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WARS®**

Adventure
JOURNAL

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Original Story by
Michael A. Stackpole
& Timothy Zahn!



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Adventure JOURNAL

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NEW HORIZONS

Join Platt Okeefe for an Imperial Double-Cross

Have you ever wanted to tag along with a famous *Star Wars* smuggler, visiting exotic starports and plunging into fascinating adventures? Now you can, with *Imperial Double-Cross*, a stand-alone scenario for the *Star Wars* roleplaying game from West End Games.

You play Darrik, a young man with dreams greater than his humdrum homeworld. Darrik wants to become a smuggler—you get to help him make that dream a reality. Through a series of short stories and adventures, you follow Platt as you run into stormtroopers, bounty hunters, and sinister Imperial agents.



But first you have to escape from your boring routine of going to the Brentaal Commerce Academy. Do you have what it takes to stow away on Platt's freighter? Your adventures with Platt lead you to a confrontation with bounty hunters in the corridors of Cloud City, then to an Imperial ambush on Tatooine. Although you choose what Darrik does, success depends equally on how you use your skills and a bit of the Force.

The adventure can be played without *Star Wars The Roleplaying Game, Second Edition, Revised & Expanded*. All the rules needed to play are provided in *Imperial Double-Cross*. The adventure teaches the rules during the action. All you need to play is this book, several six-sided dice and a pencil. The adventure is ideal for *Star Wars* fans who have never tried roleplaying before. It introduces them to the rules and to the excitement of adventuring in the *Star Wars* galaxy.

Imperial Double-Cross will be in book, hobby and game stores in June. It retails for \$10.00.

Yoda Trains Jedi in Desktop Adventures

"Try not. Do. Or do not. There is no try."

— Jedi Master Yoda

The heroic struggle between good and evil collides with the Force in *Yoda Stories*, the next challenging installment in a series of easy-to-play Desktop Adventures scheduled to release on Windows 95 CD-ROM this spring from LucasArts Entertainment Company. Set in the time spanning the classic *Star Wars* films *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, *Yoda Stories* chronicles Luke Skywalker's intriguing adventures as he trains with Yoda to become a Jedi Knight and battle the evil Galactic Empire.

Yoda Stories, like its predecessor *Indiana Jones and His Desktop Adventures*, features unique world generator technology capable of creating countless varied, short game scenarios, each designed to be completed in about one hour. Though *Yoda Stories* continues the gameplay philosophy of *Indy Desktop*, its world builder engine has been significantly upgraded to offer more puzzles, characters, locations, weapons and sounds.

"LucasArts specifically designed the Desktop Adventures series to provide gamers with a quicker sense of gratification," says Tom Byron, product marketing manager for *Yoda Stories*. "Novices will enjoy *Yoda Stories* because it's easy to load and play, while seasoned gamers will appreciate its many challenges, which are as vast as the *Star Wars* universe."

Yoda Stories is a collection of short quests in which players encounter a variety of well-known *Star Wars* characters in several familiar environments. In order to successfully complete a game, players must thoroughly explore each world, interact with other characters, collect artifacts, tools and weapons, trade goods, and combat Imperial stormtroopers, bounty hunters, unfriendly locals and a variety of alien creatures.

Each game begins as Luke lands his X-wing in the thick swamplands of the mysterious planet Dagobah. As Luke, the player's initial task is to find Yoda who will send him on a quest and provide a valuable item to assist him in his travels. Luke's trek then takes him to one of several exotic worlds or Imperial strongholds where he must solve a sequence of puzzles to defeat an enemy, rescue a colleague, or obtain an item crucial to the Rebel Alliance.

Throughout *Yoda Stories*, Luke has at his disposal a wealth of weapons, including the Force and a lightsaber. While a lightsaber is always at a player's disposal, the Force can only be obtained in one of two ways: a player must win 10 games or solve a puzzle uncovering a "Force Zone," in which Obi-Wan Kenobi appears and grants

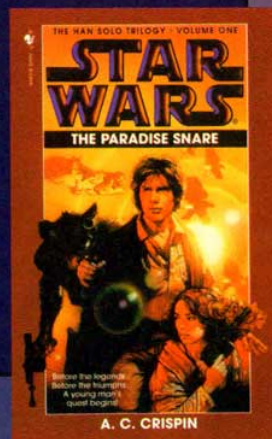
Force powers. Players can then use the Force to retrieve various items from a distance, move rocks or immobilize weak-minded opponents.

Yoda Stories features a unique help system which allows players to call upon the assistance of R2-D2 at any point during the game. As Luke's constant companion, R2-D2 can be placed on any item to provide information valuable to the successful completion of each quest.



Star Wars: The Paradise Snare

This June Bantam Spectra releases the first novel in A.C. Crispin's *Han Solo Trilogy*: *The Paradise Snare*. Set before *Star Wars: A New Hope*, the first book tells the story of how a young Han Solo survives on a sinister world where slavery is the chief export. Don't miss this story about the galaxy's most famous smuggler before he met Luke and Leia. *The Paradise Snare* will be available in book stores across the nation for \$5.99.



In addition to a "save game" feature, *Yoda Stories* also allows players to gain Force Factor Points which are tabulated according to how quickly a game was finished, how many puzzles were solved in order to reach the end, and how difficult it was to defeat Luke's adversaries. The game can also be customized, allowing players to determine world size, combat difficulty and game speed.

As a special bonus, *Yoda Stories* includes Making Magic: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Making of the *Star Wars* Trilogy Special Edition, which chronicles the various digital enhancements and all-new shots that appear in the theatrical release of the *Star Wars Trilogy Special Edition*. The interactive CD-ROM takes fans on a multimedia journey offering commentary by George Lucas and a rare glimpse into the world of Lucasfilm production. Included is exclusive footage of the much-anticipated meeting between Han Solo and Jabba the Hutt in Mos Eisley, as well as various storyboards, historical photographs and production stills from the *Star Wars* Trilogy.

LucasArts Entertainment Company is one of the Lucasfilm companies which develops and publishes interactive entertainment software for a variety of computer and game console platforms.

Corran and Hal Horn were already suspicious about the four strangers poking around Corellia's Treasure Ship Row—two smugglers, one young kid, and a Tunroth. When the bounty hunter Jodo Kast showed up, they had a bad feeling something big was going down. The two CorSec officers easily joined the group posing as travelers looking for work with one of Corellia's criminal organizations.

Corran should have known they were in too deep when he discovered the smugglers and Kast were transporting crates packed with low-grade spice and valuable Durindfire gems. If he was going to find out what illicit deal was really going on, he had no choice but to trust the bounty hunter. He didn't expect he'd lock them up—with the smuggler Haber Trell and the Tunroth—in the dungeon of Zekka Thyne, Black Sun crime boss on Corellia...

SIDETRIP

Part Three

By Michael A. Stackpole

Illustrations by Elizabeth Danforth

Propelled by a poke in the kidneys with a blaster carbine, Corran Horn stumbled into the makeshift cell. He got control of himself fast enough to avoid bumping into his father and turned back quickly, but Jodo Kast swung the wrought-iron gate shut. That effectively sealed the two Horns in a small, dusty grotto that had once been home to a fine collection of wines from throughout the Empire. *At least that's the impression I get from all the broken bottle bits on the floor.*

Corran skewered Kast with the nastiest stare he could muster. "This isn't over between us, Kast."

The bounty hunter regarded Corran placidly, but the trio of Zekka Thyne's henchmen forcing the other man and the Tunroth into a second grotto across the cellar laughed out loud. Their leader, the beefy, red-haired man who had given Corran the shove, sneered at the undercover Corellian Security Force officer. "You're strictly small time, pal. The boss isn't going to give you a crack at this guy. I'll be the one to take care of you."

"Oh?" Corran gave the man a feral grin. "I didn't realize Thyne was into doing favors for the hired help. You're welcome to try me any time."

"He won't get the chance." Kast's voice came low and cold. "I've put up with your prattling and bragging and threats, Corran, and I am not of a mind to let someone else eliminate annoyances from my life." The armored mercenary pointed a finger at the red-headed man. "Touch him and I will consider it a matter of honor to turn you



inside out."

The redhead paled. "Yes, sir."

Another of Thyne's Black Sun underlings closed the other gate and secured it. "They're in. Wanna threaten any of *them*, Nidder?"

The redhead frowned. "Suck vacuum, Somms. You think you're so funny, you can think up jokes while you stand guard on these clowns."

Somms' blond brows arched down toward his nose. "They're in here secure, they don't need guarding."

Kast shook his head. "No, not in here, of course not, but outside the room, on the first stair landing. There you can hear commotion from in here or the main floor and be able to respond."

Nidder shoved his blaster carbine into Somms' hands. "You heard him."

Corran smiled. "Just what I expected, Kast. You want someone stationed between you and me."

Kast grabbed the grate's iron bars and shook it once, hard. The metal rattled loudly and, startled, Corran involuntarily took a step back. Nidder, Somms and the third Black Sunner started laughing, but their mirth didn't stop Corran from hearing Kast's reply to his remark.

"I've no fear of you, Corran. I look forward to you getting out of here because with Thyne sending his blaster-boys off to ambush Maranne and Riiij, I'm pretty much assured that I'm all that stands between you and your freedom. You may be good—you may even be better than I give you credit for being—but I'm still better."

Corran's left temple throbbed from where Kast had jammed his blaster pistol against it. "Keep thinking that, Kast, and don't be surprised when I prove you wrong."

"Come see me, Corran, when your boasts are not idle." Kast turned and herded the rest of the men from the small room. An old wooden door closed behind him and clicked shut.

Corran stared after him for a moment, then spun on his heel and swore. "Sithspawn! That son of a rancor played me for an idiot." He looked up at his father. "I'm sorry, Dad. I really made a mess of things."

The elder Horn's hazel eyes narrowed. "How do you plot our predicament being your fault?"

"I should have known there was something wrong." Corran scrubbed his hands over his face. "Their ship, the *Hopskip*, is a piece of trash that Crisk wouldn't use to haul dead bodies, much

less valuable merchandise. The others had no idea what was in their cargo hold and it turned out to be full of *sleight* boxes."

Hal frowned. "*Sleight* boxes are hardly state-of-the-art for smugglers these days. It's almost as if they wanted to be caught."

"Right, exactly." Corran leaned against a fiberplast wine rack built into the grotto's wall. "Kast told Thyne the boxes are empty, but I found some with junked holo-seals and popped them. One box had spice—strictly joy-dust grade, but spice nonetheless—and the other had a fortune in uncut durindfire gems. Even if we figure that one box of gems is it and the other 199 are spice, Crisk can use the gems to buy an army and use the spice to flood the market and kill Black Sun's profits."

Hal Horn turned a wooden wine-box over and sat. "So what you're telling me is that we have non-smugglers bringing in two hundred *sleight* boxes and they have no idea what's in them. You find gems and spice in two and the shipment is headed for Crisk. Crisk himself can't put together that sort of shipment, so he has a backer. Who?"

Corran frowned. "The gems come from Tatooine. Isn't there a Hutt out there working the spice trade?"

"Jappa or Jadda or something like that, yes. He's powerful there, but expanding into Corellia? That's too bold a move." Hal's mouth opened, then he shook his head. He motioned his son aside and looked past Corran toward the other cell. "Haber Trell, how long have you known Jodo Kast?"

The *Hopskip*'s pilot stood and grasped the bars of his prison. "I don't know him. He's along for the ride."

"Yes." Hal leaned back against the wall and laughed lightly.

"That's it."

"If Thyne doesn't react well to our refusing his hospitality, you don't want to be in the blast radius."

and gems."

"No, Corran, Kast isn't the mastermind, he's what's being smuggled into Corellia."

Corran's jaw shot open. "It doesn't make any sense."

Corran shook his head. "You're saying Kast is behind the shipment going to Crisk? But that makes no sense since he's told Thyne's people where to find the boxes with the spice

"No?" Hal gave Corran an appraising glance—of the sort that in the past had warned Corran that his father thought he was being lazy in his thinking. "What do you make of Kast's last remark?"

Corran thought back. "He was taunting me."

"Agreed, but what did he tell us by taunting you?"

The sigh came up all the way from Corran's toes. "He told us that he was all that stood between us and freedom—that Thyne's guys are all gone. He told me to come find him when we got free." Corran slapped his forehead with the heel of his hand. "I should have seen that."

"You did."

"Yeah, but it took you to point it out to me." Corran shook his head and toed the neck of a broken bottle. "There are times when my brain just doesn't work."

"No, Corran, your brain works fine." Hal kept his tone even, but pointed a finger at his son. "You just need to focus your thinking. You're angry because of how Kast tricked you, and I think you were a bit afraid for how I was doing."

"Right on both counts."

"It's understandable, son, and appreciated in the case of your concern for me, but you can't let your emotions and incidental things deflect you."

"I know that, Dad. I really do." He smiled at his father. "I try to follow your example, but you're better at it than I am."

"I have a few years on you, Corran."

"It's more than just the years, Dad." Corran winced. "I never would have read Kast's message right the way you did."

The elder Horn's eyes twinkled. "I have to admit to you, Corran, I cheated this time out."

"What?"

Hal pointed past him. "Up there, on the bars Kast shook, see what that little thing is, will you?"

Corran turned and looked closely at the bars. Where Kast had grasped one in his right hand, Corran saw a small black cylinder about a hand-span in length and about the diameter of a blaster-bolt. He freed it from the bar with a tug, leaving an adhesive residue on the wrought-iron, and felt a small button beneath his thumb, near the cylinder's tip.

"Be careful with that, Corran."

The younger man nodded and hit the button. All but invisible in the half-light, a delicate monomolecular blade slid from the cylinder.

der. "I know what it is, and I remember what happened to Lefty Dindo." Corran cut carefully down with the blade and through the lock's bolt. He retracted the stiletto's fragile blade and swung the door open. "Freeing us from this cell is a bit easier than Lefty trying to use one of these to free himself from binders."

Hal Horn paused in the door cell's doorway. "You might want to cut us a couple of the bars to use as weapons. Somms might not be the brightest of Black Sunners, but I think he's going to take some convincing before he lets us out of here."

"Agreed." Extending the blade again, Corran cut a pair of 50-centimeter-long bars from the bottom of the grate and handed one to his father.

Hal swung the club against his left hand with a meaty thwack. "This will work. Now how do we lure Somms in?"

Corran squinted at the room's closed door. "You figure Somms as someone who will raise an alarm immediately, or will wait to report success?"

"After Nidder's giving him the duty? He'll act, then report."

"That's my read, too. The landing was ten steps up and we're far enough away from the office that if we make some noise, no one will notice, I think." Corran smiled. "I'll do the hard work if you want to do the yelling."

"Yelling works for me." Hal Horn smiled. "Be careful."

"Right." Corran walked over to the wooden door and set the length of the blade to a half-centimeter shy of the door's depth, then cut very cautiously. He scored a circle in the center of it. Once he had the circle taken care of, he cut lines heading out from it as if a child drawing a sunburst. Lastly he carved little semicircles around the hinges and the lock.

He closed the blade and handed it to his father in exchange for one of the clubs. "Okay, here goes nothing."

"Wait!"

Corran looked over at Haber Trell. "What do you want?"

"Don't leave us in here. If you're busting out, we want to go, too."

"I don't think so, Trell." The flesh tightened around Corran's eyes. "Even if you're twice the fighter that you are a smuggler, you'll still be in the way."

Hal nodded in agreement, but tossed them the molecular stiletto anyway. "Corran's right, you won't want to come with us. We'll head out and deal with Thyne. Give us a couple of minutes, then go fast. Steal one of Thyne's airspeeders and fly. Head back to your ship and



get out of the system."

Trell nodded. "Thanks."

Corran frowned at his father, then pointed at Trell. "And, listen, don't put that cargo back on your ship. You don't want to be shipping spice around."

Trell shivered and Corran took that to be an eloquent answer to his caution.

"Ready, Dad?"

"All set."

Corran smiled and ran backward at the door. He leaped up and hit it smack in the middle with his back. The door exploded into fragments around, spraying large chunks of wood into the narrow corridor outside the makeshift prison. Corran crashed down amid it all, yelping involuntarily instead of letting forth with a great oof as he had planned. *No jagged edges, but the debris sure is lumpy.*

Hal's voice flooded through the dying echoes of the door's crisp crack. "Keep that Tunroth away from me!"

With his eyes nearly shut, Corran saw Somms come flying down

the stairs to the landing. The man kept his back to the stone wall as he crept toward the cell, then he brandished the blaster carbine and prepared to rush into the cell. To do that he prepared to pivot on his right foot, fill the doorway, then go in.

As Somms' left foot came around in the pivot move, Corran caught it in his left hand. Letting Somms' momentum pull him up into a sitting position, Corran brought his metal truncheon down on the top of the man's pelvis. Somms started to cry out, more in surprise than pain it seemed, when Hal appeared in the doorway and clipped him with a fist in the head.

Somms collapsed to the floor and did not move.

Corran frowned at his father. "Why cut the club if you aren't going to use it?"

"Didn't need it." Hal snaked the blaster carbine from beneath Somms, flicked the selector lever over to stun, and pumped a blue bolt into him. The Black Sunner twitched once, then lay gently still. "I expect he'll still feel the blow you dealt him when he wakes up."

"We can but hope." Corran rolled him over and unfastened his blaster belt. Donning it himself, Corran pulled the blaster from it and checked the power pack. He glanced up at his father. "You going to leave that set on stun?"

"I haven't noticed that killshots fly any more true than stunbolts."

"True, but there's just so many more forms to fill out when we bring them back alive."

"Don't even joke about that, Corran." His father gave him a reproving glance that made Corran feel about as big as a hologame piece. "Set it on stun and you won't regret accidentally hitting a friend."

"Yes, sir." Corran flicked the pistol's selector lever to stun and stood up. He waved his father toward the door. "Time to get Thyne. Age before beauty."

"Brains before impudence." Hal tossed a quick salute to Haber Trel and Rathe. "Luck to you, but keep your heads down and get out of here fast. If Thyne doesn't react well to our refusing his hospitality, you don't want to be in the blast radius."



Arl Nidder matched Jodo Kast's long-legged stride as best he could. The bounty hunter impressed him, but the armor impressed

him more. *Now if I had a suit of that Mandalorian armor I'd be pretty tough. I'd be able to get a lot of light-years between me and the rest of the Bromstaad boys. Maybe I'd hire out to do wetwork for some Moff, or maybe even Prince Xizor.*

His ruminations ended abruptly as they reentered Thyne's office. Nidder liked the office because it seemed like a museum to him. He'd never been in a real museum, but he knew they were

places where old and valued things were collected. He took it as a mark of pride that Thyne kept him close enough to protect the crime lord's prized possessions.

Surrounded by beauty though he was, Thyne did

not look happy. The holoprojector plate built into his desk showed a view of Thyne's fortress and the surrounding valley in translucent green detail. Moving around the area were small orange icons that Nidder had seen in security simulations, but only when they were running worst case scenarios to scare the wits out of new recruits.

Nidder's jaw dropped. "Are those really stormtroopers?"

Thyne nodded, then snapped a comlink on. "All personnel report to battle stations. This is not a drill. We have hostile deployment to the north and east. Move it, I want all defenses reported as operational in thirty seconds."

Nidder and Deif started toward the room's partially ajar doors, but Thyne stopped them with a snarl. "Not you two. Not that I don't trust you, Kast."

Kast raised his hands. "But you don't trust me. I'll remind you of this next time we negotiate a price for my services." The long, tall bounty hunter pulled a chair around where he could watch Thyne on the right and the doors at the left, but did so in such a casual way that it took Nidder a moment or two to recognize exactly what he was doing. Kast looked directly at Nidder, then calmly crossed his right leg over his left.

Nidder shifted uncomfortably and got the distinct impression that the only way he'd get a suit of that armor was to be lucky enough to be around when someone else killed Kast and peeled him out of it. Of course, the thought didn't form itself exactly that way

Nidder even began to imagine that Kast might take him on as an apprentice, or even a partner.

in Nidder's brain. He just knew he didn't want *that* suit of armor, just one like it.

His momentary feeling of inferiority vanished as he realized Kast wasn't as smart as he thought himself to be. If the mercenary had turned his chair around he still could have watched the desk and doors, but also could see the painting of frolicking nudes on the wall. As it was, Nidder could fully appreciate it—though he was at a loss to explain why the artist had included gardening implements in the painting—and smiled to let Kast know what he was missing.

The hologram shifted to a schematic of the house, with the corridor outside the door rendered in yellow light that blinked on and off. Thyne hissed furiously. "Someone is in the hall. The Imps have already infiltrated the building." He pointed Nidder and Deif toward the door.

Kast started speaking in a loud voice. "Of course, handling things in a diplomatic manner works best." The bounty hunter pointed toward two spots along the wall where the Bromstaad mercenaries could cover the doorway with a murderous cross fire. "Then again, there are times when one has to be *undiplomatic*."

Nidder marveled at how Kast's voice covered the sound of his approach to the door. He stopped exactly where Kast wanted him to and drew his blaster pistol. He set it to kill and waited, but shot Kast a wink and a nod. When the nod was returned, Nidder even began to imagine that Kast might take him on as an apprentice, or even a partner. *He's seen how good I am. He knows what he'll be getting when we work together.*

The exploding of the lower half of one door interrupted Nidder's fantasy. Through the smoke and spray of fiery debris came the smallest of the prisoners they'd left below. Coming up into a crouch from the somersault that carried him through the hole, the brown-haired man raised a blaster pistol and triggered two shots. The first blue bolt missed, but the second caught Deif in the stomach, wreathing him in azure energy.

Nidder brought his pistol in line with the little man. *He doesn't see me. He doesn't know I'm here. His mistake.* Nidder started to tighten his finger on the trigger when he felt himself moving backward. He felt his shoulders hit the wall, then his head rebounded from it. Through the exploding stars he saw a second bolt flash out from the blaster built into the thigh of the Mandalorian armor.

In the nanosecond it took for the scarlet bolt to sizzle through his

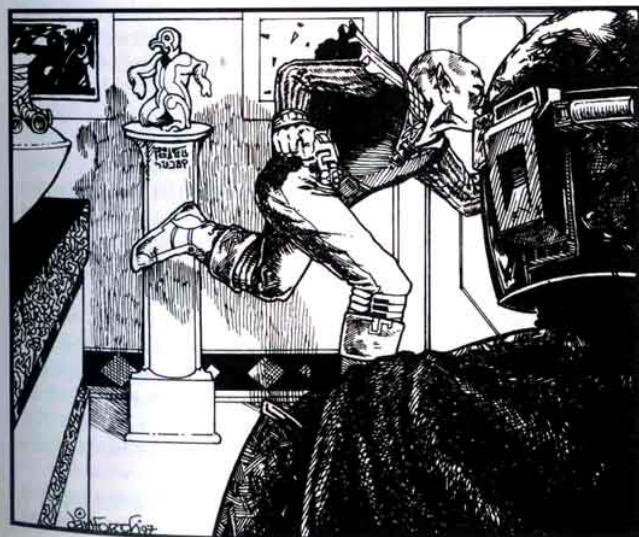
chest, Nidder realized Kast had positioned him so carefully and precisely because the bounty hunter wanted to kill him. Nidder did not feel outrage at having been so easily betrayed and slaughtered, nor did he, in his dying moment, grant Kast a modicum of respect for having worked so coolly to slay him. No, for Arl Nidder, dying as he slid to the floor, there was only one final thought. *Now if I had a set of that armor...*



Corran saw the red bolts burn by on his left and swung around in that direction as his target flopped to the ground. At the back of the room, Corran saw Thyne running for where a wall panel slid back to reveal a black recess. He started to track the fleeing crime lord, but pulled his pistol back as Kast's head and shoulders eclipsed Thyne. *He's getting away.*

Corran glanced back at the door. "All clear."

Hal stepped through, looked at Nidder's body, then at Kast. "That's another round of drinks on me by way of thanks."



The bounty hunter uncrossed his legs and stood. "Pest control," Corran pointed at the dark opening in the wall. "Thyne went out through there."

Hal approached it cautiously. "Looks clear."

Corran appropriated the blaster carbine the man he'd shot had been carrying and set it for stun. "Let's go find him."

He turned to Kast. "Come along. We could use your help. There's a bounty on Thyne. We're going to get him, but the bounty can be yours." Corran looked around the room at the garish decorations and horrific art. "It might even be sufficient to buy some real art and offset memories of this place."

"You tempt me very much." Kast shrugged. "However, someone with such inferior taste in art should not be hard to catch. I would join you, but I'm a simple bounty hunter and I still have a job to do."

Despite having no read on Kast, Corran knew he was lying. He raised an eyebrow. "I don't believe you're a simple bounty hunter."

"Nor do I believe you and your father are simple hoodlums looking for underworld employment." Kast crossed to the desk and punched a button on the holographic display unit's control panel. A view of the surrounding area came up and Corran saw small orange icons moving in swarms over the terrain. "These are Imperial stormtroopers. They're likely to make things uncomfortable if you don't get going. You don't want to be caught here."

"Neither do you."

"I won't be."

Corran nodded. "Another time, then."

"Perhaps." The finality in Kast's voice told Corran there never would be a next time, and somehow he didn't find that prospect cause for anything but relief.



Corran rejoined his father just inside the entrance to Thyne's escape passage. The narrow corridor had been melted through the native stone with a gentle slope downward. Every fifteen meters or so it cut back on itself, forcing the Horns to advance carefully. The brevity of the passages meant any firefight would be at close quarters and extremely deadly.

Corran clutched his blaster carbine in both hands and snuggled it against his right flank. It had been modified slightly after its

arrival from the factory by the inclusion of a pinpoint glow rod attached to the left side of the barrel, and more work had been done on it to make it a what was known in street parlance as a *hotshot*. The trigger guard had been cut away, leaving the trigger free and the weapon liable to be fired when the trigger caught on clothing or was otherwise jarred. Using a *hotshot* was supposed to indicate how tough a person was, but it only took one view of the results of an unsafe *hotshot* pistol being tucked into a waistband to convince most folks it was a foolhardy modification.

Of course, no one is going to tuck a carbine into his pants. Corran smiled slightly, then nodded as his father signaled him to come forward. Remaining low, Corran came around the corner of the corridor, then dropped to the ground as a red blaster bolt sizzled through the air above him.

He shot back twice, but neither blue bolt hit anything but stone. "Corridor widens out into a natural cave. We're probably at the rear of the property."

"Okay, take it slow. Lose the light."

Corran flicked off the pinpoint glow rod and closed his eyes. He waited for a count of ten for his eyes to get adjusted to the darkness, then opened them. Bioluminescent lifeforms—lichen and the things that ate it—gave off a purplish glow that allowed Corran to make out shadowed shapes. Some were regular and appeared to be duraplast boxes of varying sizes, while the larger, more menacing ones were curiously hunched and gnarled stone formations. There seemed to be little physical modification of the cave; the floor remained uneven and boxes had been wedged in various places where space allowed. Corran assumed the previous owner had kept the cave in its natural state and Thyne had stored in it precious or vital cargoes that he did not trust to have any place else.

Corran crept forward, remaining low. He reached the first box and in the faint glow made out the stenciled Imperial legend proclaiming it to be full of blaster carbines. He would have opened it, but the scent of spice lingered strongly enough in the immediate area that he knew what it really contained. *Either Thyne is just storing spice in this, or Black Sun has some backdoor Imperial connections that are allowing them to ship this stuff in past Customs. I'll have to ask Loor about that.*

Corran whistled short and sharp, then heard his father close the gap between them. For an older man, and one as big as he was, Hal moved pretty quietly. *I felt his presence before I picked up that slight*

Thyne jammed the gun harder into Corran's jaw.

"You were stupid enough to join CorSec, let's not be stupid enough to die for it."

scuff of his sole against the stone. Oh, Thyne, you don't know who you're messing with.

A return whistle sent Corran forward. He moved slowly and carefully, wending his way from one dark rock to another. He did his best to avoid those that were glowing because he didn't want to silhouette himself against one. He took great care to make as little noise as possible, and smiled as he hunkered down

behind a large black rock.

Corran looked back toward his father and was set to whistle when he heard the scrape of metal on a rock. He glanced up and triggered one shot from the blaster carbine. The azure bolt streaked past Thyne as he leaped down from a large dolmen, then Thyne's right heel caught Corran in the shoulder and spun him to the ground. His blaster carbine bounced away, firing off two random shots. He felt Thyne's left arm tighten around his neck and then he was hauled to his feet as the alien straightened up, his body shielding Thyne from fire.

The muzzle of a blaster pistol ground in under the right corner of Corran's jaw. A glow rod lit up, bathing the right side of Corran's face with light. The muscles on the arm around his neck bulged, constricting his breathing and killing any thoughts of struggling.

Thyne growled loudly, sending angry echoes of his voice throughout the cavern. "Your partner is dead if you don't show yourself in five seconds."

Those five seconds took an eternity to pass for Corran, and he filled it with an unending series of *if-onlies*. *If only I had tucked the blaster pistol into my waistband when I took the carbine. If only I had the stiletto. If only I'd been more quiet in my advance....* Self-recriminations clogged his mind and fed the despair slowly creeping into his head.

Then his father stood up and the glow rod on his carbine burned to life. Illuminated by its backlight, Hal Horn stood twenty meters away, the carbine held steady in his right hand. He presented Thyne with a profile—offering him a target other than Corran. The expression on his father's face bore a gravity Corran had not seen



since his mother's funeral. Hal's eyes seemed purged of anger and fear, but full of intent.

"It is my duty to inform you, Zekka Thyne, that I am Inspector Hal Horn of the Corellian Security Force and you are under arrest. I have a valid warrant for your apprehension for violations of smuggling laws. Let your hostage go and stop making things more difficult for yourself."

Thyne's chuckle came low and ringing with contempt. "No, this is the way it's going to go. You're going to remove your finger from the trigger and lower your blaster."

"I can't do that."

"You will do that." Thyne tightened his hold on Corran's neck. "My eyesight is good enough even in full darkness here that I can tell if your finger so much as twitches toward pulling the trigger. And my reflexes are good enough that I'll pump three shots through your partner's head before you complete that move. You may get me, but your partner will be dead. Do it, *now!*"

Hal frowned. "Okay, don't do anything rash."

"Don't, Hal! Shoot him...."

Thyne jammed the gun harder into Corran's jaw. "You were stupid enough to join CorSec, let's not be stupid enough to die for it."

Hal's left hand came up. "Okay, I'm doing what you said. I'm pulling my finger off the trigger."

Corran tried to shake his head to tell his father not to comply with Thyne's order. *He has to know that the second he disarms himself Thyne will shoot me and then shoot him. I may already be dead, but no reason for him to die, too.*

Hal Horn's right index finger slowly unhooked itself from the blaster carbine's trigger. As it did so the glow rod's backlight washed all color from the digits. The finger straightened and Corran saw bones pointing at him. *It's over. We'll both be skeletons left here to molder forever.*

Then the blue bolt shot from the carbine's muzzle. The air crackled and Corran's hair stood on end as the bolt sizzled past him and hit Thyne. The blue nimbus resulting from the shot sent a tingle through Corran's body and weakened him enough that he fell to his hands and knees. Behind him Thyne's body hit the ground with a heavy thump accompanied by the light clatter of the blaster pistol dancing off into the darkness.

Hal dropped to one knee beside his son, then pumped another stun round into Thyne. "Are you okay, son?"

Corran sat back on his heels. "I will be." He rubbed at the side of his neck with his right hand. "He gave me a bruise to balance the one Kast gave me. Having blaster bruises on my head and neck is an experience I could have done without."

"Beats having the bolts hit home, as our friend here discovered."

Corran looked at Thyne in the light from Hal's carbine. The area around Thyne's right eye had begun to swell indicating where the bolt had hit him. "How did you...?"

Hal smiled. "The little gold diamond in his eye gave me a great target. I just focused on it—setting aside my concerns for you so I could—and hit him."

He frowned at his father. "No, not that. You had your finger clear of the trigger and the gun fired anyway. How did you do that? The spice vapor back there give you some sort of telekinetic power or something?"

"Me, move something with the power of my mind?" Hal shook his head and brandished the carbine. "This is a hotshot. At the same time I pulled my index finger off the trigger, I was able to bring my

middle finger up and stroke the trigger. Nothing special or unusual, just sneaky."

Despite the smile on his father's face, and the cold logic of his answer, Corran couldn't shake the feeling that his father wasn't telling the entire truth. *He probably doesn't want me to know how chancy his move was, but at least he had the guts to make it. I wouldn't have wanted to be in his boots for all the spice in the galaxy.*

Hal handed Corran Thyne's blaster pistol, then hauled Thyne to his feet and tossed him over his shoulder. "I can feel a breeze from ahead. We're almost clear."

Corran retrieved his own blaster carbine and carried it by the pistol-grip in his left hand while using the blaster pistol in his right hand and its glow rod to light their way out. "I see something up ahead. Stars and Selonia out there."

The two CorSec agents got clear of the cavern fairly easily. The mouth of it had been blocked with a lattice of iron bars with a door in it similar to those of the prison they'd escaped earlier. Corran shot the lock open then led the way out into a small grassy clearing.

Hal laid Thyne out on the ground and brought his blaster carbine to hand again. "Check him for a comlink. We can call for transport to come get us."

Corran knelt over the body and began to search it when a vaguely mechanical sounding voice snapped an order at him.

"Drop the weapons, hands in the air." The first of eight stormtroopers emerged like ghosts from the trees surrounding the clearing. Their armor bone-white in the reflected moonlight, they made themselves very easy targets. The fact that each of them brandished a blaster carbine prompted Corran to raise his hands. *I can't imagine any of them has a weapon set on stun.*

Hal lowered his carbine to the ground carefully. "I'm Inspector Hal Horn and this is my partner, Corran Horn. We're with CorSec. We've just apprehended Zekka Thyne."

The leader of the stormtroopers approached Hal. "Looks as if you are trying to help Thyne escape and are lying to me."

Corran frowned. "What a stupid conclusion to draw. I don't know why you've got that big helmet to protect your head because there clearly isn't anything you're putting to good use under it."

The stormtrooper swung his gun to cover Corran. "On your feet, Black Scummer."

Corran glanced at his father as he stood. "I guess we're their prisoners."

The stormtrooper shook his head. "Who said anything about taking prisoners?"

Hal's voice came low and calm, but full of intensity and power. "I think I would want a specific order from a superior about shooting us. I think to operate otherwise would seriously jeopardize your career, and possibly your life."

"Two CorSec agents, a handful of smugglers and a bounty hunter who isn't a bounty hunter aren't going to be enough to bring Black Sun down."

The stormtrooper reoriented himself toward Hal and Corran thought for a moment he'd have to jump the man to prevent him from shooting Hal. Corran would have gone for him, too, because he'd seen countless bodies that had ended up dead for making

remarks that were no where near as confrontational. What held him back was the way the man's movements slowed as he watched Hal. The stormtrooper wasn't reacting to the tone or challenge in the words, he was clearly considering their full import.

Will wonders never cease?

A comlink clicked inside the man's helmet and the murmurs of conversation hummed into the night. Corran smiled and shrugged at his father. Hal winked back and allowed himself the start of a grin.

The stormtrooper's head came up. "It'll be a minute or two wait."

Hal nodded, then jerked a thumb back toward the cave mouth. "You'll want to have your squad secure that cavern. It leads back into Thyne's office. Your people can get inside and hit the towers from below because if shooting starts, your people are going to die taking that place."

The stormtrooper thought for a moment, then sent half his squad forward. The remaining trio set themselves up to watch the clearing perimeter while the leader kept his blaster on Corran and his father. The night air had become a bit chilled and the fact that he'd been sweating earlier became readily apparent to Corran.

"Mind if I lower my arms? I'm getting cold."

The stormtrooper shook his head. "You can get colder."

"Nice night, isn't it?" Corran gave the man a toothy grin and hiked his arms up high.

A soldier in the olive drab uniform of the Imperial Army broke

through the brush, flanked by two more stormtroopers. The eight bar box with rank cylinders on each side worn on his chest proclaimed him to be a Colonel. His dark-eyed gaze flicked between father and son, then lingered on Thyne's body. "Zekka Thyne. You may put your hands down. I take it you must be the CorSec agents."

Hal nodded. "Hal Horn. This is my son, Corran. I have a disc that identifies me in my shoe. It also contains the open warrant CorSec has for searching this place and arresting Thyne. I can dig it out for you, if you wish, to prove who we are."

"I'm Colonel Veers and I believe you are who you say you are. My source indicated you would be coming out somewhere in this vicinity and even suggested we might want to backtrack you." He glanced at the stormtrooper who had threatened to kill them. "Apparently my reasons for dispatching this squad around here were not fully understood."

Hal shrugged. "No one got lit up, so no problem."

Corran pointed to Thyne. "We've gotten the nastiest of them out of there. There aren't many people left in there and, by now, they should all be Thyne's people."

Hal nodded. "You can safely consider it a free-fire zone."

"I'll remember that if they give us a reason to go in." Veers smiled. "You didn't happen to notice any signs of Rebel agents or Rebellion supplies in there by any chance?"

"No, but as a CorSec Inspector, I do believe it is within my discretion to ask for assistance in serving a warrant and apprehending suspects." Hal looked at the hillsides on either side of the valley. "I should check with my liaison officer, but calling back to Crescent City from here would be impossible, so I guess I'm on my own."

Veers shook his head. "Pity."

"Indeed." Hal waved a hand toward the cavern. "Colonel, if you and your squad would care to assist me, I would be most appreciative."

"We always like working closely with local officials." Veers gave Hal a nod and pointed his stormtroopers at the black hole. "You heard him. No waiting for them to shoot first, we're clear to go."

The stormtroopers jogged forward in a clatter of armor. Veers handed Hal a comlink. "Your transit code word is 'masterpiece.' At our perimeter just commandeer one of our landspeeders to get your prisoner out of here."

"Thanks." Hal, looking back toward the cave, pointed at a stream of green laser bolts coming from one of the mansion's towers toward the ground. "Looks like your war has started."

"Then we'll get in quickly and end it." Veers gave them a brief salute and ran off with his men.

Corran looked after the Imperial officer. "I thought Imps believed in leading from the rear."

"Not all of them, it seems." Hal grabbed Thyne's hands and hauled the man up onto his back. "Get the ankles there, will you?"

"Sure." Corran grabbed Thyne's ankles and trailed behind his father. "So, is this the end of Black Sun on Corellia?"

"I doubt it. Two CorSec agents, a handful of smugglers and a bounty hunter who isn't a bounty hunter aren't going to be enough to bring Black Sun down. Even if the Colonel and his people level that place, Prince Xizor still has enough power and the resources to restore it to what it was before, and you have to know there are countless individuals willing to take Thyne's place."

Corran shivered. "Yeah, I'm afraid you're right. How depressing."

"Depressing?" Hal turned and looked back at his son. "It's not depressing. As long as there are Horns to catch criminals, Prince Xizor is welcome to send all he cares to in our direction."

"And you don't find that prospect depressing?" Corran frowned at him. "If it isn't depressing, what is it?"

"I think it's obvious, son." Hal's hearty laugh blotted out the whines of blasters being fired back and forth. "It's job security. It may not be easy work, and it's dangerous quite a bit of the time, but it's work that holds evil at bay and there's nothing better you can devote your life to doing."

Corran nodded and recalled a bit of conversation he'd had with Rijj Winward. "And what will we do when the only evil left in the galaxy is the Empire?"

"That's a good question, Corran, a very good question." Weariness seemed to creep into his father's voice. "It's one that each person must answer for himself. I just hope, when the time comes for me to answer it, I'll have the wisdom to choose the right answer and the strength to act upon it."

"Me, too."

"You will, Corran, no doubt about that." Hal gave him a wink and a nod. "When the time comes, you'll see the light and those wallowing in darkness who move to oppose you will regret that decision throughout what little remains of their lives."



Part 4

By Timothy Zahn

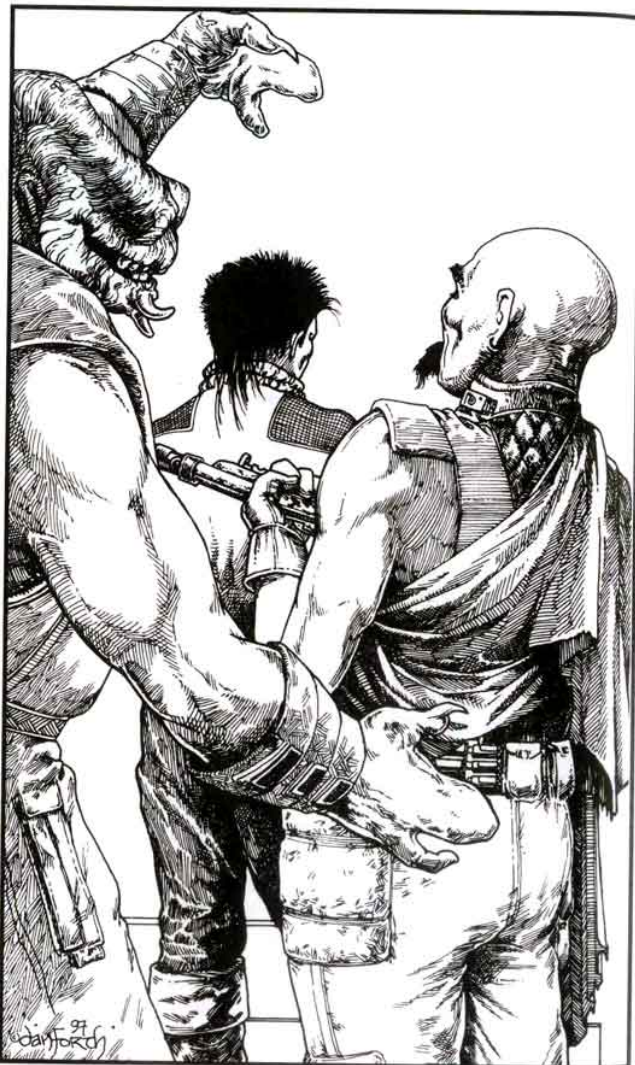
Illustrations by Elizabeth Danforth

Zekka Thyne's airspeeders were stored on the low end of a split-level section of the fortress roof, inside a bunker-like structure with a single entrance from the stronghold proper and a single hangar bay-style exit. Two guards were on duty, but their attention was turned outward, toward the distant blaster fire coming from the woods around the fortress, and neither noticed the shadowy bulk of Rathe Palror moving quietly up behind them. A pair of deceptively gentle-looking hand movements from the Tunroth, and both guards temporarily lost the ability to notice anything.

"I'll have to get you to teach me that trick," Trell commented, ducking down to peer through the window of a likely looking airspeeder. The vehicle looked ordinary enough, but in the dim light he could see the add-on weapons control board tucked coily away under the main panel on the passenger side. Perfect. "We'll take this one. You still have that molecular stiletto?"

"Here," the Tunroth rumbled, pausing in his task of stripping the guards' weapons to dig the slender cylinder from his belt. "Should we not take one of the armored vehicles instead?" he added, pointing his chin horns toward one of the three KAAC Freerunners parked near the wide exit opening as he lobbed the weapon in Trell's direction.

"They're a little obvious for in-town driving," Trell told him as he caught the stiletto. Extending the almost invisible blade, he began carefully cutting around the airspeeder's lock mechanism. "This



one's got some hidden firepower—means it's probably got some hidden armor, too."

By the time Palror joined him, he had the door open and was sitting in the driver's seat. "Yeah, this'll do just fine," he said, pulling the weapons board out for a closer look. "Are you hunters any good with non-traditional stuff like light laser cannon and concussion grenade launchers?"

"A *shturlan* can work with all weapons," Palror said, dropping his appropriated blaster rifles onto the rear seat and peering in over Trell's shoulder.

"Good—you're hired," Trell said, starting to strap himself in. "I'll drive."

