye. Severely traumatized, the eye itself was damaged, sheathed in the pupilless, irisless remains of a clear, yellowed orb.

"Fable!" Jaalib shouted, shaking her.

"Jaalib," Brandl whispered, "mind your manners. An audience, even an audience of one, is always to be treasured and respected."

Glaring at her, Jaalib hissed, "You shouldn't have come here!"

Fable glanced at him briefly and then moved away, refusing to acknowledge that she agreed with him.

"An admirer, Jaalib?"

"Yes, Father, but she was just leaving." Before Jaalib could herd her back up the aisle, he felt the light restraint of his father's hands.

Drawn to the innocence of the young woman's frightened eyes, Brandl closed the distance between them. With hesitation, he caressed Fable's smooth cheek, gently lifting her chin to raise her eyes. Astonished by the strength in her gaze, Brandl smiled pleasantly. "There is no frailty here," he whispered with a narcissistic grin. His eyes narrowed dubiously as he took her bandaged hand,

"Losing is not an option ... it's a conscious decision."

warming her cold fingers in the warmth of his touch. "The dark side beckons with the promise of easy gain; but there is always a price, always a tribute to its passion."

Fable swallowed, struggling to find her voice. "I ... I," she stammered, "Lord Brandl, I need you ... to ..."

"Weigh your words carefully, young woman, do not waste time counting them." Turning to Jaalib, he gently pressed her toward his son. "Jaalib, take our guest to a comfortable room. She will stay the night."

Shoulders hunched in rage, Jaalib led Fable up the wide aisle, leading her out of the grand hall auditorium.



An excruciating cramp in her leg brought Fable to consciousness. She bolted frantically from the bed, scanning the shadows for signs of movement. Taking her lightsaber from beneath the pillow, she assumed the ready stance, waiting for the unseen phantom to strike. But there were no shadows to fight, except her own. "No bad dreams?" Stiff from the close quarters of the X-wing, she felt surprisingly well and rested. Snorting softly, Fable sat down on the bed. "No bad dreams!" she cheered into her pillow. Her optimism was short lived as a knock sounded at the door. Momentarily, the latch cleared and the door parted. Pulling the blanket over her body, Fable swallowed a moment of fear, relieved when Jaalib's brooding face peered into the chamber.

"The morning meal is ready," he growled.

"I'll be right there." As the door closed, she hurried from the bed and dressed quickly. Ignoring her flight jacket, she pulled the fine linen shirt over her head and shoulders, leaving the long ends to hang over her leggings. In the darkened corridor outside her room, Jaalib was waiting. "This way."

As the sweet aroma of sausage and boiling cereal filtered through her nostrils, Fable's stomach rumbled appreciatively. Painfully aware of her hunger and the young actor's annoyance, she waited for him to sit down at the small table. A series of large flame ovens lined the back of the room behind him. Fable waited until Jaalib took the first bite, then eagerly began filling her plate with steaming broth and several links of sausage.

Hearing only the clang of her utensils, she looked up to find Jaalib glaring at her. There was a deep-seated loathing behind his eyes. Gazing about the small, crude kitchen, she realized that they were

alone. "Where is Lord Brandl?" she whispered, hoping he would ignore her.

"You shouldn't have come here!"

Piqued by his cruel tone, Fable slammed her fork against the plate. "Why don't you just butt out of it!"

"He won't help you," the actor snarled. "Others have come. Like you. So why don't you just get your things and I'll walk you back to your ship."

"I said, where is he?" Fable hissed with premeditated venom.

"He's in the Barrows," Jaalib relented. "He's been waiting for you."

"The Barrows?" she questioned around a mouthful of hot broth.

"The graveyard."

Outside in the cold dawn, storm clouds swept the sky. Wishing for her flight jacket, Fable shivered, hugging herself as the cool breeze fluttered through her hair and the thin fabric of her shirt. Trotting up the back landscape of steps and garden porches, she wandered into the rear courtyards of the theater, needing no specific direction to follow the dark presence of Lord Brandl. She followed a short path to the outskirts of Kovit, where the earth rose and fell in an irregular series of earthen mounds and grassy knolls. Up the steepest mound, she halted on the crest, finding herself surrounded by wax cylinders, hundreds of them, mounted atop slender pedestals, which were buried in the soft ground. Metallic ball bearings were precariously perched on each cylinder, giving the appearance of small, blue flames.

Across from her, on the opposite mound, Brandl stood with his back to her, at the foot of an enormous sarcophagus. The grainy image of a woman had been carved into the lid, delicately outlining the lace and fabric of the gown she was laid to rest in. "The Jedi is his own worst enemy," Brandl declared. "The greatest conflict comes from within. Our Masters teach us, scold us," he hesitated, "command us to follow reason, not our emotions."

"You disagree?" Fable asked, stepping into the center of the wax cylinders.

"Where there is smoke, there is fire." Brandl straightened, staring down his nose at her for a long moment. "Vialco is a coward. His tactics are mere illusions, prey for the weak-minded."

Brushing off the possible insult, Fable shrugged. "But he is powerful." Shaking her head remorsefully, she whispered, "I can't beat him. At least, I don't think so."

"Losing is not an option ... it's a conscious decision. You will not know until you try."

"Trying isn't good enough! I have to succeed or —"

"Or he may succeed in his attempts to lure you to the dark side? How do you know that I will not turn you?"

Fable felt a tremor down her back. "I don't."

"The student's greatest achievement is attained through succession," Brandl began, "a succession which requires the destruction of the Master. This is what the dark side teaches us. But what you must always remember is that when we embrace the darkness, we are already masters in the design of fate, humbling ourselves as students." He leaned heavily against the massive stone tomb. "When we seek the dark side, we seek our doom. Too often, we are successful."

"So you'll help me?"

"Vialco's undoing is inevitable. Even I have seen this."

"So I'll win, right?"

Brandl gently tugged at the clasp of his robe, loosening the collar. "If you're looking for visions, Fable, sit quietly and dwell on your past. Now prepare yourself. See the ball bearing directly ahead of you, sitting atop the wax cylinder? Draw your lightsaber and strike it. Destroy only the metal bearing. Leave the wax unharmed."

Fable hesitated, deliberately slow in assuming the ready stance. Breathing with effort, she stared at the ball bearing, her wounded hand tingling from her last experience with the lightsaber.

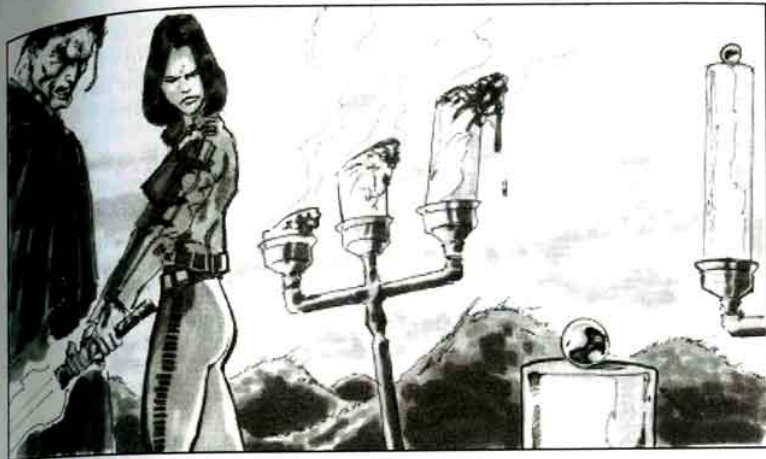
"The dark side's influence is stronger in moments of weakness. Do not let yourself be distracted. Now strike."

Fable drew the lightsaber from her belt, concentrating on its ignition. Swinging in a wide arc, she struck at the ball bearing, elated as it evaporated into nothingness, leaving the wax cylinder slightly scorched but unharmed. She disengaged the weapon and resumed the ready stance, unable to hide the arrogant smirk etched across her features.

"When climbing great mountains, it is always best to begin at a slow pace," Brandl remarked quietly. "Now strike for two."

Without waiting to focus on the pedestal's position, she ignited the lightsaber and struck two blows, swinging the blade toward the ball bearings and disintegrating them as the cylinders remained untouched. Overwhelmed with confidence, she again disengaged the weapon and resumed the ready position, eager to begin the next phase.

"No gain comes without a price. I will be your mentor and you my pupil. You will forever carry the distinguishment of my presence, as well as the taint," he stumbled over the word, "the traits of my own Masters."



"You mean the Emperor," Fable whispered, "don't you?"

"I chose the path that led me to this life," Brandl continued, "I will lead you on a parallel course, where I will show you the glories of the light and the majesty of the dark." He nodded, indicating the next alignment of wax cylinders. "Now strike for 10."

Fable faltered for a moment; then fresh with the assurance of her performance, she ignited the lightsaber and charged, working her way through the line. As she reached for the fourth cylinder, she felt herself floundering. Furiously struggling to the fifth, she sliced neatly through the cylinder and knocked the ball bearing at her feet. In a failed attempt to rally for the sixth, she tripped and fell into the wet earth, taking several stands and cylinders with her.

Brandl slowly descended from the mound, stepping just inside the perimeter of the training circle. Shamefully rising to her feet, Fable flinched as he drew his lightsaber and moved toward her. With a resonating power that spread out from it in all directions, the lightsaber became a smear of brilliance as Brandl worked his way through the wax cylinders. He destroyed one ball bearing after another, leaving no perceptible mark on the wax. Fable watched in awe as the weapon danced through a score or more of ball bearings before Brandl completed the cadence and disengaged the weapon. Gawking at the craftsmanship, she turned to Brandl. "You really are a Jedi Master."

"Only fools admire what they see," he hissed evenly, brushing

past her. "I know ... for once I was a fool." The first drops of rain began to fall, quickly covering the barrows with a slick film of water and loose earth. "You will continue this exercise until you have mastered it properly. Only then may you return to the theater."

"And if I can't," Fable insisted.

"You know where your ship is docked. Don't hesitate to go back to wherever it is you came from." He left her alone, with no further comment.

Nearly eight hours later, Fable walked through the stormy deluge of rain, listening to the frigid drops against her shoulders. Every chafing step brought her closer to the theater and closer to a temper tantrum of monumental proportions. Jaalib was waiting for her at the door with a modest smile and a warm blanket. "He asks the impossible!" she hissed.

The actor draped the blanket over her shoulders. "Your dinner's getting cold."

Fable pushed through the door of her room, startled to find a heavy plasteel tub in the center of the floor, steaming with hot water. "A bath?" she whispered wearily. "Oh," she groaned, stumbling across the floor, discarding boots, socks, and belt as she moved across the room. About to pull the muddy shirt over her arms, Fable hesitated, feeling a draft from the door, where Jaalib stood, watching her. "Do you mind?"

Flushing with embarrassment, he stepped back into the shadows. "I'll bring your dinner later," he stammered and closed the door behind him.



As its orbital axis began its seasonal tilt, Trualis was thrust into a tempestuous season of torrential rainfall and thunderstorms. Dawn showers became steady downpours by the afternoon, flooding the gutted lowlands with muddy water and the persistent rumble of thunder. Above the biting autumn breeze, the hum of a lightsaber was interrupted by the rattle of falling pedestals, wax cylinders, and ball bearings as Fable blundered through the exercise.

Brandl watched with mounting dissatisfaction. As the last pedestal fell to the saturated earth, he stormed down from his high mound. "You little fool! Do it again!"

Fable braced herself against the malevolent voice, glaring at the ground, too frightened to meet Brandl's cruel eyes. Despite a streak of improvement, she was steadily losing ground and his frustration

was proof of that, as were the whispered obscenities spoken vehemently under his breath. She watched his broad, swaying shoulders as the Jedi Master started back up the mound to his stony, sarcophagus throne.

"How eager you young upstarts are to give yourself to the Force, demanding tribute from it, as if you were the source of the power. The Force does not thrive on the basis of whether you live or breathe! It exists because it has always been so! Begin again!"

Grateful to the rain for hiding her tears of humiliation, Fable tucked the lightsaber into her muddy leggings and started up the opposite mound. Defying Brandl's command, she headed for the dark solace of the theater, where Jaalib would be waiting for her with a warm blanket and a much needed kind word.

Enraged by her failure to comply, Brandl pursued her, throwing accusations and threats of retribution. Though Fable had seen only traces of it, she recognized the temperament and arrogance that must have been the beginning of Brandl's descent into the Emperor's power. And though she felt numb from the onslaught of his dreary emotions, she had transcended his mental barriers and become an admiring witness to the dedication and devotion that had kept him whole through the trial of his life. He was a man who would stop at nothing to accomplish his goals and he would kill her in an instant, if it so suited his purpose. And the time they had spent together, learning and growing, would hold no bearing on his decision. Sickened by the thought, Fable found herself in a position to admire and loathe the fallen Jedi.

Fable slowly pushed through the door of the theater. It was early and Jaalib was not there as she had expected. Emotionally spent and demoralized, she nearly collapsed right there at the threshold, desperate for the young actor's support after yet another dismal day of training. As she stepped from the rain, Brandl was right behind her with another scathing assault. "The Force is your enemy! Turn your back on it and it will destroy you! It is your lover! Lust for it! Spurn it and it will devour you in fire. But go to it, as a child to its mother, make yourself humble before the omnipotence of its existence and it will guide you beyond the shallow confines of this mortal world!"

Alarmed by the commotion, Jaalib hurried into the antechamber, placing himself between Fable and his father. Bordering on obvious hysteria, she stumbled into his arms, dampening his shoulder with well-deserved tears. Putting the blanket over Fable's trembling shoulders, Jaalib gently sent her off to her room. "Your bath is

Adalric Brandl

**Type:** Dark Jedi**DEXTERITY 3D**

Blaster 4D, dodge 6D, lightsaber 9D, melee combat 6D+2, running 4D

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 4D+2, bureaucracy 5D, business 5D, cultures 5D+1, intimidation 6D+2, languages 6D+1, planetary systems 5D, survival 5D, willpower 6D+2

MECHANICAL 3D

Astrogation 3D+1, beast riding 4D, communications 5D+1, space transports 3D+2

PERCEPTION 3D+2

Command 6D+1, investigation 5D+2, persuasion 6D, search 5D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 4D, stamina 5D+2

TECHNICAL 3D

First aid 5D

Special Abilities:*Force Skills: Control 6D, Sense 5D+1, Alter 6D**Control: Absorb/dissipate energy, accel-**erate healing, control pain, hibernation trance, resist stun**Sense: Combat sense, danger sense, life detection, life sense, receptive telepathy, sense Force**Alter: Injure/kill**Control and Alter: Inflict pain**Control and Sense: Farseeing, lightsaber combat, projective telepathy**Control, Sense, and Alter: Affect mind, control mind, telekinetic kill**Sense and Alter: Dim other's senses***This character is Force-sensitive.****Force Points:** 3**Dark Side Points:** 9**Character Points:** 3**Move:** 10**Equipment:** Lightsaber (5D), dark robes

Capsule: Adalric Brandl is a highly intelligent, self-motivated individual, whose grim obsession with tragedy stems from his career as a tragic actor. Even before his seduction by the dark side, he was a callous, moody man preoccupied with the visage of the next star-crossed character he was meant to play.

An apathetic murderer, he kills without remorse — this made him an invaluable resource to the Emperor. After faking his death, Brandl retreated to Trulalis, his homeworld. Disillusioned by the genuine tragedy of his life, he was content to remain out of the mainstream and tutor his son, Jaalib, in the finer arts of acting and stage performance. Despite this assumed complacency, Brandl remained a dangerous individual. While his pride and loyalty to the Emperor were partly to blame for his fall from favor, it was these attributes that would bring Brandl back to the Imperial embrace. His acceptance was not without a price. It is rumored that his son, Jaalib, has latent Jedi powers.

waiting," he whispered quietly. "I'll be there in a moment."

Waiting for the girl's shadow to dissipate in the adjoining darkness, Brandl hissed, "She's impossible!"

"Odd," Jaalib chuckled, handing his father a steaming cup of broth, "she said the same about you."

"She is so charged with emotion and sentiment!" he growled, allowing his emotions to show through the aloof veneer. "It's as if your mother never —" his voice broke off abruptly, "as if your mother never left us."

"She didn't leave us," Jaalib replied matter-of-factly. "She died, defending me from stormtroopers. Stormtroopers and Jedi hunters who came looking for you." He sniffed at the absurdity of his mother's devotion to the man that had abandoned them, only to return eight years later, bringing the darkness of his life with him. "When they didn't find you, they found a way to justify the cost of their visit by obliterating the village."

"Courtesy costs little, Edjian-Prince, and discourtesy can rob even the richest man of his fortune."

Feigning anger, Jaalib drew away from his father, recognizing the famous line. "Courtesy?" he declared impishly. "Then no more call me Edjian-Prince. Dress me in rags and let me be a poor, rude man."

Brandl's face brightened with the spontaneous performance. "You've been practicing! Excellent! You're finding the right voice for the part. Come," he whispered eagerly, pulling Jaalib against him, "we should use this moment to complete the final act." Together, they vanished into the shadows of an adjoining corridor.



Relaxed and warm beneath the downy comforters, Fable resisted the notion of rising. She laid very still, waiting for the inevitable knock on the door. "Come in."

"You're awake?" Jaalib remarked, peering inside.

"I'm usually awake," she chuckled. "I just pretend to be asleep so you'll feel sorry for me."

"Why would you want me to feel sorry for you?"

"Come on," she rolled her eyes. "You're father is the most difficult man I've ever known, Jaalib." Sitting up on her elbows, she teased, "Look what I've been going through and then tell me you don't feel some sympathy."

"Consider yourself fortunate. He was a lot worse, believe me."

"Worse?" she scoffed. "What do you mean?"

"In the last five years, he had to be a father, a mother," Jaalib sighed sadly, "as well as a mentor. It changed him."

"I knew I would have to work hard," Fable said, "but I was certain that all the work would be keeping him from luring me to the dark side."

"Has he tried?"

"I don't think so. Every time I feel it coming on, he stops me and tells me to make the right choice. My choice." She yawned, throwing the comforter to the side. "I'd better go."

"My father's not here," Jaalib said. "He's going to be away for a few days; so there's no training, unless you do it on your own." He forced himself to face her openly, allowing himself only the solace of the shadows about them to conceal his apprehension. "I was hoping you might go on a picnic with me. To make up for my behavior."

"Your behavior?"

"You remember, when you first arrived." He laughed softly. "I all but attacked you. It was inexcusable."

"And perfectly justified. You were protecting the person who is most important to you. I would have done nothing less." Patting the side of the bed, she beckoned him to sit down beside her. "My mother was a Jedi. She trained my father and then watched him die at the hands of a rival. After that, we spent most of our time running from the Emperor." Fable shook her head sadly. "I was only a baby, but I remember it well. Living with a Jedi," she paused thoughtfully, "you learn to hide your emotions, especially the hurtful ones. My mother never knew how I felt." Fable sighed as the strain of those emotions returned. "Then one day, I picked up a lightsaber and let go!" She giggled. "I don't know who was more surprised, my mother or me. That's when I began my training, whether I liked it or not." Fable shrugged away the arduous memories. "Now about that picnic, I'm starving."

"We'll have to hike, I'm afraid. The Empire didn't leave much behind in the way of transportation. Not even a bantha. Do you mind?"

"It'll be relaxing. Come on."

The Khoehng Heights were located nearly five kilometers outside the perimeter of the Kovit Settlement. Long overgrown by wild wheat, the trail leading into the mountain pass had narrowed, no longer marked with the footsteps of the farmers who once tended them. It was a rare, clear morning. Storm clouds loomed in the distance, held back by a persistent wave of warm breezes blowing through the lowlands. From the Heights, Fable scanned the pan-

oramic view of the countryside. She could see the winding trail that led into the base of the lower mountains. The footpath climbed to give her inquisitive eyes the full benefit of the view.

Fable sighed with immeasurable pleasure, her stomach full of warm sweet cakes and honeysticks. She endured Jaalib's gentle caress at her cheek, as he playfully wiped the excess sweet powder from her face. "I've been in space too long," she whispered, taking a deep breath. "It's so beautiful here."

"After they left," Jaalib whispered, "we were cut off. No supplies, no medicinal goods, nothing. There was plenty of food ready for harvesting, but there was no one left to do it."

Fable hummed a melancholy tune. Shivering in the mountain air, she turned to Jaalib and held his gaze as he draped his cloak over her shoulders. "Why do they call this place the Khoehng Heights. Is that Old Corellian?"

"There's an outdoor theater built into the side this mountain," he replied, indicating a slight, stony ridge. "This place is named for the first play that ever performed there nearly 500 years ago."

"Five hundred years ago?" she gasped.

"Uhl Eharl Khoehng. Khoehng is Old Corellian for king. The eharl comes from Socorran mythology." He shrugged uncertainly. "It means elf or trickster."

Reminded of her Socorran companion, Deke, Fable felt a pang of remorse for leaving him. Her thoughts were abruptly diverted by a clap of thunder overhead. The skies released a deluge of cold rain. Frantically gathering the blankets and remaining baskets of food, Fable held onto to Jaalib's hand as they sprinted over the ridge. Their voices and laughter reverberated against the hollowed side of the mountain, as they slid down the precarious face of the moss-covered bank and into the shadowy protection of the antiquated theater.

An overhanging eave of solid rock covered the main stage and the first few rows of the audience pit. Cobwebbed and damp, the ancient structure stood in a silent tribute to its creators. Ragged tapestries hung from the rock walls, covered with mold, grime, and clay from the decaying structure. A few prop swords and robes were arranged on the inner panels of the stage and a multitude of candles and pedestals stood to either side of the audience pit, centuries-old relics left behind by a more playful, tolerant age.

"I used to come here as a boy," Jaalib confessed. Extending his arms to either side, he declared, "Now this was true theater, by candlelight, in an age which understood and coveted its artisans."

"Uhl Eharl Khoehng," Fable whispered dubiously. "What's it about?"
 "It opens on a distant world, in a kingdom built in the center of a dark forest. After many years of ruling this kingdom, the good, wise king dies and his handsome son," Jaalib winked, "the Edjian-Prince, takes the throne."

"I thought you said this was a tragedy."

"It is a tragedy," Jaalib scolded, "and that becomes apparent when the Edjian-Prince decides to expand the kingdom and begins sending expeditions into the forest to mark trees for felling. The men he sent never returned." He narrowed his eyes, moving his face very close to hers. "And that is when the older folk began whispering

about uhl Eharl Khoehng."

**"Worship me and
 call me master and
 all that I have shall
 be yours."**

"Stop it!" Fable hissed, batting his hands away as he tried to frighten her.

"The Edjian-Prince was intrigued. He began sending daily messengers into the forest, carrying his invita-

tion to the Eharl Khoehng to dine with him in the palace. None returned. When there were no more messengers, he sent small armies, keeping only the best and strongest warriors to guard the kingdom. They did not return. When the townspeople demanded a halt to this dangerous ambition, the Edjian-Prince ordered his remaining army to drive them all into the forest. None, not even the soldiers, were heard from again." Lighting two candles, he moved the pedestals into the center of the stage. "Only the Edjian-Prince and his faithful old hunt servant remained."

"He sent the old man?" Slapping Jaalib's thigh, Fable hissed, "This is a terrible story! What happened to the Edjian-Prince after the old man left?"

"When his servant did not return, the Edjian-Prince barricaded himself in the palace. Without his armies or his subjects, there was nothing to stop the Eharl Khoehng from attacking. One quiet night," Jaalib whispered, "the Eharl Khoehng did come, invading the Edjian-Prince's dreams. He promised safe passage through the forest. Eager to make peace, the Edjian-Prince went into the wood, where he remained for nearly a decade."

"What!"

"The Eharl Khoehng tricked him. While he did have safe passage through the forest, food, clothing, and shelter, the Eharl Khoehng held him prisoner, using illusions to trap him in the labyrinth of the forest." Jaalib blew out one of the candles. "Ten years of guilt took

its toll. The prince thought he heard the voices of his subjects crying out to him. Then one day, he was startled by the spirit of his beloved huntsman. The old man reported that the Eharl Khoehng had turned the townspeople into trees and left them there in the woods, conscious, but unable to move or speak, except when the wind blew through their branches."

"And then?"

"And then," Jaalib whispered, "unaffected by the Eharl Khoehng's illusions, the huntsman led his master on a journey to the outer edge of the forest, where the Eharl Khoehng was waiting for them." A malevolent shadow fell over his face as Jaalib stepped into the center of the stage, posing beside the lit candle. " 'Worship me and call me master and all that I have shall be yours, including your kingdom,' the Eharl Khoehng said."

"And what did the Edjian-Prince do?"

"He went mad," Jaalib began in the narrative voice. "He ran back into the wood and set fire to it. By the time he was finished, there was nothing left, not one tree. 'This is the only kingdom I deserve to rule,' he declared, 'and the only kingdom that the Eharl Khoehng can claim.' " Taking one of the blackened tapestries from the wall, he threw the thick material over his left shoulder and continued the narration. "Dressed in the rags of his former life, hands and face blackened with soot, the Edjian-Prince went before the Eharl Khoehng, falling to his knees in homage. In his loudest, most humble voice, he cried, 'Long ... live ... the king.' "

Visibly moved, Fable applauded, shaking her head with wonderment. "Your father played that part?"

"The Edjian-Prince was my father's greatest role," Jaalib said absently. "No one has been able to bring the same dignity to the role." He sat down on the edge of the stage. "And when the time is right, we'll produce it again and I will be the Edjian-Prince and he shall be my nemesis, uhl Eharl Khoehng himself."

Fable chewed anxiously at her lower lip. "Jaalib, why didn't you become a Jedi?"

"All I ever wanted to be was an actor," he remarked, swinging his legs against the stage. "And that's exactly what I've become. I've learned the lightsaber and other meditations of the Jedi, mostly to appease my troubled sense of loyalty. Beyond these, my father seems reluctant to teach me anymore. And I'm reluctant to ask."

Staring the rows of candles, Fable was reminded of the wax cylinder exercise. "The lightsaber exercise, the one using the ball bearings? Can you do it with candles?"

Jaalib shrugged. "That's how he taught me. I never used the wax cylinders until much later."

"Can you show me your secret? Your execution is almost flawless, elegant and equally effective."

Assembling the pedestals in the familiar circle, Jaalib motioned for her to step inside the exaggerated diameter. "May I?" he teased, gently embracing her from behind. He placed his hands on top of hers and ignited the lightsaber. The elongated shaft pulsed with magnificence and power, throwing light across the stage and the first few benches in the pit. Fable stiffened for a moment, feeling his body so intimately against her. But as he guided her through a slow rotation with the lightsaber, she relaxed and concentrated on his directives. "What do you see?" he whispered.

Staring down the line of unlit candles, Fable's eyes traced the straight, angular path. "No," Jaalib whispered, reading the expression on her body. "This is why you're having such a hard time."

"You've been watching me?" she hissed, elbowing him in the ribs.

Jaalib laughed softly. "You're trying to think in linear terms, spatial dimensions. It's not like flying a starship. You can train your eyes, which you've done quite well; but sooner or later, he'll catch you." Moving her gently to the side, he added, "You may let your eyes dictate where the lines begin, but let the Force guide you. It's not like clearing a room and then moving on to the next. There is no sequence, except the one you create as you move along. There are always several paths, right to left, top to bottom, any combination."

He removed the lightsaber from her hands and began the cadence. His movements were slow and deliberate so that she could follow him; but even these motions were faster than her most frenzied attempts to complete the exercise. As the lightsaber swept over the tops of the candles, the small wicks exploded with flame; but the wax tips remained unscarred by the weapon. Quickly moving around the circle to blow out the flames, Jaalib handed the lightsaber back to her. "Now you try."

Fable swallowed doubtfully, wondering how she would follow such a flawless performance. Igniting the lightsaber, her eyes traced the several lines of candles as they extended out in every direction. She arced swiftly through the circle, feeling the confidence of her former self return. Ten, fifteen, eighteen. As she reached the last movements of the cadence, she lost control, pitching forward as she spun frantically on her heels.

"Easy," Jaalib crooned, catching her in his arms. "You were doing wonderfully until you lost your concentration." Blowing out the

candles, he said, "Try again. And this time, remember, the Force is a waterfall. Nothing can stop or turn it off. Nothing can divert the flow." Scolding her with a stern finger, he added, "Doubt and uncertainty form barriers, but only if you let them."

"Now you're starting to sound like your father."

In response, he bowed ceremoniously, then motioned toward the candles. This time, as she moved through the circle, Fable allowed the rain to guide and open her to the Force. The steady beat of the drops against the stone benches steadied her concentration and she completed the cadence without incident.

She disengaged the lightsaber, trembling slightly as she turned from the center of the circle. The Force was flowing through her, still channeling her conscious mind. Jaalib was behind her and Fable could feel his heart racing above the gentle vibrations of the Force. Before her nerve could fail, Fable turned and kissed him passionately.

"Shall we try it again?" he whispered.

"Rogue!"

Jaalib grinned, winking mischievously. "The cadence, I mean." His grin deepened as he stepped into the circle and began to blow out the candles.



The Force was with her and Fable felt it, flowing through her mind and body. She imaged the power channeling through her arms and hands and grasped the lightsaber from her belt. Visualizing the path in her mind, she moved through a series of precise parries and feints, disintegrating the first several balls with faultless execution. As she began the second half of the cadence, Brandl whispered, "Execute each motion as though it were your last. Someday, your life may depend on it. Or the lives of others."

For nearly two hours, Fable worked through the first cadence and was moving onto the second. Obviously fatigued, she began making poor judgment errors and scorched the tops of the last ten cylinders, slicing through the last one at the conclusion. She stepped back into the ready stance, gasping for breath.

"As you progress, you will learn the limits of your abilities," Brandl stated. "You are excused for the remainder of the day."

Bowing respectfully, Fable pulled her jacket from a nearby branch and started on the trail back to the theater. Jaalib was waiting for her with a sweet cake and the promise of a bath and a kiss. "How did it go?"

"I made it to the second cadence!" she whispered with excitement. "And Jaalib, I think I saw him smile."

"Now *that* is good news."

Glancing over her shoulder, she winked at him. "I think I'll go to bed early tonight, as a reward. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Father and I are working on the last act of the play." He smiled pleasantly, betraying his affection. "See you in the morning."



Fable awoke to a terrible sense of foreboding. Quickly dressing, she sat tentatively at the edge of the bed, hugging her knees against her chest as she scanned the shadows. Something was terribly wrong and she could feel it. Cradling the lightsaber in her lap, she took a deep breath, assured that she was ready for the worst, whatever that may be, whenever it might come.

The familiar knock came at her door. "Come in," she replied, eager to share her concerns with Jaalib. But as the door opened, she was greeted by the foreboding shadow of her mentor. "Where's Jaalib?"

"Jaalib is the one and only treasure left to my miserable existence," Brandl snarled "I forbid this to happen. I forbid it!"

"Where is he? I want to talk to him!"

Advancing into the room, Brandl cornered her. "The theater on Iscera will be opening in a few days. I sent him there to make preparations for our production. By the time he returns, you will be gone."

Fable followed Brandl into the corridor with heavy, angry strides, allowing her emotions to seethe within her. On the verge of a temper tantrum, she braced herself as common sense called on her to reason. She had come to Trulalis to improve herself, to get an edge on the enemy who pursued her, and then to return, if possible, to her friends in the Rebel Alliance. Falling in love had no place in that design.

Brandl set a bowl of steaming broth at the end of the table and sat down on the opposite end. Fable slammed herself into the stool, barely able to curb her temper. "So what's it like to be a pawn for the Emperor?"

"I brought pleasure to my master through the tears of his subjects." Momentarily distracted by the sincerity of the spontaneous soliloquy, Brandl stared into his bowl. Recovering his cynicism, he glared across the small table. "The Emperor's ideas are quite noble. It's his methods which eventually offend those of lesser vision."

"Sounds like you're still loyal to him." Through narrowed eyes, she retaliated, "Why not, he only tried to kill you."

"In time, you will learn that an old friend is very much like a good mirror. The longer you stare into it, the harder it is to find the flaws."

A shrill whine echoed from high above, sending a peculiar reverberation through the theater. Fable felt a chill as her ears recognized the distinct sounds of a shuttle flying overhead. Its exhaust boosters could be heard above the whine of the ion drive, as the pilot circled, looking for an appropriate place to land. "That's Vialco. Isn't it?"

Brandl closed his eyes and was silent. Fable straightened her shoulders as she rose from the table, turning her back on the Jedi. "No more bad dreams," she whispered with firm resolve and stepped from the shadows of the theater into the dawn. Her body knew every hollow and rise in the unmarked trail that led to the picturesque grounds of Kovit's graveyard. She stared across the entrance mound to where Vialco stood among the tarnished graves and markers. For a moment, the fear and horror of their first encounter returned in full force.

"You've matured much faster than I expected," Vialco declared. "I never imagined Lord Brandl to be such a gracious host."

Vialco walked among the raised tombs, brushing his gloved hands over the rough-hewn stone, as if drawing power from the shadows lurking at the site of each grave. His face was gangly and angular, unattractive, with gaunt cheeks and unusually large brows. Sensing her peripheral thoughts, he whispered, "No, no more bad dreams, girl. I've come for the harvest." A sinister determination shadowed his pallid face. "What shall it be, hmm?"

Fable shifted her weight to one foot, cocking her hip arrogantly. As Vialco ignited his lightsaber, she calmly drew her own, assuming the ready stance. She parried his first, preemptive attempts to break through her defenses, losing no ground to him, and met his surprise with a coy smile.

"We are much improved," he commented. "Have I left too much time for you to prepare?"

"Lord Brandl did say you were a coward," Fable taunted. "But I already knew that."

Vialco's face flushed with rage as he began a series of short lunges, forcing Fable to move back along the perimeter of the muddy basin. Feinting to the left, she swung around behind him, delivering a swift kick to Vialco's behind. Enraged by her insolence, Vialco turned on her, gripping the lightsaber tightly in his hands. Deliberately stretching her defenses, he attempted to penetrate her confidence.

Vialco



Type: Dark Jedi
DEXTERITY 3D
 Blaster 3D+2, dodge 4D, lightsaber 6D
KNOWLEDGE 2D
 Alien species 4D, languages 5D, survival 5D, willpower 5D+1
MECHANICAL 2D
 Astrogation 3D, space transports 4D, starship shields 3D
PERCEPTION 4D
 Command 5D+1, investigation 5D, persuasion 5D
STRENGTH 2D
 Brawling 3D
TECHNICAL 2D
Special Abilities:

Force Skills: Control 4D, Sense 3D+2, Alter 4D

Control: Absorb/dissipate energy, control pain, resist stun

Sense: Life detection, life sense, receptive telepathy, sense Force

Control and Alter: Feed on dark side, force lightning, inflict pain

Control and Sense: Lightsaber combat, projective telepathy

Control, Sense, and Alter: Affect mind

This character is Force-Sensitive.

Force Points: 2

Dark Side Points: 7

Character Points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), lightsaber (5D)

Capsule: Trained under the infamous High Inquisitor Tremayne, Vialco assumed at one time he would be chosen to replace the Jedi Lord, should the need for a replacement ever arise. Doting on his whims and talents, Vialco made every effort to turn or kill any Jedi or latent Jedi he encountered. His favorite hunting techniques include stalking his victims from a distance, haunting their minds and senses with disturbing images.

Despite his ego and inability to work well under non-Jedi commanders, he entertains a good deal of success and was able to evade the wrath of Tremayne as well as the Emperor.

"Fable?"

Fable heard the soft-spoken voice from the past; and without turning toward the shadowy image on the edge of her peripheral vision, she knew the illusion to be Arecelis. The image waved and laughed, sounding intimately like her dead friend. "No," Fable whispered, "no, I don't think so, Vialco. I saw what you did to him. I saw it!" she seethed. The tip of her lightsaber sliced easily through the

shoulder of his cloak. "And that was your first mistake."

"And my second?"

"Letting me live to remember it!" She lunged savagely at him, knocking Vialco against the tomb of Brandl's wife. Breaking off the assault, she somersaulted back down into the depression. Disengaging her lightsaber, she stood there defiantly. "Shall I play with you like you played with him?"

"Wretched girl!" Vialco hissed, spittle flying from the corners of his mouth. "If you will not be turned, you will die!" Summoning the corrupt powers of the dark side, Vialco felt the energy coursing through him. He extended his arms, curling his fingertips as the first tendrils of lightning surged from his hands.

Fable flinched, awkwardly balanced as she tried to back away. The arc of lightning shot through her, ripping into her flesh. Screaming in pain, she dropped to the ground, curling into a fetal ball as the agony washed through her. Before she could collect herself, a second and third blow left her tortured body temporarily paralyzed.

"Have we come so far to fall so low?" Vialco taunted. "Tsk, ts, what a pity," he smacked his thin lips.

Reeling with the corrupt power surge, Fable jumped to her feet. As Vialco took aim, she somersaulted, voicing a shrill squeal of effort



as the pulse of electricity cuffed her shoulder. Wielding the lightsaber in both hands, she began the subtle movements of the first cadence. As each tendril of lightning arced at her, she swept the blade of the lightsaber across it, effectively deflecting it. She imagined that each arc was a new series of lines. Each point was the metal reflection of a ball bearing, the shiny wick of a candle.

Twenty, thirty ... she lost count of the number of successful deflections. Even as the crescent of lightning arced behind her, slipping in above her head, she simply brought the lightsaber over her shoulder into its path. Never turning to look, her body reacted as her eyes designed the next path.

Fable fought her way to the top of the mound. Knocking Vialco from his feet, she pushed him down into the depression. She watched in horror as the tendrils of lightning rebelled against their master, burning through his clothing and flesh. He lurched for his lightsaber and fumbled, knocking the weapon out of reach. "Have we come so far to lie so low?" Fable mocked. She slid down the face of the mound, raising her lightsaber to finish him.

Vialco cowered below her, writhing in the mud. Something in his groveling manner made Fable hesitate, dropping her arms to chest height, as the lightsaber hummed insistently in her hands.

"Will you give him the chance to betray you again?" Keeping her eyes on Vialco, Fable felt the dark presence of her master. "Kill him and be done with it," Brandl whispered. "Only then will you know that the nightmare is over."

Fable disengaged the lightsaber and turned to her Jedi mentor. "It is over. Why kill him?"

"Remember what he is and what he has done. He will betray your dreams, as he has done before, and use them to his advantage. End the nightmare, Fable. Kill him."

Fable heard the pulse of the lightsaber before she saw it. Wondering how Vialco had gotten hold of his weapon without her sensing it, she whirled, igniting her lightsaber. Vialco arced his blade toward her vulnerable legs. In a wild strike, she severed his head from the shoulders, never losing momentum. But as he fell, she clearly saw his empty hands. The lightsaber was still on the ground, several meters from his body.

"Who's tricking who?" Fable hissed, enraged by Brandl's careful deceit. Lunging toward her mentor, she met the abrupt thrust of his lightsaber. Dominating and powerful, he knocked Fable off of her feet and drove her back into the opposite mound. "You lied to me!" she gasped, weakly rubbing her bruised cheek. "What have you done?"

"I have set your place at the Emperor's table," Brandl replied. "Soon, I shall again stand at my master's side and you shall stand beside me." He glared down at her, mocking the injury in her eyes. "You knew there would be a price."

"What price?"

Brandl smiled, posing arrogantly for his small audience. Offering his hand, he whispered, "Worship me and call me master and all that I have shall be yours, including Jaalib's affections. There's no use fighting it, Fable. Accept and you will be well cared for, this I promise you." Brandl turned to leave. "Don't bother running to your ship. Thermal detonators are rather effective tools." Gently caressing the scars at his temple, he chuckled, "I should know."



Locked in her room, Fable rocked quietly from side to side, wiping tears on her sleeve. Her fingers were blood-covered and black with grime, the nails shredded from a recent tantrum at the site of her X-wing. In an attempt to avoid her impending fate, she had fled to the vessel and found the gutted remains of her starfighter in a blackened blast diameter. Only the central frame of the X-wing had survived the initial blast. Vialco's shuttle was also consumed by the explosion, strewn across a sunken depression of scorched earth. Cursing Brandl, she rocked faster and harder, desperate to find some way to escape him.

The door opened slowly, a small crack that grew larger as the hunched figure skulked into the room. Fable's eyes brightened immediately, recognizing the face. "Jaalib," she whispered, swept into his arms. "Your father's —"

"Shh, I know," he hushed. Sitting down on the bed beside her, he gently pulled her trembling body against him. "I just happened to go over my ship's back-up logs and discovered my father's side trip to Byss."

"Byss?"

"The Emperor's pleasure world. I hurried back as soon as I could and found what was left of your X-wing. Wasn't hard to figure out the next scene." He picked up a small satchel of her things and threw it over his shoulders.

"What are you doing?"

"You're leaving," he replied curtly. "Don't talk. Don't think. Don't even breathe heavy or he'll find us."

"He'll know eventually, as soon as we step outside this theater."

Jaalib Brandl

**Type:** Young Actor**DEXTERITY 3D**

Blaster 3D+2, dodge 5D+2, lightsaber 5D, melee combat 5D, melee parry 5D, running 4D+1

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Alien species 5D, languages 5D+2, survival 4D, willpower 5D

MECHANICAL 2D

Astrogation 2D+2, beast riding 3D, repulsorlift operation 3D, space transports 4D, starship shields 3D,

PERCEPTION 4D

Persuasion 6D+1, search 5D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 3D, climbing/jumping 3D+2, stamina 3D+2

TECHNICAL 2D

First aid 3D

Special Abilities:*Force Skills: Control 3D, Sense 3D, Alter 1D+1**Sense:* Receptive telepathy, sense Force*Control and Sense:* Lightsaber combat, projective telepathy**This character is Force-Sensitive.****Force Points:** 2**Character Points:** 6**Move:** 10**Equipment:** Blaster pistol (4D), 300 credits

Capsule: Despite his age, Jaalib Brandl has exhibited an uncharacteristic genius for tragic theater. Following in the footsteps of his father, Lord Adalric Brandl, himself a renown actor and tragic figure, Jaalib began an early career in stage performance under the tutelage of Otias Atori. After the fall of the Trulalis Stage Company, Jaalib was highly sought after as the lead actor on the Iscerian stage. Despite Jaalib's youth, directors and performers were awed by the depth of experience and strength that Jaalib could pour repeatedly into every role. And while bested by only the talents of his father, the young actor is considered to be one of the finest tragic figures to grace the stage. After a stirring reproduction of "For the Want of an Empire," the young actor vanished without a trace.

"And that doesn't give us much time," he argued. "So just run."

Following the trail out of the settlement, Jaalib jogged toward the mountain range, using the jutting lip of the Khoehng Heights as a guide beneath the moonlit skies of Trulalis. Fable matched his earnest strides and together they ran the short kilometer to the wheat field, where a familiar ship was waiting for them.

"The *Prodigal*!" she screamed. "Deke!"

"Heard you got yourself in a spot of trouble," the Socorran grumbled with relief. "Didn't think I'd let you go down alone, did you?" Hearing a proximity alarm from within the ship, Deke nodded to Jaalib. "I set the sensors just like you said." He eyed his ship dubiously. "Something or somebody just tripped the perimeter sensor."

"It's him," Fable trembled, casting her gaze to the far off theater steeple.

"Then you had better go," Jaalib whispered.

"What about you?" Fable protested. "Come with us."

"He's my father, Fable. It's not that easy."

"And you call this easy?" she croaked, tears in her voice. Seeing the denial in his eyes, Fable pleaded, "Jaalib —"

Cutting off her objections with a kiss, Jaalib gently crowded her toward the ship. "For once in your life, listen and go before he gets here."

"But —"

"No, Fable!" Jaalib hissed. "You're nothing but a consolation prize to the Emperor!"

"He's right, capt'n," Deke insisted. "Time to bail."

Desperately appealing to her defiant eyes, Jaalib grinned, anxious to subdue her temper. "I was born to play this role, remember? I am the Edjian-Prince." Swallowing his sorrow, he embraced her warmly. "It's the last act, Fable. I have to burn the forest down now."

"Then burn it," she sobbed, cradling her head against his shoulder.

"I can't. Not while you're still here."

Fable stumbled up the ramp and cued the hatch controls. Leaning heavily on the secured door, she wiped absently at a tear, sensing the warmth of Jaalib's touch on her cheek.

Shielding his eyes from the freighter's exhaust, Jaalib stepped back into the swaying fields of wheat. Engines glowing red with the strain of sudden acceleration, the *Prodigal* banked sharply against the foot of the mountains, carrying Fable away. Lightning signaled her departure, bringing on a deluge of cold, cold rain. Jaalib took a deep breath, bracing himself for the wrath of the brooding presence slowly moving up behind him.

Brandl briefly glanced up, searching for some signs of Fable — his squandered prize. There were none and his austere gaze fell heavily on Jaalib. "Arrogant, deceitful child," he snarled.

Feeling the subtle constriction of his throat, Jaalib resisted panic

as his wind pipe contracted, seized by invisible fingers. "No less arrogant than my father," he rasped. Desperate for air, he dropped to his knees, slowly losing consciousness as the grip tightened about his throat. His father abruptly released him and the cool, damp air flowed into his body.

Staring after the retreating figure of his father, Jaalib staggered precariously. Compelled to follow, he screamed, "Long ... live ... the king!"