Trell wasn't sure what exactly was happening out in the woods surrounding Thyne's fortress. But whatever it was, it definitely seemed to be getting worse. The forest was alive with the muted flickers of multiple blaster fire, the light peeking coyly out through gaps in the leaf canopy on at least two sides of the stronghold. "I sure hope they're too busy out there to bother with us," he muttered as he eased the airspeeder through the opening and onto the landing pad just outside the bunker. "Corran and Hal are going to have their hands full getting through all that."

"But less trouble than it could be," Palror said. "Do you not remember? Thyne has dispersed many of his people on errands."

Trell grimaced. "Yeah, I remember. One group to go grab our cargo, the other to snatch Maranne and Riij."

"But at Jodo Kast's recommendation," Palror reminded him. "If Kast is truly here to oppose Thyne, then he will not allow harm to come to our companions."

"I don't buy that," Trell growled. "Even if Corran and Hal were right about that, it doesn't mean he cares slork droppings about the rest of us. *And* that assumes they were right, which we don't have any proof of. Personally, I'd say there's an even chance that Thyne and Kast cooked up the whole thing together to expose a couple of undercover CorSec agents and lure 'em into a trap. In which case, they're probably already dead."

"If so, then we should be likewise," Palror pointed out. "Who are we that Kast would allow us to escape?"

"Yeah, well, we haven't exactly escaped yet," Trell reminded him tartly, eying the open air off the edge of the landing pad with stomach-churning apprehension. But procrastination wouldn't gain them anything except increased odds that someone inside the

fortress would notice they were missing and raise the alarm.

And besides—thanks to Kast—Maranne and Riiij were walking into a trap out there at the Mynock's Haven cantina. Had possibly already walked into it. Riiij he wasn't so much worried about—the guy was a Rebel agent and not his responsibility. But Maranne was his partner, and he was shrugged if he'd abandon her to Thyne's thugs.

"We waste time," Palror rumbled at his side. "I will not leave Riiij in danger."

"Likewise," Trell said, keying in the repulsorlifts and throwing power to the drive. He wouldn't leave Maranne, and Palror wouldn't leave Riiij; and as the fortress roof dropped away beneath them he realized with hindsight's usual clarity that Kast had probably set up the various groupings with precisely those different loyalties in mind.

Though to what end, he still didn't know. And wasn't sure he wanted to.

He was still mulling over the question thirty seconds later when the two TIE bombers dropped neatly into formation beside him.



They'd been sitting in the Mynock's Haven for nearly half an hour; and in Riiij Winward's opinion, it was yet another bust. "They're not coming," he said quietly to the woman on the other side of the small table. "Whoever we were supposed to meet here, they aren't coming."

"I think you're right," Maranne Darmic growled back, scratching viciously at the nape of her neck. "Score another big fat zero for the great and marvelous Jodo Kast."

"The greatly incompetent, you mean," Riiij said, looking with distaste at the yellow and red jebwa flower in the center of their table. Kast's datacard had specified the flower as their identification marker, but so far none of the cantina's other patrons had given it a second glance. Considering the clientele, most of their first glances had been humiliating enough.

"Yeah," Maranne agreed. "It makes you seriously wonder about his chances of getting Trell and Palror and the others out of Zekka Thyne's place."

"It makes *me* wonder if he even wants to get them out," Riiij countered darkly.

Maranne eyed him closely. "You think this whole thing was a setup?"

"It's looking more and more that way," Riiij said, scowling as he glanced around the cantina. "Look at the series of events. First he sends Trell to the wrong booth in Treasure Ship Row, which apparently tips off Thyne and his people that we're looking for Borbor Crisk. Then he sends Trell, Palror, and Hal back and lets them get snatched. Finally, he goes there himself with Corran and sends us off on this idiot's errand. Someone in Kast's business can't possibly be that incompetent and have survived this long."

"You think it's someone else posing as Kast?" Maranne suggested. "I mean, all we've ever seen is his armor."

"Possibly," Riiij said. "But now remember where this whole mess actually started: aboard an Imperial Star Destroyer."

"With us squeezed into running an Imperial captain's errand."



Maranne swore gently. "You're right. How stupid can one group of people be, anyway?"

"We're in line for some prizes, all right," Riiij agreed. "The only question is what exactly the game is that the Imperials are playing."

"I vote for them trying to stir up trouble between Thyne and Crisk," Maranne said. "Maybe looking for an excuse to come down hard on both sides."

"Using the spice and gems as bait," Riiij said. "Still, whatever Kast's going for, there's one thing he doesn't know."

Maranne smiled tightly. "That the cargo isn't aboard the *Hopskip* anymore."

"Exactly." Riiij dropped a couple of coins on the table and stood up. "Come on, let's get out of here. Crisk's people aren't going to show."

"So what's our next move?" Maranne asked, standing up beside him.

"Kast's Plan B, I guess," Riiij said, turning toward the door and elbowing them a path through a pack of loiterers. "We take our sample boxes to Thyne's fortress and see if we can make a deal to buy Trell and Palror out."

Maranne caught up to his side. "You're going to follow *Kast's* plan?" she asked incredulously. "What are you, crazy?"

"No, just desperate," Riiij conceded grimly. "Aside from the two of us storming the place, I don't see any other options."

"What about your—" Maranne threw a quick glance around and lowered her voice. "What about your friends?"

Riiij grimaced. His friends: the Rebel Alliance. A reasonable enough request, he supposed, especially since the only reason he and Palror had been aboard the *Hopskip* in the first place was to baby-sit the load of blasters Trell and Maranne had agreed to smuggle to the Rebels on Derra IV. Unfortunately—"They can't help us," he told her regretfully. "Even if the leaders agreed, it would take too long to gather together enough of a force to take on Thyne, Corellian Security, and the local Imperial garrison."

"You sure they just don't want Prince Xizor and Black Sun mad at them?" Maranne asked nastily.

"You have to pick your fights carefully, Maranne," Riiij sighed. "Personally, I think we've already bit off more than we can swallow."

"I suppose you're right," Maranne muttered. "Fine. Let's give Plan B a try."

They had reached the door now, sliding their way through the middle of an incoming group of Duros and heading out into the muggy night air. The *Hopskip's* dilapidated landspeeder was parked in the small lot to the left—

"Excuse me?" a hesitant voice called.

Riiij turned, his hand dropping automatically to the butt of his blaster. A heavyset man had emerged from the cantina a handful of steps behind them, their jebwa flower clutched in a meaty hand. "Yes?"

"You forgot your flower," the man said, lobbing it through the air toward him. Automatically, Riiij reached up to catch it—

And suddenly there was a small blaster in the heavy man's fist. "Nice and easy," the man said. "Selty?"

"I'm on it," a voice said from somewhere behind Riiij. There was a quick set of approaching footsteps, and Riiij felt his blaster being lifted from its holster. Another moment, and Maranne had been disarmed as well. "Got 'em."

"Now just keep moving," the first gunman said, gesturing Riiij and Maranne in the direction they'd been going. "Let's go take a look at your landspeeder."

The parking lot was dark and deserted. But it wasn't going to stay deserted for long. Even as Riiij led the way toward the landspeeder he could see shadowy forms drifting in from all directions. Whoever had gotten the drop on them didn't seem interested in taking any chances. "You want to tell us which one's yours?" the heavyset man asked.

"You want to tell us whose side you're on?" Riiij countered.

The other's eyes flashed. "Don't push it, scum," he warned harshly. "You're in enough trouble with us as it is."

"Must be with Zekka Thyne," Maranne said ruefully.

"Must be," Riiij agreed, his heart pounding a little harder. So it was definitely to Plan B now. "It's that dirt-brown one over there."

Two of the approaching thugs veered toward the landspeeder, the rest forming a loose but competent enough guard circle around the prisoners and their two escorts.

A double-sided circle, Riiij noted with interest, with as many of their members facing outward as inward. Expecting trouble, maybe?

The thugs had the storage compartment open now and with grunts of satisfaction hauled out the two *sleight* boxes. "Got 'em, Grobber," one of them said. "Couple of *sleight* boxes, just like the man said."

"All set to fill up, huh?" the heavysset man said, throwing a dark look at Rijj. "I guess Kast wasn't blowing smoke rings after all."

Rijj threw a glance at Maranne, got the same look in return from her. They'd been right; Kast was definitely playing some crazy double- or triple-edged game here. "Kast told you about this?" he asked.

"Sure did," Grobber assured him. "So what were these for, the first payment?"

Rijj shook his head. "Sorry, but I can't help you. We were hired to deliver the boxes and that was it."

"Sure," Grobber growled. "Just deliver the boxes. And if Crisk just happened to fill them up while your back was turned—well,

Promk had finally gotten the sleight box open...and even in the faint light Rijj could see the stunned look on his face.

hey, that's none of your business, right? Promk, what the frink are you doing?"

"What does it look like?"

one of the men at the landspeeder retorted. He had carried one of the boxes around to the hood and was in the process of

popping the seal with a knife. "A couple of wise guys, a couple of empty boxes; I figured it might be fun to send 'em on to Crisk with their heads inside."

Rijj was suddenly aware of his collar pressing against his throat. "I don't think that would be a good idea," he said, striving to keep his voice even. "You don't know where the rest of the boxes are."

"We don't, huh?" Grobber sneered, digging out a comlink and thumbing it on. "Skinkner? Hey, Skinkner, look alive."

"Funny, Grobber, funny," a twisted voice came back. "What d'ya want?"

"You at the dewback storage yard yet?"

"Yeah, 'course we are. If you were hoping to report us to Thyne for slogging off, you're out of luck."

"Wouldn't think of it," Grobber said, sending another sneer toward Rijj. "Still think we don't know where the rest of the boxes are, hotshot?"

Rijj felt his stomach tighten. So much for Plan B. So much, too, for any leverage they might have had against Thyne and his mob. Any chance of rescuing Palror and Trelle was now squarely in his and

Maranne's laps.

Assuming they were able to find a way out of this, their own private mess. Carefully, keeping his movements casual, Rijj looked around the ring of thugs, trying to formulate some kind of reasonable plan—

"Mother of smoke!"

Rijj jerked his head back around. Standing beside the landspeeder, Promk had finally gotten the *sleight* box open...and even in the faint light Rijj could see the stunned look on his face. "Grobber—you gotta—what the frinking—?"

"Have you gone dust-happy?" Grobber demanded, striding toward him. He got two steps, and then suddenly his face changed, too. "What the—?" he gasped, all but leaping the rest of the distance to Promk's side.

Rijj sniffed the night breeze carefully, caught the faint odor of spice. "You were saying something about empty boxes?" he asked.

Grobber ignored him. "Get the other one open," he ordered, pulling out a knife of his own and probing delicately into the spice. "Selly, get over here. The rest of you, watch for trouble."

Selly joined his boss as Promk brought around the second box and set to work, and for a moment the two thugs conversed in low voices over the spice box. The debate was interrupted by the crack of breaking duraplast, and the two joined Promk by the second box.

Someone whistled in awe. "Grobber—are those—?"

"Durindfire gems," Grobber said, lifting his eyes like twin turbolasers to Rijj's face. "Let's have it, pal, and let's have it straight and fast. What the frink kind of game are you playing, anyway?"

"I told you before: we're not playing any games," Rijj told him. "We were sent to deliver the cargo, and that's it. If there's a game going on, someone else is running it."

"Kast," one of the other thugs snarled.

"Or Kast and Crisk," Grobber snarled back, yanking out his comlink again. "Skinkner? Wake up, Skinkner."

"What d'ya want?" the other's voice demanded. "Frink it all, Grobber—"

"Shut up and listen," Grobber bit out. "You looked in any of those boxes yet?"

"Course not. Thyne said to just watch them until Crisk's blaster-boys came to fill them with—"

"You idiot—they're already full," Grobber snapped. "Which means the contract's already been filled."

The voice on the comlink swore. "Kast."

"That's my bet," Grobber said. "Start getting your boys together—I'm going to raise Control." He keyed the comlink again. "Control? This is Grobber. Control?"

"Grobber!" a new voice half barked, half gasped. "We've been trying to raise you for half an hour—where the frink are you?"

"At the Mynock's Haven," Grobber said. "Listen—"

"No, *you* listen," the other cut him off. "We're under attack here, skrag it—you've got to get back right away."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," Grobber said. "What attack? Who's attacking?"

"Who do you think? The frinking Imperials, that's who."

Grobber threw a startled glance at Selty. "The *Imperials*?"

"Started out as some anti-Rebel operation," Control said. "At least, that's what they told us. Then someone took a shot at them, and suddenly here they are, burning their way through the east wall."

"Skrag! Where's Thyne?"

"I don't know—we can't find him."

"Must have gotten out," Selty muttered.

"Or ducked into some private bunker," Grobber said. "All right, Control, we're on our way. Skinkner?"

"We're packing up, too," Skinkner's voice confirmed. "You want us to do anything with these other *sleight* boxes?"

"To blazes with the boxes," Control snapped. "We need you *here*."

"No, pack 'em up and bring 'em along," Grobber said.

"Grobber—"

"They're worth a fortune," Grobber growled. "Thyne'll have our heads if we leave 'em behind. Come on, how much trouble can a few Imperials be?"

Faintly over the comlink came the sound of a distant explosion. "That answer your question?" Control snarled. "Get the frink back *here*."

And with a sudden hiss, the comlink went dead. "They're jamming it," Grobber growled, shoving the cylinder back into his belt. "Selty, you take Promk and Bullkey and get these two and their landspeeder back to the fortress. Everyone else, back to the airspeeders. *Move* it!"

The others scattered. "Don't get any ideas," Grobber warned softly, glaring from under creased eyebrows at Rijj and Maranne.



"We're a long ways from being done with you two yet."

With that he stomped off after the rest of his mob, disappearing just as they had appeared back into the shadows again. "Get over here," Selty snapped, waving Rijj and Maranne forward. Somewhere in the distance an avian or insect whistled, sounding strangely out of place in the urban setting. "Bullkey?"

"I'm on 'em," a deep voice came from behind Rijj, the confidence backed up by a blaster nudge in the back. "Come on, move it."

Rijj started forward; and as he did so, Maranne veered slightly toward him and nudged him with her elbow. "Get ready," she murmured, just loud enough for him to hear. At the landspeeder Promk, under Selty's direction, had picked up the box containing the Durindfire gems and was carrying it back toward the storage compartment. The strange avian whistled again; and suddenly, inexplicably, one of the bottom edges of the box split open, spilling the gems out onto the ground.

"Promk!" Selty squeaked, aghast. "You stupid idiot." He jumped forward, grabbing at the box as Promk tried to turn it upside down. For a moment they both fumbled with it, the prisoners temporarily forgotten—

And from behind Rijj came a short gurgles and a muffled thump.

Beside him, he sensed Maranne preparing to charge. "Not yet," he muttered, touching her warningly as he lengthened his stride. Preoccupied with the spilled gems, Selty and Promk hadn't yet noticed what had happened over here. Another four paces...three...if they'd just fight with the box another few seconds...one...

"Now," he murmured; and jumping forward, he put his left palm down on the landspeeder's hood and leaped over the vehicle to slam both feet hard against Promk's chest.

The thug didn't even have a chance to gurgle as he hit the ground, the *sleight* box spinning out of his hands into the darkness. Selty did have time for a startled curse and a grab for his holstered blaster before he went down with Maranne on top of him. A savage jab with her knee, and he went limp.

"Are you injured?" Palror rumbled from behind them.

"No, we're fine," Riiij assured him, regaining his balance and turning around. Behind the Tunroth, the third thug was lying in an unnaturally crumpled heap. "Nice job with Bullkey," he added.

"Not to mention the box," Maranne added, retrieving their appropriated blasters from Selty's belt and tossing Riiij's back to him. "How'd you manage that one?"

"That was mine," Trell said, stepping out from behind one of the other parked landspeeders and crossing to them. "Just an exquisitely well-thrown molecular stiletto."

"A whistle code and a molecular stiletto," Riiij said, shaking his head wonderingly. "You two are just full of tricks, aren't you?"

"The stiletto was a gift," Trell said, crouching down beside the *sleight* box. "Blast—the blade's broken."

"Never mind the blade," Maranne said, crouching down beside him. "Get the gems."

"Forget the gems," Riiij told her, peering off in the direction Grobber and the others had gone. The rescue had been remarkably quiet; but if Grobber took it into his head to fly over this spot on the way back to Thyne's fortress, the four of them could still end up fertilizing a patch of razor grass. "Let's just get out of here."

"But—"

"No, he's right," Trell said through clearly clenched teeth. "If whatever's going on back at Thyne's place dies down fast enough we could still find Grobber's buddies camping out in the *Hopskip's* cargo bay. Just grab the box and whatever's still left inside."

Maranne hissed something vile sounding, but she nevertheless

stood up, the now half-empty box in her hands. "Fine," she said bitterly. "What about the spice?"

"Leave it here," Trell told her. "Corran said we wouldn't want to get caught shipping spice, and I'm rather inclined to agree with him."

"We can call CorSec on the way and tell them where to pick it up," Riiij added. "Now let's go."

"It's from Kast," Riiij said. "To the crew and passengers of the Hopskip: well done."

They all piled into the landspeeder. "Speaking of Corran and CorSec," Trell commented as he spun the vehicle around and kicked power to the engines. "Turns out they're one and the same."

"Corran's with Corellian Security?" Maranne asked, frowning at him. "You're joking."

"That's how he and Hal were talking, anyway," Trell said. "Last we saw, they were heading off after Thyne."

Riiij winced. "In the middle of Thyne's fortress? They haven't got a chance."

"That was also our estimation," Palror agreed. "But counting the number of Thyne's warriors here and those fighting the Imperials outside his stronghold, it seems likely the core areas within may have been nearly deserted."

"'Nearly' might not have been good enough," Maranne said. "And what about Kast? He was still there, wasn't he?"

"I've given up trying to guess what kind of game Kast is playing," Trell said, twisting the landspeeder hard to get around a Herglic-parked speeder truck. "All I know is that he's the one who gave Corran the molecular stiletto that got us out of there."

"And we do not believe it was merely a trap," Palror added. "We were challenged by Imperial TIE bombers as we left the stronghold; yet upon identification, we were permitted to pass."

"That had to be Corran and Hal's doing," Trell said. "CorSec's supposed to be working pretty closely with the Imperials these days."

"Yes," Riiij murmured, thinking back to the brief argument he'd had with Corran about the Rebellion. And now to find out Corran was actually CorSec. Could he have guessed Riiij's true loyalties from that conversation?

"We were both permitted to pass," Palror reminded him softly. "I understand," Riiij told him. "I also understand that the way everything else here's been going, that doesn't mean a whole lot. If we get to the *Hopskip* without running into an ambush—from any of the sides of this crazy powerplay—then maybe I'll believe we've gotten away with it."

"Gotten away with what?" Maranne asked.

Riiij spread his hands. "With whatever in blazes we did here."



There was indeed no ambush poised outside the *Hopskip*. Nor were any of their former companions—Corran, Hal, or Kast—waiting there.

What *was* there was a single datacard.

"Looks like the same stuff that Kast used to stick the molecular stiletto to Corran's cell bars," Trell commented, poking experimentally at the bits of adhesive residue that had been left on the datacard. "Should we read it here, or inside?"

"Inside," Riiij said firmly, taking the datacard from him and glancing around. "And not until we're out of here. You and Maranne get the pre-flight started; Palror and I'll check to make sure no one left us any surprises."

Trell had the engines nursed and sputtering to life, and Maranne had the nav computer working on their course, when Riiij and Palror returned from their tour of the ship. "Looks clean," Riiij told the others as the two of them took their seats. "Or at least, there's nothing obvious. You talked to the tower yet?"

"We're third in line to leave," Maranne told him. "You want to read us a sleepy-time story now?"

"Sure," Riiij said. From behind Trell came a faint rubbing sound—Riiij getting the last bits of adhesive off the datacard, probably—and then the brief scraping as he slid it into his datapad. "It's from Kast," Riiij said. "To the crew and passengers of the *Hopskip*: well done."

"Well done?" Maranne growled. "What in blazes—?"

"Shh," Trell cut her off. "Go on."

"You have adequately completed the mission that was assigned you," Riiij continued. "You may return now to the *Admonitor* and

retrieve your cargo. This datacard will serve as proof to Captain Niriz that you have fulfilled your side of the bargain and may have your cargo returned to you.' Then it's signed with his name and what looks like some kind of ID mark."

"So he's not going back, huh?" Trell said, an odd feeling stirring in the pit of his stomach. "I'm not sure I like that."

"He must have arranged his payment to be delivered somewhere else," Maranne said. "It didn't look like he and Niriz got along very well."

"Perhaps his payment is in the remainder of the *sleight* boxes," Palror said.

"I wouldn't count on it," Riiij said. "There's a postscript: 'Do not return to the dewback storage yard for the other *sleight* boxes. They are empty.'"

"What?" Trell growled, half turning to glare back at Riiij over his shoulder. "Come on, now, that's just crazy. You're telling me the two boxes you happened to take to the Mynock's Haven were the only ones with anything in them? What are the odds of that happening?"

"Not too bad, really," Maranne said grimly. "Not when you consider that they were the only two we knew we could open and then reseal again. They were leading us around by the nose the whole way, weren't they?"

"The whole way," Riiij agreed. "And don't bother with either the Durindfire gems or the spice. Both are counterfeit."

Trell looked across the cockpit, to find Maranne looking back at him. There didn't seem to be anything to say.

There was another faint scraping behind him as Riiij pulled the datacard from the datapad. "Look, we got in and out again alive," he reminded them, reaching over Trell's shoulder to hand him the datacard. "My instructors used to say that no mission you walked away from was a complete failure. Maybe we'll meet Corran and Hal someday and find out what this whole thing was all about."

Trell turned the datacard over in his hand. "I doubt it," he said. "I'd say chances are good that neither of them knew what was going on, either."

He slid the datacard into a storage slot on his board. "Come on, Maranne. Let's get out of here."



"I know this sort of thing embarrasses you," Captain Niriz said as he poured his guest a glass of aged R'alla mineral water, "so I'll only say it once. When I heard the reports of military action on Corellia, I was concerned for your safety. I'm glad to find out my fears were unfounded."

"Thank you, Captain," Grand Admiral Thrawn said, accepting the proffered glass and taking a sip. He was still wearing his Jodo Kast armor, though without the helmet and gauntlets. "You're wrong, though, about expressions of concern and support being an embarrassment. On the contrary, loyalty is one of the two qualities I value most in my subordinates and colleagues."

"I was able to watch the battle outside Thyne's stronghold... in my opinion the Imperial officer in command is being wasted in a garrison assignment."

trast, it almost seemed to detract from the sense of authority that was already there. "The bridge has orders to let me know when they leave." He cocked an eyebrow. "Which reminds me: you promised to let me know what all this was about when you returned."

"And I intend to do so," Thrawn assured him. "I'm waiting for one other person to join us here first."

Behind Niriz, the door slid open. Niriz turned, opening his mouth to reprimand whoever this officer or crewer was who would dare enter the captain's private office without permission—

And an instant later was scrambling to his feet, the harsh words dying in his throat as if they had been choked to death. The armored figure striding with casual arrogance through the door—

"Ah; Lord Vader," Thrawn said, rising more easily to his feet.

"And the other?" Niriz asked, pouring a glass of R'alla water for himself.

"Competence," Thrawn said. "Has the *Hopskip*'s cargo been reloaded aboard yet?"

"It's being done, sir," Niriz said. With most people, he thought distantly, the addition of Mandalorian armor would instantly create a powerful air of strength and mystery. With Thrawn, in con-

"Welcome aboard the *Admonitor*. We're honored by your presence."

"As we are with yours, Admiral Thrawn," Lord Darth Vader said, a distinct edge of challenge in his deep voice. "You're nearly six hours late."

"I know, my Lord, and I apologize for keeping you waiting," Thrawn said, nodding his head deferentially. "As it turned out, I was forced to significantly modify the plan I originally outlined to you."

"But the objective *was* achieved?" Vader demanded.

"It was indeed," Thrawn said. "Zekka Thyne and the Corellian branch of Prince Xizor's Black Sun have been effectively eliminated."

Niriz looked at Thrawn in surprise. "Zekka Thyne? But I thought—"

"You thought the Emperor had an arrangement with Xizor?" Vader demanded, turning that grisly mask toward him.

Niriz swallowed. Vader's reputation concerning flag officers who had displeased him...but on the other hand, Thrawn demanded absolute honesty from his subordinates. "Yes, my Lord," he said. "I did."

Vader's stiff posture seemed to ease slightly. "For the moment, perhaps, that is true. But such arrangements are made to be altered." He turned back to Thrawn. "Yet I understood there was Imperial action against Thyne's stronghold."

"A small battle only," Thrawn assured him. "And the battle was instigated from Thyne's side, as both sides' recorders will bear out. The record will also show the Imperials were in the area solely because of information their commander received suggesting a Rebel force was gathering in the forest there."

"Information which you supplied, of course?" Vader asked.

"Of course," Thrawn nodded. "And since there can be no possible link between the verification code I used and any of your forces or contacts, Prince Xizor will be unable to create any connection between you and the mysterious informant."

"Yet Imperial troops *were* involved," Vader persisted. "His first thought will certainly be of me."

Thrawn shook his head. "In fact, my Lord, the marginal Imperial involvement will actually tend to exonerate you in his eyes. He would expect you to launch either a full-fledged Imperial attack—which he could easily trace back to you—or else to scrupulously avoid Imperial forces entirely, relying perhaps on your quiet bounty hunter or mercenary contacts. The ambiguity of the actual event

will leave him confused and uncertain. Which, I believe, was one of your key objectives."

"It was," Vader said, sounding a little uncertain. "But as you say, Xizor knows of my bounty hunter connections. Even though Jodo Kast is not among them, your assassination of Thyne while disguised as Kast will again lead his attention to me."

Thrawn smiled. "Yes, but I *didn't* assassinate Thyne. I was able to leave his fate in the hands of a pair of undercover CorSec agents."

Vader cocked his head slightly to the side. "I don't recall Corellian Security ever being mentioned in our discussions, Admiral."

"The two agents attached themselves to my group," Thrawn said. "And it was obvious right from the start that they were in Coronet City for the specific purpose of getting to Thyne. It presented such a perfect opportunity that I decided to modify the original plan so that they would be the ones to deal with him."

"Then Thyne isn't dead?"

Thrawn shrugged. "At the very least he's out of power," he said. "Actually, having him in CorSec custody would actually serve your purposes better than a quick death. It would leave Prince Xizor wondering if the Corellians were digging any dangerous secrets out of him. A major distraction; and distraction, I believe, was another of your key objectives."

There was a tone from the comm. Stepping to the console, Niriz keyed it on. "Niriz," he said.

"Hangar Bay Control, sir," a voice said. "Reporting as per orders that the *Hopskip* has just left."

"Thank you," Niriz said. "Signal the bridge to watch its vector when it jumps to lightspeed."

"Yes, sir."

Niriz keyed the comm off. "I gather the smugglers and their Rebel friends performed their part adequately?" Vader asked.

"Quite adequately," Thrawn assured him. "They provided the necessary excuse for me to move Thyne's men out and clear the way for the CorSec agents."

The unseen eyes behind the black mask seemed to bore into Thrawn's face. "And the other part of your plan?"

Thrawn cocked a blue-black eyebrow at Niriz. "Captain?"

"Yes, sir," Niriz said. "A homing device has been installed inside each of the hidden blasters they were smuggling."

"And the boxes repacked exactly as they were?"

"To the millimeter," Niriz confirmed. "They'll have no way of

knowing the boxes were even opened, let alone tampered with."

The Dark Lord nodded. "Excellent," he said.

The comm pinged again. "Captain, this is the bridge. The *Hopskip* just jumped to lightspeed. Their vector's confirmed for the Shibric system."

"Thank you," Niriz looked at Thrawn, lifted his eyebrows.

The Grand Admiral nodded. "Have them prepare a course back to the Unknown Regions," he instructed. "Our task here is finished."

"Yes, sir," Niriz gave the order and keyed off the comm.

"Unless," Thrawn added, looking at Vader, "you'd like me to deal with Prince Xizor directly for you."

"It is indeed a tempting thought," Vader said, his voice dark with veiled menace. "One alien against another? But no. Xizor is mine."

"As you wish," Thrawn said. "Incidentally, I doubt that Shibric is the final destination for those Rebel blasters. From their vector, and other bits and pieces I gleaned along the trip, my guess is that their ultimate collection point will be somewhere in the Derra system."

"The homing devices will show us for certain," Vader said. "But



the Derra system is rumored to have a strong Rebel presence. I'll make sure to have some forces waiting there."

"Very good," Thrawn said. "One final suggestion, and then I suspect we must both be on our separate ways. I understand the general in command of the *Executor's* ground forces resigned suddenly a month ago. I was able to watch the battle outside Thyne's stronghold for a while as I waited to make sure the smugglers escaped; and in my opinion the Imperial officer in command is being wasted in a garrison assignment."

"Your opinion carries considerable weight," Vader said. "As I'm sure you know. The officer's name?"

"Colonel Veers," Thrawn said. "From the level of his tactical skill, I'd also say he's long overdue for a promotion. Perhaps his political connections within the command structure leave something to be desired."

"Political connections do not concern me," Vader rumbled, stepping to the door. "I will see what I can do with this Colonel Veers. Thank you, Admiral."

"My pleasure, Lord Vader," Thrawn said with a respectful tilt of his head. "One favor for another. Perhaps we'll have the chance to work again together."

Once again, the hidden eyes seemed to probe the Grand Admiral's face. "Perhaps," he said. "Farewell, Admiral."

And with a swirl of his long cloak he was gone. "An interesting exercise," Thrawn commented, crossing to the R'alla bottle and refilling his and Niriz's glasses. "I don't know though. I sense that this Rebellion is more powerful and better organized than perhaps Lord Vader realizes. I hope our activities here will allow him to deliver a crushing blow against it."

His glowing red eyes glittered as he took a sip from his glass. "But that's not our concern, at least for now. Our concern is the Unknown Regions; and it's time we were getting back."

"Yes, sir," Niriz hesitated. "If I may be so bold, Admiral...your last comment implied that you received something in return for helping Vader against Thyne and Black Sun. May I ask what that favor was?"

"A very personal gift, Captain," Thrawn said. "Which was why I felt the need to personally orchestrate Thyne's destruction. Lord Vader has turned over to me command of a group of alien commanders who have proven themselves highly valuable to him over the years. While I won't have much use for them in the Unknown Regions, I have no doubt I'll eventually be returning to the Empire

proper. At that time—well, we shall see what they can do."

"I never heard of Vader employing aliens," Niriz said doubtfully. "Are you sure he's telling—well—"

"The truth?" Thrawn smiled. "Indeed he is. Mark their name well, Captain: the Noghri. I guarantee you'll be hearing more of them."

He drained his glass and set it down. "But now to the bridge. The Unknown Regions are calling; and we have a great deal of work yet to do."

Roleplaying Game Statistics

■ Hal Horn

Type: CorSec Officer

DEXTERITY 3D

Archaic guns 3D+2, blaster: blaster pistol 6D+2, brawling parry 4D, dodge 5D+2, firearms 5D, melee combat 3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 5D, bureaucracy 4D, bureaucracy: CorSec 7D+2, bureaucracy: Imperial 5D, business 4D, business: smuggling 6D, cultures 4D+2, intimidation 4D, intimidation: interrogation 6D, languages 3D+2, law enforcement 4D, law enforcement: CorSec 8D, planetary systems 4D, planetary systems: Corellian system 8D, streetwise 7D+2, willpower 6D+2

MECHANICAL 2D+2

Astrogation 5D, beast riding 4D+2, repulsorlift operation 5D, sensors 6D, space transports 5D, starfighter piloting 3D+2, starship gunnery 4D+2, starship shields 4D+2

PERCEPTION 4D

Bargain 4D+2, command 5D, con 5D, forgery 5D, gambling 5D, hide 5D, investigation 6D, investigation: Corellian system 8D, persuasion 6D, search 7D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 3D+1

Brawling 5D+1, swimming 4D+1

TECHNICAL 2D

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

This character is Force-sensitive.

Character Points: 16

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), CorSec identification

Capsule: Hal Horn—like his father before him—has been a longtime member of the Corellian Security apparatus. A native of the Corellian system, Horn is widely recognized in CorSec circles for his effective counter-smuggling operations.



■ Corran Horn

Type: Young CorSec Officer

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 4D+2, brawling parry 4D+2, dodge 4D+2, melee combat 3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Bureaucracy 3D, bureaucracy: Imperial 6D, law enforcement: Corellian Security Force 5D+2, planetary systems 5D+2, streetwise 6D+2, value 5D, willpower 4D+2

MECHANICAL 4D

Astrogation 4D+1, communications 4D+2, sensors 4D+2, starfighter piloting 4D+2, starship gunnery 5D, starship shields 5D

PERCEPTION 3D

Command 4D, con 5D, forgery 4D, persuasion 4D+2, search 4D, sneak 6D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 5D, climbing/jumping 4D+2, stamina 5D

TECHNICAL 3D

Computer programming/repair 4D, droid programming 4D+2, droid repair 5D, first aid 4D, security 6D, starfighter repair

This character is Force-sensitive.

Force Points: 2

Character Points: 6

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), CorSec identification

Capsule: Corran Horn is a young, idealistic agent of the Corellian Security Force, who—like his father—has an extreme distaste for those who violate the law. While not as experienced as Hal Horn, Corran is an extremely capable law enforcement officer.



■ Zekka Thyne

Type: Black Sun Operative

DEXTERITY 3D

Archaic guns 4D, blaster 6D, brawling parry 6D, dodge 5D, grenade 4D, melee combat 4D, melee parry 4D, thrown weapons 5D

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Alien species 3D, bureaucracy 4D, business 5D, intimidation 6D, intimidation: bullying 6D+2, law enforcement 5D, planetary systems 6D, streetwise 6D+2, value 6D, willpower 5D

MECHANICAL 2D+2

Astrogation 4D+2, repulsorlift operation 5D+2, sensors 3D+2, space transports 5D, starship gunnery 5D, starship shields 4D+2, swoop operation 6D

PERCEPTION 4D

Bargain 4D+2, command 5D, con 5D, forgery 5D, gambling 6D, hide 6D, search 4D+2, sneak 6D

STRENGTH 4D

Brawling 6D+2, climbing/jumping 6D+2, lifting 6D+2, stamina 6D

TECHNICAL 2D+1

Demolitions 4D+1, first aid 4D, security 6D

Character Points: 10

Move: 10

Equipment: Heavy blaster pistol (5D+2), hold-out blaster (3D+2), vibroknife (STR+2D)

Capsule: Zekka Thyne was little more than a youthful human-alien drifter when he was recruited into the infamous swoop gang, The Skulls. After building a reputation as a brutal, capable and violent criminal (quite a feat, given the vicious nature of The Skulls), Thyne drifted to the Corellian system, once again developing notoriety as a relentless and dangerous thug in the employ of local loansharks.

Currently, Thyne acts as an operative for the criminal organization, Black Sun, in the Corellian system. While there is little evidence to support the theory that Thyne was personally selected for his current "assignment" by Prince Xizor, many members of CorSec are convinced that the brutal criminal has earned favor in the upper echelons of Black Sun.



■ Maranne Darmic

Type: Smuggler

DEXTERITY 3D+1

Blaster 5D+1, brawling parry 4D+2, dodge 5D+1

KNOWLEDGE 2D+1

Alien species 4D+1, languages 4D+1, planetary systems 6D, streetwise 4D+1, value 6D

MECHANICAL 3D+2

Astrogation 4D+2, communications 6D, repulsorlift operation 5D+2, sensors 6D, space transports 4D+2, starship gunnery 4D+2, starship shields 5D+2

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 4D, con 4D, gambling 5D, search 5D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 3D+2, stamina 3D+2, swimming 3D+2

TECHNICAL 2D+2

Computer programming/repair 4D+2, first aid 4D+2, repulsorlift repair 6D, security 5D+2, space transports re-



pair 6D

Character Points: 7

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), hold-out blaster (3D), comlink, datapad, toolkit

Capsule: Maranne Darmic is a young woman who was born on Coruscant. Her father, Dreja Darmic, worked as a mechanic in one of Imperial Center's many commercial spaceports; as a result, Maranne developed a great love of starships and space travel.

After her father was arrested (ostensibly for "tax evasion," though many spoke of Dreja's sympathy for the Rebel Alliance), there was little to tie Maranne to Coruscant. Roughly two years prior to the Battle of Yavin, Maranne shipped out on the first available freighter, a freighter captained by Haber Trell.

Over time, Maranne has become a shrewd businesswoman, though she is still very naive when it comes to smuggling; despite her sharp mind and fierce determination, she still has a great deal to learn.

Haber Trell

Type: Smuggler

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 6D, brawling parry 5D, dodge 5D, melee parry 5D

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 4D, bureaucracy 5D, business 5D, business: shipping 6D, business: smuggling 6D+1, languages 4D, law enforcement 5D, planetary systems 7D, value 5D

MECHANICAL 4D

Astrogation 6D, repulsorlift operation 6D, space transports 6D+2, starship gunnery 4D+2, starship shields 7D

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 5D, con 5D, forgery 6D, persuasion 5D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 2D+1

Brawling 4D+1

TECHNICAL 2D+2

First aid 3D+2, repulsorlift repair 4D+2, space transports repair 4D+2

Character Points: 11

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), comlink, datapad

Capsule: Haber Trell is the captain of the *Hopskip*, an independent light freighter re-tooled to engage in minor smuggling activities. Trell, a middle-aged human from Carida, has been a "foot-loose wanderer" for most of his adult life, moving from system to system and taking whatever jobs—legal or illicit—that would help finance the next leg of his rather aimless travels.



Rijj Winward

Type: Rebel Procurement Specialist

DEXTERITY 3D+2

Blaster 5D+2, dodge 5D+2, melee combat 4D+2, melee parry 4D+2

KNOWLEDGE 3D+1

Alien species 5D+1, bureaucracy 6D+1, business 5D+1, cultures 5D, languages 5D, law enforcement 5D, planetary systems 5D, streetwise 5D, value 5D

MECHANICAL 2D+1

Beast riding 3D+1, repulsorlift operation 5D+1, sensors 5D, space transports 4D+2

PERCEPTION 3D+2

Bargain 7D, con 5D+2, forgery 5D, hide 4D+2, persuasion 4D+2, sneak 4D+2

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 4D+1

TECHNICAL 2D

Blaster repair 4D, computer programming/repair 5D, first aid 4D+2, security 5D

Character Points: 2

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), fake ID

Capsule: Rijj Winward joined the Rebel Alliance roughly one year prior to the Battle of Yavin. Winward—born in Calius Saj Leeloo on the planet Berchest—grew up under Imperial rule. After his brother was pressed into Imperial service, Winward stowed away on a ship departing the planet, in hopes of escaping the Empire.

The vessel, an independent freighter that was covertly running guns to the Rebel Alliance, rendezvoused with the Alliance fleet before the young stowaway was discovered. The freighter's captain, upon hearing Winward's story, turned Winward over to the Alliance, which promptly welcomed him with open arms. Over time, Winward discovered he had an aptitude for locating needed parts and supplies—a benefit of growing up in the middle of a modest trading center—and rapidly became a "procurement specialist" for the Alliance.

Rathe Palror

Type: Tunroth Hunter

DEXTERITY 4D

Archaic guns: Yctor black-powder pistol 6D, bows: Tunroth *klirun* bow 6D, blaster 4D+2, blaster: blaster pistol 7D, blaster: blaster rifle 7D+2, brawling parry 6D, dodge 6D, grenade 5D, melee combat 6D+2, melee parry 7D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Planetary systems 5D, survival 5D

MECHANICAL 2D+2

PERCEPTION 3D

Hide 5D, search 6D, sneak 6D

STRENGTH 3D+2



Brawling 6D+1, lifting 6D,
stamina 6D+2

TECHNICAL 2D

Demolitions 4D

Special Abilities:

Quarry Sense: Tunroth Hunters have an innate sense that enables them to determine which path or direction prey has taken. A Tunroth Hunter gains a +1D bonus to *search* for targets that he or she is at least passingly familiar with.

Character Points: 15

Move: 10

Equipment: Yctor Arms black-powder pistol (3D, 3/10/25, two rounds to reload), *klirun* bow (5D, 10 arrows), blaster pistol (4D), comlink

Capsule: Rathe Palror was a sharpshooter for Churhee's Riflemen, a pro-Imperial mercenary group that operated throughout the Outer Rim Territories. During a recent operation, the Riflemen were nearly wiped out while working for Imperials on the planet Y'Trella; this incident also led to the death of the Riflemen's commanding officer and founder, Vlaydm Churhee. Ever since the debacle on Y'Trella, Rathe has been actively assisting Riij Winward, a member of the Rebel Alliance. Precisely how the unlikely pair met and became associates is unknown, and neither Winward nor Palror is willing to discuss the matter.



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CONFLICT of INTEREST

By Laurie R. King

Illustrations by Christopher Yemas

Standing on the steps of the Verkuylian Imperial Governor's Hall waiting to present her fake credentials to the stormtrooper at the door, Selby Jarrad took another swipe at the sweat trickling down her temples and wished she'd been warned about the blasted stink.

Just another "minor" detail Intelligence had neglected to mention during the mission briefing, she thought. The city—the whole sweltering *planet*—reeked of alazhi being stripped, pulped and simmered for refinement into bacta. Of all the attacks that the New Republic team might face while helping Verkuyl's rebelling native workers oust the Empire, this obnoxious olfactory assault had never come up.

She slanted a glance at the tall, dark-skinned man beside her. Before landing, the stiff, formal collar of Major Cobb Vartos' business suit had been crisp and clean, but it had long since wilted in the suffocating heat. Grimy marks showed where he'd pried it away from his perspiring neck. Selby didn't even want to know what she looked like. Her own suit clung to her, and the thick auburn hair piled atop her head felt hot and heavy.

"I'm not sure which is worse," Vartos murmured to her, hooking a finger in his collar and giving it another yank. "Breathing through my nose and smelling the blasted stuff, or breathing through my mouth and *tasting* it."

Selby had a definite opinion on that, but just then the stormtrooper at the door barked "Next!" Vartos stepped up to the portal and handed him his forged ID. Carefully schooling her expression into the cool, professional mien of a corporate bidder—or at least as cool and professional as she could manage with hair sticking damply to her face and sweat trickling down her back—Selby did the same.

The stormtrooper scanned the cards. "Purpose of your visit?"

"My associate and I are here to present a proposal to His Excellency, Governor Parco Ein," Vartos told him. Since the Governor currently had a hall full of bidders waiting to present him with business proposals, Vartos didn't bother to add that the only proposal he and Selby intended to give Ein was: Surrender, or die.

When Ein had advertised he'd be considering bids for the construction of a new bacta refinery on Verkuyl, Intelligence had deemed the situation too good to pass up. The planet's native workers, encouraged by the slow but steady reduction in Imperial might in the three years since Endor, had finally indicated their willingness to openly rebel.

And in this case, the Republic's new allies would come with a bonus. Though Verkuyl was sparsely settled and a bit too far out on the Rim to be strategically valuable, Selby knew the New Republic considered military support of the coup a small price to pay to bypass the hassles of dealing with the bacta cartel and gain a direct pipeline to the medical resources. The Governor's Bid Party offered the perfect opportunity to insert an Intelligence team into his presence—combined with the military threat the fleet would present when it jumped into the system, orchestrating his surrender should be a snap.

Selby felt another drop meander down her spine as the stormtrooper seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time checking their credentials. His white armor gleamed brightly in the sun as they stood there, sweating under his blank, black-visored gaze for what seemed an eternity. The uneasy silence lengthened. She exchanged a glance with Vartos, and knew he was thinking the same thing when suddenly a voice behind them broke in.

"Excuse me—is there a problem?"

She turned. The new arrival, a lanky, fair-haired man dressed in the dark blue uniform of an Imperial aide, regarded them quizzically from the sidewalk.

The stormtrooper snapped to attention. "Sir, they say they're here for the Bid Party, but I haven't been able to confirm their authorization to attend."

"I see," the man said, coming up the steps. "Your names?" He briefly consulted a small datapad. "You're on the list," he confirmed. "It's all right, Sergeant. Let them pass."

The stormtrooper nodded, stepping aside as the massive Hall door swung open. Inside, marvelously cool air welcomed them, and a copper-colored droid dotted with tiny green, rusty-looking specks glided forward to take their travel bags. *This awful humidity*, Selby thought. *Even the droids are affected.*

"I'm Daven Quarle," the man said, extending his hand first to Vartos, then to her. "I'm His Excellency's aide in charge of the refinery project."

Selby shook it, noting that Quarle's grip was firm, with hard calluses ridging his fingers. Not a mere bit-pushing bureaucrat then; this man was accustomed to work—and quite a lot of it.

Intelligent green eyes sized her up, as well. "So, you're the two from GalFactorial," he commented as they boarded the turbolift, en route to their rooms on the fifth floor with the other bidders. "Your

company has a reputation for doing good work. But," he cocked an eyebrow as the lift started to rise, "I hear the refinery you people built on New Cov ended up coming in over budget. That true?"

"Of course not," Selby said, suddenly grateful that whatever omission Intelligence had made regarding the smellier aspects of refining bacta, she *had* been thoroughly briefed on her cover story. "Midway through construction, the client decided to change the venting system so the plant wouldn't vent to the outside. Obviously, redesigning at that point was difficult, but the client insisted, so the budget was readjusted and approved." She gave him a blandly professional smile. "In the end, the project actually came in under the revised budget."

"I see," Quarle murmured. "I'm glad to hear that. His Excellency always appreciates a creative bit of number-crunching."

Selby looked at him sharply, uncertain how to interpret the remark. She decided to change the subject. "If you don't mind me asking, how many other companies sent bidders for the project?"

That eyebrow quirked again. "Curious about the competition?" *Not really*, she thought. *Concerned about innocent civilians.* Although the crowd gave them more opportunity for cover, she didn't like having to worry about the bidders' safety. The mission had been carefully planned to be as bloodless as possible, but accidents could—and frequently did—happen.

"A little," she answered out loud. "Actually, I wondered if there'd be an opportunity to present our bid to the Governor in person. I find it's beneficial to personally explain the numbers to prospective clients." She caught his eye meaningfully, held the look. "Our clients often find it rewarding, as well."

"Ah," Quarle said, inclining his head knowingly. He understood the covert language of a bidder wishing to offer a bribe. "As it happens, you'll be able to meet His Excellency later this evening, at a special reception we've planned for the bidders. And those who wish to —" he hesitated — *to privately* discuss their bids with Governor Ein may make an appointment to meet with him. Perhaps sometime tomorrow?"

Selby considered. Tonight, Claris would help members of the Verkuyl resistance set fuses around the planet's main comm transmitter tower as her fellow operatives set in motion their own explosive plans at the Hall. Tomorrow, she'd signal the fleet and then destroy the Imperials' only means of calling for backup of their own once Selby gained entrance to Governor Ein's office to offer

him the New Republic's "bribe."

Which, being a savvy public official skilled in the art of self-preservation, and further encouraged by the military might which would have just arrived to orbit persuasively overhead, His Excellency would, of course, accept.

She smiled at Quarle. "Tomorrow's perfect," she said. "I'll look forward to it."



And if it weren't for the necessity of keeping up her guard, she might have managed to relax and enjoy herself—at least a little, Selby mused that evening as she and Vartos stepped into the Hall's open-aired central courtyard where the reception was being held. If Verkuyl's dubious charms this afternoon had lived up to the planet's reputation as an Outer Rim backwater, their comfortable, well-appointed rooms and this gracious gathering tonight could do a lot to change their minds.

The sultry purr of smooth jizz poured over them, and from the looks of the buffet table along the far wall, the Governor was a generous, even lavish host. With sunset, the jungle humidity had at last become bearable, and the decorative tile underfoot and the fancy, fashionable garb of the bidders would have been right at home in any of the corporate ballrooms on Coruscant.

Except—it stank. Even in this beautiful setting, outside of the Hall's blessedly closed air system, the smell of simmering alazhi was impossible to escape.

"Let's split up, shall we?" Vartos murmured, eyes on the corner bar fountain spilling some kind of dark red drink into a shallow pool. "It'll be easier to slip out that way."

Not that he'd be slipping out for his reconnaissance of the Hall until he'd thoroughly reconnoitered the reception, Selby thought, amused. After all, they did have covers to maintain. "Sure," she agreed. "I think I'll check out that buffet myself."

Three hours, two plates, and endless bidder chit-chat later, she paused under one of the courtyard's graceful archways to glance back at the swaying dance floor. It had steadily expanded in direct proportion to the shrinking bounty of the buffet table and the Governor's free booze supply. Bidders moving to the soulful wail of a bass viol filled nearly two-thirds of the courtyard, while the rest

of the party had begun wandering through the arches and into the Hall proper.

Which made it a perfect time to do a little wandering, herself.

She didn't dare use the turbolift beyond the fifth floor, where most of the Bid Party attendees had been given rooms. But even so, finding the Governor's office on the top floor proved no problem, as Intelligence had very thoughtfully provided a map. Shoes in hand, she crept up the Hall's quaint staircase, discovering and dismantling half a dozen security sensors before reaching her destination. It took only a moment to unfasten the tiny eavesdropping device, a silver-toned stud indistinguishable from the dozens of less-useful ones decorating the neckline of her stylish blue evening gown. But getting the thing past the security sensors, sentry cameras, and the guard in front of Ein's office proved a bit more difficult.

In the end, she was reduced to enlisting the aid of a housecleaning droid, which—either having not noticed the silver stud arcing through the air to plunk neatly into the Governor's wastebin or programmed not to care—obligingly carried it right past the guard and deposited it under Ein's desk. Selby waited until the droid finished its housecleaning, repacked its cart, and disappeared into the turbolift before she slipped back down the stairs to rejoin the reception.

She never made it.

Hurrying across the tenth floor's polished landing, Selby heard the turbolift's doors unexpectedly slide open behind her. *Burnin' stars*, she cursed, stomach sinking. *Did I miss a sensor?* Still meters away from the safety of the stairwell, with nowhere to go and no choice but to brazen it out, she turned to face the new arrival.

Daven Quarle.

They both stopped short in surprise. Green eyes swept over her, noting the shoes she held in her hand and lingering briefly on the gown's decorative neckline before settling on her bare feet. Selby, holding the hem of the dress nearly to her knees to facilitate her scurry down the stairs, hastily dropped it and covered her toes.

When Quarle looked up again, his eyes glinted—with suspicion, or amusement, Selby couldn't tell. "Bidder Jarrad," he said politely. "If you're looking for your room, I believe you have the wrong floor."

"Um, no. No, I don't," she said, thinking fast. That thumbpass in his hand—"I mean, I appreciate your concern, but I'm not really lost."

Quarle said nothing. She hurried to explain. "It's such a nice night, and the stars looked so pretty from the courtyard. I thought I'd go up on the roof and enjoy the view."

He raised an eyebrow. "Wouldn't taking the turbolift be easier?"

Something about Quarle—his concern for the workers, perhaps—told her there was more to him than met the eye.

"Well, of course. But —" She shrugged and played her hunch. "It wouldn't take me all the way up, so I found the stairs and started walking."

"I see," Quarle said, eyes dropping again to the shoes dangling from her fingers. "As it happens, these stairs don't go up to the roof."

"Oh," Selby said, trying to sound disappointed. "Well...it

was just a whim. Never mind." She started to turn away — "Wait."

She glanced back. Quarle regarded her thoughtfully. "It is a nice night," he agreed. "And the view from the roof is spectacular. I can take you up there, if you like."

Selby studied his expression, wondering what was behind the offer. Did Quarle suspect her of lying, and want to get her someplace dark and private to quiz her more thoroughly—or worse? Or was it something far less sinister; just a simple invitation from a man to a woman to go stargazing?

It bothered her, a little, that it had been so long since the last such invitation that she could no longer tell when one was being offered. The demands of working Intelligence kept most people at arm's length—or further. *I ought to at least find out what he wants*, Selby told herself. *If he is suspicious, the roof might not be such a bad place to deal with the problem.*

She made herself smile brightly at him. "Sure. I'd like that."

The short ride up to the roof was made in silence, and outside the air was still and stiflingly warm; a shock after the comfortably cool Hall. But overhead, a thousand-thousand stars glittered like tiny jewels strung on garlands in the heavens—a spectacular sight, as Quarle had promised.

They stood near the carved stone railing—Selby carefully keeping just out of his reach—and gazed out over the city. She located the main comm tower rising out of a small ring of lights about a

kilometer away, and wondered if Claris and her team had finished rigging the explosives. If all went as planned, by this time tomorrow evening Verkuyl would be back in the possession of its original owners.

"Seem a long way off, don't they?" Quarle said.

"What?" She turned, looked at him sharply. "Who does?"

"The stars," he said, giving her an odd look. He waved his hand in a gesture that took in the jeweled sky. "They seem so far away, but in terms of interstellar trade, they're just a hop, skip, and a jump away—so close you can almost reach out and touch them."

"Oh," Selby said. Apparently he had brought her up here solely to stargaze. She looked up, too. "The miracle of hyperspace," she quoted, not sure what else to say. "Linking a hundred-thousand worlds together in a galactic village."

"That it does," Quarle agreed, gazing overhead. "Which one's yours?"

Selby scanned the night sky for a glimpse of Averill, but the starscape was completely unfamiliar. "I don't know," she confessed, surprised at the absurdly pleased feeling the small talk engendered. "It's out there somewhere."

He smiled too. Without that reserved, watchful expression, he looked younger; perhaps only a few years older than herself. "Where are you from?" she asked.

"Here," he said. "Bacta bred, born, and raised. Never even been off the planet."

"Really," she said, mind clicking over his words. If Quarle was a native, then his parents had been among the original migrants who'd come to the planet as shareholders in Verkuylian BactaCo, alone contingent which somehow managed to form its own enclave apart from the bacta cartels. Quarle's parents were probably among those workers who'd turned their backs on their colleagues and joined forces with the Empire when it had arrived to nationalize the company. And, given his position in the Governor's office, no doubt among the ones who had looked the other way as their former co-workers became little more than slaves, no longer producing bacta for their own profit, but for the imagined glory of the Empire.

In short, the kind of loyal Imperial citizen the rebelling workers she'd come to liberate widely regarded as traitors.

Selby reminded herself that given her fake ID and the convincing packet of professional lies that comprised her cover story, Quarle

believed her to be a loyal Imperial citizen herself. "You're the right man to ask, then," she said, deliberately steering away from that topic of conversation. "Does it always smell this...this *bad* here?"

Quarle laughed out loud. "I barely notice it," he told her, "but then again, I've lived here all my life. I'm not sure I even have a sense of smell anymore."

"Lucky you." She grinned. "The first whiff out the hatch just about knocked me flat."

He laughed again. "Verkuyl will never attract the tourist trade, that's for sure." He paused, staring out over the city. "But while we won't ever be mistaken for the bright center of the universe, there are lots of things which could be done to improve the situation here," he said, abruptly serious.

"Such as?" Selby asked, curious in spite of herself. Just how did Verkuyl's Imperial masters envision molding the future of the planet they had stolen from its rightful owners?

Quarle looked at her a moment as if deciding how to answer. Then, apparently reaching a decision, he relaxed against the stone railing. Behind him the comm tower's distant lights cast reddish glints off his golden hair, and beyond the tower the absolute blackness of Verkuyl's vast alazhi jungle stretched to the horizon.

"The Governor has several ideas, most of which are very sound," he began, and though Selby had expected no less, she was somewhat disappointed when he went on to recite the standard Imperial line. She couldn't quite dismiss the nagging feeling he wasn't truly convinced though. So when he paused, she said, "Now. Tell me what *you* would do if you were in charge."

Quarle favored her with another of those long, assessing looks. Selby forced herself not to flinch as he stepped closer, narrowing the distance between them. "You really want to know?" he asked, voice low, standing so close their shoulders brushed.

Pulse abruptly pounding and all senses alert to any sign of attack, Selby nodded.

Quarle stared at her intently a moment more. Then, slowly, he folded his arms across his chest and eased back against the railing. "All right," he said, looking away. "What I think is that a new approach is needed—an aggressive expansion that'll ultimately offer Verkuyl more economic independence in the galactic community, give us more security, and address some of the concerns the workers have been voicing lately."



He glanced over, gauging her reaction. Intrigued, Selby relaxed against the railing herself and settled in to listen. Encouraged, he started to go on, but was interrupted by a discreet beep. "Excuse me a moment," he said, pulling a comlink from his pocket. "Yes, what is it?"

"Daven, it's Jorli," said a voice Selby recognized as belonging to a junior aide on Ein's staff. "I'm sorry to bother you, but the reception's pretty much wound down except for a few party-hards who won't take a hint. I turned off the fountain and got the droids stacking chairs, but they still won't leave. Should I call Security?"

"No," Quarle said with a sigh. "Leave them to me. I'll be down in a moment." Repocketing the comlink, he looked at Selby ruefully. "I'm going to have to cut this short. Duty calls."

"It always does," Selby said. She straightened up too, wondering if perhaps—"Would it be all right if I stayed up here a little longer? It really is a beautiful view."

"Sorry, no," he said. "You'd need a thumbpass to get down the lift, and I don't have any extras. This one's keyed to me—non-transferable."

"Oh. Okay." Not that she'd really expected he'd give her free run of the Hall, Selby shrugged. "Well, then. Shall we go?"

The ride down was as quiet as it had been on the way up, the brief moment of camaraderie gone. Quarle courteously escorted her to her room, bid her a polite good evening, and strode away. Sternly resisting the urge to watch until he'd disappeared into the turbolift, Selby shut the door behind her. This was one of the worst parts of the job—when an enemy showed himself not as an adversary, but a decent-seeming person who just happened to be serving on the opposite side.

She sighed. In her line of work, it was easier to see everything in black or white, friend or foe, than to attempt sorting out all the shades of gray. Color blindness was often healthier, as well. Agents who hesitated to silence their foes often found that their newfound "friends" did not hesitate to silence them. Working Intelligence meant keeping the battle lines clear, and the enemy firmly fixed in your sights. There was no room for anything else.

Too bad, she thought. Something about Quarle—his concern for the workers, perhaps—told her there was more to him than met the eye. Not that it mattered, of course. She knew where her duty lay. She sighed again, turned around. From the doorway connecting their rooms, Vartos regarded her with a frown.

"Everything okay?" he asked. "You were gone quite awhile."

"Fine," Selby reassured him. Walking over to the bed, she sat down and began pulling out the decorative combs that secured the neat crown of curls atop her head. Auburn locks slipped down about her shoulders. "We okay to talk here?"

"I checked it out. We're clean." He took a few steps further into the room. "Did you get it set?"

"Uh huh." Selby inspected the combs on the coverlet before her. Picking one up, she touched a fingernail to a certain spot and activated the receiver. They listened. Silence. She nodded in satisfaction. All quiet, as it should be. The eavesdropper awaited tomorrow.

Suddenly, a faint squeak broke the quiet. She and Vartos exchanged a glance. Another squeak, accented by the scrabble of tiny claws. Selby grinned. "His Excellency appears to have a skitter problem."

"Let's hope it doesn't have an appetite for shiny little snacks."

"They don't eat metal," she told him. "It's about the only thing they *don't* eat."

"Good." He studied her briefly. "So, what happened with that aide, Quarle?"

"He caught me coming back downstairs," she admitted. "I thought there'd be trouble, but it seemed to work out all right."

Vartos looked relieved. "Well, if you had to get caught, good thing it was him. He's in a good position to bail you out."

Selby frowned. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Bail you out—cover for you. Make an excuse why you're someplace you shouldn't be." Vartos gave her an odd look. "Didn't he ask what you were up to?"

"I told him I was trying to get up on the roof to see the stars."

"And he bought it?"

"He seemed to." She looked at him, still frowning. "Why would he cover for me?"

"Wait, let me get this straight," Vartos said. "As far as you know he knows, you were just wandering around the Hall because —" he grinned — "you wanted to go stargazing?"

"That's what I said," she gritted. "What did you mean —"

"Sel, he's on our side," Vartos said gently. "He's with the Verkuylian resistance."

She caught herself before her jaw dropped. "He is?" It took another moment to digest the news. "Then he knows all about us," she said. "He knew the whole time what I was up to."

"No, I don't think so," Vartos said. "You know how these things are set up, Sel."

She nodded, still taking it in. Members of resistance cells almost always had nominal contact with each other, and limited knowledge of what was going on in order to reduce liability. That way, if one were compromised or caught, the damage to the overall group could hopefully be kept to a minimum.

She thought about it a little more, recalling her initial impression that Quarle wasn't quite what he seemed. "That takes nerve, playing both sides that way," she said, rethinking their conversation on the roof in light of this new information. "He's got a tough hull to patch passing himself off as a loyal Imperial."

"So do we," Vartos said, rather tartly. "And unless we absolutely need him for something, we're going to keep on treating him like he is one. Time enough *after* the coup to compare notes on your respective undercover careers, Sel."

The admonition was hard to miss. "Of course," she said, slightly hurt that he'd think anything else. "You can count on me to put the mission first, sir."

"I know." He studied her a moment longer, nodded once, and

changed the subject. "So. Here's what the security setup on the lower levels looks like."

He launched into a description of sensor panels, guard posts, and hidden cameras. Selby listened, grateful her brain was kept busy visualizing the Hall layout rather than replaying that evening's encounter with Quarle. Wondering if the duplicity inherent in carrying off his masquerade gave him any difficulties. Whether it was...lonely...living a life split between ideals and duty, unsure who to call friend and who to call foe, but all too sure he could not let his guard down with either.

Realizing the direction of her thoughts, Selby forced her mind back to the task at hand. As Vartos had said, time enough for that sort of thing later.

Or perhaps there would have been, if things had turned out differently.



Selby listened to the whispers from the tiny speakers concealed in her ornamental ear-sculpts as she sped up to the Governor's office the next morning. What she heard sent her stomach plunging as surely as if the turbolift's floor had suddenly dropped out from beneath her. Which, in a sense, it had. Claris, waiting at the comm tower for Selby's signal to hail the fleet, had just been captured.

And in the short space of time that it took Governor Ein to be informed of the arrest, and for Selby to overhear it before the eavesdropper's signal abruptly cut off, their carefully crafted plan went to pieces. The loss of Claris shattered it as effectively as a change in cabin pressure micro-fractured a ship's brittle hull.

For that first stunned moment, Selby felt panic freeze her mind as she watched the floor indicators flash past, carrying her ever closer to her meeting with the Governor. Claris captured, herself only seconds away from the stormtroopers sure to be awaiting her arrival at Ein's office—

Then a hot surge of adrenaline thawed the frost and sent her brain scrambling to find a way to salvage the situation. *Think*, she ordered herself, damning the eavesdropper for cutting out just when she needed an ear in the Governor's office the most. Was there any way she could stop the lift, get off it, and find a way to warn Vartos?

She bit her lip. Without a thumbpass, no. Not before first making a stop on the Governor's floor. The guard below had entered her destination, notified Ein's office she was on her way up, and keyed the lift for non-stop.

But there are other ways of making an exit, she thought, glancing up to confirm the presence of a maintenance panel in the lift's ceiling. She could knock out the panel, climb into the shaft, and go...where? Her hand, reaching for the lift's controls, hesitated—

And then, suddenly it was too late. The doors slid open.

Selby froze. Two stormtroopers stood opposite the lift, blaster rifles resting imposingly on their white-armored shoulders in traditional parade-ground stance. She stared at them. They stared back, seemingly in no hurry to take her into custody. Inside, hope battled with caution. Could it be they didn't know?

She couldn't just stand in the lift forever. Taking a deep breath, she stepped out. Boldly, she announced: "I'm here to see His Excellency."

The stormtroopers just stared at her without responding, but off to the side a golden-eyed protocol droid snapped to attention. "I'm sorry, but the Governor is unable to see you now," it apologized in an officiously smug manner that made Selby suspect it delivered this particular speech quite often. "Unexpected business has come up that requires his immediate attention. May I reschedule your appointment to another time?"

"Oh, I suppose," she said, trying to look annoyed at the delay. Still not quite believing her luck, she agreed to a time and re-entered the turbolift. As it sped back down to ground level, she steeled herself to tell Vartos there had been a change in plan. As the mission's commanding officer, it would be up to him to decide what course of action that change required.

For just a moment, she allowed herself to think about Claris, now in Imperial custody—an Intelligence operative's worst fear. Then the door slid open and she set out in search of the generator room where Vartos waited for his signal to cut power to the Hall. If they hadn't been before, the Imperials were monitoring electronic communications now for sure. She'd have to deliver this message in person.

But as it turned out, she didn't have to. Vartos already knew.

Hands in the air and a grim expression on his face, he stood pinned against one of the humming power relay boxes. He turned his head to look at Selby as she slipped in, and she had her own

blaster out and in her hand before the situation really even registered. But the stormtrooper holding the blaster rifle on him didn't even glance her way. He didn't have to. Before she got her weapon up to firing position, a harsh voice from the side ordered her to drop it.

Selby froze mid-aim and slowly turned her head to look. A short distance away, Daven Quarle had his hands half-raised as he stood between two rows of power relays. Behind him, the second stormtrooper's blaster rifle now pointed in her direction. "Drop it! Now!" the trooper repeated forcefully.

Selby risked another glance at Vartos. His eyes met hers, and in their grimly resigned depths she could see he understood her dilemma.

As it stood now, with the whole New Republic team captured and the fleet not called, the mission was doomed to certain failure. Without the fleet to encourage his surrender, Ein and his stormtroopers would simply crush the rebelling workers, and the three—no, the four of them, counting Quarle—would be interrogated and then most likely killed.

However, if she went ahead



and took a shot at Vartos' captor, it would probably result in her commanding officer's immediate execution, but if—and it was a big if—Quarle over there was as quick-minded as he'd seemed and thought to divert the second stormtrooper, she just might manage an escape during the ensuing firefight.

And if she got free, there was still a chance she could—somehow—call the fleet.

You can count on me to put the mission first, she'd said to Vartos.

She'd meant it.

Raising the blaster, Selby fired.

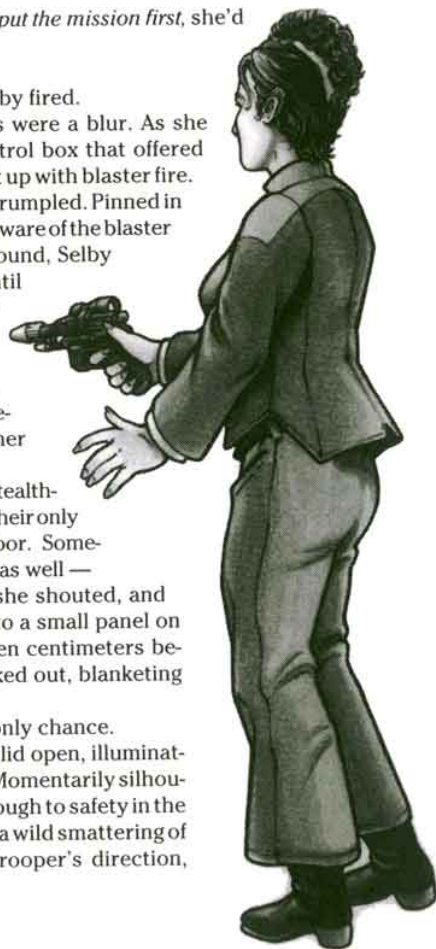
The next few moments were a blur. As she dove behind a metal control box that offered meager cover, the room lit up with blaster fire. Across the room, Vartos crumpled. Pinned in place and uncomfortably aware of the blaster bolts sizzling close all around, Selby kept shooting anyway until the first stormtrooper went down. Then, twisting to aim at his comrade, crouching behind a metal box of his own, a movement to the side caught her eye.

It was Quarle, edging stealthily along the wall towards their only means of escape, the door. Something else caught her eye as well—

"Daven—watch out!" she shouted, and fired. The bolt sizzled into a small panel on the wall a scant few dozen centimeters before him. The lights blinked out, blanketing the room in darkness.

And this was it—her only chance.

As if on cue the door slid open, illuminating her path to freedom. Momentarily silhouetted, Quarle slipped through to safety in the corridor beyond. Aiming a wild smattering of cover fire in the stormtrooper's direction,



Selby got to her feet and darted after him.

She almost made it unscathed. Just as she reached the door, a blaster bolt grazed her outstretched arm, sending jagged claws of hot pain streaking up to her shoulder and forcing out an involuntary cry as she stumbled into the corridor beyond. The door slid shut behind her, the faint sounds of the trooper's fire slamming uselessly against the metal barrier.

Alerted by her cry, Quarle turned back. Suddenly nauseous, and dizzy by the burning pain, she faltered just outside the door and struggled to get her bearings. "Which way?" she managed from between grit teeth.

Quarle hesitated, but far behind him down the corridor, two stormtroopers rounded the corner and the question suddenly became moot. Her arm felt engulfed in flames, but she managed to fire a few discouraging bursts their way before turning to run. As blaster fire echoed down the corridor, she felt more than heard Quarle close on her heels.

They hadn't gone more than 50 meters before he pushed her firmly to the right and slapped at a door panel there. Selby let him guide her, bursting into a long, narrow room with no doors other than the one they'd just come through. "Where're we going?" she demanded, pain making the question come out harsh.

"Somewhere safe," Quarle said, just as shortly. He felt along the blank wall on the far end of the room while Selby restlessly prowled, scanning the room for possible avenues of escape. She was relieved to be out of the immediate line of fire, but with no apparent way out, that relief was sure to be short-lived. And the stormtroopers would be here any moment —

Turning back to Quarle, she was startled to see an old-fashioned swing door in the far wall where she was positive none had previously existed. "Hurry up," he said, and proved the door wasn't a mirage by pushing it open and stepping into the darkness beyond.

Selby hastened into the narrow passage beside him, and watched as he did something at a panel set in the back of the wall. The light streaming in the open door suddenly changed. When Selby looked through it to the room beyond, it was like looking through a gauzy curtain.

She flinched as the door at the far side burst open. One at a time, two stormtroopers leapt into the room with weapons at the ready. But astonishingly, they spared no more than a cursory glance at the far wall. She realized then that they must see the same blank wall

she'd seen when first entering the room, and looked at the gauzy curtain with new respect. Hologlage—some of the best hologlage she'd ever seen—concealed the secret door from prying eyes.

"I'm impressed," she murmured tightly as Quarle shut the door, flicked on a glow rod and led the way down the dark passage. Her arm throbbed with each step. "Very impressed. How did you know it was there?"

"Old family secret." He glanced briefly over his shoulder. "My grandfather was Corlin Quarle Deld."

A moment later, the name clicked. "Verkuylian BactaCo's principal owner," she said, and he nodded. Selby nodded too, as the pieces fell more neatly into place. No wonder Quarle masqueraded as an Imperial while secretly plotting revolt. His family had owned the whole planet before the Empire took it over.

**"I see," Quarle said.
"So it's call the fleet
now, or never get
another chance."**

She thought of the hologlage and felt a renewed stirring of hope. "Got any other family secrets I'd like to know about?" she inquired.

Quarle paused before a door. Beyond, the passage disappeared into darkness.

Crouching, he shined the glow rod on a dusty keypad and punched in a series of numbers. A lock snicked, and he opened the door to reveal a tiny room.

"I might," he said finally, locking the door again behind them. "But we need to figure out what we're going to do here. It's obvious that whatever plan you and your partner came here with has fallen apart, and my cover's been blown as well. At this point, just getting out alive seems the best we can hope for."

"That's not good enough." Selby shook her head. "If I can get word to the fleet, there's a chance we can still pull this off."

Quarle looked at her sharply. "The fleet?"

"There's a small New Republic battle force nearby waiting for a signal from Claris—or rather," she amended, "a signal from me, before jumping in. Once it shows up, unless Ein has a Star Destroyer or two hidden in his back pocket, he'll have no choice but to surrender."

"I see," Quarle said slowly. He gazed off a moment, thinking, then slanted her a faint smile. "And no, he doesn't." The grin faded as his eyes went to her injured arm. "Why don't you tell me what's going

on while we take care of that burn?" he suggested. "We'll figure out where to go from there."

The medpac he produced contained only the mildest anesthetic, so Selby was just as glad to focus on describing the mission as Quarle gently cleaned the burn and slathered a viscous green gel over it. "Unstabilized alazhi," he said at her doubtful look. "Not quite as effective as refined bacta, but it'll certainly help."

It did. The cool gel soothed the burn and, as it hardened, provided a protective coating which made bandaging unnecessary. Selby flexed the arm experimentally, relieved to find the movement elicited only a dull throb of protest. "So," she said. "What do you think?"

"It's *your* arm." Quarle raised an eyebrow. "What do *you* think?"

"The arm's fine," she said, giving him a faint smile in thanks. "I meant, what next? Can you get me access to a subspace comm unit?"

He pursed his lips thoughtfully and sat back. "Probably," he allowed, then paused. "One question, though. What were the fleet's orders if it never got a signal? Send someone to investigate, or just go on home?"

"They wouldn't abandon us," Selby said. "They'd try to find out what happened."

"So someone would eventually show up to find out why the signal never came?"

"They wouldn't abandon us," Selby said again, feeling a twinge deep inside that, on the uncertain chance she could salvage the mission, she had basically abandoned Vartos back there in the generator room. She knew that if she failed, Intelligence would eventually send someone to investigate, but at that point the mission would simply mean extracting the surviving team members, if there were any, and pulling out. Vartos and Claris would have been lost in vain, the rebelling Verkuylian workers would be purged, and the Empire would win—perhaps permanently. Without enough support from the workers who were left, the New Republic would probably not return.

"I see," Quarle said. "So it's call the fleet now, or never get another chance."

"Looks that way," Selby agreed. She hesitated. "I'm sorry—this could get a lot messier than originally planned. If Ein starts rounding up workers, using them as hostages... we can still win, but victory may come at a higher price."

Quarle's cheek twitched. "All things worth having usually do." "There could be fighting; in orbit, or on the ground," she warned. "Will it be worth it to you?"

He looked at her. In his eyes, she saw grim acceptance.

"I want what's best for Verkuyli," he said. "If bloodshed is what it takes—" He looked away. "I'll regret it, but I'll learn to live with it."

"Now." He abruptly changed the subject. "I can think of three subspace comms we might be able to get to. Let's figure out which one would be best to try for...."



If she'd known of all the Hall's hidden passages last night, Selby reflected as she followed Quarle down a narrow corridor, getting up to the Governor's office undetected would've been as easy as shooting mynocks off a power coupling.

The Hall had proven a virtual warren of hidden passages. Quarle's grandfather had been a careful, one might even say paranoid, businessman—fortuitous, given the present circumstances. It meant they could move within the Hall with astonishing freedom, only needing to leave cover to call the fleet. Selby smiled to think that when the Imperials, no doubt monitoring outgoing subspace transmissions, came running to investigate the call, all they'd find were unconscious guards in an empty room. She and Quarle would slip back into hiding to await the fleet's arrival before confronting Ein.

"We're almost there," Quarle said quietly, pausing at an intersection. "Before we go any further, I want to check the situation outside; see what we're up against."

"Sounds good," she murmured back. "Lead on."

He hesitated, then turned to look at her. "I'd rather do it alone," he said. "I know the passage system. You don't. And this way, if I get caught there'll still be one of us left to finish the job."

Selby frowned. It made sense, but she did not particularly want to split up. Quarle didn't have a blaster and would be unable to protect himself if he ran into trouble. She felt another twinge, remembering Vartos. Team members were supposed to watch each others' backs. She briefly considered giving him her own blaster for the reconnoiter, but decided not to. Intelligence had taught her to watch her own back, first.

Quarle's eyes dropped to the blaster too, but when she didn't offer it, he didn't ask. "You wait here," he told her. "I shouldn't be gone too long."

Selby nodded. He looked at her a long moment more, as if wanting to say something else, but then merely nodded too. Turning, he started around the corner —

"Watch your back," she said softly.

He glanced back, raised that eyebrow. "Always," he assured her, and strode away.

Once he was gone, Selby leaned back against the narrow passage's wall and sighed. Alone with her thoughts since the shoot-out in the generator room, she could not get Vartos' face out of her mind. Had it simply been incredibly bad luck, his being discovered by the stormtroopers? Or had Claris already been "persuaded" to talk about her fellow operatives?

Which reminded her —

She reached up, slipping off the now-useless earsculpt. Holding it in her palm, she stared at it thoughtfully.

Claris must have talked, she decided. For the eavesdropper to have cut out so quickly and unexpectedly after her arrest, the Imperials must have known exactly what to look for. She fingered the smooth curve of the metal, feeling it gently flex, then brought it up close to study the intricate scrollwork doubling as a tiny speaker.

When Quarle's voice sounded from it, she froze.

With hands that suddenly felt like ice, Selby held the device against her ear. Silence; only her pulse pounding in her head. She frowned, carefully flexed the earsculpt again, and this time whatever weak connection inside the receiver that had apparently caused it to cut out now held. She listened, growing colder with each word.

"— Tafno has promised backup within six hours," Ein was saying. "Two Dreadnaughts at least, maybe more. Convince her to delay making the call until then. When the Rebels arrive, they'll find a fleet with a little firepower of our own waiting for them—not the easy pickings they expect."

"Yes, of course, Your Excellency," Quarle said. "But how do you propose I convince her? We are nearly in position to make the call now. She'll want to know why we should wait."

A long pause. Selby could barely breathe for the tight feeling in her throat. "Tell her that we've imposed satellite silence," the

Governor finally said. "Due to this terrorist threat, I've ordered a temporary ban on outgoing subspace comm traffic. Tell her the satellite relays have been shut down—but that a very old, unofficial relay placed in orbit by your grandfather will be within transmissible range in, oh, about six hours. And that you—*only you*—know how to access it."

Ein chuckled dryly. "You know, Daven, you may have hated the old man, but you must admit being Corlin Quarle Deld's grandson has put you in a unique position to realize his visions for Verkuyl."

"It's the only thing it ever *has* done for me," Quarle said. "The rest of the time, I'd as soon forget the tyrant ever existed."

"I shouldn't worry about it," Ein said. "No one holds it against you. You've already done more to make Verkuyl the success it is today than your grandfather ever could have. Your service to the Empire will long be remembered."



When Quarle rounded the corner, he found Selby waiting for him.

He stopped short at the sight of the blaster she held pointed at his chest. His eyes took in the steadiness of her aim, then brushed past to settle on her face. "Trouble?" he asked.

"How is it," she began conversationally, "that Corlin Quarle Deld's grandson ends up on the same side of the Empire that stole his home and destroyed his family's company?"

Quarle moved a few steps closer. Her aim did not waver. He stopped.

"BactaCo has hardly been destroyed," he said. "In fact, we currently have more business than we can handle. And the new refinery will increase both production and profits."

"I see," Selby said. Although determined to remain as cool about this as he, she felt her eyes narrow. "Then you don't care what the Empire does to Verkuyl, so long as the company gets its share of the credits."

He raised that eyebrow, and she had to fight back a sudden, violent urge to wipe that calm look off his face. "Those credits are what feed and clothe the workers, Selby. That's what a company is all about—providing goods or services for a price. To whom, it doesn't matter. Don't kid yourself that it was any different in my



grandfather's day, and don't think your New Republic's motives are any more pure. When it comes to running a company, the accumulation of credits is the bottom line."

"At least your grandfather came by the company honestly," she bit out. "He bought the planet, built the refineries, brought in the workers. He didn't steal it from its rightful owners in the name of the Empire and enslave its workers. He—"

"Don't preach that Rebel propaganda to *me*," Quarle broke in sharply. "He *did* do that—and worse, he did it in the name of free trade. At least when the Empire took over, Verkuyl began giving something back to the workers, not just producing credits to satisfy my grandfather's greed."

He stopped, took a breath to compose himself. "Do you know how he got workers to come to Verkuyl?" he continued, a little more quietly. "Remember, this was before the Empire. People needed jobs, and they were willing to do almost anything to get them. To sell themselves into slavery, even. And so they did."

"In exchange for their passage here and the privilege of working in my grandfather's refineries, they signed on for ten-year terms, at the end of which they were promised a share of stock of the company they'd labored to help build. My grandfather called it

indenture," he added bitterly, "but it was slavery."

Selby said nothing. Indentured servitude wasn't like being your own boss, free and clear, but it wasn't slavery, either. Both parties willingly entered into an agreement, and at the end of the contract —

"When the contract expired, most of the workers were so deeply in debt that even with their share of the stock, they couldn't get out," Quarle said. "Once they cashed out and paid off what they owed, there wasn't enough left over to leave. So they stayed."

She frowned. "How'd they get so far in debt?"

"The Company Store, of course," he said. "Most of the workers brought families with them, or married and started families once they arrived. My grandfather provided basic food and housing—soup kitchens and barracks—but anything else cost extra. A lot extra. It added up. By the time the Empire arrived to nationalize BactaCo, 90 out of every 100 workers were so deep in debt they didn't even get credit vouchers on payday. The wages were simply transferred straight to their delinquent accounts."

He gave Selby a bitter smile. "If the Republic really wanted to *liberate* the workers, it should have been here 25 years ago."

Silence followed. "What happened when the Empire took over?" she finally asked.

Quarle's mouth twisted. "Well, I'll say one thing for old Corlin. If he couldn't have the credits, he didn't want anyone else to, either. When he realized the Empire wasn't just going to come in and oversee the operation—that they intended to boot him out and run it themselves—he started erasing company records. Client lists, production reports, shipping contracts —"

"And employee records." She nodded, beginning to understand. "The Empire didn't know about his arrangement with the employees."

"That's right," he said. "So when the Empire took over, Verkuyl stopped being a miserable little company planet run by a tight-fisted tyrant, and became what it was supposed to be: a place for these people to work and live. In the past 20 years, we've tripled our worker population and quadrupled our bacta production—and increased our profits by a thousand percent. Verkuylians are better off under the Empire than they ever were under my grandfather, so don't imagine you're doing us any great favors by *liberating* us."

It was true the Verkuylians had not clamored to be free of the Empire.

Indeed, it had only been in the two years or so, when the New

Republic chased the Empire out of the Core and triumphantly claimed Coruscant, that the resistance movement on Verkuyl had even begun. During her mission briefings, Selby had formed the impression the workers might have been cowed—or *content*, a small voice now whispered—to labor for the Empire forever if not for two things. One, that as Imperial strength ebbed, it provided less and less in the way of support to its smaller possessions such

Black or white, friend or foe, she reminded herself. In this job, there was no room for anything else.

as Verkuyl; and two, the loss of a major medical supplier at Chennis last year had sent New Republic rabble-rousers to various Imperial-held suppliers to see what kind of rebellion they could stir up.

Verkuyl had stirred

nicely.

But that doesn't mean the workers aren't sincere in their desire to be free, Selby told herself. Just that it took our encouragement to give them the courage to revolt.

She looked at Quarle. "If the Empire is forced to leave Verkuyl, you probably stand to inherit the bulk of the holdings. How can you possibly object to that?"

He shook his head. "You just don't get it, do you? I want what's best for Verkuyl—not what's best for myself, but best for the company and the planet. And I believe what's best for it right now is the Empire."

"The workers don't agree."

"The *workers* don't see the big picture," Quarle retorted. "They're laborers, not administrators. At the moment, they can't see past the promises the New Republic's dangling in front of them like nerfs being led to the milking shed."

"Independence —" He made it sound like a dirty word. "You tell me where, anywhere, workers don't dream of being their own boss. But they haven't got the faintest idea how to actually do it. Without the Empire's guidance, they'll run this company—their livelihood—right into the ground, or make juicy pickings for the bacta cartel. Then how much will their *independence* mean?"

"They'll be free," Selby said.

"Free to starve, maybe," he shot back bitterly.

She raised the blaster.

"Selby, *think* about it," he said warningly. "The Governor knows what's going on here. You can't win, but if you surrender now, I give you my word you won't be harmed."

He took a step forward, eyes earnestly searching her face. "Please, Selby. You won't get out of here any other way. It doesn't have to be like this."

In her mind's eye, Selby saw Vartos held at blaster-point by the Hall stormtrooper. She thought of Claris, and the horror stories every Intelligence agent heard of the fate that awaited them at the hands of Imperial inquisitors. She thought of Quarle, and that in doing what he truly felt best for his people, he had to betray their confidence, knowing full well that for many of them it meant certain death.

Black or white, friend or foe, she reminded herself. In this job, there was no room for anything else.

"Yes, it does," she said, and fired.



Thirty-four hours later, leaning against the stone railing of the Hall's roof and staring down at the dancing flames of a celebratory bonfire in the street below her, Selby reflected that, for having salvaged success from such certain failure, she should be in a much brighter frame of mind.

Listening to the revelry going on below, she wondered at the absence of her usual satisfaction at the successful completion of a mission. She didn't doubt the New Republic had done the right thing, bringing about the liberation of Verkuyl and restoring BactaCo. to its native workers. A populace held in thrall, either to an Empire or a business dictator, needed to be set free.

But for the first time in her years of being involved in such liberations, it occurred to her to question whether the New Republic had done it because it was the best thing for the planet and its people, or because a direct pipeline to BactaCo. was the best thing for the New Republic.

She could not forget Quarle's prediction; that the Verkuylsians, faced for the first time with self-government and the running of a business, would be crushed under the weight of their new responsibilities. To help ease their transition, Selby had been told the New Republic planned to provide advisors to help the fledgling

businessfolk find their economic feet in the galactic community. She frowned, bothered by this train of thought. New Republic "advisors" to Verkuyl somehow sounded too similar to the same sort of "advice" the Empire had dispensed.

She half-wished Quarle, who had the experience to run the company and, by birth, the right, had chosen to stay and help. But released from the hidden passage where she'd left him bound, only a certain darkness in those green eyes betraying the feelings he kept from showing on his face, Quarle had elected to leave Verkuyl with the rest of the Imperial interlopers. Once the workers learned what he'd done, it was painfully clear that they would never trust him again.

"Sel?" A voice cut into her brooding. "It's almost time to go."

She turned. Vartos' dark skin blended into the shadows around the turbolift, but she could see the faint gleam where his eyes reflected the starlight overhead. Both he and Claris had survived their captivity, although Vartos had required a few hours in a bacta tank to fully recover. Selby found that somehow ironic. "Yes sir," she replied. "I'll be right down."

Vartos nodded and stepped back into the turbolift, leaving her alone. Selby turned back to the railing, eyes again drawn to the bonfire below. Verkuyl celebrated its freedom tonight—but how long would its jubilation last under the pressures of its new responsibilities?

She sighed. She would not be around to find out. She had done her job—done it well—and now it was time to forget the things Quarle had said and move on to the next assignment.

Black or white, friend or foe, she reminded herself. Under the Empire, Verkuyl had been black. Under the New Republic, it would be white. It might be true that Verkuyl's future most likely held shades of gray—but in her line of work, it was best not to look at those shadowed colors too closely.

Turning away, Selby took a deep breath. She grimaced at the stink—the awful smell of the alazhi simmering in the refineries. It permeated everything, and after just four days on Verkuyl, she felt as if its stench had somehow soaked right through her skin and taken up permanent residence in her heart.

She feared it would stay with her forever.

Roleplaying Game Statistics

■ Selby Jarrad

Type: New Republic Intelligence Operative

DEXTERITY 4D

Blaster 6D, brawling parry 4D+1, dodge 5D, pick pocket 5D+1

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Bureaucracy 4D, business 4D+2, law enforcement 5D+2, streetwise 4D+1, willpower 5D

MECHANICAL 3D

Communications 5D, repulsorlift operation 4D+2

PERCEPTION 3D

Con 6D+2, hide 4D, investigation 4D+1, search 4D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 2D+2

Brawling 4D+2, climbing/jumping 3D+2

TECHNICAL 2D+1

Computer programming/repair 4D, droid programming 4D, first aid 3D+2, security 5D+2

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, fake ID, hold-out blaster (3D), variety of unique eavesdropping devices, including detachable listening devices that masquerade as decorative studs on an evening gown, and receivers hidden in earsculpts and hair accessories.