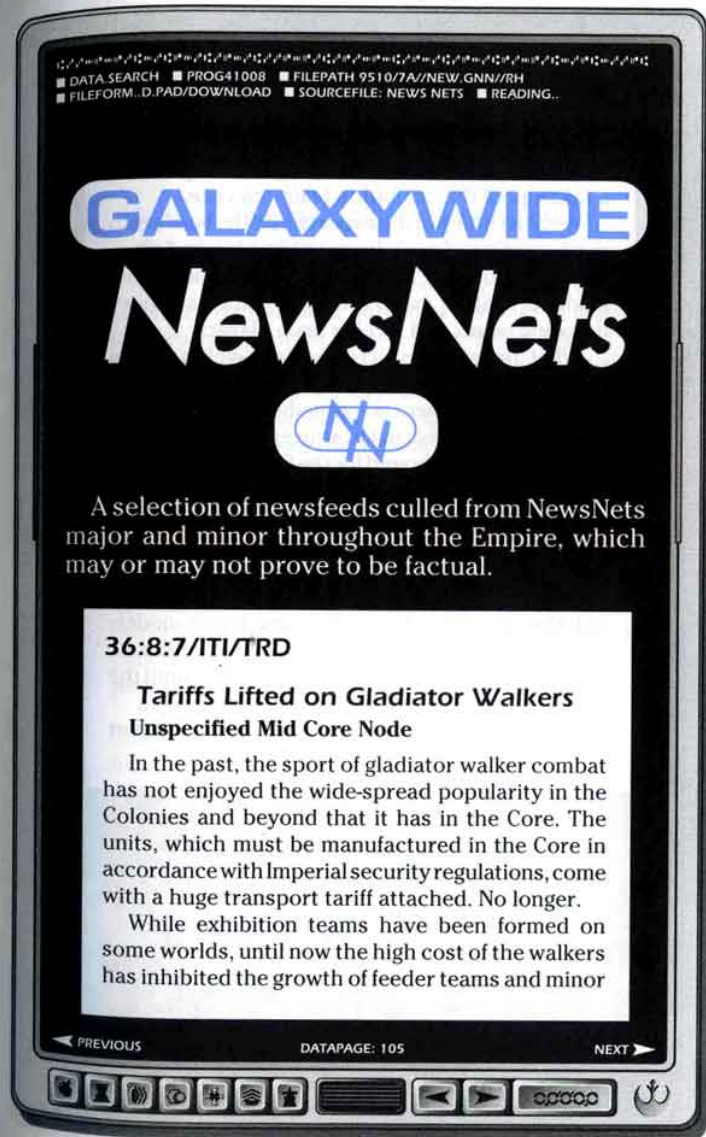
Journal Submission Policy

The *Star Wars Adventure Journal* has been asked by Lucasfilm to solicit material only from previously published writers. Therefore, we must require potential writers to meet the following guidelines.

If you are a published writer interested in writing for the *Journal*, please send a brief cover letter outlining your interest in writing for *Star Wars* and your writing experience. Include a bibliography of previously published works, as well as samples of this work. Please include your daytime phone number if we would like to commission you to write an article for the *Star Wars Adventure Journal*.

Please do not send any *Star Wars* manuscripts or proposals with your query. Lucasfilm Ltd. has a strict policy forbidding any member of its company from reading, reviewing or accepting unsolicited submissions or ideas. As Lucasfilm's licensee for *Star Wars*, we are obligated to abide by this policy.

If you are not a published writer, we encourage you to pursue publishing your writing in other areas. It has been our experience that some of our industry's best writers are newcomers to the field. Newspaper, magazine and fanzine editors often seek freelance writers to help fill their pages — this is a good place to gain some writing and publishing experience so you can later be considered to contribute to the *Star Wars Adventure Journal*.



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leagues. Only the grass-roots leagues can generate a talent pool the exhibition teams can use.

With the lifting of the export tariff, the barriers to the formation of such leagues has vanished overnight. Speculators anticipate a huge boom in the gladiator walker market, and investors are busy founding teams and signing team players.

What no one has actually done yet is buy a walker. This will change within days, however. Mainstream shippers are already loading their supercargo haulers with scores of zZipp and Galladinium units bound for the Colonies, and independent trading co-ops are likewise pooling resources to enter the new market.

Even so, there is a narrow window a sharp spacer may be able to exploit. It is not likely that an independent spacer will land the major contracts, but she may be able to sell a few demo models before the market is flooded. Haldeen and Barma sectors are expected to yield the best ROIs until the megacorps nail down the long term contracts.

Independent Traders' Infonet

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36:8:22/DSN/T11R/ESS.3.ALA/

Rebels on Esseles Shut Down Power Calamar, Esseles

Early today during the morning rush hour, Calamar experienced a near-total blackout, plunging the city into chaos. The power was shut down at the Calamar Power Plant when the plant computer received a direct order to shut down the Calamar grid. The computer claims the order followed proper protocols, and bore the authorization key code of the mayor's office. The identity of the person giving the order has not yet been established.

This might be seen as an isolated but malicious prank if it were not for the fact that the blackout occurred at precisely the same time law-enforcement authorities were closing in on a cell of Rebel terrorists in the state university. Officials now suspect the blackout was a related incident, since it permitted the Rebels to escape.

It is not currently known who might have shut down the city's power grid, or how he or she might have obtained the mayor's key codes. It has been speculated that there are Rebel spies in the mayor's office, and Governor Takel has formed an investigation committee to look into the matter at Moff Graffe's urging.

Darpa SectorNet

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36:8:27/IHV/NER3/JTE.5.REY/GEN

Jante and Freda Feud Erupts

Reynolds, Jante

For decades Jante and Freda miners have been arguing about the mining rights to the Rettna system, which lies squarely between them. But until now, the clashes have been relatively peaceful ones, consisting of fist fights, minor sabotage, and an occasional death out in the Rettna system.

This week, however, saw a deadly escalation in the war over resources, as news spread that the Mid-Rim shortage was driving prices up on rawmats throughout the region. A Jante frigate fired several shots at a group of Freda mining craft which were operating on what Jante Materials Corporation representatives claim was Jante territory, destroying two ships and disabling the third. The following day, several Freda patrol lighters destroyed a Jante mining camp which had been the source of several disputes.

Both sides are now massing their hyperspace-capable defence forces in separate areas of the Rettna system, and tensions are running at an all-time high. Mediators from both systems and Moff Havaland's office have been attempting to defuse the situation before the crisis breaks out into armed conflict, but the negotiators have made little progress thus far, and Havaland is threatening to send in an Imperial arbiter if a peaceful resolution is not forthcoming. Three Imperial ships have been dispatched to keep an eye on events at Rettna.

Imperial HoloVision

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36:9:4/NEO/G76D/COR.1.IPC/MIL/
 A.Jarvis

Tigellinus' Star Rising in Imperial Court

Imperial City, Coruscant

Grand Admiral Rufaan Tigellinus is increasingly being seen as a force to be reckoned with in the Emperor's Court. He has forged a formidable faction in the short time he has spent on Coruscant, having established alliances with several key Imperial Advisors, including Alec Pradeux, who is known to have the Emperor's ear.

Tigellinus moved several steps closer to the center of power last month when he gained Moff Jamson Caglio's support in backing Tigellinus' protégé, Gerald Weizel, for the post of governor on Chandrila. Caglio's defection from Grand Moff Traeda's faction is seen by Court observers as a significant event, since Caglio has long been a solid supporter of Traeda, and an influential champion of his policies.

Tigellinus is currently rumored to be courting Moff Disra. Disra, who has been out of favor with the Emperor for some time, nonetheless has many friends in Traeda's faction. Disra has not yet given any indication whether he is seriously considering Tigellinus' offers.

By Alendar Jarvis, *New Order Progressive*

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36:9:15/COL/D3WW/ELS.4.ELS/POL

Tombat Sacks 'Secure' Resort

Elshandruu City, Elshandruu Pica

The Elshandruu Pican resort hotel *Margrath's* has joined the august ranks of several dozen high-security resorts which have been plundered by the intergalactic jewel thief known only as the Tombat.

The establishment opened its security vaults for business this morning to discover that the valuable jewelry stored within had been replaced with a blue quella stone, the trademark of a Tombat heist. Altogether, the Tombat spirited away gems and settings valued at over six million credits, including a stunning necklace of three corusca stones in a mythra setting, the property of Lady Landric of Danteel, itself valued at over two million credits.

Kina Margrath, the proprietor of *Margrath's*, is visibly upset at the theft, though she refuses to comment on the heist. The heist may well have permanently stained *Margrath's* sterling reputation as a highly-secure business resort where wealthy patrons might show off and store their valuable jewelry without any worries — a reputation built up over several generations.

Perhaps more worrisome for Margrath is the news that Lady Landric, the wife of a Core Worlds Moff, has announced that a full-scale Imperial investigation at the site of the theft will be launched within a few days.

Colonial News Nets

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36:9:17/NOV/ENN3/ELS.4.ELS/POL

Tombat Returns Gems — 'Unheard of!'

Elshandruu City, Elshandruu Pica

The news that the Tombat had successfully looted the Elshandruu Pican resort hotel *Margrath's* two days ago was certainly unexpected, but not, perhaps, altogether surprising, given the hotel's high profile. That the Corellian thief left no evidence for the investigating team to work with was not shocking, either. After all, he's had years of practice doing just that.

What utterly floored idle spectators and experienced investigators alike was the news that, as of this morning, the jewels, to a stone, have mysteriously reappeared in the same vault from which they vanished, together with another quella stone!

Observers are baffled by this unprecedented action. "We have to assume that the Tombat just changed his mind about this heist," said Inspector Toorka. "Why, we don't know. It's unheard of." Toorka was unwilling to accept the hypothesis that another thief might have returned the goods. "That's a rather large leap. It's difficult enough, and rather embarrassing, to believe that the Tombat had a change of heart and replaced the jewels while both bypassing Margrath's security systems and our still-ongoing investigation team. To believe that an equally talented thief happened by, and outwitted both the Tombat and the security systems takes a lot more faith than I have."

NovaNetwork

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36:10:5/COL/AF21/HAL.4.CAM/POL

JAN Leader Executed After Extradition Fight

Camele, Haldeen

Yesterday morning, two months after being sentenced to death by an Imperial court, Earnst Kamiel, a ringleader and founder of Findris's most violent anti-Empire underground group, was lead before a Colonial firing squad and shot.

Kamiel was found guilty by the Colonial Imperial court system over two months ago, and sentenced to death by firing squad. In most capital punishment cases, the sentence is carried out almost immediately. However, there was a two-month delay in the execution of Kamiel because so many systems were clamoring to carry out the sentence in their own capitals.

At the time of his arrest on Elrood, Kamiel had the death penalty in 54 systems. Each of these 54 systems desired to have Kamiel transported to their own capital for execution. After several weeks of arbitrating a settlement, Moff Gandril finally ordered the execution to take place on Haldeen itself. As a final gesture to the injured systems, he allowed each system to contribute one marksman to the firing squad.

Kamiel was one of the founding members of the Justice Action Network, a terrorist group of radicals formed to destroy the Imperial infrastructure. The group was born on Findris 16 years ago, and has

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now spread to over a hundred worlds in the Colonies, according to Imperial crimewatch experts. JAN has claimed responsibility for the bombings of thousands of civil authority buildings throughout the Colonies, and is thought to be responsible for over 10,000 deaths. As one of the three founders of this organization, Kamiel was charged with being personally responsible for 3,000 of these deaths.

Colonial News Nets

36:10:11/TRI/A64F/CAM.5.TRA/A.Javin

Cynabar's True Identity Revealed!

Camalon, Trantor

The rogue newsnet operator known only as Cynabar has long been a thorn in the Empire's side. This person has for years successfully protected his or her identity and eluded the best bounty hunters and Imperial investigators the Empire has to offer.

However, your humble TRI correspondent has managed to obtain proof positive that Cynabar is none other than the infamous smuggler Platt Okeefe! By careful analysis of the syntax used in both the writings of Okeefe and Cynabar, my droid V1-CH has determined a near-perfect match between the two. Moreover, it is a known fact that Platt Okeefe dropped from sight at the same moment that the Empire chased Cynabar off Nar Shaddaa. The clincher, of

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course, is that the name "Cynabar," when translated into Ithorian and printed out in the Huttese character system, looks very much like "Plttke" when viewed sideways, which can readily be extrapolated into Cynabar's true name, Platt Okeefe.

Clever, Platt, but there is one man who is just too clever for you! As responsible citizens of the Empire, we at TRI have reported our findings to the Imperial Office of Criminal Investigation. Unfortunately, the officials I spoke with failed to appreciate the damning evidence V1-CH and I have uncovered. Though the IOCI has since shown little sign of pursuing my lead, rest assured that your tireless correspondent will stay on the case until the bitter end!

By Andor Javin, TriNebulon News

**36:10:18/DSN/T11R/ESS.3.CAR/POL/
 D.Mipps**

Rawmat Recession Threatens Ralle's Coalition

Camalar, Esseles

President Ralle's dominance of Esselian politics has weathered many threats over the decades, but none have truly posed as serious a threat as the current challenge by Esselian New Order party leader Jamson Freller. As the local Esselian economy falters in the wake of the Core recession set in motion by the Mid-Rim rawmat shortage, the New Order

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Party is making major inroads in Ralle's coalition with the Cardeans, and even with members of Ralle's own Forad Party.

Ralle, though revered for his role in leading Esseles through the Clone Wars years ago, is fast aging and his support among voters has increasingly become split among ENO and Cardean candidates. With Hall elections coming up, Freller is capitalizing on the economic downturn by targeting Ralle's policy of allowing aliens to hold strategic manufacturing jobs on Esseles, a policy held on few other Core worlds (Corellia and Brentaal being two major exceptions).

"It was acceptable, up to a point, to allow Esseles' alien population to contribute to the production of our goods and services," Freller said today in an interview on Damatal Holonews. "However, with unemployment among the Human population rising, it becomes less tenable to allow outsiders to hold jobs that should rightfully belong to the sons and daughters of the Esselian Empire. If the Esselian New Order party is given the majority in the Hall, I assure you that Esseles will weather this recession and come out of it far better than our fellow sector worlds."

By Deena Mipps, Darpa SectorNet

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IOCI Assigns Investigator to Tombat Case

Landru City, Danteel

At the behest of Moff Landric of Emmo sector, the Imperial Office of Criminal Investigation has assigned a Special Enforcement Officer to bring the art thief known only as the Tombat to justice. IOCI Director Jacen Corbit introduced the officer, Inspector Zanza Gata, to a packed room of reporters in a press conference today.

"When the decision came down to get the IOCI involved in the Tombat case," Corbit said, "we didn't have much trouble in finding the right officer for the job. Inspector Gata has made something of a hobby in tracking the exploits of this Tombat character. His uncannily accurate reading of the Tombat's psych profile have become something of a legend around the Office. We hope his zeal for the case will drive him to apprehend the Tombat in short order."

Gata's speech was short and to the point. "As the Director indicated, I have a great interest in the Tombat case, and am delighted that I am able to devote my full resources to tracking down the Tombat and bringing him to justice. I will not rest until the Tombat is brought before an Imperial court to answer for his crimes!" With that stirring speech, Gata strode from the room, ignoring all further questions by the media mobbing the halls outside.

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In all candor, we at TriNebulon News could scarcely have hoped for a more dramatic development in the Tombat case. Gata is an extremely capable officer with years of experience bringing crime syndicate leaders, assassins, and slicers to justice. His success rate is nearly 84 percent, and he is known to go days without rest when tracking his prey. That he has taken a personal interest in the Tombat case spells certain trouble for our favorite thief.

TriNebulon News

37:F1:1/CDN/G76D/COR.1.IPC/ENT

New Year Fete Week Launched in Imperial City

Imperial City, Coruscant

The festivities of New Year Fete Week have been officially launched here in Imperial City with the traditional Shaldania Parade. Thousands of floats, bands, and military regiments processed among the spires of the Entertainment Center. Even the threat of rain could not keep away the millions who gathered to watch from the plaza, balconies, and the viewglobes hovering over the street.

The first thundering display consisted of an armored division of Imperial walkers from the Imperial Star Destroyer *Vanguard*. The walkers set the pace for the parade, and following presentations

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were hard-pressed to top them. In terms of sheer beauty, the Flandorian flower floats were a definite highlight, and the tamed herd of giant lumbering wombacks from Parada made a definite impression on the crowd. Interspersed among the cultural presentations were more displays of Imperial might, including celebrated units from every branch of the Imperial military.

This marks the first Shaldania Parade in eight years which the Emperor has not attended. According to his publicity office, the Emperor is attending to Imperial business in the Deep Core, and was unable to return to the Palace in time for Fete Week. His absence also meant the absence of his elite Palace Guards — the celebrants had to do without the stunning presentation of arms by the guards which traditionally opens the festivities.

Grand Admiral Tigellinus, Grand Moff Traeda, Moff Jaan, and a number of Imperial officers were on hand to officiate in the Emperor's absence.

Coruscant Daily NewsFeed

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**37:F1:4/DSN/T11R/ESS.3.CAR/POL/
 D.Mipps**

New Order Captures Parliament Majority

Camalar, Esseles

For the first time in over two decades, the Forad party has lost its lock on the Hall majority. With yesterday's election returns tallied and processed, it became clear that the Esselian New Order party had made sweeping inroads into the parliamentary body.

Jamson Freller, the leader of the ENO party, was ecstatic at the gains made in the Hall. "We are poised on the edge of a brilliant new era," he told a huge crowd gathered at the Nurumbal Shrine to celebrate the victory. "Tomorrow we open a new chapter in Esseles' history, a return to her glorious days of empire and sector dominance. Arm in arm with our Coruscant comrades, we will shed the dead weight of past indulgences."

Though Freller did not explain what indulgences he was referring to, observers are surmising that it refers to Esseles' Foradian policy of employing large numbers of aliens. Freller has promised to call for new presidential elections within a few days. He is expected to accept his party's nomination.

By Deena Mipps, Darpa SectorNet

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The Yard of opportunity

"Welcome to the Yard. I am A-3T0. Come with me, fellow scum." It gestures toward a corridor. "Syndicate One awaits ..."

Syndicate One

The organization that became Syndicate One was once a marketing division of Trigdale Metallurgy (from *Han Solo and the Corporate Sector Sourcebook*). After the Empire's fall, when chaos reigned, the company severed its link with several subordinate divisions, leaving them to survive alone. The marketing division supervisor, Saujutta-Ok-Topii, recognized the moment to seize this opportunity. She used personal holdings and business contacts to form Syndicate One and Executive Results from the old marketing personnel. She based the syndicate on Valgauth, a forgotten planet in the Expansion Region, and developed it for weapons manufacturing and distribution.

The syndicate makes weapons on Valgauth and delivers them to Executive Results for distribution to independent governments, political barons, pirates, and isolated military units of the New Republic and Empire. Handheld, vehicle and small starship-sized weapons are produced. Syndicate One's weapons are well-known for their availability and reliability. It is not uncommon for opposing forces to have identical Syndicate One armaments.

Syndicate One has the monopoly on weapons trade in three adjacent sectors in the Expansion Region and is competitive in several other areas. It is comfortable with its low profile as a neutral establishment in a war-torn galaxy.

Executive Results

This front company for Syndicate One is responsible for hiring and outfitting mercenaries to perform operations dictated by Saujutta's inner circle. Their offices are located in starports near the Perlemian Trade Route in the Expansion Region. Officially they are "used equipment dealers," but smuggle weapons inside machinery and vehicles.

Executive Results uses mercenaries as security guards, smugglers, messengers, and diversions. Few involved with Executive Results realize their cargoes contain weapons from Syndicate One. General cargo is brought to Valgauth, where weapons are inserted and hidden inside. Once packaged, the cargo and its hidden contraband is shipped to an Executive Results office and then delivered to the customer. Fewer than a dozen freighters make the runs from Executive Results to Valgauth.

Valgauth

Valgauth is one of three planets in the V1 and V2 binary star system. It is the only life-sustaining planet in the system, although a

breath mask is required by those visiting its surface. Long ago, manufacturing centers were built on this mineral-rich world during the galactic industrial expansion. Its wealth long depleted, the droid-automated silos were abandoned and programmed for periodic maintenance cycles. Through the years, the planet became a dumping ground for unwanted machinery and waste products.

Saujutta considered Valgauth a treasure when she discovered it on old star charts. Most of the facilities were in a state of terminal decay, weathered away by the planet's corrosive atmosphere. At first glance the planet appeared worthless, but the strongest and most adaptive droids had survived. They armored selected structures from the weather, pressurizing them and purifying the atmosphere within, and awaited release from their decades-long maintenance duties. This large droid labor force and its automated infrastructure were available to those who realized Valgauth's worth. Considering its strategic location in the Slice, Saujutta was convinced she could make a profit here.

Working for Executive Results

Executive Results hires all sorts of mercenaries for the transport and protection of cargo. For characters in the New Republic era working independently, this could be a good business opportunity that might lead to further adventures involving criminal underworld elements.

Executive Results pays 800 to 1,000 credits for each die in the hired mercenary's primary skill. A smuggler might be hired based on his *space transports* skill, or a mercenary could be hired for her *blaster* skill. These salaries are for one standard month's employment.

Example: *Lofre Yinne is hired for his space transports ability, 4D+2. Executive Results offers to pay Lofre a monthly salary of 3,200 (4 x 800) credits. This starting wage is based on his first hiring and no proof of exceptional skill.*

Executive Results also helps provision mercenaries for their missions. The company pays for five percent on the lease of vehicles, ships and heavy equipment required for some missions. One-third the normal cost of fuel, provisions and maintenance is paid. On many missions, however, characters are provisioned with ships, equipment and gear owned by Executive Results.

The planet is owned by Syndicate One. To protect its obscurity, official records have been changed to list Valgauth as an airless moon to a gas giant. Only select individuals are allowed unrestricted travel here. Those who are summoned here receive pre-routed codes to enter in their starship's nav computers. These codes assist in navigating the hostile atmosphere and in finding Syndicate One's base among the mountains of corroding refuse and ancient storage silos.

Valgauth has a craggy, barren surface littered with artificial mountains of debris. A perpetual rainstorm envelops the planet. When the precipitation contacts the surface, it reacts chemically and evaporates. This corrosive vapor condenses and cycles back to the ground.

Valgauth's corrosive atmosphere is both a benefit and hazard. Sensor scans to detect anything on the surface are only successful with a Very Difficult *sensors* roll. A Heroic roll is required to more specifically identify anything found on the planet's surface.

Any vessel entering the atmosphere must be steam sterilized no more than 20 standard hours after initial entry. Failure to do so results in plagues of mechanical and electrical complications. Treat these complications as ionization damage during starship combat.

Valgauth

Type: Waste world

Temperature: Temperate

Atmosphere: Type III (breath mask required)

Hydrosphere: Moist

Gravity: Standard

Terrain: Barren wasteland, debris fields

Length of Day: 26 standard hours

Length of Year: 669 local days

Sapient Species: Various aliens, Humans

Starport: Standard

Population: 35 Aliens and Humans, 1,000 droids

Planet Function: Manufacturing, hidden base

Government: Corporate owned

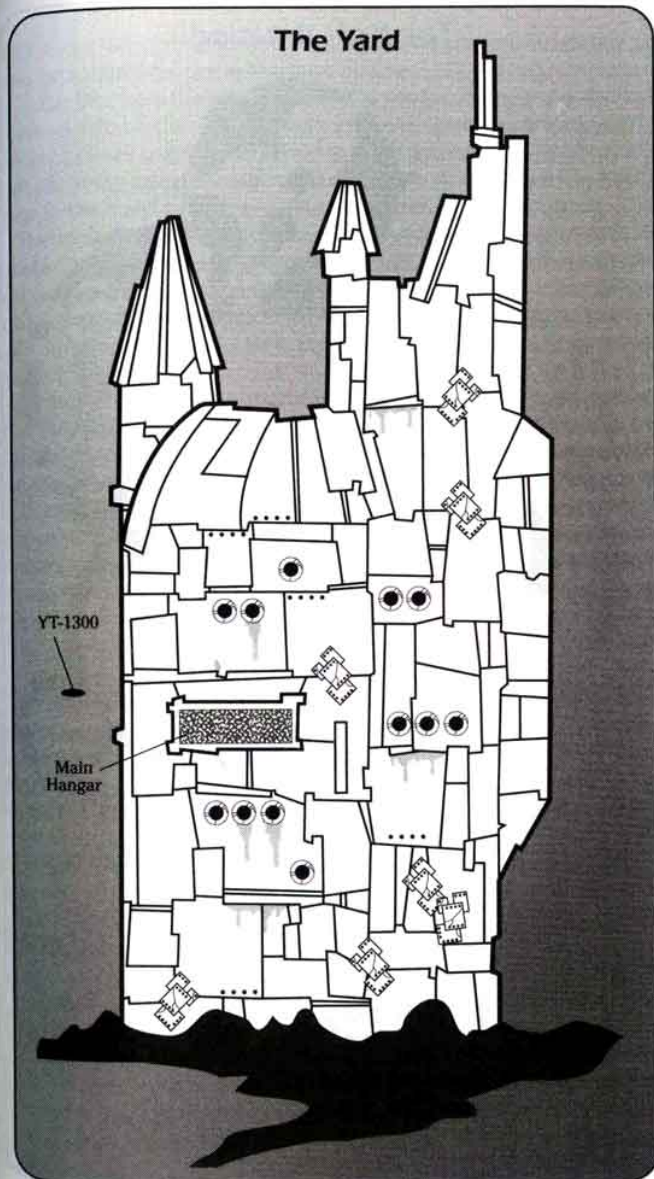
Tech Level: Space

Major Exports: Weapons

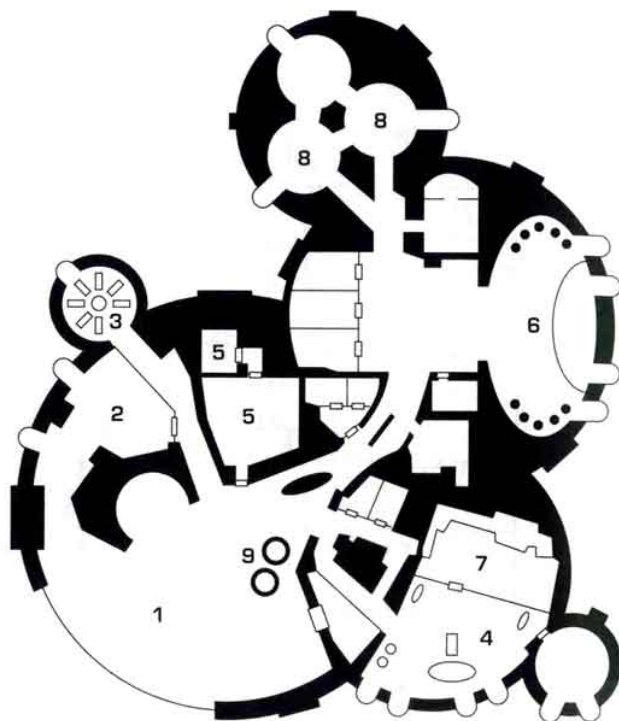
Major Imports: Metals, foodstuffs, luxury goods

The Yard

Syndicate One's headquarters is an assembly silo cluster known as the Yard. From the exterior it appears to be a junk heap. Discarded machinery and plates from torn down silos armor the Yard from Valgauth's hostile atmosphere. Inside, the Yard is mostly hollow, unused space with rooms constructed as needed. Obsolete



The Yard (Interior)



Key

- 1 Docking Bay
- 2 Maintenance Shop
- 3 Medical Center
- 4 Operations Center
- 5 Armory
- 6 Council Chamber
- 7 Computer Room
- 8 Rec Center
- 9 Cargo Lifts

machinery has been encased with walls and plastcrete, giving the interior a massive, castle-like appearance.

Turbolifts from the main floor give access to the upper and lower levels. Most of the lower levels contain droids and automated assembly lines used for weapons manufacturing. The upper floors contain living quarters and storage rooms. A solid fuel converter deep in the Yard's bowels generates power for the factories.

The main hangar can accommodate five light freighters and up to six starfighter-sized craft. Although small, it is sufficiently stocked and equipped to classify as a standard class starport. Specialized equipment uses sterilization fluid to remove atmospheric residue from landing starships. Two cargo-sized turbolifts are near the docking bay.

Saujutta converted an abandoned droid factory into the council chamber used to discuss daily business. Saujutta has decorated the chamber with her homeworld's spherical architecture. Stone pillars line the chamber's perimeter.

The Yard's only defense is heavy armor plating and the planet's corrosive atmosphere. Those trapped in the skies eventually leave or land. Those trying to land without the proper pre-routed navigational codes often crash in the corrosive, debris-strewn wastelands with little chance of survival.

Saujutta-Ok-Topii

Syndicate One's owner and operator began as a marketing lieutenant for Trigdale Metallurgy. Her division established sales relationships with the few acceptable alien societies within the Empire. She never had an opinion on galactic politics — she only cared about the credit value rate between sectors. The collapse of the Empire

Adventure Idea

Executive Results hires the characters to recover one of Saujutta's mercenary ships from a starport's impound yard. They must search the starport for the ship's location. Several leads should be explored, resulting in cold trails, new contacts or firefights. Eventually the characters learn that the local authorities have sold Saujutta's ship to pirates who transferred it to an isolated repair dock in the starport. The characters must successfully steal the vessel and return it to Valgauth undamaged.



and the New Republic's founding served to polarize the galactic community and make conditions even more profitable for a weapons manufacturer.

As marketing lieutenant, she developed strong ties and investments in mineral claims and manufactured products throughout the mining industry. Her persistent vision of someday owning her own company became a reality after the fall of the Empire. Moving quickly, she seized a forgotten planet and initiated business as Syndicate One, a name that expressed her aggressive corporate dreams.

Saujutta formed Executive Results as a front for Syndicate One. The company muscled its way through the adjacent sectors, securing its dominance in the weapons trade. Her products are a much-needed commodity in a galactic civil war.

Saujutta is a member of the amphibious Pan-preneur species from the Sonn Vilmari system. Her species is believed to be genetically related in a distant way to the Mon Calamari — although many aliens with aquatic origins share a similar genetic make-up. She has rust-orange skin with blue spotting. She often dresses in the traditional Terbulus ceremonial cloak from her homeworld's dominant culture.

■ Saujutta-Ok-Topii

Type: Corporate Crime Boss

DEXTERITY 2D

Blaster 3D, pick pocket 3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 6D+2, bureaucracy 7D, business 7D+2, cultures 6D+2, streetwise 5D, value 6D+1

MECHANICAL 3D

Communication 4D+1

PERCEPTION 4D

Bargain 6D+2, command 7D, investigation 5D+2, persuasion 6D+2

STRENGTH 2D

Swimming 4D

TECHNICAL 3D

Computer programming/repair 7D, droid programming 4D+2, security 5D

Special Abilities:

Underwater Activity: Pan-preneur suffer no penalties for performing actions under water, and can breathe water as easily as they breathe air.

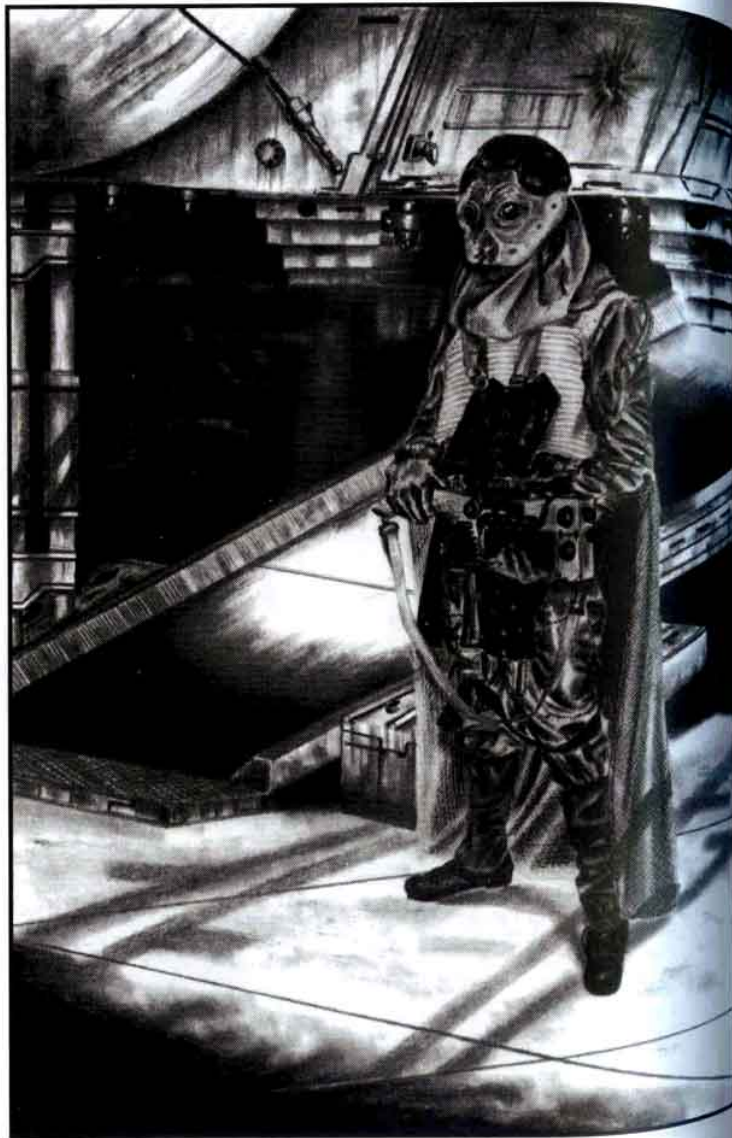
Swimming: All Pan-preneur characters begin with +2D added to their swimming skill.

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 4

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, datapad, sporting blaster (3D+1)



Sassan Sareeta

Native to the Sareet star system, Sassan's last name is derived from his nickname Sassan the Sareeta. His world was in the atomic age when it joined the galactic community. Sareet's leaders urged the young to explore the new community and help develop their homeworld. Responsibility was not for reckless Sassan; he hitched rides with seedy freight haulers and acquired a taste for YT-1300 series ships. Eventually he constructed his own hot-rod starship out of components from three YT-1300 freighter hulks he acquired.

With his ship the *Moondrake*, Sassan earned a living hauling various cargoes to dangerous locations. On a smuggling run in the Harrin Trade Corridor, Sassan encountered a TIE fighter picket line in the Lazerian system. Jury rigging his ship's controls, he oriented all shields forward and punched through the fighters, smashing all in his path. His piloting skill and heavily armored ship earned him a name as a blockade runner.

Executive Results needed such a mercenary and Saujutta liked his style. Sassan was hired to calculate jump routes for Syndicate One's gun-running expeditions and supervise the transport side of the business.

Sassan has mottled pink skin and large lidless eyes, and wears an old navy starfighter flight uniform.

■ Sassan Sareeta

Type: Sareetan Smuggler

DEXTERITY 4D

Blaster 6D+2, dodge 5D, melee combat 5D+1

KNOWLEDGE 2D+1

Languages 6D+1, planetary systems 5D+1, streetwise 4D+2

MECHANICAL 3D

Astrogation 7D+2, repulsorlift operation 4D+1, space transports 5D, space transports: YT-1300 7D+2, starship gunnery 4D+2, starship shields 4D

PERCEPTION 2D+1

Bargain 5D+1, con 4D+1, sneak 4D

STRENGTH 4D

TECHNICAL 2D+1

Security 4D+2, space transports repair 4D+1, space transports repair: YT-1300 6D+2

Force Points: 3

Character Points: 7

Move: 10

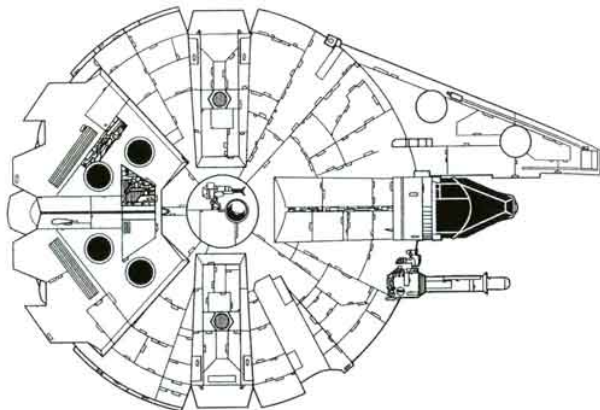
Equipment: Blast helmet (+1D physical, +1 energy), blast vest (+1D physical, +1 energy, torso only), blaster carbine (5D), flight suit

■ The Moondrake

Craft: Salvaged YT-1300 freighter

Type: Light freighter

Scale: Starfighter



Length: 26.7 meters
Skill: Space transports
Crew: 2
Crew Skill: See Sassan Sareeta
Passengers: 4
Cargo Capacity: 100 metric tons
Consumables: 2 months
Hyperdrive Multiplier: x2
Hyperdrive Backup: x8
Nav Computer: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 3
Atmosphere: 260; 750 kmh
Hull: 5D
Shields: 3D
Sensors:
Passive: 10/0D
Scan: 25/1D
Search: 40/2D
Focus: 2/3D
Weapons:
One Double Laser Cannon
Fire Arc: Front
Skill: Starship gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1-3/12/25
Atmosphere Range: 100-300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 4D+2

Norjax Thall

Before Palpatine's rise to power, Norjax Thall and the Flamestrike Legion defended the Bamula sector from foreign insurrections. Small and cohesive, the Legion was well trained and equipped. Reputed to be invincible, they met their match against the expand-



ing Galactic Empire and were forcibly disbanded.

Norjax, staying ahead of the Imperial tide, sought employment with various mercenary organizations. The former Flamethruster was now being orbitally inserted into hot landing zones on backwater worlds. Most of his opponents, ill-equipped to deal with modern soldiers, were easily dispatched. The anarchy of these primitive national wars forced Norjax to seek employment closer to the Core. He signed on with New Cov Biomolecule Company's security force (from the *Dark Force Rising Sourcebook*) before leaving to become involved in organized crime's "civilized" warfare.

Norjax found working with organized crime much more to his liking than corporate security. The pay was better, the missions an actual challenge, and the experience well earned. During one assignment to neutralize a Syndicate One operation, the opposing crime lords settled their differences and further conflict was avoided.

Adventure Idea

The characters are approached by an undercover New Republic operative attempting to stop Syndicate One's business with pro-Imperial governments. Syndicate One has become a thorn in the New Republic's efforts to unite the galaxy — on several occasions, isolated pockets of Imperial resistance have survived with weapons provided by Syndicate One. The agent offers an opportunity for the characters to set up their employers for a hard fall. The New Republic wants the characters to haul a piece of equipment to Syndicate One's headquarters — equipment containing a hidden sub-space tracking device.

If the characters choose to help the agent, they are granted docking privileges at any New Republic port. But they must first return to Valgauth with the tracking device, guiding New Republic infiltrator teams to Syndicate One's stronghold. If Saujutta learns of their traitorous activities, she places a bounty for their capture.

The characters might choose to play along with the operative's scheme, only to expose and capture him for Saujutta later. Loyalty to Syndicate One assures favor from Saujutta and her close associates. It opens opportunities for select assignments with the inner circle of Syndicate One. However, the characters are also listed in New Republic files as criminals against the Republic.

Saujutta was so impressed by Norjax's command and control abilities that she insisted he be put on her payroll as a permanent retainer. Since then he has served as weapons and tactical expert for Saujutta's business ventures.

Norjax is a tall, grizzled, pepper-haired human with cold eyes. Veteran to dozens of conflicts, he proudly wears his dependable, but battered, mustard-yellow Flamethruster armor. In this business, Norjax learned spit-and-polished uniforms earn less respect than ones with "character."

Norjax Thall

Type: Professional Soldier

DEXTERITY 4D

Blaster 7D, dodge 5D, firearms 5D, melee combat 5D, thrown weapons 5D+1

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Bureaucracy 3D+1, intimidation 4D, languages 3D, planetary systems 4D, survival 3D+2, tactics: ground assault 6D, willpower 4D

MECHANICAL 2D+2

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 4D+2, command 6D, persuasion 6D+1

STRENGTH 3D+2

Climbing/jumping 5D+2, stamina 7D

TECHNICAL 2D

Armor repair 5D, first aid 4D+1

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 7

Move: 10

Equipment: Flamethruster armor (+1D energy, +2D physical, -1D to *Dexterity* and related skills; internal targeting sensors add +2 to hit with ranged weapons), sniper blaster (5D)

Azuroth Khell

Born in the frigid hills of Kalzeron's Kost province, Azuroth Khell grew up in a harsh and savage pre-atomic civilization. Kalzeron's nations developed from tribal enclaves of the feudal age. A rigid honor code allowed their barbaric world to advance beyond a point of self-annihilation. When Imperial troops attempted to tame the citizens of Kalzeron, Azuroth joined a resistance group that fled Kalzeron to regroup. They trained, obtained equipment and planned a glorious return that would fuel a revolution. During their vacancy the Battle of Endor occurred and the Imperial occupational forces were withdrawn, allowing Kalzeron to regain freedom, but without duty and honor.

As a result, those in the home resistance accused those like Azuroth of being cowards. A formal charter from the over-council decreed them as traitors to their nation. He became an outcast from his birth world. Bitter, Azuroth vowed vengeance against his judg-



mental world-kin.

Azuroth sought employment as a hired gun, using his well-developed skills. He traveled from system to system with pirates, renegades and rebels. Azuroth became known for his uncompromising discipline, tenacity and stringent honor code. While employed by Executive Results, he was recommended by his superiors for Saujutta's inner circle. Now Azuroth is in charge of neutralizing the minions of Saujutta's rivals.

Azuroth is a near-human with gray, leather-like skin, black teeth, and yellow eyes. He wears a haphazard assortment of armor, equipment and weapons acquired over the years. A permanent scowl is worn on his face, and he rarely speaks.

Azuroth Khell

Type: Kalzerian Warrior

DEXTERITY 3D+1

Blaster 6D+1, dodge 4D+1, grenade 4D+1, melee combat 5D, melee parry 5D, running 4D, thrown weapons 4D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D+1

Languages 4D+2, planetary systems 6D, streetwise 4D+2, survival 4D+2

MECHANICAL 3D+2

Ground vehicle operation 5D, repulsorlift operation 6D+1, starship gunnery 5D+2

PERCEPTION 3D

Hide 4D+2, search 5D, sneak 5D+1

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 4D+1, climbing/jumping 6D, stamina 6D+1

TECHNICAL 2D+2

Blaster repair 3D, demolition 4D+2, first aid 4D

Force Points: 2

Character Points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Blast vest (+1D physical, +1 energy, torso only), blaster rifle (5D), comlink, force pike (STR+2D)

COUNTER STRIKE



By George R. Strayton

Illustrations by Matt Busch

Corva Sector. The Outer Rim. Dark times have fallen in this backwater section of the galaxy. Once far from the center of the Galactic Civil War, Corva has turned into a war zone only a few months after Grand Admiral Thrawn's defeat at the Bilbringi Shipyards.

An Imperial faction led by a mysterious Human has recently destroyed the New Republic communications center hidden within the gas giant planet Galaan, hampering New Republic communications in the sector. Over the past two weeks, Imperial activity has exploded, forcing the New Republic to spread its troops and starships thin across the sector to protect the inhabited worlds from the death grasp of the Kaarenth Dissension — a powerful splinter of the once mighty Empire.

But New Republic forces have encountered resentment among the alien species in the Outer Rim. On some worlds the animosity has grown so fierce that the aliens have declared war on the New Republic. Intelligence operatives have discovered that these beings believe Coruscant plans to subjugate all of its non-Human citizens, much like Emperor Palpatine did during his tyrannical reign. Should these false beliefs spread, it could doom the New Republic presence in the Outer Rim — starting with Corva Sector ...

The characters have assembled in a briefing room aboard the New Republic carrier cruiser, *Nova*. Captain Naren Bluuis, the Corva Sector Network Leader, arrives a few moments later to address the group. Read aloud:

Captain Bluuis strides into the briefing room. His shoulders seem hunched, his face drawn and pale. He coughs into a clenched fist and scans your group for a moment as he slips a datapad from an inside pocket.

"This mission is a dangerous one, but critical to the New Republic's continued existence in this sector. As you are aware, a new Imperial faction has risen to power in Corva Sector. Though at first we thought it an extension of the Pentastar Alignment, we have recently discovered that it is an independent splinter group calling itself the Kaarenth Dissension.

"Several Intell agents have reported that the Dissension has begun to infect the alien cultures of the sector with false rumors of the New Republic's agenda in the Rim. The source of this slander must be squelched before he — or she, or it — causes any further harm. And your team will carry out that task."

Bluuis presses one hand to his temple and closes his eyes. His face tightens as if he were fighting some inner conflict, but the struggle lasts only a moment.

"You will pose as smugglers plying the space lanes of the Outer Rim, especially the Daranc Run. Halfway along the run, near the center of Corva Sector, is the Betha system, a stop-over point for traders to rest, restock supplies, and lose their miserable lives in gambling and drink. We have lost several vessels and a number of Intell agents on Betha II, making it the most logical starting point for this mission.

"Your goal is simple: trace these rumors to their source and eliminate it." He looks over your group, locking eyes with each of you in turn. "I feel this bears rewording: you must find the *origin* of these false words, otherwise you will succeed in removing only

the pawn, not the master.

"You've been outfitted with a modified Trianii RX4 Patrol Ship, the *Instigator*. I had the ship techs reprogram her transponder codes with the designation the *Surge* as part of your cover. Be careful with her, she's a bit battered and her systems have been severely modified, but she's a good ship — and one of the few we have left. With luck, reinforcements will arrive from Coruscant before the next Imperial attack, but for now, every vessel counts.

"When you reach Betha II, rendezvous with Cev Malanx at Docking Bay 92. He's the smuggler who will purchase your cargo of illerium. We felt this action would strengthen your masquerade as traders and allow you to more easily assimilate into the ... culture.

"Oh, and be careful with those storage tanks — the illerium becomes highly volatile if it's exposed to air. And that's also the reason you should watch out for pirates. My techs tell me that some groups have been known to use it in concentrated form as a substitute for detonite. If anyone manages to discover the nature of your cargo, you might encounter some trouble.

"Last, I must stress that this operation requires the utmost of secrecy. Do not contact the New Republic until you have completed it.

"Any questions?"

Captain Bluuis has not fared well since his appointment as Corva Sector Network Leader. The Imperial faction calling itself the Kaarenth Dissension has eliminated several key Intell agents, plus uncountable ships and equipment. One of Bluuis' aids turned out to be an Imperial spy, sabotaging crucial operations throughout the sector. And now, from improper nutrition and lack of sleep, the captain has fallen gravely sick. But, ignoring doctor's orders, he refuses to rest, saying that the New Republic is counting on him to save it from the darkness of the Empire.