Capsule: Despite the loneliness inherent in the personal life of a New Republic Intelligence operative, in the six years since leaving her mine-clan on Averill and joining the Rebel Alliance, Selby Jarrad has never questioned the rightness of her decision to dedicate her professional life to freeing the galaxy from the tyranny of the Empire.

To her, proof of the Empire's oppressiveness is obvious: for generations the independent Jarrad mine-clan had worked hard, prospered, and lived well despite the difficult conditions in the quadrenium minehold deep below Averill's cracked surface. But after the Empire arrived to monopolize sales of the precious ore, the mine-clan's fortunes drastically changed. Its members still worked hard—desperately hard—but with the scant prices the Empire paid for the product of their back-breaking labor, the Jarrads no longer prospered, much less lived well.

After seeing her father crippled in a mining accident (which could



have been prevented had the clan had the funds to purchase more drilling droids), 18-year-old Selby proved more than receptive to suggestions of rebellion from a distant cousin who had recently returned to the minehold. Others in the clan were not so easy to rouse to action. When her cousin—a Rebel Intelligence officer charged with organizing active resistance against the Empire—eventually gave up and left, Selby went with him.

Along with other members of the Alliance, Selby rejoiced when the Emperor was defeated at Endor three years later, but knew her own part in the ongoing struggle had only just begun. Since joining the Intelligence division, she's eagerly encouraged, organized, and carried out resistance on worlds she believes would otherwise be too cowed by the Empire to consider revolt on their own—as was her overly cautious mine-clan back on Averill.

Until Verkuyll, it's never occurred to her that some worlds remain loyal to the Empire because many of their citizens genuinely prefer it that way. Her realization that things are not always as black and white as they seem is a sobering one, and Selby will be pondering this unsettling truth for some time to come.

■ Daven Quarle

Type: Imperial Governor's Aide

DEXTERITY 2D

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Bureaucracy: Verkuyll Governor's office 5D, business: Verkuyllian BactaCo 6D, willpower 5D

MECHANICAL 2D+1

PERCEPTION 4D

Bargain: bacta 5D+2, persuasion 6D+1, sneak 4D+2

STRENGTH 2D+2

TECHNICAL 3D

Computer programming/repair 4D+2, **security** 4D+1

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, datapad, security thumbpass

Capsule: Daven Quarle is a man divided by his intense—and often conflicting—loyalties. But to the conscientious Quarle, with his self-imposed sense of responsibility for Verkuyll's workers and his deep respect for the Empire, the price he pays for such split allegiance is nothing compared to its potential rewards.

Quarle is the grandson of Corlin Quarle Deld, the tyrannical founder of Verkuyllian BactaCo. Quarle was too young at the time to fully understand what happened when the Empire nationalized his grandfather's company and (unknowingly) released its workers from indenture. He did understand, however, that for the workers, life improved when the Empire arrived, and as he grew to adulthood a well-intentioned Quarle dedicated himself to making sure it stayed that way.

Dropping the "Deld" from his surname to distance himself from his grandfather's despotic legacy, Quarle worked first in the refineries,

then in the Governor's Hall, eventually working his way up to a position as one of Governor Parco Ein's most trusted aides. At the same time he remained close to the workers, always willing to lend a sympathetic ear and use what influence he had to ensure their concerns were addressed. Although aware some of them weren't happy under Imperial rule and began whispering of revolt, Quarle remained convinced that BactaCo's, and therefore the workers's best chance for continued prosperity rests with the Empire. "After all," he says in a gentle attempt to dissuade the would-be rebels while carefully concealing the worst of their treacherous rumblings from the Governor, "the Empire has done well by us so far."

Until now Quarle has been able to maintain an uneasy equilibrium between the two groups. By acting as a bridge between the workers and the Empire, he firmly believes that he can help work out their differences, to the ultimate benefit of all. But with the arrival of a New Republic Intelligence team intent on helping the workers roust the Empire, the delicate balance he's worked so hard to build abruptly shifts. Forced to choose where his loyalties really lay, Quarle can only do what he's always done—act in what he feels is the best interest of the workers...even if it turns out not to be in his own best interest.



■ Major Cobb Vartos

Type: New Republic Intelligence Operative

DEXTERITY 3D+2

Blaster 7D, **brawling** parry 5D, **dodge** 6D, **grenade** 4D+2, **melee combat** 5D, **melee** parry 5D, **pick pocket** 4D

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Languages 4D, **law enforcement** 5D, **streetwise** 5D+2, **survival** 4D, **willpower** 4D

MECHANICAL 3D

Communications 5D, **repulsorlift operation** 5D, **sensors** 4D+2, **space transports** 4D

PERCEPTION 3D

Con 6D, **forgery** 5D+1, **investigation** 5D, **persuasion** 3D+2, **search** 4D+2, **sneak** 5D+1

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 5D, **climbing/jumping** 4D+1, **stamina** 4D

TECHNICAL 3D+1

Computer programming/repair 4D+1, **demolitions** 5D+2, **droid programming** 4D, **droid repair** 4D, **first aid** 4D, **security** 5D

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, false ID, hold-out blaster (3D).

Capsule: Cobb Vartos has been a special ops agent with the Rebel Alliance since the beginning. He took pride in training new recruits, preparing them for the desperate commando missions and deep-cover operations to stay one step ahead of the Empire and uncover important information necessary for the Rebellion's survival. He instilled within each trainee the importance of staying focused on the mission at hand. Although he wasn't the usual shouting drill sergeant, Vartos maintained a cool exterior and a persistent, subtle pressure on his students. To many he was a benevolent father figure who allowed his trainees to learn from their own mistakes—and was on hand to help them out of tight spots.

After the Emperor's defeat at the Battle of Endor, Vartos transferred to New Republic Intelligence. Many of his students had risen above him, accepting positions in the new military structure. Vartos chose to use his talents in training a new generation of intelligence operatives. Although the obstacles didn't seem as challenging as before, Vartos knew special ops training would always be helpful—especially when every mission had some chance of failing.



■ Verkuyl

Type: Terrestrial

Temperature: Hot

Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)

Hydrosphere: Moist

Gravity: Standard

Terrain: Alazhi jungle

Length of Day: 27 standard hours

Length of Year: 315 local days

Sapient Species: Humans

Starport: Standard class

Population: 220,000

Planet Function: Bacta plantation

Government: Imperial governor

Tech Level: Space

Major Exports: Bacta

Major Imports: Foodstuffs

Capsule: Hot, humid, and wafting a stench so overpowering it makes

even the natives' eyes water, Verkuyl richly deserves its reputation as an Outer Rim backwater planet. With virtually every kilometer of its two continents covered with thick green jungles of alazhi, the planet has one purpose and one purpose only: to produce bacta for the Empire.

Uninhabited until just previous to the Clone Wars, Verkuyl was bought and colonized by Corlin Quarle Deld. The planet's remote location far from established trade routes and limited land mass made it of little interest to the galactic bacta cartel, but perfect for an ambitious entrepreneur like Deld, who brought scores of indentured workers to the plantation world to help him build Verkuylian BactaCo. Under the guidance of a few independently contracted Vratix (the insectoid species which had originally discovered bacta), the workers spent the first few years in back-breaking labor, eradicating Verkuyl's native plants and carefully prepared her newly shorn soil to the exact chemical composite required to grow the finicky alazhi. After the groves were finally planted, they thrived in the humid climate, the lush green vines twining together to form an impressively thick jungle eventually capable of producing more than 40 billion tons of raw alazhi a year.

When the Empire came to power, it saw Verkuyl as an opportunity to secure a ready supply of bacta completely free from the hassle of dealing with the powerful cartel. After Deld's unfortunate death while negotiating the deal, the Empire nationalized BactaCo. Over the next few decades, it oversaw the construction of several alazhi refineries, allowing the company not only to grow an essential component of bacta, but to create the finished product as well. Though still trifling in comparison to the output of a typical cartel-run plantation, the upgrades allowed BactaCo to do a tidy little business indeed.

Most of Verkuyl's small population lives in Headquarters, the company town carved out of the jungle on the Dalos Peninsula. Surrounded on all sides by dense, sticky greenery, Headquarters also houses the Governor's Hall, the refineries, and the small starport. Other workers live in harvesting camps scattered throughout the interior of the planet's two continents, enduring sweltering conditions while dodging the sting of alazhi sap as it drips from the oozing vines. The harvesters consider themselves lucky, however, to only go near the refineries to drop off a load. As bad as the ever-present smell of the sap is, they say, it's a thousand times worse while being processed.

Despite the Empire's recent setbacks, including losing Coruscant to the hated New Republic and seeing its territories shrink in other sectors as well, out on the Rim Verkuyl and BactaCo continue to flourish. Governor Parco Ein judiciously keeps certain Imperial warlords supplied with bacta, and, for a man previously making do on a retired Army colonel's pay, reaps quite satisfactory profits on what bacta he doesn't give away. At the suggestion of one of his aides, Ein is currently eyeing Dakuy, the system's other habitable planet, as another potential plantation. If he succeeds in expanding operations to there, within 10 years BactaCo should more than double its current production and quadruple its profits.

TALES OF THE JEDI COMPANION

Four millennia before the rise of Emperor Palpatine, Jedi Knights struggle against the minions of the dark side of the Force. The Beast Wars of Onderon and the Freedon Nadd Uprising have hurled the galaxy toward an inevitable clash between good and evil, and brave Jedi like Ulic Qel-Droma, Nomi Sunrider, and Tott Doneeta have joined forces with the Republic to fend off the growing darkness.

This companion to the popular comic book series features:

- Detailed game statistics and histories for the people, places, starships, vehicles, and droids involved in the events leading up to the Great Sith War.
- A comprehensive listing of *all* Force powers ever featured in any *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* product.
- A section on designing and running a *Tales of the Jedi* campaign.
- New equipment and character templates.

**The epic struggle against the dark side
of the Force is only beginning...**



*A selection of newfeeds culled from NewsNets
major and minor throughout the Empire,
which may or may not prove to be factual.*

Galaxy News Service

38:F1:1/GNS/XW23/COR.1.IPC/POL

Notables Absent from New Year Fete Week

CORUSCANT, IMPERIAL CITY: The famed Shaldania Parade opened Coruscant's New Year Fete Week, a celebration Imperial Court observers note was not well-attended by the Empire's most influential personalities.

The parade was filled with the traditional displays of Imperial power, including an entire corps of the Palace's elite stormtroopers, a column of AT-ST walkers, and a fabulous fireworks display released by thousands of TIE bombers soaring above the city spires.

Observers paid more attention to the absence of some of the Imperial Court's key players. For the second year in a

row, the Emperor spent his Fete Week attending to official Imperial business in the Deep Core. Alec Pradeux, one of Emperor Palpatine's close advisors, assured newsnet correspondents that Palpatine was in good spirits and health, though he hinted that the Emperor was busy finalizing plans to deal with the last vestiges of the terrorist Rebel Alliance. Pradeux and some of his fellow Advisors—including Sate Pestage, Bregius Golthan and Kren Blista-Vanee—presided over most of the Fete Week celebrations.

Darth Vader was absent from the festivities, though he rarely appears during Fete Week. Last month Vader left Imperial City to oversee Admiral Ozzel's Death Squadron in the Outer Rim Territories. There has been much speculation about Vader's departure. Whether the Emperor sent him away as punishment for some unknown transgression or Vader requested the assignment himself remains to be revealed. Ozzel's task force is charged with locating and eradicating Rebel military installations.

Two of the Imperial Court's most interesting figures, Grand Admiral Tigellinus and Admiral Thrawn, also failed to attend the New Year celebrations. The two have been major adversaries throughout internal Court politics. Their followers within Court factions continue to maneuver for more powerful positions even in their leaders' absence.

Court observers refused to comment on the absence of such notable rivals. Imperial Advisor and spokesman Alec Pradeux made a statement regarding the unusually high number of Court officials who did not attend Fete Week celebrations. "Our magnificent Empire requires constant supervision to ensure order and safety for all citizens," Pradeux said. "The Emperor must often send his most trusted servants to maintain the New Order throughout the vast reaches of his Empire...even during Fete Week."

Independent Traders' Infonet

38:1:9/ITI/CST1/SVA.CYC/TRD

Empire Boards, Questions Free-Traders

SOMAVVA, CYCLEA STATION: Numerous reports of Imperial intervention in commercial activities have prompted Independent Traders' Infonet to issue an advisory for all free-traders traveling the more remote regions of the Outer Rim. Spacers are cautioned against using lesser-known hyperspace routes where they are likely to be suspected of working for the Rebel Alliance.

Several free-traders have been apprehended and questioned by Imperial forces patrolling isolated areas within the Outer Rim. Those who were released after interrogation claim they ran into several Imperial Star Destroyers while visiting usually quiet, out-of-the-way systems. These Star Destroyers are reportedly elements of Admiral Ozzel's Death Squadron charged with rooting out and obliterating any trace of the Rebel Alliance. No one is certain whether they've seen the entire task force, which is rumored to include an undisclosed number of Star Destroyers and one of the new Super Star Destroyers, the Executor, recently launched from Kuat's massive shipyards.

Survivors corroborate stories that Imperial forces are systematically seeking any signs of the Alliance. The boarding actions take place under the pretense of standard Imperial Customs procedures. This is nothing unusual, since that office is not well-represented in some Outer Rim systems. The Imperial Navy has long served as a commerce inspection organization in areas where Imperial Customs

cannot effectively operate without substantially more power. During questioning, it is revealed that the Empire is looking for Rebel spies or cargoes destined for Alliance bases.

The growing number of these incidents is disturbing, as is the surprisingly aggressive firepower behind such boardings. The appearance of a Star Destroyer task force does not bode well for the more backwater regions. An increased Imperial presence in the Outer Rim could slow free-trader activities and adversely affect the economies of settlements dependent on such commerce.



TRINEBULON NEWS

38:1:15/TRI/25GV/BOZ.2.THOK/GEN/A. Javin

Kooroo Shrine Mystery Uncovered

By Andor Javin

BOZTROK, THOKISL: After a whirlwind tour of several shrines of Kooroo throughout the Outer Rim, your determined newsmag investigator, Andor Javin, has unraveled the mystery of these ancient monuments. What seem to be primitive temples are in truth archaic communication devices established by a long-dead species of scouts who explored our branch of the universe millions of years ago.

The shrines consist of a central sanctuary built from native stone. They are round, and often include a central dome, sometimes supported by several columns. The inner chamber is always dome-shaped, with a pedestal at center and a low step around the perimeter. From these

innermost chambers ancient scouts transmitted reports back to their homeworld. Most of these inner sanctums are easily accessible, although some can only be reached through booby-trapped passages.

A series of carved stone obelisks radiate out from the central shrine at evenly spaced intervals. Each obelisk is inscribed with a series of runes—strange, since the shrines themselves contain very few markings at all. These “spokes” leading from the sanctuary suggest the outline of a primitive comm transmission dish, or perhaps even an archaic natural energy-gathering device.

Shrines of Kooroo have been uncovered on several Outer Rim worlds, including Haffrin, Geggelar, Branteez, Sufezz, and Boztrok. By carefully studying the placement of shrines and the movement of various astrographical bodies, it might be possible to pinpoint the scouts’ homeworld and send an archaeological expedition.

Your intrepid reporter recently concluded his tour of shrines by visiting the sanctuary on Boztrok. My host was the Hutt art collector Prebda Thok, who owns one of the most valuable properties on the planet. The shrine was located on his exclusive island estate, where numerous bodyguards and soldiers escort dedicated pilgrims of Kooroo to and from the ruin each day. The inner sanctum consists of a central domed chamber, with a raised step along the perimeter where pilgrims sit and meditate. The island is not terribly large—though it is the biggest in the inhabitable archipelago which forms much of Boztrok starport. Unfortunately, no carved obelisks were discovered on the island, although I believe these monuments to be submerged beneath the surrounding ocean.

The modern-day Fellowship of Kooroo has few connections to the ancient scouts who constructed the shrines.

The secretive group has never made its doctrine public—we do know that followers venerate the shrines as signs or relics from their spiritual leader, Kooroo. These blue-robed pilgrims travel the Outer Rim, visiting these sanctuaries and meditating within their confines. Members seek the “enlightenment of Kooroo,” which many believe to be telepathic powers. Some think the shrines help sharpen natural telepathic ability. Perhaps the primitive scouts did not use the shrines to store technical comm equipment, but to heighten their own mental capability to send messages across space. Who knows how many more of these ancient communication devices remain to be discovered in the wastelands, jungles and overgrown savannas of numerous Outer Rim worlds?

Coruscant Daily NewsFeed

38:1:29/CDN/G76D/COR.1.IPC/POL

Imperial Advisor Golthan Leaves Court

CORUSCANT, IMPERIAL CITY: After meeting with Emperor Palpatine last week, Imperial Advisor Bregius Golthan departed from Coruscant to return to his sanctuary on Voktunma. The Emperor recently returned from the Deep Core, where he was attending to important affairs of state. His meeting with Golthan was among the first audiences he granted, though it is unclear whether Palpatine summoned his Advisor or Golthan requested the meeting himself.

Imperial Advisor Alec Pradeux assured Court observers that Golthan is not suffering from ill health, as had been suggested by some news sources. “The Emperor has charged Advisor Golthan with overseeing security within the Colonies and the Core Worlds,” Pradeux said. “My esteemed colleague is returning to Voktunma to examine how best to protect the welfare, property and livelihood of every citizen while improving the quality of life we enjoy.” These duties officially rest within the purview of the Minister of Security—Pradeux noted that Golthan’s role was clearly supervisory in relation to the Ministry.

While Pradeux did not elaborate on the cause for the appointment, sources within the Court suggested such actions are precautions against Rebel terrorist threats. Some claim Golthan plans to meet with high-level strategists from all military branches to assess the situation and make plans to increase security at key military installations and population centers. Such areas could include the Kuat shipyards on the edge of the Core Worlds, repulsorlift and walker production facilities on Kelada in the Colonies, and the agricultural cooperatives on Salliche and the systems administered by the Salliche Ag Corporation.

Although his current role is to ensure security, Golthan has been a staunch supporter of the Emperor’s aggressive campaign to crush the Rebel Alliance. Golthan rarely emerges at the forefront of Court maneuvering; however, his iron grip is rumored to be controlling or influencing several factions with various strategies for hunting down the Rebels. He has discreetly backed those Court factions urging military action against the terrorist group.

Cynabar's InfoNet

38:1:34/CYN/COR.1.IPC/GEN

Galladinium Contraband Headed for Spirva Sector

CORUSCANT NODE: Attention free-traders! Grab your Galladinium Datalog, stock up on weapons and self-defense products, and head for the Spirva sector.

Moff Shinda recently placed the catalog on a sector-wide contraband list, and has ordered Imperial Customs and local law enforcement offices to seize any Galladinium shipments headed for his sector. Apparently some of the local street gangs, criminal organizations and terrorist groups have been ordering, modifying and using Galladinium equipment to harass Imperial forces, escalate local conflicts, and cause general mayhem. Although reports indicate these riotous factions are lawless and unorganized, your friends at Cynabar's believe several larger groups are backed by the Rebel Alliance, as well as key criminal organizations who shall remain anonymous.

As with any prohibition, Moff Shinda's actions have opened up some lucrative opportunities for independent entrepreneurs. Buyers in Spirva sector are willing to pay top credit for weapons and self-defense products from the Galladinium Datalog. Ranged weapons are preferred: blasters, rifles, and slugthrowers. Find a good supplier within Galladinium's massive distribution bureaucracy. Practically anyone with a legitimate captain's accredited license and a ship's operating license can qualify as a wholesale shipper with Galladinium—and get their substantial dealer

incentive discounts.

Once you've brought the goods into Spirva sector, you can expect to sell your stock at 150 percent of Galladinium's Datalog price. Be careful, though. Distinguish between small-time customers and more solidly funded clientele. You don't want to be stuck in the sector with a load of Prax Arms projectile hunting rifles and a buyer with no credits.

Perhaps the most sought-after items are the gladiator walkers from the datalog's "recreation" section—although we don't advocate trying to smuggle anything that big under the Moff's nose. The heavy-hitters in Spirva sector's conflicts have modified what gladiator walkers they could get with more powerful blasters and upgraded armor. Rumors say the reason for Moff Shinda's prohibition stems from a confrontation between some Imperial Customs troopers and some criminal thugs in modified gladiator walkers. Guess we don't need to tell you who stomped away from that skirmish alive.

Sharp speculators will wait a few weeks before they start smuggling in first aid supplies and medical equipment from the datalog.

GALACTIC RESORTS

38:2:7/GLR/G208/BRT.4.VOT/ENT/T. Marelle

Brentaal Prepares for Kallea Cycle

By Tanda Marelle

VOTRAD, BRENTAAL: All of Votrad is abuzz this week as the city prepares for an epic performance of the Kallea

Cycle. The classic three-part opera depicts the life of Freia Kallea, the legendary Brentaal explorer who single-handedly charted the Hydian Way hyperlane 3,000 years ago.

Kallea will be portrayed by Vessa Brentioch, Mistress of the Hall and a descendent of the legendary pathfinder. Famed Chandrilan singer Gelod Vothran will play Sival Brentioch, the prominent Hall Brentioch seneschal who financed Kallea's explorations and would eventually marry her. The production will be performed by members of the prestigious Brentaal Hall Conservatory, including the Conservatory Epic Orchestra and the Brentaal Illustrious Choir. Special sound effects will be provided by the Conservatory's antique orchestrion said to have been commissioned by Kallea herself.

This grand production is funded by several of Brentaal's most prominent commerce houses, including the Dajaal Family, House Brentioch and Hall Jo'uda. The company has outfitted Votrad Stadium for operatic performances, with more than 100,000 seats and a 500-meter-long stage. No expense has been spared in creating the lavish backdrops, including the rotating Jungle of Nuvar set, a massive edifice recreating the First Hall of Brentioch, and the pyrotechnic-rigged Temple of Imynusoph.

With the premiere only days away, prominent dignitaries from around the Core Worlds and Colonies are arriving. Members of Core Worlds high society and advocates of Human High Culture are flooding Brentaal's posh hotels, spreading their wealth to Votrad's most expensive restaurants and entertainment complexes. The most renown of these visitors are guests of the trading Houses which control Brentaal's vast commerce enterprises. Security is understandably tight. Inspector Zanza Gata of the Imperial Office of Criminal Investigations (IOCI) is in charge of

arrangements. "We have taken every precaution to ensure visitors enjoy their stay on Brentaal," the Inspector said. "The Kallea Cycle is an important part of this planet's—and indeed the Core Worlds' — culture. We want to avoid having anyone's experience marred by the activities of criminal elements."

Interest in the Kallea Cycle was spurred during the past two years by Neile Janna's popular holo, *Kallea's Hope*, which translated the opera into a popular format. Brentaal's Council of Human High Culture began work to bring the Kallea Cycle back to its classical roots. With the help of Brentaal's prominent Houses, this timeless story returns once again as a traditional art form.

Sektor 242 NewsLine

38:2:9/242/3R4Y/QAL.3.FYR/REL

Fellowship Files Bounty on Reporter

PORT FYRIN, QALYDON: The mysterious Fellowship of Koaroo has taken out a contract on TriNebulon News investigative reporter Andor Javin for what the group's leaders are calling "a gross injustice against our holy order." Javin's recent report theorized that the ancient shrines the cult reveres were in fact communication arrays used by a species of long-dead scouts.

"How dare such an unbeliever make statements that completely invalidate our faith," High Reverend Massus

Gyne told newsnet reporters. "In taking out a contract on Javin, the Fellowship of Kooroo has declared holy war against this infidel. Although our beliefs prohibit us from partaking in acts of violence, they do not forbid us from encouraging others to engage in such acts, especially when they are in the greater interest of the Fellowship."

Few bounty hunters within any guild have expressed an interest in taking on the assignment, despite the 20,000 credits the Fellowship of Kooroo is offering for proof of Javin's demise.



TRINEBULON NEWS

38:/2:12TRI/V45T/BRT.4.VOT/GEN

Tombat Strikes at Brentaal Banquet

VOTRAD, BRENTAAL: The infamous jewel thief known as the Tombat struck again this week—though his goal was more to embarrass his pursuers than to steal any great treasure.

The incident occurred on Brentaal, where dignitaries and high-profile guests from around the Core Worlds had traveled to enjoy the operatic production of the Kallea Cycle. Several of the more renown attendees had gathered for a feast at House Brentioch—the ancestral home of the opera's heroine, Freia Kallea. The guests included Mistress of the Hall Vessa Brentioch and Gelod Vothran (lead players in the epic), Maestro Trebian Shullos, Bormea sector Moff Jamson Caglio, Imperial Advisor Alec Pradeux, and, most notably, Inspector Zanza Gata, leader of the IOCI's

inquest into the Tombat's activities.

As the assembly sat down to dessert, certain prominent diners quite painfully discovered small quella stones baked within their bowls of shim-bay crispa. These worthless stones are the Tombat's trademark, left in place of the treasures he steals. The incident was a clear indication of the Tombat's criminal prowess—and investigators' inability to capture him.

Although Inspector Gata was overseeing security during the Kallea Cycle, some believe his true intent was to set a trap for the Tombat—one the infamous jewel thief discovered, evaded and revealed. Some observers at the banquet report Moff Caglio publicly upbraided the Inspector for his inability to keep the Tombat from interfering with the Kallea Cycle festivities. Gata declined to comment on the entire Tombat incident. He quickly retreated from newsnet reporters to have a medic check out his broken tooth.

None of the Kallea Cycle lead singers were injured.

Brema News

38:3:18/BMA/Node/MLL.3.CDI/REL

Fanatics Prepare Pinacist Exodus

CMAOLI DI, MALLONORE: Radical Pinacists are preparing an exodus from their homes in Brema sector. These groups represent the most fanatic elements of the Pinacism movement who believe those who sit out the major galactic events will be left to pick up the pieces.

The fanatical leader of these Pinacists, Von Doobba, is a representative to Cmaoli Di's planetary council who has

strongly encouraged his colleagues to withdraw from the Empire. After last week's decision against such action, Doobba resigned from the council and began preparations to leave the system with his most devoted followers. The group has been readying transports and freighters near Doobba's home city of Ferronel. These Pinacists have refused to speak with newsnet reporters, and in some cases have driven them and others away with threats of violence. Their departure date and intended destination have not been revealed.

It is not yet known whether Moff Malcom will step in to prevent the mass departure. His statement several months ago asking communities to discourage the Pinacism movement seemed to have little effect. Observers feel the Moff will not position Imperial forces against the Pinacists unless the situation becomes more volatile.

This incident is an almost repeat performance of the emigration from systems surrounding Salliche in the Core Worlds 250 years ago. An idealist named Adarian Tropis encouraged those disaffected by the corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy to leave for the Outer Rim Territories, where they intended to establish self-sufficient enclaves where each member was directly represented in government. Many of these refugees founded uncharted colonies which even today remain lost.

While the most radical of the Pinacists are leaving Brema sector, they represent only a handful of those who believe in Pinacism. Those left behind have already expressed a more firm commitment to insulating their own communities from the activities, support and rule of the Imperial government.

Nal Hutta Kal'tamok

Basic Edition

38:3:31/HUT/NAR.4.SHD/TRD

Empire Destroys Syvris Shadowport

NAR SHADDAA NODE: In a surprise attack, elements of the Imperial fleet destroyed the shadowport on the crater moon of Syvris. The smuggler enclave was bombarded by Star Destroyer turbolaser batteries, then gutted by AT-ST walker units and Imperial ground troops.

While the Imperial Navy has not offered any explanation, the few survivors provided some details. Days before the attack, shadowport control tracked an escape pod which landed on the moon's far side. When a patrol found the craft, it was empty. Some believe the pod carried an Imperial spy who scouted the moon and somehow reported the shadowbase's location back to the fleet.

Some survivors—who shall remain anonymous—suspect the shadowport was betrayed by the Mon Calamari smuggler Basz Maliyu, who conveniently raised ship from the port hours before the Imperial Star Destroyers arrived. Although Maliyu had mostly run cargoes for crime syndicates, some believe he was really working for the Empire.

Most spacers at the shadowport had enough time to blast off and evade the Imperial assault. The initial turbolaser bombardment leveled the base, and only a few TIE fighter picket patrols were stationed to take parting shots at fleeing smugglers. Unfortunately, Rance, the retired pirate who ran the shadowport, remained behind to die with his station.

The Empire's motivation behind this attack is not clear. Although the fleet is charged with customs duties in regions where Imperial Customs cannot maintain authority, it has rarely made a priority of hunting down and obliterating smuggler shadowports—especially those as small as Rance's operation. Analysts believe it might be a token show of power to curtail smuggler shipments to and from hidden elements of the Rebellion. Some think the shadowport was mistaken for a Rebel Alliance installation. Rumors abound that these Star Destroyers were part of the Imperial Death Squadron. Admiral Ozzel's task force charged with rooting out and destroying any Rebel presence in the Outer Rim Territories. If this is true, it may well explain the more aggressive policy the fleet is taking against anyone who may in some way resemble or aid the Rebellion.

The *Nal Hutta Kal'tamok* supports the Independent Traders' Infonet's advisory to smugglers and free-traders in the remote areas of the Outer Rim Territories. The action against the Syvris shadowport is a clear indication of the Empire's aggressive presence in this region. Our next report will analyze whether this increased military force will adversely affect shipping in the region.



STAR WARS

A BATTERED WARSHIP,
IMPOSSIBLE ODDS, AND AN ANCIENT EVIL ...
(Saving the galaxy has never been this much fun!)

THE DARKSTRYDER CAMPAIGN

The DarkStryder Campaign Boxed Set

A New Republic task force has been dispatched to the distant Kathol sector to topple Moff Kentor Sarne, who possesses mysterious alien artifacts codenamed "DarkStryder technology." This boxed set contains two 64-page guidebooks (featuring an introductory story by Timothy Zahn), 100 cards of color character and ship recognition cards, and a poster insert showing detailed deck plans of the New Republic vessel, the *FarStar*.

The Kathol Outback

The *FarStar* has pursued the renegade Imperial Moff Sarne into the uncharted reaches of the Kathol Outback. Join the intrepid *FarStar* crew as they track Sarne's forces through this isolated and dangerous region of space. This 64-page campaign supplement features five new adventures that continue the DarkStryder saga as well as extensive source material on the Outback, allowing Gamemasters to expand the scope of the *DarkStryder Campaign*.

The Kathol Rift

Having successfully traversed the dangers of the Kathol Outback, the *FarStar* arrives at the dreaded "Kathol Rift," a mass of charged particles and radiation storms that most sane sentients regard as impassable. The Rift—long known as the "Kathol Rift"—has long had a reputation of being haunted or cursed—hides many secrets, one of which may be the final clue that leads to Moff Sarne. This 64-page campaign supplement contains five new adventures, as well as background information on the fearsome Kathol Rift.

Now Available ... Endgame

The final *DarkStryder Campaign* supplement has arrived! Prepare for mystery, intrigue, action and terror unlike any you've ever seen in the *Star Wars* game line! The *FarStar* has tracked Sarne to his hidden staging area: the site of an ancient, catastrophic battle and home to a monstrous evil. This 128-page book features a full-length adventure that completes the *DarkStryder Campaign* story arc as well as detailed source material on Kathol, a mysterious, ancient planet with bizarre inhabitants and a unique form of "magic." Only the heroics of the *FarStar* crew will allow them to survive the final showdown with their most dangerous enemies ...



The Last Hand

By Paul Danner

Illustrations by Christopher Trevas



"Sabacc!"
Doune's resounding laughter echoed through the gambling hall, the Herglic's huge body shaking with the effort. "You lose again, boy."

Vee-Six, Doune's droid, quickly calculated his master's winnings and enthusiastically reported the total for all to hear.

The gathered crowd cheered as the Herglic claimed the pot, leaving Nyo with a single credit to his name.

The young man lowered his head in disbelief, fighting back tears. *How could I have been so stupid?* Nyo thought as he stared at the lone cred chip that constituted all the money he had in the galaxy. Now, all hope was gone.

"Doune...the great gambler. Able to steal the money from a poor



farmboy with ease. I suppose you are equally skilled at firing your heavy blaster on unarmed opponents."

The bold words silenced the room.

The Herglic looked up in shock, searching the sycophantic circle of admirers who always clung to winners for the dissonant voice.

The spectators parted for the cloaked figure as if he were a thermal detonator. A large hood kept the stranger's face in shadow, but the dark visage was obviously focused on the Herglic.

"You think you could do better, friend?" Doune asked, a dangerous edge in his deep voice.

The figure gestured to the crowd. "I wouldn't want to embarrass you in front of all your...friends."

"I never turn away anyone so obviously willing to lose his money to me," Doune chuckled. "Sit down."

The stranger paused for a moment, then slid into the empty seat. "Very well. I must warn you, though..."

The Herglic cocked an eyebrow. "Wait, don't tell me. Let me guess," Doune gestured dramatically. "You're the greatest gambler who ever lived, right?"

"Actually, I was just going to say that I don't have any money on me, but now that you mention it..." The stranger lowered his hood, eliciting a collective gasp from the spectators. "I am."

The stranger's close-cropped hair was white, though streaks of silver snaked their way through the ivory. His eyes were pale violet, like tropical flowers that had withered and lost their luster. A jagged scar wound its way around his lip, cutting an unnatural line up past his nose. With stony features reminiscent of a royal statue, the man was undeniably handsome; however that wasn't the reason for the crowd's reaction.

The whispers had begun, and the buzzing made it seem like a colony of insects had descended upon the room. Throughout the snatches of conversation in the multitude of languages, two words were repeated with frightening frequency.

Kinnin Vo-Shay.

Doune's thick flesh had begun to mottle, a sure sign the Herglic was agitated.

"This is nothing but a trick, Master." Vee-Six leaned forward, eyes flashing as his data banks began recalling information. "The *Ashanda Ray* was reported lost in the Tyus Cluster half a century

ago. If Kinnin Vo-Shay had survived, which is highly unlikely, he would be well over 100 standard years old. The man was lucky, but he was no Jedi."

"It would seem you are not who you appear to be, after all." Doune seemed to calm down a bit, his usual predatory smirk returning to his face. "I must admit, though, the resemblance is uncanny. You must have paid a fortune on cosmetic alterations. No wonder you're broke."

A nervous chuckle escaped the crowd.

"For such a renowned gambler, Doune, you're a much faster dealer of opinions than cards." The stranger leveled his piercing gaze. "Perhaps you win by talking until your opponents die of sheer boredom."

"The one thing I never deal in is charity," the Herglic said, a note of irritation creeping into his voice. "Until you ante up, there will be no game."

That drew a mixed reaction from the crowd. Many wanted to see if the stranger really was telling the truth, and there was only one way to decide that....

"But, Doune, what if he really is Vo-Shay?" one brave soul asked.

The Herglic had enough, and his blubber shook with fury. "I don't care if he's Jabba the Hutt. Without money, he doesn't play!"

A single credit spun through the air, shimmering in the dim glowlights. Without blinking, Vo-Shay plucked the cred from its flight with practiced ease. He slowly turned to face his surprise benefactor.

Nyo started to say something, but Vo-Shay offered a wink that was so quick the young man was scarcely sure he saw it at all.

"From one loser to another...how appropriate. Are you ready, then?" Doune demanded.

Vo-Shay's face lost all expression, resembling a droid that had been abruptly powered down. Those strange eyes took on a far-away look, as if they were staring into eternity. He spoke only a single word, but it sent a chill down the spine of every being present who had one.

"Deal," Vo-Shay said.

The room grew deathly quiet.

And the game began....



Doune slid a blubbery fin across his forehead, which was glistening with perspiration. The Herglic examined his cards and grunted softly. His pile of credits was steadily decreasing, while Vo-Shay's lone credit had gained thousands of friends in less than an hour. He glanced up at his opponent, but the human gambler's face may as well have been carved out of ferrostone.

Only Vo-Shay's right hand was in motion, absently twirling the obsidian stone pendant hanging from his neck. When he had first removed the bauble from underneath his shirt, a collective gasp resounded from the crowd. The necklace that was rumored to be the source of the legendary gambler's astonishing luck. It was yet another piece of evidence that proved this man was really who he claimed to be.

The Herglic watched his shifting sabacc cards and nearly grinned. The Four of Coins had reformed into the Mistress of Staves, with a value of 13. He already held the Nine of Staves. Doune dramatically pushed the metallic cards into the neutral stabilizer field. "Twenty-two."

Vo-Shay began laying out his cards. The Ace of Flasks, the Master of Flasks, and the Nine of Flasks. A total of 38. A low murmur rippled through the crowd. Nyo winced and looked away. The gambler was about to go bust.

Chuckling, the Herglic reached for the pot...15,000 credits.

Vo-Shay played one more card into the neutral field. The Evil One. Negative fifteen. That brought his hand down to 23. "Sabacc," he said, grabbing Doune's hand just as it reached the thick stack of credits at the center of the table. "I believe that's mine."

The Herglic snarled. "Your luck cannot last forever, impostor." But it did.

In another hour, Vo-Shay held over a 100,000 credits. The crowd not only began to believe, they had completely shifted allegiance. Vee-Six was the lone supporter remaining in Doune's corner, and the droid was not exactly encouraging. "Please, Master," Vee-Six implored, "you must end this before—"

"Shut up!" the Herglic roared, shoving the droid away. He slammed a cred stick onto the table. "One more, human...double or nothing."



"Don't risk it," Nyo whispered, eyeing Vo-Shay's winnings. "Let's just cut and run."

The gambler smiled, his pale violet pupils dilated with excitement. "I never back down from a challenge." He eyed his opponent. "Ready?"

Doune nodded, nostrils flaring.

The gambler spun the obsidian pendant on its chain, and the stone danced as if it were alive. More than one observer found himself transfixed by the sight as Vo-Shay reached for his cards....

Nyo and Vo-Shay walked out of the gambling hall with nearly a quarter of a million credits.

The young man was so excited, he couldn't stop talking. "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I would never have believed it."

"Well, Doune actually played the game and I'm betting he still isn't sure what happened." The gambler patted the youth on the back and handed him the small electronic stick containing 200,000 credits. "All yours, my boy. I kept the change for expenses...hope you don't mind."

"Are you kidding?" Nyo's hand was shaking as he held the cred stick. "I can't thank you enough for this...you've literally made my dreams come true."

"That's a lot of money you've got there." Vo-Shay studied the young man. "You obviously don't frequent places like that, so I'm assuming you were trying to win for a reason."

Nyo glanced off into the distance, shuffling his feet uncomfortably.

"Sorry...I have a bad habit of sticking my nose in where it's not welcome. Curiosity is just one of my many vices, but it gets me in trouble more than any of the others." The gambler squeezed Nyo's shoulder. "Whatever it is, I hope it works out for you."

Vo-Shay pulled up the hood of his cloak and effortlessly slid into the crowd.

"Wait!" The gambler turned, just as the youth caught up. "If you hadn't been nosy back there, I'd be walking home with one credit in my pocket...can we talk?" Nyo glanced around the bustling street. "In private?"

Vo-Shay shook his head and laughed. "Now you've gone and done it. I never could pass up a good confidential chat." The gambler gestured to a dingy cantina in the distance. "After you...."



The duo sat at a booth in the rear of the cantina, with a bottle of Corellian whisky and a good deal of space between themselves and the next patrons. Vo-Shay blended in so well with the shadows that it seemed like Nyo was sit alone at the table.

The gambler downed another shot of the tangy drink and stared at his companion. "Well, have you imbibed enough liquid courage, yet? Or am I going to sitting here all night?"

**"Have you ever
been off-world
before?"**

**"Well, no...but I've
seen plenty of
holos—"**

Nyo chuckled, then grew serious. "Are you really Kinnin Vo-Shay?"

"Last I heard."

"Then how is it that you're—"

The gambler held up a gloved hand. "I thought we were here because you wanted to reveal your secrets...."

"Point taken." The young man took a drink and then a deep breath. "The reason I need the money is—promise not to laugh?"

"I never make promises, son. I only deal in cards. Not words."

Nyo didn't respond. He was staring into his glass, as if mesmerized by the smooth contours. After a few more moments of silence, he finally spoke. His voice was a whisper. "I want to buy a lightsaber."

The gambler's eyes widened. "Really?"

"You think it's stupid."

"No! That's just the last thing I expected to hear. I figured it was something more mundane...a sick family member in need of an expensive operation, a beautiful girl you couldn't afford to marry, maybe a debt to a nefarious crime lord."

Nyo shook his head. "No, nothing like that."

"So where do you intend to pick one up? They're not exactly standard stock for equipment shops, you know."

"I've heard about a black market dealer who has one for sale."

"Where?"

Nyo was obviously reluctant to answer.

"Come on, son," the gambler said, reaching for his glass, "it's not like I'm going to race there ahead of you and snatch it up...."

"Nar Shaddaa."

Vo-Shay nearly spit out his drink. "The Smuggler's Moon!" The gambler narrowed his eyes and gave the young man an appraising glance. "Just how old are you, anyway?"

"Twenty standard years," he said proudly.

"And you've lived here on Morado all your life. Have you ever been off-world before?"

"Well, no...but I've seen plenty of holos—"

Vo-Shay burst out laughing.

"What's so funny?" Nyo said, obviously annoyed.

"Nothing! What could possibly be funny about a boy who's never been off his home planet traveling by himself to one of the most dangerous hives of scum and villainy in the galaxy with 200,000 credits on him to purchase an illegal weapon from a shady black market dealer?" He leaned forward. "Are you even carrying a blaster?"

The young man's silence answered his question.

The gambler wiped tears from his eyes. "By the Force...you must be either an overconfident fool or a half-wit. Your star may be fiery, but it isn't going to burn long in this galaxy if you keep up this sort of behavior."

Nyo abruptly stood, slamming his fist against the table. "I don't need a lecture! Especially not from somebody who's supposed to be dead because he was too lazy to pilot his ship around an extremely dangerous area of space..." The young man started to leave, but wasn't through yet. "And you may be the greatest gambler who ever lived, but you have a lot to learn about dealing with people. See you around." With that, Nyo promptly stormed out of the cantina.

You never change, do you, Shay? The disembodied voice was hauntingly beautiful, caressing the gambler's cheek like a cool breeze.

"Listen," Vo-Shay took a final swig directly from the whisky bottle and walked to the door, "if you want to put your two credits in, just leave them on the table...I don't have change for a tip."



"So, how much for passage to Nar Shaddaa?"

The Barabel captain quickly calculated his figure, then grinned at Nyo. With all those sharp teeth, it wasn't a comforting sight. "Twenty-five thousand. Paid in advance. No refund under any circumstances...."

The young man stumbled over his words. "I...I don't know. That seems like an awful lot."

"That's because it is."

Both the Barabel and Nyo looked up at the new voice. Vo-Shay stood at their table, arms folded across his chest. "The boy could get a better deal from a Jawa...and on something far nicer than the garbage scow you're passing off as a tramp freighter."

Enraged, the captain stood, towering over the gambler. "You insult me...."

"No. You insult *him*," Vo-Shay said, indicating Nyo. "And if you want to live to prey on another easy mark, I suggest you leave immediately. Or else you'll be insulting *me*."

Barabels, however, are not easily intimidated. "And why should I care about that, little man?"

Vo-Shay shifted his position slightly, flashing the two hold-out blasters he held tucked under arms.

The captain snorted and took a threatening step forward, "I could make you eat those."

"If you *were* that good, you'd have already done it instead of just talking about it," the gambler said, refusing to give up a centimeter of ground. "Now go; find some nerfs to herd."

The Barabel shoved past Vo-Shay and slipped into the crowd milling around the bar.

Still chuckling, the gambler slipped the blasters into his cloak and dropped into the vacated seat.

"What do you want now?" the young man asked.

"Just to talk."

Nyo started to get up. "I don't have anything else to say to you."

Vo-Shay reached out and quickly yanked him back into his seat.

"Hey! Lemme go...."

"Not until you've heard my offer."

"What kind of offer?"

"I'll fly you to Nar Shaddaa."

Nyo couldn't believe it. "Why would you do that?"

"To make sure you get there without dying," the gambler said, rocking back in his chair. "And so you can pay me 10,000 credits." It didn't take him long to consider the offer. "Deal," Nyo said, smiling.

"Let's get going, then."

The young man was already headed for the door, giddy with excitement. "I can't believe this...."

Vo-Shay shook his head as he followed Nyo out. "Join the club," he said softly.



"There she is." The gambler's voice was filled with the pride only a parent or ship captain could ever know.

Nyo stepped into docking bay 49 and his mouth promptly fell open. "The *Ashanda Ray*...."

The two men circled the graceful curves of the light freighter. Vo-Shay carefully slid a hand along her smooth underbelly. "She was designed by a good friend of mine...a Mon Cal engineer with a great eye."

Like most ships designed by the Mon Calamari, the *Ray* was a model of efficiency, structural strength, and aesthetic appeal. More than a spacecraft, it resembled a hand-crafted piece of art. With a myriad of pods, bulges and bumps, the ship almost appeared organic rather than constructed—like a great ocean-dwelling creature.

"She can be a headache for maintenance and repair, but other than that..."

"Quite a beauty," Nyo agreed, "but I don't see any weapons...or sensors. Or anything."

"What would an exotic woman be without her secrets?" The gambler laid an arm around the young man's shoulders. "Now come on...let's go get your lightsaber."



Exhausted from his exploits, Nyo spent most of the trip in one of the *Ray*'s extremely comfortable bunks.

Vo-Shay was resting in the cockpit, half-asleep himself. The ship would warn him if anything came up, and the smoothly accelerating starlines of lightspeed always made the gambler drowsy. When he heard the lilting voice, he wasn't sure if he was dreaming or not.

You definitely have your moments.

His eyes popped open. Definitely not dreaming....

"Was there ever any doubt in your mind?"

Do you want me to be honest, or nice?

"Nice," Vo-Shay grinned. "So, what's the word?"

It's hard to say right now. I need more time.

"Don't we all."

He's coming.

Vo-Shay craned his neck up over the top of the chair. "Well, well. Look what the gundark dragged in...."

Nyo entered the cockpit, still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. He unceremoniously plopped down into the co-pilot's seat. "Are we there yet?"

The gambler checked his displays. "Almost. You get some rest?"

The young man nodded, surveying the cockpit.

"Good." Vo-Shay leaned back in his chair, absently twirling his pendant. "You'll need to keep your eyes wide open in a place like Nar Shaddaa. Bad things can happen to people faster than you can even think about pulling your blaster."

"That's okay," Nyo answered with a grin. "I don't have one, remember?"

The gambler chuckled. After a few moments, he grew serious and turned to face Nyo. "You never told me why you wanted a lightsaber."

"You never told me how you survived your untimely demise in the Tyus Cluster," the young man countered evenly, "or how come you're not over a hundred years old."

"An even exchange, huh? Okay, but I asked first."

The gambler immediately recognized that distant look that crept into Nyo's eyes. It was the one that always prefaced the resurfacing of a lifelong dream and usually culminated in trouble.

"I want to become a Jedi Knight," the young man said in a voice just above a whisper.

The gambler was silent for a moment. "I thought they built their own lightsabers when they were actually ready to wield one...."

That seemed to deflate Nyo slightly, but he quickly recovered. "I just wanted to have something...connected with them. I mean, it's not like there's anyone around to train me. I don't know...." He stared out the viewport, at the stars rushing past. "I guess I thought that if I felt a lightsaber in my hands, there'd be some kind of magic, you know? You have to take your first step somewhere, and this was the only path I could find."

Well spoken, young one.

"Huh?" Nyo snapped out of his reverie and glanced back at Vo-Shay. "Did you say something?"

"Wasn't me," the gambler said with a wink.

"So, I held up my end of the bargain ... Now, let's hear your story."

Something caught Vo-Shay's eye. "It'll have to wait."

"Why?"

The gambler's hands were already dancing over the controls, abruptly dropping the *Ray* out of hyperspace. "Because we've got company...."



"I've got a bad feeling about this." Vo-Shay tracked the three incoming ships on the *Ray*'s sensors.

"Who is it?"

"They haven't introduced themselves yet, but somehow I don't think it's a welcoming committee." The gambler eyed the display and frowned. "One Ghtroc freighter and two Z-95 Headhunters. Could be worse, I guess...."

"How? We're already outnumbered."

"But never outclassed." The comlink sounded its shrill call, drawing Vo-Shay's attention "It sounds like they want to talk. That's always a good sign."

"This is Captain Yarrku of the *Night Raider*...." came the filtered voice.

"He sounds familiar," Nyo said.

Vo-Shay grunted. "It's that Barabel from the cantina."



"Are you sure?"

"I never forget a voice."

"What could he possibly want?"

"Only one way to find out," the gambler said, then engaged the comlink. "Is there a problem, Captain?"

"There will be unless you hand over all the credits you stole from Doune."

"Stole? From Doune? Hah! That blubberpot Herg must be going senile...I won that money fair and square at a sabacc game."

"Doune does not share your view of the situation. He believes you cheated him and he has hired us to retrieve his money. If you hand it over, there will be no damage to you or your ship. Otherwise...." The Barabel's voice trailed off ominously.

"Doune is nothing but a poor loser. And as far as I'm concerned, he's going to stay that way."

"You know, I was hoping you'd say that," Yarrku said with an unfriendly chuckle. Then there was only static.

The two Z-95s broke off into standard flanking formation as frighteningly powerful laser bolts erupted from the Ghtroc freighter.

Vo-Shay executed a quick barrel roll and then pointed the *Ray's*

nose into a power dive. The two bolts screamed past, cutting through the space that the ship had occupied microseconds before.

Nyo couldn't believe it. "That thing's got a pair of quad lasers!"

"So much for talking," Vo-Shay grumbled as he swung the *Ray* around to face an oncoming Headhunter.

"This ship *does* have weapons, right?" Nyo asked.

The gambler merely grinned and touched one of the control screens.

One of the pods on the *Ray's* belly spiraled open, revealing a large triple-barreled laser cannon. The turret swung around, locking onto the approaching Headhunter.

A thunderous volley of laser bolts tracked the Z-95 as it tried to execute an evasive turn. The blasts "walked" right up the ship's exposed starboard side, shredding the shields, and finally exploding the ship's wing.

Without the starboard stabilizers, the Headhunter began to spin out of control, harmlessly veering off into the distance.

"Does that answer your question?" the gambler asked with a smug grin.

His smile faded when one of the *Night Raider's* quad laser bolts slammed into the *Ray's* port side. The impact spun the light freighter around sharply and Vo-Shay found himself fighting to keep her steady.

The other Headhunter was closing in, with all blasters blazing away mercilessly.

Unable to evade the attack, the *Ray* was forced to take a considerable pounding from the Z-95's strafing run.

The ship bucked and shook under the assault, knocking the two men around in their chairs. The gambler cursed under his breath as he steadied his wounded craft.

"We just lost half our shields!" Nyo cried out in alarm.

Acting as if he didn't hear, an enraged Vo-Shay brought the *Ray* into a hard bootlegger's turn that sent a structural groan through the ship. He closed the distance with impossible speed. Nyo felt as if a giant invisible hand was pressing against his chest. "I didn't know freighters could move this fast."

"Most can't. This one can."

Thanks to Vo-Shay's expert piloting, the *Ray* mirrored every last maneuver the Headhunter executed. It was as if the two pilots were

of one mind. No matter what tactic it tried, the Z-95 could not shake off the larger ship. A sustained burst of heavy blaster fire quickly turned the Headhunter into a flaming starburst.

"Gotcha!" Vo-Shay shouted.

"And I got you," came Yarrku's filtered voice over the comlink. It was followed by another bone-jarring impact as another quad laser blast found its mark.

"Shields are gone," Nyo cried out in alarm. "And the hyperdrive's been damaged."

The gambler quietly brought the *Ray* around to face the *Night Raider*. The big Ghtroc freighter hung there in space, waiting, with its big quad lasers brought to bear. The two idle ships looked like gunfighters, each one waiting for the other to draw....

Yarrku's voice broke the silence. "Your shields are gone. Another hit from my weapons and you'll be nothing but debris. Do the sensible thing and hand over the money. Before it's too late."

"So we give you the credits and you'll leave us alone?" Vo-Shay asked.

"You have my word."

He's lying.

Vo-Shay and Nyo spoke at the same time. "I know." The two men exchanged a quick look, though Nyo seemed more than a bit bewildered.

The gambler keyed the comlink. "Deal. I'll put the credit chip in a probe and launch it over."

"Minimal contact, minimal need for trust. Yes, that would be satisfactory. However, any tricks and I'll blow you to microns."

Vo-Shay shut off the comlink and reached for the controls.

"We're not really going to give it to him, are we?" asked a flustered Nyo.

The gambler grinned. "Oh, we're going to give it to him, all right."

Three of the small forward pods on the *Ray* slid away to reveal darkened launch tubes.

"All yours," Vo-Shay said over the comm as he punched the control panel.

A trio of proton torpedoes simultaneously screamed out of the *Ray*'s tubes, streaking toward the *Night Raider*.

In response, the Ghtroc opened up with both quad lasers.

Nyo shut his eyes.

The quad laser bolts reached the *Ray*, and impacted...against the ship's shields.

"Nooo!" That was the final transmission from the *Night Raider*, before the torpedoes converged and turned the ship into a giant, blossoming fireball.

The young man slowly looked around, utterly amazed to be alive. Vo-Shay flashed a grin.

"But...our shields were gone," Nyo said in disbelief.

"One of the miracles of Mon Cal engineering, son. Redundant shield systems. Of course, half-witted opponents don't hurt, either." The gambler took the controls and engaged the sublight engines. "Nar Shaddaa, here we come...."



"I don't have it," the dealer said. "How many other ways can I say it?"

"What do you mean you don't have it?" Nyo repeated for the fourth time.

Vo-Shay arched an eyebrow, leaning on the counter. "I think my associate is just curious as to the reason why you no longer have the lightsaber."

The chubby businessman grinned, bearing diamond-white teeth. "Because I already sold it."

"But I put down a deposit so you wouldn't."

"What can I say?" the man said simply. "A better offer came along."

Nyo looked just about ready to kill the fat merchant. Vo-Shay was suddenly glad the kid was unarmed.

"Well, who did you sell it to?" the young man demanded.

"Sorry. That's privileged information."

Nyo swept a hand across the bare warehouse that served as the dealer's shop. It was currently empty except for the three of them. "There's no one else here. Maybe I can cut a deal with the buyer. I swear I won't say a word."

"It's not going to be too hard to figure out who gave you the information." The dealer shook his head. "Can't do it. Now, if there's something else you'd be interested in...."

Nyo seemed to be on the brink of exploding at the man, but thought better of it. He spun around and stormed out of the shop. The gambler shrugged and followed him out.



"Sorry, kid," Vo-Shay said as they boarded the Ray. He squeezed Nyo's shoulder. "The galaxy can be a cruel place sometimes."

"I know," the young man said softly, "it's just that I wanted that saber so much."

"Well, you never know—" The gambler's voice abruptly trailed off as he saw the flashing light on the display.

"What is it?"

"A message...." Vo-Shay tapped the control.

A holo-recording cracked into the air, taking the shape of a certain Herglic gambler.

"Doune." The word tumbled from the gambler's lips like a curse.

"Greetings, farmboy. And to you as well, oh legendary one. It seems as though the attempt to recoup my losses failed miserably. Ah, well...life can be surprising, can it not?" The Herglic held up a long, silver haft and smiled.

Nyo's eyes had grown to the size of thermal detonators threatening to explode.

"As I'm sure you've guessed by now, it was I who purchased this elegant little weapon you so craved. And I would not be loathe to part with it—under certain circumstances."

"Come on, get to the point, you bloated bag of wind," Vo-Shay mumbled.

"What I am proposing is simple. One last hand of sabacc between myself and Vo-Shay. If the gambler wins, you can have the lightsaber. If I win, I get the source of the gambler's uncanny luck—the obsidian necklace. If you accept, meet me at the Nygann Cantina three hours from now...." The holographic image faded.

Nyo and Vo-Shay exchanged a look.

"You've done so much for me already," the young man began. "I would never ask you to do this—especially if it means you could lose your necklace."

"I won't. Lose, that is" The gambler grinned. "Besides, I told you...I never could resist a challenge."



Doune and Vo-Shay faced off once again, this time in a private gambling room at the back of the cantina. The only other beings present were Nyo and Doune's droid, Vee-Six.

"One last hand decides it all, correct?" asked the Herglic.

The gambler nodded slowly, never taking his eyes off his opponent.

The dealer droid sent five sabacc cards to each player, then obediently waited for the two men to look over the hands they'd been dealt.

**"I make my own
luck. As do we
all...."**

"Sabacc!" With a thunderous laugh, the Herglic abruptly shoved his cards into the interference field and glowered in triumph. "Beat that?"

Nyo paled as he glanced at Vo-Shay, who was nervously twirling his pendant.

The gambler looked up from his cards and slowly inserted them into the field. First was the Idiot card. Then came the Two of Sabers. A three of any suit would give Vo-Shay an Idiot's Array.

And a winning hand.

The Herglic took in a sharp breath, his skin mottling furiously....

The gambler fingered one of his remaining cards, then slipped it into the field. For a moment, his hand covered the surface, then finally moved clear.

The Five of Staves. For a total of eight.

Vo-Shay had lost.

Nyo blinked once, then his mouth fell open. He tried to meet the gambler's eyes, but Vo-Shay had turned away as if he had found something incredibly interesting on the floor.

The Herglic roared his approval and then extended a flipper. "I believe you have something that now belongs to me...."

Vo-Shay carefully slipped the obsidian pendant from his neck and handed it over without a word.

Ecstatic, the Herglic snatched it up. "So, the unbeatable one has fallen at last. With this, I will be unstoppable." He grinned at Nyo. "Congratulations, boy...you have just witnessed the death of an old legend and the birth of a new one." Doune got to his feet and started



for the door, Vee-Six trailing behind him. The Herglic paused at the door, and almost as an afterthought, tossed the lightsaber onto the table. The weapon scattered the sabacc cards. "Here! It's not as though I need it..." With a final terrible chuckle, the Herglic and his droid left.

Nyo stared first at the saber, then at Vo-Shay. "I...I don't know what to say...."

The gambler looked up, brandishing a wide smile. "Well, you could start with 'you're welcome.'" He flipped over one of the sabacc cards he hadn't played....

The Three of Sabers.

The young man was stunned. "You had the Idiot's Array! You won!" Then it hit him. "But why didn't you play it?"

"First of all, considering how badly Doune reacted to my winning his money in the first place, do you really think he would have let us just waltz out of here with the lightsaber even if I did win it fair and square? Plus, I counted at least a half-dozen mercs nursing glasses of lum on our way in here. My guess is that all they were waiting for was Doune's order."

"I see your point, I guess. But you didn't have to sacrifice your pendant!"

"Listen, kid ... that particular bauble was given to me a long time ago by a tenacious old girlfriend who wanted more of a relationship than I was ready for at the time. This girl refused to give up, no matter what I said or did. The only reason I considered it lucky was because the day she gave it to me, we finally broke up. I kept the thing and discovered that when I played with it during a game, it did a wonderful job of distracting my opponents. So you see, it really has no mystical power. I make my own luck. As do we all...."

A smile crept onto Nyo's lips. "Doune's in for quite a surprise, then."

"Exactly why we should get going," Vo-Shay said, tossing him the lightsaber.

Nyo caught it easily and couldn't believe he was holding the one thing he had dreamed about for so long. He turned the haft over in his hands, caressing the smooth lines and imagining himself swinging that beautiful bright blade through a graceful arc....

Vo-Shay abruptly reached back inside the room and yanked the starstruck young man after him.



Nyo awoke to a soft, humming sound. It varied in pitch almost constantly, and for a moment, he thought some sort of insect had crawled into his head during his nap. He was momentarily disoriented, but slowly recalled being on the *Ashanda Ray*, headed away from Nar Shaddaa.

Far away.

Then he saw the odd glow reflected on the ship's bulkhead. Quietly making his way back to the passenger compartment, Nyo peeked around the corner.

Vo-Shay stood in the *Ray*'s lounging area, deftly swinging the bright orange energy blade through a series of amazing thrusts and parries. After a few moments, the gambler sensed he was being watched and powered down the saber. He turned to Nyo, extending the weapon handle-first to the young man. "I hope you don't mind. I just couldn't resist."

"How do you know how to do that?" Nyo demanded. Then the young man suddenly grinned. "And can you teach me?"

The gambler plopped down onto one of the lounge chairs. "I guess I still owe you my story, right?"

The young man nodded, taking the seat opposite Vo-Shay's. "Well, the legends surrounding my disappearance were correct. The *Ray* was indeed caught in the Tyus Cluster, and at the center of that mass of ugly black holes, time was nonexistent. Many others had been trapped there before me, though none had survived. Except for one...a Jedi Master. She helped me escape, and even taught me a little about the Force."

"That's a pretty short summary...."

"I'll save the whole story for another day," Vo-Shay said dismissively. "After all, we'll have plenty of time together when you sign on as my first mate."

"Do you mean it?"

"I never say what I don't mean, kid. Welcome aboard."

"So, you'll teach me about the Force?"

"Me? No...I'll teach you how not to lose everything to a Herglic at the sabacc table. *She*'ll instruct you in the mysterious ways of the Force."

Nyo looked around, not understanding, until a shimmering blue figure appeared next to Vo-Shay. Even dressed in simple robes, the woman's beauty was not lost.

"This is Aryzah," Vo-Shay said by way of introduction, "the lovely Jedi Master who saved my life."

Greetings, Nyo. May the Force be with you.

"And just between the two of us, kid," Vo-Shay said with a wink, "you're gonna need it."

Roleplaying Game Statistics

■ Nyo

Type: Kid

DEXTERITY 3D+2

Blaster 4D, dodge 5D, melee combat 4D

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Alien species 3D+2, streetwise 4D, willpower 5D+2

MECHANICAL 3D

Repulsorlift operation 4D

PERCEPTION 3D+2

Bargain 4D+2, gambling 4D, hide 5D, sneak 4D+1

STRENGTH 2D+1

Brawling 4D, climbing/jumping 5D, stamina 4D+1

TECHNICAL 2D+2

Computer programming/repair 4D, first aid 3D+2

This character is Force-sensitive.

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 7
Move: 10

Capsule: Nyo has lived most of his young life on a hydroponics farm on the planet Morado. His only escape from what he views as his "boring life" are holo-stories of high adventure. Nyo learned about the Jedi from one of the illicit tales he had stumbled upon, and he soon became enthralled.

Ever since that day, he has dreamed of nothing else. Nyo decided he would do anything to learn the ways of the Force. When he learned of a lightsaber for sale on Nar Shaddaa, Nyo promptly gathered up his meager savings and set out to Meigiss, the largest city on the planet.

There he hoped to win enough money to buy passage to the Smuggler's Moon, and buy the ancient Jedi weapon. Although he has become a decent gambler from all the card games he played to ward off boredom, the young man's naive outlook could be a hindrance to his quest.

■ Kinnin Vo-Shay

Type: Legendary Gambler

DEXTERITY 4D

Blaster 7D, blaster: hold-out blaster 9D, brawling parry 5D, dodge 9D, melee combat 5D+2, pick pocket 6D

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 7D, bureaucracy 5D, business 6D, languages 6D, planetary systems 6D+1, streetwise 11D+1, value 10D

MECHANICAL 3D

Astrogration 7D+1, communications 6D+2, repulsorlift operation 5D, sensors 5D, space transports 8D+2, space transports: MC-18 10D+2, starship gunnery 8D, starship shields 7D+1

PERCEPTION 4D

Bargain 9D, con 10D, gambling 13D+1, hide 8D, persuasion 5D, search 7D+2, sneak 8D

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 6D, climbing/jumping 5D+1, stamina 4D

TECHNICAL 2D

Computer programming/repair 4D, space transports repair 6D

Force Points: 3

Character Points: 30

Move: 10



Equipment: Chronometer, comlink, datapad, 2 custom hold-out blasters (4D+1), hooded cloak, obsidian pendant necklace, sabacc card deck

Capsule: Considered by many to be the greatest gambler who ever lived, Kinnin Vo-Shay was said to be unbeatable. The source of his amazing luck was attributed to many things at one time or another: the Force, ancient Sith magic, and finally the obsidian pendant necklace he always wore.

Unfortunately, Vo-Shay's reputation soon became a hindrance, as he could find no opponents to play against. No one dared to challenge the master. The gambler was forced to move to the frontier of the galaxy in order to escape his fame.

It was on one such fateful journey that Vo-Shay disappeared. His ship, the Ashanda Ray, was lost in the Tyus Cluster—a dangerous grouping of black holes that most pilots would go out of their way to avoid. But gambling was Vo-Shay's lifeblood and he needed a fix. He was never heard from again and presumed dead.

It is ironic that while trying to escape his notoriety, Vo-Shay, due to his mysterious end, guaranteed his status as one of the true legends of the galaxy....

Ashanda Ray

Craft: Modified Mon Calamari MC-18 Light Freighter

Type: Modified light freighter

Scale: Starfighter

Length: 23.6 meters

Skill: Space transports: MC-18

Crew: 1

Crew Skill: See Kinnin Vo-Shay

Passengers: 5

Cargo Capacity: 50 metric tons

Consumables: 2 months

Hyperdrive Multiplier: x1

Hyperdrive Backup: x10

Nav Computer: Yes

Maneuverability: 2D+1

Space: 8

Atmosphere: 365; 1,050 kmh

Hull: 5D

Shields: 2D*



* Mon Calamari MC-18 freighters have 4D of back-up shields. When a die of shields is lost, if the pilot can make an Easy *starship shields* roll, one of the back-up die codes of the shields can be brought up to increase the shields back to 2D.

Sensors:

Passive: 10/0D

Scan: 25/1D

Search: 45/3D

Focus: 3/4D

Weapons:

Heavy Triple-Laser Cannon

Fire Arc: Turret

Skill: Starship gunnery

Fire Control: 3D

Space Range: 1–7/20/30

Atmosphere Range: 100–700/2/3 km

Damage: 6D+2

3 Proton Torpedo Launchers

Fire Arc: Front

Skill: Starship gunnery

Fire Control: 2D+2

Space Range: 1–5/15/30

Atmosphere Range: 100–500/1.5/3 km

Damage: 9D

Ion Cannon

Fire Arc: Front

Skill: Starship gunnery

Fire Control: 1D+1

Space Range: 1–5/10/15

Atmosphere Range: 100–500/1/1.5 km

Damage: 4D

Doone

Type: Herglic Gambler

DEXTERITY 2D

Blaster 4D, dodge 3D+1

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 7D, business 6D, cultures 6D, languages 5D, planetary systems 6D, streetwise 9D, value 8D

MECHANICAL 3D

PERCEPTION 3D+2

Command 6D, con 7D, gambling 8D+2, hide 5D, persuasion 4D+2, search 5D

STRENGTH 4D+1

Brawling 6D+2, stamina 5D

TECHNICAL 2D

Computer programming/repair 4D

Special Abilities:

Natural Armor: Herglics enjoy a +1D bonus against physical attacks due to their thick, blubbery hide

Force Points: 1

Dark Side Points: 4

Character Points: 11

Move: 8

Equipment: Comlink, cred chits, datapad, expensive clothing

Capsule: In most ways, Doune is a typical Herglic. The only major difference is in his penchant for gambling. For most of his species, it is an obsession. For Doune, wagering is life. Luckily, he is very good.

Doune has spent most of his life in plush casinos, the back rooms of cantinas, and gaming salons. It didn't matter where he was, as long as a game was being played.

The Herglic is a very poor loser and has been known to disintegrate his opponents after they've cleaned him out. Resourceful and quick-witted, with a nasty disposition, Doune is not someone anyone would want as an enemy.



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Special Ops: SHIP JACKERS

By John Beyer and Kathy Burdette

Illustrations by Kathy Burdette and Robert Duchlinski

It was nearly sunup, and activity at the starport seemed to be winding down. Haathi was seated in one of the maintenance towers with her feet up on the viewport rim, surveying the tarmac with a pair of beat-up macros. She was not supposed to be there.

Neither was the new medic, who was making her twitchy, and not in a fun, exciting way.

"Excuse me, Major...Major?" he said, tugging at the sleeve of her coveralls.

Haathi's attention remained fixed on the scene below: messenger droids and automated baggage carts struggled around each other, cranky and argumentative after a long night's work. All around was the coughing and sputtering of transports charging, trying to get up enough juice to pull themselves through another day. Down by the guard towers the security guys were all fidgeting, like their shift was about to be up and their relief would arrive soon.

That last factor was something Haathi was relying on. This was Zelos II, where most of the native population was composed of humanoids who for some reason or other were terrified of night. The guards were more intent on huddling together and watching over their shoulders than on worrying about people who might, say, be about to break the law.

Now Haathi needed to locate the rest of her Special Ops team. She glanced at the nearest lighting tower; Morgan was dangling from the catwalk on a thin strap, her long arms buried to the elbows in an access panel. Right on schedule.

Haathi rested the macros on her thigh for a moment and gazed at the YT-1300 berthed in a high-security docking bay straight ahead. Behind her was a steady clicking; that was the sound of Jayme unplugging data jacks and exchanging c-boards at the security substation. He was completely rewiring the backup security computers to do the team's bidding, courtesy of a set of the starport's remodeling plans. Right on schedule.

"Hey, Major! Maaajor!"

Now she turned around. "What, Nord? What? Whaaat?"

"I've got an issue I want to bring up here," Nord said, fumbling with one of his stolen tech uniform's gloves.

"Is it that important? I need you to keep your eye on the security patrols. If they make Morgan, this will all be for nothing."

"I just want to ask you a question."

"And that is?"

"Why are we doing this?"

He said it passionately, like he'd rather spend the morning eating live firebugs than do what Haathi had in mind. Haathi sighed. She had been assured the new guy had been on several wet missions before being assigned to her team, but his hair and fingernails—his whole attitude—told her otherwise. Was the Rebellion really this desperate for field agents?

"We had three days in hyperspace to go over this, Nord," she said, helping him into his glove. "Would you like me to say this for the eighty billionth time?" She leaned toward him and spoke slowly and quietly into his ear. "Rebellion needs ships. We steal ship. Take home to base."

He jerked back and turned red. "I know that," he snapped. "I mean, why that particular ship?" He pointed at the one straight ahead.

"The YT-1300 is a classic," she told him. "If you had panache, Nord, you would have known that right off."

"No, I meant—"

"And it's practical, too, Nord. You seem like a practical guy. Don't you think we could use it on Derricon?" Haathi swept her free hand across the viewport. "Imagine how grand it would look in the hangar next to the troop transport."

"No, I mean why this particular YT-1300? There's dozens of them around here—hey, look, there's two right over there!"

Haathi squinted. "What's so great about those?"

"They aren't located directly underneath the guard tower."

"Bo-ring," said Haathi.

Nord gave a weird high-pitched snort; Haathi suspected that his voice was caught between obeying his commanding officer and screaming for help.

After a moment he said, "Fine. Okay. I just want you to know, I think this is a bad idea."

"Really?"

"Don't you?"

"No," said Haathi. "I *know* this is a bad idea."

"Then why don't we call it off before anybody breaks into anything and, ah...anybody gets, you know, shot?"

"It's too late for that," Haathi said sadly. "He called to me."

Nord looked around, over his shoulder, across the bay at the hundreds of ships and thousands of passengers between flights, out at the sky, and back at Haathi.

"Who called to you? 'Master Fate?'"

"Him," said Haathi. "The ship."

Nord rolled his eyes.

"It said, 'T'Charek! T'Charek! Save me from these ugly black market nerf-heads! I need a real pilot inside me. I need a rewiring job.'"

Suddenly Haathi grabbed Nord by the shoulders. "What am I supposed to say? 'No? Sorry, Ship, but my new med-tech thinks we should get that slag heap to your left because nobody's guarding it and there aren't any security alarms wired to it?' Is that what I should say to that ship out there? Look at him!"

Nord didn't look at the ship. His expression was that of a drowning man being thrown an AT-AT and he kept looking at Haathi, who mentally smacked herself on the hand. *He's the new guy. Be nice. Be nice. Let's give Rebel Command the benefit of the doubt.*

Haathi dusted off Nord's shoulders where she'd grabbed them. "Nord, listen. Don't worry about the other ships. Why don't you watch the security patrols and tell me when they swap shifts, and I'll worry about Haathi-stuff."

Nord studied her. "Define 'Haathi-stuff.'"

"Everything else."

"That's what worries me," Nord whispered.



During the course of the Rebellion, Special Ops teams have been called on to perform numerous assignments—some relatively safe, others exceedingly dangerous. And while each job may hold its own importance in the greater plans of the Alliance, few would succeed if not for the skills and talents of those who perform shipjacking missions. Without a constant supply of ships, the Rebellion would grind to a halt as operatives, information, and critically-needed supplies failed to arrive when and where they were most needed. Starfighters, freighters and capital ships are the backbone of the Rebellion, but acquiring them is extremely hazardous.

Best suited to this task are the Special Ops teams, whose creative members and risk-takers thrive on the challenge of pocketing yet another vessel. Often it seems the more impossible the odds and the greater the prize, the higher the rate of volunteers to participate in these missions. One has to be highly skilled or mentally unbalanced to join Special Ops, and shipjacking is a little of both.

Although the Alliance has the ability to design and manufacture ships, the resources required are limited and focus exclusively on the production of starfighters and capital ships. Defections from

the Imperial Navy and planetary defense forces, as well as secret contributions from private concerns, add greatly to the number of ships available to the Rebellion. Still, the entire Alliance Fleet barely equals in number what the Imperial Navy seems to send to the scrap yard in a single year.

Obtaining additional ships legally would bankrupt the Alliance in just a few days, and prove fruitless once the ships were used directly against the Empire. The Bureau of Ships and Services (BoSS) maintains exacting records of ship codes and ownership registrations, making such ships easy to trace and significantly increasing the risks involved in covert operations. Ships can also be obtained via the black market, but again the cost prohibits large-scale purchases. It is up to the Special Ops teams to acquire the ships needed to complete even the simplest missions.

What's Hot

All Special Ops teams are briefed on which ship types the Rebellion needs most. While any ship is better than none at all, certain ships are more desirable than others—some for versatility or durability, some for cargo capacity, and others for ease of maintenance and repair. Even while performing other objectives, the teams often scout out prime targets, passing the information to another team of shipjackers or, in some instances, incorporating the theft into their current mission.

Highest on the Rebellion's wish list are freighters. Experience has taught the Rebellion that the timely delivery of personnel, weapons and supplies is the key to winning battles. Stock light freighters like the YT-1300 and the Ghtroc 720 are the highest priority targets. Few other ships are as versatile and as popular as these two models. Replacement parts are easy to obtain, and modifications can be accomplished rather inexpensively. In addition, the ratio of these models to other ships in operation throughout the galaxy makes them very easy to disguise.

Next up, but harder to acquire, are stock medium and bulk freighters. Unfortunately for the Alliance, the Empire often directly or indirectly controls the manufacture and use of the majority of these craft. Many shipyards capable of producing these vessels do so under Imperial supervision. Pocketing one of these ships from a manufacturing yard is a suicidal feat and is seldom attempted. An additional concern is their immense cost, which prompts the

owners to increase the security against shipjacking.

As always, the Alliance requires combat craft, but starfighters and capital ships are the hardest types of ships to acquire and can almost never be replaced as quickly as they are lost. Mass-produced and widely distributed fighters like Z-95 Headhunters are prime targets. Unlike their faster and more powerful contemporaries, such fighters are extremely versatile and easy to maintain. In regard to capital ships, the Rebellion will gladly accept any such craft it can get despite maintenance considerations. Anyone who actually manages to retrieve even one of these vessels is regarded as a hero (at least by the Alliance Fleet Command).

The Shipjacker's Top Ten List

These vessels are considered the top priorities for Rebel Alliance shipjackers, although they are also prime targets for pirate and privateer shipjackers:

1. YT-1300
2. Ghtroc 720 Freighter
3. Corellian Action IV Transport
4. Gallofree Yards Medium Transport
5. Y-wing Starfighters
6. Z-95 Headhunters
7. Corellian Corvettes
8. Capital Ships
9. Lambda-Class Shuttles
10. Lantillian Short Haulers



Morgan, the youngest member of the team, figured she was reasonably inconspicuous as long as she acted casual. Certainly, now that the starport had been upgraded, it warranted security cameras affixed to every pole, poking out of every orifice, but they were looking for the conspicuous. Anybody seemingly doing a repair job underneath a catwalk did not warrant a security alert. In fact, at this place, Morgan figured, anybody seemingly doing a repair job deserved a medal. Still, the point was to avoid attracting

attention; those who glanced her way got a goofy salute in response, and went away grouching about why nobody bothered to screen out the weirdos during the hiring process anymore.

"Morg," Haathi's voice said over the headset.

"Yeah, Cap'n."

"Major. It's Major. It's been Major for three months."

"Sorry, T'Charek."

"Explain to me what you're doing right now."

"I'm cutting this wire here."

"I can't see you, dolt. What's the wire look like?"

"Oh. It's neat. It's bright green."

Haathi sighed. "I mean what's it attached to."

"Bright green's the color that hooks into the security monitor video relay. Is the security monitor fuzzing up?"

There was a pause. "Yeah...hey, yeah, you can't see anything."

"Okay, now I fuse the green wire to the orange wire on my datapad here. In a second the monitors should be displaying our program." Morgan fused the wires together nice and clean with her spanner.

"Yeah, you did it! This is great!" said Haathi.

"Tell me what you see," Morgan said.

"The area around the YT-1300."

"Can you tell it's a computer image?"

"No. Not at all. You did a great job."

Now all she could really do was hope Jayme didn't get killed.

That was it; they could blow the ship up if they wanted to, and the monitors would still show a YT-1300 completely undisturbed.

"Okay, now, Morg? I need you to—"

"Wait a second!" said Morgan.

"What? What is it?"

"Watch the viewscreen some more!"

There was a pause.

"I'm not seeing anything different," said Haathi.

Morgan gave a terse sigh. Haathi was smart, but she always looked at the big picture instead of the little important details. "The shadows, T'Charek, the shadows! Watch—as time passes, they move!"

"Oh? Well, that's very—"

"It goes through the whole 20-hour cycle—if you sit there long enough, you can see the night scene! I even put in a stray mynock getting fried by the outer forcefield cube!"

"Ah...we only needed 20 minutes, Morgan...."

"And there's also a moment where—"

"It's great, Morgan, really. It's great," said Haathi.

"Really?"

"Yes. Now listen. You have three minutes, starting now."

Morgan pulled her chrono off her wrist and tossed it lightly at the control panel door. The chrono stuck with a heavy, muffled clang. Then Morgan went to work again. This was the easy part. She had the next accessory, a metal tube about twice the size of a standard manual comlink, with a small, flexible plug at each end. Morgan plugged one end of this device into the scomp link; the other end she plugged into a power outlet. Once she had ascertained that the device was secure, she allowed it to charge, and passed the remaining time drinking a cold fizzyglug from her toolbox.

"Morgan. Jayme's ready."

"Roger that," Morgan said. She took back her chrono, pulled herself up onto the catwalk. Then she removed a small black box from her utility belt and held it in her palm with her thumb raised, waiting.

Now all she could really do was hope Jayme didn't get killed.



Ship Security Systems and Protection Levels

Shipjackers must overcome three levels of protection which must be tackled independently. First are the physical barriers: guards, walls, tripwires and the like. These barriers can be overcome through meticulous planning or by brute force. Next is the hardware or physical protection of the security system itself—locks and alarm systems to be neutralized. The *security* skill is used to roll against the difficulty level of the devices. Success indicates that the shipjacker has bypassed, rewired or picked the locking mechanism and associated alarms. Failure sets off alarms and booby-traps (Han Solo's failure to rewire the blast doors of the

Circumventing Security Measures

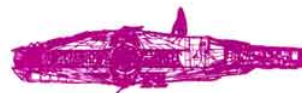
Difficulty Physical Security Measures

Very Easy	Simple catches/latches with cheap locks, no alarms: used on starfighters, maintenance craft and small shuttles stationed on bases or ships.
Easy	Standard lock—keycard locks, simple alarms: protecting maintenance craft and shuttles assigned to a centralized pool in secure areas.
Moderate	High-quality lock, standard military lock, key cylinder/password, multiple alarms: locks guarding commercial freighters, independently owned ships, VIP shuttles and starfighters operating outside secure areas.
Difficult	Hidden locks, palmprint/voice-activated, multiple alarms monitored from remote locations, non-lethal booby-traps: used in secure access areas, personal yachts, private docking bays.
Very Difficult	Super security locks, multiple randomized passwords, multiple alarms monitored at manned security posts, lethal booby-trap.
Heroic	Ultra security locks, utilizing any combination of alarms and booby-traps.

Note: Separate security rolls may be required for individual attempts to detect the locks and then to unlock or bypass them.

Imperial bunker in *Return of the Jedi* resulted in the closing of an additional blast door).

Lastly, there are software considerations, the elements of the system controlled by computer programs. These systems are independent of the actual locks themselves but usually have the ability to override the security system when present (R2-D2 successfully overriding the computer in *The Empire Strikes Back* to open the security door to the *Falcon's* landing pad is one example). The skill of *computer programming/repair* is required.



Jayme wasn't very tall, but he was solid, and he had a "please-don't-talk-to-me" veneer when he wasn't around Morgan and Haathi. Which was why, as he stood in the doorway to the control tower's entrance, right in front of a group of chattering human and droid baggage handlers, he had to struggle to look non-threatening.

Fortunately nobody acknowledged his presence. They hadn't objected when he and the others had gone into the tower, either. The droids knew only that anybody in a green starport uniform, carrying a set of work orders, was allowed to come into the tower and do whatever he or she wanted. The droids' brains figured: uniform-orders-entry-obey. Jayme liked that about droids. He suspected that the human workers' brains functioned the same way.

Then he heard Morgan's raspy voice over the comm-channel.

"I'm ready," she said.

Jayme stepped onto the tarmac below the viewport. With one hand he scratched at his black goatee, indicating that he was ready, too. His other hand was holding a dinged-up, rust-colored toolbox.

"Jayme?" said Morgan. "You sure you're ready?"

He glanced up at Morgan, who was standing on the catwalk looking down at him.

"Yeah," Jayme said.

He ambled across the docking bay as casually as time warranted; when he got to just outside the forcefield cube, he set down his toolbox and pulled out a silver rod about a half-meter long. For a minute he studied the forcefield cube, an almost-invisible iridescent shimmer, and the humming mesh-link power fence behind it. Beyond that was a low blast wall. Jayme snorted. Thinking the blast wall would be a deterrent would be like thinking somebody who had stolen your keycards would be put off by an extra door to your house.

"No problem clearing that wall, right?" said Morgan.

"Morg, I told you, I've done this lotsa times."

He meant he had pole-vaulted and free-fallen over walls lots of times, but never through a forcefield area. He didn't tell Morgan that.

"Okay," said Morgan.

"Now you're clear of the power board this time, right? I mean,



way clear?" he asked. "Because it was just dumb luck that you didn't lose your whole hand last time, young lady."

"Oh, come on, Jayme. It's not like they weren't able to re-attach my thumb."

Jayme was about to respond to that when Haathi's voice cut in. "Say, Jayme, anytime this week would be nice."

The comm-channel went quiet. Jayme took a couple of deep breaths and focused; then he clicked the center switch on his silver rod, and both ends extended a meter apiece.

"Spike it," he said.

There was a light buzzing noise as Morgan's thumb met the red switch on her little black box, and caused a massive power surge through the main security computer. The iridescent shimmer disappeared and the fence stopped humming. At the same time, there was a popping noise from Morgan's maintenance panel as the power box circuit board exploded. In nanoseconds, the main security computer was crippled, and its automatic cry for backup systems would be answered by the substation Jayme had rewired. Which was to say, it was a cry that would go unnoticed.

Now Jayme had maybe three minutes before the auxiliary power kicked in and the fence and forcefield came back on.

Or he might have a quarter of a second. He put that out of his mind as he slid his hands up to the top of the pole, backed up, and then sprinted toward the forcefield area.



After the Jack

Once the ship is stolen, the jackers are faced with a dilemma: what to do with the hot property. Unless they plan to sell the ship or hide it away, they must make the ship legal again. Special Ops teams working from a large Alliance Base have the fewest problems; often the ship is transferred directly to Fleet Command whose trained technicians alter and refit the ship for its first mission.

Rebels operating from smaller outposts or as independent units must find other means. Contacts in the black market and smuggler syndicates can provide the location of good transponder technicians and illegal repair yards. These techniques are expensive. Budget-conscious jackers may attempt the modifications on their own, provided they can wrangle up the required materials. However, getting the ship legally entered with BoSS is impossible to accomplish without an expensive payoff. Many times the cost of the alterations and the BoSS documentation can be purchased as a package deal if you make the right connection.

Another option is to forgo any attempt to alter the ship for covert operations. Instead the ship is refitted for combat operations. When used in suicide runs and dangerous cargo-drop missions it makes no difference whether the ship is legal, and once it is armed, not many people care.

Black Market Sales

Ships can be sold or purchased on the black market with no questions asked; occasionally a massive underworld event known only as "the Auction" is sponsored by a crime lord or pirate syndicate. Shipjackers from all over the galaxy arrive with everything from aging Z-95 Headhunters to scrapped Imperial Dreadnaughts, willing to wheel and deal. Parts, upgrades and alterations can usually be added into the bargain.

The event is so large that entire sub-cultures have sprung forth. Luxury liners converted into floating casinos and pleasure yachts provide accommodations usually found only at planetary resorts. Salvage ships, smelter vessels and hyperspace-capable dry-docks appear at every auction, providing on-the-site modifications and repairs. And there are the inevitable transponder "experts," who offer their services, promising the latest in foolproof transponder alterations and masking techniques.

Security for "the Auction" is arranged by the sponsor, who must assure the patrons that they can conduct their business free from Imperial entanglements. Black market contacts usually provide the location only to their favorite shipjackers and to customers who can prove they have the credits to do business. Be prepared to pay lavish docking fees; when the galaxy's best shipjackers come together security is not cheap, and there is no honor among thieves.

Forming the Shipjacking Team

Special Ops teams are usually composed of personnel solicited throughout the Alliance. Some are flamboyant hotshots who thrive in dangerous conditions. Some are misfits with exceptional talents who cannot cope with the rigid discipline required in a military hierarchy. Others are simply there to fill a slot or perform a general function. Regardless of how they made it to the team, only those members with the ability to face incredible challenges and unforeseen setbacks survive.

Specialization in the areas of *space transports*, *space transports repair*, *demolition*, *security* and *computer programming/repair* is essential, while secondary training in *forgery*, *first aid* and *combat* skills may also be useful. Shipjackers should rely on stealth and meticulous planning to achieve their objectives, and use brute force only when absolutely necessary. Bloodthirsty shipjackers not only show a lack of finesse, but are regarded as nothing more than common pirates.



The next time Jayme heard voices over the comlink, he was standing about 30 meters away from the YT-1300. He hadn't heard

any buzzing, but there was an iridescent shimmer over his head and the power fence sizzled behind the blast wall. The wall itself surrounded him and the YT-1300; to get to the ship he would have to cross a wide open area. The only cover was provided by a few big metal crates and a tool shed down at his end.

"Well?" said Haathi's voice. "Is that the ship we checked out on the computer?"

Jayme squatted down behind a crate and pulled out his comlink. "Yes, I'm fine, thanks," he said.