Before leaving the briefing, Bluuis hands over a rectangular storage container about 100 by 50 by 20 centimeters that holds the equipment Intell has provided the characters for this mission: five medpacs, one BioTech FastFlash Medpac, a datapad, two blocks of detonite, a timing device (which can be jury-rigged into a detonator timer) and, the most expensive piece, a Drooim-Durtha Systems ShipFinder (a subspace tracking device) acquired from a recently captured crimelord called Mahk'khar. The case has two handles, one on each of the shortest sides.

The *Surge* awaits the characters in docking bay Zed-Eleven. It sits

tucked in a corner by itself, having just been returned to working condition — like Bluuis says, at this critical time every ship counts. Though an older vessel, the *Surge* has undergone several modifications, most personally made by Captain Bluuis in his days before he joined the Alliance.

The *Surge* carries five metric tons of illerium — a highly volatile chemical used in the production of ejection pod release charges — in 20 one-and-one-half-meter high, silver canisters. Cev Malanx, their contact on Betha II, has agreed to pay 5,000 credits for the shipment, which he plans to sell to an underground group that uses illerium as an inferior alternative to detonite. Unfortunately, one of the storage tanks was cracked as it was loaded into the cargo bay. If the characters check the containers for leaks, they discover the problem and may fix the damaged valve on an Easy *Mechanical* roll. If they fail to examine the canisters, however, the first time laser fire penetrates the ship's shields, the crack bursts open and the container of illerium detonates, knocking out the rear deflectors until repaired.

The hyperspace journey to the Betha System takes six hours.

The Surge

Craft: Trianil RX4 Patrol Ship

Type: Modified light patrol craft

Scale: Starfighter

Length: 33 meters

Crew: 2, gunners: 2, skeleton 1/+5

Passengers: 6

Cargo Capacity: 30 metric tons

Consumables: 2 years

Hyperdrive Multiplier: x1

Hyperdrive Backup: x14

Nav Computer: Yes

Maneuverability: 1D+1

Space: 4

Atmosphere: 295; 850 kmh

Hull: 5D

Shields: 2D+1

Sensors:

Passive: 20/1D

Scan: 35/1D+1

Search: 80/2D+1

Focus: 2/3D

Weapons:

2 Twin Turbolasers (may be fire-linked)

Fire Arc: Turret

Crew: 1 (may be locked forward and fired by pilot, but fire control is 0)

Skill: Starship gunnery

Fire Control: 2D

Space Range: 1-5/15/20

Atmosphere Range: 100-500/1.5/2 km

Damage: 4D (5D when fire-linked)

1 Ion Cannon*

Fire Arc: Rear

Skill: Capital ship gunnery

Scale: Capital

Fire Control: 2D

Space Range: 1-10/25/50

Atmosphere Range: 2-20/50/100 km

Damage: 3D+1

* The ion cannon draws off a special power generator and can only fire once per day

ShipFinder

Model: Drooim-Durtha Systems ShipFinder

Type: Subspace tracking device

Skill: Sensors

Cost: 100,000

Availability: X

Game Notes: Use of the ShipFinder requires an Easy *sensors* roll. If successful, the character can locate the tracking device and plot a course to it from her present coordinates.

Capsule: Under contract from Drooim-Durtha Systems, Neb Ufentes, a noted space vessel engineer and an expert in hyperspace theory, designed the ShipFinder for the remaining Imperial forces nearly two years ago. He created several prototypes over the ensuing months, informing his superiors that he had at last mastered the problem of the device's small size coupled with its need for vast amounts of power to project its signal its full range of 20 light years. Rather than emitting a continuous beam, the ShipFinder disperses bursts of particles at a given time interval. The faster the interval, the easier it is to track the device, but the shorter its power cell life. This current version lasts only eight days and then goes dead. Unfortunately, before Neb could transfer the latest incarnation of the device, the crimelord Mahk'khar and his forces raided his private lab on the outskirts of Corva Sector, killing the engineer and stealing the ShipFinder prototypes.

Episode One: The Delivery

Read aloud:

The *Surge* soars across the sector along the Daranc Run, the most heavily trafficked space lane in this part of the galaxy. Finally, after six hours of hyperspace travel, star lines stream past the front viewport and suddenly snap into tiny points of light.

Your sublight engines take over, flaring blue as you head for the system's second planet, Betha II, a yellow-orange hunk of rock that no one is her right mind would want to call home. Over the millennia, the planet's moisture has escaped through its thin atmosphere, leaving a barren world of rocky crags and cliffs — the perfect spot for a smuggler's spaceport.

A flat, metallic voice blares over your comm as if the sender had turned up his output levels past critical. "*Surge*, we have you on our scanners. Please state your intentions."

Any character succeeding at a Moderate *Perception* check feels a tingling sensation run down her back. This spaceflight controller sounds much more sophisticated than the average smuggler ...

Betha II

Type: Terrestrial

Temperature: Temperate

Atmosphere: Type II (breath mask suggested)

Hydrosphere: Arid

Gravity: Standard

Terrain: Buttes, crevasses, desert canyons

Length of Day: 20 standard hours

Length of Year: 117 local days

Sapient Species: Various aliens and Humans

Starport: Limited services

Population: 800

Planet Function: Smuggler's outpost

Government: Anarchy

Tech Level: Space at starport, feudal elsewhere

Major Exports: Black market goods

Major Imports: Black market goods

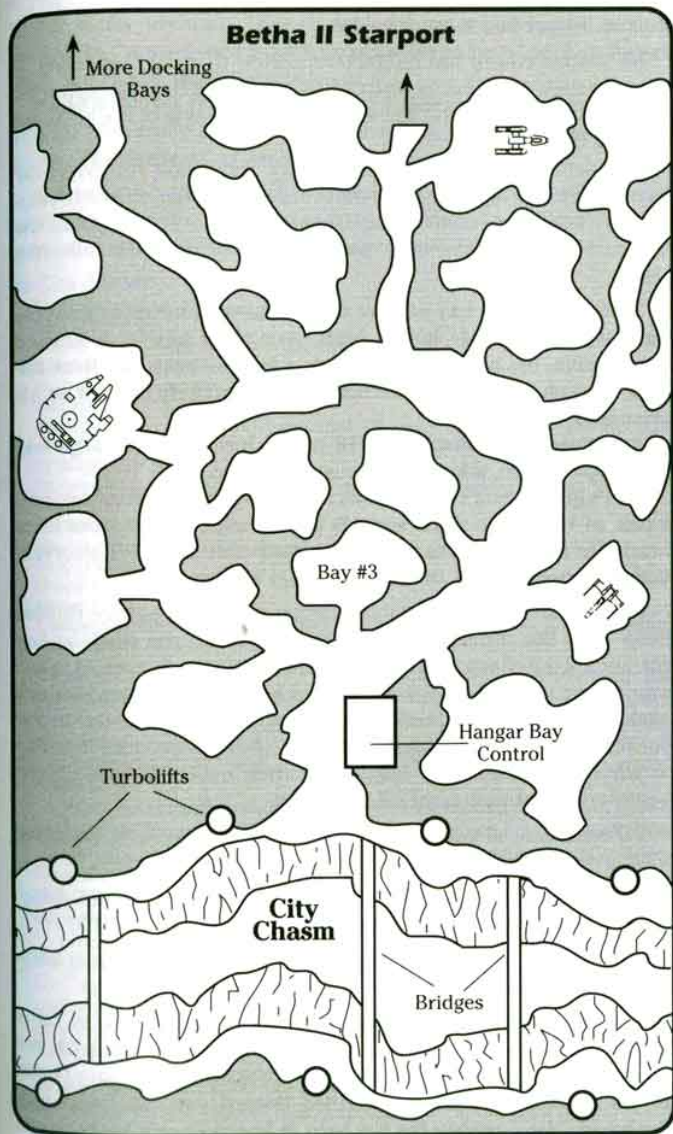
Capsule: Thousands of years ago Betha II thrived as a rest point halfway along the Daranc Run. But over time, the planet's weak gravity began to lose its hold on its atmosphere and soon after, the remaining few colonists finally abandoned it. Not until 30 years ago did anyone set foot on the barren world again. An enterprising smuggler brought in atmospheric generators that re-established a gaseous envelope in a small area near the equator. A small smugglers' enclave sprang up around the generators, and Betha II became known as a hideout and repair base. Since then the smuggling traffic has remained constant.

The control tower does not have stringent requirements for docking. Their only interest in the nature of a particular ship's intentions is to decide which docking bay to assign it. The more important the smuggler, the better the bay location he receives. The flight controller assigns the *Surge* to Bay 47, one of the worst in the spaceport. Read aloud:

With a final whine of its repulsors, the *Surge* sets down in Bay 47. It was a tight squeeze — the bay is just a few meters wider than the ship.

You step down from the *Surge* onto a crumbling duracrete floor, large holes dotting the grainy, gray surface. Scorch marks, obviously from blaster fire, mar the bay's walls, but at least the illumination panels seem to be working.

Suddenly, with a hissing pop, several glow panels flicker and



then short out in a flare of sparks.

No matter where the characters decide to go at this point — either to their rendezvous with Cev Malanx or out to explore the city — they happen upon the scene of a robbery at one of the adjacent docking bays.

Characters who succeed at an Easy *Perception* roll overhear someone muttering orders of “don’t move” and “hands where I can see ‘em” when they come within 20 meters of the robbery. Once the characters get within visual range of the bay, read the following aloud:

Looking into the bay you see two Humans standing against the right wall with their hands high over their heads. A horned Devaronian, his back to you, stands a few meters away from the men. In each hand he holds a blaster, both of them trained on his prisoners.

A battered Corellian YT-1210 tramp freighter, its cargo bay doors open wide, takes up the rest of the bay.

“Let’s go. We don’t have all day,” the Devaronian grumbles, and a pair of Ho’Din — thick strands of hair sticking out from their heads like nests of snakes — drops another crate onto a repulsorsled and then rushes back into the freighter’s cargo area.

Once finished unloading the freighter’s cargo, the three thieves jump onto the repulsorsled and speed toward the docking bay entrance. If the characters engage in battle with the thieves, or in any way distract the Devaronian, the two Humans reach into hidden pockets, yank out hold-out blasters, and fire immediately on the horned alien. If the characters do not act, the thieves zoom off to Bay 63 where they load their cargo onto their own ship — a Ghtroc freighter — and then blast off into space.

1 Devaronian. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 3D, *blaster* 4D, *brawling* 3D+2, *grenade* 4D+2, *Strength* 3D+1. Move: 10. Heavy blaster (5D).

2 Ho’Din. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 3D, *blaster* 4D, *dodge* 4D+2, *repulsorlift operation* 3D. Move: 10. Blaster pistol (4D).

After the battle, the Humans thank the characters for their help. Read the following aloud:

The two Humans stash their hold-out blasters back in their hidden pockets. One, the taller and thinner of the two, with the sides of his head shaved and a long swath of blond hair going back across the top of his head, strides toward you, his hand outstretched. “Hey, thanks for the help. It just ain’t safe for Humans

in this sector anymore. That’s the third time we got — well, *almost* got taken. I’m supposed to pick up some cargo here but, hey, forget that. We’re just getting outta here.

“And if there’s ever anything I can do for you — you know, hook you up with some o’ my *connections* or something — just let me know. The name’s Cev Malanx.”

Cev refuses to purchase the illerium — he wants to leave Betha II as soon as possible. If the characters succeed at a Moderate *con* or *persuasion* roll, however, he does agree to buy half.

Cev Malanx

Type: Smuggler

DEXTERITY 3D+1

Blaster 5D+2, dodge 5D, melee combat 5D

KNOWLEDGE 2D+1

Business 3D, languages 3D+1, planetary systems 4D, streetwise 3D+2, value 5D

MECHANICAL 3D+2

Astrogation 4D+2, repulsorlift operation 4D, space transports 6D, starship gunnery 4D

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 4D+2, con 3D+2, forgery 3D+2, gambling 3D, persuasion 3D+2

STRENGTH 3D

TECHNICAL 2D+2

Blaster repair 3D, repulsorlift repair 3D+2, space transports repair 4D

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 7

Move: 10

Equipment: Blast vest (+1D physical, +1 energy, torso only), comlink, heavy blaster pistol (5D), hold-out blaster (3D)

Capsule: Cev Malanx joined the smuggling profession at an early age, for his father plied the spacelanes of the Mid-Rim and took young Cev along to show him the ropes. When Cev reached what his father considered the proper maturity level, he sent his son off to the Outer Rim in a battered and bruised Ghtroc tramp freighter. But Cev, or his ship rather, never made it.

He found himself stranded at Gelgelar Free Port on the swamp planet of Gelgelar. Though traffic through the city was slow, Cev eventually met up with Regec Sloom, a fledgling smuggler looking for a pilot and partner. Only after the two had left Gelgelar in Sloom’s Corellian YT-1210 freighter, the *Starspin*, did Cev learn that Regec had a few *problems* with the Imperials.

Since then the two have spent most of their time eluding the Empire. But over the past year they have started to become less concerned with the Imperials and more concerned with profit. But Corva Sector has proven hostile toward Humans as of late, and both Cev and Regec plan to return to the Mid-Rim or even to the Core Worlds as soon as they complete their next transaction.

Regec Sloom. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 4D, *blaster* 4D+2, *starship gunnery* 5D+1. Move: 10. Heavy Blaster (5D), hold-out Blaster (3D).

Both Malanx and his companion, Regec Sloom, have visited Betha II often over the past few years. Though Regec remains quiet throughout the exchange, Cev can provide the characters with some information on the city's establishments. As soon as their conversation ends, Cev and Regec plan to leave the planet.

Should the characters decide to investigate the starport's control center, they arrive at a locked, heavy blast door. A slotted intercom next to the door crackles and buzzes, and then a filtered voice demands to know the characters' business. No matter what the characters say or do, the stormtroopers on the other side of the door refuse to allow the team inside...

Episode Two: The Infection Spreads

Read aloud:

You head down the central promenade of the docking bay complex, passing dozens of tramp freighters from all over the sector. The area where you left your ship had dim lighting and various sorts of debris scattered across the duracrete. But as you get closer to the main exit, the bays seem to be in much better shape — clear of trash, well-lit, and recently painted. Worker droids busy themselves fixing holes in the floor and walls, and several repulsorsleds filled with shining spare parts whiz by you in both directions.

Just as you pass Docking Bay 3, a boxy shape suddenly slides out of nowhere to block your progress. An old, bulky droid hovers about a meter above the floor as its control panels flash in a seemingly random pattern. A rectangular panel slips down to reveal the black end of a blaster.

"I would not advise proceeding on your current course," it says in a monotone buzz. "The Dissension does not appreciate intruders." Its head swivels around a full circuit as its single photoreceptor scans the wide corridor. As it turns you notice that a strange design covers the rear section of its dome. The bold, swooping insignia looks familiar, but you can't recall where you've seen it before.

The droid's photoreceptor stares at you again, whirring as it constantly refocuses. "Tell your comrades to reveal themselves."

Tee-Eleven at one time served the Old Republic as a military tactics specialist, programmed with the details of millions of campaigns ranging from feudal skirmishes to devastating space battles. But when the Empire emerged out of the remnants of the Imperial

Senate, Tee-Eleven immediately received transfer orders. It was reprogrammed to run a garbage scow which would meander the sectors of the Core Worlds swallowing the debris that littered the spacelanes. Unfortunately for Tee-Eleven, the slicer who did the reprogramming failed to re-initialize one of its memory units. And worse, that unit did not mesh well with its new program.

Slowly, Tee-Eleven's subroutines mutated as a result of the incompatibility. Its "thoughts" became erratic, snapping into one process in the middle of another. This sudden, involuntary shifting led to several "psychoses," the most problematic of which was paranoia. Not more than three months after its recommissioning, Tee-Eleven and the garbage scow vanished into the Outer Rim.

Agents of the Kaarenth Dissension recently recovered the scow (after a short blaster exchange). Tee-Eleven was transferred to a droid storage bay for purging — again. This time, however, it would not let them ravage his insides. After several weeks the slave droid in charge had lost all patience with Tee-Eleven and decided to send it out on the next request no matter what kind of droid was needed.

Tee-Eleven's only assignment on its current mission is to keep the Skipray blastboat docked in Bay 3 ready for immediate take-off. But it knows that the "others" slip through the shadows that its photoreceptor cannot penetrate, stalking it, waiting to catch it unaware and twist up its memory banks again.

Tee-Eleven snaps at the slightest provocation, lashing out with bright blaster fire. On a Moderate roll the characters may *con* or *persuade* the droid that they stand with it as friends, not against it as enemies. If this occurs, Tee-Eleven decides that the characters can protect it better than its current master, and offers to join the team. But even if the characters decline the offer, Tee-Eleven follows them throughout the city, hanging back just enough to keep within sight of the group. As time passes, however, his circuits malfunction and he concludes that the characters somehow tricked him. He quickly heads back to Docking Bay 3 to await his master, afraid of the wrath that might come upon him if he should be discovered away from his post.

It has learned little of the Dissension aside from its name, though it has noticed that during the past several weeks, tension among the members of the group has increased significantly.

■ T-11 (Tee-Eleven)

Type: JV-Z1/S DataBank Droid
DEXTERITY 2D
KNOWLEDGE 4D
MECHANICAL 1D

PERCEPTION 1D
STRENGTH 1D
TECHNICAL 2D+1

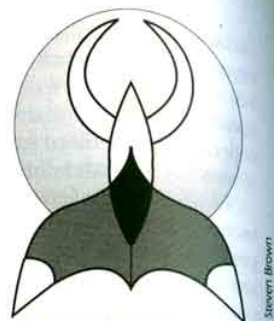
Equipped with:

- Low-power repulsorlift unit
- Box-like torso and dome head
- Concealed blaster (4D)
- Voculator speech/sound system

Move: 8

Size: 1 meter tall

Game Notes: The constant short-circuiting of Tee-Eleven's systems has caused him to lose all specific knowledge and capabilities beyond his base attributes — he has lost all of his skills.



Kaarenth Dissension Emblem

Steven Brown

Docking Bay 3 houses a blastboat that bears the same strange markings found on Tee-Eleven's dome. The vessel seems a deep gray in color, but closer examination reveals a thin film of dust and grime that covers its metal surface, darkening its base hue.

Characters making a *Moderate Knowledge* roll can vaguely identify the strange markings as the symbol for the Kaarenth Dissension. The blastboat is the only vessel they've seen in the starport bearing such insignia. Should the characters feel that this starship is somehow important to their mission, they may attach their subspace tracking device to its hull on an *Easy space transports repair* roll.

Heading Into Betha Starport

Read aloud:

After about 10 more minutes of walking, you finally reach the gaping exit of the complex. But looking out over the rocky landscape, you don't see any sign of a city — not even a single building — just the edge of a cliff about 35 meters away.

The city is built in a huge crevasse, with several bridges spanning the distance between the two sheer cliff faces. All of the city's establishments have been carved right into the rock. Six-meter wide turbolifts run through the city's three levels — Level Three being the bottom-most — in cylindrical shafts cut into the cliffs. The characters never have to wait more than three minutes for a lift. The docking bay complex is to the west of the city. When the characters approach the edge of the cliff, read the following aloud:

As you cross the pale-orange, rocky ground and near the cliff's edge, a tramp freighter soars by overhead and then disappears into the docking bays behind you. You continue forward, and when you get within five meters of the ledge, you see a gleaming

metal cylinder set within the cliff wall nearby. Metal doors slide open with a whoosh to reveal the turbolift's interior.

The turbolift takes the characters to whichever city Level — one, two, or three — they desire.

Few people wander the city, giving the place a somewhat eerie feel — much like that of planets suddenly abandoned after their spice mines ran dry. The beings the characters do see are all aliens, who glare at any Humans in the group until one group or the other passes out of sight.

The characters may visit the city's establishments in any order they choose. Apart from those detailed below, the buildings along the cliff faces belong to private individuals — most of whom are not at home at the moment.

When the characters attempt to cross one of the bridges that stretches between the cliffs, read the following aloud:

As you cross one of the city's many bridges, a trio of Hammerheads steps onto the opposite side of the span. They walk casually toward you, slapping each other on the back as they whisper in a voice too low for you to hear. As they get closer, you notice that they seem to be staggering and bumping into each other randomly.

When they get within a few meters of you, they fan out into a line that blocks your passage. The center Hammerhead stares at you with its bulbous, milky-white eyes. "New here," it slurs in broken Basic. The two aliens flanking the speaker erupt in groan-like laughing.

These Hammerheads once plied the space lanes of the Mid-Rim Territories, but were ambushed by a group of Humans — former Imperials fleeing the Core Worlds after the fall of the Empire. These Humans stole the aliens' vessel and left them stranded in space in a malfunctioning assault shuttle that was already low on power. Only through their technological skill and a string of good luck did the Hammerheads survive, and they vowed to find — and wreak their revenge upon — the men who had done this to them.

In their drunken stupor, the aliens mistakenly believe that the characters are members of the Imperial group that left them to die. The characters must proceed carefully in their conversation with the Hammerheads; a single mis-spoken word or contradictory attitude could result in a firefight. A *Very Difficult con or persuasion* roll, however, might allow the characters to pass without incident.

3 Drunk Ithorians. All stats are 2D except: *blaster 3D, brawling 2D+2*. Move: 10. Blaster pistol (4D).

The Personal Supply Shop — Level One, West Cliff

Read aloud:

In a shaded corner of the city, blocked from the sun by a curving precipice high above, hangs a pressure-painted sign bearing the words "Seroooin's Gear."

Glaring white glow panels bathe the interior of the shop, reflecting off the sparkling metal, crystal, and transparisteel parts of the equipment on display. Nooks and niches carved into the rock walls hold both new and used gear, from illegal BlasTech heavy blasters to the latest in computer infiltration slicer cards.

Behind a smooth, stone counter on one side of the shop stands a Squib. "What do you want?" he says as one of his hands slips below the counter.

The Squib, Arrejis Mellaha, doesn't like the atmosphere that has fallen over the city lately. He trusts no one at this point, though he bears no particular ill will toward Humans, or toward the New Republic, for that matter. If it weren't for the government bans placed on certain trade goods, he'd be out of a job.

But he has learned not to become involved with any side in any dispute — better to sell to both and enjoy the extra profit. With the Kaarenth Dissension's recent offerings to alien smugglers in Corva Sector, the renovation of Betha II's starport facilities especially, Arrejis feels the war steadily marching toward his doorstep. And he plans to relocate to a safer sector before the fighting begins.

Since he needs to gather as many credits as possible to facilitate his move, he sells anything a customer shows interest in, including information. He answers any question put to him to the best of his knowledge for the fair price of 50 credits each.

Characters can find much legal and illegal equipment here, priced at 20% above normal. The gamemaster should use her discretion as to what Arrejis has left in stock.

When the characters decide to leave, Arrejis offers one final warning: stay away from Docking Bay Three. He will not explain further, saying that he wishes to distance himself from the conflict.

Arrejis Mellaha. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity 3D+1, blaster 3D+2, dodge 4D, running 3D, Knowledge 3D, business 3D+2, value 4D, bargain 3D+2, con 4D, persuasion 3D+1*. Move: 8. Blaster (4D).

Starship Supplies — Level Two, East Cliff

Read aloud:

On the second level of the East Cliff you find a gaping square hole about 15 meters high and 40 meters wide. A computer display to one side reads "Univamp StarParts" in huge block-letters.

Inside, a few small ships and several stripped hulks sit under the harsh light of the powerful, cone-shaped illuminators hanging above them. As you march across the gray duracrete, your footsteps echo off the high ceiling and several aliens in the midst of repairing a Z-95 Headhunter look up from their work.

The aliens do not wish to dally with the characters, saying they have important business to attend to at dusk. If pressed about their business at dusk, the aliens take on an arrogant tone and tell the characters to mind their own business, or else they might learn the nature of their upcoming meeting too soon for their liking.

If the characters ask about spare parts or new equipment for their starship, the owner, a Chadra-Fan named Gwinneec Strov, emerges to taunt any Humans in the characters' group for a few moments, saying how typical it is that Humans are always hoarding the choice starship parts for themselves and their constant modifications. He continues by saying that Humans never leave well enough alone, and always have to bother themselves with other beings' business. The rest of the workers in the bay leave their work and stand behind their boss.

Strov refuses to sell the characters any starship parts, and firmly asks them to leave his establishment.

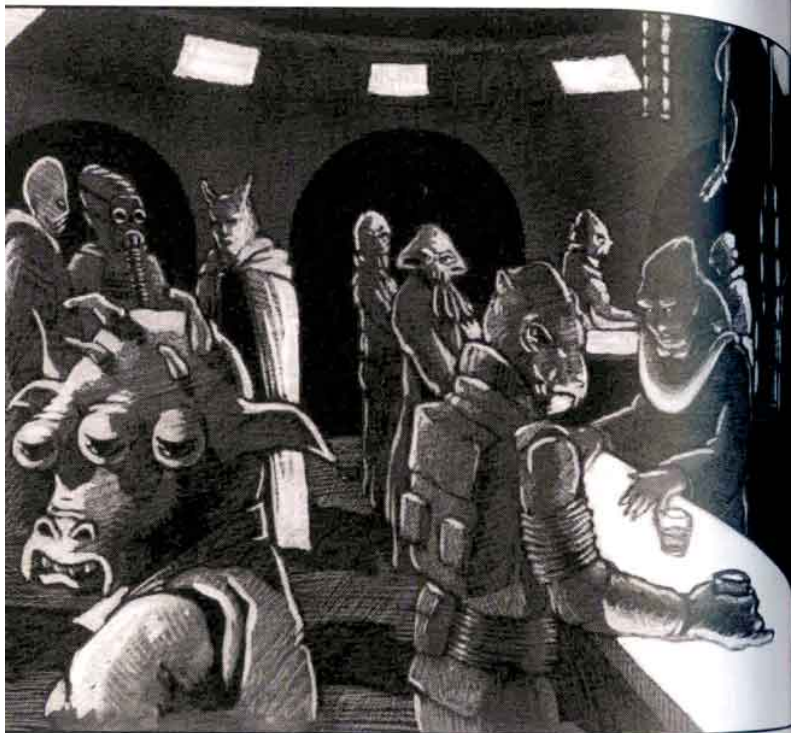
If the characters watch Univamp StarParts from afar, they eventually see most of the aliens pack up for the day and head off along the starports cliff ledges and turbolifts for their meeting at the Lazy Bergruutfa Cantina.

Lazy Bergruutfa Cantina — Level Three, East Cliff

Read aloud:

The inside of the Lazy Bergruutfa sprawls back into the cliff in a large circular chamber. Stone tables and benches sit haphazardly about the domed cantina, all centered around a disc-like stage where a group of aliens bash out garbled music. A hastily written sign pasted onto a huge, black, round instrument proclaims the group "The Galactic Plague."

Dozens of alien species — including Duros, Givins, Rodians, Kubaz and Gotal — crowd around the stone tables, muttering,



whispering and laughing. Above their heads, near the ceiling of the large chamber, hangs a wispy cloud of cigarra smoke, highlighted by the red light from the few dim glow panels.

Several of the cantina's patrons look up as you enter, nudging each other while they stare at you.

The Bergruutfa offers the finest in smugglers' beverages — Corellian whiskey, Renan Irongut, Reactor Cores, spiced liquor, Socorran raava, and Ottegan mead.

The alien patrons ignore Human characters. Should a character provoke one of the aliens, it gives a harsh warning and resumes its business. If the provocation continues, however, the alien — and at least two of its friends — attack.

Alien characters who distance themselves from their Human companions have a better chance at acceptance. A larger-than-

normal Kubaz named Shuzz wanders the cantina, stopping at various tables. He eventually sits down with the alien character and invites him to a special meeting at dusk. Shuzz does not explain further, saying only that the assembly will help all alien species across the galaxy retake their long-forgotten rights.

If the characters have arrived in time for the scheduled meeting, read the following aloud:

The musicians drag away their clunky instruments, leaving the stage completely clear. Then all at once the muttering of the patrons falls off, as if they were waiting for something — or someone.

A moment later, sharp footfalls break the silence. With long, deliberate strides, a tall figure — a Human — moves through the crowd and steps up onto the bare stage. He pivots on his heel, and stares out over his audience.

The man wears a black Imperial uniform with a multicolored rectangle of insignia across his left breast. His hair is brushed and oiled straight back, giving it the look of a tight helmet as it reflects the red light streaming down from the glow panels.

"Beings of the galaxy," he begins. His voice sounds shrill and scratchy, as if ravaged by overuse. "You know as well as I the dangers of this New Republic government. We cannot let ourselves fall beneath them. And we cannot wait for them to gather their forces for the final battle for dominance."

He eyes suddenly meet yours, and he glares at you for a moment, then looks away. "We must strike now. Strike hard, strike fast! Strike to kill!" He emphasizes the last phrase with a punch into an open palm.

He lets the silence hang for a moment, allowing his words to gestate, and then steps off the stage.

The Human — Commander Ulcane — steps up to the bar and orders a Corellian whiskey. Several aliens converge on him in a tight circle as they strain to hear his plans. Characters who succeed at a Difficult *Perception* check overhear snippets of the conversation. Apparently, Ulcane belongs to the Kaarenth Dissension. The former Imperials want nothing more than to distance themselves from their predecessors, at least that is what Ulcane says. The retaliation against the New Republic will begin soon — the Dissension has already assembled a formidable fleet. It needs only a few more vessels, especially smaller ships to take on the New Republic's starfighters. And that is where the alien smugglers come in.

Characters who study Ulcane's clothing note an insignia on his



uniform's right shoulder — the same mark as the one on the droid Tee-Eleven and the blastboat in Bay 3.

A few of the aliens immediately voice their intention to join in the battle against the New Republic. The rest say nothing, but neither do they leave Ulcane's side.

Then the conversation ends abruptly. Ulcane looks up and around, stands, and heads out of the cantina with a final nod to his listeners. Characters who succeed at an Easy Perception check notice that many of the aliens have slipped their hands to their blasters.

Two aliens — a Kubaz and a Givin — step in front of the cantina's single exit, their blasters in hand. Six other aliens, the ones who had been speaking with Ulcane, draw their weapons and open fire on the characters.

The aliens chase the characters as far as the docking bay complex, and then, apparently, give up.

10 Alien Smugglers. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 3D, *blaster* 3D+2, *dodge* 3D. Move: 10. Heavy blaster pistol (5D).

Meanwhile, Ulcane chuckles darkly to himself as he heads to his ship. He knows nothing of the characters' identity, thinking them merely a bunch of meddling smugglers, but he is pleased that his alien *friends* have finally fallen to his side. The New Republic in Corva Sector cannot stand against their combined force.

It takes Ulcane 10 minutes to arrive at and board his ship, a stolen and heavily modified Skipray blastboat, at Docking Bay 3. Four more minutes pass as the blastboat completes its power-up. He receives instant clearance from the control center, which is run by members of the Dissension, and plots a course to the Spawn Nebula.

When the characters arrive and attempt to plant their subspace tracking device, Tee-Eleven slips from the shadows near the bay's entrance and opens fire (if he hasn't already been somehow disabled by the characters). Once they have defeated the paranoid droid, the characters may successfully affix the subspace tracking device to the outside of the blastboat on an Easy *space transports repair* roll.

■ Commander Meres Ulcane

Type: Kaarenth Dissension Officer

DEXTERITY 3D+2

Archaic guns 8D, blaster 7D, *dodge* 5D+1

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 5D, bureaucracy 5D+1, cultures 4D+2, intimidation 5D, languages 8D, planetary systems 6D, survival 4D+1, tactics 6D

MECHANICAL 2D

Astrogation 3D, repulsorlift operation 3D, space transports 5D, starship gunnery 3D

PERCEPTION 4D

Command 8D+2, con 5D+1, persuasion 6D

STRENGTH 2D+1

Stamina 3D+1

TECHNICAL 2D

Demolition 4D+1, security 3D+2

This character is Force-sensitive.

Force Points: 3

Dark Side Points: 4

Character Points: 11

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, datapad, heavy blaster pistol (5D), slugthrower (4D)

Capsule: Meres Ulcane entered the Imperial Academy at the age of 17. Though he scored low on his entrance exams, Ulcane had an uncle in the military who persuaded members of the applicant acceptance board to let his nephew bypass some of the minimum requirements.

Ulcane's first posting put him in a lowly demolition squad, a skill for which he seemed to possess little natural talent. He began to suspect that some of his superiors detested him for his familial connections and

planned to cut short his career. When his first assignment thrust him and his squad into the heart of Rebel Alliance territory, he confirmed his suspicions, and knew that his rise to the top might prove more difficult than he had imagined.

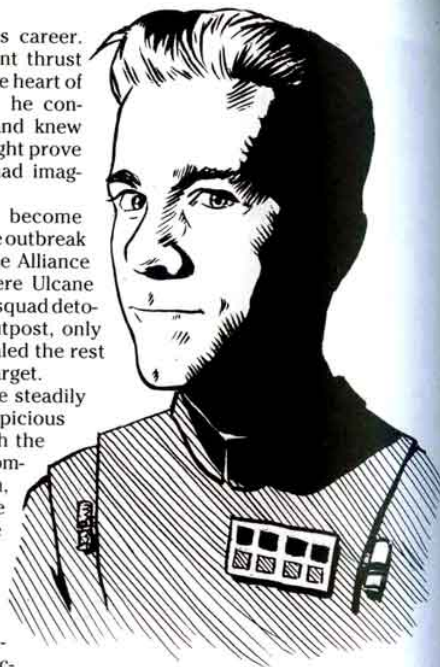
Field promotion had become standard practice with the outbreak of direct war between the Alliance and the Empire, and there Ulcane saw his chance. When his squad detonated an entire Rebel outpost, only he escaped — he had sealed the rest of his team inside their target.

Over the years he rose steadily — and always under suspicious circumstances — through the Imperial ranks. Since his comrades failed to accept him, Ulcane kept to himself. He immersed himself in the study of alien cultures, hoping to obtain a transfer to the Outer Rim where he believed he would gain more control over his underlings and fewer restrictions from his superiors.

A few years later, mere months after the Empire's devastating defeat at Endor, Captain Ulcane fled from a mass mutiny of his Outer Rim troops who threatened to eject him into space. He eventually fell in league with another former Imperial, a mysterious man who promised a new, stronger Imperial presence — a man who had created the Kaarenth Dissension from a splinter of Palpatine's Empire.

Ulcane soon launched his master plot to pit the aliens of the Outer Rim against the New Republic. He knows that without the support of the non-Human species, the New Republic will fall hard. He enjoys his excursions to the smuggler holes scattered across Corva Sector, though he never travels without his prized archaic slugthrower — and a good blaster, just in case.

Skipray Blastboat. Capital, capital ship gunnery 5D+1, capital ship piloting 5D, maneuverability 1D+2 (2D+2 in atmosphere), space 8, atmosphere 415; 1,200 kmh, hull 2D+1, shields 2D. Weapons: 3 medium ion cannons (fire-linked; fire control 3D+2, damage 4D+2), proton torpedo launcher (fire control 2D, damage 9D), 2 laser cannons (fire-linked; fire control 2D, damage 5D+1), concussion missile launcher (fire control 2D, damage 6D).



Episode Three: Blast Out of Betha

Once the characters return to the *Surge* and prepare to leave the planet, the control center informs them that they do not have takeoff clearance. Only on a Difficult con roll may they convince the control center to allow them to exit the docking bay. If the characters proceed without clearance, the metallic voice screams over and over that the *Surge* may not leave the city.

When the characters exit Betha II's atmosphere, an Easy sensors roll alerts them to a group of four vessels coming at them fast. If they fail the roll, however, the incoming ships gain a free round of fire upon the *Surge*. Read the following aloud:

As you pull away from the orange sphere of Betha II and head into the blackness of space, four sparkling objects careen toward you, skimming the planet's atmosphere.

Ulcane asked his newfound alien allies to destroy the *Surge*. The more he thought about their curious arrival, the more suspicious he became. After a search through his own ship's data records, he found no references to a vessel in this sector bearing the designation *Surge*. And he could not afford to take any chances.

If the characters helped Cev Malanx, the smuggler arrives in his tramp freighter, the *Starspin*, to aid the characters after the first round of combat. Read the following aloud:

As laser fire slashes through space all around you, another ship zooms by overhead. Green bursts of energy lance out from the vessel and slam into a Z-95 Headhunter, sending the small fighter into a tight spin.

"Well," a voice howls over the comm, "looks like we'll be able to pay you back after all." Cev Malanx's tramp freighter makes a tight loop and comes in again with its laser cannons blazing.

2 Z-95 Headhunters. Starfighter, starfighter piloting 4D, starship gunnery 3D+1, maneuverability 1D, space 7, atmosphere 400; 1,150 kmh, hull 4D, shields 1D. Weapons: 2 triple blasters (fire-linked; fire control 1D, damage 3D), concussion missile launcher (fire control 1D, damage 7D).

2 Ghtroc Freighters. Starfighter, space transports 3D+2, starship gunnery 4D, maneuverability 1D, space 3, atmosphere 260; 750 kmh, hull 3D+2, shields 1D. Weapons: 1 double laser cannon (fire control 1D+2, damage 4D).

Starspin. Starfighter, space transports 6D, starship gunnery 5D+1, maneuverability 1D, space 4, atmosphere 480; 800 kmh, hull 5D,

shields 2D+2. Weapons: 1 laser cannon (fire control 2D, damage 6D), 2 concussion missile tubes (fire control 1D, damage 8D).

Cev duels with one of the Ghtroc freighters while the characters engage the remaining three enemy vessels.

After the battle, Cev, if he survives, bids the characters farewell, saying that he's heading for the Core Worlds. He hopes that their paths cross again soon.

On an Easy *sensors* roll, the characters can pick up the ShipFinder's signal. An Easy *astrogation* roll allows them to program the coordinates for the light speed jump to a nearby system.

Episode Four: Into the Nebula

Read aloud:

After only an hour out from Betha II, the nav computer begins its countdown to normal-space re-entry. The chronometer clicks down to zero and, as your pilot eases the lightspeed throttle forward, the gray clouds of hyperspace erupt into star lines and then snap into gleaming star-points.

And then the *Surge* shudders wildly, throwing everything — and everyone — not strapped down half-way across the ship.

Every character not strapped into their station must make an Easy *Dexterity* roll or suffer 2D of damage from smashing into one of the ship's interior bulkheads. The *Surge*'s pilot must make a Moderate *space transports* roll to steady the ship. As a result of the wild bucking, characters must make an Easy *Dexterity* roll each time they want to attempt a task.

The characters have dropped out of hyperspace at the edge of the Spawn Nebula. The gases, radiation, and gravitational energy of the nebula affected the *Surge*'s nav computer, causing it to return to normal space too early.

Any character making a Moderate *sensors* roll determines that the *Surge* must alter its course since, on their present vector, the ship will plunge into the heart of the nebula — and might never escape in one piece. The slight course adjustment brings the *Surge* into a pocket of "empty" space within the nebula cloud.

If the characters do not change the ship's trajectory, its shields completely burn out after 20 minutes. This time an Easy *sensors* roll alerts them to the needed course correction. In this section of the nebula bursts of electrical energy erupt from where volatile gases collide, slicing through the cloud like huge ionization beams. As a result, for every additional 10 minutes that the characters remain

within the nebula cloud, a randomly determined ship system goes off-line, returning to full function after several moments.

When the characters enter the pocket of "empty" space within the nebula, read the following aloud:

The *Surge* continues to buck uncontrollably, and you start to worry that it might fly apart. Then suddenly, the terrible shuddering ceases. You plunge out of the nebula, wisps of galactic dust trailing behind you. But you haven't escaped the cloud, you have only entered an empty pocket of space deep within it.

As you look out, dozens of tiny, gray blobs fill the viewport, each growing with the passing seconds. Then their details begin to form, and you realize that you're looking at ships. And not just any ships. Assault shuttles, system patrol craft, strike cruisers and frigates float lazily in space, highlighted by the red glow of the surrounding nebula cloud.

As the *Surge* levels out, it rises higher than the closest strike cruiser. Your vision finally falls past the cruiser, and then your mouths drop. The gray-white diamond shape of an Imperial Star Destroyer looms in the viewport, getting larger and larger as you drift closer. It is a monstrous thing, huge and imposing, a vessel with enough firepower to destroy an entire fleet.

All the ships orbit a central repair facility built around a reactor core, a spherical object nearly the size of the Star Destroyer. As the characters look on, a CorelliSpace Gymsnor-3 freighter shoots out from one of the reactor core's many docking bays and rotates 90 degrees, flashing its underside at the *Surge*. The pilot of the freighter comes over the comm, "Hey, just a word of advice. Don't try cheatin' 'em today. They ain't in the mood." The ship then leaps into hyperspace with a burst of white light.

Luckily for the characters, these Imperial ships currently hold no crews. Over the past year the Kaarenth Dissension has hoarded these vessels here, repairing and stripping what they could, readying this massive strike force for the Dissension's first battle against the New Republic.

The subspace tracker's signal emanates from a landing bay within the reactor core. Ulcane has landed here to discuss the shipyard's progress with its administrator.

Any character making an Easy *demolition* roll realizes that detonating the reactor will destroy all the ships docked in the repair facility, as well as all the vessels within the nebula pocket. The charges must be placed as close as possible to the core's main

power coupling — inside the reactor sphere — to ensure complete destruction. No amount of firing upon the hull of the reactor facility has any effect, since it is enshrouded in a layer of heavy shielding.

When the characters approach the facility, a static-riddled hail demands to know their business. The Imperials continue to step up security as the time for the campaign against the New Republic draws near. Only a Difficult *con* roll allows the *Surge* to land in one of the gaping docking bays near the equator of the reactor.

Episode Five: The Shipyard's Heart

Read aloud:

As you zip through the shipyard, you notice tiny flurries of motion along the hulls of many of the floating vessels. Worker droids flit up and down, left and right, repairing damage that could not be fixed from the inside of the ship. Streaks of carbon scoring mar the dark gray hulls of many of the vessels and a few even have jagged, gaping holes with hundreds of tubes, pipes, and wires spilling out.

The spherical reactor core rotates slowly about a central axis. Widely spaced rings of tiny, square light panels circumnavigate the reactor's metallic surface, and tunnels open up to the sphere's interior repair and landing bays.

You head toward the docking bay designated by the core's control center and then slip into the rectangular opening. A wide tunnel with blinking blue lights running in parallel lines on each face leads inward. Finally, after about 30 seconds, you exit into a high-ceilinged bay.

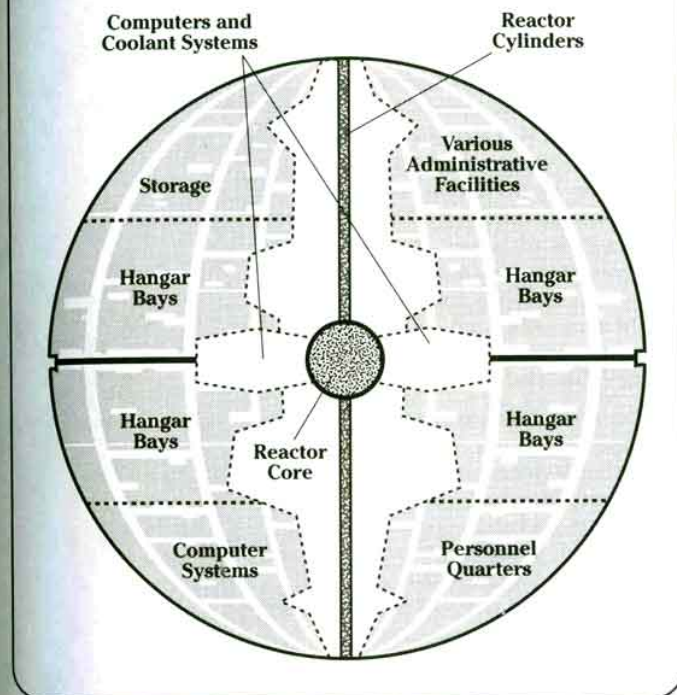
Squads of stormtroopers march in tight formation across the polished, black floor as several uniformed men at one end of the bay unload crates from a modified Corellian YT-1300 freighter.

You set the *Surge* down in a clear section of floor and shut down its engines.

For the first 10 minutes, the stormtroopers and naval personnel in the docking bay ignore the characters, thinking them mere smugglers here to drop off supplies. After that point, a squad of troopers arrives to question the characters about the cargo to be unloaded ...

Computer interface terminals run along the base of the docking bay walls at five-meter intervals. A character plugging into the interface must make a Moderate *computer programming/repair* roll or Moderate *security* roll to locate the reactor's main power cou-

Reactor and Repair Station



pling. She may then download the information to a datapad which can show a map leading from the bay to the coupling.

Three repulsors — two empty and one bearing five cases of food products — hover near the wall just a few meters away from the *Surge*. Characters may use them to enter the wide corridors leading to the reactor core under the guise of "transporting supplies."

It takes five minutes to reach the entrance to the main reactor section of the power station. A Moderate *security* roll opens the magnetic blast-door barring the entrance.

Read aloud:

The blast-door whips upward with a hiss, revealing the huge chamber that houses the main reactor. One massive, metallic cylinder hangs downward, its bottom a field of tiny, silver cones.