"Jayme-are-you-okay-is-that-the-ship-we-checked-out-on-the-computer?" said Haathi.

"Hang on a second," said Jayme, peering out. There was nobody else inside with him, and of course Morgan had taken care of the dozen-plus security cameras scattered around the area; but the whole docking bay and its respective defenses were nestled up to one of the starport's perimeter walls. On top of these walls the security guards patrolled back and forth, high enough to look straight down and see everything that was going on across the tarmac.

Not that these guards were going to make a world of difference to Haathi's mission. The ones nearby had their backs to the ship, which meant they were probably split between watching Morgan's computer simulation of the undisturbed ship on the security monitors, or they were just too busy thinking about the shift-change to pay attention. Jayme found, when he crept to the ship, that if he stood closer to the cockpit he was at an angle relatively out of their view.

He had never seen a brand-new stock light freighter before; they were always dingy with carbon-scoring and full of dents. This one was so shockingly clean he felt he had to squint now that he was up close.

He craned his neck to see the pilot's viewport. Just below it there were numbers painted in sharp black; he relayed these numbers to Haathi.

"I do believe you are looking at our friend *The Maker*," said Haathi, "owned by one...let me see here..." There was the distant sound of a datapad beeping. "...Sythluss Leethe."

Jayme waited until he was back behind the crates before responding. "What kind of name is Sythluss, anyway?" he asked.

"Sluissi."

"Figures."

"So, can we come in, too?" asked Haathi.

She bounded around to the front of the ship, set a foot on the landing ramp, and was violently thrown backward in a sizzling pink flash.

minute lecture on how it worked; but all he bothered to note was "put it in place and speak into it."

The door's security system spoke first. "Voice authentication," it said.

"Me," said Jayme into the box.

A few seconds later, there was a beeping sound. "Access granted."

"Shields down, open the door," said Jayme.

The forcefield cube and power fence turned off again; the door clicked and swung open, and Haathi and the others came inside. Jayme asked the box to put the forcefields back up, then he looked up at the guards. None of them were paying attention.

"Everybody note the guards," said Jayme.

"We're all going to die," said Nord, huddling against a crate.

"What's the next course of action, T'Charek?" asked Jayme.

Nobody answered him.

"Er, T'Charek?" said Jayme, looking around. "T'Charek?"

Haathi was standing under the ship, looking upward. On her tiptoes with one arm stretched over her head, she was stroking *The Maker's* underbelly.

"Morgan," she said slowly into her comlink. "Get this ship's defenses down. Right now."

Jayme suppressed a wide grin.

"Okay, Cap'n," Morgan said.

Haathi didn't correct her. "Jayme?" she said.

"Yeah."

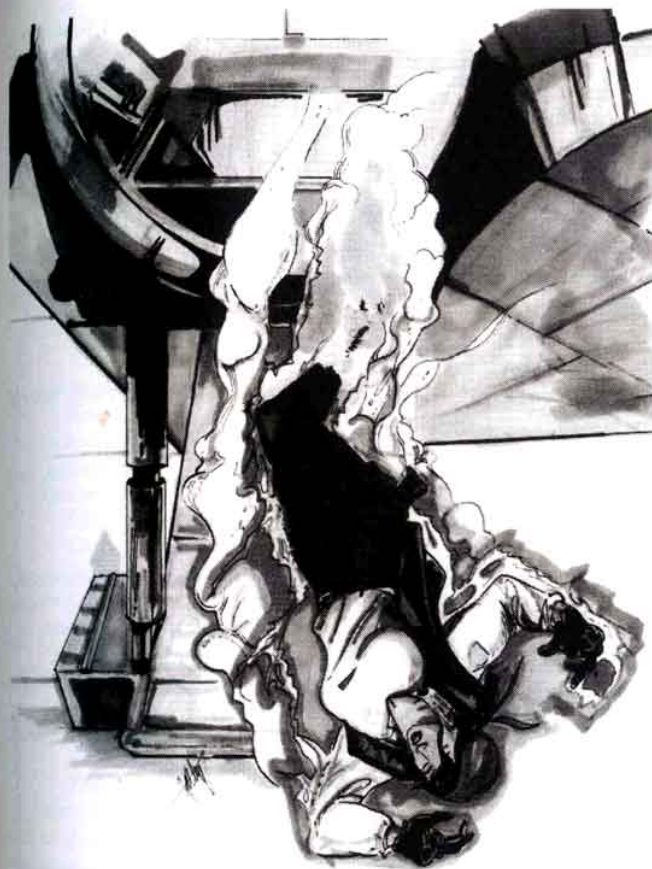
"Keep Doctor Paranoid behind the crates and tell him to stay quiet. I need him to watch those guards."

"Got it. Morg?"

"I'm going." Morgan made her way over to the ship holding a cluster of tools in her hand like a bouquet. When she got there she

"Oh," said Jayme, "I guess so. Give me a minute." He found the door on the north wall, opened up its maintenance panel, and affixed a small metal box to one of the c-boards inside. This gadget was called the VoiceBox, and Morgan had given him a 20-

he bothered to note was



pulled open a few ventral maintenance panels and set to work on *The Maker* in a blue spray of sparks. Haathi watched from a short distance away, visibly restraining herself from hanging over Morgan's shoulder and asking how much longer it would take.

Just then, Jayme heard a hissing noise. It was Nord, crouching in his assigned place about 10 meters behind Jayme.

"Pssst! Jayme! Would you please talk some sense into Major Haathi? She's going to get us all killed!"

"There's an informed opinion," said Jayme. To Haathi he said, "T'Charek, maybe you wanna give Morgan some breathing space?" Haathi looked up and grinned at Jayme across the compound. "It's ours, you know," she said. "A couple of seconds and it's ours."

"Okay, I got it, all defenses are down—" said Morgan.

"Yesss! We are into the soup!" said Haathi. She bounded around to the front of the ship, set a foot on the landing ramp, and was violently thrown backward in a sizzling pink flash.

"—right after I disconnect the stun steps," said Morgan.

Jayme smacked a palm against his forehead.

"It'll just take another second, Cap'n," said Morgan, looking around. "Cap'n?"

"She's down!" Jayme said.

"What's going on?" asked Nord.

"Just maintain your position, Nord," said Jayme irritably. "Morg! T'Charek is lying in the open. Get her clear, now!"

"Hey—is she dead?"

Jayme turned around. Nord was standing right behind him, out in the open, pointing at Haathi.

"Nord, get back to your position."

"This is my position," said Nord.

Jayme took a deep breath. "Nooo," he said. As evenly as he could manage, and as slowly as the situation would allow him. "Your position is behind those crates and out...of...view!"

"Does she need a medic, Mister Expert?" asked Nord.

"I'll let you know in a minute, Nord, now just shut up and get back!" He glanced at Morgan, who had cleanly and efficiently moved Haathi out of the way. He wasn't even sure where Haathi was now.

"Hey!"

Jayme snapped to attention. That was a new voice.

"Hey! What's going on down there! Hey, halt!" shouted one of the men on the wall, pointing at Nord and drawing the attention of his fellow security guards. In quick succession, the outer forcefield and the fence powered down once again and a ladder well shot down the side of the guard wall. Before anybody on Haathi's team could register what was happening, the ladder was swarming with security guards—none of whom even waited for a response before opening fire.



Campaign Scope and Themes

While it would become repetitive to run a campaign composed solely of shipjacking adventures, several missions run consecutively would allow players to hone their characters' skills and talents and could provide a break from another campaign. The

Shipjacker Slang

Bantha Brakes: Tractor beams.

Boring: Either extremely dangerous or no threat at all, or possibly both at the same time.

Bricks and Mortar: Security systems which include forcefields, power fences and other physical obstacles.

Gift For Ackbar: A capital ship.

Geeks With Guns: Local security guards.

Jackers: Ship thieves.

Level Zip Ship: An easy target possessing few or no security obstacles.

License to Steal: Alliance-authorized shipjacking.

Nerf Bait: Phony locks and security systems booby-trapped to catch shipjackers.

Note From The Doctor: Forged documentation.

One-Stop Shopping: Stealing a ship with its cargo intact.

Parental Supervision: Heavily armed guards, or Imperial escorts.

Party Crashers: Bounty hunters specializing in the capture of shipjackers and retrieval of stolen ships.

Pocket: Steal.

Tatooine Tattoo: Price on your head (Jabba the Hutt level).

Used Speeder Lot: An Imperial hangar bay or docking complex.

Vader Grader: A target so well protected that even Darth Vader would find it hard to acquire.

characters may find themselves temporarily assigned to Alliance Ordnance and Supply, either as a reward for succeeding or as a punishment for failing their last mission. Perhaps the characters themselves have planned a major operation that Alliance Command has approved, but cannot supply the required ships.

Not all shipjackings are limited to Special Ops; at one time or another all characters are faced with the awkward situation of having to steal the first starship they come across. The characters might be pirates, smugglers or even regular Rebels who just need a quick getaway. In these incidents no special talents or equipment are required—instead they must improvise using the resources at hand.

Interesting scenarios should be created, requiring the players to plan and execute the “ultimate” shipjacking. Their ship might have been stolen or repossessed by crime lords or legitimate creditors at an inconvenient time, and now they must steal it back. Maybe the characters need to infiltrate a crime syndicate, but must first steal a ship and its cargo to earn the trust of the criminal boss. A loan shark to whom they owe money might offer to forget the loan if they retrieve a vessel used as collateral by another client. The possibilities are limitless and easy to integrate into most existing campaigns.



Haathi couldn't be sure exactly what was going on. What she did know was that there was a lot of noise mixing in with the acrid metallic scent of blaster power packs being unloaded, and that she couldn't feel her legs.

“T'Charek!” said a voice. “How many fingers am I holding up?” Haathi blinked furiously. After a second she shielded her eyes and focused on a hand being held in front of her face. The hand smelled like grease and...fizzylug?

“Muh—Morgan?”

“How many fingers?” Morgan asked again.

“Autumn,” Haathi replied.

“Close enough.” Morgan scooted away, then reappeared for a second. “Stay where you are,” she said, and left again.

Stay where you are. Haathi wondered where that was. She raised herself up on one arm and realized, after the head-rush had

subsided, that she was lying under the ship, fully shielded by the entry ramp. Her legs had now acquired a jangly, throbbing feeling.

Haathi rolled over onto her stomach and got a good look at what was happening. A flood of guards had come off the catwalk. All of them were leftover night-shift guys—twitchy, paranoid, and shooting red kill-shots from their cheap starport-issue blasters. Jayme had taken cover behind the tool shed, and Nord's head popped up from behind a different set of crates every few seconds. The guards were much too wired to concentrate on whether they were actually hitting anyone or not, but in a way that was worse. The tarmac looked as if it were being spattered with pink rain, interrupted occasionally by the odd blue stun bolts from Haathi's team.

At least everyone was okay so far. It wasn't hard to figure out what had happened, or whose fault it was. Snap judgments were one thing, but she certainly knew how to spot a pattern. She sighed heavily and let her head sink down below her shoulders. Scrub the mission. Scrub the YT-1300. Who needed it, anyway? Whoever thought of naming it the *Maker*? Stupid name for a stupid ship.

She glanced upward at its white underbelly, its multicolored entrails still hanging out of the compartments Morgan had opened. Haathi stared. Seeing it like that was a kind of blasphemy. It was stuck like that because the guards had called Morgan away from her work.

Haathi's eyes narrowed. There was no way she was going to let a bunch of psycho starport geeks with guns stand between her and the nicest ship she had ever had the privilege of drooling over.

She took out her comlink, which was buzzing and sputtering the sounds of blaster-fire, and with Jayme's voice.

“Jayme!” Haathi said. “Fall back! Everybody on board!”

“Where are you?”

“Behind the entry ramp! Come on, I'll cover you...Morgan, where are you?”

“Aft!” Morgan shouted from somewhere behind Haathi.

“Listen carefully!” Haathi said.

Suddenly the bright-red shot of a hardly used blaster gouged into one of the guards at the top of the ladder and sent him, screaming, to the ground. There was a loud crack. Louder than Haathi would have ever imagined.

“Aaah, no, no, no!” Haathi shouted into the comlink. “Who did that? Take your blaster off ‘kill’ right now!”

“Only if you get us out of here!” Nord shouted back.

"Jayme, he's hysterical. Stun him," Haathi said. Jayme smiled sweetly and took a bead on Nord's head, which disappeared instantly behind a crate.

"Okay! It's on stun! Are you happy?" Nord shouted.

"Morgan, you still there?" Haathi asked. "Get the steps disconnected!"

Morgan ducked under the ship, picked up the cables and her tools from the ground, and set to finishing her job.

Haathi could see that the guard count was thinning rapidly; most of the night-shift lay on the ground, stunned, their blaster power-packs long since spent on wild shots into pylons and crates. Still, they weren't entirely stupid. A number of them had retreated back up the heavy wall, where they had a better vantage point than any member of Haathi's team.

Haathi's mind raced. If any of those guards had the presence of mind to sound general quarters—and they would, once the sun rose, or if the day-shift had arrived...and it would, any second now—there wasn't going to be an option of scrubbing the mission or of escaping in the ship.

"Do you smell that...? It's the smell of our brand-new ship!"

"Morg, hurry it up," she called. "I need those steps down two minutes ago."

A burst of laser-fire cut off Morgan's response. Haathi jerked her head over in Morgan's direction; the shot had gone into the now-smoking forward landing gear strut. The security guard who fired the shot stood on the lowest rung of the guards' ladder, his shaking blaster pointed at Morgan. He stepped to the ground.

Morgan stood looking confused for a second. You could see the situation register on her face; panic followed the confusion, and then resignation.

Haathi felt a little sick. If Morgan just moved to the left, Haathi would have the security guard pegged. If not, Haathi was in no shape to get into position and get her shot off first.

Morgan looked at the guard. Suddenly her face relaxed.

"Good morning," she said. "Fill 'er up?"

The guard's face contorted in a panic. "What?"

"Hold this," Morgan said, jerking the cables at him. A pink arc shot into his chest, and then he lay on the tarmac jerking around. Haathi felt the blood return to her face. She knew what to do now.

"Morgan, the wires! Drop the wires!"

"They're cables!" Morgan yelled back.

"Drop them!" Haathi pointed at the ladder.

Morgan's eyes cleared. She understood, and she let the cables fall onto one of the ladder rungs. A blast of vivid pink shot up the ladder, across the railing and the metal floor of the catwalk on the guard wall. The remaining security guards jolted and dropped in place.

Then there was silence.

That was the last of the night-shift. Jayme peered around the corner of the tool shed, and Morgan came back under the ship, hauling the cables.

"We're clear," Haathi said into her comlink. "Everybody hurry it up."

Nord appeared from behind a stack of crates and ran, red-faced like a maniac, toward the ship. His footsteps clanged up the landing ramp over Haathi's head, and in a few seconds she could hear him above her in the ship, still running until he got to where Haathi estimated the storage bay was.

Jayme followed. Instead of heading up the landing ramp, however, he pulled Haathi's arm around his neck and helped her stagger up the ramp. Morgan followed.

Jayme set Haathi on the lounge sofa. "Where's Nord," he asked, "now that we need him and his medpac?"

"Who cares?" said Haathi. "Get me to the cockpit—"

"Jayme!" Morgan called from the entryway. Jayme tore down the corridor. The sound of blaster-fire followed. The day-shift had arrived.

Great. They would sound general quarters for sure. Haathi yelled down the corridor, "Use the manual override lever to shut the ramp! We don't have time to waste on these guys!"

The blaster-fire grew muffled and distant. In a moment Jayme and Morgan appeared in the lounge.

"Can anybody think," Haathi asked, "of any other kinds of surprises our boy Sythluss might have for us?"

"No," said Morgan.

"Good. Get me to the—"

"Unless he put in a cockpit hatch and had it sealed. I'm sure he wouldn't do that, though."

Jayme grabbed Morgan's sleeve. Haathi pulled herself up against the bulkhead, leaned against a bunch of storage compartments.

She watched Morgan and Jayme run up the main corridor. Sure enough, there was a heavy steel wall blocking their way to the cockpit entrance. Haathi groaned.

"This is no problem," said Morgan. "Classic smuggler ploy. My dad used to do this in the old days. See, it's just this little hose that keeps the door shut."

Jayme pulled a gray roll of thick, gummy tape out of one of his pockets, and while Morgan spoke he affixed the tape to the hatch's four sides.

"So," Morgan said, "to reroute the power, we just—"

"Fire in the hole!" Jayme called. He fired his blaster at the door and jerked Morgan to the ground by her collar. Haathi ducked. There was a loud bang followed by the clang of the door against the bulkhead.

Haathi peered around the corner. Jayme and Morgan, both covered in soot, were getting to their feet, coughing.

"Okay, that works, too," Morgan said.

Haathi squinted. Way down the passage she could see a dim alcove, half-lit by a few scattered red lights.

It was the cockpit. Her cockpit.

She took a deep breath and then exhaled just as deeply. "Morgan! Jayme!" she said. "Do you smell that?"

They looked at her, at each other, at the smoldering door.

"It's the smell of our brand-new ship!" she shouted, and reeled down the corridor. Before Jayme or Morgan could offer assistance, she was in the pilot's chair.

"T'Charek?" said Jayme from the doorway. "You all right?"

Haathi's voice came over the ship's intercom, clear and ringing. "General quarters, general quarters," she said. "Testing one, two, three."

"Hey, neat!" said Morgan, squeezing in behind Jayme.

"And to your left, ladies and gentlemen, you can see half the starport guards attempt to stand up after being stunned into oblivion. To your right, you can see the other half of the guards point their guns and make obscene gestures at our ship," said Haathi's voice.

"Um, about those security guards?" said Jayme.

Haathi looked over the main console, and then out the viewport. The sky was turning a sickly purple through a thin covering of altostratus clouds. It wasn't going to be the sunniest of days on Zelos. Good. Maybe everybody would wilt or something.

"Morgan," said Haathi. "Ship is on standby. Suggestion for the fastest possible exit."

Morgan leaned over her shoulder and studied the console. "Oh. Okay. Don't power up the guns. Don't power up all the shields. Don't power up—"

"Re-route everything into the engines, in other words," said Haathi, blocking Morgan from getting her sooty hands on any buttons.

"Right."

"Done." Haathi spoke into the intercom again. "Strap yourselves in, people. And Nord."

The floor rumbled. Down below, the security guards took withering little pot-shots at the ventral side of the ship and then fell or jumped to the ground, their hands locked over their ears.

"Everybody wave," Haathi said.

Morgan and Jayme waved.

"Maaajor!"

That was Nord's voice. Haathi glanced at the console; one of the intercom switches had been tripped.

"Nord! Wave!" Haathi said.

"Get us out of here, you psychomaniac!" Nord shouted back.

"Nord, your problem is, you don't know how to have a good time," Haathi told him. She flicked the intercom off-line—Morgan had said reroute everything, after all—and shot past the weak scattering of security air patrols in the Rebellion's brand new stock light freighter.



Adventure Outlines

Here are some guidelines for a few unique shipjacking adventures. Almost any type of character can be used to complete the scenarios. Gamemasters are encouraged to tailor these outlines to their own campaigns, using their own familiar settings and recurring characters.

Special Pickup

Alliance Intelligence recently discovered that the Empire has been secretly developing a new prototype starfighter. Information from a reliable source connected to the project reveals that the

prototype is ready for extensive field testing. One of the new breed of starfighters must be captured for the Alliance to study, and the program must be delayed if possible. Are the characters capable of performing such a demanding task?

Episode One: The characters must invent a convincing cover story to penetrate Imperial security. The tests are being conducted at an abandoned mining complex, located in a remote asteroid field and patrolled by a small fleet. Here the Empire can conduct the test flights safely away from prying eyes.

Episode Two: Once inside the facility the characters must gain access to the fighters and the research laboratories. Using resources at hand, they must destroy as much of the facility as possible, while simultaneously stealing at least one of the prototypes. In addition, they may need to rescue their informant.

Episode Three: Pursued by squadrons of TIE fighters and fleet ships, the characters must fly through the hazards of the asteroid field in order to rendezvous with a Rebel capital ship that will get them out of the system.

Wrap It Up

While involved in another operation the characters see the opportunity for some one-stop shopping. A bulk freighter carrying medical supplies has made an unscheduled landing at a backwater starport for engine repairs. With only a minor detachment of troops as an escort, can the characters steal the transport and the cargo before it can rejoin its convoy? This scenario is ideal for large groups of players, since the bulk freighter's crew complement is eight.

Episode One: The characters must scout the area and determine the best way to get aboard. After overpowering the guards they must continue with the effort to repair the freighter's engines. They should find it suspiciously easy to get aboard; hatches have been left unsecured and guards are not at their assigned posts. A detailed investigation supports hunches that the vessel was sabotaged.

Episode Two: Complications arise as the characters encounter an opposing group of shipjackers working for a notorious crime lord. Attempts to negotiate fail, as the opposing shipjackers don't want to share their prize. A minor skirmish leaves the characters in control of the ship but not the landing field and its surrounding buildings.

Episode Three: The characters must repair the engines (perhaps with the aid of their Imperial prisoners) as they hold off the other shipjackers who have laid siege to the crippled vessel. They need to flee the starport before the shipjackers can muster enough support to overcome the characters' limited defenses. If they delay too long the Empire sends out a patrol to find its overdue freighter, decreasing the odds of a successful getaway.

The Auction Block

On completing another successful, high-profile mission, the characters realize the ship they are using is too hot to keep. Can they unload the vessel at a black market auction and still turn a profit?

Episode One: Unknown to the characters, the light luxury yacht they have recently stolen was formerly the property of a major crime lord (possibly the same one who hired the rival shipjackers in "Wrap It Up" above). The crime lord wants his ship back, and has sent a large band of bounty hunters to retrieve it. The bounty hunters are also being paid to teach the thieves a lesson, and are relentless in their pursuit.

Episode Two: Having escaped one ambush by the bounty hunters, the characters must meet with an informant who knows the location of a black market auction where they must try to sell their ship and its current cargo for enough credits to get back home. After they leave, the bounty hunters pay a visit to the same informant.

Episode Three: Matters come to a head when the characters find out that the crime lord is at the auction and has brought additional bounty hunters with him. They must grab their credits and possibly another ship, while eluding the grasp of the crime lord and his hired thugs.

Roleplaying Game Statistics

■ Flex-5 Detonite Tape

Model: Merr-Sonn Munitions Compound Flex-5 Detonite Tape

Type: Adhesive explosive strip

Scale: Character

Skill: Demolition

Costs: 1,500 (per 5 meters)

Availability: X

Difficulty: 10

Blast Radius: 0-0.5 meters

Damage: 3D

Capsule: Flex-5 Detonite Tape is a plastic adhesive tape impregnated with concentrated detonite and is packaged in 5-meter rolls. The compound is fairly stable and requires intense heat or an electrical charge to detonate. Much like a shape-charged projectile, the tape can blast a hole through many materials. It is especially useful for blowing seams, such as hatches and hull-plates. Since the tape is flexible and self-binding, it can be applied where normal explosives may be too awkward to use. In the hands of an expert, the tape can sever just the right connection or break the smallest lock without causing collateral damage.

■ Stun Steps

Model: Telex-Delcor Ramp Entry Security System

Type: Anti-boarding security device

Scale: Character

Cost: 1,500, 500 for each additional die of stun damage past 3D up to 5D.

Availability: 2, F

Damage: 3D-5D stun damage

Capsule: Stun steps use the natural conductive abilities of standard steps and ramps to create an electromagnetic neuro-shock field. Anything which enters the field receives a 3D stun shock. Upgrades can increase this stun damage up to 5D. The system is plugged directly into the ship's power grid and can deliver an infinite number of stun shocks as long as the ship has power. A backup battery allows the unit to discharge a total of 20D of stun damage should power be lost.

Most users do not install the stun step controls into the ship's security programs; instead they prefer to use a remote control device. This technique makes it almost impossible for intruders to discover the unit's presence until it is too late. The system is composed of a backup power supply, charge capacitor, remote control unit, field generator rods and a simple sensor package. A separate system must be installed for each ramp, step or entrance to be covered. Multiple systems can be slaved to the same remote control.

■ VoiceBox

Model: BothiCorp VoiceBox Speech Pattern Duplicator

Type: Voice lock buster

Skill: Security

Cost: 5,000

Availability: X

Capsule: Modern voice-activated security systems process accent, inflection, tone, stress, and many other voice pattern characteristics for encryption. The super-encryption and multi-sensors make the locks difficult to defeat. The VoiceBox is plugged into a lock's wiring where it searches the memory for the voice authentication files. The unit then fools the lock by encrypting the user's voice patterns with a copy of the authentication files. A successful security roll against the lock's difficulty rating is required for success.

■ Scomp-Spiker

Model: Custom-made

Type: Outlaw-tech computer spiker

Cost: 20 (in spare parts)

Availability: X

Capsule: This unit consists of a charge capacitor, scomp link, power jack, and a remote control. The spiker must be plugged first into the scomp link and then the power jack to prevent blowout. After charging, the unit sends a high voltage blast into the computer system, melting connections and destroying programs along its course. This device is not selective: it is designed to destroy computer components, or at least the sub-station where it is used.

■ The Maker

Craft: Modified Corellian YT-1300 Transport

Type: Modified light freighter

Scale: Starfighter

Length: 26.7 meters

Skill: Space transports: YT-1300 transports

Crew: 1 to 2 (can coordinate)

Crew Skill: Varies

Passengers: 6

Cargo: 100 metric tons

Consumables: 2 months

Hyperdrive Multiplier: x2

Hyperdrive Backup: x12

Nav Computer: Yes

Maneuverability: 1D

Space: 6

Atmosphere: 330; 950 kmh

Hull: 4D

Shields: 2D

Sensors:

Passive: 10/0D

Scan: 25/1D

Search: 40/2D

Focus: 2/3D

Weapons:

1 Quad Laser Cannon

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: 5D

2 Concussion Missile Tubes (fire-linked)

Fire Arc: Forward

Skill: Starship gunnery

Fire Control: 2D

Space Range: 1-2/8/15

Atmosphere Range: 100-200/800/1.5 km

Damage: 7D

Game Notes: The *Maker* has been specially fitted with a custom-made "transponder mask," capable of switching the transponder code to an alternate signal. Both signals are entered into official BoSS records, allowing the operator to use either of the two "legal" signals at will.

Capsule: Formerly the possession of Sythluss Leethe, a black market droid manufacturer, the *Maker* has been lightly modified to allow him to further expand his markets. After an expensive trip to the Minos Cluster, the ship now possesses an extra transponder code which he uses when delivering his customized droids. Since the vessel and the modifications are so new, both the original code for the *Maker*, and the alternate code registered under the *One Shot* have no black marks against their records.

■ Major T'Charek Haathi

Type: Special Ops Team Leader

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 6D+2, brawling parry 5D, dodge 4D, vehicle blasters 4D

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Business 5D, intimidation 3D+1, languages 4D, law enforcement 4D, planetary systems 5D, streetwise 5D, value 4D, value: starships 6D, willpower 5D

MECHANICAL 4D

Astrogation 6D, astrogation; Inner Rim 8D, sensors 5D, space transports 7D, starfighter piloting 6D, starfighter piloting; Y-wing 8D, starship gunnery 5D, starship shields 6D

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 5D, bargain: starships 6D, command 7D, con 5D, gambling 5D, investigation 4D, persuasion 4D, search 5D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 5D, stamina 5D, swimming 4D

TECHNICAL 3D

Blaster repair 4D, capital starship repair 4D, security 4D, starfighter repair 4D, starfighter repair: Y-wing 5D, space transports repair 5D, starship weapon repair 4D

Force Point: 3

Character Points: 18

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), comlink, fake ident chits, heavy blaster pistol (5D)

Capsule: The two things Haathi has never been able to put up with are stability and predictability. Working in her grandmother's successful shipping business on Wroona left her bored out of her mind and prompted her to apply to the Imperial Academy despite the promise of constant violence and prejudice due to her alien status. Although she wasn't accepted, the local Wroonian defense force recruited her when she was 18; at 19 she became a pilot. The highly regimented life patrolling Wroona didn't appeal to Haathi—when her squadron decided to go rogue and follow more lucrative and exciting pursuits, she gladly split.

Their initial raids against Imperial corporate shipping were bold, and it soon won them the unwanted attention of the Imperial Navy. A devastating counterattack crippled their ranks, but Haathi survived to

limp back to the Inner Rim Planets. There, she took up with a couple of Rodaj miners and talked them into joining the Rebellion with her.

Although Haathi's experience coupled with her natural abilities have led her to be ranked among the Rebellion's better pilots, her recklessness and irreverent attitude have made her the bane of her superior officers' existence. She enlisted shortly after the Battle of Yavin only to find that the Rebellion was primarily in retreat mode, which involved hiding, waiting, and then hiding some more. Haathi dealt with the monotony by purposely sabotaging random systems in her Y-wing just to see how well she could fly without them, by yelling "Eject!" into open comm-channels just to see who was twitchy enough to eject for no reason, and by referring to her commanding officer as Admiral Nerf just to see how long it would take for him to turn purple. Worst of all, she was even more annoying whenever she got suspended from flying, which was fairly often. Haathi's commanding officer eventually gave up punishing her in favor of ignoring her. Then she was more bored than ever.

Special Ops turned out to be a blessing for Haathi and her superiors, the latter having recognized this as a way to keep her talents in the Rebellion while getting rid of her at the same time. As for Haathi, being a Special Ops leader has placed her in her element. Now she answers to a base commander, but he has almost no control over what goes on once Haathi and her team leave the base. Still, it should be noted that Haathi is not power-hungry—she is always open to suggestions from her teammates. She doesn't like to pull rank unless she really has to, as this would make her feel like the rigid authority figure she never wants to turn into.

T'Charek Haathi is short for a Wroonian—about average height for a human female—with blue skin and shoulder-length blue hair. She is



easygoing and quick-witted, a natural leader who can talk her way out of anything. She places the welfare of her friends above all other priorities, including the Alliance.

■ Captain Ivhin Jayme

Type: SpecForces Urban Operative

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 6D, blaster: heavy blaster pistol 8D+1, blaster artillery 5D, brawling parry 5D, dodge 5D, grenade 6D, melee combat 5D, melee parry 5D, thrown weapons 4D, vehicle blasters 5D

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Intimidation 4D, intimidation: interrogation 6D, survival 5D, survival: urban 7D, streetwise 6D+2

MECHANICAL 4D

Starship gunnery 5D, repulsorlift operation 5D, swoop operation 5D

PERCEPTION 3D

Persuasion 4D, search 5D, sneak 4D, sneak: urban 5D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 6D, stamina 5D, climbing/jumping 8D

TECHNICAL 3D

Blaster repair 5D, demolition 7D, droid repair 4D, first aid 5D, repulsorlift repair 4D, security 10D

This character is Force-sensitive.

Force Points: 4

Character Points: 8

Move: 10

Equipment: 2 Fragmentation grenades (5D), 2 heavy blaster pistols (5D), hold-out blaster (3D), thermal detonator (10D), 2,000 credits

Capsule: As a child, Jayme never quite found a sense of purpose in anything he did; his parents' *laissez-faire* attitude toward raising him had made him open-minded but aimless. When he turned 16, he lied about his age and enlisted in the Imperial Army, hoping that the structure and stability of military life would provide him with some direction.

He was right. The Imperial Army beat him into a canny powerhouse who made staff sergeant before his eighteenth birthday, and he was assigned to a division of Imperial Sector Urban Troopers shortly thereafter. But as time went on,



Jayme noticed dedicated soldiers being weeded out in favor of greedy autocrats. Finally he was ordered to blow up a building filled with political dissidents; only after he carried this out did he discover that there had been children inside. Jayme immediately went AWOL, shaved his head, and burned his uniform. He drifted around the galaxy for years trying to find a new sense of purpose. It came in the form of T'Charek Haathi, a dejected ex-pilot working at the Rodaj mining colony. Both of them agreed that joining the Rebellion was sounding better and better.

Jayme spent a year working with a team of Rebel Urban Commandos, but found them to be so tightly bound to Alliance regulations that he doubted their flexibility. Moreover, he found he couldn't follow regulations or trust his superior officers unconditionally anymore. He was very close to quitting altogether when Haathi requested him on her new Special Ops team.

Ivhin Jayme, short but muscular, has dark skin, a shaved head, and a goatee. He is constantly haunted by the things he did in the Imperial Army, and is distrustful of authority—except for Haathi. He is rather protective of her and extremely protective of Morgan. Outsiders make him suspicious. He'll do anything for the good of the team, but for the Rebellion on the whole, well, that remains to be seen.

■ Lieutenant Morgan Q. Raventhorn

Type: SpecForces Scout

DEXTERITY 2D+2

Blaster 4D+2, blaster: blaster carbine 6D+2, brawling parry 4D+2, dodge 3D+2, melee combat 4D+2, melee parry 4D+2, thrown weapons 3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 6D, cultures 5D, planetary systems 6D, survival 6D, survival: jungle 7D

MECHANICAL 3D

Beast riding 4D, communications 5D, ground vehicle operation 4D, repulsorlift operation 5D

PERCEPTION 2D

Bargain 3D, hide 4D, sneak 3D, sneak: jungle 5D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 4D, climbing/jumping 4D, stamina 5D, swimming 4D

TECHNICAL 3D+1

Capital ship repair 4D+1, computer programming/repair 5D+1, computer programming/repair: nav computers 6D+1, ground vehicle repair 5D+1, repulsorlift repair 5D+1, security 4D+1, space transports repair 7D+1, starship weapon repair 6D+1, starfighter repair 5D+1

Force Point: 3

Character Points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster carbine (5D), comlink, flare pistol, heavy blaster pistol (5D), 3 knives (STR+1D+2), macrobinoculars, toolbox, utility belts with various tools and alien trinkets

Capsule: Morgan was born into a family of scouts, and spent her childhood and most of her adolescence learning the essentials of surveying planets. While her ability to survive in the wilderness is a result of conditioning, her aptitude for all things technical has always



pretty face, and a rather scruffy appearance. At 18 years old, she is one of the brighter techs in the Rebellion—a number of her jury-rigged inventions have been adopted as standard Special Ops gear. On the other hand, she's also hopelessly absentminded; she's just as likely to lose the nav computer as repair it.

■ Dren Nord

Type: Rebel Fleet Surgeon

DEXTERITY 2D+2

Blaster 3D+2, dodge 4D+2, running 5D+2

KNOWLEDGE 3D+2

Alien species 5D+2, bureaucracy 6D+2, cultures 6D+2, languages 5D+2, planetary systems 4D+2

MECHANICAL 2D+1

PERCEPTION 3D

Command 4D, hide 5D, persuasion 4D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 2D+1

TECHNICAL 4D

Droid programming 5D, first aid 7D, (A) medicine 2D, (A) medicine: surgery 4D

Force Points: 1

comenaturally—at 10, she took apart some hyperdrive components in her father's ship and put them back together in less than 90 minutes. When she left the scout service, Morgan went to Rodaj to become a miner, only to fall in with a couple of misfits—T'Charek Haathi and Ivhin Jayme—who wanted to join the Rebellion and managed to talk her into doing the same.

For Alliance Command, pigehonholing Morgan proved to be rather tricky. Morgan's superiors began to notice that despite her unusually high intellect, she had a tendency to become completely clueless on matters that didn't relate to technology or wilderness survival. She often spaced out in the middle of briefings, debriefings, and even casual conversations. In addition, she had almost no concept of military hierarchy, and orders often took a back seat to her instincts.

Morgan Q. Ravensthorpe is very tall, with long, dark, hair, a

Character Points: 4

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, field-medical kit, medical datapad

Capsule: The youngest of four, Nord was brought up in a family of politicians. Excellent grades and political maneuvering got him into one of the top medical schools in the Inner Rim, followed by plum surgical internship positions at the best hospitals. When Alderaan was destroyed—along with many of Nord's family's closest friends and political contacts—the Rebellion recruited young Dren to head up a surgery team on a medical frigate.

Although he wasn't very popular among patients or underlings, Dren could be very charming when it came to forming political connections within the Alliance, and nobody could question his abilities. At least not until Dren encountered an attractive patient who said that she was far more impressed by the people in Special Ops than by Dren's skills and status. Dren had no idea what Special Ops was, but nobody had ever suggested that there was a more prestigious military position than his, short of becoming Mon Mothma (and even she couldn't run a bacta tank).

Dren began pulling political strings to get himself transferred immediately. It was pointed out that Special Ops did need individuals of his caliber, but he was hardly a prime candidate for such a combat-heavy job. Dren made a few calls and this statement was quickly retracted; he was assigned to Major Haathi (amid her protests), who had fired or lost eight medics in the previous six months.

Dren Nord is slick and handsome, with beautiful surgeon's hands. He is not used to taking orders, let alone from somebody nearly 10 years his junior, nor is he adept at giving them outside of surgery. He does not know how to handle a combat situation and as a result is very indecisive under fire; when he's not being shot at, he's just arrogant.



For a pair of romance-stricken Weequay, Zelos II seemed like the perfect place for relaxation. Little did they realize they'd soon be swept up in a search for fantastic treasure during the most feared event on the planet....

DAY OF THE SEPULCHRAL NIGHT

By Jean Rabe

Illustrations by Matt Busch

"Wonder what we'll find?" Solum'ke mused for what I guessed was the half-dozen time since we set out.

"Maybe nothing," I replied—again. "It's just a legend, after all. Don't get your hopes up."

"Well, Diergu-Rea Duhnes'rd, love of my life, I think there's something to it," she persisted. She formed her bulbous, mottled lips into a delightful pout. "The Qwohog thinks so, too. Otherwise, he wouldn't have talked us into renting this sail barge."

Talked you, I mentally corrected her. Talked you into spending the last of my credits during the Day of the Sepulchral Night.

If we'd stayed in the city—and on dry ground—we could have booked passage on that Corellian corvette occupying most of the port and got back into Imperial lanes. There we could pick up a few leads on lucrative contracts. I'd spent so many credits on our brief vacation on this backwater world that I needed to turn a good bounty to replenish my normally bulging account.

We'd come to Zelos II several days ago for a little relaxation. The place is known for its tourist spots—elaborate spas and cantinas that cater to all manner of beings and all manner of tastes and

appetites. For the past several days I'd been lavishly doling out my credits on the exhibitions and in the casinos, and—of course—on the more-than-suitable accommodations in which I had been romancing the lovely Solum'ke. Like me, she's a Weequay, a tough-looking humanoid with alluring coarse, gnarled skin. Hers is an enchanting desert tan, shaded darker in just the right places and relatively smooth across her beautiful bald head. Mine is a dark gray, nearly the color of the magnificent wiry topknot that extends to the center of my back. We make an attractive couple.

We don't *have* to use words between us—not spoken ones, anyway. Ours is the ability to excrete pheromones that allow us to communicate our moods and desires. Right now my desire was to be elsewhere, but I kept my pheromones in check so as not to give me away and disappoint her.

"Look at the moons," she breathed huskily. Her pheromones said she was in a very romantic mood. "They're beautiful."

We don't *have* to use words. But I like the sound of her voice, and she knows it. I followed her gaze. Zelos II has four moons, and I had read somewhere that moonlight is an essential ingredient to an amorous environment. That's one of the reasons I suggested we come to this planet.

Unfortunately, it was also because of those four moons that we were now on an understaffed sail barge skimming a meter above the Great Zelosi Sea and leaving land uncomfortably far behind.

K'zk, the Qwohog piloting the rented barge, had been sitting at a nearby table in the restaurant we had selected for dinner last night. He had looked small and out of place among his human-like Zelosian companions—whom he was failing to convince to make this very trip. In fact, he pretty much looked out of place away from water. That drew Solum'ke's attention, and she immediately became more interested in K'zk's diatribe than in my soft-spoken words of adoration and the grilled lemcock haunch sizzling on her plate.

Qwohogs are bipedal amphibians. This one was pale green, almost matching the restaurant's drapes. He had silvery-blue scales atop his head, pointed ears, and long thin fingers that he waved every time he uttered a word. His speech was funny and clipped, made harsh and nasally by the vocalizer mask he wore. I'd learned that Qwohogs normally communicate by sending vibrations through the water—freshwater—and need a mask to be understood above the waves. Saltwater isn't their preferred environment, but appar-

ently this Qwohog and his fellows had swallowed their fears and were about to strike off across the Great Zelosi Sea. They just needed someone along who wasn't averse to maybe getting in the saltwater.

"Isn't this romantic?" Solum'ke whispered, interrupting my musings. She demurely leaned against the rail and stared at three of Zelos II's moons. They hung low in the sky, practically touching the sea. "The moons, the water, the breeze across my skin. Truly romantic."

"Not if you're a Zelosian," I said as I moved closer and placed my hand on the small of her back. "Right now it's midmorning, and under any other circumstance you couldn't see those moons. The fourth moon's aligned with the sun. The natives are superstitious enough as it is about the moons and night and day. But on this particular day their behavior is extreme—or so I can tell from the datachips I've skimmed. No wonder K'zk couldn't get any of the natives to come with him. Suicides, insanity, unfounded hysteria. In fact..."

"All right," she said flatly, the whimsy suddenly gone from her voice. "It's an eclipse. Nothing romantic about an eclipse, huh? At least not to you. Hysteria. Such a romantic word."

"The Day of the Sepulchral Night," I said, thinking I should say something to get the mood back. I shouldn't have gotten analytical on her. "Not romantic in and of itself, certainly. But everything's romantic—and perfect—when you're with me."

She grinned, revealing a pearly row of wide, blunt teeth, and settled against me. "I'm so glad we came to this place."

I kept my pheromones in control, smiled, and thought about my credits, which were continuing to evaporate on sail barge rent with each kilometer of sea we crossed. "Nowhere else could we have seen this day of night," I answered as I held her close.

The Zelosians' culture is wrapped around day and night—we both learned that our first day on the planet. Light is good, darkness is bad, according to their philosophy. And during this extremely rare eclipse, the natives lock themselves indoors in abject terror. The cantinas and casinos close, the spas are boarded up, and only non-Zelosian ships in the port come and go. Even I had to admit the morning sky looked a little eerie.

The reflection of the three full moons, a sallow blue, a pallid violet, and a glimmering green a shade darker than K'zk the Qwohog, hit the small waves, sending patterns of light dancing

toward the prow and the horizon.

I squinted at a spot far in front of us. Something was breaking up the light show.

"Wreck off starboard!" one of the four Qwohog crewmen called. It was a scant crew, the Zelosians who worked the barge taking the day off to hide. My rent had paid for the craft only—K'zk provided the crew.

"There, K'zk!" a stocky Qwohog shouted. "That wave-skimmer's busted good. Must've run aground on the rocks!" The Qwohog gestured wildly toward jagged shards of hull that floated on the dark water, scattered amid bits of torn sail and rigging.

A coral spike jutted defiantly in the center of the refuse. The ruined wave-skimmer's masthead, a remarkably buxom Zelosian woman, was caught against the spike and thumped hollowly like a beating heart with each lapping wave. There were bodies, most bobbing face-down, the life long since seeped out of them. A few men were draped over the larger pieces of hull and might still be alive. It was impossible to tell from this distance, and the matter was becoming moot. I spied a tiny dome-shaped pate cut through the water—melk. The scaly rodent-sized beast rose, rolled its eyes back and opened its mouth. In an instant it had begun to feast on one of the possible survivors. Other melk were appearing, about two dozen I guessed. I imagined the waves, painted black by the eclipse, were becoming tinted red with blood.

K'zk padded toward us and peered toward the coral spike and slowly shook his head. "Too many shoals around here. Tide's too low. Any skimmer captain worth his water would have known better, wouldn't have taken a skimmer into these parts." He ran his slender fingers across his scales. "Lower the sails!" he called through his mask. "Hold our position! I don't want us drifting any closer." Softer, he said to the closest Qwohog, "Take a sail raft over. See if there might be any survivors. I'll not risk this barge going into those shallows for any man. Diergu-Rea, do you mind going with him? Little shorthanded because of the eclipse, you know."