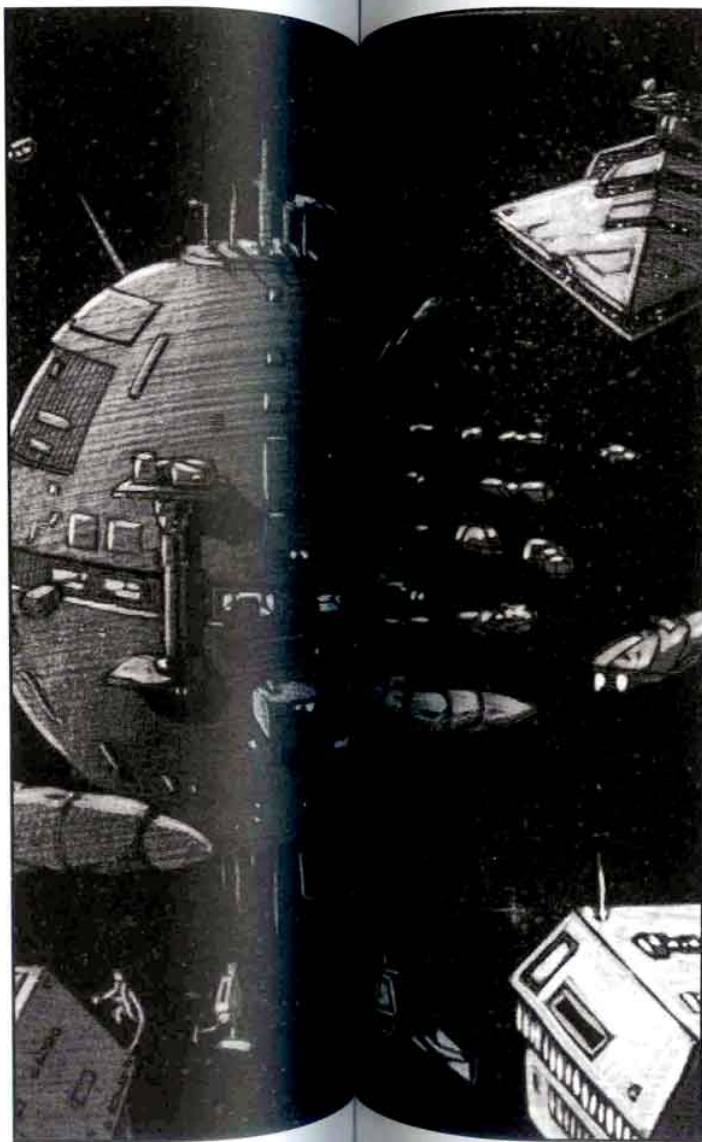
A second cylinder of the same design pokes upward, ending about a few dozen meters below the first. Tendrils of blue energy crackle in arcs across the empty space between the two cylinders, drowning out all other sounds.

In front of you a slender bridge extends outward into the chamber and ends at a circular platform only a few meters short of the twisting tendrils of power. A bank of controls sits at the edge of the platform, with graphic displays flashing in sync with each arc of lighting that crosses between the two silver cylinders.

The characters need only set five thermal detonators (or jury-rig an explosive device using the canisters of illerium aboard their ship, a block of detonite, and a timer) on the platform to have enough explosive force to destroy the reactor. After a Moderate *demolition* roll and two minutes of setting the charges, the characters may initiate the detonation timer and then head back to their ship. Unfortunately, as soon as one of the characters steps onto the control platform, an alarm alerts Imperial security.

Just as the characters prepare to leave the platform, read aloud:

As you turn to head out of the reactor chamber, a sudden hiss from above calls your attention. On the left side of the chamber, three stormtroopers step out onto a small observation balcony and aim their blaster rifles at you.



One round later four more stormtroopers open the blast-door to the bridge the characters are standing on and begin firing. Game-masters should feel free to allow additional stormtroopers to join the battle if it will help enhance the adventure.

7 Stormtroopers. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 3D, *blaster* 4D, *blaster: blaster rifle* 5D, *brawling parry* 4D, *dodge* 4D, *brawling* 3D. Move: 10. Blaster rifle (5D), stormtrooper armor (+2D physical, +1D energy, -1D *Dexterity*).

After the battle, the characters may race back to their ship unhindered. But as they enter the docking bay, Commander Ulcane's voice blares over the intercom, "Don't let the intruders escape! I know who you are. Give up now and I promise your punishment will be swift!" At the command of their leader, a squad of six stormtroopers breaks its tight formation and unleashes a barrage of blaster fire upon the characters (use the same stats listed for the stormtroopers above). If the characters don't stop running, they reach the *Surge* in one combat round.

Episode Six: The Clock Is Ticking ...

Read aloud:

The *Surge* rises on its repulsors amidst a volley of blaster fire and then plunges into the exit tunnel. The running lights along the wide corridor zip by as the ship screams

through. Then, up ahead, you see thick, metal bay doors sliding closed — one from above, the other from below.

The characters have two chances to escape. If the pilot makes a Moderate *space transports* roll, the *Surge* squeezes through in a fury of sparks as the closing doors scrape along its hull. Otherwise, a character at the laser cannon may blast the doors' override controls which are just to the right of the narrowing exit. The shot has a Moderate difficulty.

Read aloud:

You burst out of the spherical power station and begin to make your navigation computations for the jump to light speed, when movement from ahead calls your attention. Eight TIE fighters swoop over a strike cruiser and vector toward you. Blue sublight engines flare from behind their bulbous mid-sections as they accelerate.

The shipyard's administrator erroneously thought this location was totally hidden from the New Republic. Under this false sense of security he decided to refit all of his defense forces with new weaponry and put all available personnel on repair duties. These TIE fighters are flown by inexperienced pilots, since much of the facility's crew is busy trying to repair the other ships. They're not very effective under fire from a real enemy, but try to overwhelm the characters' ship by sheer numbers.

8 TIE Fighters. Starfighter, *starfighter piloting* 2D, *starship gunnery* 2D, *maneuverability* 2D, *space* 10, *atmosphere* 415; 1,200 kmh, hull 2D. Weapons: 2 laser cannons (fire-linked; fire control 2D, damage 5D).

The characters must blast past the TIE fighters while they continue calculating their jump to hyperspace. The TIE pilots offer easy targets — they clump together and try to attack all at once. Although this allows them greater firepower, it also brings them into a closer formation — any TIE fighter destroyed easily causes complications with nearby TIE fighters, possibly including control ionization, pilot confusion, or even collision. During the dogfight, however, the characters should be reminded that they're running against the clock — if they don't get out of the area soon, they're going to be going up in the reactor core fireball ...

After the battle with the TIE fighters ends, read the following aloud:

You speed away from the power station, knowing it's going to blow any minute now. And then, with a flicker, another ship enters the nebula's pocket — an Interdictor cruiser. Your onboard sensors start flashing as they pick up an increased power reading

in one of the cruiser's gravity well projectors.

Interdictor Cruiser. Capital, *capital ship gunnery* 5D+1, *capital ship piloting* 5D, *capital ship shields* 4D, *maneuverability* 1D, *space* 6, hull 5D, shields 3D. Weapons: 20 quad laser cannons (fire control 2D, damage 4D), 1 gravity well projector (fire control 6D, damage blocks hyperspace travel).

One of the characters must make a Moderate *astrogation* roll to jump into hyperspace before the Interdictor cruiser uses its gravity well projector to block the *Surge*'s escape path into hyperspace. If that fails, the characters may try a daring strafing run on the Interdictor cruiser — on a Very Difficult *starship gunnery* roll a character may damage and knock out the cruiser's single on-line gravity well projector.

When the characters have cleared their escape path, read aloud:

At the very moment you set the last hyperspace calculation, the power core explodes in a furious ball of orange-and-yellow flame and billowing, white gas. A shock wave of green energy bursts outward in a crackling sphere that grows impossibly larger every second. The ships floating nearest to the repair facility shudder as the wave hits them and then erupt in a violent blaze.

The green energy expands outward like a child's balloon, and you frantically punch at the *Surge*'s controls. Something slams hard into the back of your ship. Then the stars elongate into bright lines and you leap into hyperspace.

Epilogue

Back at the *Nova*, Captain Bluuis, now recovering from his illness, has learned of the characters' arrival and wishes to personally thank them for their heroic efforts. Read aloud:

With your covert operation now at an end, you find yourself once again aboard the *Nova*. Captain Bluuis enters the briefing room with an armload of datapads and stacks them on a nearby table. Bluuis's skin has lost its sickly pallor and he seems to move more easily than he had the last time you met with him.

"I wish to commend you on your performance in this mission. Had the Kaarenth Dissension brought its fleet to bear, we would have been doomed. Coruscant has now given priority to this sector for new ships and personnel, and we expect reinforcements within a month. And thanks to you, we should be able to hold off the remaining Imperials until then."

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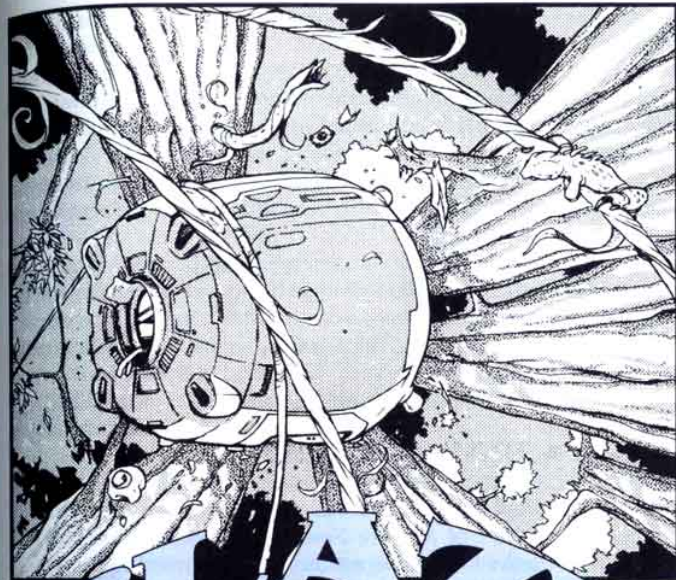
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BLAZE of GLORY

By Tony Russo

Illustrations by Mike Vilardi

"Every mercenary wants to be remembered." Lex "Mad Vornskr" Kempo paused a moment as the jungle browns and greens of Gabredor III rose up toward their diving freighter. With a sardonic smirk, the spacer twisted around in the pilot's seat and gazed at Brixie.

"A mercenary doesn't retire gracefully. There's no such thing as an Old Mercs Home either. What a real mercenary wants is to go out ... in a blaze of glory."

November, 1995

Star Wars Adventure Journal • 169

"Really?" Brixie Ergo shifted around nervously in one of the acceleration chairs situated behind the co-pilot's station. Space was tight in the modified Corellian light freighter, especially up front. The craft rattled and shook as the vessel plunged deeper into the planet's atmosphere. Kempo smiled a toothy, wicked grin.

"Absolutely."

What sounded like a cross between an order and snarl came from the fur-covered being currently occupying the co-pilot's seat beside Kempo.

"Leave the rook alone." Sully Tigereye was a Trunsk, a stout alien species well known for their fighting ability and equally legendary short temper. Bristly brown hairs covered the length of Tigereye's body except for his face and the palms of his hands. As if emphasizing his displeasure with Kempo, two shiny, sharpened tusks protruded from his lower lip. Brixie recalled stories her parents had told her as a child, about Trunks being the showpieces of many a carnival show as gladiators and ring fighters.

If Sully Tigereye had ever been part of such a show in the past, he never let on. What she did know was that he had once been a highly-decorated member of an elite New Republic infiltrator unit. No longer with the New Republic military, he continued to serve with his former colonel in a band of mercenaries called the Red Moons. It was Tigereye who had been appointed as team leader for this mission, and it was Tigereye who had chosen Brixie to come along as combat medic, although it was for a mission that Brixie still did not quite understand. Just sitting close by Lex Kempo and Sully Tigereye made the former medical student uncomfortable, as if she was part of a group she did not truly belong to.

The mercenaries' target was a Karazak Slavers Guild operation lurking in the jungle swamps and dense foliage on Gabredor III. Like the few Red Moon operation files she had a chance to study during her training period, any further information on the exact target and their reason for assaulting it would not be explained in detail until they landed. That protected not only the Red Moons, but those who hired them. All of this secrecy just didn't make any sense to Brixie. What could they hope to accomplish against an entire camp of slavers? Who thought up this brilliant strategy, anyway? Then again, she chided herself — joining a mercenary force like the Red Moons so she could find her parents was not exactly a brilliant strategy either.

Tigereye continued to berate Lex Kempo. "I didn't ask her to be part of this team to keep you entertained. Just fly this junk pile, if you don't mind."

Unlike Sully Tigereye, who looked naturally forceful yet showed a surprising concern for others, "Mad Vornskr" Kempo easily looked like he had just fallen out of a grim entertainment holo. He claimed to have served with over a dozen different private armies and militias, even a brief stint in the Imperial Army as a scout, as evident from the customized suit of scout trooper armor he wore. The normally eggshell-white armor pieces had been carefully dulled and therma-painted with a camouflage scheme that matched Gabredor's jungle environment. Extra holsters and pockets hid a variety of throwing blades, hold-out blasters, power packs, grenades, medpacs, glow rods and other necessities. With his closely-cropped hair, thin blaster scar on his right cheek and gray eyes, Kempo acted a lot like the intimidating walking arsenal he appeared to be. Still, Tigereye had touched a nerve. Kempo turned defensive as the ship shook again.

"I'm just trying to let our combat medic in on the mysteries of the merc psyche, oh fearless leader."

Brixie sensed almost immediately that Tigereye simply hated that expression. The Trunsk settled for turning his baleful face on Kempo. Trunks were not known for their cordiality, especially under stressful conditions.

"Can we have a little less talking please?" The fourth member of their group spoke up in a whiny voice. Of all who called themselves members of the Red Moons, Hugo Cutter was the last person Brixie would probably think of as a mercenary. An escapee from a psychotrauma ward maybe, but never a soldier. Cutter's hair was as wild and unpredictable as the stares that came from his eyes. Before the start of the mission, Lex Kempo had remarked to her that Hugo Cutter had once been enrolled in the prestigious Imperial Engineers Academy, only to be disbarred after he found it more interesting to blow things apart than put them together. Then again, Kempo always did have a knack for exaggeration. Especially when he talked about himself.

The ship dipped again. Cutter, sitting beside her, inhaled sharply. She reached out a hand to calm him. Cutter reacted by clutching the satchel bag in his lap even tighter.

"Don't touch me!"

"I'm sorry," she faltered out an apology. "I just thought ..."

"Thought what?" He began to laugh hysterically. "That I would need help from the likes of you?"

"Don't knock it," Kempo murmured quietly with a twisted smile.

"Quiet. All of you." Tigereye warned as he checked the pocket navigator he carried in a special pouch as part of his weapons

Brixie Ergo



Type: Mercenary Combat Medic
DEXTERITY 3D+2

Blaster 4D+2, brawling parry 4D+2, dodge 4D+2, grenade 4D, melee combat 4D, melee parry 4D, running 4D+2, vehicle blasters 4D

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 6D+2, cultures 5D, languages 5D, planetary systems 4D, survival 3D+2

MECHANICAL 3D

Communications 4D+2, repulsorlift operation 4D+2, sensors 4D, space transports 3D+2, starship gunnery 3D+2, starship shields 3D+2

PERCEPTION 2D+1

Hide 4D+1, sneak 4D+1

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 4D, climbing/jumping 4D, stamina 4D

TECHNICAL 3D

Computer programming/repair 6D, droid repair 6D, first aid 6D+2, (A) medicine 3D+2

Character Points: 10

Move: 10

Equipment: Blast helmet (+1D physical, +1 energy), blast vest (+1D physical, +1 energy, torso only), blaster pistol (4D), comlink, 4 medpacs, medical field kit

Capsule: Both of Brixie Ergo's parents are recognized medical specialists in the Entralla system. So it seemed a logical choice for their prodigal daughter to enroll in one of the prominent universities there and pursue a medical career of her own. Brixie was drawn to the study of alien species and quickly excelled in that field. Her parents were on their way to attend her graduation commencement when they were suddenly "encouraged" to enlist in the combat medical unit of the Pentastar Alignment military branch. Brixie never saw her parents again.

Enraged and overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness, several of her fellow students quietly suggested she seek out the help of a suspected mercenary force known as the Red Moons. The Red Moons were interested in liberating Entralla and other worlds from iron grasp of the Alignment. She finally managed to contact the Red Moons during a strange encounter with a crazy old drunk who turned out to be their disguised leader, Colonel Andrephan Stormcaller. The former New Republic colonel suggested a working arrangement. He and the Red Moons would do everything in their power to try to locate and rescue her parents, and in return, Brixie would train to become a combat medic and work for the Red Moons. Reluctantly, the young medical student agreed, not knowing quite what to expect from Stormcaller or his unusual band of mercenaries.

harness. Huge yellow eyes glanced up and caught the reflection of the Human with the unkempt hair in the forward cockpit screen. They locked on Cutter like targeters. "Especially you. Stop fidgeting. We're almost down." Cutter's nervousness was wearing even his own patience thin. Their craft shook again. He closed his eyes tightly.

"You know how much I hate insertions!"

"Relax. You clutch those shaped charges any harder and you're likely to set them off."

"Doubtful." The freighter dipped sharply in the thickening atmosphere of Gabredor III. He gulped. "It takes a detonator firing at triple frequency intervals to properly set off a Mesonics focalized explosive."

"I'll make a note," the fur-covered Trunsk growled as he glanced over at Kempo. "How much longer 'till we reach the landing point?"

Kempo checked the navigational readings as they flashed by almost too quickly for Brixie to keep up. "A few more minutes. Sensor masking is holding up so far. A Z-95 patrol upstairs didn't even bother to sniff our contrail."

"I'll feel better when we're down. Brixie, get your gear ready to go."

"Right," she tried to keep her voice steady as she unfastened her restraint harness. The freighter suddenly lost power and began a steep dive. Brixie was immediately thrown into a wailing Cutter, who was positively revolted by her close proximity. Kempo wrestled the controls back. Regaining her footing, Brixie tried to ignore Cutter's expression and his tightly-closed eyes.

"What was that?" Tigereye asked.

Kempo shook his head. All business now, he was fighting to bring the ship back under control. Red lights broke out all over the engineering panels. Alarms hooted nosily. The freighter abruptly rolled right and pitched down hard. Tigereye began flipping switches — the ship's starboard maneuvering thrusters were not responding.

Kempo quietly cursed between clenched teeth. "Where did procurement pick up this piece of Corellian crud anyway? I've seen better hulks from Socorro!"

"Can you land?"

Kempo looked directly at Tigereye. "You want an honest opinion?"

Brixie could tell that, this time, Kempo was no longer joking. Systems were failing all over the vessel. Beside her, she overheard Cutter whimpering. Some mercenary he made.

Tigereye unsnapped his own seat belts. "All hands to the lifepod now! This is no drill!"

The others spilled out of their chairs, rapidly grabbing equipment and supplies in emergency order and tossing them into the lifepod.

For only a moment during the chaos, Brixie found herself watching Lex Kempo almost curiously. The Corellian pathfinder was still standing before the controls of the battered, falling freighter, gesturing with his hands locked together in an odd sort of way. Perhaps it was a ritual known only to spacers and their ships, she thought. The last thing she saw before the interior lights failed was him grinning at her as he usually did. Their fates and the ship's were about to part ways in a most violent fashion.

"Hope you signed up for the duration, Lady Brix. From now on, it gets nothing but interesting!"

Gabredor III

Type: Terrestrial

Temperature: Temperate

Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)

Hydrosphere: Moist

Gravity: Standard

Terrain: Jungle

Length of Day: 22 standard hours

Length of Year: 352 local days

Sapient Species: Various aliens

Starport: Landing field

Population: 100 slaves

Planet Function: Slaver outpost

Tech Level: Space at outpost, stone elsewhere

Major Exports: Slaves

Major Imports: Slaves, weapons

Capsule: The Gabredor system is part of a region of space which many scouts refer to as Myto's Arrow, a hyperspace route named for the Old Republic scout Keos Myto. Myto was well-known for discovering faster routes to interconnect many of the commercial sectors. The scout had been commissioned by several prominent financial firms to trace a new hyperspace route which would link Dantooine with the Obtexta Sector. Unfortunately, the new route, dubbed Myto's Arrow, lead past many stellar dust storms, nebulae, and other dangerous phenomenon. Any worlds within the systems he visited were either uninhabitable, or downright hostile — like Gabredor III. With no interest in further development, Myto's Arrow route fell into disuse, and after many years, was eventually abandoned for safer, albeit longer, hyperspace routes.

Despite the presence of numerous organisms on this world which are dangerous to sapient life, a faction of the Karazak Slavers Guild has used this planet as a gathering base for slaves. The planet is obscure enough not to be noticed, and the wildlife hostile enough to discourage casual visitors. A small compound serves as a base where slaves are gathered, processed and shipped off to profitable markets.



Ten thousand meters later. Straight down.

"You know," said Hugo Cutter. "If you were Han Solo or Wedge Antilles or any one of a hundred other pilots I know, we wouldn't be here right now."

"Shut up," Lex Kempo snapped back. "I didn't see you help land the pod." Of course, it was difficult for the pathfinder to make an argument considering that the Red Moon assault team was dangling inside an escape pod caught in the thick canopy of Gabredor's jungle.

"Would it help if I did this?" Brixie's voice called from deeper inside the pod. A secondary hatch blew off, slicing vines and branches. Without means of further support, the pod fell the remaining 40 meters until it landed in the thick bough of an ancient swamp tree. Tigereye scratched his bruised head as he and the others spilled out of the pod and hit the dirt.

"No."

Kempo was the first to pick himself up off the jungle floor. He quickly checked the small arsenal of weapons he carried. Content, he turned and mock-saluted Sully Tigereye.

"The Red Moons have landed."

"Thanks for the update. Brixie?"

"Yes?" The rookie pulled herself over. She had joined the Red Moons only two months ago, training at a distant base with other recruits who were either disgruntled or disappointed with the New Republic's efforts to liberate the remainder of the galaxy. Her parents, both dedicated to the medical sciences and the saving of lives, had been conscripted into military service with an Imperial faction which called itself the Pentastar Alignment. Brixie had signed on with the Red Moons as a medical technician, hoping to somehow put an end to her parents' servitude. She was still struggling with the ill-fitting armored hat that had been issued to her earlier by the Red Moons' procurement detail.

"Did you pull that hatch lever?"

She bit her lower lip. There were worse things one could do than to get a Trunsk angry. Uncomfortable, she resigned herself to her fate. "Yes sir, I did."

"And what did I tell you before?"

She rolled her eyes a bit. "Don't do *anything* unless you tell me to do it."

"Exactly." Figuring that he really shouldn't be angry with her, he snatched the helmet off her head and made several adjustments to the inner web straps. After a moment, the helmet fit her perfectly. "Now pay attention and stay close."

"Yes, sir!"

"And can that *sir* nonsense."

"Yes ..." Catching herself, she shrunk back to help collect equipment from the lifepod.

"Excuse me," Kempo stretched his aching frame. "You know how I hate to interrupt your instruction of the troops but ..."

At long last, Tigereye was finally irritated with his unamusing tirade.

"What is it, Kempo?"

"Can you please direct me to the bad guys so we can fry them and find a way off this lovely vacation spot?"

"Wrong attitude. This is not some search and destroy job like the last one you botched on Dantooine. This is a search and rescue. Here are the particulars that need rescuing."

He handed Kempo a datapad. Images of two young faces appeared in full portrait and side view modes. A distinct frown formed on the pathfinder's face as Brixie also looked at the datapad screen over his shoulder.

"Kiddies. We bailed out on to this mudball just to save a couple of pups?" Kempo tossed the datapad back at Tigereye. "The colonel must have gone nuts."

"Hey!" Cutter spoke up. "Colonel Stormcaller is the last sane person left in the galaxy. I can personally vouch for that."

"All bow. The Pirate King of Corellia has spoken," Kempo spat sarcastically as he affixed a grenade launcher underneath the muzzle of the "procured" stormtrooper blaster rifle he carried. "So the four of us are going up against a slaver camp to yank two kids out with no ship. I'd say we're off to a famous running Red Moon start, Tigereye."

"Who are they? Why are they so important?" Brixie started to say "sir," but managed to clip it off in time.

"Don't bother," Kempo answered as he spun a DL-18 blaster pistol around on his index finger. "Our job is not to question why. That's what diplomats and tax collectors are for. We're soldiers. We get paid to solve the problems their kind create. And I want you to know, Trusk, that I intend to get paid very well for this little field trip."

Tigereye eyed him coldly as he handed the datapad to Brixie. "Study their faces and descriptions carefully. We need them alive. And intact."

"But we don't have a ship. Shouldn't we wait for a rescue pickup?" Brixie started to say.

"You're the team medtech," Tigereye's gaze hardened to dynaglass. "Is anyone here injured?"

She glanced at Kempo and the expressionless Hugo Cutter. So this was the life of the mercenary, she thought sullenly. Blindly taking orders. Crawling around on an unforgiving world, enemies all around them. No relief forces. No help. No remorse. She shook her head slowly.

The shriek of a snubfighter engine high over the tree canopy suddenly broke the silence. After a tense moment, it finally passed. Creatures and other tree dwellers began to slowly hoot and call again through the dense foliage. Kempo's expression turned grim.

"They found the crash. We better start moving."

Tigereye immediately agreed.

"I can re-triangulate the coordinates of the slaver camp from our position here. I'll take the point. Kempo, you take the rear. Make sure you have your survival kits and critter repellents. The slavers chose this moss rock for a reason, and that's probably because these jungle worlds can be downright hostile. All right. Move out!"



The slave master Greezim Trentacal relaxed in his chair aboard the transport freighter *Atron's Mistress*, fanning his face with the elaborately decorated hide of a lexiatus beast. His darkened quarters aboard the large freighter were filled with decorations and trinkets from a hundred different worlds. Trentacal sighed, letting his jowled complexion rest on his palm as he propped his head up with an elbow. A lithe, sparsely dressed Human girl moved around him, her gestures as light as the spice-laced air. She offered him a cup of wine. Annoyed, he brushed her offering away as he looked to the shadow hiding there in the darkness.

"Just how long is this going to take, Vex? You know how I hate sitting here in this humid jungle."

In reply, a voice slithered back. "We await another shipment of slaves from the last expedition near the Rim. By dawn tomorrow, the ship should be completely filled."

"Good," Trentacal yawned. Details. Minor little details. The slaves down in the cargo holds of his ship were just tiny portions of merchandise compared to the credits he could be making. It was one of the problems of doing business with the Pentastar Alignment.

Greezim Trentacal

**Type:** Karazak Slave Master**DEXTERITY** 2D+2

Blaster 3D+1, brawling parry 3D+1, dodge 4D

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 6D+2, bureaucracy 5D, business: Karazak Slavers Guild 9D+2, intimidation 6D+2, languages 5D+2, planetary systems 6D, value 7D

MECHANICAL 2D+1**PERCEPTION** 4D

Bargain 7D+2, command 7D, persuasion 7D

STRENGTH 2D+2

Brawling 3D+2

TECHNICAL 2D+1**Dark Side Points:** 1**Character Points:** 14**Move:** 8**Equipment:** Comlink, datapad**Capsule:** Greezim Trentacal's career began in the betting pits of

Boztrok, a world dominated by criminal enterprise and gangsters. He tried various unsuccessful schemes of his own for a number of years until he joined several slavers who were affiliated with the Karazak Slavers Guild. With the Guild, Trentacal found organization and direction. He discovered he had a knack for the commerce of enslaved beings, and did not mind in the slightest when the Guild offered him more and more responsibility. The Guild placed him in the Outer Rim to deal exclusively with several Hutts and corporations, which Trentacal developed into a large, complicated network of slavers, contacts and prime raiding worlds.

With the Empire's fall and the arrival of the Pentastar Alignment, the need for slaves has boomed. The Alignment needs strong backs for its factory complexes and agri-worlds and has little regard for the rights of individuals. Trentacal knows that he can all-too easily fulfill those needs. He supervises his operations from his personal slave ship, *Atron's Mistress*.

To suggest that the Pentastar Alignment was just another Imperial warlord faction, just another pale pretender to the mighty former Empire, was a foolish assumption. The Alignment perceived itself as the Empire reborn. Led by a Grand Moff named Arduus Kaine, the Alignment had ignored Grand Admiral Thrawn's attempt to consolidate Imperial forces, carefully waiting until it could mount its own campaign against the New Republic.

Unlike other warlords, the Alignment was extremely organized

and well-equipped thanks to the corporates, powerful companies formerly allied with the Empire. Now that one of these corporates, specifically the PowerOn Conglomerate from Cantras Gola, was secretly threatening to bolt and join the New Republic, the Pentastar Alignment was doing everything it could to prevent it. So the Alignment had turned to the Karazak Slavers Guild to solve its New Republic problem.

How completely ironic, Trentacal mused, that the children of the Cantras Gola ambassador had been kidnapped by his slavers. The note left in their place made the ambassador's situation quite clear. As long the ambassador held off any further talks with the New Republic, the children would remain alive. The delay would be long enough for agents from the Alignment to completely sever the ties between Cantras Gola and the New Republic. In the end, Cantras Gola would remain loyal to the Pentastar Alignment and, in turn, the Karazak Slavers Guild would continue to conduct its operations on Gabredor III unhindered.

There were some benefits to this type of business arrangement — Trentacal had decided to keep the children as payment for his work. The Alignment had no opinion on the matter; the ambassador himself would be experiencing a most unfortunate accident and be quietly replaced ... with a more reliable Alignment official.

The slave master glanced sideways at the ambassador's children chained to the cabin's far wall and admitted that they would make fine additions to his household. Still, everything had its price. What, he wondered, would be the price for keeping these two?

Trentacal motioned to the slave girl at his side and took the cup of wine from her delicate hands. His thick palms caressed her expressionless cheek. The girl had been mute since a child. She had been among the first of the slaves he had kept for his own. He cupped his fingers under her chin and turned her head so that she could see the frightened children.

"Soon you will have others to instruct in the fine art of caring for me."

The shadow stepped forward, barely discernible in the darkness of Trentacal's private cabin. Trentacal watched his bodyguard and confidant, a Defel, as he stood before the stateroom's viewports. Vex's thick body was completely covered in layers of rippling black fur that absorbed all surrounding light. In his right hand he held a comlink close to an attentive ear, his head bobbing slightly as he listened to what sounded like little more than static. Outside the viewports lurked the tangled jungle growth of Gabredor III and the surrounding clearing that comprised the staging camp. Lookout

towers armed with heavy repeating blasters rose from the jungle floor. On either side of the bulbous freighter, slaves were being led into the ship under the scrutiny of Karazak thugs. It was a fabulously efficient operation, Trentacal assured himself. After all, it was his.

"What is it, Vex?" The Defel was responsible for not only for his master's security, but for the entire slaver operation on Gabredor. When summoned to the defense of his master, very few survived to tell about his rage. Trentacal did not mind the fear surrounding his kind's fearsome reputation either.

Vex thumbed the comlink off and turned slightly, not liking to stare too long at the pool of light that bathed his master. "One of the Z-95 patrols has spotted the wreckage of a light freighter some distance from here. The ship had come in low and fast, using some type of counter-measures to elude long-range sensors and our patrols. Who-

ever they were, it appears they did not want any attention."

"Was it a ship from the New Republic?" Trentacal asked cautiously, suddenly alert.

The wraith's eye slits narrowed as he explained. "I do not think so. They would not risk coming so deep into Alignment territory. Doing so could mean an all-out war between them. That is something the New Republic is not willing to risk. The only way to know is to interrogate the survivors. But the main lifepod from the ship was not found in the wreckage. My trackers are still searching for it."

Trentacal slammed a meaty fist down on the armrest of his sumptuous chair. The serving girl sprang back in terror.

"Then it must be the Alignment. They've crossed us!"

The black head shook slowly. "I do not think it is the Pentastar Alignment either, Master Trentacal. Their resources are vast. They have no need for small strike teams. If they wanted to, they could attack with an *Enforcer*-class picket cruiser or something similar."

"Then who?"

Vex's eyes slid toward the far wall and the two figures chained silently there. The slovenly slave master sharply inhaled, understanding immediately. Whoever these intruders were, they were coming for *them*.

"Vex, I think you should activate the security perimeter."

"It has already been done, master."



"*Ged it ob of me!*" Lex Kempo, the mercenary's mercenary, whined like a bantha calf as he pulled at the slimy, multi-folded creature that had fallen on his head. Brixie was trying her best to pry it off with her vibro-knife. Sully Tigereye just watched them. If the situation had been different, he might have been amused.

"Get it off of him, Brixie," the Trunsk unsheathed a combat vibro-axe from his weapons harness.

"I'm trying!"

"Can we go home now?" Hugo muttered as he sat on a dead log, tired and agitated.

"I'm sorry we're boring you!" Kempo snapped. He had the creature by both hands and was forcibly pulling it off when the little beast whipped out a tail appendage and squirted a powdery jet in his face. Coughing and sneezing uncontrollably, Kempo knocked Brixie into the brush. Cutter laughed.

Tigereye swore, his patience exhausted.



"That does it. Exobiology class is now over!"

Tigereye grabbed the thing by its now-extended tail and swung. The vibro-axe removed the flailing appendage. A greenish fluid squirted over everyone. The creature flopped off Kempo's head and expired at their feet.

Humiliation forgotten, Brixie immediately snapped open her medkit and examined the grumbling pathfinder's head for puncture marks or other lacerations that would indicate a bite. She used a water jet to clear off his face. A quick spot test of the creature's blood revealed that it was not inherently dangerous. Unfortunately, there was little she could do for their wallowing morale. They had been trudging through the jungle for almost a day now. Tempers were as short as grenade timers.

"I feel like a droid with a bunch of haywire receptors and a bad servo creak. Thanks kid," Kempo wiped at his face with the moisture cloth Brixie had given him. "What was that thing?"

Tigereye considered for a moment. "I don't know, but you're lucky it wasn't poisonous. I suggest the next time you hear a noise, you might want to look up as well as around." Kempo fell quiet as he poked sympathetically at the growing welt on his forehead. Cutter continued to chuckle.

Tigereye turned his ire on the squatting demolitions expert.

"I don't recall giving any order for a rest break, Hugo."

"Well, you guys looked so busy fooling around with that thing that I didn't want to disturb you."

"Time's short. You're on point. I want you to scout ahead and make sure there aren't any more surprises waiting for us."

The frazzled-haired engineer pointed at his own chest, startled. "I don't want me to ... scout? Sully, you know I don't scout. I blow things up into itty-bitty pieces. Everyone in the unit says I make a poor scout."

"Consider it a valuable life lesson. Brixie's gotta finish checking out Kempo, and someone has to watch over her."

Hugo rose angrily to his feet, the charges still rattling around in his camo bag. He drew a blaster pistol from a holster.

"Fine, but who's going to watch over me?"

"Enough complaining. Scoot!"

Hugo vanished over the dead log he had been sitting on, still complaining loudly as he walked off. Tigereye shook his tired, grizzled head. Removing the map pad, he checked their current coordinates with the expected slaver encampment. They should be reaching their security perimeter soon. He looked up momentarily to watch Brixie dab a medicated ointment on Kempo's head. She was

Sully Tigereye



Type: Mercenary Team Leader

DEXTERITY 4D

Blaster 7D+2, blaster artillery 7D, brawling parry 7D, dodge 7D, grenade 7D, melee combat 7D, melee combat: vibro-axe 8D+2, melee parry 6D, missile weapons 7D, running 7D, vehicle blasters 5D+2

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Intimidation 8D, streetwise 8D, survival 8D+1

MECHANICAL 3D

Beast riding 5D, communications 4D, repulsorlift operation 5D+2, sensors 5D, space transports 4D+1, starship gunnery 4D, starship shields 4D, swoop operation 5D+1

PERCEPTION 2D

Command 7D, hide 7D+2, persuasion 7D, search 7D, sneak 7D+2

STRENGTH 4D

Brawling 8D, climbing/jumping 6D+1, stamina 6D, swimming 6D

TECHNICAL 2D

Demolition 4D, first aid 4D+2, security 5D

Special Abilities:

Claws: Trunks have long, retractable fighting claws which give them +1D to *Strength* when figuring damage for a brawling attack.

Character Points: 12

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, datapad, 6 fragmentation grenades (5D), heavy blaster pistol (5D), vibro-axe (STR+3D), weapons harness

Capsule: Sully Tigereye served with the Rebel Alliance, enlisting as a standard ground force trooper. He worked his way slowly through the ranks, gaining the attention of superiors and fellow soldiers as a fearsome warrior prone to exuberant fits of violence. Eventually, he caught the eye of Colonel Andrephan Stormcaller, who had him assigned as fire support coordinator for the infiltrator team designated as Red Alpha. Since his assignment, he directly participated in nearly every Red Alpha mission in some capacity. When Stormcaller left the New Republic military — displeased with their handling of the situation with his home world of Entralla — Sully Tigereye and a handful of other infiltrators joined him in support.

Although shorter than a Wookiee, Sully Tigereye has shown he is more than proficient with heavy blaster rifles, repeating blasters, vibro-axes, and other large weapons.

also looking at him.

"Problem?"

"No. I was just wondering," she stumbled over her words. "I mean, everyone spends so much time arguing and insulting. You don't act exactly like what I've seen. You know ... like professionals."

She stopped, believing she had somehow completely insulted them. Now it was Kempo's turn to laugh. Even Tigereye, surprisingly, was not offended.

"You've been watching too many entertainment holos, Brixie. Not all of us pretend to be the master merc like Kempo."

"Who's pretending?" Kempo interrupted, still rinsing his eyes. "Don't let our sparring fool you any, kid. We go back a long way. Far enough back to hate each other's guts and still be the best of chums."

"Hugo's your best friend?" Brixie looked confused. "But you don't act like best friends."

Tigereye pursed his lips. "Everyone in this company, everyone in the Red Moons that is, comes with a story. Your parents for instance. You don't like the way the Alignment is treating them, do you?"

"My parents were both taken from their clinic and forced to work for the Alignment military as combat surgeons. It's almost as if they've been locked up. I just want them back."

"Hugo's parents were Imperial nobility. He lived on a corporate world during the reign of the Emperor. His parents tried everything to keep him under control, including locking him up. I was treated like an animal once. I know what it's like to be caged. When you go through life like that, sometimes you need someone to keep you in check. Hugo minds over me like I mind him."

Kempo pulled himself to his feet and handed the salve back to her.

"Remember kid, the first rule of soldiering is to not let appearances fool you. Tigereye didn't choose us for this team just because of our singing voices. Tigereye's got more combat experience in his little right toe claw than most Imperial generals. Hugo can make an AT-ST dance a jig and explode with just a spanner and a thermal detonator. My job is to make sure we survive to brag about this little tale. And in case we do fall apart, Lady Brix, your job is to put the little pieces back together so I can collect my finish fee."

Brixie felt completely embarrassed. What she had mistaken for open hostility among the three veterans was actually their way of dealing with yet another impossible situation.

Hugo Cutter's head suddenly appeared over the log.

"Excuse me. I don't want to interrupt your talking about me, but I think I found something."

Hugo Cutter



Type: Mercenary Demolitions Expert

DEXTERITY 2D

Blaster 4D+2, blaster artillery 4D+2, brawling parry 4D, dodge 5D+2, grenade 5D, melee combat 4D+2, melee parry 4D, missile weapons 4D, vehicle blasters 4D

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Languages 4D, planetary systems 4D+1

MECHANICAL 4D

Astrogation 6D, capital ship gunnery 5D, capital ship piloting 5D, capital ship shields 5D, communications 6D, ground vehicle operation 5D, powersuit operation 6D, repulsorlift operation 5D+2, sensors 6D, space transports 5D+1, starship gunnery 5D, starship shields 6D, walker operation 5D

PERCEPTION 3D

Forgery 6D, hide 6D+2

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 4D+1, climbing/jumping 4D+2, stamina 4D

TECHNICAL 4D

Capital starship repair 7D, capital starship weapon repair 7D, computer programming/repair 8D, demolition 9D+2, droid repair 7D, security 7D+1, space transports repair 7D+2, starfighter repair 7D, starship weapon repair 7D

Character Points: 10

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), comlink, electronic junk and parts, various grenades and explosives

Capsule: A notable New Republic general once commented that, "Hugo Cutter can be best described as a high-yield bomb looking for a target without a guidance system." Hugo Cutter spent much of his privileged youth and formal education in one of the prominent Imperial engineering academies. Cutter's parents were corporate nobles in the Empire, and did their best to have their son raised in an atmosphere of control. When he joined the Rebellion against the Empire, like many other idealistic youths, he was called upon by Colonel Andrephan Stormcaller to use his vast knowledge in destroying vital things like shipyards, battle cruisers, garrisons, satellite transmission relays. The more he destroyed, the more he found himself enjoying his work.

An alleged pyromaniac, Hugo Cutter is a destructive, wild-haired guru of cosmic metaphysics, obscure alien religions, and alternative hyper-dimension theory. He sometimes wears his New Republic infiltrator uniform inside out as part of making some obscure point.



From a distance, the sensor mast appeared like a metal chrome ball mounted on a pole slightly taller than the surrounding vegetation. Others just like it rose approximately 20 meters to either side. They positioned themselves almost 30 meters away from the distinct-looking sensor fence.

"Looks like we found their perimeter," Kempo muttered quietly to Tigereye, not anxious to trip any possible acoustical pickups. Behind them, Cutter and Brixie waited anxiously.

"Or we tripped over a buried, outer perimeter line already." Tigereye checked his own detection instruments. Despite his concern, the possibility of an outer barrier was unlikely here. The ever-present moisture and local lifeforms would make short work of almost anything made of metal or complex circuitry buried in the humus. He glanced back. "All right Hugo, you're on."

Cutter took off his service jacket and dumped the contents of his bag of tricks on to it. Shaped charges, broken datapads, anti-vehicle grenades, droid parts and bits of c-board and chips spilled everywhere. Kempo eyed the strange assortment with some disdain.

"You're carrying enough junk to supply Industrial Automaton."

"Spare me," Cutter snapped back as he set to work. Brixie watched the entire process with interest as Kempo and Tigereye took up sentry positions close by. Not even realizing she had been recruited to assist him, Cutter was asking her for tools from the tech kit and bits from the scrap pile. In minutes, a truly strange conglomeration of sensor boards, probe droid chips, scanners and communication jammers was taking shape.

"Is this going to work?" she asked.

Cutter took a moment to sit back and admire his creation with a small sense of satisfaction. "They banned me from the Imperial Engineering Academy. They laughed at me. Well, does this look like the work of a madman to you?"

Brixie stared hard at the device. Cutter looked up at her, perhaps sensing the thoughts crossing her mind. A crooked little smile formed across his lips.

"Don't bother answering that."

A crashing sound from the nearby bushes startled all of them into silence. Kempo growled over to them, "Keep down. Someone just set off one of my door bells."

Tigereye pulled out a set of macrobinoculars. Keeping his view on

the trail they had just come from, he waited for several long moments. He saw a brief movement and focused. Through the viewfinder, he saw a scaly head sniffing the ground. Moving the binocs slowly, he finally caught the rider wearing a camosuit to blend against the jungle backdrop. The rider was clenching a long force pike in his free hand as he examined Kempo's "door bell," a tree limb tied across the trail with thin cord.

"What is it?" Kempo whispered.

"Looks like a tracker. Riding some kind of two-legged reptoid."

Kempo used the targeting sight on his stormtrooper rifle to watch the newcomer.

"I see him now. Another might be close by," he whispered.

"Another won't make any difference. All it takes is one report to bring the whole slaver camp down on our heads."

"Those odds are good enough for me." Kempo unsnapped the scabbard on his back and handed Brixie a very sharp vibro-cutlass, its blade and edges blackened for military duty. She dubiously took the weapon in her hands.

"What's this for?"

"You get to watch my back for a change. I've had enough of this mud crawl." Kempo started running toward the trees. "The rest of you take down the fence. I'll handle the bad guys!"

"Kempo! I didn't ..." Tigereye snarled at him just as the pathfinder took off. Brixie and Cutter looked to him for guidance. "Don't just sit there! Hugo, disarm the fence. Brixie, you cover him!" No sooner had he said that when he too had disappeared through the thick growth.

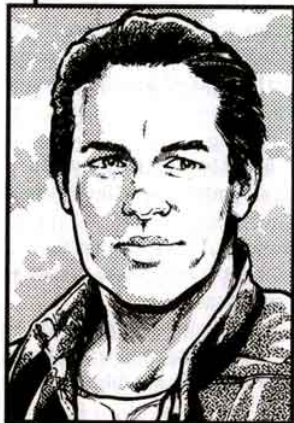


Kempo dropped to one knee as he sprang through the trees, startling the tracker and his mount. He fired the blaster rifle at short range, but missed the rider.

The rider spurred the trained reptoid and charged. The creature snapped at the open air just by his head, then tried to cleave him open with serrated feet claws. Kempo fired back, his stolen set of Imperial scout armor taking the brunt of the beast's charge as it sent him sprawling. The impact knocked the blaster rifle out of his hands.

Poised above him, the tracker raised his force pike to strike. A howling, fur-covered missile burst from the trees, turning the tracker's attention away. Sully Tigereye crashed against both tracker and beast, his vibro-axe swinging and connecting against the creature's thick hide. The reptoid screamed from the terrible injury and bolted

Lex "Mad Vornskr" Kempo



Type: Mercenary Pathfinder

DEXTERITY 4D+2

Blaster 8D+2, blaster: blaster rifle 9D+2, blaster artillery 7D+2, brawling parry 5D+2, dodge 7D+2, grenade 7D+2, melee combat 7D, melee parry 5D+2, missile weapons 7D+2, running 6D, vehicle blasters 6D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Intimidation 6D, languages 3D+2, planetary systems 5D, streetwise 6D+2, survival 6D, value 4D, willpower 5D

MECHANICAL 3D+1

Astrogation 5D+1, beast riding 5D+1, bureaucracy: Imperial Army 5D, communications 6D+1, ground vehicle operation 5D+1, repulsorlift operation 6D+1, sensors 6D, space transports 6D, starfighter piloting 6D, starship gunnery 6D, starship shields 5D+1, swoop operation 6D

PERCEPTION 3D

Command 5D, con 5D, hide 5D, persuasion 5D, search 6D+2, sneak 7D+2

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 6D+2, climbing/jumping 5D+2, stamina 5D, swimming 3D

TECHNICAL 2D

Armor repair 5D, blaster repair 5D+2, first aid 3D+2, security 5D, space transports repair 5D, starfighter repair 5D, starship weapon repair 5D

Character Points: 12

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), comlink, 5 concussion grenades with launcher (5D), hold-out blaster (3D), medpac, modified blaster rifle (5D+2), modified scout trooper armor (+1D physical and energy), 2 smoke grenades, throwing blades (STR+1D), vibro-cutlass (STR+2D+2)

away, carrying its rider reluctantly along with it. With the tracker's back turned to them now, Kempo picked up his fallen weapon and fired. A screaming burst of energy struck the tracker square in the back, killing him before he struck the ground. The injured reptoid, now riderless, kept on crashing loudly away through the foliage.

Tigereye brandished his vibro-axe at Kempo.

"I should have let that thing take a bite out of you, if only to teach you a lesson."

"I was doing just fine before you showed up."

"Let me guess — you had him exactly where you wanted him," the Trunk snorted as he caught his breath. "Check the body. If we're lucky, he didn't have a chance to report in."

"We're never that lucky," Kempo retorted as he headed over to the body of the dead tracker.

Capsule: Lex Kempo's military service career began, rather unexpectedly, with a brag to the patrons of a bar in the Corellian sector. The local jet juice apparently had more of a kick than Kempo anticipated, and the next day the young Kempo found himself waking up with the worst headache of his life ... and on his way to basic training in the Imperial Army! After having signed the standard five-year service agreement in less than a perfect state-of-mind, Kempo nonetheless toughed his way through infantry training. His fellow soldiers and superior officers quickly grew to hate him — he was braver, faster, and constantly arguing the tactics of whatever situation they were in.

Kempo was finally assigned to the Imperial 676th Light Support Scouts, a unit that served no function except to house murderers, thieves, cowards, the less intelligent, and other discipline problems until their term of service ended. The unit had the indistinct reputation as being, "the first to arrive, and the first to die." He had no sooner arrived when he snuck away with a stolen suit of scout trooper armor and weapons.

Kempo wandered the backwaters of the galaxy, ducking Imperial patrols, and renting his blaster out to whoever would pay. If Kempo had anything, he had the distinct ability to survive. Dozens of times he was thrown into blaster battles and situations that would kill the hardiest of soldiers, only to emerge with a leering smug expression on his face. Someone eventually dubbed him "mad as a vornskr." Kempo liked the sound of that, and so the nickname stuck. But most of all, he enjoyed embarrassing the very Imperial units he had been assigned to. He joined the Rebel Alliance as a mercenary pathfinder and worked closely with Colonel Stormcaller and his Red Alpha infiltrators. When Stormcaller broke away from the New Republic to form his own mercenary force, Kempo tagged along.



Hugo got to his feet, holding up the contraption. Brixie looked on, eyeing him and his spontaneous invention dubiously. He began to move slowly toward the sensor mast, fumbling for the power switches that would activate the united parts. He suddenly stopped in his tracks.

"What's wrong?" Brixie half-whispered to him, trying to watch him and their surroundings at the same time.

"Something about this type of sensor mast."

He took another step. A whine came from the datapad's power coupling. The device was not used to handling the power requirements of the other components. The two and a half meter tall mast

loomed over his head as he slowly approached. An expression of recognition came over Cutter. He stopped in his tracks, making quick adjustments to the components in his hands.

"Now I remember!"

"Remember what?" Brixie sputtered.

An intense beeping came from Hugo's contraption. Before Brixie's eyes, an alternating pattern of light began to phase from the sensor mast. She gasped as the solid-looking ground before their feet suddenly evaporated, exposing a cargo speeder-sized ditch trap. Explosives and mines lay at the bottom of the excavated pit. Hugo smirked.

"A holographic trap. Very sneaky. Very expensive. These slavers have better security than I thought. Did you see how I set the multiphase emitter to turn off the hologram?"

Brixie had been watching Hugo so intently that she almost did not hear the sound of dead leaves and underbrush being crushed behind her. She spun around, Kempo's vibro-cutlass in her hands. A second tracker and his reptoid leered at her like predators about to pounce. A threatening rumble echoed in the sharp-toothed beast's throat as the tracker leveled the point of his force pike at Brixie's throat.

"Ah, Hugo?" she gulped.



The sound of a female scream cut through the jungle air like the edge of Sully Tigereye's polished vibro-axe. The Trunk plunged through the jungle, back toward the sensor perimeter.

Tigereye stumbled into a clearing in time to see Lex Kempo drop from the trees and fall on the tracker. The reptoid bucked underneath them as the pathfinder slapped a now familiar-looking organism on the tracker's head. The tracker, his eyes completely covered by the filmy creature, knocked Kempo off as he swung the force pike wildly.

The whole scene looked completely ridiculous until the blinded tracker spurred the reptoid forward. A shot from Tigereye's own heavy blaster brought the tracker down, but the creature still charged into and over a shrieking Brixie.

"Brixie!" Tigereye bellowed, leaping forward.

The beast suddenly became quiet and rolled away from the startled girl in a heap — Kempo's vibro-cutlass buried up to its hilt in its scaly chest. She looked more terrified than hurt as Tigereye ran



up to her.

"Are you okay?"

She gulped once and fought to bring her fear under control.

"Yes ... yes I'm fine."

Even Cutter was stunned as he looked up at the tree branch where Kempo had jumped from.

"And I thought I was crazy," he muttered.

Kempo had gotten to his feet. Brixie watched him for some time, trying to think of some way to thank him without sounding petty. Shrugging the incident away, the pathfinder turned his back to her and retrieved his vibro-cutlass. He then moved to the body of the fallen tracker, switching off his comlink. Exhaling hard, Brixie collected her medkit and gear, not desiring to look on the scene anymore.

In the meantime, Cutter and Tigereye had turned their attention to the disarmed sensor mast and the exposed pit trap.

"Can we go around it?" Tigereye had exchanged his vibro-axe for the map locator. Cutter triumphantly held up his device.

"No problem. Those slavers are probably scratching their heads, wondering how we did it."

"If the slavers stick around long enough to wonder," Tigereye interjected, "We have only one shot at this. Karazak slavers aren't stupid. Once they figure out we bypassed their perimeter, they will probably leave their paid guns behind to pick us off while they jump planet with their valuables — including the children."

"Sully," Brixie slung a medical pack over her shoulder. "Before we go any further with this, I have to know who these children are. The least you can do is tell us why their lives are more important than ours."

"The kid's right," Kempo added as he sheathed the vibro-cutlass in its carrier. "I'm deliberately jumping out of perfectly good trees for these pups. You owe us that much."

Tigereye sighed. "They're the children of the ambassador to Cantras Gola."

"Cantras Gola is a corporate world." Brixie found herself getting angry. "An Alignment world. What's so important about that?"

"Everything," Tigereye silenced her. "Kempo is right, Brixie. We're soldiers. We don't ask questions. We supply answers. With an entire corporate world about to sway over to the New Republic, and the New Republic unable to openly confront the Pentastar Alignment, you need someone else to fight the battle. We are that someone else."

"But I thought the reason why the Red Moons broke away from the New Republic was because the New Republic wasn't doing enough. Now we're fighting their battles for them!"

"Helping the New Republic win Cantras Gola helps everyone. Like it or not, returning these kids alive to the Cantras Gola ambassador is crucial. We need to take that slaver ship before it gets away. It's the only way to save those kids and for us to get off this planet. Now are there more questions from the ranks?"

The four of them looked at each other, the faint odor of ozone from blaster fire still in the air around them.

"I suppose it's too late to request a transfer?" Kempo remarked.



The longer he waited, the more Greezim Trentacal nervously paced about the deluxe stateroom aboard *Atron's Mistress*. The trackers sent out to investigate the crashed freighter's missing escape pod had not reported in for several hours. There was more to the mysterious, downed vessel than even Vex had anticipated.

"They must be soldiers. Or worse. Mercenaries." He shuddered at the thought. The incentive of credits and personal fortune that

drove beings to enslave other beings also drove them to fight for foolish causes.

"Well?" He looked to Vex, still poised like a dark statue beside the stateroom's viewports. He dropped the comlink from his ear.

"The tracker team is still not responding. In addition, one of the perimeter sensors seems to have malfunctioned, although I do not know why yet."

"They're here!" Trentacal put a hand over his mouth, completely alarmed now. "Lords of Atron! They're here already! Give the order to debark. Immediately!"

"As I pointed out earlier," the Defel spoke quietly but firmly, "We have not loaded the latest shipment of slaves." He gestured at the large prefabricated building that served as a temporary clearing-house for the newest arrivals. "They have to be tagged and medically scanned. Many slaves from this shipment are to be sold to the Hutts. You know how displeased the Hutts become when they are sent inferior wares."

"You can medically scan them after they have been loaded. Do as I command!"

Vex's expression did not change. He bowed slightly.

"I will give the order personally, master. We shall depart immediately."

Trentacal rushed out of the stateroom to his own sleeping quarters. The Defel wraith looked upon the ambassador's children, still chained to the cabin wall. Expressions laden with fear and loathing gazed back up at him. The girl, several years older than her brother, tried to protectively shield him from Vex's penetrating, awful stare.

Suddenly, the wraith was gone. The girl blinked, uncertain whether or not to believe her eyes. She had not imagined the disappearance. Abruptly, the cabin door bolts clanged solidly shut, locking them in darkness again. Her brother whimpered. She held him a little tighter, silently wondering what would become of them.

Something touched her shoulder. The girl gasped loudly, if only long enough for a hand to clamp down over her mouth. She recognized the pained expression of Trentacal's favorite slave girl. How long had she been hiding here, waiting for Vex to leave? The slave pressed a key into her hand and made a gesture with her finger to her lips.

Before she could say a word of thanks, the door to Trentacal's private chamber was suddenly shoved aside, the slave master's bulky outline filling the doorway. His face was masked in shadow.

"What's going on in here?"

Atron's Mistress

Craft: Custom Zuraco Cargo Hauler

Type: Modified medium transport

Scale: Starfighter

Length: 87.3 meters

Skill: Space transports: Zuraco cargo transport

Crew: 4, gunners: 1, skeleton 2/+10

Crew Skill: Astrogation 4D, space transports 4D+2, starship shields 4D+2, starship gunnery 4D

Passengers: 6

Cargo Capacity: 185 slaves

Consumables: 2 months

Hyperdrive Multiplier: x2

Hyperdrive Backup: x5

Nav Computer: Yes

Space: 6

Atmosphere: 330; 950 kmh

Hull: 5D

Shields: 2D

Sensors:

Passive: 30/1D

Scan: 80/2D

Search: 100/3D

Focus: 4/4D

Weapons:

1 Medium Turbolaser

Fire Arc: Turret

Crew: 1

Skill: Starship gunnery

Fire Control: 2D

Space Range: 1-3/12/25

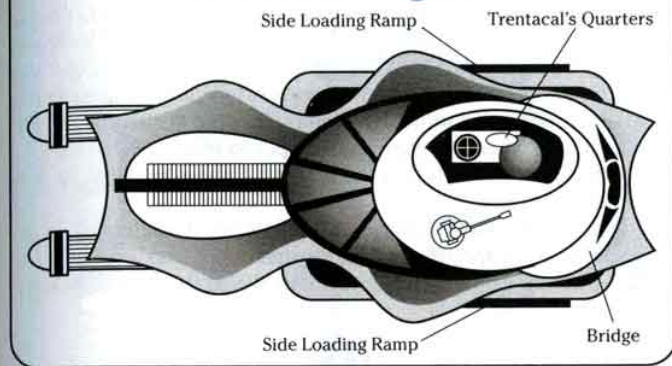
Atmosphere Range: 100-300/1.2/2.5 km

Damage: 6D

Capsule: *Atron's Mistress* is Greezim Trentacal's personal slave transport and his mobile base of operations. Although the slave lord often conducts business in starports, he rarely ventures from his inner sanctuary when Atron's Mistress lands on hostile or primitive worlds to collect or process slaves. Trentacal's comfortable quarters are located near the transport's bridge so he can oversee any operations requiring his attention. He's made sure his quarters are filled with all the luxuries he's used to enjoying. The transport also contains crew quarters, and a cabin for Trentacal's bodyguards.

The transport's cargo hold has been modified to hold 185 Human-sized beings in sealable inner modules. Each compartment has bunks for sleeping, nutrient dispensers, and waste facilities. Quite often these modules are packed with slaves, although Trentacal is careful not to allow overcrowding to damage his goods.

Trentacal's Freighter



Lying prone in the foliage ahead of the assault team, Lex Kempo aimed the macrobinoculars at the clearing in the jungle growth before him.

"What do you see?" Brixie whispered beside him.

The slaver camp consisted of several watchtowers, a few prefabricated buildings and a currently-vacant landing pad for a snubfighter-sized craft. In the middle of the camp, the jungle's heavy humus had been pressure-formed flat to provide room for the large cargo transport situated there. Beings of all origins were being rushed into the ship, which was not a good sign.

Kempo chewed slowly on a bit of protein survival wafer as he continued to sight the camp through the binocs. "Looks like we're outgunned maybe seven to one. There are four watchtowers armed with blaster cannons: two close to us, two past the freighter. The camp is crawling with thugs. See that bunker right beside the ship? Looks like their command center. All sensors, communications and defensive controls are probably housed in there."

"Are those hatches on the side?"

Kempo frowned as he zoomed the binoculars. "You've got laser eyes, kid. Those are definitely gun ports. It doesn't matter, that bunker might as well be half a light year away. We'll get cut down before we even reach the freighter."

"Not if I can keep them occupied," Cutter's voice murmured behind them.

Kempo and Brixie looked around in unison at Cutter and his bag of magic tricks. In his hands he had one of the oddly concave Mesonics focalized explosives, the kind used to demolish structures. Squatting beside Hugo, Sully Tigereye made a hand gesture, fingers spread open wide which he turned into a fist. Kempo snorted derisively, but still nodded in agreement. Confused, Brixie poked at Kempo.

"I'm not familiar with that hand signal," she whispered to him. "What does it mean?"

The pathfinder smiled grimly as he switched the safety off on the grenade launcher mounted to his stormtrooper blaster rifle.

"It means hang on to your pretty head. We're about to make some noise."



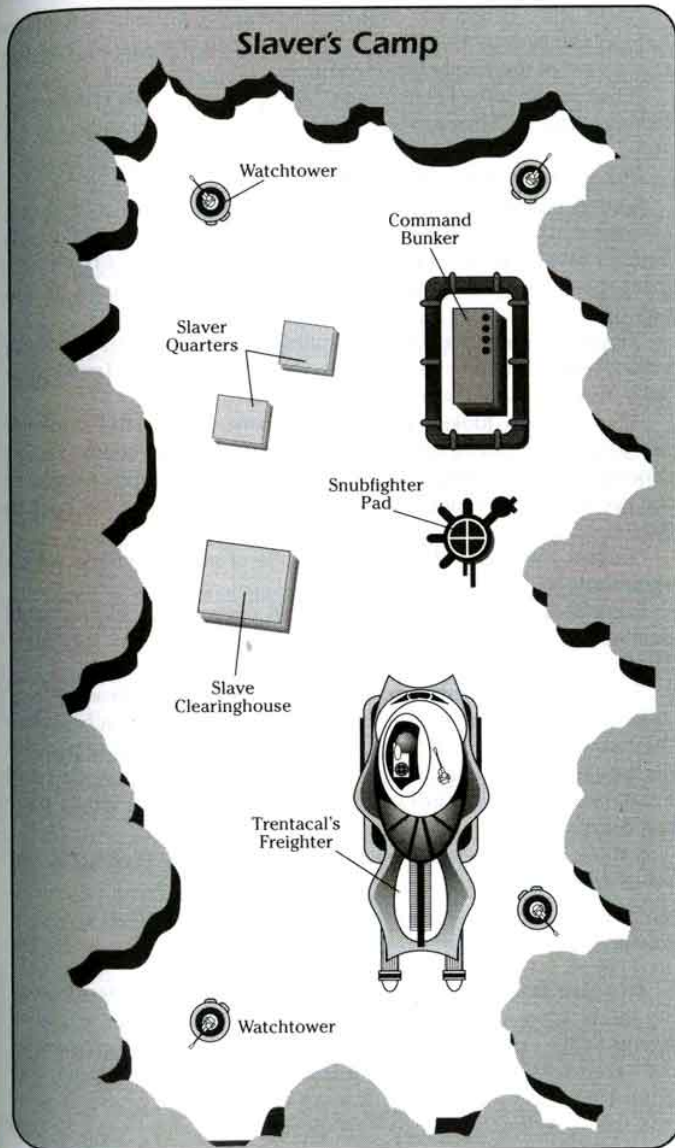
The slave girl lunged at Trentacal, a slender metal object in her hands. Despite his size, the slave master could move quickly if he wanted to. In seconds, he had the girl's arms pinned. She strained silently against his grip, trying to bite his hands. Trentacal held her long enough for him to press the emergency call. The wraith and several armed guards appeared in moments, just as Trentacal pushed the slave girl roughly to the cabin floor.

"Fools! All of you! You're supposed to protect me!" He held up the knife he had taken and pointed it at the slave girl. "I want you to vaporize this insolent thing and get us out of here! And pray that my next wish is not all of your heads on a serving platter!" The guards drew their energy weapons, aiming them at the slave. The ambassador's daughter cried aloud, trying to shield her brother from the cruel scene.

A muffled explosion rattled the huge transport. Trentacal's eyes bulged in mute surprise as he watched two of the guard towers tip over and collapse in perfect unison.



Kempo and Brixie had made it only as far as the makeshift landing pad for the camp's snubfighter when the snouts of several huge blaster cannons appeared from slits in the command bunker. The heavy weapons were laying down a withering curtain of fire, pinning them there.



"Hold still!" Brixie was still trying to apply a medical wrap to Kempo's singed right leg. The pathfinder had unexpectedly been the first target of the heavy blaster attack.

"Look at the size of those guns!" Kempo clucked his tongue in a tisking manner. "They probably ripped them out from some capital ship."

"Who cares! Can you see Hugo and Sully?"

Kempo poked his head slightly around the corner and shot a slaver guard in the torso, dropping him instantly. He spotted Cutter's familiar tousled mane of hair as he hid from the energy fire coming from the command bunker. The prefabricated structures he hid behind would not last for long.

"Hugo's trapped over by those buildings." He tapped his comlink switch twice, but there was no reply. He shook his head. "I can't raise Sully, but I think he made it to the freighter."

When Kempo looked around the corner again, the bunker's weapons were aiming once again for Cutter. Energy beams rained down all over the demolitions expert, burning away huge chunks of the prefabricated structures. Kempo shouted over the din back to Brixie.

"Hugo's gonna be a little smoking pile of nothing unless we do something to shut those guns up!"

Surprised by his words, she looked over at the impregnable command bunker. "But shouldn't we be going for the freighter? That's our way out of here!"

"Leaving teammates behind is *not* in my employment description."

Kempo took a step back and jostled something. The niche where they were hiding served as a storage shed for the landing pad. He disappeared for a moment inside and returned with a grav-cart and a half dozen large cylinders with prominent warning labels plastered over them.

"I think it's time we extended a warm Red Moon greeting to our slaver friends."



Two guards armed with stun prods stood by a secondary boarding ramp of the cargo transport, shoving as many of the enslaved beings as they could into the ship. Many of the slaves, panicked by the explosions and screaming beams of energy fire, had taken this opportunity to run. The guards were in no place to argue. One by one, the other loading ramps were closing as the ship began its final

preparations for takeoff. A message crackled over the guards' secure comlinks. Relieved to be as far away from the shooting as possible, they began to climb the ramp. As one of the guards turned to follow the slaves in, he noticed a slave without a restraint collar. He growled to his partner as he seized the Trunk by the arm.

"Hey! They forgot to put a pain collar on this one."

Sully Tigereye turned around. Sharpened fighting claws seized the startled guard by his chin. In his other hand, he aimed a heavy blaster pistol at the second guard and shot the stun prod right out of his hands. The guard spun and ran.

"There will be no more pain collars. Not as long as I live." He clenched the first guard by the jowls of his neck and swung his face close. "Now that I have your undivided attention — where's your boss?"



Working quickly, Kempo and Brixie stacked the cart with the fuel cylinders they had found as well as the explosives and grenades they were carrying. The cannon fire around them was getting closer and closer.

"Come to think of it, there's one small problem with this plan," Kempo muttered half-aloud.

"We don't have time for problems!" Brixie replied, wincing slightly as a piece of the nearby landing pad was blasted apart by a bunker weapon.

"One of us is going to have to pilot this thing up to their doorstep."

They both looked at each other, eyes frozen. A tight little grin began to form across Kempo's face. He took Brixie's hand and kissed the back of it.

"Don't worry kid, I just volunteered." The pathfinder climbed aboard and took up a position by the cart's steering controls, trying to hunker down low. He handed her the stormtrooper rifle.

"Keep them occupied long enough for me to get up close." He activated the cart's repulsorlift controls. The cart surged slowly forward as he smirked back at her.

"Just don't let people forget about me, right?"

She shook her head. There was something about his expression that she had never seen before. There was so much she wanted to learn about him and no time left.

As the grav-cart emerged, Brixie took up a position to the side of the landing pad. She fired the rifle's grenade launcher, spitting



concussion explosives at the hardened outer shell of the command bunker — for what little good it would do.

The grav-cart zigzagged across the clearing. For what felt like an eternity, the bunker's blaster weapons clumsily tried to follow him, just barely missing. Just as the grav-cart reached the bunker, Brixie could see the pathfinder time his leap — only to stumble on the cart's side railing. His foot caught, he was dragged relentlessly along until ...

The next second, she was looking up at the failing light of the evening sky. The shock wave had knocked Brixie flat on her back. She staggered to her feet. Where there had been a command bunker, there was now only the jagged remains of a permacrete foundation. Even the sides of the cargo transport had been scorched by the blast. Slavers were running wildly in all directions. She moved to the edge of the heart of the fire, shielding her face as she looked for a familiar form to stagger out.

Kempo had to come out. That's the way the holos always ended. The hero always walked out. Nobody did.

Hugo grabbed her by the arm and began pulling her over to the ship.

"No!" she screamed at him. "We won't leave a teammate behind! We can't!"

He had to drag her away from the inferno.



The explosion was so huge it shook the cargo transport violently on its landing legs.

The transport bridge's accessway popped open. Tigereye shoved the guard into a few of the crewers standing there. Several reached for weapons, but they were not fast enough. Energy beams ricocheted across the bridge. When it was over, Tigereye waved the blaster pistol at the survivors.

"Everybody in the escape pod! Now!"

They filed into the bridge's lifeboat pod. Tigereye sealed the hatchway behind them, locking them inside. After securing the bridge, he then tapped his comlink.

There was no need. Brixie and Hugo Cutter appeared at the bridge's accessway. The demolitions expert's shoulders were sagging. Brixie was crestfallen, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Tigereye understood immediately. Kempo. The explosion.

His hands balled into fists, Tigereye wanted to scream. He wanted to tear the bridge apart. He grabbed the guard he had taken prisoner and slammed him against one of the control consoles so hard the impact dented the panels. He shoved the datapad before the guard's eyes, pictures of the ambassador's children flashing on the tiny screen.

"They're not among the slaves held down below. So *where* are they?"

The guard gestured at another doorway on the bridge.

"They're in the master's quarters! In there!"

Tigereye tossed the heavy blaster pistol to Cutter as he unsheathed his vibro-axe.

"Set weapons to stun. We need those children alive."

"I'm coming too," Brixie stepped forward, shaking, still clenching Lex Kempo's stormtrooper rifle with whitened knuckles. Tigereye gestured at the guard.

"No. You have to watch him."

Brixie pivoted and shot the guard using the blaster rifle's stun setting at point-blank range. The guard slumped over into unconsciousness.

Vex

Type: Defel Bodyguard**DEXTERITY 3D+2**

Blaster 5D+2, blind fighting 4D+2, dodge 4D+2, melee combat 5D+2, melee parry 5D

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Alien species 3D+1, business: Karazak Slavers Guild 5D+1, streetwise 5D+1

MECHANICAL 2D+1

Astrogation 3D, space transports 4D+1

PERCEPTION 3D

Command 5D, con 4D, hide 6D, search 6D, sneak 7D+2

STRENGTH 4D+1

Brawling 6D+2, stamina 6D+2

TECHNICAL 2D

Security 4D

Special Abilities:*Invisibility:* Adds +3D to sneak.*Claws:* Adds +2D to damage when brawling.*Light Blind:* Defel can only see ultraviolet light, and must wear light visors to screen

out other forms of light. If a Defel loses his visor, the difficulty of any sight-based task is increased by one level.

This character is Force-sensitive.**Dark Side Points:** 2**Character Points:** 12**Move:** 11**Equipment:** Comlink, heavy blaster pistol (5D), knife (STR-1D)

Capsule: Like most of his kind, Vex is a mysterious Defel motivated by his own unrevealed goals. Trentacal first heard of the Defel when Vex's name was mentioned with some regard by one of Trentacal's slave buyers. When finally introduced, Vex at first was not interested in Trentacal's offer to be the slave master's personal bodyguard. The Defel apparently had other matters requiring his attention, and had little time to dally with what he saw as a petty and slovenly slave lord.

But Vex quickly changed his mind. He soon found himself trapped between rivals to Trentacal's local interests and the fire-power of the Karazak Slavers Guild which came to protect Trentacal's interests. Vex decided joining Trentacal's slaving operations was perhaps the best way for him to accomplish his own mysterious goals. The Defel has served faithfully at the slave master's side ever since, for reasons he keeps to himself. Over time, Trentacal has informally elevated him to his personal lieutenant, and placed him in charge of the more mundane aspects of his slaving operation.

"He's going nowhere," she replied tersely as she inserted two stun grenades into the rifle launcher.

Tigereye and Cutter regarded each other, surprised.

Muffled blaster fire erupted from somewhere behind the door, followed by a painful scream. Tigereye gestured to Cutter at the door controls.

"Open it. Now!"



The well-appointed domain of the slave master was almost completely dark. The slave master himself was dead, slumped over in his lounge. Brixie immediately took a step toward the young girl and her brother still chained to the wall, but Tigereye held her back. From the way they were cowering in silence, he could tell something was not right.

"Someone else is in here," Tigereye whispered.

"That is correct," a voice from the dark declared.

Crouching low, the mercenaries separated as they made their way into the cabin. As she moved past the lounge, Brixie's foot grazed something soft. She inhaled sharply as she saw the torn throat of a dead slave girl lying on the floor, a hold-out blaster still clutched in her tiny hands. The slave master's guards lay dead close by.

"She saw an opportunity to escape," the voice explained matter-of-factly. "I had to convince her otherwise. Take a good look, mercenaries. Your fate will be the same as hers."

A shape lunged at Cutter, sending him sprawling across the floor. In just moments, the shape appeared again, claws burying deeply inside Brixie's protective vest. The thing shoved her into the wall, knocking her senseless. The stormtrooper rifle clattered to the floor.

Holding her injured head and side, she heard more fighting. Trying to focus, she saw their attacker stand against the dim light of the cabin's viewports for only a moment. She immediately recognized the shaggy, black-furred creature from her medical training at the university. No wonder the lights were out!

"It's a Defel! A wraith!"

Tigereye found the cabin's lighting controls and flipped them to their maximum setting. Glowspheres filled the room with brightness. The terrifying creature screamed in agony, trying to shield its eyes from the powerful lights.

Surrounded and blinded, the Defel spun around wildly. Brixie had picked up the stormtrooper blaster rifle. Hugo Cutter was back up

on his feet, blaster pistol in hand, his face badly bruised. Sully Tigereye's gaze narrowed to a chilled yellow as he took a step forward, vibro-axe in hand.

"The only fate you should be worrying about ... is your own."



The cargo ship, almost fully laden with freed slaves, climbed slowly into the sky above Gabredor III. Below on the night-eclipsed surface of the planet, the destroyed slaver camp burned with a vengeance. Tigereye had made it a point that they should leave plenty of Red Moon marks for all to find there. Knowing they had been targeted, the Karazak Slavers Guild would have to look long and hard for another place to conduct its business. And with the children of the Gola ambassador safely aboard the ship, the Pentastar Alignment had lost as well.

In Brixie's heart, it was a hollow victory. They had tried to search the wreckage of the command bunker, but the fire was simply too hot. She sat in a chair on the transport's bridge, keeping to herself as Tigereye and Cutter familiarized themselves with the ship's astrogation controls. She finally thought about taking the helmet off her head. With a tired sigh, she undid the straps and let the helmet fall to the deck beside her feet.

Tigereye looked over at the sound. During her training, it had been difficult for her to judge the Trunsk — to separate reputation from reality. The same clawed hands which had so eagerly torn the Defel to pieces were the same hands which gladly unlocked the pain collars of dozens of slaves.

She finally realized why he had chosen her for this mission. There were some things that cannot come with training or preparation, they must be experienced and felt. Brixie had experienced the camaraderie and the fear, seen the violence and death that was all part of the life of the blaster-for-hire. For a brief moment, Tigereye's expression softened. He and Hugo would mourn the loss of their lifetime friend in their own ways.

Her gaze fell upon the bridge's visual screens. Gabredor III was falling slowly away. She found herself wishing Lex was here, wondering what his reaction would have been to her realization. He probably would have just winked at her.

Then she saw the remains of the slaver camp on the screens. A chill ran down her spine — there was something familiar about the shape of fires down there. Kempo's voice echoed in her mind. In his

Supplemental Record:

Karazak Slavers and The Pentastar Alignment

The Pentastar Alignment is among the most powerful of the so-called "Imperial warlord factions." Despite the large domain of space it controls, even the Alignment lacks the worker forces it requires. So the Alignment often turns to the Karazak Slavers Guild to supply hard-working backs with few questions asked.

So how does the KSG get away with slaving when anti-slaving regulations from pre-Empire days still exist? The Alignment issues "mass employment notices" to the Karazak Slavers Guild and others. Karazak slavers then "recruit" beings to fill those positions — through abduction, force, deceit or other unscrupulous methods. To permit them easy access within Alignment space, the Alignment allows slaver guilds to conduct their collection operations on worlds distant from well-traveled space lanes and prying eyes — worlds like Gabredor III. The Alignment asks no questions as to how the KSG obtains its "recruits." In return, the Karazak Slavers Guild provides a continual supply of slaves for the Alignment's mining, agri-production, and industry worlds.

Needless to say, I found great pleasure shutting down the Karazak Slavers Guild's operations on Gabredor III. Dropping a thermal detonator on the Guild's inner circle of slave masters would provide great satisfaction as well."

Sully Tigereye

Red Moon Special Mission Operations

own words, the pathfinder had indeed gone out in a blaze of glory.

From hundreds of kilometers above, the explosion that had flattened the command bunker appeared like a fiercely glowing crescent ...

A red moon.

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NEW REPUBLIC
SOURCEFILE

Scouts' Dispatch

From the datafiles of Captain Korren Starchaser, New Republic scout:

The Serianan System is a small star cluster, well off of the galactic beaten path even by Outer Rim standards. The only planet in the system, Serias, maintains conditions capable of supporting standard life forms — three other worlds, too small and far away from the sun to sustain life, orbit the system's outer edge.

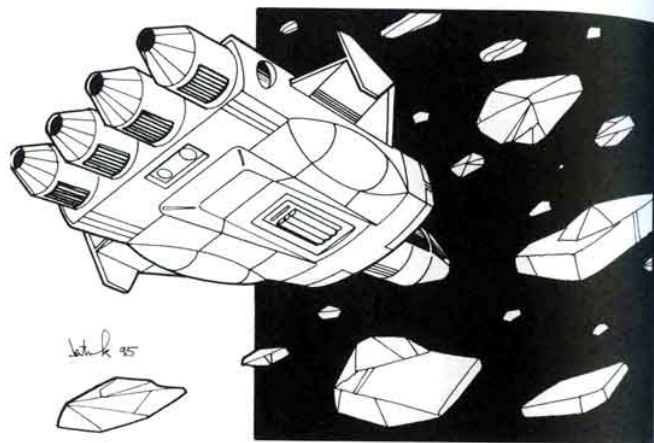
The lone inhabited world also gives its name to the system's main feature, an enormous asteroid belt that easily takes up more than half the star system. Many of the larger asteroids have stable orbits, and actually have smaller asteroids orbiting them. Scans show that at least some of the belt is constantly shifting and moving. According to preliminary sensor reports, however, the asteroids themselves are not likely a natural phenom-

enon, and may be the remains of a multiple planet collision. As this is quite a rare occurrence, more data needs to be collected to verify this assertion.

The first surprise the belt had in store, however, was the discovery of strange patterns of ancient runes we found etched into the sides of several asteroids while performing a routine topographical scan of grid sector 867-

3A4. Upon closer inspection, these runes proved to be much more precisely carved than any natural occurrence could. Subsequent sensor readouts and hands-on observations by team members in vac suits suggested an even more in-depth cataloguing of these puzzling designs was warranted. It was then that *Jedi Dreamer* stumbled into the next big surprise — the Gulch.





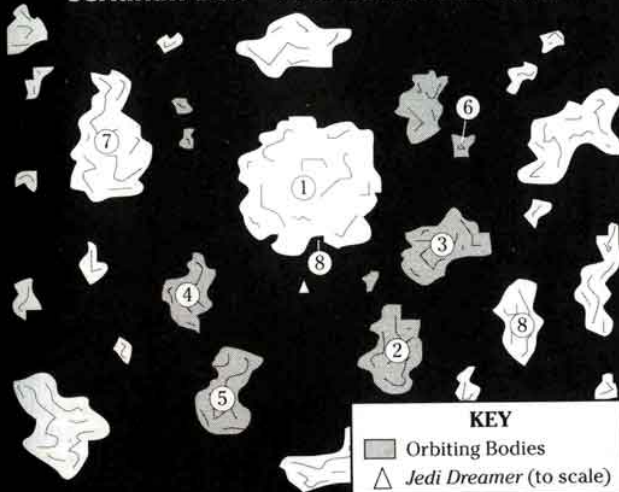
The Gulch is the nickname we gave to an immense cavern inside the largest, most heavily carved asteroid in sector 867-3A4. Large enough to carefully maneuver a small scout ship inside, the Gulch contained not only more designs on its interior, but also a stone alcove in the rear of the cave in which rested several small, perfectly preserved alien statues. We recovered the artifacts and recorded all the symbols and their locations. Deciding to try to protect the system from what would happen if word of an unusual archaeological discovery went around, I cut further exploration short and ordered the team back to the Daxis Outpost so one of my most trusted colleagues, Dr. Maxina Sensis, would have a chance to analyze our findings before the Scout

Service published them.

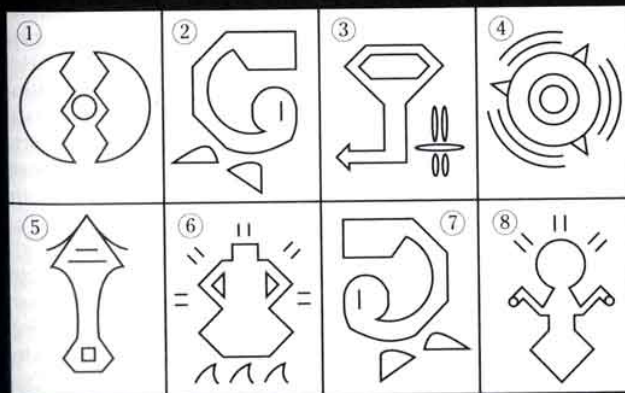
With the wealth of data from the Gulch and the desire to decipher this information before going on to make first contact, our team opted to perform only a brief inspection of the planet Serias, and hard data on the terrestrial civilization is unavailable at this point. Instead, a portion of the ship's log from our in-system survey has been included for reference. Scouts are warned to remember that this is based on partial personal observations and not actual sensor logs.

Right now, the data about the artifacts and carved symbols is still under analysis, but whispers have begun to circulate in fringe circles that a leak has spilled word of our find. With first contact with any lifeforms on Serias still a question and

Serianan Belt - Grid Sector 867-3A4



Runes Found on the Asteroids



**ADDENDUM/PERSONAL
STARCHASER, KORREN/CAPTAIN ..**

One of the things a scout must be prepared to deal with all the time is facing the mysterious and unexpected. But seldom are field teams prepared to see something that is really out of the ordinary, no matter what they may think. It took my own team's recent investigation of the Serianan Belt to make me realize that I still haven't seen everything in the galaxy.

only an incomplete survey of the system itself, I worry about remnants of the Empire or other unsavory types hearing about the unusual relics or mineral

samples that have been discovered and attempting to exploit the Serianan Belt. Given the team's findings, my fears aren't entirely unfounded.

Preliminary Findings

While the whole field of asteroids deserves to be studied in detail, several of the larger specimens, particularly in grid sector 867-3A4, have gained the most attention. A diagram showing the most prominent symbols and their locations has been forwarded with this report. Some of the marks are as large as several scout ships end to end — however, some of the more interesting impressions are only large enough to be visible under intense sensor scrutiny. Hand examination by the scout team also revealed that these etchings were worked by unknown tools and were almost certainly made by intelligent beings.

A few of the smaller marks also seem to indicate humanoid beings, although judging from the preliminary scans, the inhabitants of Serias are most

likely quite biologically different from Humans. A search has been proposed to see if this system might have been visited during the Old Republic, or if the markings were made by any known species. Pending the results of a full analysis of the recovered artifacts and an examination of the prominent runes in the belt, this proposal is unlikely to be approved. However, any further expeditions will also fall under the jurisdiction of the New Republic Scout Service and will certainly receive much more official attention than the last survey.

One particular discovery to note is the unusual mineral composition of the Gulch, which was nearly overlooked in the efforts to document all the markings and artifacts from the belt. Trace samples sent back to New Republic scientists have shown the

minerals in this vicinity to be extremely dense and resistant to wear; however, preliminary evidence also indicates that the entire Gulch was hollowed out of this material. If this is true, whoever or whatever it was who cut the cavern from the asteroid must have been using tools with energy outputs far beyond anything the New Republic is aware of at this time.

Preliminary holograms of the alien artifacts our team recovered show them to be remarkably exquisite sculptures of what appear to be alien buildings of some kind. However, these artifacts are still under precautionary quarantine at Scout Service Headquarters and will be unable to be studied in detail for quite some time,

**ADDENDUM/PERSONAL
STARCHASER, KORREN/CAPTAIN ..**

When a scout team absolutely needs to get up close to an object and do it in the vacuum of space, as was the case in retrieval of the Gulch antiquities, precautions must be taken to ensure that not only is the subject not disturbed in any way, but that the scouts return in one piece. My recommendation is do what I call "branching" — leave one crew member aboard ship to keep track of everyone's movement's with the ship's sensors and comm units, and make sure everyone follows a narrow, predetermined "branch" area during their search. In low light, high radiation, or other hazardous conditions, making sure that you hang on to every byte is as important as bringing back the data you need.

Archaeological Evidence

Five artifacts were removed during the Serianan exploration, all of them from the same location inside the deepest part of the Gulch. They stand around half a meter tall and are each roughly 1 meter wide. As far as our team and Dr. Sensis have been able to determine, the sculptures are made from a similar type of mineral as the rest of the Gulch, although their material is far less dense than the other samples discovered — each piece can be easily carried by an adult Human. All five sculp-

tures are dull orange in color and have a completely opaque composition; each seems to represent a domed alien building of some kind, complete with miniature staircases and doorways. However, the question of whether or not the structures are actually hollow will have to remain unanswered until the quarantine of the objects is lifted, as they have proven resistant to scanning by standard measures.

So far, the only truly interesting feature to be determined

Adventure Idea

The New Republic Scout Service hires the characters to conduct a follow-up investigation on the Serianan Belt, primarily a mineral study on the Gulch. When they arrive, however, they find a group of independent alien archaeologists already working the asteroid field. They seem to have made interesting progress toward deciphering the history and meaning of the mysterious markings, and how they pertain to the sculptures Korren's team discovered.

But their careless attitude about the secrecy of the unique minerals found in the asteroids is starting to attract other, less-honorable prospectors to the belt. The characters must find some way to work with the alien archaeology team while warding off potential prospectors.

from these sculptures is that they appear to be modular. They appear that they would form an interlocking, roughly circular shape about two meters in diameter if they were joined together. However, if this is a cor-

rect observation, then one sculpture is missing from the arrangement, because a half meter gap appears in the formation when it is assembled. What it would mean were this piece to be discovered is unknown, but as an archaeological find it could be most beneficial in unraveling the mystery of the Serianan Belt.

Vagabond Suit

With the intensive open-space reconnaissance required to explore the asteroids of the Serianan Belt, this new deep space suit design was put to the test. One of my personal, customized pieces of equipment, the vagabond got its name when Mowa commented on the suit's long range exploration capability. More than just a simple space suit, however, the vagabond incorporates the sensor capabilities of a full standard scanning unit with directional arrays mounted on the shoulders and chest, so the scout may perform manual tasks without hindrance.

These scanners can be set to record data on the suit's small on-board computer system, relayed directly to a nearby ship by the helmet's comm transfer programs, or given to the scout in a continuous heads-up feature on the helmet visor. The scanners themselves are quite

versatile, and can be configured to probe nearby radiation levels or conduct a complete mineral analysis. The

suit also provides information vital to the scout, such as a full bio-scan readout and constant navigational fixes to keep the scout aware of his location at any given time.



Vagabond Suit

Model: Customized vagabond space suit

Type: Deep space powersuit

Scale: Character

Skill: Powersuit operation

Cost: 2,500 credits

Availability: 3

Game Notes: Adds +2D to sensors and communications rolls while the suit is used independent of a base ship. Adds +1D if linked to base ship. The suit's armor provides +2D against physical attacks and +2 against energy attacks. Booster jets provide a top speed equivalent to Space 1 with a maneuverability of 1D. The onboard sensor array has the following specifications:

Passive: 3/0D

Scan: 6/0D

Search: 9/1D

Focus: 1/2D

Doctor Maxina Sensis

Dr. Sensis is an eager, attentive young xenoarchaeologist and exploratory historian currently attached to the Scout Service's Daxis Outpost in the Jandolhoon system. Her bright, optimistic outlook and passion for detail has bought her the position of Chief Researcher of the Daxis Outpost and the sincere respect of Korren Starchaser. Although he had only met her twice before the Serias expedition, she had already proven herself as the authority on analyzing and cataloging the artifacts that made their way back to known space

through the hands of Korren's team.

A young Human female originally from the Parkis system, Maxina's goal in life was to make important new discoveries well before anyone else had even thought of them, and always tried to be one step ahead of her teachers and competitors. This kind of edge is just what she needed to make it into the top universities in the



Core Worlds

Maxina was on the fast track to a comfortable job as a Corporate Sector researcher when she saw a Scout Service promotional holo just days before graduation. Three hours after she received her honors credits, she was on a shuttle to the Daxis Outpost. Some of her colleagues are mystified by her desire to remain "in the field" instead of taking a safer — and higher paying — post closer to the Core. But Maxina knows she's found her niche in life when she gets her hands on some new data or an exotic artifact weeks ahead of everyone else in the Scout Service.

Dr. Sensis is currently hard at work trying to decipher the workings of the strange sculptures that Korren's team brought back from the Serianan Belt. Maxina has studied the group of artifacts in as much detail as possible at this point, and currently has several theories about these relics and how they relate to the markings on

the asteroids of the belt. However, she has kept her findings to herself and to Korren so far because of a lack of hard data. Right now she's searching for another scouting team to do a more detailed study of the system. Another scout survey could give her the information she needs to solve the riddle behind the strange markings and artifacts — and make the breakthrough that she knows is waiting just out of her reach.

This issue's Scout's Dispatch was created by Peter Woodworth and illustrated by David Deitrick.

■ Doctor Maxina Sensis

Type: Scout Service Researcher

DEXTERITY 2D

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 5D+2, languages 4D+2, planetary systems 5D+1, scholar: Old Republic 6D+1, scholar: xenoarchaeology 7D+1, willpower 5D

MECHANICAL 2D+1

Astrostation 3D+2, astrostation: Jandohoon system 5D, communications 4D, repulsorlift operation 2D+2, sensors 5D+1

PERCEPTION 4D

Investigation 6D, con 4D+2, persuasion 4D+1, search 4D+2

STRENGTH 2D+2

Stamina 3D+1

TECHNICAL 3D

Computer programming/repair 5D+1, first aid 5D+2, (A) medicine 4D

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 4

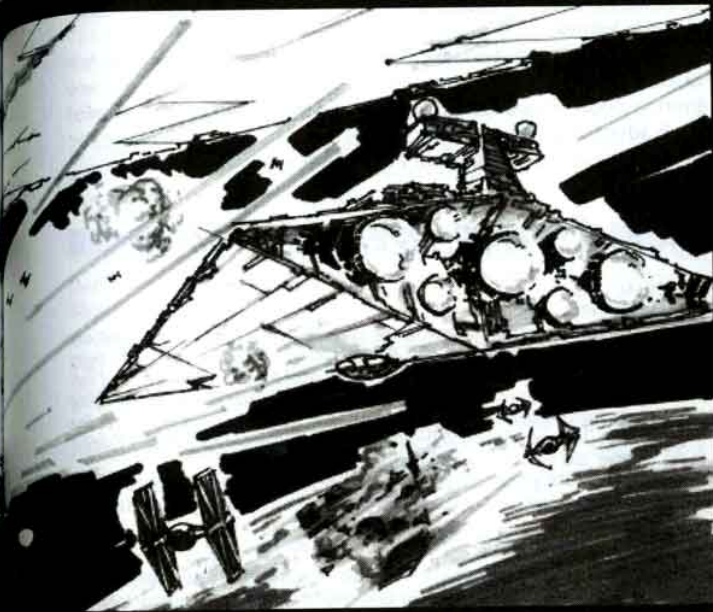
Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, datapad, personal data journal

Adventure Idea

The characters are directed by the Scout Service (or hired by a wealthy patron, if they are independent) to try to find the missing Serianan sculpture and retrieve it. En route to the Serianan Belt, however, they are waylaid by pirates not far from Series and taken to their hidden command post, only to find that the base building itself is a giant recreation of the missing sculpture. The characters must find out what relation the pirates have to the artifacts, procure the missing piece itself, and manage to evade the pirates long enough to deliver it to their patron.