I scowled. I didn't like the water, but I knew how to swim, so I wasn't afraid of hopping in a little sail raft. But I didn't want our captain to spend the rest of the day picking through bloating bodies. With so many melk feasting, the odds of finding someone alive were about as great as finding a veelgeg in a kemlish pulled from Kryndyn's deep bay. Nil, in other words. I wasn't worried about the melk looking to me for dinner. With so much flesh in the

water, they'd leave the sail raft alone. What worried me was the waste of time.

We were here to find Zelosian's Chine—or not find it, more likely—and return to the relative safety of the Kryndyn spaceport. I thought about voicing my objection, since I was financing this little trip, but one of the Qwohogs cut me off.

"Found a couple of live ones, K'zk!" An alert Qwohog had a pair of macrobinoculars pressed to his eyes and trained on the water. He was gesturing with a spindly arm.

I let out a deep breath and headed toward the sail raft. "Yeah, I'll go."

"Me, too," Solum'ke added excitedly. Her pheromones told me she was honestly anxious to help.

There, a couple hundred yards out, something edged above the waves.

We climbed into the raft, reached for the syntherope dispenser to lower it a bit, then we

kicked on the repulsorlift switch. The tiny craft settled about a half a meter above the water. I glanced back at K'zk, who was checking over the barge's repulsorlift unit.

Our Qwohog mate guided the sail raft among the refuse. From the looks of the broken deck plates and the floating, bent mast, I guessed the wave-skimmer had been a little less than half the size of the sail barge. Its lift mechanism probably wasn't powerful enough to float it high above the spires, and hence the skimmer had struck one and become crippled.

The smell of the bodies wasn't strong yet, suggesting the men probably died around dawn. Still, it was enough to make Solum'ke wrinkle her pretty nostrils. She pointed toward the two men the Qwohog had miraculously spotted. Humans, not Zelosians like most of the unfortunates facedown in the water. They were clinging desperately to a couple of cargo crates lashed to another coral spike. It kept them out of the water and away from melk, but it was a precarious perch. The men waved frantically and called to us. The sail raft scraped against a ridge edging just above the surface as we made our way toward them. I glanced over the side, the moonlight revealing a shallow reef. I could've stretched my arm over the side and touched it if I wasn't afraid a melk would bite my hand off. If we'd have taken the sail barge in to rescue these men, we might've run aground, too, and been melk food.

As we pulled alongside the crates, I helped the survivors in. They were pale men with dark brown hair that was matted with blood. Their features hinted that they were Corellian—far from our home, but not at all that far from the Corellian corvette that was in port. If they were from that ship, they might be our free ride out of here—transportation in exchange for our saving their lives.

The older one looked to be in worse shape. His lip was split, and a deep gash along his leg was swelling, probably becoming infected. It looked like a melk had bit him and spit him back out. A primitive gaffhook at his side was crusted with blood and made me wonder if he had managed to take a piece out of the reptile.

"Thank the moons someone saw us," the younger man said. "We'd have been dead by evening if you hadn't come along."

"Anyone else alive?" Solum'ke asked.

The pair shook their heads and found a spot in the center of the sail raft, settling heavily onto the seat. "They're sleeping in the bellies of the melk," the eldest said. He extended his hand to me, and I shook it. It was terribly cold. He'd been in the water a while. He introduced himself as Hanugar, and the younger survivor as Sevik.

"What happened?" I found myself asking.

"A coral reef and a low tide because of the eclipse," Hanugar said. "The wave-skimmer we rented struck it late last night. Cracked the hull open and ruined the repulsorlift mechanism. It was a good ship, but the captain was nervous, wanting to get home before the Day of the Sepulchral Night. When we hit, we took on water too fast to do anything to save her."

"What were you doing so far from the coast?" Solum'ke wondered aloud.

Sevik shrugged. "Sightseeing. The regular tourist stuff."

The Qwohog steered the sail raft back to the barge, while we listened to Hanugar and Sevik explain how they were barely able to tie the cargo containers together and hang onto a coral spike to escape being melk bait. They seemed genuinely thankful for the rescue, and volunteered to pay for our passage offworld. My hunch was right. They were from the big corvette in port.

Once on deck, Solum'ke looked over the Corellians' wounds. She has a knack for fashioning poultices and bandages—Sriluur knows she's had to bandage me plenty of times after I ended up on the wrong end of a cantina fight.

"What brought you out here so late at night?" Sevik asked us. It

was a fair question—we'd asked it of him.

"Sightseeing. The regular tourist stuff," Solum'ke replied.

"Honeymooning," I whispered in answer so softly that he couldn't hear. I grinned and turned away, knowing Solum'ke wouldn't tell the Corellians the real reason we were out here—hunting for treasure that according to K'zk was buried in Zelosian's Chine.

From somewhere behind me, I heard K'zk order one of his fellows to bring the Corellians some food. As the pair devoured the meal, I listened to their idle banter. K'zk was telling them we were heading south, thinking about skimming toward the Bryndas Islands where the more exotic spas could be found. The Qwohog sounded convincing. Ha! I thought to myself. *He had tried to convince the Zelosians at the restaurant to come out on this fool treasure hunt with him. But they'd have nothing to do with it because of the eclipse. Then he turned his charms on Solum'ke and succeeded. Treasure appealed to her.*

I heard the flap of the sails rising and billowing above me, the rev of the repulsorlift engine. Time to be on our way again.

K'zk had told us he couldn't go after the treasure himself. It was the problem with saltwater. He couldn't breathe it, and being submerged in it could make his skin blister. Going after the treasure might entail getting wet—and hence his need for someone to help him. He said we'd split whatever we found fifty-fifty.

I felt the barge veer to the right to avoid another dangerous coral ridge.

K'zk claimed that according to Zelosian legend, during the Day of the Sepulchral Night the tides would be at their lowest point. Several miles offshore of the main continent, the crest of the sunken mountain ridge called Zelosian's Chine would poke above the waves. Supposedly great wealth rested within a cave inside the crest—treasure that once belonged to a merchant prince. According to the legend, nearly two hundred years ago during another rare eclipse, the prince's ship was caught in Zelos' gravity well and pulled into the atmosphere and crashed into the chine. The prince survived and directed his men to bury his treasure in a cave along the ridge. He intended to make a raft of part of his ruined ship, sail into a port, and purchase a ship that would take him back to his treasure and then offworld.

But according to the legend, he drowned before he got to shore. The melk probably ate him. And in the decades in between and since, no one had recovered the prince's treasure. Not the Zelosians,

because they wouldn't go out during the Day of the Sepulchral Night. And not the tourists, because the legend was supposedly a closely guarded secret. K'zk wouldn't say how he came by the tale.

"The chine, K'zk! I see Zelosian's Chine!" one of the Qwohogs roared through his vocalizer mask.

I skeptically peered over the rail. Nothing but choppy water. I couldn't see what the Qwohog was so excited about.

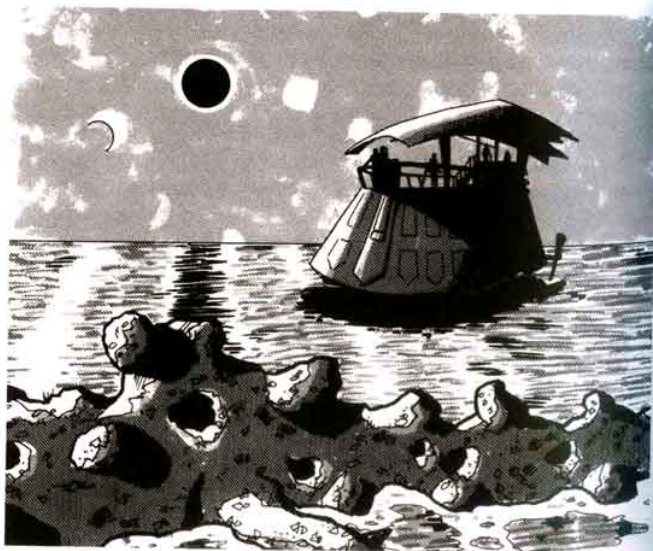
"K'zk?" I heard a Qwohog prompt. "We goin' in?"

I felt the sail barge ease forward, then I looked past the bowsprit. There, a couple hundred yards out, something edged above the waves. At first glance I thought it was the spiny backbone of some great sea creature. I felt my hand drift to my blaster. But the backbone didn't move, and I relaxed a little. It was nothing more than another coral ridge.

Solum'ke was at my side. She had left Sevik and Hanugar and had silently snuck up behind me. "This has to be it," she breathed. "This has to be Zelosian's Chine."

"You don't know that," I gently warned. "There's lots of coral ridges around here and..."

Her dark eyes sparkled and her wide mouth fell open as we



neared the ridge. The moons illuminated the peaks that jutted above the surface about a dozen feet or so. There were a few deep shadows amid the rocks—caves, I figured. The largest was round, like the eye of some immense beast, and it was toward the top. The smallest were just above the surface of the waves.

I heard the sails being lowered and the hum of the repulsorlift engine dropped to a whisper.

K'zk quickly explained he didn't want to chance the sail barge's hull on finding any dark rocks hiding just above the surface, said he didn't want it ending up like the Corellians' wave-skimmer.

"The legend of Zelosian's Chime," Sevik whistled.

"That's what you were out here after, wasn't it?" Solum'ke asked him.

The Corellian nodded. "Yeah, tourist stuff—just like you."

"Wonder what we'll find?" she mused aloud.

I shook my head. "It's a ridge, nothing more, with a few caves in it."

"The prince's treasure's in one of the caves," Solum'ke said. "Etren crystals as big as my fist, the legend says."

"If this is the right ridge, and if the legend about the merchant prince is true," I cautioned. "But the treasure might be gone—if there was any to begin with. Sevik and Hanugar are evidence enough we're not the only treasure-hunters on the planet. And don't forget, a lot of years have passed. Sol, don't be too hopeful about this." My words and my pheromones were doing nothing to dampen her enthusiasm.

"Take the sail raft in as close as you can." K'zk had moved up behind us. "Whatever you find—put in these sacks. Don't try to hide anything from me. We'll split it fifty-fifty."

"What about us?" Hanugar interrupted.

"You have your lives," Solum'ke said, a threatening tone laced into her sultry voice. "Fifty-fifty means two shares—ours and the Qwohogs." Her pheromones backed up her threat, though the Corellians couldn't read them.

"Now, now," the Qwohog tsked, the noise sounding like an insect buzzing in his vocalizer mask. "We might spare them just a little bit if they lend a hand."

I grabbed a couple of glow rods, got in the sail raft, and helped Solum'ke climb in.

She was curious like a jarencat, and despite my best efforts I couldn't convince her to stay on the sail barge while I looked

around. Sevik came along, and Hanugar took a one-man sail raft. "Wonder what we'll find?" Solum'ke mused aloud, as I steered the sail raft closer. "Wonder what we'll find?"

"Maybe nothing," I said—again—as I tied the raft off on a rocky protrusion.

Hanugar had already landed, and was heading into the largest cave at the top, the one that seemed to look like a beast's eye. Let him have that one, I thought, as I watched him scramble inside. If I was hiding a treasure, I would put it in the least likely spot. And the least likely spot that we could see tonight seemed to be the cave I noticed closest to the water, a narrow crevice that looked like a big black wrinkle. It would be a tight squeeze. The other caves were too small to even consider. It was possible there were more caves beneath the surface.

Solum'ke nudged me forward. I hated enclosed places. And I hated treasure hunts. Give me a handful of contracts on pirates, spies, and failed smugglers—you'll get richer much faster.

Solum'ke passed a glow rod to Sevik. He still looked in sorry shape, despite her ministrations, but his eyes gleamed like hers at the prospect of wealth. Was I the only one being realistic about this? I wondered. Was I the only one who knew we would be sailing away empty-handed? Anything to humor Sol, though. Anything to make

her happy. I felt her thick fingers brush my shoulder. She was right behind me. It was easy going at first, as there were few jagged edges to bite into our boots. The decades beneath the waves had smoothed the rocks' surfaces.

"Wonder what we'll find?" she whispered again.

I shrugged my broad shoulders and slid inside the crevice. The space was small, making me uneasy, and the glow rod Solum'ke held behind me lit the

A myriad of multi-colored crystals littered the floor of a natural cavern, covering every bit of stone and twinkling merrily like fireflies in the light of the glow rod.

damp walls and sent shadows rollicking about the cramped confines. Our own silhouettes against the rocks seemed eerie and added to my queasiness. Still, I edged forward and down, following the natural shaft, then I stopped when I heard something crunch

beneath my boot. I looked at the stone floor and blinked. Bones, humanoid ones from the looks of them. They were brittle with age, but white, picked clean by melk I guessed.

"Diergu-Rea?" Solum'ke's voice was tinged with just a touch of nervousness.

"What'd ya find?" Sevik called. He couldn't see anything around Sol's pleasantly stocky frame.

"What's left of earlier treasure hunters," I replied. Maybe they'd found the crevice on a Day of the Sepulchral Night decades ago and dallied too long, became trapped inside and drowned when the eclipse ended and the water rose. Or maybe something else had happened to them. I sped our course and wished we would have thought to buy rebreathers before we left port.

We must have been more than a dozen feet below sea level when the passage became tighter still and pools of saltwater swirled around my knees in the depressions. No wonder the Qwohog was afraid to come down here. The water had so much salt in it that even my thick skin was irritated.

To complicate matters, I felt trapped, like a caged beast. I almost signaled Sol to turn back, but something sparkled ahead, quickening even my doubting heart. I pushed myself between the shaft walls and cringed when my shirt ripped on a rock. I felt the stone cut across my shoulder blades and felt the warmth of my blood running down my back. My back would heal, Sol would see to that, but the shirt wouldn't. And it was expensive, a gift she gave me on our first night here.

"How much farther?" Sevik called.

I didn't know, so I didn't answer. I continued to squeeze through the shaft and edge downward still. The walls were slick with moisture, and I suspected the glow rod light bouncing off the water was what caught my eye. I ran my finger along the stone in front of me and brought a drop to my lips. More saltwater. There must be cracks in the rocks someplace, letting a little bit of the sea in.

"There's nothing here," I whispered to Solum'ke. "Let's turn back and hope Hanugar was more successful."

I saw the dejected look on her face, read her pheromones that screamed disappointment, then her expression and mood instantly brightened. She was looking past me. I craned my neck and followed her gaze. Red crystals. A couple of shards sat on a ledge a little farther down. It was enough to make me forget my concerns and my claustrophobia and press onward.

"We found something!" Solum'ke passed on to Sevik. He let out a whoop behind her.

My boots crunched over more bones as I reached the niche with the crystals. Beyond, the shaft opened—as did my mouth. A myriad of multicolored crystals littered the floor of a natural cavern, covering every bit of stone and twinkling merrily like fireflies in the light of the glow rod. Some crystals winked up at us from below the surface of small pools, making it impossible to tell just how deep the wealth lay. Urns, miniature statues, hammered metal idols, and more caught Solum'ke's attention. A large wooden chest sitting amid the wealthy clutter caught mine. I let out a low whistle and padded toward it, my boot heels clinking across the crystals. I quickly knelt before the old chest. The wood stank, rotten with age.

"We're rich!" Solum'ke cried. "Oh, Diergu-Rea, I knew there was something to the legend. I just knew it! K'zk was right!"

I looked over my shoulder. She had set her glow rod down and was scooping up crystals, letting them fall through her fingers and clink against the floor. Sevik was busy skirting the edges of the saltwater pools. He started unrolling the canvas sacks K'zk had given us and was deciding what to fill them with first.

"These crystals are old, lover," Solum'ke said. She was holding one, almost reverently. "We'll be set for the rest of our lives." Bits of rotting leather were scattered here and there, remnants of the sacks that the crystals had once been stored in. She brushed the leather aside and plunked the crystals into her own sack. "This'll buy us our own freighter, a fleet of them, maybe a moon somewhere."

I returned my attention to the chest. It had a large, primitive locking mechanism that was rusted, as were the iron bands that cut across the discolored wood. An iron plaque on top had some type of inscription on it, but it was in a language I couldn't read. I reached to my waist and retrieved a Rodian throwing razor. Jabbing the pommel at the lock made a hollow sound that reverberated around the chamber. The lock wouldn't give. But the wood was old, and I redirected my attention to prying at it. It took me quite a while. How long I'm not certain, but eventually I cut a hole in the top of the chest. I reached for a glow rod, peered into the cavity, and sucked in my breath.

"Diergu-Rea, what'd you see?"

"Gems, crowns, the wealth of a prince, Sol," I answered hoarsely. My throat had gone dry. "Crystals not quite as big as your fist, but



big. We're going to be very rich."

She squealed with delight and passed me a sack. I thrust my hand in the chest's opening, my fingers closed around the gems, and I started pulling them out. The light danced across their facets, and I enjoyed the view for a moment before I dropped them in the sack. My arm worked faster, in and out of the opening, retrieving sparkling gems as black as a midnight sky, pale blue ones in the shape of tears, orange ones that brightened with the heat of my hand, and more. I dropped a green-crystal necklace over Sol's head, and returned to scooping jewels into my sack. I let my thick fingers play along the surface of a large sunblaze, let myself get carried away.

I'm not sure how much time passed, time seemed irrelevant while there was all this loot about. But I know it was enough time to let me fill my canvas sack. I started stuffing my pockets full of the gems left in the bottom of the chest. I wasn't going to let even one bauble escape me.

"I can hardly lift this," Solum'ke grunted. She was a formidable Weequay, probably stronger than I, and the seams of her sack were threatening to split. "If this planet was more civilized, we could've rented droids to help us carry this."

"Not many droids on Zelos II," Sevik cut in. He was obviously strong, too. He had two bulging sacks, each tossed over a shoulder.

"In fact, there's not many..."

His words trailed off when I waved at him. I cocked my head to the side and listened. Water. "Something's wrong," I said. My pheromones told Solum'ke I was worried. I shouldered my sack, took one of the glow rods, and eased my way by Sevik and into the tunnel.

I'd made it to the narrowest part of the shaft when I realized something was very definitely wrong. A rivulet of water was running down the rocky floor, the source of the noise. At first it looked like a trickle, but as I stared, the water spread out and was coming quicker, becoming a stream. It rushed into the pools of water that were in the depressions of the tunnelway, then came out the other side like a miniature waterfall.

"Sol! We've got to get out of here, now! Grab what you've got and let's go! Fast! I think the sea is rising!"

I heard Solum'ke scabble across the crystals on the floor behind me. A glance over my shoulder revealed that Sevik's feet were rooted to the spot, his eyes transfixed on all the crystals we were leaving behind.

"Sol!" I shouted, nodding toward our guest.

She gave him a harsh nudge that seemed to snap him back to reality. He brought up the rear of our little entourage, carrying his sacks practically effortlessly. It was tougher going climbing the shaft. It was steeper than I'd realized, and the floor was slippery. As we neared the opening, the water came rushing in even faster, surging around our knees, then our thighs.

A moment later, my head poked out of the opening, and I balanced on the ledge to keep from falling into the sea—which was lapping at my waist now. I let the glow rod slip from my fingers—I didn't need it. The sky was lighter, the eclipse ending, the tides rising quickly. I started scrambling up what was left of the ridge, motioning Sol to follow me.

Hanugar's sail raft was heading toward the barge—along the deck of which all the Qwohogs stood. Our sail raft was ruined—there was a deep gash in its hull where the repulsorlift mechanism rested. The mechanism was a useless piece of history, shattered by being dashed against a sharp coral spike. The sail raft still floated—but like a primitive boat—on the water, not above it. And it was without any power.

A wave broke against my chest, threatening to push me under. The sea was rising even faster now, and within minutes I knew we'd

be treading water—or drowning if we didn't drop the gems.

"When the sea gets a little higher, I'll bring the sail barge in!" K'zk hollered. He called something else, but his words were lost by the crash of a wave against the rocks around us.

The minutes seemed to crawl by as the sea rose up to our shoulders. We watched Hanugar tie his sail raft to the rail and climb onto the barge. Hanugar's raft was pulled up.

The raft! Our raft! My eyes searched about and locked onto our damaged one. It was drifting away from us. It would do to keep us above the water.

"Hurry!" I yelled to Solum'ke, as I gestured toward the raft. I'd sighted a couple of melk heads in the distance—naturally heading in our direction. And I desperately wanted to be out of their element fast. I felt the sting of the saltwater against my back where I'd cut it, and I knew my blood was seeping into the sea. It would lead the melk straight to us.

"Where's Sevik?" Solum'ke shouted. She'd somehow managed to reach the raft and tossed her sack into its bottom. She hefted herself over the side and started using her arms as paddles to drag the crippled raft toward me.

The water was up to my chin now, and I had to point my head



toward the lightening sky to keep my mouth above it. "There's no sign of him!" I answered. "He might have drowned!"

Within a handful of heartbeats, she was tugging my sack and me into the raft. I glanced at the sail barge, at Hanugar who was standing at the railing. Then my mouth dropped open as I saw Sevik climbing up the side of the ship, his two sacks still over his shoulders. It would have been physically impossible for him to have swum so far with the weight of the crystals. Unless... I looked closer, spotted an repulsorlift belt around his waist. "Why you slimy excuse for a Nimbinese jowl-preener..."

The rest of my words were drowned out by a wave crashing against the side of our raft. I saw the sail barge hover higher and glide toward us.

"Throw us a line!" I yelled.

"The crystals first!" Sevik called back as he leaned over the side with a length of syntherope.

"No!" Solum'ke and I shouted practically in unison. We clutched our treasures.

K'zk was next to Sevik, peering over the side, a blaster rifle trained on Solum'ke's beauteous face. His voice cracked through the vocalizer mask. "We'll take all of the crystals—one way or another."

Solum'ke made a move for her blaster. *What happened to fifty-fifty?* her pheromones asked.

"The saltwater," I whispered to her.

I heard her groan. Our blasters would be useless, ruined by our dip in the sea. I draped my arm around her shoulders, and she slumped against me, as we gave in and watched our sacks of gems and crystals rise into the traitorous Qwohog's sail barge.

"Just tell me," I called up to K'zk, "Were the Corellians involved in all of this? From the first? You obviously know them."

"Of course. Partners. Fifty-fifty," the Qwohog replied as he eased the sail barge a few meters away from our crippled raft. "I'd received a message they were marooned, so we had to pick them up before looking for the chine. *We were all looking for Zelosian's Chine*—they on the skimmer and me with the barge. Two ships would have a much better chance of finding it. They truly fell afoul of the ridge, lost some of our mates in the process. Our captain won't be pleased."

"But this should mollify him!" Sevik chuckled, as he held up a big crystal.

"So why'd you need us?" I sneered.

"Insurance in case they didn't find the ridge," came the Qwohog's curt reply. "Or in case I couldn't save any of my Corellian friends. Couldn't deal with the saltwater myself, you know. Besides, you made fine extra pairs of hands. Sorry to leave you stranded—you were good sports about the whole thing—even paid to rent the sail barge. But we can't have you turning us in to the authorities before we've had a chance to get offworld."

"The corvette."

The Qwohog nodded. "Our ship. And we'd best hurry. The captain's waiting for us. Thanks for your help!"

As the moons faded and the sun came out, chasing away all signs of the eclipse, we watched the sail barge become a spot on the waves and then disappear. Our little sail raft bobbed near the reef, still afloat, protecting us from the melk.

"We'll die out here," Solum'ke said. I'd never heard her sound so sad.

"We're not that far from the coast. Other barges will be out before the day is up—headed toward the spas on Bryndas Islands. Someone will rescue us."

"We lost everything," she continued to moan. "All that treasure. All those..." She dropped a hand to her neck, to the green crystal necklace I'd put there.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out a handful of sunblazes. "Every pocket is full," I said. "More than enough to pay our rescuers and buy passage off this place—buy us a small freighter, a new one maybe."

"And we still have our lives," she said, brightening a little.

"Very long ones," I added. She caught the gleam in my eye. "Maybe in another dozen or so decades we can come back here—during the next Day of the Sepulchral Night."

"Get what we left behind in Zelosian's Chine," she finished.

I drew her close, buried my nose against her still-damp neck. She smelled of the sea and of summer, intoxicating.

Solum'ke returned my embrace. "What are you thinking about?" she whispered after several quiet moments.

"A Qwohog."

"And two Corellians?"

"Shouldn't be too hard to find."

"Not for the best bounty hunters in the sector," she replied. "I think I hear another sail barge coming our way already."

Roleplaying Game Statistics

■ Diergu-Rea Duhnes'rd

Type: Weequay Bounty Hunter

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 6D, brawling parry 5D, dodge 3D+2, grenade 4D, vehicle blasters 4D+1

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Alien species 5D, cultures 4D, languages 6D+1, planetary systems 3D+1, survival 4D+2, value 7D

MECHANICAL 2D+1

Beast riding 3D, repulsorlift operation 2D+2, space transports 3D+2

PERCEPTION 3D+1

Bargain 3D+2, con 4D, hide 4D+1, investigation 6D+2, search 4D+2, sneak 3D+2

STRENGTH 4D

Brawling 5D+1, climbing/jumping 4D+1, lifting 4D+2, stamina 4D+2, swimming 4D

TECHNICAL 2D+2

Demolitions 5D

Special Abilities:

Short-Range Communication: Weequays of the same clan can communicate through complex pheromones.

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Blast vest (+1D physical, +1 energy, torso only), heavy blaster pistol (5D)

Capsule: An opportunist by his nature, Diergu is a successful bounty hunter who favors pursuing contracts that pose the least amount of risk for the most amount of financial gain. He excels at his work, and, like many of his Weequay kinsmen, he is violent and driven. Still, Diergu has a soft spot that on more than one occasion has proved his undoing. He is a romantic at heart, and he puts the love of his life, fellow bounty hunter Solum'ke, above all else. Religious to a fault, and devoted to a variety of Weequay gods, Diergu makes an annual pilgrimage to his homeworld of Sriluur. This pilgrimage coincides with the holy days of Quay, the main god of the Weequay. It is after this time that Diergu is the most dangerous, as he is consumed with a near-unquenchable fervor to fulfill contracts and reap the financial rewards.



■ Solum'ke

Type: Weequay Bounty Hunter

DEXTERITY 3D+2

Blaster 7D, brawling parry 4D, dodge 4D+2, grenade 4D

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Alien species 4D, cultures 4D, languages 4D+2, planetary systems 4D+1, survival 4D+2, value 5D

MECHANICAL 2D+2

Beast riding 3D, repulsorlift operation 3D, space transports 4D

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 4D+1, con 4D, hide 4D+1, investigation 5D, search 4D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 4D

Brawling 4D+2, climbing/jumping 4D+1, lifting 4D+2, stamina 4D, swimming 4D

TECHNICAL 2D

Special Abilities:

Short-Range Communication: Weequays of the same clan can communicate through complex pheromones.

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Blast vest (+1D physical, +1 energy, torso only), heavy blaster pistol (5D)

Capsule: Solum'ke is Diergu's faithful companion, both in romance and bounty hunting. Although she is somewhat less focused at times, she is no less dangerous than her partner. Solum'ke is often distracted by anything new and intriguing they encounter on their travels—especially if it involves acquiring, gaining or spending massive amounts of credits. Whatever credits she and Diergu manage to salt away eventually pay for occasional vacations, extravagant personal gifts, or passage to more exotic worlds. Her companion tolerates these habits, accepting them as part of her charm. She also has his respect: both Weequay are formidable hunters and deadly adversaries.



■ **K'zk**

Type: Qwohog Treasure Hunter and Con Artist

DEXTERITY 2D+1

Blaster 3D, dodge 5D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Alien species 3D, cultures 4D+2, languages 4D, planetary systems 4D, streetwise 5D, value 6D

MECHANICAL 3D

Capital ship piloting 4D+1, repulsorlift operation 5D+2, space transports 4D, starfighter piloting 3D+2

PERCEPTION 3D+2

Bargain 5D, con 5D, investigation 4D+2, search 6D, sneak 4D+2

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 3D, swimming 8D

TECHNICAL 2D+1

First aid 3D, security 5D+2, space transport repair 3D, starfighter repair 3D

Special Abilities:

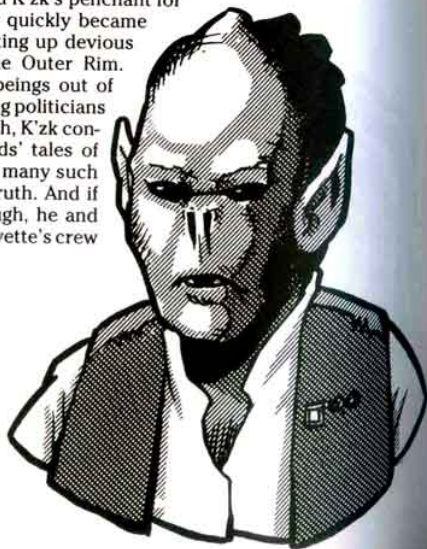
Amphibious: Qwohog are freshwater amphibians who breathe equally well in and out of water. Retractable webbing on their hands and feet adds to their swimming rate. They gain an additional +1D to the following skills while underwater: *brawling parry, dodge, survival, search, and brawling.*

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 3

Move: 8 (land), 14 (swimming)

Capsule: K'zk was forced to flee the Qwohog homeworld of Hirsi when he was caught bilking a prominent family out of its fortune. Rather than trust his fate to a jury of his peers, he escaped custody and stole away on a visiting Corellian corvette. Fate was with him, as the corvette captain shared K'zk's penchant for schemes and scams. They quickly became fast friends and began setting up devious operations throughout the Outer Rim. When not trying to trick beings out of their last credits or extorting politicians out of a share of their wealth, K'zk concentrates on various worlds' tales of treasure. He's learned that many such tales have some basis in truth. And if the basis is tempting enough, he and several members of the corvette's crew will pursue it.



Adventure Hooks

Gamemasters running New Republic adventures might be able to work elements from this story into their own campaigns. Here are some adventure hooks based on "Day of the Sepulchral Night":

The Scam: The characters are approached by K'zk with a way of making a considerable amount of credits: financing a (phony) mining operation, investing in a (dummy) speeder bike corporation, or purchasing some ancient (paste) Zelosi crystals. Just by meeting with the Qwohog, they are suspected as his associates...and immediately set upon by others K'zk has cheated. After some initial misunderstandings, the characters and those bent on revenge join forces to find K'zk and get their credits back.

The Setup: K'zk has discovered the location of one of Jabba the Hutt's old retreats. The Hutt, being long-dead, has no use for the wealth and information left behind there. The Qwohog quickly convinces the characters that he needs their help to recover information from computers there that is vital to the New Republic. Indeed, the information might be important, but what K'zk really wants is anything valuable left behind. He'll use the characters to take care of any beings who might be occupying the place. And when the time is right, he'll call in his pirate friends to stun the characters and make off with the loot.

The Chase: Diergu is hot on K'zk's tail, and the Qwohog needs help escaping the Weequay's clutches. He convinces the characters that he's a New Republic operative who desperately needs to lose the bounty hunter who has a contract on him. K'zk is hopeful the characters will kill the Weequay, thereby ending one threat to his continued operations.

Bosphs

Appearance and Biology: Bosphs are short, four-armed bipeds with three-fingered hands and feet. The creatures' semicircular heads are attached directly to their torsos; in effect, they have no necks. Bosph eyes, composed of hundreds of individual lenses and located on the sides of the head, also serve as tympanic membranes to facilitate both the senses of sight and hearing. Members of the species possess flat, porcine noses, and sharp, upward-pointing horns growing from the sides of the head. Bosph hides are tough and resilient, with coloration ranging from light-brown to dark-gray, and are often covered with navigational tattoos.

Temperament: The Bosphs are deeply philosophical and spiritual beings who enjoy isolation, both from each other and from the rest of the galaxy. When encountered, Bosphs are amicable, if indifferent, but they usually try to avoid contact with others if possible.

The Bosph reverence for philosophy and religion perpetuates an air of superstition in the species, as members are nearly always attributing unexplained phenomena to Yennar, the "unknown spirits." This superstition often gives others the false idea that the Bosphs' intellects are anything but keen; however, these aliens usually do not mind what others think of them.



Being a scandal report on different sentient lifeforms from locations throughout the galaxy.

By Brian Smithson

Illustrated by Pablo Hidalgo

History and Culture: The Bosphs evolved from six-limbed omnivores on the grassy planet Bosph, a world on the outskirts of the Empire. Forced to constantly out-think their carnivorous predators—the luprisi, still a major threat on the world—the early Bosphs soon developed true sentience.

The first Bosphs were solitary nomads, traveling the trackless plains of the world in pursuit of wild umuls and favria, two staple beasts of the Bosph diet. In order to orient themselves among the vast grasslands, the nomadic Bosphs often implemented an unusual map-making technique: they would tattoo themselves with maps and star charts for future navigation. The tradition of tattooing is still practiced by the species' high-ranking officials, and many non-ranking Bosphs also follow this "way of the traveler."

The Bosphs were discovered by scouts several decades ago. The species was offered a place in galactic government. Although they held the utmost respect for the stars and those who traveled among them, the Bosphs declined, preferring to remain in isolation. Some Bosphs, however, embraced the new-found technology introduced by the outsiders and took to the stars. The tattoos of their nomadic ancestors soon became intricate star maps, often depicting star systems and planets not even discovered by professional scouts.

For reasons that have not been revealed, Bosph was orbitally bombarded during the Emperor's reign; the attack decimated most of the planet. While most of the Bosphs remained on the devastated world, a few left in secret, taking any transport available to get away. The remaining Bosphs have adopted an attitude of "disrememberance" toward the Empire, not even acknowledging that the Empire exists, let alone that it is blockading their homeworld.

Politics: Bosph society is ruled by a complex hierarchy of factions with names such as the Gamefinders, Sickhealers, and Farseers. The few individuals allowed a place in the government are the only Bosphs allowed the right of ownership, a fact symbolized by their "glyphs," symbols represented on rune-encrusted pendants. Whenever an official wishes to procure something, he simply places his personal glyph on the item, and it is immediately considered his property. If the ownership is contested, a duel is fought over the item, often to the death. Needless to say, this practice has led to many misunderstandings between Bosphs and members of other species.

Technology Level: Before they were discovered by scouts, the Bosphs had developed a strange, industrial-level technology tailored to their four-armed physiques. Many Bosph musical instruments, for example, cannot be played by two-armed beings because of the innate complexities of the instruments' design. The species now uses several elements of hyperspace technology, but remnants of their outdated, if unique, technology still remain, partly because of their solitude from the greater galaxy.

Trade and Technology: True isolationists, the Bosphs do not trade with other planets, preferring to provide for their own needs. Travel to and from their world is restricted not only by their cultural isolation, but by a small Imperial blockade which oversees the planet.

Bosphs in the Galaxy: Because their world has been isolated by the Imperial presence, Bosphs are only found in the greater galaxy in limited numbers. Most of these are refugees from their planet—loners who make a living trading, smuggling, or working at some other occupation that does not require them to encounter others often.

Gamemaster Notes: The Empire's bombardment and blockade of Bosph is, as the Bosphs believe, a religious purge of sorts, but there is more to it than even the Bosphs know. Ranking Bosphs are those individuals with the ability to use the Force, which manifests itself through intricate rites and ceremonies. The Emperor became aware of the Bosph Force-users, and consequently the world was quarantined.

The Bosphs know the Force as *abo b'Yentarr*, "power of the unknown spirits." When a young Bosph shows promise in the Force, he is taken as an apprentice by one of the various orders of ranking Bosphs (those allowed the rights of ownership). Each of the numerous orders teaches its initiates different Force skills and powers first. For example, Gamefinder apprentices learn *sense* first and specialize in powers such as *life detection*, *postcognition*, and *sense path*; Sickhealer initiates first learn *control* and concentrate on powers like *accelerate healing*, *control disease*, and *control pain*. Bosph Force-users, called *Ela b'Yentarr*—"the chosen of the unknown spirits"—may improve Force skills and learn new powers in the same way as Jedi characters.

All Force powers have a minimum "Time to Use" of one minute when used through *abo b'Yentarr*; followers believe that the correct

rituals must be performed to call upon the unknown spirits.

There are very few *Ela b'Yentarr* left on Bosph, and most have never heard of the Jedi Code. Each order follows different policies and codes of conduct. Some of the factions are completely good, almost on par with the Jedi Knights, but some embrace the powers of the dark side. All *Ela b'Yentarr* know right from wrong, however, and must choose for themselves which path to follow—whether it be the light or the dark.

Personality Notes: Bosphs are fiercely independent beings who want nothing more than to be left alone. Those few Bosphs who have left their planet can be fierce opponents when forced into a confrontational situation, using a combination of primitive and high-tech weapons with equal skill. Because the Bosphs have “disremembered” the Empire, they have no qualms about breaking Imperial laws, a fact which hasn't endeared them to the Empire.

Suggested Skills: Bosphs have access to all available skills, though those on their homeworld will not likely have skills related to high technology, such as *blaster*, *starfighter piloting*, or *computer programming/repair*.

Notable Personalities: Because so few Bosphs leave their homeworld, few have made a name for themselves in the greater galaxy. Bora Boru, a smuggler in the Outer Rim, is one of the more famous Bosphs. For more information on Bora Boru, see *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #5, pages 105-108.

Average Bosph: *Dexterity 1D+2, Knowledge 3D, Mechanical 1D, Perception 2D+1, Strength 3D, Technical 1D.* Move: 7.

■ Bosphs

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

Story Factors:

Isolationism: Bosphs are inherently solitary beings. They are also being isolated from the galaxy by the Imperial blockade of their system.

Different Concept of Possession: Because of the unusual Bosph concept of possession, individuals often take others' items without permission, believing that what belongs to one belongs to all or that ownership comes from simply placing a glyph on an item.

Religious: Bosphs hold religion and philosophy in high regard and always try to

follow some sort of religious code, be it *abo b'Yentarr*, Dim-U, or something else.

Move: 7/9

Size: 1-1.7 meters tall

Geelan

Appearance and Biology: The Geelan are a short, pot-bellied species with coarse, dark-colored fur. Geelan are roughly humanoid, with two short legs and two arms ending in sharp-clawed hands. Their long, tooth-filled snouts end in dark, wet noses, their brilliant-yellow eyes face forward, and their upward-pointing ears are located on the sides of their heads.

Temperament: Geelan are meddlesome beings whose only concerns are to collect shiny trinkets and to engage in continuous barter and haggling. Typical Geelan are natural entrepreneurs and are quite annoying to those outside their species. Despite the disdain with which they are usually viewed, however, Geelan are renowned for their ingenuity. This is due in part to Geelan curiosity (trying to do something just to see if it can be done), and partly to good business (trying to do something to make money).

History and Culture: The Geelan hail from the planet Needan, a world beyond even the Outer Rim. Needan was once a beautiful jungle world, covered with innumerable species of plants and animals, with two-thirds of its surface covered by massive, life-teeming oceans. In this environment, the Geelan evolved from canine pack animals.

After developing sentience, the Geelan followed their inherent pack instinct, and cities were soon



formed. The Geelan had no predators of their own and continued to thrive as their civilization and technology soared toward unknown boundaries.

Just as the Geelan were entering the information age, their world was hit by a passing comet. Needan was wrenched from its orbit by the impact, and rapidly drifted away from its life-giving sun. Most of the native species died off from the resulting cold, but the intelligent Geelan used their technology to survive by building dome-like habitats and shielding themselves from the eternal winter outside. The supply of fuels on which the Geelan relied was dwindling rapidly, however, and the species realized it did not have long to survive.

Geelan scientists immediately began broadcasting distress signals in hopes that someone would respond. Luckily for the Geelan, the signals were intercepted by an Arconan medical vessel. The vessel's crew followed the signals and were eventually led to the planet Needan. Through this visit, the Geelan were introduced to galactic technology. They quickly adapted this technology to themselves, and knowing their world was dying, left in great numbers to explore the galaxy.

The Geelan now operate several lucrative businesses across the galaxy, including casinos, cantinas, and spaceports. Each establishment must pay a percentage of its profits to the Geelan leader, but the businesses usually do well enough that the tax is almost negligible.

Politics: All Geelan are ruled by one individual, known as the *Geeloniran*, roughly translated as "Great Geel" or "Master Geel." This Geelan is responsible for all major business ventures and contracts that effect all Geelan. The Great Geel has jurisdiction over a loosely connected series of "nests," each of which consists of several Geelan, one of whom is appointed Nest Leader and answers directly to the Great Geel. The other members of the nest may have one of many other positions, such as treasurer, secretary, spy, assassin, or negotiator.

Technology Level: The Geelan possess a space-level technology, although the species had only advanced to information-level technology before it was discovered by the Arconan medical vessel.

Trade and Technology: Geelan live for trade and thrive on the inherent adventure of pursuing a deal and obtaining more baubles for their precious hoards. Geelan love possessions, no matter how worthless, though they prefer expensive commodities such as spice, jewels, and credits. This hoarding mentality always supplies them with material to sell and trade, and many Geelan nests are filled with wealth beyond imagination.

Geelan employ a sort of "no-holds-barred" method of conducting business. When pursuing a deal with a Geelan, anything is acceptable, from blackmail to bribery to physical violence. Understandably, Geelan prefer to perform business transactions with outsiders when the other members of their nest are present, a defensive precaution against any overly violent customers. Those who trade with Geelan know that "normal" deals bore them to no end, and the more complicated a deal, the more likely it will be acceptable to the Geelan.

Geelan in the Galaxy: Geelan are fairly widespread throughout the galaxy. Members of the species find employment in any number of fields, from information brokering to investment speculating.

Gamemaster Notes: Most Geelan encountered by characters are employed in some sort of Geelan enterprise. This can tip the players off as to who owns an establishment; if the waiter at the local restaurant is a Geelan, there's a good chance that the Geelan own some portion of the business.

Personality Notes: Geelan are generally arrogant, meddlesome beings who never let a day go by without obtaining some new piece of junk. Other species try to avoid Geelan if possible, for they are widely regarded as somewhat disreputable.

Suggested Skills: Geelan may possess any skills, and many specialize in skills that help them haggle, such as *bargain*, *persuasion*, and *con*.

Notable Personalities: Several Geelan own and operate Zirtran's Anchor, a bizarre space station made up of hundreds of connected starships. For more information on the station, see *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #5, pages 221-248.

Average Geelan: *Dexterity 3D, Knowledge 2D, Perception 3D, Strength 2D, Technical 2D. Move: 10.*

■ Geelan

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

Special Abilities:

Claws: All Geelan possess claws that add +1D to their *Strength* when determining damage in combat.

Story Factors:

Hoarders: Geelan are incurable hoarders—they never throw anything away. The only way Geelan will part with a possession is if they are paid or if their lives are in danger.

Move: 10/12

Size: 0.75-1.5 meters tall

Gigorans

Appearance and Biology: Gigorans are huge bipeds covered in pale-colored fur. They are well-muscled, with long, sinuous limbs ending in huge, paw-like, padded hands and feet. Due to their appearance, Gigorans are often confused with other, similar species, such as Wookiees. Gigorans are capable of learning and speaking Basic, but most speak their native tongue, a strange mixture of creaks, groans, grunts, whistles, and chirps which often sounds unintelligible even to translator droids.

Temperament: Despite their fearsome appearances, most Gigorans are peaceful and friendly. Individuals are extremely loyal and affectionate toward family and friends and have been known to sacrifice themselves for the safety of their loved ones.

Gigorans are curious beings, especially with respect to items of high technology. These “shiny baubles” are often taken by naive Gigorans, ignorant of the laws of the galaxy forbidding such acts.

History and Culture: These gentle beings evolved on the mountainous world of Gigor. Descended from social, troglodytic primates, the Gigorans established a hunter-gatherer society which still exists today. Gigorans dwell in the caves of Gigor in groups known as “home-clans.” These clans consist of three to five families of Gigorans and may have 50 or more members. Contact between home-clans is rare but welcomed.