BLACK CURS BLUES



By Peter Schweighofer

Illustrations by Chris Gossett

Six months after the Rebel Alliance's victory at Endor, the galaxy is in turmoil. The crumbling Empire is scrambling to prepare defenses, pulling fleets from some sectors, reallocating troops and armored divisions, and trying to cope with a myriad of minor governors, Moff's and admirals who have broken from the Empire to forge their own realms of power. Hoping to take advantage of the Empire's disarray, Rebel forces are massing their troops and fleets to prepare for a strike toward the Core Worlds.

A small band of mercenaries with loyalties to the New Republic has infiltrated the Core Worlds, collecting information from Rebel operatives and observing Imperial troop and fleet activities. The Black Curs are a disaffected group of outlaws and smugglers bent on personal

vengeance against the Empire. They hope their reconnaissance efforts can help the New Republic crush the remnants of the Empire forever.

But these mercenaries have aroused the ire of the remaining Imperial command. Fearful that the Black Curs may provide damaging tactical information about Imperial forces to the New Republic, the Imperial Advisors now running the Empire have charged Advisor Bregius Golthan with capturing these mercenaries. Now that the Black Curs have finished their reconnaissance mission, they are making a desperate drive to flee the Core Worlds and escape Golthan's forces ...

This short campaign involves characters in the dealings of the Black Curs, a fringe mercenary group bent on revenge against the Empire. The three short scenarios follow the adventures of the Black Curs, bringing characters in contact with the infamous Platt Okeefe, Dirk Harkness, Tru'eb Cholakk and Jai Raventhorn. The

adventures can be modified for different levels of characters — gamemasters are encouraged to tailor the opposing forces to characters' abilities.

Gamemasters can turn each one of these scenarios into one full night's adventure — play can even be extended by adding a few more encounters and playing up some of the roleplaying aspects of each adventure's gamemaster characters. Hints on expanding the action are provided in sidebars marked "Expansion Tips."

STORMS OVER MOORJA

PERSONAL LOG HARKNESS/DIRK ..

We've finished our reconnaissance of the Core Worlds and the Colonies and are making a mad dash to reach some New Republic forces or a safe world. Platt's been jumping the ship as fast as she can get a navigational fix on our position and our destination, but the forces of Imperial Advisor Bregius Goltan are hot on our tail, trying to prevent us from delivering our recon report to New Republic command. Add to the chase two Star Destroyers from Moff Prentioch, who is carving out his own little Empire in the Mid-Rim, and we've got quite a party.

We should be making Moorja in a few hours. If we're lucky, I can pick up the Y-wing hidden in the caves there and split up.

A Call From Cracken

The characters are working with the New Republic and are called to meet with General Airen Cracken, chief of New Republic Intelligence. Read aloud:

Thank you for coming on such short notice, but an emergency has arisen which must be addressed immediately. It seems our scouts and intelligence operatives have reported a small massing of existing Imperial warships to join a chase which apparently originated in the Core Worlds. It seems these vessels, under the direct command of Imperial Advisor Bregius Goltan, are trying to capture a lone light freighter. Nobody's been able to identify the freighter, its passengers or cargo, but we suspect it is one of our intelligence operatives who has been participating in a recon mission within the Core Worlds. Our assumption is that he completed his report and is trying to deliver it to us.

I need you to travel to the Moorja system, where we believe our intelligence operative has hidden a cache of equipment — possibly a small starship. You must provide some diversionary support to the operative's vessel, trying to draw away those Imperial warships in pursuit. If possible, you are to obtain the report and

attempt to return it to the New Republic fleet. May the Force be with you.

Cracken assumes the characters are using their own freighter — if characters don't have a starship of their own, Cracken loans them the use of a banged-up light freighter, the *Valiant Damsel*. Gamemasters should feel free to substitute another ship as they see fit.

Valiant Damsel. Starfighter, maneuverability 1D, space 4, atmosphere 480; 800 kmh, hull 4D+1, shields 1D. Weapons: 2 laser cannon turrets (fire control 2D, damage 4D).

Cracken has the ship resupplied and repaired quickly for this mission. The characters are provided with three extra medpacs and two speeder bikes in case they require transport after landing on Moorja.

Nightfalcon Speeder Bike. Speeder, maneuverability 3D+1, move 160; 460 kmh, body strength 1D+2. Weapons: laser cannon (fire control 2D, damage 4D).

The hyperspace jump to Moorja from the New Republic fleet's current position near Calamari takes only a few hours, enough time for the characters to check their ship's computer for some information about their destination:

Moorja

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Hydrosphere: Moist
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Badlands, plains, low hills, forests
Length of Day: 17 standard hours
Length of Year: 310 local days
Sapient Species: Humans, Ithorians, Arcona
Starports: 1 limited services
Population: 25,000 Humans, 15,000 Ithorians, 2,500 Arcona
Planet Function: Agricultural and mining colony
Government: Corporate owned
Tech Level: Space
Major Exports: Salt, fenti beans, ruva grains
Major Imports: Heavy farm machinery, electronic components

Capsule: Moorja is a small Inner Rim mining and agricultural colony governed by the Salliche Ag Corp. The colony has been running rather nicely on its own with little supervision from its parent corporation — as long as the colony sent its produce coreward and paid all the proper taxes, Salliche left it alone. The population cares little for galactic politics, and has been conducting business as usual since the Empire's defeat at Endor and the rising social unrest on Salliche.

A small contingent of Arcona on Moorja mine and export salt, to which

most Arcona on the planet are addicted to some degree. The Ithorians are concentrated in several forested areas on the planet, where they grow and harvest specialty fruits and low-yield forest crops. Moorja, the starport and only major city, is a rather peaceful place surrounded by millions of acres of fields and smaller agricultural settlements. Although Moorja's soil has been naturally fertile for many years, bad crop management has made the planet dependent upon artificially synthesized fertilizers. Moorja has plentiful rainfall from the numerous ion storms which blow in from the planet's oceans.

While the rain is good for the crops, the frequent storms wreak havoc on electronic equipment, including the systems of starships unfortunate enough to descend into a storm or be caught airborne beneath one. Direct strikes from ion lightning tend to ionize major electronic components like weapon control systems, nav computers, life support systems, shields and ion engines. Most of Moorja's harvesting equipment stays firmly rooted to the ground to avoid such ion lightning strikes, but machinery left out in open fields during storms often attracts lightning. Moorja's principle imports include new heavy farm machinery and electronic components to replace machinery destroyed by ion lightning strikes.

Episode One: Clash of the Giants

When the characters emerge in the Moorja system, they see an immense space battle ahead. Poised above the planet are four Imperial Star Destroyers, two attacking two others with odd insignia emblazoned on their conning towers. Wild turbolaser bolts flash between them, and innumerable TIE fighters zip around, blasting each other and trying to damage the enemy Star Destroyers. Two of the Star Destroyers are part of Advisor Golthan's pursuit fleet, trying to chase down the New Republic operative fleeing the Core Worlds. The other two belong to Imperial Warlord Prentioch, a pretender to the Imperial throne who is trying to carve out his own little empire. Prentioch believes he could have a significant advantage in stamping out the Empire himself (or obtaining some of its ships or materiel) if he obtained the New Republic recon report.

The emergency comm channel crackles to life with a message from a third ship apparently crash landing on Moorja itself. Read aloud:

... going down. I repeat, this is the *Last Chance* calling any New Republic ships in the area. We've been hit by turbolaser fire and have sustained major damage. Please assist. I repeat, we're going down ...

Some characters might recall that the ship *Last Chance* is owned by smuggler Platt Okeefe, who sometimes worked for the Rebel Alliance and New Republic. Anybody making a Difficult *sensors* roll can deter-

mine the general area on Moorja where the ship will crash land.

But reaching the *Last Chance* isn't as easy as the characters would like. First they must evade a few TIE fighters and stray turbolaser bolts from the Imperial Star Destroyers slugging it out above Moorja. Although the Star Destroyers are preoccupied with each other, several TIE fighters might separate from the main battle to attack the characters' ship.

Once the characters have evaded the space battle above, they must try to determine the location of the crashed *Last Chance*. Unfortunately, the general area of the crash determined earlier is now beneath an immense ion storm swirling over Moorja's surface. Communications from the *Last Chance* have ceased. Characters who want to try and get another general location for the downed ship must make a Heroic *sensors* roll. The *Last Chance* has put down almost in the center of the storm. Anyone making at least a Difficult *sensors* roll also notices several drop-ships from the Star Destroyers setting down on the fringes of the ion storm ...

Episode Two: Eye of the Storm

The characters may descend into Moorja's atmosphere directly into the ion storm or — like the Imperial drop-ships — along one edge. Either way, they must travel through or beneath the storm at some point to get anywhere near the *Last Chance*.

The storm buffets the characters' ship, while blue ion lightning leaps between clouds and to high points on the ground. The dense clouds and sheets of rain also make visual and instrument navigation difficult, and visibility is cut down drastically.

When in or beneath the ion storm, there is a 1 in 6 chance each round that the ion lightning hits the ship, ionizing one ship's system for 1D6 rounds. Roll randomly on the "Ion Storm Damage" table to determine which ship's system is ionized.

If the ion drives are ionized for six consecutive rounds, the ship can't stay airborne. The pilot must make some Heroic *space transports* rolls to make a hasty yet successful landing in some grassy hills — although the ship will be a little more dented than before, and splattered with mud.

Ion Storm Damage (1D6)

- 1 Ion drives
- 2 Weapons systems
- 3 Shields
- 4 Maneuverability thrusters
- 5 Sensors
- 6 Nav computer

If the starship's engines remain operational through the ion storm, the characters can descend below the clouds and head to the point where they believe the *Last Chance* set down.

Soon after the group sights ground and begins trying to home in on the downed freighter, they see what the two groups of drop-ships have let off. On one end of the ion storm several drop-ships loyal to Imperial Advisor Golthan have deployed four AT-AT walkers, which begin plodding their way toward the downed freighter. On the other end of the ion storm several drop-ships loyal to Moff Prentioch have let off two AT-AT walkers and four AT-ST scout walkers.

The characters might be able to attack these Imperial forces from their ship, if they can do so in the ion storm. Of course, the Imperial forces, both loyal and rogue, return fire ...

Imperial AT-AT Walker. Walker, *walker operation 4D, vehicle blasters 4D+2, maneuverability 0D, move 21; 60 kmh, body strength 6D. Weapons: 2 heavy laser cannons (fire control 2D, damage 6D), 2 medium blasters (fire control 2D, damage 3D).*

Imperial AT-ST Scout Walker. Walker, *walker operation 4D, vehicle blasters 4D+2, missile weapons 4D, maneuverability 1D, move 30; 90 kmh, body strength 3D. Weapons: 1 twin blaster cannon (fire control 1D, damage 4D), 2 twin light blaster cannon (fire control 1D, damage 2D), concussion grenade launcher (fire control 1D, damage 3D).*

The two groups of Imperial armored walkers are converging on the downed freighter from both sides. However, once they're in range of each other, they begin shooting at each other, trying to bring down as many enemy armored walkers as possible.

When close enough, the AT-ATs let off their complements of troopers to carry on the battle by foot — and to attempt to capture the *Last Chance* and her crew. Each AT-AT walker left at this point in the battle carries 10 troopers who disembark and begin moving on foot toward the *Last Chance*. Those forces still loyal to the Imperial Advisors and the late Emperor include 40 stormtroopers (10 per surviving AT-AT walker). Those forces loyal to Moff Prentioch include 20 Imperial Army troopers (10 per surviving AT-AT). They attempt to surround and subdue the crew of the downed freighter, and hold off enemy troops until they can retrieve the reconnaissance report.

Imperial Stormtroopers. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity 3D, blaster 4D, blaster rifle 5D, brawling parry 4D, dodge 4D, brawling 3D. Move 10. Stormtrooper armor (+2D physical, +1D energy, -1D Dexterity), blaster rifle (5D), blaster pistol (4D).*

Moff Prentioch's Troopers. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity 3D, blaster 4D+1, dodge 4D+1, grenade 3D+2, heavy weapons 3D+2, Strength 3D+1, brawling 4D. Move 10. Blast helmet and vest (+1D against physical, +1 against energy attacks), blaster pistol (4D), 2 grenades (4D), comlink.*

The characters have many options in this battle. They may shoot at the walkers and troops with their ship's guns, if their ship is able to remain airborne in the ion storm. If they crash, or land near the *Last Chance*, they may still try to use the ship's guns, but they are an easier target for the walkers. The troops are also a large problem, and try to slowly advance over the dampened plains. There is little cover, so they may be picked off. However, if at least one AT-AT per side has not been destroyed before the troops have disembarked, the characters stand a good chance of being overwhelmed by enemy soldiers.

Episode Three: Harkness on the Run

When the characters reach the *Last Chance*, they see it isn't as badly damaged as they thought. The ship can still fly, but seems to have taken several turbolaser hits. Three individuals are defending the freighter against the Imperial factions' attacks. They are Tru'eb Cholak, a Twi'lek gunrunner, Jai Raventhorn, an outlaw mercenary, and Platt Okeefe, smuggler. The three are friends of the New Republic, and are grateful for any aid the characters can give them.

Platt explains they were completing a reconnaissance mission through the Core Worlds when the Imperials caught on to them and began pursuit. She has no idea where the other Imperial group after them came from, although she guesses it could be a rogue Imperial commander out to carve up his own empire.

While Jai crews the *Last Chance's* guns against any advancing Imperial forces left, Platt tells the characters that their leader, Dirk Harkness, has the only copy of the final recon report to be delivered to General Cracken. The report contains information on the crumbling Empire, including coordinates and schedules for troop and fleet movements. However, the stubborn and impatient Dirk Harkness has struck out across Moorja's plains on his own, intending to find a ship the Black Curs hid here before heading coreward. He is carrying a datapad copy of the report — if he is captured, the information in the report will be of little value to the New Republic.

Since her ship is damaged — and there's no way she's going to leave it here — Platt asks the characters to rescue Harkness either with their ship or their speeder bikes (the ion storm barely affects

craft smaller than a light freighter). She guesses that Harkness set off on a northerly course, toward a rocky region known as the Crumbling Lands. Platt, Jai and Tru'eb intend to continue repairs on Platt's ship, hoping to finish by the time the characters locate Harkness so they can add some firepower when breaking through the Imperial blockade in orbit.

If characters begin their search immediately, they do not find it difficult to track Harkness through the matted grasses and muddy smears in the plains. A few Moderate *search* rolls reveal his trail. However, once they reach the edge of the rocky area called the Crumbling Lands, they lose his trail completely among the sandstone formations and eroded gullies.

Characters have a better chance carrying out the search on foot from here. However, the Crumbling Lands are very unstable — sedimentary rock strata has been hollowed out by water action and digger beasts known as bruwoses. At one point during their search on foot, one character steps on a weak part of the rock and falls through a series of tunnels. Optionally, the Imperials might send TIE bombers during a break in the ion storms to try and drive Harkness out of hiding. When they drop their concussion bombs in the Crumbling Lands, they blast immense sinkholes in the ground. Each blast crater reveals several caves leading beneath the Crumbling Lands. A near miss could cause the characters to fall into one of these sinkholes and become trapped deep in several subterranean passages.

Once trapped in the underground caves, the characters find it difficult to get out — perhaps rock has blocked the way out, or more concussion bomb blasts have sealed off their exit. The deeper caves are also the only real cover characters have against the TIE bombers. They begin wandering through the passages, seeking a way out and trying to find Dirk Harkness.

Eventually the characters come to a fairly large underground chamber from which several exit passages lead. As a character approaches, a blaster shot flashes out from rocks far away from the passages. Something in the exit cave squeals out and growls!

Dirk Harkness is hiding in the rocks opposite the exits, waiting for the three bruwoses to move along. The beasts have stopped to rest in the passages leading to Harkness' hidden Y-wing. Firing the blaster is Harkness' way of scaring the bruwoses away before they leap onto a character. Alternately, a bruwose might attack a character coming too close to their nesting passages, and Harkness can come to their aid with his steady blaster hand.



Dirk Harkness. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 4D, *blaster* 8D+2, *dodge* 5D, *melee combat* 6D, *Knowledge* 3D, *Mechanical* 2D+2, *starfighter piloting* 4D, *starship gunnery* 5D+1, *starship shields* 4D, *hide* 5D, *search* 3D, *sneak* 5D, *Strength* 3D+1, *brawling* 6D, *Technical* 3D. Move 10. Heavy blaster pistol (5D), knife (STR+1D). For complete stats on Dirk Harkness, see *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #1, page 281.

3 Bruwoses. *Dexterity* 3D, *Perception* 2D+2, *Strength* 5D+2, *brawling* 5D. Special abilities: may attack once with a giant burrowing claw for STR+1D damage. Move 7.

The bruwoses are immense lizards with large fore-paw talons used to claw through the soft rock in search of small prey. Their tiny white eyes reflect light, although bruwoses' eyes are only vestigial and cannot truly see. These beasts use sound, heat and smell to "see." Their pale scaly skin is not tough enough to function as effective armor.

Once the bruwoses are killed, Harkness reveals himself (hopefully before the characters shoot him) and seeks the characters' assistance. The Y-wing is in a cave not far away. The group must move the bruwoses' heavy bodies from the passageways and proceed through the caves.

Expansion Tips

The characters' wanderings through the tunnels beneath the Crumbling Lands can easily be expanded with gamemaster maps and additional encounters. The stone passages wind on through larger caverns and underground lakes, and could be filled with flooding or collapsing tunnels, dangerous creatures (see the stats for Bruwoses above), or harmful and explosive subterranean gases. A squad of stormtroopers from Imperial Advisor Golthan or a squad of Moff Prentioch's troopers might also follow the characters into the tunnel, trying to chase them and capture Harkness.

Soon the group can hear rushing water — rainwater from the storms above gushing through the caverns. Water begins trickling through the passageway they're traveling through. It soon turns into a small stream, and later a torrent. Have characters make Difficult *Dexterity* rolls to keep their footing in the slippery caverns. Soon they see the Y-wing ahead — it's docked in a large cave with an opening to the outside. But a swift-running torrent of water separates the group from the ship. To jump across, characters must make Very Difficult *climbing/jumping* rolls or lose their footing (unless characters find another means of crossing using syntherope or a makeshift bridge). Characters losing their footing must make Difficult *swimming* rolls to avoid drowning and being pummeled by the rocks in the torrent. The rapids don't go far — the rushing water soon spews out the cave mouth, cascading into a lake several meters below.

The Y-wing is still in good condition, just as the Black Curs left it. The starfighter only has room for a pilot and co-pilot. Other characters can easily climb down from the cave mouth, but must either make it back to their ship on foot, or wait for the Black Curs to bring the *Last Chance* around for transport.

Episode Four: Escape!

The characters and Dirk return to the *Last Chance*. The freighter might already be repaired by Platt, Tru'eb and Jai. If any Imperial forces survived the earlier battle, they might have captured the *Last Chance* and her crew (and possibly the characters' ship), and would have to be destroyed before the characters could escape.

Although Dirk is competent in a Y-wing, he needs some diversions and some armed escort to make it from the planet's surface to a point where he can jump to hyperspace. Platt and the characters

can provide such support, flying cover in their freighters. If any characters believe they could fly the Y-wing better than Harkness, they may try to persuade him to ride in the Y-wing's co-pilot seat while they pilot — but Harkness is pretty stubborn. He isn't about to entrust his safety and the security of the Black Curs' recon report to someone he's just met. Characters need a Moderate *persuasion* roll and some good roleplaying to convince Harkness to allow another character to fly the Y-wing for him. If this fails, a character may offer to fly in the co-pilot seat and crew the Y-wing's ion cannon.

And the Black Curs need all the help they can get to escape Moorja. Waiting in orbit above them are the two pairs of Star Destroyers (still intent on blasting the other pair out of the sky). As soon as the characters lift off, however, the Imperials turn their attention to capturing the New Republic recon team! The characters, with assistance from Platt, Tru'eb and Jai, must hold off a swarm of TIE fighters while Dirk makes a run for the jump point.

TIE Fighter. Starfighter, *starfighter piloting* 4D+1, *starship gunnery* 4D, maneuverability 2D, space 10, hull 2D. Weapons: 2 laser cannons (fire-linked; fire control 2D, damage 5D).

Somebody has to watch the Y-wing's tail, since only the turret ion cannon can fire aft at any TIEs. Between the characters' freighter and the *Last Chance*, the team should be able to evade the Star Destroyers and blast any pursuing TIE fighters.

Y-Wing Fighter. Starfighter, maneuverability 2D, space 7, hull 4D. Weapons: 2 laser cannons (fire-linked; fire control 2D, damage 5D), 2 light ion cannons (fire-linked; fire control 3D, damage 4D).

Last Chance. Starfighter, *space transports* 6D+2, *starship gunnery* 4D, *starship shields* 6D, maneuverability 1D, space 4, atmosphere 480; 800 kmh, hull 4D+2, shields 1D. Weapons: 2 quad laser cannons (fire control 2D, damage 6D). These stats reflect unrepaid damage to Platt's ship. Full stats for the *Last Chance* can be found in *Platt's Starport Guide*, page 7.

Once Harkness has safely made the jump to hyperspace, the characters can help out Platt until everyone is able to escape. Upon returning to the New Republic fleet, Harkness delivers his report to General Cracken. Perhaps he has a chance to thank the characters for their help — but only briefly. He and Platt are off on another mission for New Republic Intelligence. Characters interested in Harkness' report can read it in *Recon and Report: The Journey to Coruscant* from *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #2.

CRYSTAL INTRIGUE

The characters, in league with the New Republic, are called to meet with Jedi Knight Luke Skywalker during his visit to the New Republic fleet. The characters assemble in a briefing room aboard a Mon Calamari cruiser currently serving as the New Republic fleet's flagship. The young Jedi is rather calm and peaceful, despite his recent ordeals at Bakura. He has been invited to make diplomatic contact with a mining colony which could help the New Republic, but has pressing matters elsewhere and personally asks the characters to represent him instead. Read aloud:

Hello. Please, make yourself comfortable. I have called you here to ask you to represent me in a diplomatic mission. I have pressing business with Mon Mothma and Admiral Ackbar, and cannot make the journey this diplomatic mission requires.

I've received an invitation from the administrator of a small, independent mining colony on a planet known only as Canyon. It seems one of their mining teams discovered a cavern with large deposits of a crystal substance which they thought might be of some interest to me as a Jedi Knight. Perhaps these crystals are naturally-occurring jewels used in the construction of lightsabers. If they are, they could be used to aid a new generation of Jedi Knights.

Unfortunately I don't have time to travel to Canyon and exam-

DATATRANS PRIORITY MESSAGE

To: Luke Skywalker, New Republic Fleet

From: Guldus Bemm, Canyon

Jedi Skywalker, we have recently discovered several rare crystalline formations in a cave on our planet, Canyon, where we are running an independent mining operation. We are unsure of the nature of these crystals, but we believe they may be of the kind suitable for lightsaber construction.

We humbly invite you to visit our mining facility here on Canyon, and we would be honored to show you the location of these crystals so you may determine whether they may be of use in constructing new lightsabers for the next generation of Jedi Knights.

Guldus Bemm

Administrator

Canyon Mining Facility

ine these jewels — which is why I'm sending you as my official representatives. New Republic Intelligence recommended you for this assignment based on the success of your past missions.

This datapad contains a document introducing you as my authorized representatives, to be afforded the same courtesies they would extend to me. You should journey to Canyon to meet Guldus Bemm, the administrator of the colony. He will show you to the area where the crystals were found. I'd like you to retrieve samples and return them here, where I'll examine them later. I might need you soon after your return as well, in case these crystals really are helpful in constructing lightsabers.

Beware, however, that the Empire might have gained knowledge of these crystals somehow. If so, any dark Jedi secretly in the Emperor's service might try to intercept you, or at least try to steal some of the crystals. We can't afford to allow the Emperor's dark forces to rise again ...

General Cracken said we have an operative already on Canyon who might be able to help you. She's a mercenary working for the New Republic named Okeefe. Okeefe has been meeting with Guldus to try and create an arrangement to trade and transport Canyon's minerals to major New Republic starports.

You'd best get started on your travels. Remember, if the Empire finds out about those crystals, we could be in greater danger than we expect. Who knows what legacy of the dark side the Emperor left. May the Force be with you.

Although the characters might wish to use their own ship, gamemasters can allow them the use of the *Valiant Damsel* from the last adventure. It has since been repaired and restocked. During the hyperspace journey to Canyon, the characters might be able to discover the following information about their destination:

■ Canyon

Type: Mountainous terrestrial

Temperature: Cool

Atmosphere: Type 1 (breathable)

Hydrosphere: Arid

Gravity: Standard

Terrain: Mountains, lakes

Length of Day: 28 standard hours

Length of Year: 389 local days

Sapient Species: Humans and assorted aliens

Starports: 1 standard class

Population: 28,000

Planet Function: Mining colony

Government: Colonial administrator

Tech Level: Space

Major Exports: Minerals

Major Imports: Mid and high technology

Capsule: Canyon was accidentally discovered several years ago when a *Victory*-class Star Destroyer was yanked out of hyperspace by a rogue asteroid on this system's fringes. Unable to maneuver out of the immense rock's way, the vessel grazed the asteroid and was seriously damaged. The *Victory* Star Destroyer's distress beacon summoned several smuggler and pirate groups, as well as an Imperial rescue team. While the Empire showed no interest in Canyon's high mountains and deep ravines, the smugglers and pirates saw this as a mining opportunity in the making. They created a starport settlement on one of the mountains and made a small fortune hauling supplies and new settlers to the planet to mine the mineral-rich canyons.

Today Canyon is a small colony which mines and processes many ores important for starship construction and electronics systems. Immense treaded mining craft crawl through the canyons, blasting up rock and feeding it through an on-board processor which separates precious ores from the debris. A refinery facility at the base of the starport city mountain purifies ores and smelts them into ingots.

Guldus Bemm is the colonial administrator, the original pirate who decided to create a mining colony from an uninhabited world. A shrewd Twi'lek, Guldus runs the colony efficiently, ruling from the mountaintop spaceport and ore processing facility. He is constantly looking for new ways to make money, especially off the colonists who crew and live aboard the mining crawlers.

Episode One: A Cordial Welcome

Canyon is a few days from the New Republic fleet's current position. The hyperspace journey is uneventful. But when the characters' ship emerges in the Canyon system, they see a *Victory*-class Star Destroyer looming ahead in their path!

Fortunately, the Star Destroyer is an old wreck, a lifeless hulk left here three years ago after it accidentally came out of hyperspace and slammed into a giant asteroid which drifted into its path. A large asteroid the size of a small moon spins slowly nearby, the ship and asteroid both in a loose orbit around the system's distant sun. Careful examination of the Star Destroyer's dark hulk reveals that those areas not severely damaged by the asteroid collision have been scavenged for electronic components and hull plates.

The characters should maneuver past the Star Destroyer and asteroid into a field of smaller asteroids before they reach Canyon and descend to its surface — this requires a Difficult *space transports* roll.

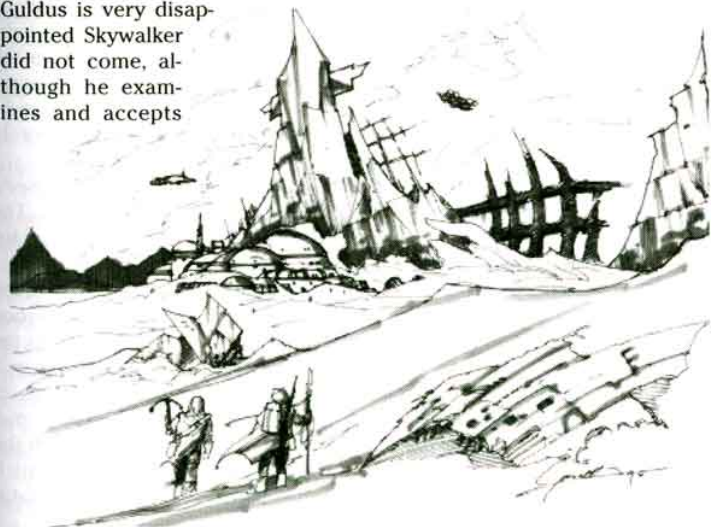
As the characters descend, they see several black mountain peaks emerging from Canyon's blanketing cloud cover. A starport beacon leads them through the overcast skies to a lower mountain topped with a small city.

The characters have no problem landing on one of the landing pads at Canyon starport. The starport is a hodgepodge of docking pads and buildings perched precariously atop the low mountain. Various levels in the starport and city are connected by stairways and turbolifts, and most of the corridors, quarters and public areas have windows overlooking Canyon's rugged terrain. Those structures closer to the city's high point (close to where the characters have docked) are ornate and seemingly brand new. The lower areas of the city seem to be run-down and decaying — some are even constructed of modified cargo containers and old-style survival modules.

When the characters arrive, a small party of beings emerges from the city to meet them. The group consists of the Twi'lek Guldus Bemm, his Rodian advisor, and four rugged-looking individuals serving as guards (although they could pass for bounty hunters). Guldus Bemm greets the characters — read aloud:

Welcome, people of the New Republic. I am Guldus Bemm, administrator of this colonial facility and your host. Have you not brought the Jedi Skywalker?

The characters must roleplay through this situation — and come up with a feasible reason why the Jedi did not accompany them. Guldus is very disappointed Skywalker did not come, although he examines and accepts



the datafile introducing the characters as Skywalker's authorized representatives. Read aloud:

If Jedi Skywalker has sent you in his stead, then we shall offer you every courtesy intended for him. Please, I shall show you to your quarters where you may rest up before I show you this facility and then send you off to the crystal cave.

Along the way to the characters' chamber, Guldus explains he is currently in heated negotiations with Platt Okeefe over sale and transport of Canyon's mineral resources to certain New Republic concerns. Guldus is a very busy person with the negotiations going on later in the day. He also notes that he himself is unable to accompany the characters to the crystal caves, although one of his men will fly them to the cave instead.

The characters' quarters are part of a rather luxurious suite which is shared with Platt Okeefe. If they stop by to visit Platt, she is grateful to see them — and spends a good deal of time chatting and catching up with any smugglers or those characters she's met before. Platt fills the characters in on the general operation on Canyon. Immense mining crawlers (similar to Jawa sandcrawlers on Tatooine) blast up and process the rock deep within the canyons, then dump their load on a huge processing pile at the base of the starport mountain. There huge refineries separate the precious metals and cast them in cylinder ingots (the acceptable trade form for these pure metals) to be later transported by shuttle to the starport and then to customers across the galaxy. Guldus seems intent on making the New Republic a consistent and large customer, since he apparently can only sell small quantities to certain unreliable parties in these troubled times of the failing Empire.

If asked if she trusts Guldus, Platt replies that her smuggler's instincts don't allow her to trust anybody, especially Guldus. The Twi'lek was a former pirate leader, and has a gleam in his eye for cold, hard credits.

Soon Guldus comes to lead the characters on a quick tour of the city. It includes a mine refinery control room, several picturesque public squares, and the docking, storage and processing areas for refined ore. One of Guldus' henchmen is waiting at one dock in a small shuttlecraft. Horvat is a gruff Rodian dressed in pieces of armor and armed with two heavy blasters. Guldus explains that Horvat is to fly them to the narrow canyon where the cave with the crystals is located. The shuttle is equipped with climbing gear which can help characters reach the cavern. As the characters leave with

Horvat for the crystal caves, Guldus and Platt head off together for another meeting about the New Republic's ore deal.

Episode Two: The Crystal Cave

During the short shuttle flight, Horvat explains (in his sneering Rodian language) that the cave is located in an extremely narrow canyon — so narrow even a light freighter could not land in it. The shuttle is equipped with some syntherope and glow rods for the characters to use in the cave. Horvat says the crystals are deep within the cave, which delves beneath the mountain. Unfortunately, he must stay with the shuttle — avalanches and rockslides are common in the area near the cave, and he may have to momentarily leave in the shuttle to avoid becoming trapped in the canyon.

Horvat. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 4D+1, *blaster* 7D+2, *brawling parry* 5D, *dodge* 6D, *Mechanical* 2D+2, *repulsorlift operation* 6D, *space transports* 5D+2, *starship gunnery* 6D, *Strength* 3D, *brawling* 5D+2. Move: 10. Two heavy blaster pistols (5D), blast vest (+1D physical, +1 energy, torso only).

The descent into the canyon is somewhat tricky, and Horvat brushes the steep rock walls once, scraping the shuttle's hull. However, he manages to set the vessel down with no major problems. Horvat keeps the shuttle's engines running while the characters disembark.

The cave is not far from the shuttle — as the characters gather their gear and head over to the cave entrance, several small rocks clatter down from the cliffs above. Horvat looks up into the canyon — but as the falling rocks stop, Horvat gives the characters a high sign. The shuttle remains on the ground.

Once inside the cave, it becomes very dark, and the characters must use their glow rods to see. The rocky corridor winds narrowly into the mountain some ways, and eventually turns into a steep sloping passage. The passage levels off, then ends at a crevasse. After easing down the crevasse with their syntherope, they come to a larger passageway with a small stream running along one side. The passage soon opens into an immense cavern — light from outside gleams in the distance through a far cave entrance. The cavern and entrance are rather high — at least 15 meters — and the cave floor is covered in well-packed gravel, the stream running through the middle of it.

The cavern is fairly expansive, and contains many large, shadowy niches and curves. The characters should begin looking for the crystals in this cavern, examining the rock walls and ceiling. But

despite their best searching efforts, they find no crystals.

Guldus Bemm has betrayed the characters — he initially hoped Skywalker himself would come, to be captured by Imperial Advisor Golthan and returned to Coruscant for interrogation. Rather than crystals, the characters soon find four AT-STs hiding in dark corners of the cavern, waiting for them!

4 Imperial AT-ST Scout Walkers. Walker, *walker operation 4D, vehicle blasters 4D+2, missile weapons 4D, maneuverability 1D, move 30; 90 kmh, body strength 3D. Weapons: 1 twin blaster cannon (fire control 1D, damage 4D), 1 twin light blaster cannon (fire control 1D, damage 2D), concussion grenade launcher (fire control 1D, damage 3D).*

The two AT-STs closest to the back of the cave (where the characters entered) move out first to block any retreat back into the stone passageway, while 16 stormtroopers jog out at the brightly lit cave entrance to keep them from escaping that way.

16 Imperial Stormtroopers. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity 3D, blaster 4D, blaster: blaster rifle 5D, brawling parry 4D, dodge 4D, brawling 3D. Move 10. Stormtrooper armor (+2D physical, +1D energy, -1D Dexterity), blaster rifle (5D), blaster pistol (4D).*

Expansion Tips

To liven this battle sequence, allow the Lambda shuttle crew to be a bit more cunning than usual. Should the characters somehow board the Lambda shuttle and break into the cockpit, the co-pilot turns around and fires a few blaster shots to keep them busy. Meanwhile, the pilot — acting as a fanatically loyal Imperial officer — sets the shuttle's timed destruct sequence. After the characters defeat the pilots, they must first notice and then disarm the destruct mechanism before the shuttle explodes!

Noticing the destruct sequence's ticking and blinking lights is an Easy *Perception* task. However, to disarm the mechanism requires a Difficult *security* roll and a Difficult *demolition* roll. Gamemasters should allow characters who fail either roll time enough to try again once. After that, a few *dodge* rolls might be in order to race out of the shuttle and dive for cover as the ship explodes.

Fortunately, the AT-ST drop-ship farther down the canyon is not booby-trapped, nor are its pilots as vigilant and loyal as these pilots were.

The AT-STs are able to move around beneath the high ceiling of this cave, and there is plenty of room for them to engage the characters without hitting each other or running into walls (although they won't use their grenade launchers here). Indeed, the cave mouth to the outside is large enough that they can follow the characters should they try to escape outside — if they manage to fight their way past the stormtroopers.

Waiting in the steep valley beyond the cave mouth is a *Lambda*-class shuttle which transported the stormtroopers here. Only four additional stormtroopers guard the shuttle, and a pilot and co-pilot crew the cockpit. It is possible for the characters to commandeer the shuttle for their escape back to their ship at Canyon starport — Horvat was part of the trap's set-up and has already left his landing spot at the other end of the cave passages. The Imperial pilots do not have much experience, so they may surrender if characters defeat the stormtroopers and board the shuttle quickly.

Lambda Shuttle. Starfighter, maneuverability 1D, space 5, atmosphere 295; kmh 850, hull 4D, shields 1D+2. Weapons: 3 double blaster cannons (fire control 2D, damage 4D), 2 double laser cannons (fire linked, fire control 3D+1, damage 4D+1).

If the characters follow the canyon further, they find a larger area where the AT-ST drop-ship landed. No guards watch the shuttle, but the two pilots are sitting around outside the main hatch, entertaining each other with bad New Republic jokes. They're too far from the cave to hear how the battle's going, and they're too inexperienced to be monitoring the battle on the comm channels. The canyon's rocky terrain can provide good cover for characters sneaking up on the pilots.

AT-ST Drop-Ship. Starfighter, maneuverability 0, space 2 (on return flight), atmosphere 225; 650 kmh (on return flight), hull 4D, shields 1D. Weapons: 1 light laser cannon (fire control 1D, damage 1D).

Episode Three: Enter the Empire

The characters could easily flee the system in the hyperspace-capable Lambda shuttle (although the drop-ship has no hyperdrive), but their New Republic ally, Platt Okeefe, is still at the starport, and the characters don't know whether or not the Empire has landed there and taken her captive.

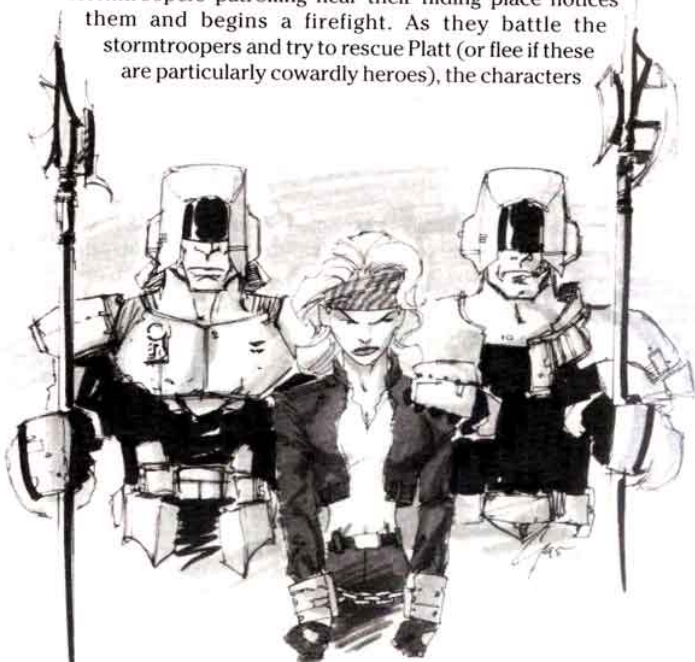
The characters can proceed to the starport. They may instead choose to escape if they're flying the Lambda shuttle, ending the adventure rather prematurely and losing their personal ship. If they land at the mountaintop colony starport, they find everything

strangely deserted — and Platt isn't in her quarters.

By following a passing patrol of stormtroopers, they come to a balcony overlooking one of the docking pads where Guldus Bemm is waiting with his entourage and a platoon of stormtroopers — an Imperial Lambda shuttle sets down, this one with strange, official-looking markings. After several stormtroopers disembark, four heavily armored and beweaponed bodyguards step out to protect Imperial Advisor Golthan himself. Golthan is a tall, gaunt man dressed in dark robes and an odd hat. His bodyguard escort stays very close ...

After a short exchange between Golthan and Bemm — which the characters are unable to overhear — Platt Okeefe is brought forward through the crowd, struggling against her captors. Golthan inspects her with a sneering grin on his face. He's been hunting the Black Curs for several months, and has finally caught a prize. Guldus Bemm hands her over to several stormtroopers, and Platt's led aboard the Imperial shuttle!

If the characters don't act to try and save Platt, a detachment of stormtroopers patrolling near their hiding place notices them and begins a firefight. As they battle the stormtroopers and try to rescue Platt (or flee if these are particularly cowardly heroes), the characters



hear the Lambda shuttle's engines whine as it prepares to take off.

If the characters manage to reach the docking pad in their attempt to rescue Platt, they must first fight off several more stormtroopers (most of Guldus Bemm's thugs fled when the fighting broke out). Just before characters reach the shuttle, two of the Imperial Advisor's bodyguards step in to block their way. They fight to the death to insure that their liege, Imperial Advisor Golthan, and his prize captive escape unharmed. Gamemasters should remember that the landing pad offers plenty of opportunities for characters to fall over the edge ...

2 Imperial Bodyguards. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 4D, *blaster* 8D, *brawling parry* 6D, *dodge* 7D, *melee combat* 6D+2, *melee combat: force pike* 8D+2, *melee parry* 5D+2, *Strength* 4D, *brawling* 6D, *climbing/jumping* 6D. Move: 10. Heavy blaster pistol (5D), armor (+2D physical, +1D energy, -1D *Dexterity*), force pike (STR+3D).

Unfortunately the characters are waylaid long enough so they just miss the Imperial shuttle carrying Platt and the Imperial Advisor. They watch it take off and disappear into the gray clouds obscuring the sky. The characters must beat a hasty retreat back to their own ship (or their commandeered Lambda shuttle) to escape the starport before more stormtroopers or Guldus Bemm's guards regroup and attack. A few stormtrooper patrols or local thug guards can help "encourage" the characters to flee the colony.

As the characters blast off the colony and burst through the planet's heavy cloud cover, they spot an Imperial Star Destroyer (possibly one of the ships they encountered above Moorja). The vessel doesn't seem to be interested in the characters' ship — in fact, it hasn't even launched any TIE fighters. Instead, its engines flash as it bursts off into hyperspace.

Before jumping to hyperspace in their own ship, the characters should almost instinctively check their hyperdrive. If they don't think to, perhaps someone notices a red light on the hyperdrive damage control board. Guldus Bemm planted a powerful explosive around one of the hyperdrive motivators, set to go off when the hyperdrive is engaged. Someone must disarm it on a Very Difficult *demolition* roll before the jump can be made.

Once they jump to hyperspace, they return to the New Republic fleet and report their news that Platt has been captured. Skywalker is grateful to the characters for taking his place, now that he knows the entire scheme was a plot to capture him. However, the New Republic is reluctant to gather the resources to rescue Platt Okeefe ...

PLATT'S RESCUE

Episode One: Curs Recruiting

The characters, intent on rescuing their associate (and possibly friend at this point) from the clutches of Imperial Advisor Golthan, have been turned away by General Cracken's aides again. Cracken has his orders — the New Republic cannot risk the resources to go after Platt Okeefe.

Cracken's operatives have already reported that Platt was taken to Golthan's fortress on Voktunma, a fortification well-guarded by loyal Imperial troops, a powerful shield, and a sensitive sensor-guided network of anti-starfighter guns which prevents an effective assault. Cracken cannot help the characters.

While pondering Platt's situation, the characters are approached by a shady figure lurking about the New Republic command cruiser's flight deck. Dirk Harkness — now considered an outlaw mercenary by the New Republic — has come here to recruit the characters' talents in an attempt to rescue Platt. But the flagship of the New Republic fleet is no place to discuss the Black Curs' plans. Harkness insists that for the characters to help rescue Platt, they're going to need the Black Curs' assistance. Dirk insists on flying the characters to the Black Curs' secret base on Tru'eb Cholak's freighter, the *Luudrian Star*, docked nearby. Although the characters are allowed to wander Tru'eb's ship during the flight, they are not allowed in the cockpit and are not allowed access to the nav computer — the Black

To: General Airen Cracken

From: Mon Mothma

My dear Airen, I understand your concern for your informant Platt Okeefe. It is a shame to have lost such a good agent. However, we cannot expend the necessary forces at this time to free her from imprisonment by Imperial Advisor Golthan. His stronghold on Voktunma is too heavily guarded, and we cannot spare the soldiers or the starships to free Okeefe.

Fey'lya is also concerned that Okeefe could be a security risk since she was working on her own, in association with her mercenary group, the Black Curs. The New Republic does not condone mercenaries, and you should cease using this group as a reliable source of information.

Regretfully, Mon Mothma

Curs insist on keeping the location of their secret base a closely guarded secret to outsiders.

Harkness flies the characters to an old abandoned Rebel base, the Black Curs' secret operations center. Although the docking hangar and command centers have been repaired, the rest of the underground base is in ruin. Some makeshift quarters have been fashioned, and a few gunnery emplacements are carefully hidden above ground. Most of the base is crewed by young kids — teenagers and their younger siblings — all orphans who have been recruited to the Black Curs' cause.

The characters are welcomed by the Twi'lek gunrunner, Tru'eb Cholak. Read aloud:

Welcome, friends of Platt Okeefe. Please accept our apologies for your method of transport here, but we need to insure the secrecy of our base's location. The New Republic has declared mercenaries a threat to their diplomatic plans, and our presence is no longer welcome in the areas they control.

We have been planning Platt's rescue since we learned of her capture and transport to Advisor Golthan's stronghold on Voktunma. However, we do not have sufficient personnel to effect a successful operation.

The fortress is in a mountainous foothill region west of Voktunma's Imperial class starport. Imperial forces patrol the ground area, and a shield system and sensitive turbolaser targeting system protect the fortress from air assaults. No craft is permitted to fly through the shield near the fortress except for one Lambda shuttle per day, flying from the starport with special codes allowing it to pass the shields and defensive turbolaser targeting sensors.

It would be extremely difficult to infiltrate and board that shuttle. We have devised a different plan of attack. I would drop you off at the starport with speeder bikes, so you may travel quickly to an area close to the fortress. You must be careful to avoid Imperial patrols, for if your presence is discovered, all is lost. We can provide you with climbing equipment to scale the mountain upon which Golthan's fortress stands. Once inside, you should find the location of the shield generators and sensor arrays and set explosive charges to destroy them. Find and rescue Platt. You have three hours to accomplish all this before Harkness and I and a squad of our X-wing fighters fly in to attack the fortress and pick you up. If the shields and the sensor array are not destroyed by then, they will stop our air assault ...

Tru'eb supplies the characters with camouflage outfits, climbing

gear (including grapple guns with tow winches), and four satchels with five high explosive charges in each bag. After gearing up, they board Tru'eb's freighter for the journey to Voktunma.

Episode Two: Golthan's Minions

Landing at Voktunma starport is no problem — it's a busy port and the characters are likely to be lost in the shuffle. However, they do note the presence of three Imperial Star Destroyers and other Imperial military support vessels in orbit ...

It is easy enough for the characters to slowly cruise out of the city on their speeder bikes (and they can change later into their camouflage fatigues — it's a bit too conspicuous in the starport). Their journey toward Golthan's stronghold takes them over immense stretches of cultivated plains and then into a large forest.

Here the characters must be careful. As they get closer to the mountain range where the fortress is located, they sometimes get glimpses of it's tall spires and high, steep sloping roofs. Perceptive characters also avoid certain clearings in the forest where large turbolasers are mounted on tall towers jutting just above the forest's trees. Each gun is part of the stronghold's defense grid, and is guarded by two biker scouts and an AT-ST, so characters must be careful to avoid these areas quietly. Several stormtroopers and gunners are inside each gun tower.

Eventually, the characters zip right past a scout trooper patrol. Comlinks must be jammed and these two troopers destroyed before they alert the fortress of their presence. Other scouts could join the fray (possibly one per character). The scout troopers try to flee for the nearest gun tower — and the protection of its AT-ST walker. The characters may try to cause some kind of diversion at the tower to distract the troops there, or they may just follow the biker scouts to the tower and engage the AT-ST. Remember, the characters have to try and maintain some kind of secrecy. An all-out battle at a gun tower could blow their cover and alert forces at the stronghold.

Biker Scouts. All stats are 2D except: *blaster 4D, brawling parry 4D, dodge 4D, Mechanical 3D, repulsorlift operation 3D+2, brawling 3D*. Move 10. Hold-out blaster (3D), scout armor (+2 physical and energy).

Speeder Bikes (for scouts and characters). Speeder, maneuverability 3D+2, move 500; 175 kmh, body strength 2D. Weapons: laser cannon (fire control 2D, damage 3D).

After the speeder bike battle, the characters emerge from the forest near the base of the fortress mountain. Climbing the cliff

requires several Difficult *climbing/jumping* rolls, even while using the grappling devices Tru'eb gave them. The cliffs are craggy and filled with crevasses and caves. At one point, a character might disturb the lair of lizard-like avians which fly out in a mad rush, possibly surprising that character. Characters might also climb too close to a turbolaser mounted just within a cave entrance. This is an easy way into the fortress, if the characters can ambush the turbolaser's four gunners without having them raise the alarm. They might swing into the cave on ropes from above, or try to sneak up on the gunners, who are not paying much attention to the cave entrance.

4 Imperial Gunners. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity 3D, blaster 4D+1, dodge 4D+1, heavy weapons 5D, Strength 3D+1, brawling 4D*. Move: 10. Blast helmet and blast vest (+1D physical, +1 energy), blaster pistol (4D), comlink.

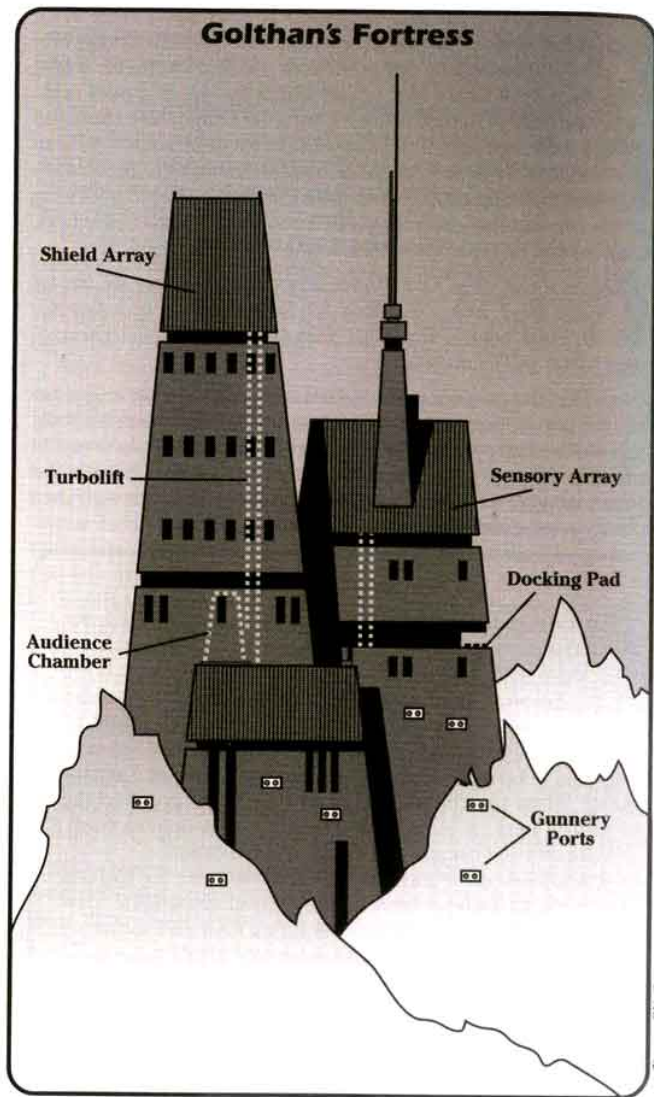
Once past the gunners at this turbolaser post, the characters can follow the passageway inside to the lower levels of Golthan's fortress.

Characters can also continue their climb until they reach one of the fortress' lower parapets. A pair of stormtroopers patrols the parapets every few minutes, so characters must time their entrance perfectly — or quietly eliminate the stormtroopers.

Expansion Tips

To extend the adventure, gamemasters can equip the stormtroopers with a E-web repeating blaster (8D), and provide them with a few metal storage crates for cover. If the characters were extremely sloppy during their speeder bike approach, and gamemasters believe the fortress would be alerted to their presence, the stormtroopers may set up a trap just before the characters reach the shield and sensor array. When the characters round the corner and find the stormtroopers, a blast door crashes down behind them, cutting off their escape and denying them cover!

Ambitious gamemasters should feel free to expand Golthan's stronghold beyond the limited elevational view shown in the fortress diagram. A quick floorplan including the turbolift accesses to the sensors and shields, the audience chamber and the docking pad could easily be fleshed out with a command and communications center, several turbolaser emplacements, guard rooms, and security checkpoints.



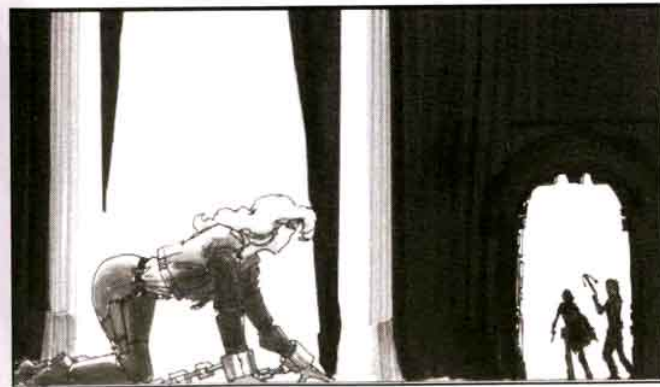
Episode Three: Destroy Sensors and Shields — Rescue Platt

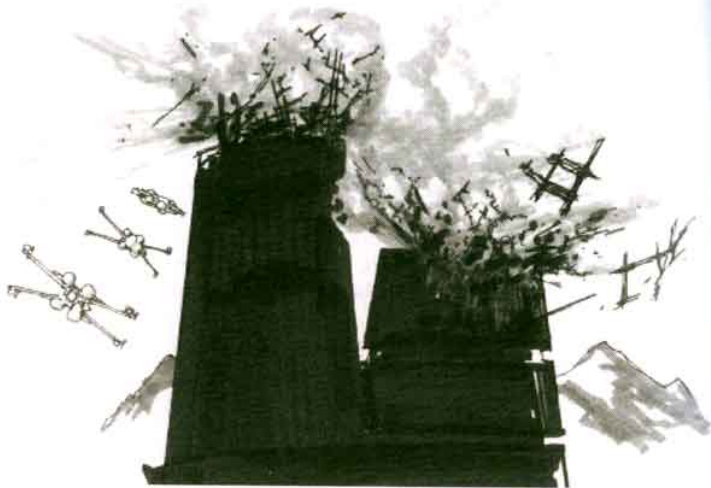
Once inside, the characters must find out where the shield generators and targeting sensor arrays are located. They could discover this by interrogating one of the gunners or guards they encounter. Otherwise they must infiltrate the central part of the fortress and try to slice into a base computer terminal or access port located in very visible areas — this requires a Very Difficult *computer programming/repair* roll in addition to a few *sneak* rolls to avoid patrolling stormtroopers. Of course, characters could wander around on their own until they find the turbolifts to the shield and sensor systems.

The shield generators and sensor arrays are hidden within the two steep-sloping roofs of the stronghold. To get into each area, the characters must con or battle a squad of eight stormtroopers, then get by a code-locked blast door (requiring a Very Difficult *security* roll to open). One of their many explosive charges could be used to destroy a blast door, but that would also destroy any element of surprise and possibly bring more stormtroopers.

8 Imperial Stormtroopers. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 3D, *blaster* 4D, *blaster: blaster rifle* 5D, *brawling parry* 4D, *dodge* 4D, *grenade* 4D+2, *brawling* 3D. Move: 10. Blaster rifle (5D), stormtrooper armor (+2D physical, +1D energy, -1D *Dexterity*).

A few well-placed charges would destroy the shield generators and sensor array — requiring a few Moderate *demolition* rolls. The characters can set the detonation timers to go off just before their





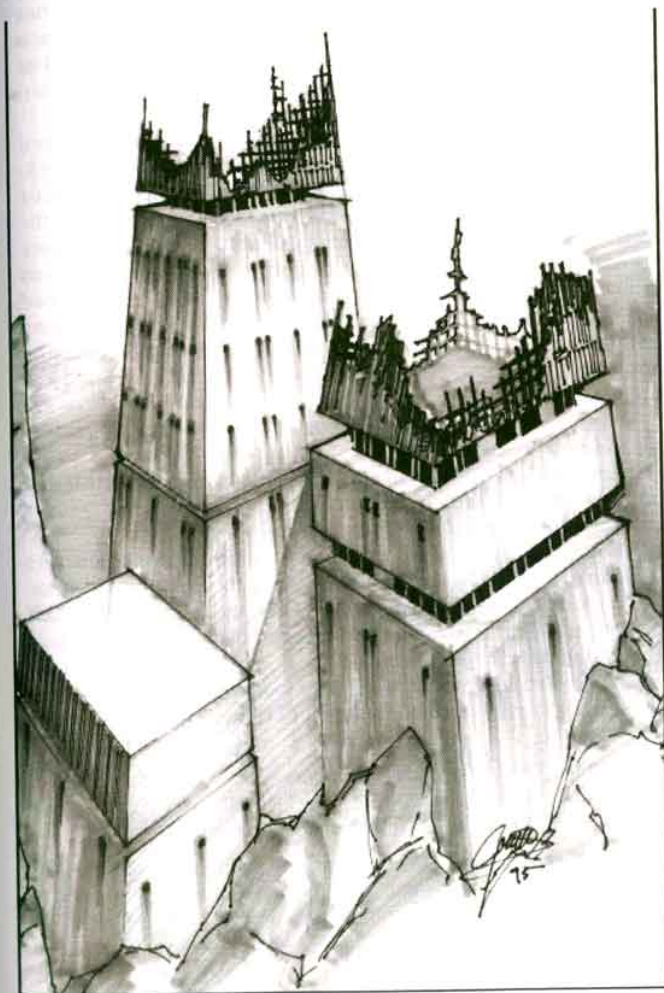
three-hour time limit is up, destroying the shields and sensors just as the Black Curs' ships blast in and rescue them. The explosives are set to blow the fortress roof, so the characters shouldn't really worry too much about the explosions destroying the stronghold beneath them.

Rescuing Platt is another matter altogether. Golthan has placed her in the center of his high-vaulted audience chamber, which characters can enter through large and intricately carved double doors. The chamber vault is supported by several immense stone pillars, each easily five meters in diameter. A hazy shaft of light shines down from high up in the ceiling, illuminating the center of the chamber and keeping the peripheral areas and the gallery behind the columns in shadow. Platt is slumped in the center light, a heavy chain binding her to a ring set in the stone floor.

As the characters rush to free Platt, they are unaware of Imperial Advisor Golthan's four personal bodyguards hiding in the shadows behind the immense stone pillars. While the characters are preoccupied with cutting Platt from the heavy chains, the bodyguards sneak up and attempt to kill the characters. These formidable guards have been trained to follow Imperial Advisor Golthan's orders to the letter — and they have been ordered to fight to the death to keep the characters from freeing Platt.

4 Imperial Bodyguards. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity* 4D,

blaster 8D, *brawling parry* 6D, *dodge* 7D, *melee combat* 6D+2, *melee combat: force pike* 8D+2, *melee parry* 5D+2, *Strength* 4D, *brawling* 6D, *climbing/jumping* 6D. Move: 10. Heavy blaster pistol (5D), armor (+2D physical, +1D energy, -1D *Dexterity*), force pike (STR+3D).



Once the Advisor's personal bodyguards have been defeated, the characters can continue freeing Platt from the chains. A lightsaber can easily cut the chains. If they don't have a lightsaber or a fusion cutter with them, they're going to need several blaster bolts to sever Platt's bonds. Platt herself is not in good condition — Golthan has been starving her, and she might have been interrogated. It takes a Difficult *first aid* roll to rouse her, and even then she is treated as incapacitated for the rest of the adventure. She is in great pain, but is thankful to see the characters.

Soon the explosives go off in the sensor array and the shields, and the fortress is rocked by laser fire from the Black Curs' incoming X-wings and the blazing guns of the *Luudrian Star*. The characters must blast their way past several stormtrooper patrols to reach the landing pad where the *Luudrian Star* can pick them up. Gamemasters should keep the action lively, including a few twists and turns through the stronghold's vaulted hallways. Perhaps there's a dead end, a collapsing hallway, or a passageway that ends in a balcony high above a cliff. The number of stormtroopers encountered can be varied to suit the characters' strengths. The characters should just barely make it to the docking pad. As the *Luudrian Star* sets down, her guns clear the entrance of any hostile troopers. The characters drag Platt on board and fly off to safety ...

Characters with *first aid* or *medicine* skill can strap Platt into a bunk aboard the *Luudrian Star* and can begin helping her recover from her imprisonment and interrogation.

Although they've accomplished their mission, the characters may wish to help the Black Curs escape from the Voktunma system. The *Luudrian Star* and the Black Curs' X-wings need to blast past three Imperial Star Destroyers and several smaller support vessels before jumping to hyperspace.

Although Tru'eb's modified freighter can evade the Star Destroyers, they can't really shake the swarm of TIE interceptors they have to fly through.

TIE Interceptor. Starfighter, *starfighter piloting* 5D, *starship gunnery* 5D, maneuverability 3D+2, space 11, hull 3D. Weapons: four laser cannons (fire-linked, fire control 3D, damage 6D).

Tru'eb has two forward-firing mass drive cannons on his ship (fire control 2D, damage 5D; each fires on alternate rounds), and a recently installed forward-firing proton torpedo tube mounted directly beneath the centrally located cockpit (fire control 1D, damage 9D). The ship's shields are 2D+2 if anyone chooses to crew those.

The ship's hull code is 3D+2, but gamemasters shouldn't use it unless they seriously want to destroy the characters. Gamemasters can find more specific information on the *Luudrian Star* in *Cracken's Rebel Operatives*, page 62.

Escaping shouldn't be too hard, but gamemasters should give the characters just enough action before ending the adventure with the traditional climactic jump to hyperspace ... just in time.

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WANTED BY CRACKEN



SLAR-DAN TI GARDI

Species: Twi'lek Sex: Male
Homeworld: Rylloth
Height: 1.9 meters Age: 34

Crimes Against the New Republic: Slavery, assault on New Republic personnel, resisting arrest, bribery, theft, kidnapping

Reward for Capture: 45,000

The Twi'lek slaver Slar-dan ti Gardi is wanted for the capture of New Republic operatives Krotorra and Lamorack the Wookiees and Sergeant Tauran Nartal, a Klaatu.

When the Alliance defeated the Empire at the Battle of Endor, jurisdiction of the Ison Corridor soon came under the New Republic's power. Where bribery of local Imperial officials once allowed Gardi free run of the space lanes, the first New Republic officer he attempted to pay off, Lieutenant Commander Dasha Fanron, imprisoned him.

Gardi spent an uncomfortable two months in a temporary detention facility. After his release he headed for the safer yet shrinking Imperially controlled space. It was there he met the infamous slaver Borun Call and was introduced to the slave trade. In his first operation with Call, they captured three escaped Shistavanen from the Valfin labor camps. The profits were great, and Slar-dan had a new profession.

Though his activities were hindered by the New Republic, it wasn't until he captured two Wookiees that his troubles truly began. Both Wookiees were



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New Republic representatives from Kashyyyk. Soon after capturing them, he saw a holomage announcing their disappearance. Gardi quickly sold them to the Vax Mining Group and fled the region.

The Klaatu Tauran Nartal, a Special Forces sergeant, was assigned to investigate the disappearance. When Nartal cornered Gardi on Werncin 3, Gardi once again faced imprisonment. Instead, his old partner Borun Call came upon Nartal escorting Slar-dan—Call surprised Nartal and downed him with his stun pistol. In a spiteful move, Gardi sold Sergeant Nartal into slavery.

Now the New Republic has issued a bounty on Gardi's head and the Twi'lek has gone into hiding, fearing another stint in a prison.

Slar-dan ti Gardi is a gaunt Twi'lek with a light green-blue complexion. He dresses in the flowing robes often associated with his people, but his are generally more soiled and in poorer condition than those usually seen on other Twi'leks. Slar-dan's most noticeable feature is that his left head tail is nearly a half a meter shorter than the right — Gardi walks with his head tilted

to the right, as he has yet learned to compensate for the missing weight. The head tail was long ago the victim of an attack by an enraged Gamorrean whom he attempted to capture.

■ SLAR-DAN TI GARDI

Type: Twi'lek Slaver

DEXTERITY 3D

Blastar 5D, brawling parry 4D+2, dodge 5D, melee combat 4D+1

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 4D, value 4D, value: slaves 5D+1

MECHANICAL 2D+1

Astrogation 3D+2, beast riding 2D+2,

space transports 4D, starship gun-

nery 3D, starship shields 3D

PERCEPTION 4D

Bargain 5D, command 4D+1, con 6D,

search 5D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 4D, stamina 3D+2

TECHNICAL 2D+2

Demolition 3D, security 5D

Special Abilities:

Tentacles: Twi'leks can use their head tails to communicate with one another.

Force Points: 1

Dark Side Points: 2

Character Points: 12

Move: 10

Equipment: Blastar pistol (4D+1), manacles, stun grenade (5D stun), comlink

■ ADDENDUM/PERSONAL

■ CRACKEN, AIREN/GENERAL..

As a slaver, Gardi has already proved himself to be a lowly individual no better than the Quarrrats of the Barancar Port sewers. In his capturing of both the Kashyyyk representatives and Tauran he has proved himself despicable. I wouldn't mind being the one to throw this scum in the cell waiting for him at the detention facility on Dles IV.

PREVIOUS

DATAPAGE: 248

NEXT

PREVIOUS

DATAPAGE: 249

NEXT

DATA SEARCH ■ PROG41008 ■ FILEPATH 9511/03A/PER.ADB//RH
FILEFORM...D.PAD/DOWNLOAD ■ SOURCEFILE: WANTED BY CRACKEN ■ READING...

NICLARA VARNILLIAN

Species: Human Sex: Female
Homeworld: Alderaan
Height: 1.5 meters Age: 24

Crimes Against the New Republic: Sedition, murder of New Republic personnel, murder, theft of New Republic property, accessory to theft of New Republic property, destruction of New Republic property, destruction of New Republic equipment, accessory to destruction of New Republic equipment

Reward for Capture: 30,000

The youngest daughter of a prosperous Alderaanian t'ril harvesting company family, Niclara Varnillian now serves the remnants of the Imperial war machine. Niclara grew up the pampered favorite child of her single father, as her two older brothers had long gone off to university in other parts of the galaxy.

Despite her father's vehement protests, she opted to join the Imperial Navy rather than obtain a higher education as her brothers had. After her basic training and vocational testing, Varnillian found herself a member of an operations crew aboard the first Death Star under the com-

■ NICLARA VARNILLIAN

Type: Imperial Officer
DEXTERITY 3D
Blaster 5D, blaster artillery 6D, dodge 4D, vehicle blasters 5D+2
KNOWLEDGE 3D
Bureaucracy 4D+1, law enforcement 4D
MECHANICAL 3D+1
Capital ship gunnery 6D+2, capital starship gunnery: turbolaser 7D, communications 3D+2
PERCEPTION 3D
Command 5D, sneak 3D+1
STRENGTH 2D+2
Stamina 4D
TECHNICAL 3D
Capital starship weapon repair 4D
Dark Side Points: 2
Character Points: 9
Move: 10
Equipment: Imperial uniform, blaster (4D), comlink



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mand of Grand Moff Tarkin. Varnillian was part of the original operations crew of the space station's superlaser weapon, and helped test it against Alderaan.

The irony of her assisting in the destruction of her home planet — and killing her father — did not affect Niclara in the least. She had come to see those people from her past as seditious to the New Order. Such is the nature of Imperial training.

Soon after the weapon's demonstration on Alderaan — and before it's destruction at the Battle of Yavin — Varnillian was transferred to the Imperial Star Destroyer *Pulsar*, where she was later promoted to chief gunnery officer under Commander Rader.

While on leave on Ord Mantell, Varnillian identified a group of Alliance operatives, including Lieutenants Alton Lochner and Anson Blazer, but botched an attempt to capture them. In the resulting blaster fight, several Imperial soldiers under her command and more than three dozen civilians were killed. All but two of the Rebel operatives escaped. Following her poor performance against the Rebels, Lieutenant Varnillian returned to the *Pulsar*, where a demotion was waiting for her.

A year later when the *Pulsar* was forced to surrender to Alliance forces at the Battle of Endor, Varnillian and a small band of Imperial troops managed to steal a Rebel transport and escape. She surfaced a short time later in the Outer Rim Territories, commanding a group of Imperial military vessels orchestrating attacks against various New Republic installations.

Niclara Varnillian is an attractive Human female with dark blue eyes and light-colored hair. Her Imperial uniform, which she wears with the utmost pride, is always crisp and tidy.

■ ADDENDUM/PERSONAL

■ CRACKEN, AIREN/GENERAL...

It is sad enough to see a native of Alderaan in the service of the Empire, but when the individual actually had a hand in her own home planet's destruction, it is shocking. Varnillian's attack on Ord Mantell, though strategically a setback for her, cost us two of our brightest and most capable operatives. Her escape from our forces following the destruction of the second Death Star and subsequent guerrilla attacks on our facilities demands she be captured.

This issue's Wanted By Cracken was created by C. Robert Carey and illustrated by Robert Duchlinski.

About the Authors ...

C. Robert Carey is a graduate of the University of California at Santa Barbara, is a member of the Gotham Highlanders campaign and is co-author of *Alliance Intelligence Reports*. The former Mr. Carey has recently been enrolled in the Federal Gamemaster Protection Program; he now lives somewhere north of the equator under an assumed name.

Carolyn Golledge has been very prolific in the *Star Wars* fanzine field, having published more than 40 *Star Wars* stories, four of which won awards. She hails from Ettalong, New South Wales, in Australia.

Patricia A. Jackson is an administrative assistant at Jackson Elementary School in York, Pennsylvania. When not chained to a computer, she enjoys playing *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*. Her various contributions to the *Star Wars Adventure Journal* have each contained snippets of Old Corellian.

Charlene Newcomb spends her few spare hours each day doing exciting things like housework, grocery shopping and shuffling children to basketball practices and gymnastics. Currently working part-time at Rollins College and the Central Florida Library Consortium, she is working on a masters degree in library and information sciences at the University of South Florida in Tampa, and hopes to graduate in the spring of 1996. Her hobbies include *Star Wars* collecting, reading and surfing the InterNet.

Tim O'Brien is secretly *mercenarius scriptus*, a mysterious character who aids the forces of gaming. Years ago in the Occident, Tim acquired the power to enlighten people's minds, which he uses to fight the forces of boredom and mediocrity.

Christopher M. Olson is a product designer for an equipment manufacturer in Wisconsin. A roleplaying gamer since high school, he continues to exercise his creativity through industrial arts, writing and design. He tries to use restraint at work — not many customers want industrial equipment resembling stock light freighters ...

Tony Russo is a technical writer and graphics specialist for a computer consultant in northern Virginia. Besides trying to branch out into other areas of fiction (including comic books and novels), he has already developed and run a live action version of *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game* — and hopes to generate interest in running more live action *Star Wars* adventures.

George Strayton recently joined the West End Games staff as an editor covering the *Shatterzone* and *Masterbook* games. He enjoys playing *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, and has begun his first foray into the world of *Castle Falkenstein*.

Paul Sudlow maintains a full schedule of freelance and full-time game design and editing for West End Games. Between bouts of writing, he watches the cows who live across the street (no, real cows), listens to the radio, and drinks altogether too much Pepsi. After experiencing the dubious joys of editing on DOS systems when working as a Defense Department tech writer, he is pleased to be working on Macs full-time.

Peter Woodworth is a high school student from Cherry Hill, New Jersey. An avid reader and roleplayer, he enjoys writing all kinds of fantasy and fiction and is hoping to make a career out of writing full-time some day. He considers the *Star Wars Adventure Journal* a great chance to contribute to the *Star Wars* legacy.

About the Artists ...

Matt Busch spent a great deal of his childhood creating his own *Star Wars* comic books, fan clubs, "pop-up" books, fanzines and graphic novels. His first real job creating *Star Wars* art began in the *Journal*. Matt also designed and illustrated 20 items for the *Star Wars* game supplement *Fantastic Technology*. Currently living in Pasadena, California, Matt freelances for various magazines and motion picture companies.

David R. Deitrick has illustrated over 100 covers for clients such as St. Martin's Press, TOR Books, Skybox Cards, Game Designers Workshop and West End Games. He was also a consultant for GDW's *Space 1889* game, and designed the look and feel of the game world. He lives in Knoxville, Tennessee with his wife, Lori, two sons, and a dog, Punkie.

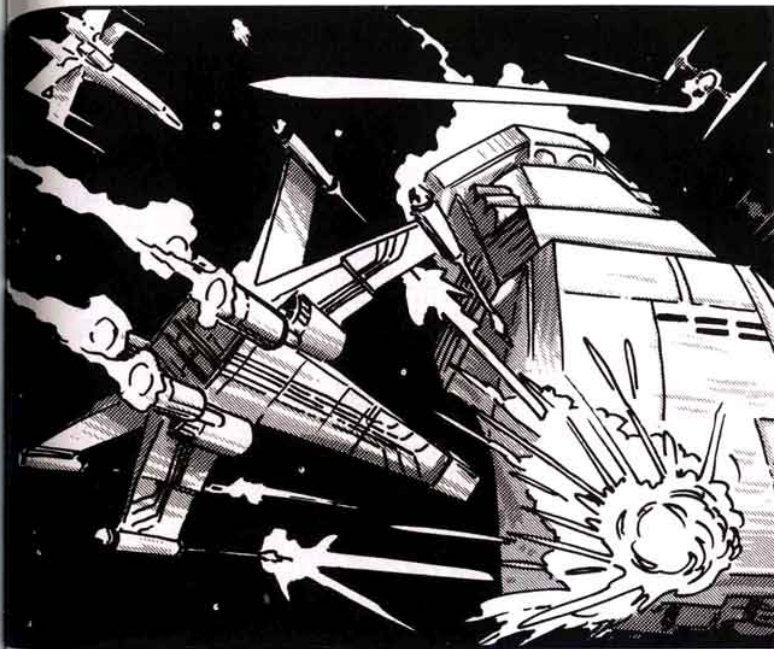
In his spare time **Robert Duchlinski** enjoys illustrating and escaping into the *Star Wars* and TSR realms through various roleplaying games and novels. He is a graduate of the duCret School of Art and Design, and hopes to someday become a special effects artist for Industrial Light and Magic.

Chris Gossett is an illustrator who was born in New York City and is currently living on the west coast. His work has appeared in Dark Horse Comics' *Tales of the Jedi* and *Dark Lords of the Sith* series.

Eric K. Olson is a freelance artist from Wisconsin who has done illustrations for *Dragon Magazine*, *Shadis Magazine*, West End Games, and other gaming companies. He has recently started an apprenticeship as a tattoo artist. No calls for any *Star Wars* tattoos as of yet.

Doug Shuler has been a freelance artist for eight years and has done work for many prominent game companies, including GDW, Steve Jackson Games, ICE, White Wolf, FASA, and West End Games. His illustrations continue to appear on new cards for *Magic: The Gathering* and *Jyhad* by Wizards of the Coast. A *Star Wars* fanatic, he lives in Boulder, Colorado, with his wife Jordi, their infant daughter, Brianna, and five maniac cats.

Mike Vilardi works at a microelectronics plant and freelances art for the gaming industry in his spare time. In addition to illustrating the *Star Wars Adventure Journal*, Mike recently helped illustrate the *DarkStryder Campaign* for *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*.



FIREPOWER

By Carolyn Golledge

Illustrations by Doug Shuler

More red lights flashed on the X-wing's flight-board and laser-scored gray metal filled the viewport. Squadron leader Makintay's R2 droid squealed and chattered alarms, telling him they'd just lost their port-side firepower. The laser tip assembly snapped off as the S-foil barely cleared the Imperial carrier's under-belly.

"We can do it. Hang in there," Mak urged, willing his small fighter free. Red-gold light filled the cockpit, the X-wing very nearly con-

sumed by the carrier's burning exhaust. Mak squeezed his eyes shut, then in the next breath, the glare was gone. The starfield welcomed him as he swooped up and out, accelerating toward the jump point.

"Green Leader," his wingman called, "Are you okay?"

"Dammit, Dallin," Mak snapped, "Obey orders. Go!" Both Green and Blue squadrons should no longer be visible. They'd been given a pre-set hyperspace vector to jump out of the battle zone. Mak noted their Corellian corvette companion had jumped to safety. They'd hoped to see her board the Imperial carrier. Mak cursed; no chance of that now. Somehow the carrier had by-passed the Rebels' jamming signals to recall its TIE fighter escort.

Responding to their commander's orders, Dallin and the six fighters following him in a tight V formation winked out into hyperspace.

Makintay gave one quick glance behind, a farewell to the young pilot he had tried to save. Spinning ever deeper into space, Gifford's X-wing had been reduced to fragmented debris. "Damn you, Dru," Mak cursed, his voice rough with restrained emotion, "I told you to leave it." He had no time for further eulogy. The TIEs rounded the carrier, bearing down on him, seeking another kill.

Mak punched the hyperspace jump and the starlight blurred further with his filmed vision. Gifford too had known how badly their Rebel friends back at Eyrie Base needed those supplies. The ground crews were listless and tired as much because of meager rations as a crippling work schedule. The Hoth disaster hadn't helped matters. Eyrie had come to the aid of the survivors, giving what little they could spare to aid the Alliance's Central Command in establishing a new base.

It was a vicious circle that grew more so with each passing day—they desperately needed to capture an Imperial supply ship, or raid one of their bases, but ever more X-wings were grounded for want of replacement parts. Curse the luck. They'd had that stray carrier almost completely disabled, the ventral engine the only one still burning when those TIEs had returned.

So near yet so far, and worse, Gifford was dead, another X-wing lost to them. Mak had tried so hard to save the boy, risking his own life. He'd diverted two of Gifford's pursuers, thrusting his fighter into the fray as the foolhardy, brave Rebel dared one last blast at the carrier's engine. Mak had imagined his X-wing as a defending sword in his fist, flashing down to intercept the enemies' blades.

In the high-tech worlds beyond Makintay's native planet, Hargeeva,

the sword was considered an archaic weapon. Mak snorted. No, even at home in Arginall City the sword would be considered hopelessly out-of-date these days. But 20 years ago, on his eighth birthday, Mak had been sent for the customary training with his father's Palace Guard. Little more than an infant, he'd still been bowed and scraped to, called, "M'Lord" by grizzled, battle-hardened soldiers. Lord Stevan Makintay, elder son and heir. It seemed impossible those days could have belonged to the one lifetime.

Disinherited by an enraged father, all that stayed with Mak was his useless expertise with a sword. Still there was much in fencing moves that could be adapted to battle strategies even when an X-wing was your weapon. Mak's pilots liked to joke about his frequent sword-references. They assumed he'd earned his famous scar in one of his native-world's aristocratic duels. Mak smiled and touched a gloved hand to that thin white line running from the corner of his right eye to the earlobe. No way would he ever reveal it was a jealous lover had given him that cut. Ketrician Altronel was definitely not the forgiving kind.

It had to have been years since he'd last seen her. He often wondered if she ever asked after him. But no, he knew she'd have lost herself to her work. He'd never known anyone who could become so passionate about metal alloys. She was a brilliant metallurgist; he'd heard she'd recently been promoted to head of her department. Working for the Empire. And probably devoted to the Empire, too. Anyone who could back her revolutionary scientific theories with generously funded research grants would certainly win her favor.

Stars alone knew what she might have invented by now, she rarely knew what day it was when some idea had hold of her. It was as well she could find solace in her work, Mak mused, feeling the accustomed twinge of guilt. Maybe he should have tried harder to contact her, to explain. It had hurt him to think she believed he'd abandoned her.

A beeping from his flight computer brought Mak out of his reminiscing. His R2 unit informed him they were coming up on Karatha. As the star lines streaked back into place about him, Mak could find none of his usual relief to be safely home. Ahead of him, just about to disappear into Karatha's blue-green atmosphere, Mak counted one fighter missing. For all his stern discipline, Mak loved his men, did his best to protect them. He'd been proud of his low casualty rate. Until today.

Mak's hand trembled as he checked his sensors, grief evaporat-

Stevan "Mak" Makintay



Type: X-wing Squadron Leader

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 5D, dodge 5D, melee combat 5D, melee combat: sword 7D+1, melee parry 6D+1, running 4D

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Bureaucracy 5D, languages 4D, planetary systems 4D+1, streetwise 6D, survival 6D+2, tactics: starfighter 6D, willpower 6D

MECHANICAL 4D

Astrogation 5D, repulsorlift operation 4D+2, space transports 5D+2, starfighter piloting 5D+2, starfighter piloting: X-wing 6D+2, starship gunnery 6D, starship shields 5D

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 5D, command 6D, persuasion 4D+2, search 5D+1, sneak 6D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 5D, climbing/jumping 4D, stamina 4D

TECHNICAL 3D

Security 5D, starfighter repair 4D

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 8

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, heavy blaster pistol (5D), knife (STR+1D), pilot's flight suit

Capsule: Lean and agile, Makintay is a 28-year-old extensively educated man with a wide experience in many areas. Born into the royal family on Hargeeva, Mak was raised in a palace and studied noble pursuits. He prefers an egalitarian manner and is often teased about his background, particularly his expertise with the sword. He is an

ing in a white-hot inferno of pure rage. There were those responsible for Gifford's death, complacent, safe in their command council seats, sending young men to battle with failing equipment and even worse intelligence reports. It looked to be a lovely bright day down there, a new day Gifford would not see.

Early morning sea-fogs had melted away from the towering limestone cliffs that held the Eyrie. That was the pilots' name for the natural sink-hole that housed the base's main hangar two levels above the living quarters that bordered the sandy beach below. A far cry from the icy nightmare Mak recalled before his transfer here from Hoth. But they'd had more food, more fuel, more personnel on Hoth.

Mak's rage peaked as he remembered the pre-dawn call-up by fighter command. They'd had word from intelligence of a straying

excellent swordsman and has a distinctive duelling scar running the length of his right cheekbone — a legacy of trying to prevent a lover, Ketrian Altronel, from carving up a rival.

When the Empire annexed Hargeeva and made Mak's father Imperial governor, Mak left to attend the Imperial Academy. There he received his training in starfighter piloting and grew to love flying. Although he later returned to his father's court, Mak opposed his father's and the Empire's tyrannical oppression of his native people. It was during this time that Mak fell in love with Ketrian Altronel. But when Mak announced his intention to marry Ketrian instead of the high-born noblewoman his father had chosen for him, Mak was disinherited. His father arranged for him to be kidnapped and sent to an Imperial penal colony, to get him out of both the political and the social scene.

After a year of languishing in the penal colony, Mak managed to escape with several other members of the Rebel Alliance during a daring raid. Indebted to the Rebels, he secretly returned to Hargeeva to start a small Rebel cell among his oppressed people. The movement quickly grew into an uncontrolled and unplanned revolt. The uprising was quickly and ruthlessly put down, and Mak barely escaped with a few Rebel friends. His role in leading the revolt won him the death mark on Hargeeva. Mak joined up with a larger force of Rebels and put his starfighter pilot training to good use as an X-wing pilot.

Mak has a basically gentle nature and genial temperament, although he is roused to anger by injustice and cruelty. Mak's contrasting stern demeanor while on duty with his pilots hides a great depth of protectiveness and loyalty. An idealist, he is also practical and highly resourceful. In addition to his constant concern for his pilots, Mak is currently worried that material shortages within the Rebellion will destroy any chance of defeating the Empire.

Imperial supply carrier. All the squadrons were excited about that, but Mak and his fellow leaders had been refused the extra fighters they believed they would need to ensure the carrier's capture. They couldn't afford the time needed to finish repairs on those downed X-wings — even if they had the necessary parts. Intelligence had assured them they would meet little opposition. Now Gifford was dead, and they were returning empty-handed.

Today would be the last time they would be sent out under-prepared. Mak swore it would not happen again. Swinging his X-wing about so that it swooped home along the sea-cliffs like one of the native birds of prey, Mak determined to deliver that oath to Intelligence Commander Baran without delay. Slag the orders! Fighter command could wait to debrief him. Who knows? He might even have cooled down a little by then, but he doubted it. One glance at

Gifford's empty place would be enough to insure that.

He took savage pleasure in rehearsing a blistering speech, his R2 droid doing much of the work as the X-wing was guided down and into the hangar. Mak was climbing up and out of his seat as soon as the canopy slid back.

"Sorry, Mak," he heard someone say softly behind him as his boots met the tarmac. "Dallin said you did all you could."

"Yeah?" Mak snarled. He swung about, confronting Merinda, the tiny female tech who was leader of his ground crew. Even the genuine concern in her ovoid green eyes could not cool his temper. "Well, it wasn't enough," he shouted. "And this time," he hefted an accusing forefinger, "those incompetent chair-polishers aren't getting away with it." He stormed off toward the turbolift that would take him down to Command Center.

"Wait, Mak!" Merinda jogged to keep up with him. "Think!" She grabbed at his arm, slowing him a little. She knew that even in a rage he was too much of a gentleman to push her aside. The turbolift was full and she took her chance as he was forced to wait. "What good will it do you to get demoted again? You remember what happened last time."

Mak glared at her, ready to tell her he didn't care. But that wasn't true; not being squadron leader left less able men to protect his pilots. "Slag it, Merin," he said, suddenly weary. "I've got to do something!" Frustrated, he ran a hand through his disarrayed hair.

"I know," she said sympathetically, "and I agree. But you need a plan if you're to have any real impact on that idiot, Barren-Brain."

The familiar disparaging name for Commander Baran brought a faint smile to Mak's lips. "A plan, huh?" he said. He waved his chief tech into the turbolift as it opened for them. "You're up to something. Give!"

She did so, laying out her ideas for confronting command with a scheme to secure experts who could manufacture needed replacement parts on Karatha rather than having the squadrons go raiding for them.

"It sure beats anything Baran's come up with lately," Mak agreed as they stepped out of the lift again.

"Thanks a million," Merinda said sourly. "A newt-worm could out-think Baran."

"I didn't mean ..." He saw her grin and realized she was teasing again, trying to trigger his "highfalutin" manners. "It's just that I know what Baran will say."

"Me, too." She imitated Baran's prim and proper tone. "And just

where are all these eager-to-defect experts you've been hiding from us, Chief? Under your bed? In your tool kit?"

"Expert!" Mak exclaimed, coming to a halt so suddenly that Merinda collided with him. "That's it. I should have thought of it sooner."

"What?" she demanded.

"Not what. Who," he declared, smiling. "Ketrian Altrone!"



He looks nothing like his son, Ketrian thought sourly. She stood on the far side of Arginall Refinery's small office, observing Imperial Governor Makintay's expression as he tried to comprehend the computer diagnostics. *Never did, but all those dinner parties aren't helping.*

"Pompous old fool," Alikka Nolan whispered to Ketrian. "He hasn't the faintest idea of what he's looking at." As personnel supervisor she was expected to be present for the evaluation of Altrone's alloy sample.

"No," Ketrian replied, leaning down to her shorter fair-haired friend, "but he sure does." She indicated the middle-aged uniformed Imperial seated beside the governor.

Major Nial Pedrin was commander of the Arginall garrison attached to the refinery. Also a qualified geologist, he'd been given this posting when the Empire discovered Hargeeva's mineral wealth. Variety and individuality were Pedrin's pet hates. Naturally his only other interest was geology — stone never changed. Or at least it did not unless it was brought in to one of Ketrian's laboratories.

Today's sample was the result of her work on a mineral known as ostrine. After months of trying various combinations, Ketrian had uncovered the correct trace elements and come up with a revolutionary method of crystalline and plas-bonding that made the raw ostrine about as different as it could get. Pedrin's eyes widened further with each line he read. He picked the alloy sample up from the desk, his fingers almost seeming to caress it.

Alikka shifted impatiently. Pedrin glanced up at her, his space-black eyes funereal beneath his thin brows, penetrating. Alikka held his gaze steadily. The two shared as much mutual animosity as did Ketrian and the governor.

"Well?" Governor Makintay prompted. "It seems suitable to me." Pedrin's burning eyes moved to him and the older man flushed.

Hargeeva

Type: Temperate

Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)

Hydrosphere: Moderate

Gravity: Standard

Terrain: Farmland, hills, forests, mountains

Length of Day: 23 standard hours

Length of Year: 380 local days

Sapient Species: Humans

Starport: Standard class

Population: 30 million

Planet Function: Agriculture, mining

Government: Imperial governor

Tech Level: Space near Arginnall City, feudal in outlying areas

Major Exports: Metals, minerals, foodstuffs, cloth

Major Imports: Luxury goods, high technology

Capsule: Hargeeva is a primitive backwater planet which warranted the Empire's attention only after the discovery of abundant mineral deposits in its mountain ranges. The Empire quickly raised Hargeeva's feudal ruler to the status of Imperial governor and established a high-tech refinery and an Imperial garrison there.

Hargeeva is the third planet of five in the Pelonat system. It was settled by Humans 2,000 years ago but soon reverted to a feudal state when outside support was cut off. Hargeeva was feudally governed and self-supporting until incorporated into the Empire 10 years ago. Although the planet and its feudal government welcomed the Empire and the technology and wealth it brought, those benefits have been restricted to Hargeeva's upper classes and urban nobility. Most of this new-found wealth never reaches the impoverished masses. Eventually this problem grew into a revolt — it was short-lived and ruthlessly quelled.

Arginnall City is one of only six urban communities and is by far the largest. It has become much more prosperous since the opening of the refinery and the establishment of a military garrison nearby. Closed in by a harbor and river at front, the city is backed by a range of sharp-peaked mountains. While the mining operations center on those mountains closest to the city, the canyons and high passes beyond serve as a haven for Hargeeva's unwanted. Caverns in these high altitudes shelter refugees, criminals, freedom-fighters and others who don't fit into the new social and technological order the Empire brought to Hargeeva.

Makintay may be governor, but it was Pedrin who wielded the true power on Hargeeva. "Of course, you're the expert." Chastened, Makintay lowered his double chin onto his red satina-clothed chest. Pedrin disapproved of the Hargeevan aristocracy's traditional dress.

Pedrin put the alloy back on the desk, and lifted his forefinger to press down his already smooth mustache. "A remarkable piece of

work," he said. His eyes gleamed with reflected computer light as he looked up at Ketrian. "Remarkable."

Not since her university days had Ketrian heard such open praise. "Thank you, Major," she said. She could feel herself blushing and knew her face must match her hair-color. "Finding the exact formula to increase the heat absorption ten-fold like that was ..."

"No doubt," he interrupted, getting to his feet. His stormtrooper guard moved to open the door behind the women. "As of now these findings are classified top secret. You understand?" They nodded. "Top secret," he repeated, his hard eyes settling on Alikka. "Not a word to anyone outside this complex. There are severe penalties for loose talk. I would not want to have to remind you of those penalties a second time, Supervisor."

Alikka's gray eyes flashed defiance. "And just who do you think would be interested? You've already imprisoned ..."

"You'll want to relay those diagnostics to your superiors immediately, I suppose?" Ketrian changed the subject.

Pedrin nodded, his eyes still on Alikka.

"Then we'll leave you to it. It's all there, ready for downloading. Alikka and I have a dinner appointment in town." She took her friend's arm.

"The Lantern Inn again?" Pedrin asked.

Ketrian sighed irritably. "Yes. Must you have your men follow us wherever we go?"

"It is for your own protection," he said, "never forget that."



Ketrian's small apartment adjoined the refinery complex, as did all the living quarters. She found that convenient, but Alikka complained it was like living in a prison. There was only one gate in the surrounding, high duracrete walls, always heavily guarded. Up on the walkways the troopers' white armor was burnished by the setting sun.

Ketrian opened her front door and left Alikka in the living room. She had bought a new dress and was eager to change out of her coveralls. Moments later, straightening the vee neckline and adjusting her unpinned hair, she left the bathroom. "Well?" she asked. "Do you think your mystery spacer merchant will like it?"

Alikka replaced the coralline sculpture she had been admiring.

She'd told Ketrian the merchant carried new stock, and arranged this meeting. "Oh, yes. Very much." She smiled then turned back to the shelves lining the living room. "Are you sure you can find room for any more?"

Ketrian laughed as she picked up her coat. "There's always room for more."

"Maybe if you moved all those awful swords and knives from the other wall?"

Ketrian moved to it, considering. She reached out to touch one of the smaller swords, a fencing foil. The first time she'd seen Stevan Makintay he'd been giving a demonstration with that sword. He moved with all the sure grace of a feline.

Watching the softening of Ket's expression, Alikka wondered if she were doing the right thing, deceiving Ket. But Ali had to do her best to aid the Rebellion.

"No," Ketrian said, "too many memories." She'd bet Mak never spared her a thought. His only true love was the stars. He'd certainly been eager to abandon her for them. "Come on," she pulled on her coat, "we'll be late."

They stepped outside and into their waiting speeder, annoyed as always to see another speeder a short distance behind. Pedrin's watchers.

When they arrived at the Lantern Inn, Ketrian was further annoyed to find Grathal, a familiar antiques dealer, waiting for them. He explained that the interstellar merchant didn't like to display his wares in public — especially with Imperial officials nearby. Customs excise could ruin him. Grathal showed them a back exit through the storage cellar.

"I don't know about this," Ketrian said nervously as they stepped out into the damp night air.

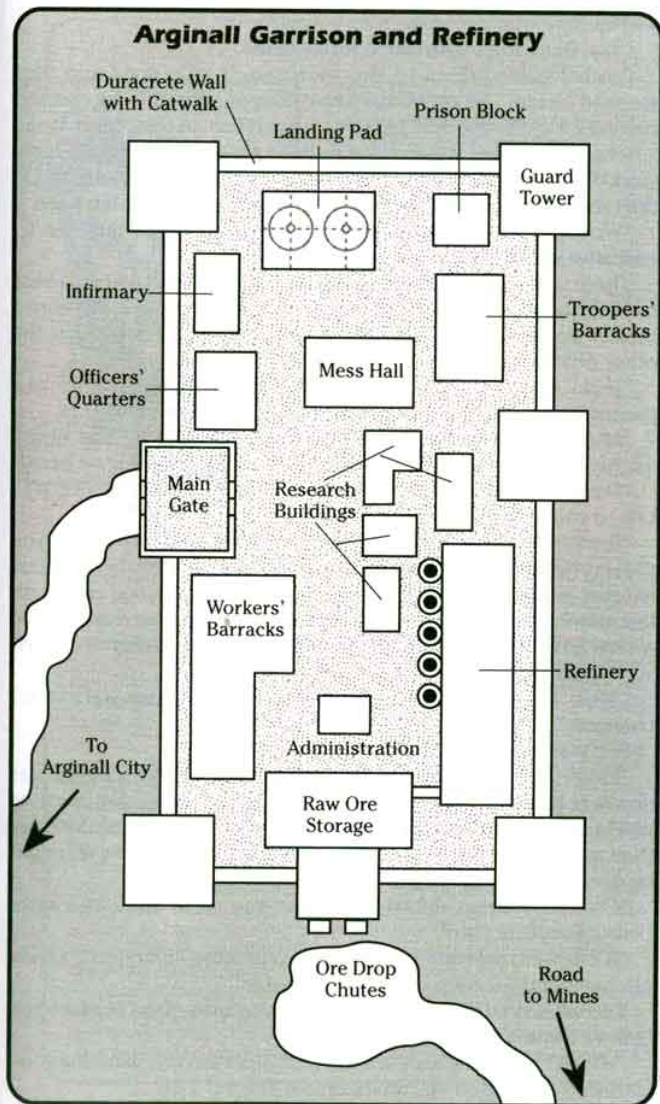
"Oh, come on," Alikka urged. "Where's your spirit of adventure? He's a smuggler. How romantic."

"Well," Ketrian decided as Grathal guided them to his speeder, "it will be good to get away from Pedrin's clowns for a while. They're probably just coming in the front door now."

Grathal drove them deeper into the more squalid sectors by the river and finally stopped in a gloomy alleyway by a dilapidated warehouse. Grathal opened the speeder door, letting in the foggy air.

"People disappear in these parts," Ketrian said sourly, "then their bodies wash up in the harbor."

"Oh, don't be so melodramatic," Alikka pushed her out. "Aren't



you the one who's so good with knives?"

"Yes. But I don't wear them with a dress."

Grathal guided them to the warehouse's side door and they stepped inside. The room was low-ceilinged, closed in by cracked rust-metal walls, and smelled of damp and fish. In the center stood a rickety table over which hung a single glow rod. About the table stood two men and a youth in various ill-matched drab clothing. On the table stood some datacards, a holo-projector, and datapads.

"Who are they?" Ketrian asked Grathal. "I thought this was an exclusive showing? Where are the samples?"

There was a creaking as a rear door opened. A tall man in a blue jacket entered — Ketrian surmised he was the merchant. He wore a blaster low on his right thigh. Ketrian checked and noted that the other people were similarly armed.

"Hello, Ketrian," the merchant said, turning to her. There was a thin white scar high on his cheek. "It's been a long time."

"Mak!" Ketrian exclaimed. "What are you doing here?" She turned angrily to Alikka. "Did you know about this? What's going on here?"

"I knew," Alikka admitted somewhat guiltily. "He said he needs to talk to you, to explain ..."

"Explain!" Ketrian snapped. "Explain what? That he's fooled you the way he fooled me. Is that the truth of it, Mak? Are you here to start another peasant revolt? Didn't you have your fill of blood and death last time? I see you've found more martyrs for your cause." She waved an arm at the group by the table. "Are they ready to die just so you can get even with your father?"

"Well," he drawled, making his way to the table, "I see you haven't changed."

She stared at him. "I'm leaving."

"Please ..." Alikka stepped between her and the door. Grathal was nowhere in sight. "Stay, Ket. For me. For my brother." Ket knew he was in one of Pedrin's labor camps. "I wanted you to come here more than any of these people. I couldn't tell you about it where we might be overheard."

"Oh, Ali," Ketrian sighed. "What are you up to now? You know Pedrin suspects you."

"It's as well someone's trying to prevent more Alderaans," a high-pitched youthful voice said from the table.

Ketrian turned to the speaker, the young man. "Don't tell me you believe those lies?"

"Which?" he threw back at her. "That Alderaan was planning germ warfare? That we all had an incurable plague? That ..."

Ketrian Altrone!



Type: Young Scientist

DEXTERITY 3D

Dodge 4D, melee combat 5D, melee combat: knife 6D, melee parry 4D.

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Business 5D, scholar: geology 6D+2, scholar: metallurgy 7D, survival 4D, value 4D+2, willpower 5D

MECHANICAL 2D

Repulsorlift operation 3D+2, sensors 4D

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 5D, command 4D, con 4D, hide 3D+2, sneak 4D

STRENGTH 2D

Climbing/jumping 3D, stamina 4D

TECHNICAL 4D

Computer programming/repair 5D, first aid 4D+2, security 5D, starship weapon repair 5D

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 12

Move: 10

Equipment: Knife (STR+1D), metal alloy, research jumpsuit

Capsule: Always fascinated by geology, Ketrian was determined to better her position in life and leave the backward surroundings of her native world, Hargeeva. Her cloth-merchant parents worked hard to give her what was an unusually thorough education for a Hargeevan woman. She won a prestigious Imperial scholarship and was sent to a university attached to the Imperial Academy. Here she studied metal sciences and earned recognition for her outspoken and revolutionary theories of industrial application to machine and vehicle design.

Her fascination with metals also drew her to collect swords and knives. At a fencing class she met and fell in love with Lord Stevan Makintay. Intensely jealous of advances made to him by another student, she gave him a facial scar as he stepped in to break up a duel. Stevan was disinherited after proposing to her and they were planning their marriage when he disappeared. Makintay's now Imperial governor father led Ketrian to believe his son had abandoned her for his first love, starfighter piloting.

Embittered, Ketrian immersed herself in her work, accepting a position as head research metallurgist back on her home planet at the newly established Imperial refinery behind Arginnall City. She later learned of Stevan's return when she saw his criminal profile on a wanted holo accusing him of leading an uprising against the Empire on Hargeeva. He disappeared off-world again soon after.

Slim but strongly boned, Ketrian is an attractive young woman of middle class background. Her fiery temperament matches her shoulder-length red hair. Past betrayal has lent her an air of shrewdness and cynicism. Exceptional intelligence gleams in her deep-set ice-blue eyes.

"Enough, Merak." A graying man moved to place his hand to the youth's shoulder. "We share you pain, and your mourning for your lost home."

Ketrian stared. "You're Alderaanian?"

He nodded proudly. "One of the few."

Mak stepped forward. "All Merak asks is that you hear him out. He has some holo-tapes he wants you to see." Ketrian looked uncertain. "Not just Alderaan. The Empire's been busy lately."

"So," Ketrian said slowly, "You're working with them now?"

"The Rebel Alliance?" Mak said. "Yes. Best move I ever made. For once in my life I've found the means to really help people. Hear us out, Ket. That's all we ask. Then if you still want, you can go."

Ketrian stiffened angrily. "This ... " she indicated the holomachine, "is the only reason you came here?"

"No," he smiled. It was the same heart-wrenching, gentle smile she remembered. "This was a neat excuse, a chance for me to see you again. Merak and the team could have handled it, but I talked my way in. I've never stopped thinking about you, Ket. About the day I was forced to leave you."

"Forced!" she sneered. "You ran away from your father's threats. Ran to your precious stars. Your father couldn't bear having you marry a lowborn instead of that lady he chose for you. I thought you were willing to stand by me, but you abandoned me."

"We have evidence of the truth behind Makintay's disappearance too," another of the Rebels spoke up. "Your would-be husband spent a year in a penal colony on Garen IV after he was kidnapped and dumped there with a false ID."

"Penal colony?" Ketrian wanted to believe, to heal that old wound.

Mak nodded sadly. "My father made sure I vanished someplace where I'd never be heard of again." He picked up one of the datacards. "Eventually I escaped and came back here to lead that uprising. When it failed, the Alliance contacted me. It's all here."

"Why did you wait so long to tell me?"

He shrugged. "Officially, I was an escaped felon. All I earned from the uprising was a death mark. You were secure, working for the Empire."

She held his gaze for a long moment, then looked away. "So many people suffered needlessly for your uprising. Can't you see the Rebel Alliance is no different? All this making war is futile, Mak. Futile. I'll hear what your friends have to say, that's all."

"Fair enough," Mak agreed, waving her to a chair.



"It's no use, Ali," Mak said an hour later. "She's made up her mind."

"Your Alliance is no different than the Empire," Ketrian repeated, glaring at the group about the holo-projector. "You're only interested in what I can do for you. And you," she turned to Makintay, "all you care about is your X-wing repairs."

"How can you go on working for Palpatine after what we've shown you?" Merak demanded.

"I knew he wasn't perfect," Ketrian told him. "He's Human, like all of us. Given the same unlimited power, who can say your leaders would not become just as corrupt?" She picked up her coat. "I've been here too long already. Pedrin's goons will be asking questions. Where's Grathal?"

"He had to get back," Mak said. "We have another speeder hidden nearby. I'll drive you to the inn." Ketrian stormed past him as he opened the door. "Don't mind her," he told Merak, "that was her standard argument. It's easy to think of no one but yourself if you label everyone else as worthless."

Ketrian hesitated, then stalked outside. It was raining and she pulled her coat hood about her face. Makintay and Alikka said nothing as they joined her.

They'd gone only a few paces when Mak suddenly stopped. He cocked his head and peered up into the night sky. "Listen," he said. Then they heard it too, the roar of airspeeders. On Hargeeva only the Imperial military used airspeeders. Searchlights settled on the warehouse and its surroundings.

"Slag!" Mak cursed. "They've found us. Come one. This way. Hurry!" He pulled them into a narrow connecting alley.

Behind them a blaster battle erupted as the trapped Rebels returned fire. Then a mighty explosion filled the streets with a flare of light.

"What was that?" Alikka said.

"We can't help them now," Mak said grimly, urging her forward. He skidded to a halt at the next corner. "Troopers," he snarled. "They found our speeder." He drew his blaster, looking set to make a fight of it.

Ketrian stared at him. "What are you trying to do, get me killed? I've got nothing to hide." She made to step around him.



"You think they'll believe that?" Mak pulled her back. But too late, the movement had been seen. A blaster bolt impacted where Ketrian had stood.

"Drop your weapons and step clear of the building," the ranking trooper called.

"Now look what you've done," Ketrian wailed. "They think I'm a Rebel, too."

"They've got us trapped," Mak cursed. "When those speeders show up, they'll blast us. There's only one way out. You two will have to be my prisoners. Hostages, okay?"

"Hostages?" Ketrian gaped at him.

"Good idea," Alikka said, then to Ketrian, "it's our only chance."

The trooper repeated his command for them to surrender, and added, "This is your final warning." Overhead, they could hear an airspeeder closing, its lights turning night into day.

Mak didn't need that illumination to see Ketrian's face — she had gone as white as snow. "I'm sorry, Ket," he said. "Come on." Mak put an arm about Ket's throat and shoved Ali forward with the blaster.

A searcher light immediately blinded them all and a snarling voice called, "Drop that weapon, Rebel."

"Back off or I kill them," Makintay shouted.

The Imperials didn't allow him a moment for negotiation. The

ground trooper and another in the speeder fired in unison, sending concentric blue power ripples through the rain. Ketrian felt Makintay try to shield her, then the stun blast darkness became complete.



The next Ketrian knew stark white light was filtering through her eyelids and the acrid smell of antiseptic assailed her nostrils. Her stomach heaved and she rolled to one side.

"Please use the waste unit," a droid's unemotional voice echoed about her.

Ketrian fell from the narrow bunk onto a duracrete floor that bruised her knees. She grabbed at the nearby waste unit, turned and threw up into it.

"Thank you," the droid responded. There was a whirring of servomotors as he came closer. Long metal arms heaved her back onto the bunk. "You are functional?" it asked, glowing photo-receptors and sensors assessing.

"Oh, go melt your circuits," Ketrian wiped at her mouth. "Who are you and where am I?"

"Medical guard unit FM-6B at your service," he replied. "You are in Arginall Garrison Infirmary Cell number 23B."

"Cell!" Ketrian felt worse than ever as it all came back. "I am going to murder you, Makintay." She clutched at her head. "If I live."

"You are experiencing head pain?" the droid asked.

"How do I get out of here?" Ketrian demanded. "Open the door." She saw all four walls were completely smooth. No sign of an exit.

"I cannot do that," the droid answered. "You must be given proper clearance. First I have been programmed to provide medication that will hasten your return to full function."

Ketrian saw an appendage appear with a ready-filled hypodermic. "What is that?" she asked suspiciously.

"Standard treatment for your condition."

"Good," Ketrian sighed in relief. As she rolled up her sleeve, she found her new dress was torn and covered in mud. The hypo-spray discharged its load into her arm. She rubbed at it and asked, "Where is my friend, Alikka Nolan?"

"I am not programmed with that information," the droid responded.

Part of the wall slid open to reveal stormtrooper guards in a corridor. Then Major Pedrin stepped into the cell. "I see you've had

your medication." His lips twitched in what could have been a smile. "Feeling better?" He pressed at his mustache as he lowered himself to sit on the single chair. "I've been worried about you, Ketrian. You received a double dose of stun shock."

"You should teach your troopers to shoot straight," Ketrian said angrily. "They could have killed me. Is that how you tell them to handle hostage situations? Where's Ali? She better be all right or I'll be making an official complaint."

Pedrin's eyes darkened to twin black holes. "You are in no position to make complaints, Miss Altronel. You and your friend deliberately avoided your guards at the inn. If not for the fact that they noticed the man who took you to the storage cellar and questioned him upon his return, we may never have located you."

"Grathal?" Ketrian's pulse raced and her mouth went dry as she wondered what the old man had told them. "Where is he now? I'd like to ask him a few things myself."

"Such as?" Pedrin leaned forward and she noticed he was recording her answers on a datapad.

"Such as how he could have managed to get so confused. He took us to the wrong address. Way back by the river. Ali and I thought we were meeting a sculpture dealer from off-world. You know how I collect such things?" He nodded. "I know we shouldn't have left without notifying your men, but Grathal said the dealer was worried about ..."

"Customs excise?"

"Yes," Ketrian sighed in relief. "Grathal explained?"

"That is what he told us, but it was not the full truth."

Ketrian swallowed. "It wasn't?"

"Who did you find waiting at that warehouse?"

"People," Ketrian said. She brushed mud from her skirt. They must have captured Makintay and identified him by now. "Resistance fighters. They wanted me to join them." She made it sound like a great joke. "Me. Can you imagine? When I refused they took Ali and me prisoner."

Pedrin said nothing for a long moment. Then he sighed, straightened and turned off the recorder. "Loyalty is an admirable trait, Ketrian," he said quietly, "but you cannot protect Miss Nolan forever. She knew where she was taking you last night."

"Surely not."

Pedrin gave her a stern look. "She knew. You see now why you needed my officers with you at all times?"

She nodded. "I'm glad they were able to rescue me. May I go home

Major Nial Pedrin



Type: Imperial Garrison Commander

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 5D, dodge 4D+1, vehicle blasters 5D

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Bureaucracy: Imperial 6D, cultures 5D, intimidation 6D, law enforcement 5D, scholar: geology 5D, survival 4D+2, tactics: ground assault 6D+2

MECHANICAL 2D+1

Communications 4D, sensors 5D, walker operation 5D

PERCEPTION 3D+2

Command 6D, con 5D, investigation 6D, persuasion 4D+2, search 6D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 4D, climbing/jumping 4D, running 4D, lifting 5D

TECHNICAL 2D

Computer programming/repair 4D, demolition 3D, droid programming 5D, security 6D, walker repair 3D+2

Force Points: 1

Dark Side Points: 1

Character Points: 10

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), comlink, datapad, Imperial uniform

Capsule: Short and stocky, Major Pedrin has compensated with an almost fanatical dedication to physical fitness. Always immaculately groomed, he is fastidiously neat and has a habit of continually pressing flat his already smooth, neatly trimmed black moustache. He has a somber expression and rigid posture, and his low dark brows add to his midnight-black eyes and disapproving stare.

Pedrin has an obsessive/compulsive personality, and is fearful of change and unpredictability. His ideal world would be populated entirely by soldiers, all identical in uniform and trained to unquestioning obedience.

Pedrin revelled in his former position as a commander of an AT-AT walker platoon. However, his background training in geology brought him an unexpected promotion as garrison commander on Hargeeva, a backward world he despises. Pedrin was responsible for the cruel suppression of the Hargeevan uprising, and he remains vigilant for any resistance activity in Arginnall City. He has imprisoned Alikka Nolan's brother as a safeguard to keep the young mine personnel chief in line — Pedrin suspects her of being an Alliance sympathizer.

Desperate to find some means of attracting praise from his superiors, Pedrin believes his only means to rapid promotion and transfer off Hargeeva is to capture an Alliance operative and uncover the location of a Rebel base.

now?"

"Soon. First I want you to tell me all you know about Stevan Makintay. You and he declared your betrothal five years ago." He snorted disgustedly and said, "Makintay's father doesn't let a day go by without complaining of his son's choice. He wanted Stevan to marry some High Lady, I take it?" Ketrian nodded. Pedrin gave another of his reptilian smiles. "Personally, I'd say that was the single smart choice of Stevan's life."

Ketrian flushed. "I have work to do, Major. I should be getting back to the refinery. I don't think there is much I can tell you about Makintay. He abandoned me five years ago and I never heard from him again until last night."

"Yes," Pedrin agreed. "Of that, at least, we are certain. We had you both under close surveillance during your university days." Ketrian's head lifted in shock. "Security, you understand. We were assessing the elder Makintay for appointment to the position of Imperial Governor."

"And did you leave off that surveillance when Stevan disappeared?" Ketrian asked angrily.

"No," Pedrin admitted calmly. "You had become of strategic importance to the Empire by then also." She drew an angry breath and he lifted a hand to forestall her protest. "It was continued surveillance that allowed me to guarantee my superiors that you have no ties to the resistance movement." Ketrian sat back. "Now, about the prisoner. I find him quite a puzzle. Why would a man of such high breeding throw away all the privileges of his birth to aid these low-life Rebels? Unfortunately Makintay is the sole survivor of the group you met and he is proving to be ... " he paused, his lips pursing into a thin line of annoyance, "... stubborn. Most stubborn. Even his father had no success with him."

"The governor spoke to him?" Ketrian blurted. "He vowed never to do so again the night he disinherited Stevan."

"Yes," Pedrin murmured. "But Makintay Senior is governor for the Empire, and as such he must obey Imperial command. He was ordered to offer his son full reinstatement of his birthright should he co-operate with us and reveal the location of the Rebel base."

"Mak would never accept such an offer."

"Mak?" Pedrin cocked an eyebrow at her. "You know him well. He was most offensive. His father left in a rage. Young Makintay left me no alternative but to try drugs."

Ketrian swallowed hard. "Drugs? Then you have the location?"

Pedrin's knuckles went white as he clutched at his datapad. "No,

it seems Makintay has been thoroughly prepared for this mission. Our drugs could not penetrate his obstinance. But that is of no consequence, we are currently employing more effective interrogation procedures." Pedrin's hooded eyes were full of perverse pleasure. "Makintay will break before another day dawns."

Shocked, Ketrian could do no more than stare.

Pedrin frowned. "I take it there is nothing you can tell me about him that might aid my questioning?"

Ketrian shook her head.

Pedrin got to his feet. "Well, I'm sure your aid won't be needed. Makintay proved his cowardice when he held you as a shield last night. You'd best go home. Rest. You have a long journey to make tomorrow."

"J-journey?" Ketrian said, dazed.

"Your alloy, Ketrian. It has caused considerable excitement among my superiors. They have commanded that you be transferred to Coruscant to continue your work under more secure conditions."



After a sleepless night full of fear for herself and her friends, Ketrian was escorted to the starport. Pedrin was sullen and rumped, as if he, too, had had little sleep. "I envy you," he said as he led her up the ramp to the waiting shuttle. "The Imperial capital. I was hoping I could get away from this backwater myself. I'm sure command would reward me if I could supply the location of the Rebel base."

"Oh?" Ketrian was pleased. "Makintay wouldn't talk?"

Pedrin scowled. "He would have if I'd had more time. Command says their experts will make him talk. Experts, pah! If I had their scan grids and fancy torture machines I could ... "

"Torture?" Ketrian paled. "Makintay is being transferred, too?"

Pedrin turned and pointed to the foot of the ramp. A squad of stormtroopers surrounded a single prisoner. "Even he's getting off this rock."

Horried, Ketrian watched as the troopers dragged a groggy, chained Makintay up the ramp. As they paused at the hatchway, Ketrian got a good look at Makintay's face. It was a mass of bruises, and his shirt was splattered with blood.

"Morning," he croaked in greeting, trying to find a smile.

"Silence!" His guard prodded him with a rifle butt. Makintay fell

forward into the shuttle.

"Surely you cannot feel sympathy for him?" Pedrin said, noting Ketrian's stricken expression.

She shook her head. "I was thinking of Ali. Where is she?"

Pedrin shifted uncomfortably. "We will hold her until she gives us the names of her accomplices."

"Is she being beaten too?"

"I would advise you to forget your traitor friend." He took her arm.

"Come, the shuttle is powering up."

She pulled free. "If I could get that location for you, would you let Ali go?"

"Of course."

"Then give me clearance to talk to Makintay aboard the transport."

"You'll have it." Pedrin smiled.



Staring at the featureless gray walls of his tiny cell aboard the transport, Makintay decided that at least here he was being left alone. He marked time by the automatic dispensing of his rations every eight hours. Three times now. It seemed the transport's drive system was not in good shape. They were making frequent stops and short jumps. Fine by him, he was in no hurry.

The only positive thought he could find was knowing he'd convinced Ketrian he had not abandoned her. That and the look on her face when she'd seen him on the shuttle pad. She'd begun to feel again, the old spark was back in those lovely eyes.

Mak jumped as the cell door whooshed open. Silently the stormtrooper guards pushed him from the cell and marched him down the corridor to a small room. Its only furnishing was a chair fitted with restraints. The troopers pushed him into it, arranging him so that the electronic clamps activated, securing both arms and legs. Then they left him.

He waited, growing ever more nervous. The door opened and Ketrian entered. "Ket," he said with relief.

"You got me in a lot of trouble back there," she said. "You owe me."

"I'm not exactly in a position to grant favors." He noticed she didn't seem able to keep still, wringing her hands, pacing, fidgeting. Muscles jumped in her cheeks and the bare forearms showing below

the jumpsuit's short sleeves. Her eyes glowed feverishly and her skin was an unhealthy greenish-yellow. "Are you okay?" he asked.

She stopped pacing and stared at him. "Okay? Oh, sure, I've never been better. I love being stunned, hauled in for questioning, and forced to leave my home."

He held her gaze. "I'm sorry, Ket. Truly sorry."

"And that's supposed to make everything all right?" She turned her back, grabbed at her elbows and began trembling from head to toe.

Mak frowned. She'd been through a rough time, but he'd been with her through worse times. He'd never seen her shake like that. Her posture and behavior reminded him of something ... of someone. "Are you sure you're not sick?" he repeated.

She swung back. "I've been throwing up ever since we left Hargeeva. This ship is jumping around so much, I can't stand it."

"Hyperspace never made you sick before. Maybe it was the stun-shock."

"No," she resumed her pacing. "They fixed that back at the garrison."

Campaign Idea

The characters are Rebels sent to Hargeeva to create a Rebel cell from those discontent poor who oppose the Empire's tyrannical policies. They must somehow infiltrate Hargeevan society and gather contacts and prospective freedom-fighters, both while maintaining a low profile and fighting native suspicions that the characters could be Imperial spies. The characters must find a base of operations — either in Arginnall City or in the mountains — and smuggle supplies and weapons there.

Once the characters have made their contacts and set up their base, they can begin sabotaging the Imperial mining operations, causing work strikes at the refinery, and stirring up riots in Arginnall City. However, they must match wits and tempers with Major Pedrin, who is not above using unrestricted Imperial force to keep the populace under control.

Perhaps the characters' most desperate mission could involve an assassination or kidnapping attempt on Pedrin. They might also try to organize a commando raid on the Imperial garrison itself in an attempt to destroy Imperial military might on Hargeeva.

Mak felt a chill run through him. Now he remembered where he'd seen similar symptoms. "They fixed you up? How?"

"Pedrin's med-droid gave me a shot. Happy? I wouldn't have needed it if you hadn't dragged me into this mess."

"No," he said slowly. "No, you wouldn't. You came here to ask me a favor?"

She nodded, began to speak but a sudden loud groaning from the hyperdrive engines drowned her out. The bulkheads creaked with transmitted strain, then steadied again. "Cursed garbage scow. It'll probably fall to pieces before we make the next stop." Tears filled her eyes. "And I don't think I'd care."

Mak wished he was free to hold her. "They told you about Alikka?" he guessed. She nodded. "Slag! She was a fine lady. I swear she didn't suffer, Ket. The drugs overloaded her heart."

Ketrian stared at him, her face managing to pale further. "What are you talking about? Pedrin told me she was still being questioned."

Mak cursed. "Filthy liar. I'm sorry, Ket. There's no mistake. We were in the same cell. I ... I held her as she died. She was talking about you, worried for you." Ketrian gaped at him, then began sobbing. Helpless, he could offer no comfort. "You see what your Empire does to people?"

"My Empire? It's not my Empire. It never has been."

"You work for them."

Ketrian's blue eyes flashed pure fury. "It was your cursed Alliance that killed Alikka." She gulped back a sob. "Pedrin said he'd let her go if ..."

"If I gave you the answers he wants?"

She nodded guiltily. "I only wanted to save Alikka."

"Oh, Ket. Don't you see? That's just how she felt. She wanted to save her brother, to save all the other victims of the Empire. To make sure there's never another Alderaan."

A deafening explosion rumbled through the deckplates that threw Ketrian from her feet. The transport shuddered and shook like an animal in its death throes. Then suddenly it went very still and quiet. Mak realized the drive had cut out. They were back in realspace.

He looked to Ketrian who was climbing unsteadily to her feet. "Are you okay?"

She nodded. "What happened?"

"I think we've been sabotaged. I used to fly freight along these routes, they're thick with ..."

"Pirates!" someone shouted out in the corridor. A terrified naval

ensign stuck his head in the door. "We're being boarded. Better get back to your cabin, Miss."

"What about him?" Ketrian indicated Makintay.

"Leave him. The troopers have all gone forward to battle the pirates. Come on, I have to escort you to your cabin. Hurry."

"I can't," she called. "I fell and hurt my ankle. Help me." The youngster came over and made to prop her up, then crumpled as she hit him hard with something she'd taken from her pocket.

Mak stared at her. She smiled nervously, opened her hand and revealed a piece of dull blue metal. "My new alloy. Pedrin told me to keep it secure."

The ship shuddered and they heard the sound of metal meeting metal as the pirates docked. Then a cacophony of battle sounds reverberated through the corridors.

"Get me out of this thing," Mak said, struggling against his restraints. She hit the release switch and he fell to the deck. As he sprawled on the deckplates, Mak noticed the pistol in the unconscious ensign's holster. Commenting, "while I'm down here," Mak grabbed the weapon then scrambled to his feet.

"What now?" Ketrian asked.

"We hotfoot it outa here and find an escape pod." He grabbed her hand and pulled her to the door. He leaned out, checked the corridor. "Clear. Come on."

"No, wait," she protested. "If anyone sees you in that outfit, they'll blast you." Makintay looked in dismay at his bright-colored prison clothes. Ketrian nodded at the unconscious man. "He looks about your size."

Mak grinned. "That's the woman I love." Impulsively he pulled her to him and kissed her.

"You do?"

"Always have," he said intently, holding her gaze. "But first I gotta get you outa here."

"Hey," she laughed, "who's rescuing who?" A spasm of nausea doubled her over. Makintay held her and as she met his gaze she saw naked fear in his eyes. Fear for her.



They had not gone far before they realized they would need to find a less public route if they didn't want to be caught in the crossfire. The Imperials were rapidly losing ground against a better



armed and more ferocious opponent.

"What are they?" Ketrian whispered, peering over Mak's shoulder as they crouched low in a shadow-filled fire equipment alcove.

"The ones that look like overgrown scaly swamp creatures are called Ghawems," he said. "We gotta steer clear of them. They'll be spouting methane gas from their backpacks. Come to think of it, they've probably already flooded the upper decks with the stuff. Slag! We'll have to find some breathers. Maybe I can grab one from one of the little blue furry guys."

"Wh-what?" she stammered as another wave of nausea swept through her. What was wrong with her? She was shaking almost constantly. She wasn't *that* scared.

"The Myills," he explained, turning to her. "They're sorta slaves of the Ghawems. They do all the dirty work. They'll be bringing up the rear and they breathe oxygen. Wait here."

"No way. I'm coming with you." She tried to stand but had to grab at the bulkhead.

"No point," he told her. "I'll have to come back this way anyhow and you need to rest. Give me that knife." She had claimed the weapon from a dead crewman and didn't look happy about giving it up. "I'm not leaving you unarmed," he explained. "I need it to work

these bolts loose." He stood aside so she could see an engineering access cover on the bulkhead. "If I'm right, it opens onto a real maze of tunnels carrying all kinds of conduits. You'll be safe in there." She gave him the knife, and moments later he dropped the cover to the deck. The clang it made as it hit was lost to the background din of blaster shots, explosions and screams. He helped Ketrian climb up and in. "Don't wander off. I'll be back."

"You'd b-better be." She reached out and touched the scar on his cheek. "Be careful."

He took her hand. "You're as cold as ice. Here, take this coat." He shrugged out of it, handed it to her and replaced the access cover. Then he disappeared out into the corridor, pistol at the ready.



Cowering in the pitch-black tunnel, Ketrian waited. Time passed and she grew more and more cold, glad for Mak's coat, certain it was all that kept her from freezing to death. Surely he should have been back by now. What if he didn't come? No, he would not abandon her, he never had. He said he loved her — did she still love him?

Scrabbling sounds at the access cover filled her with terror. Had the pirates found her? She clutched hard at her knife. The cover fell back, flooding her hiding place with greenish, foul-smelling air.

"Ketrian?" Mak called. "Are you there?"

"Wh-where else ..." she coughed and choked. Makintay climbed up to her and clamped a breath mask over her face. She gulped pure, sweet air. Mak turned away and she heard him fumbling to replace the access cover. "Hey," she protested. "I thought we were leaving?"

Ketrian's surroundings became clearly visible as he lit a glow rod. She blinked as she got a good look at him. Blood ran from a shallow cut on his brow and he had some new bruises to add to the old. Several emergency survival packs were strapped about his now grimy uniform.

"I've got good news and I've got bad news," he told her, making an obvious effort to cheer her.

"Tell me," she sighed.

"The Imperials won't be bothering us anymore, but all the escape pods are gone."

"What? We can't stay here. What are we going to do?"

"Never fear," he winked. "I have a plan." She groaned.



"So you see," Makintay repeated some minutes later, "we've got all the supplies we need. All we gotta do is stay here and sneak out when they make port."

She scowled. "Oh, sure. We walk off this ship right into some pirate enclave. Great plan."

"Hey." He gave her a wounded look. "We don't know that they're heading for home. They might have a buyer lined up someplace."

"Right." She shivered harder. "I hope we don't have to stay here too long. It's freezing in here."

"It's not that cold, Ket," he sounded worried. "You're sick. If you get any worse, I'm gonna have to get you some help."

"From them?" she gaped.

"Yeah, why not? I did some deals with ol' Uskgarv in my trader-pilot days."

"Uskgarv?"

"The esteemed leader of this motley bunch of pirates," he explained. "If we don't make landfall someplace in the next few hours, I'll talk to him. You don't look so good."

"Are you crazy?" she protested. "We don't have any bargaining power."

"Oh, yes, we do," Mak said quietly. "You're worth a fortune to the Empire."

"Ransom." He nodded and she thought that over. "I suppose, but I'm not keen on working for them anymore."

"I'm glad to hear that," he said. He drew her down to lean against his shoulder. "Had any other offers lately?"

She smiled. "One."

"And?"

"And it's looking better all the time." His arms closed about her.



She woke some time later feeling sicker than ever in her life. Shuddering with fever, she looked up into Mak's eyes and saw her own fear reflected there. "What's wrong with me?" She saw his expression change. "You know, don't you?"

He sighed heavily. "I was hoping I wouldn't have to tell you. I've

seen this before, with defectors who arrived at Eyrie Base."

"I d-don't understand."

"Poison, Ket." She stiffened with fear. "It's okay, there's an antidote. The problem is how to get you to it. We're outa time. I gotta go talk to Uskgarv. They should have some of the stuff in this transport's sick bay. Pedrin would have made sure of that. Just in case there were any delays getting you to Coruscant."

"He poisoned me?"

Mak nodded. "The med-droid, remember? It's standard Imperial procedure for keeping useful people from becoming useful defectors or healthy Alliance prisoners."

Pure fury flooded Ketrion's veins. "I wish Pedrin had been allowed to come on this trip. Maybe the pirates would let me dismember him."

Makintay chuckled. "Hold that thought." He moved back toward the access. "I'm gonna go get us some better accommodations."



"Good news and bad news again?" Ketrion asked as Mak returned a second time. "Where's Uskgarv?"

"Gone," he said, looking both pleased and sad. "There's only a few Myills and their bosses out there. They're stripping anything of value and loading it on a freighter. They're in a real panic. Attack ships are heading this way. Imperial rescuers, I suppose. You'll be okay, Ket. As soon as they secure the transport, you'll have that antidote."

"And what about you?" she asked, squeezing his arm.

He shrugged. "I stick to plan A. Hide in here, hope they count me among the dead, then jump ship first chance I get."

"I don't want to go back to the Empire," she repeated. "But even more, I don't want to leave you again." She kissed him. "You say those shots the ship's doctor's been giving me were to keep the poisoning under control?" He nodded. "Right then. Sounds to me like it's not too dangerous out there now. I'll go up to sick bay. I know the stuff they've been giving me. I'll grab a load of it and bring it back here. Then I can stay in hiding with you."

He stared at her. "I don't know. Sounds risky."

"Life with you is always risky," she said. "That's the way I want it. I'm not taking no for an answer. It's not just us ... I can give my new alloy to the Alliance. For Ali."

He held her gaze for a long moment, then said in quiet agreement, "For Ali." Ketrion made to move forward and he took her arm, steadying her. "We did a lot of ducking and weaving through the corridors out there. Can you find the way?"

She gave him a wry smile. "I've become very familiar with this level recently. I must have paced every corridor a dozen times, trying to get up the nerve to talk to you, and trying to figure what to say when I did. I'll just head back to the main corridor then go forward and up two levels to sick bay. I know it well, too. Don't worry, I'll find it, even in all the murky air and emergency lighting."

Makintay nodded and helped her to the access. While he worked the cover free, Ketrion checked her jumpsuit pockets. "I'm not going out there without a knife," she told him as he turned to her. "I might come across a few of your pirate friends lurking about on the upper levels."

"We might at that," he said, firmly accenting the "we." He patted the pistol at his belt. "This will be useful, and maybe we can find one for you too." He made to climb down into the corridor but she grabbed him.

"No, Mak," she protested. "Please, stay here. It's too dangerous for you out there. If the Empire takes you prisoner again ..." she flinched and looked away. "Pedrin bragged about what they were going to do to you on Coruscant."

"I can imagine," Mak said sourly. He tilted her face up until she met his gaze. "No way are you going out there alone and sick. No problem. I'm a naval ensign," he tapped the insignia on his tunic. "Says so right here. This guy and all his pals are dead. I'll disappear long before anyone gets organized to do an ID check." She frowned uncertainly and he added, "Trust me."

She rolled her eyes beseechingly. "I knew you couldn't go much longer without saying that. All right, all right, lead on then. The sooner we get that medicine, the sooner I can get you back to your cosy little hidey-hole."

"You always did pick on my taste in interior decorating," he complained with mock insult, "I'm the one who grew up in a palace."

"Oh, do pardon me, Your Highness," she said and laughed.

Mak reveled in the sound. He climbed out, then turned and lifted her into his arms, enjoying the feel of her as much as he did her laughter. How long had he waited to hold her, hoped to hear her laugh? Would he be forced to part with her again soon? Should he allow her to risk hiding out with him, being arrested and charged with treason if they found her with him? Conflicting emotions and arguments raced through

his mind as he cautiously led the way to the end of the corridor. There, he paused and peered around the corner.

The methane gas seemed to be clearing, though they were still better off using breath masks. Ahead lay another corridor bathed in dim red light. Bloodied bodies littered the deckplates. Silence was broken only by sporadic, muffled sounds of blaster fire. Ketrion was right — any stray pirates could easily be forced back this way. He and Ketrion best stay alert.

As they entered the main corridor, they were thrown off their feet by the shock wave of an explosion somewhere above and forward of them. "What was that?" Ketrion panted fearfully as she pushed herself to sit beside Makintay.

"Probably standard pirate tactics," he told her. "Booby trap the hatchways. Come to think of it, we'd better avoid the turbolifts too."

Ketrion groaned. "Stairs? Two whole levels?" She was already breathless and frighteningly weak as he helped her back to her feet. "You're not doing any climbing," Mak said. "I'll carry you."

"No, you won't," she refused. "Hang onto that pistol. One of us has to be ready to fight. I'm in no shape to use this knife."

"You?" he teased. "The lady who can take off a bug's wing at a hundred paces? Well ..." He touched his forefinger to the scar below his eye. "Then again, I remember you do have your off days."

She bit back a smile. "You're never going to let me forget that, are you?"

"Nope," he grinned, but the smile faded as he held her gaze and said softly, "All those long months in prison this scar was all I had to remind me of you."

"Oh, Mak," she whispered. Tenderly she traced the mark she'd given him in an accident caused by her jealousy. "If only I'd known where you were. I would have gotten you out of there. I swear it."

"I know you would have." He kissed her fingers. She was trembling with fever chills. "Bur right now it's me that has to get you out of here. Come on. Lean on me."

Gratefully, she did so. Later, halfway up a stairwell, she collapsed and was too weak to struggle free as he insisted on carrying her. At the exit door he lowered her gently to her feet.

"Wait here," he advised. "I'm gonna check around outside. I'm sure I heard something. Sounded like troopers."

"Then I should go and you wait," she panted.

"No," he repeated. He stepped hurriedly through the door before she had a chance to argue further. Thus distracted, he missed spotting the man crouched in hiding in a smoke-filled alcove further

down the corridor. A blaster bolt hissed bare centimeters past his left shoulder and burned a hole in the bulkhead behind him. He instinctively dropped flat and rolled into the shelter on the other side, another volley of blaster bolts chasing him.

"Mak," Ketrian called fearfully. "Are you okay?"

The stairwell door slid open further. Ketrian was not fool enough to show herself but Mak knew her fear for him might drive her out. "Stay there," he shouted across, unable to see her from his position. Maybe the pirates would turn and run if he gave them enough motivation. He leaned out and fired a few shots, catching a quick glimpse of his targets as they tried to make ground toward him through the dim light. Not pirates, and not stormtroopers.

"What the ... ?" Mak muttered, both puzzled and hopeful. Those uniforms ... He risked sticking his head out for another look and very nearly had it shot off. "Hey," he cried, "you're Rebels."

"You bet we are," a familiar voice shouted back. "If you wanna stay in one piece, Imp, you'll toss that pistol into the corridor and come out with your hands up. Now."

"Okay, okay," Mak said happily. "I surrender. You win, Hal. It's me. Mak. I'm coming out. Don't shoot me." Pulling the breath mask from his face and grinning from ear to ear, he threw the pistol down and stepped into the corridor.

"It's me. Makintay," he repeated, holding his hands high over his head. "It wouldn't look good on your record if you blasted your squadron leader, Lieutenant Dallin."

"Mak," the pilot called in delighted recognition. "It is you, isn't it? What are you doing in that uniform?"

"Of course it's me," Mak laughed, coming closer but not daring to lower his arms. "The uniform suits me better than a prison outfit." More men stepped out behind Dallin. "Keto, Erik," Mak greeted. "Intelligence finally sent you guys to the right place for once."

"Intelligence, pah," Corvette co-pilot Keto snorted. "We've been hoping we might run across your path ever since we heard you'd been captured and shipped out. We found this stray all by ourselves." The big burly black man poked the slack-jawed Dallin. "I think you better tell him he can put his hands down before he decided to have you demoted, Hal."

"Uh, yeah, right," Dallin mumbled.

"Mak?" Ketrian called from the stair exit. "What's going on out there?"

"We've been rescued, Ket," he called, moving to her. "Come on out and meet my friends."



Makintay leaned over the Rebel doctor's shoulder and watched as the hypodermic discharged its load into Ketrian's arm. "Are you sure that's the right stuff?" Mak asked anxiously.

The gray-haired Rebel sighed heavily. "I am a medic. I have been specifically trained to treat this poison. Have you?"

"Just checking," Mak said. He turned to Ketrian who was lying comfortably propped up on the sick bay bed. "How do you feel? You still look pale."

Ketrian shook her head in amusement and reached out and patted Makintay's hand. "I feel better than you will if you keep annoying the doctor. You can't expect the antidote to work that fast."

"Why not?" he said, then asked the medic. "How soon will she be back on her feet?"

"Mak," Ketrian chided. "Stop fussing and let the poor man tend the wounded. I'm fine and I'm not taking up this bed when there are others who need it more." She moved to sit up.

"Thank you, Miss Altrone!" the medic smiled down at her. "Perhaps you could have the commander escort you back to your cabin. You should be feeling much better by the time we land on Eyrie."

"Eyrie?"

"Your new home," Mak told her. He bent to slide his arms beneath her and pick her up. "You're gonna love it. Warm and sunny. And we have our very own beach."

"Beach?" she said, pleased. Then she remembered to protest, "Put me down. I can walk."

"Uh-uh," he refused and kissed the top of her head. "Save your energy. You'll need it when the big brass find out about that little gift you're carrying in your pocket for them."

"Oh, the alloy," she chuckled. "That's what started all this and I nearly forgot about it. Did I tell you it could be used to increase the firepower of your X-wings?" He almost came to a halt in surprise as he carried her down the corridor. He stared at her and shook his head. "Well, it can. Not directly, you understand. It's all to do with heat absorption. If we replace the laser cannon tips with it, it should ..."

Listening, Makintay smiled. He wondered how many more improvements she would invent in all the years they would have together — if the Force was with them.



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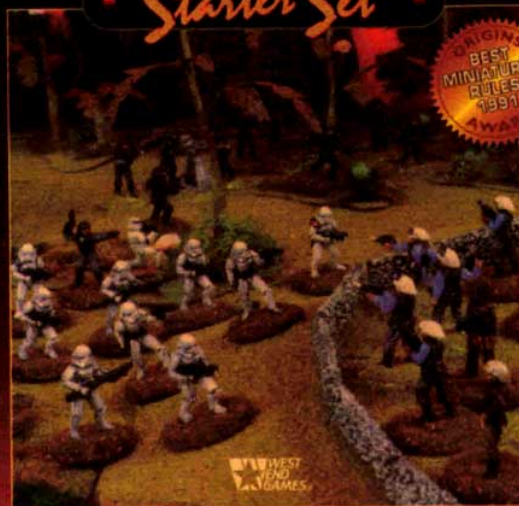
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