Gigor was long-known to the galaxy before the Gigorans were found. The frigid world was considered unimportant when first

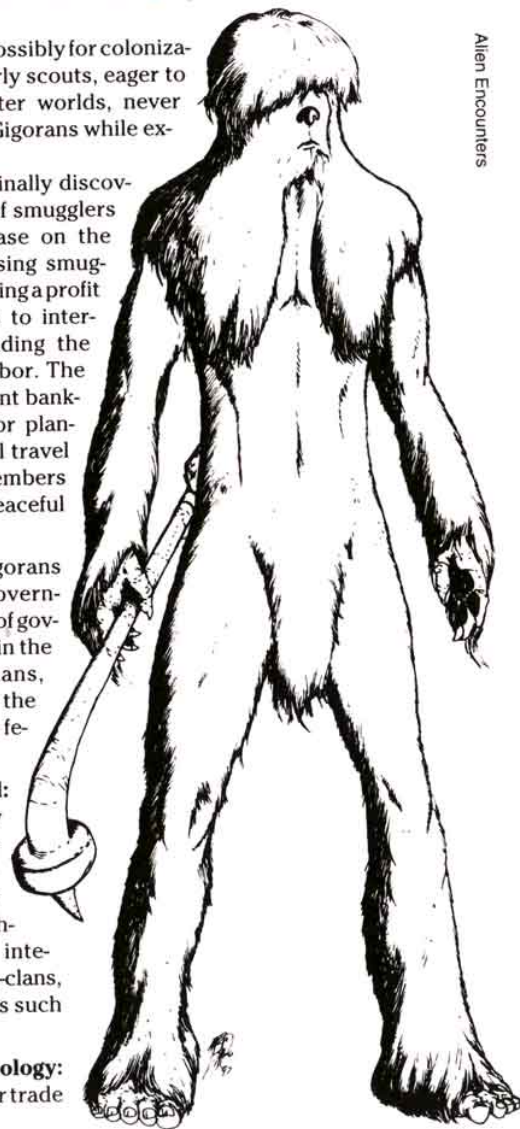
discovered, except possibly for colonization purposes, so early scouts, eager to find bigger and better worlds, never noticed the evasive Gigorans while exploring the planet.

The species was finally discovered when a group of smugglers began building a base on the world. The enterprising smugglers soon began making a profit selling the Gigorans to interested parties, including the Empire, for heavy labor. The business venture went bankrupt because of poor planning, but slavers still travel to Gigor to kidnap members of this strong and peaceful species.

Politics: The Gigorans have no central government. The only form of government on Gigor is in the individual home-clans, which are ruled by the best hunter, male or female.

Technology Level: Gigoran technology is primitive, consisting mainly of stone- and woodwork. Few items of modern technology have been integrated into the home-clans, but some do possess such items.

Trade and Technology: Gigorans hardly ever trade



among themselves, much less the rest of the galaxy. However, strong, healthy Gigorans often find work as heavy laborers or are pressed into servitude by slavers.

Gigorans in the Galaxy: Gigorans are rarely found in the galaxy. Those who have left Gigor are usually individuals who have found work as laborers or guards, or have been taken from Gigor by force. Some survive on their own or with companions as escaped slaves.

Gamemaster Notes: Like the Wookiees, Talz, and so many similar species, the Gigorans have fallen prey to unscrupulous slavers galaxy-wide. Most Gigorans encountered off their homeworld are slaves or former slaves. These Gigorans firmly believe in carrying out the duties dictated to them by their masters, but also deeply resent the harsh treatment they receive.

Personality Notes: Gigorans are simple beings who desire only love and companionship. When pressed into a dangerous situation, however, they become savage adversaries, using their huge size and strength to defend their loved ones.

Suggested Skills: Most Gigorans specialize in *Dexterity* and *Strength* skills. Very few possess skills dealing with high technology.

Notable Personalities: The Gigoran Rollos was saved from slavery by the gambler Reina Gale. Rollos now travels the galaxy with Reina, helping her pursue fame and fortune. For more information on Reina and Rollos, see *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #4, pages 107-134.

Average Gigoran: *Dexterity* 2D, *Knowledge* 1D, *Mechanical* 1D, *Perception* 3D, *Strength* 4D, *Technical* 1D. Move: 12.

■ Gigorans

Attribute Dice: 12D
DEXTERITY 2D/4D
KNOWLEDGE 1D/2D
MECHANICAL 1D/3D
PERCEPTION 3D/4D+2
STRENGTH 4D/6D
TECHNICAL 1D/2D

Special Abilities:

Bashing: Adult Gigorans possess great upper-body strength and heavy paws which enable them to swat at objects with tremendous force. Increase the character's *Strength* attribute dice by +1D when figuring damage for a *brawling* attack that involves bashing an object.

Story Factors:

Personal Ties: Gigorans are very family-oriented creatures; a Gigoran will sacrifice his own life to protect a close personal friend or family member from harm.

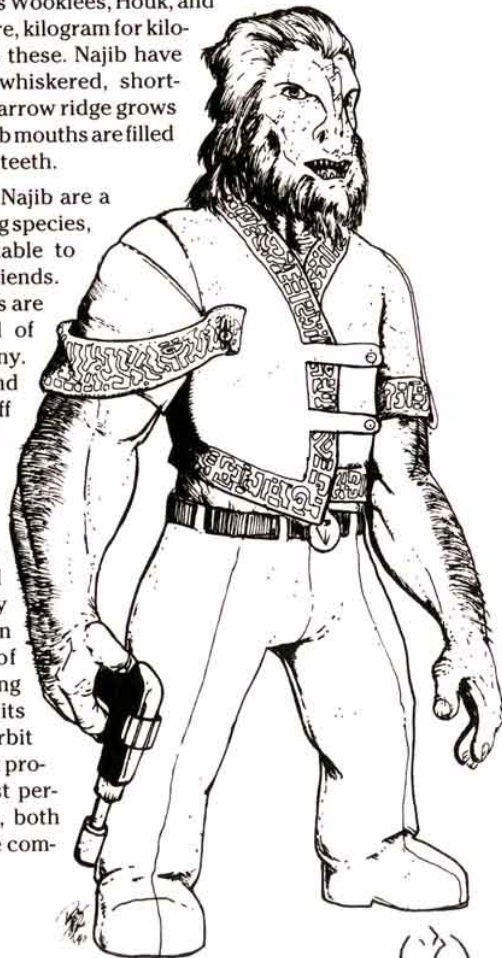
Move: 12/14
Size: 2-2.5 meters tall

Najib

Appearance and Biology: The Najib are a species of stout, dwarf humanoids with well-muscled physiques and immense strength. While not as powerful as Wookiees, Houk, and similar species, Najib are, kilogram for kilogram, just as strong as these. Najib have long manes on their whiskered, short-snouted heads, and a narrow ridge grows between their eyes. Najib mouths are filled with formidably sharp teeth.

Temperament: The Najib are a dauntless, hard-working species, suspicious but hospitable to strangers and loyal to friends. Members of the species are jovial and quite fond of good drink and company. They adapt quickly and are not easily caught off guard.

History and Culture: Najib come from the remote world Najiba in the Faj system. Najiba is isolated from nearby systems by an asteroid belt known as "The Children of Najiba" it passes during half of its orbit around its sun. The irregular orbit along with low axial tilt provides a state of almost perpetual spring. Storms, both rain and electrical, are common occurrences.



The Najib evolved from cave-dwelling primates. The early Najib remained in the caves, as several recently discovered cave paintings attest. Eventually, the species left the caves for the wetlands, possibly to hunt migratory herd animals.

Najiba was discovered in the early days of the Old Republic, but, due to the nearby asteroid field, it was not visited until a few centuries ago. First contact with the Najib was marginally successful; the Najib were eager to learn about the outsiders but were suspicious as well. Eventually the Najib agreed to join the galactic government.

The Najib are still a relatively unknown species, but their world does serve as a base of operations for several trading and mining groups.

Politics: The largest governmental group on Najiba is the tribe, but the Najib have created a special "governing tribe" to handle galactic affairs. The governmental tribe consists of one elected Najib from each of the other tribes, and the members live together and make the laws that affect the rest of the species.

Technology Level: The Najib have access to hyperspace technology, but only that which they can obtain through trade. The species produces its own feudal-level items, but nothing more advanced.

Trade and Technology: The Najib participate in galactic trade, but because the nearby asteroid field makes travel to the planet hazardous during half the year, their planet does not see a steady flow of traffic.

Najib in the Galaxy: Najib may be found in the greater galaxy, but the number encountered off Najiba is small, due to the infrequent traffic to their world.

Gamemaster Notes: Najib may be employed in any number of occupations, many depending on their strength. Since many mistake their small size for weakness, Najib can surprise unsuspecting players who underestimate their physical power.

Personality Notes: Najib are jovially boisterous beings who love the company of friends. They are easily angered, however, especially when friends are threatened. Enraged Najib make ferocious opponents.

Suggested Skills: Najib may possess any number of skills depending on their occupation.

Notable Personalities: Reuther, a bartender on Najiba, is the friend and sometimes associate of Thaddeus Ross. See *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #4, pages 72-79 for more information on Reuther and Ross.

Average Najib: *Dexterity 2D, Knowledge 1D, Mechanical 2D+1, Perception 1D, Strength 3D, Technical 2D+2.* Move: 8.

■ Najib

Attribute Dice: 12D

DEXTERITY 1D+1/3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 1D/3D

MECHANICAL 2D+1/4D+1

PERCEPTION 1D/3D+2

STRENGTH 3D/4D+2

TECHNICAL 2D+2/4D+2

Story Factors:

Carousers: Najib love food, drink, and company. They often find it hard to pass by a cantina without buying a few drinks.

Move: 8/10

Size: 1-1.5 meters tall

Issori

Appearance and Biology: The Issori are tall, pale-skinned bipeds with webbed hands and feet; hairless except for their heads. The Issori face is covered with wrinkles, usually the result of loose skin, evolution, or old age. Some, however, serve a purpose, like the wrinkles between the eyes and mouth. These function as olfactory organs, equally effective in and out of water.

Temperament: There is no standard Issori temperament. Issori may be of any disposition, much like humans.

History and Culture: The Issori have dwelled on the scarce land of Issor for untold millennia. The early Issori cities were mostly primitive ports where each settlement could trade extensively with others. Eventually, the Issori discovered the aquatic Odenji, their cousin species. They were thrilled to find new beings to interact, trade, and dwell with. The Issori gladly shared their (then) feudal-level technology with the Odenji, and soon the two species were living and working together in large numbers.

The Issori and Odenji made scientific progress like never before, and within a few centuries they found themselves with information-level technology. They immediately began a space program and a

search for intelligent life. After many years, and after colonizing the other planets of the system (and establishing their dominance over the humans of Trulalis), the Issori and Odenji received a response to their galactic search when a Corellian scout team came to visit the planet. Despite their surprise at finding other beings in the galaxy, the species joined the galactic community.

Several centuries ago, the Odenji entered a species-wide sadness known as the *melanncho* (see "Odenji: History and Culture" below). The Issori tried to help the Odenji through this troubling period but were ultimately unsuccessful. As an unfortunate result of the *melanncho*, the Issori are far more widespread than their cousin species today.

Politics: The Issori are governed by a bicameral legislature consisting of the Tribe of Issori and the Tribe of Odenji. Members of both houses are elected by their respective species to serve for life, and their laws affect the entire system.

Technology Level: The Issori have merged their own space-level technological achievements with those brought to their planet by others.

Trade and Technology: The Issori actively seek out trade for their planet. They produce many industrial goods that are needed on other worlds and import several billion



computers and droids a year.

Issori in the Galaxy: Issori are widespread throughout the galaxy. They find work in any number of fields, but due to their aquatic heritage, many enjoy marine biology and similar occupations.

Gamemaster Notes: Issori may be used to populate a frontier settlement on a mostly water world. They are also useful as ocean guides, ship captains, or even illegal ocean-going poachers.

Personality Notes: Many believe the Issori to be a rambunctious and disreputable group, but this is not true; there are Issori of every conceivable temperament. The myth has been perpetuated through the exploits of more famous Issori, many of whom are smugglers and pirates.

Suggested Skills: Issori have access to all skills, but may wish to concentrate on skills used in an aquatic environment.

Notable Personalities: Fahs Oxsor is an Issori known for his flamboyant escapades against the Empire. For more information on Fahs, see *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #5, page 134. Arner Figgis is a prominent Issori scholar and has researched numerous subjects, including Old Corellian. For more information on Figgis, see *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #7, page 238.

Average Issori: *Dexterity* 2D, *Knowledge* 2D+1, *Mechanical* 2D, *Perception* 2D+2, *Strength* 2D, *Technical* 1D. Move: 10/12.

■ Issori

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

Special Abilities:

Swimming: Issori gain +2 to their Move score and +1D to *dodge* in underwater conditions.

Move: 10/12

Size: 1.7-2.2 meters

Odenji

Appearance and Biology: The Odenji are medium-sized bipeds with smooth, hairless heads and large, webbed hands and feet. Odenji have skin ranging from dark brown to tan. Members of the

species have gills on the sides of their necks so they can breath freely in and out of water. Where the Issori have their olfactory wrinkles, the Odenji have four horizontal flaps of skin that serve the same purpose: facilitating the sense of smell.

Temperament: The Odenji are a sad and pitiable species. After the *melanncho* (see "History and Culture" below), very few Odenji publicly expressed joy, pleasure, or humor. This sadness manifests itself through the Odenji's apathetic attitude and unwillingness to assume positions of leadership.

History and Culture: The Odenji developed as a nomadic, under-water society that existed until the Odenji and Issori met for the first time. The Issori somehow persuaded the Odenji that a life lived on the surface was better than one lived underwater, and the Odenji eventually relocated their entire culture to the land.

Forming a new Issori-Odenji government, the two species made rapid technological progress. Eventually, as the result of an Issori-Odenji experiment, Issor made contact with a space-faring culture, the Corellians. The Issorians now had access to considerably more advanced technology.

Several centuries ago, the Odenji entered into a period known as the *melanncho*. During this time, the amount of violent crime increased and depression among the species was at an all-time high. Eventually the period passed, but



today many Odenji experience personal *melanncho*.

No cause has been discovered for this strange, species-wide sadness, though several theories exist. Some scientists hypothesize that the *melanncho* was caused by a virus or strain of bacteria, one to which the Issori were immune. Imperial scientists, on the other hand, insist that the *melanncho* is simply a genetic dysfunction and that the Odenji would have eventually become extinct from it had they not had access to "human" medicine. A theory gaining much support among the Odenji themselves is that the *melanncho*, both species-wide and personal, is the result of the migration of the Odenji from their aquatic home to the land above. Many of the Odenji who believe this theory have created underwater communities, much to the dismay of their land-dwelling brethren.

Politics: The Odenji and Issori govern their system through the Tribes of Issori and Odenji.

Technology Level: The Odenji have access to the space-level technology they developed with the Issori and offworlders. However, groups of Odenji returning to the ocean shun this technology and have returned to the feudal devices used by their ancestors before leaving the oceans.

Trade and Technology: The Odenji allow the Issori to handle most of Issor's trade. They do help produce goods for sale, however.

Odenji in the Galaxy: Some Odenji have left their world to explore the galaxy, but the number is less than that of the Issori. Many experiencing *melanncho* often return and live out their lives in their homeworld's oceans.

Gamemaster Notes: Like the Issori, Odenji may be used in many aspects of a campaign, especially those involving ocean worlds or occupations.

Personality Notes: Odenji do not intentionally try to be sad; most Odenji want very much to be happy and experience joy like other species. Odenji player characters should try to experience happiness, against the seemingly insurmountable odds.

Suggested Skills: Odenji may have any skills, but many concentrate on underwater specializations of *Dexterity* skills.

Average Odenji: *Dexterity 2D+1, Knowledge 2D, Mechanical 1D+1, Perception 2D+2, Strength 1D+2, Technical 2D. Move: 10.*

■ Odenji

Attribute Dice: 12D

DEXTERITY 2D+1/4D+1

KNOWLEDGE 2D/5D

MECHANICAL 1D/3D

PERCEPTION 2D+2/4D+2

STRENGTH 1D+2/3D+2

TECHNICAL 2D/4D

Special Abilities:

Aquatic: The Odenji possess both gills and lungs and can breathe both in and out of water.

Melanncho: Whenever something particularly disturbing happens to an Odenji (the death of a friend or relative, failure to reach an important goal), he or she must make a Moderate *willpower* roll. If the roll fails, the Odenji experiences a personal *melanncho*, entering a state of depression and suffering a -1D penalty on all rolls until a Moderate *willpower* roll succeeds. The gamemaster should allow no more than one roll per game day.

Swimming: Due to their webbed hands and feet, Odenji gain +3 to their Move score and +1D+2 to *dodge* in underwater conditions.

Story Factors:

Melanncho: Even when not in a personal *melanncho*, Odenji are sad or apathetic at best. They rarely show happiness unless with very close family or friends.

Move: 10/12

Size: 1.5-1.8 meters

Riileb

Appearance and Biology: Riileb are tall, gray-skinned bipeds with thin limbs and knobby hides. The Riileb are insectoid and have four nostrils (two for inhalation and two for exhalation), pink eyes, and sensitive antennae. The antennae, hold-overs from their insectoid ancestry, can be used by Riileb to detect changes in others' biorhythms, and therefore alert the Riileb to changes in their moods. Except for their heads, Riileb are hairless, though unmarried females traditionally shave all but one braid.

Temperament: Riileb are generally calm and collected beings, tolerant of others but determined to succeed in their own endeavors. This is partly due to their ability to sense the life signs of others and their natural ability to determine moods through this information.

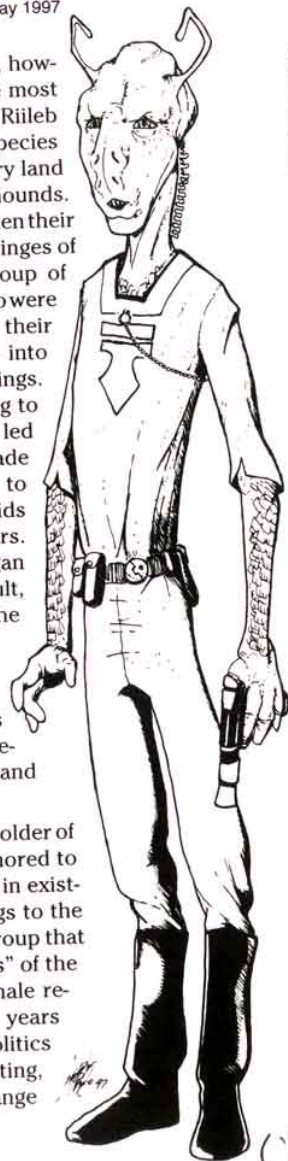
History and Culture: The Riileb come from the swampy planet of the same name. The planet Riileb is considered quite uncomfortable by most species' standards; it is unbearably hot and humid, dry land is scarce, and the native insects are notoriously blood-

thirsty. The world is teeming with life, however, from the lowliest bacteria to the most complex avians and mammals. The Riileb evolved from large, social insects, a species which dwelled on the few islands of dry land on Riileb and built huge labyrinthine mounds.

The Riileb were first encountered when their world, located on what was then the fringes of Hutt Space, was discovered by a group of Nimbanese scouts. The Nimbanese, who were on a mission to find more slaves for their Hutt masters, tried to talk the Riileb into voluntary servitude to the slug-like beings. The Riileb refused, however, choosing to remain independent. The Hutt forces, led by Velruga the Hutt, successfully made several attempts to force the Riileb to their wills, but the resourceful insectoids repeatedly turned back the invaders. Eventually the Hutts gave up and began searching for easier marks. As a result, the planet Riileb is now an island in the depths of Hutt Space.

Much of the Riileb's insectoid heritage remains with the species today. Riileb cities, located on the islands as the ancient mounds once were, are renowned for their complex passages and enigmatic, twisting alleys.

Politics: The Riileb are led by the holder of the ClanRing, an item of jewelry rumored to have been crafted by the first Riileb in existence. The ClanRing rightfully belongs to the eldest female of the MotherClan, a group that consists of only "direct descendants" of the mythical first Riileb. The eldest female receives the ClanRing after 30 local years (about 21 standard years). Riileb politics are easily prone to deceit and in-fighting, however, and many individuals arrange



for their family members to be "taken out of the way" so they may seize the throne.

Technology Level: The Riileb have full access to galactic technology but had only advanced to feudal levels before they were discovered by outsiders.

Trade and Technology: Riileb does not see much interstellar traffic. Many traders do find it worthwhile, however, to transport heklū—native amphibious beasts—from the world; the meat is considered a delicacy on many Core Worlds. Because Riileb is in the midst of Hutt Space, it often serves as a temporary haven for those seeking to evade the Hutts.

Riileb in the Galaxy: Riileb, though not a common sight in the galaxy, are not unknown to it. Many Riileb find work as traders, and many use their natural biorhythm sense as bartenders, psychiatrists, and physicians.

Gamemaster Notes: Characters in a smuggler campaign would be wise to make friends with any Riileb they meet. Because the Hutts have such an extensive crime network, it is likely that characters in these campaigns will sooner or later find themselves on the Hutts' bad side and in need of a safe haven on the Riileb homeworld.

Personality Notes: Due to their natural ability to read others' life signs, Riileb are good at setting others at ease, and are generally regarded as personable beings. They can easily tell when someone has been angered or offended and remedy the situation.

Suggested Skills: Riileb have access to all skills, but may wish to specialize in *Perception* skills to supplement their natural biorhythm detection.

Notable Personalities: Tere Metallo was to be the wearer of the ClanRing, but she was sold into slavery by a jealous sister. Forced into a life of less-than-legal exploits, she has led a full existence nonetheless. See *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #6, page 70, and *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #7, page 255, for more information on Tere Metallo.

Average Riileb: *Dexterity 2D, Knowledge 2D, Mechanical 2D, Perception 2D+2, Strength 1D+1, Technical 2D.* Move: 10.

Riileb

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

Special Abilities:

Biorhythm Detection: The Riileb's antennae give them a unique perspective of other species. They can detect changes in blood pressure, pulse rate, and respiration. A Riileb may attempt a Moderate *Perception* roll to interpret this information for a given character or creature. If the roll succeeds, the Riileb receives a +1D bonus to *intimidation*, *willpower*, *beast riding*, *bargain*, *command*, *con*, *gambling*, *persuasion*, and *sneak* against that character or creature for the rest of the current encounter.

Move: 10/12

Size: 2-2.75 meters tall

Trunks

Appearance and Biology: Trunks are stout, hairy bipeds with large, wild-looking eyes. Members of the species are entirely covered in fur except for the facial regions, the palms of the hands, and the soles of the feet. The Trunks' four-fingered hands possess sharp fighting claws, which can easily make short work of an enemy.

The Trunks have adapted to life on the chilly, thin-atmosphered world of Trunksa. The Trunks possess a pair of cave-like nostrils that help them breathe the thin atmosphere. The ears are also large, and therefore more adept at receiving sound waves. The weathered face has a wide, tusked mouth, vestigial horns near the ears, and wide, bony brows.

Temperament: Trunks are generally characterized as violent and fierce, but members of the species are kind and gentle toward friends and family. It is only to strangers that Trunks react badly; they are a somewhat paranoid species who do not trust anyone they have not met before. Thankfully, this attitude does not usually escalate into violence unless the Trunk is provoked.

History and Culture: The Trunks evolved on Trunksa, a rocky world in the Colonies region. The ancestors of the Trunks were clawed predators who hunted the various tuber-eating, hoofed creatures that populated the world. As these ancestral Trunks developed sentience, their paws became true hands with opposable thumbs (though the claws remain), and began to walk upright.



The early Trunks utilized their world's intricate river system to support agriculture and eventually built cities. Trunk cities gradually grew into city-states, and finally large empires. Several Trunk warlords constantly feuded and battled with

each other, continually striving for more territory on the craggy world. Not until the species had entered the information age did one warlord finally conquer the entire planet. This military genius, Tyl the Deplorable, quickly turned his army into a formidable police force, and new funds were freed for technological advancement.

Under the newly formed government, Trunk scientists began developing advances at a rapid rate. Eventually the Trunks discovered hyperspace technology (whether by themselves or from an outside source is unknown), and they quickly moved through several neighboring sectors. Their integration into galactic govern-

ment followed shortly.

During Emperor Palpatine's reign, the Trunks lost their freedom and position in the galaxy. They were declared a slave species, and members were taken away from Trunksa in the thousands. Early Imperial slavers soon learned that the Trunks were not a species easily tamed, however, and today the Trunks' popularity among slave owners continues to dwindle.

Politics: The Trunks are currently ruled by Emperor Belgoa. Belgoa is merely an Imperial figurehead; his appointment as ruler of the world fools the Trunks into believing that one of their own is in charge. Belgoa publicly denounces the enslavement of his people and assures them that he is doing all he can to stop it, but he is secretly allowing the Empire and other parties to take slaves from Trunksa. In exchange, the local Moff allows Belgoa final say over which Trunks stay or go. Obviously, Belgoa has few enemies left on the planet.

Technology Level: The Trunks have access to hyperspace-level technology, but by Imperial law, Trunks are not allowed to carry weapons or pilot armed starships.

Trade and Technology: Trunksa sees a constant influx of traders, though the selling of weapons is forbidden—a law strictly enforced by the Trunkan police force.

Trunks in the Galaxy: A moderate number of Trunks have integrated into the galaxy, though the number is nowhere near that of humans, Duros, and other common species. Many of the Trunks are slaves, several having been forced into gladiatorial games; free Trunks often work as scouts, bodyguards, and sector police.

Gamemaster Notes: Many Trunks have been enslaved by the Empire and other groups. They are fiercely hardy beings who make excellent laborers and popular (illegal) gladiators. The Trunks hate slavery almost as much as the Wookiees do—a trait that prompts many of them to join the Rebel Alliance.

Personality Notes: The average Trunk is grumpy and sometimes violent around outsiders. When near those he is familiar with, however, the Trunk becomes somewhat more genial, but will still be considered a grump by his companions.

Suggested Skills: Trunks have access to all available skills, but many focus on *Strength* and *Dexterity* skills.

Notable Personalities: As a Rebel Alliance infiltrator, Sully Tigereye has become quite famous (or infamous) in Alliance and Imperial circles. For more information on Sully, see page 172 of *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #3 and page 183 of *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #8.

Average Trunk: *Dexterity* 3D, *Knowledge* 2D, *Mechanical* 2D, *Perception* 1D, *Strength* 3D, *Technical* 1D. Move: 9.

■ Trunks

Attribute Dice: 12D

DEXTERITY 2D/4D

KNOWLEDGE 2D/3D

MECHANICAL 2D/4D

PERCEPTION 1D/3D

STRENGTH 2D/4D+2

TECHNICAL 1D/3D

Special Abilities:

Claws: Trunks have long, retractable fighting claws that give them an extra 1D to *Strength* when figuring damage for a *brawling* attack.

Move: 9/11

Size: 1.5-2 meters tall

JOURNAL SUBMISSIONS POLICY

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If you are a published author, please send a brief cover letter outlining your interests in writing for *Star Wars* as well as your writing experience. Include a bibliography of previously published works and samples from that list. Please include your daytime phone number so we can contact you.

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The Occupation of Rhamalai

by M. H. Watkins

The ominous black shadow enveloped her completely. She wanted to lash out against it, but she couldn't move, couldn't even breathe. Something held her shoulders in a relentless grip—

"Mother, wake up!"

The voice pulled Charis Enasteri back to reality and she struggled to open her heavy eyes. A blurred face, framed in golden-brown hair, gazed down at her as she lay in bed. Gentle hands grasped her shoulders, shaking her awake.

"Mother, I've got good news, wake up!"

"Oh, Nadra," Charis blinked her eyes as the dream faded. Slowly her daughter's face came into focus. "What's the matter?"

"I just heard—I rushed home to tell you—"

"Nadra," Charis grasped her daughter's hand. "Calm down."

Nadra took a deep breath. "I heard some good news today. There's a chance you could be cured!"

Charis sighed. Her daughter would never accept the inevitable. "I'm not going to get better, you know that. This condition comes and goes but it will only get worse with time. Nothing can change that."

"But, Mother, Imperial ships have landed on Rhamalai! Right here in Argona!"

Charis gasped and searched her daughter's face. "When?"

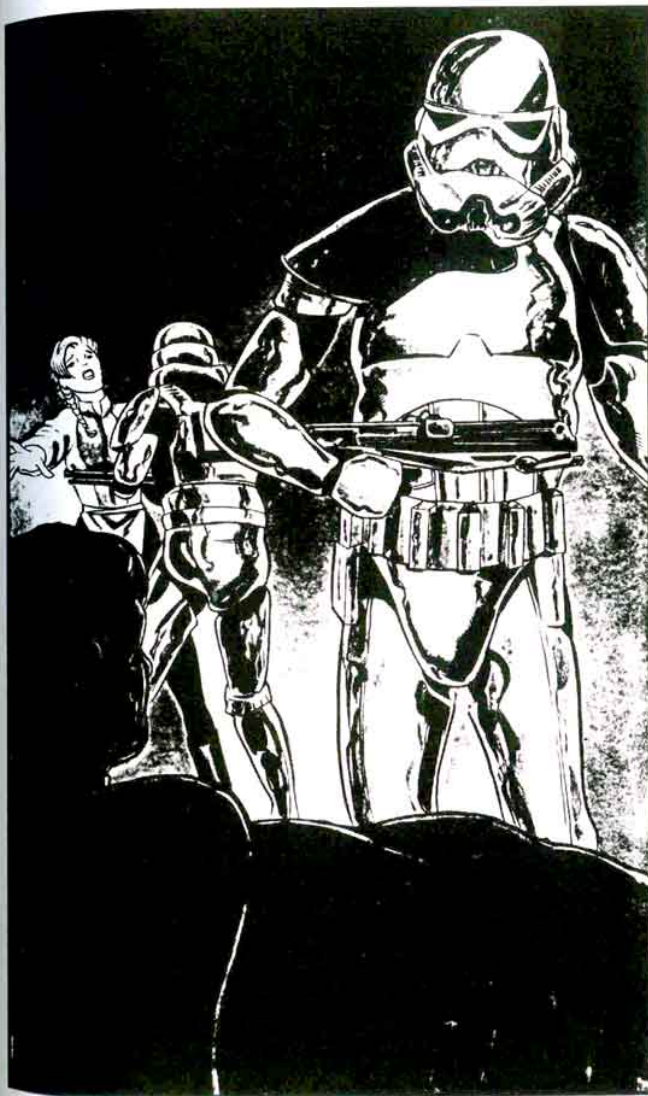
"Just an hour ago."

"Oh, no," Charis moaned.

"But, that's good news, Mother. Don't you see? The Empire has

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The Occupation of Rhamalai

all the technology that Rhamalai shuns. It must have advanced medical treatments as well. I just know you could be healed!"

"Absolutely not! I will not be treated by Imperials," Charis insisted. Her daughter's look of perplexed hurt troubled her. "Nadra, listen to me. There are many things you don't understand. The Emperor's men can't be trusted—"

The sudden rumble of marching feet interrupted her. Nadra crossed to the window. "There are soldiers in white armor coming down the street."

"Stormtroopers!" Charis couldn't disguise her fear.

"They're going into the houses. What are they doing?" Nadra seemed more curious than afraid.

Panic threatened but Charis tried to calm herself. "Come here, Nadra. Help me sit up before they get here," she said.

Nadra returned to assist her. "They're coming here? Why?"

"They will search every house. They always do," Charis replied. "We must appear...unconcerned. Why don't you sit and read to me?"

Nadra perched on the narrow chair next to the bed. She picked up the wordscript they had started the night before, but didn't open it. Seconds slogged by, dragging into minutes. Heavily booted feet sounded on the pavement. A panicked voice shouted in the distance. A child wailed.

Without warning, a heavy pounding came at the door to their small home. Both women jumped. "This planet is now under the jurisdiction of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Palpatine," a harsh voice rang out. "Any occupants of this house, come forward at once."

Nadra moved toward the outer room and Charis hissed after her. "Be careful. Do not anger them."

Nadra nodded.

Charis heard her daughter step to the door and open it. "We're here. My mother is sick so please don't disturb her."

Heavy footsteps thudded across the floor. "Where is your mother?" the same filtered voice demanded.

"In bed. She's very ill—" Nadra's answer was cut off as a tall trooper wearing a shoulder pauldron strode into the bedroom to stand over Charis. Nadra stumbled in after him, another stormtrooper holding her upper arm tightly.

Their presence was overwhelming. Charis felt nauseated. "How may we assist you, Lieutenant?" she asked, straining to keep her

voice under control.

"All males between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five are ordered to report to the Imperial base for immediate screening and conscription into the Emperor's service."

"Only my daughter and I live here," Charis managed to answer. Her heart pounded and she felt short of breath. "My husband died years ago. I have no other children," she added.

His helmet's grim expression pinned Charis to her sheets. "Do not think to hide your men from us," he menaced, leaning over her. "If you have lied, you will suffer."

He turned to look carefully at Nadra. "We need civilians in support positions. Report to the Civilian Service Personnel office at the garrison in the morning. You will be assigned duties."

"But my mother is sick," Nadra protested. "I have to care for her."

The stormtrooper stared again at Charis. "The Emperor is benevolent," he said in a mechanical monotone. "She will be treated at our medical facility. A transport will collect her in the morning."

He turned to his companion. "Move on to the next house." They strode away as abruptly as they had come.

Charis felt as though she had been struck by lightning, its swift and deadly energy leaving her a quivering mass.

Nadra returned to her bedside, bending down to hug Charis tightly. "I got my wish, but I don't think I want it anymore," she said, her voice shaking.

Charis stroked her daughter's hair. "You understand now. The Emperor is an oppressive overlord and his stormtroopers are ruthless. Just do whatever they ask. Your father gave everything to ensure our safety. We can't throw that away carelessly."

"What do you mean?" Nadra straightened up to look into her mother's eyes. "I thought Father was dead."

Charis sighed deeply. "Your father was being hunted by the Emperor's agents. He left Rhamalai when you were just a year old, to protect us." Her eyes filled with tears. "I never heard from him again."

"Then he's still alive somewhere? We could look for him, if we could get off-planet somehow!" Nadra's eyes lit with hope.

"It's been sixteen years. He sent no word in all that time. He must be dead."

"Maybe Director Pellias can help."

Charis sighed. "Nadra, I've wrestled with this for years. There's

no way—”

“But we have to try!”

A dull pain throbbed in Charis’s head. She put a hand over her eyes. “Nadra, please.”

“I’m sorry,” Nadra murmured. She kissed Charis lightly on the forehead. “I’ll bring you some tea.”

When Nadra had gone, Charis let her tears fall. The hope in Nadra’s eyes wrung her heart. “Oh, please,” she whispered into the air. “If there’s anyone out there who can hear me, please, please protect my daughter.”



Denel Moonrunner sat on the stone wall behind his parents’ house. The sun shone warm on his shoulders, but something wasn’t right. He felt a strange disturbance, as if someone was calling for help. He wanted to jump up and give aid, but to whom? He tried to locate the source of these feelings, but they dissipated quickly. He’d had these strange urges a lot lately—he just wished he knew what they meant.

“Just growing pains, adolescent yearnings,” his father had said. But Denel wondered if Lorn Moonrunner knew more than he would admit.

Suddenly another strong feeling flooded through him, this time a sense of danger. He was startled as something nudged him hard in the back, nearly pushing him off his place on the garden wall.

“Chaser, you old beggar,” Denel chuckled. He turned around to scratch the gorset between its blunt horns. “Never get enough attention, do you, boy?” The four-legged animal stamped a hoof and shook his curly head. “No, I can’t take you out for a run right now. I have studies to finish.”

The tall, black beast brayed at him.

“Denel?” his mother called from the house. “Denel, come here please.” Her voice sounded strange somehow. He hopped down from the wall and headed into their home.

As he entered the sitting room, he was surprised to see four Imperial stormtroopers surrounding his mother. Artis’s face was taut and frightened. “What’s going on, mother?” he asked carefully.

“You must go with these men,” she answered in a tiny voice. “Why?”

“No questions!” their commander barked. “You’ve been drafted into the Imperial Army. Come along immediately.” They encircled Denel and began pushing him toward the door.

“Wait a minute,” Denel protested. “I’ve been planning to attend the Academy for years. I just turned eighteen so now I can apply. Give me an hour to get some things together and I’ll—”

“Silence!” the officer barked. “You will follow orders. The Empire will provide all your needs and you’ll be grateful.”

“But, where are you taking me?” Denel continued as one trooper shoved him out the door with the butt of his blaster rifle. “When can I return? Can’t I at least say good-bye to my parents?” He stumbled down the steps.

“Shut up and move along.” Another trooper grabbed Denel’s arm and hauled him down the walk toward the front gate.

Denel could hear his mother weeping. He wrenched out of the stormtrooper’s grasp and turned around. “Mother—” he began, but fell to his knees in pain as he was gun-jabbed from behind.

“You will obey my orders,” the commander growled in Denel’s ear. They hauled him to his feet and out the gate.

As he was herded down the street, Denel noticed many other men being taken from their homes. He saw his neighbor Dorn Lister, and his friend Amos Granley. Sweat trickled down Denel’s spine. No one spoke. Apparently they had all learned their first lesson in obedience, just as he had.



“You will order your people to cooperate, or we will have to demonstrate our intentions more...dramatically.” General Yrros strutted across the Planetary Trade Director’s office. “I’m sure your citizens would rather live peacefully than sacrifice themselves for no good reason.” He paused to read a framed award which hung on the panelled wall.

Markren Pellias gazed up from behind his desk at the Imperial general’s square, haughty face. His fingernails bit into the palms of his clenched fists. “Their peace has already been ripped away by your stormtroopers. You’ve invaded their homes, taken their husbands, brothers, and sons. I wasn’t aware the Emperor condoned such methods.”

General Yrros turned to face him. “It is not preferable, but it is

necessary at this time. Their families will be adequately compensated."

"Adequately compensated?" Pellias rose to his feet and stepped toward Yrros. "Do you think a few credits here and there will make up for losing a loved one?" It was all he could do to keep from planting his fist right in the middle of the general's aristocratic nose.

Yrros was not intimidated. With precise steps, he crossed the carpet, stopping with his face no more than twenty centimeters from the director's. The general's greater height forced Pellias to tip his head back to meet the dark, angry eyes.

"It is necessary at this time," the general enunciated slowly, gliding down at Pellias.

The director lowered his eyes and stepped back.

"Imperial troops are paid generously," Yrros went on. "Their families will not suffer unduly. Everyone *will* be grateful for the chance to contribute to the New Order. You'll make sure of that, won't you?"

"Yes, General." Pellias turned away to hide his bitterness. "We will cooperate."

"Good. Now, please, be seated and we'll discuss the terms of our presence here." Yrros perched on the arm of an intricately carved wooden chair facing the desk. He didn't stop to appreciate its beauty and craftsmanship.

Pellias sat down heavily behind his desk, wondering how long it would remain his.

As if he could read Pellias's thoughts, General Yrros continued, "I am now in command of this system. You will be my chief liaison between the military presence and the people."

"If you remain cooperative, you will be allowed to run your government much the same as before, with one exception." The general slapped his dark gloves into one hand as he spoke. "Every decision you make—whether holding elections, making new laws, trade and commerce agreements, even holiday celebrations—must be pre-approved before being put into action. Do you understand?"

Pellias understood all right. He and all the guild leaders would be nothing more than Imperial puppets. "I understand."

"You'll be allowed to retain these offices." The general looked around, not bothering to conceal a sneer. "Imperial headquarters will be at the base."

"Of course," the director replied with a touch of sarcasm.

"There will be some significant changes, however, especially in the area of technological improvements to this backward planet."

"Such as?"

"The reason we are here. Agriculture. Rhamalai's rich soil is ideal for raising food crops. As soon as construction of the garrison base is complete, we will begin work on a chain of food processing plants and a central exportation complex. Rhamalai will have the glorious duty of feeding our troops."

Pellias had no reply.

"Get word to your farmer's guild," the general went on. "They are to send representatives to Argona immediately. Next week we begin retraining, using modern methods of food production." The general shook his head slightly. "How this planet ever remained in such primitive condition is beyond me."

"We don't want your improvements," Pellias said. "Rhamalai has existed for four hundred years without technological entrapments."

"A strange attitude to hold, considering all the benefits of technology." Yrros peered at the director, like an entomologist examining a new species of insect.

"This planet was settled by Cherishites," Pellias explained. "They chose to live simply, in harmony with the planet. Those beliefs are held to this day and we have laws to protect them."

"I am well aware of your planet's history, Director," General Yrros said. "The Cherishites and all who follow their ways are fools. You're nothing but a loose collection of blind idealists playing children's games. It's a wonder no one has taken over this planet until now."

"For three centuries, a Jedi master who settled with the original colonists guarded this world," Pellias answered. "He defended the planet against exploitation, and acted as a healer as well."

"A Jedi? Living for over three hundred years?" Yrros scoffed. "There are none left in the entire galaxy."

"He died about the time the Emperor came to power. Since then we have been unprotected."

"Well then, be glad you have something the Emperor values. Rhamalai now has the greater protection of the Empire."

Pellias stood behind his desk. "Yes, but who's going to protect us from you?"

In two strides Yrros crossed the room, lifted his right arm and backhanded Pellias across the face. "Guard your words, Director,

or you will soon become the worst kind of example for your people."

The general stalked to the door. He turned to Pellias again. "Talk to your leaders tonight and report to me in the morning. One day you will thank me for bringing this mud-hole of a planet into the present century." He slammed the door shut behind him.

"I sincerely doubt that, General," Pellias replied.



Lorn Moonrunner sat with his wife in their kitchen. It was late at night, the light of a single taper glowing on the table before them. The town was strangely quiet since the Imperial curfew had been enacted. Lorn drummed his fingers on the table as a Rhamalan time device ticked in the background.

"Director Pellias told me there is nothing we can do," he said at last. "Denel should be treated well enough since he's human. It's the non-human species that are forced into slavery when the Empire takes over."

"But when can we see him?" Artis asked. "Why didn't they let him leave in a normal fashion?"

Lorn took his wife's hands. "You already know the answer to that. Intimidation. Fear keeps the people under control. You've seen the procedure often enough. If Rhamalai had been a technologically advanced planet, the Imperials might have tried to woo us into the Empire with promises of power and favor. But since we're undefended, they don't hide their true nature. They just take over."

"I thought we left all that behind long ago," Artis shook her head, then gasped as a new thought struck her. "What if they interrogate Denel? What if they find out who we are?"

"Denel doesn't know," Lorn assured her. "How could he tell them anything? We both had our looks altered before he was born. And our identity files should be flawless for the price I paid."

Lorn stood up to gaze out the window. Several stormtroopers were circulating through the town, enforcing the curfew. "At least things have settled down for now," he said. "Pellias was wise to forbid any active resistance. The Imperials believe we're completely helpless."

"But we can't just sit here and do nothing."

Moonrunner returned to the table. "I agree. It's time to put our

emergency plan into action."

"Are you sure?" Artis asked. "Can we get Denel out of the garrison?"

"We'll have to get word to him somehow." He thought for a moment. "Nadra Enasteri is working there in civilian support. She's allowed in and out of the base every day. We'll need her help. And something else."

He stood and went into their bedroom with Artis following. Lorn shut the door and drew the blinds over the windows. They moved their bed aside and he knelt on the bare wooden floor.

"Hand me a bolt driver." Artis found one in a drawer.

Lorn ran his hand carefully along the floor until he felt a tiny notch cut in one edge of a floorboard. Inserting the tool into the notch, he pried the board up. He reached into the gap and brought up a small bundle. He shook off the dirt, unwrapped the object, and blew away any remaining dust.

In his hand lay a black rectangular box about fifteen centimeters long. On one end was a dark lens, less than a centimeter in diameter. Across the front were several input keys and indicator lights. With a tiny click, Lorn turned the mechanism on. It hummed faintly as several of the lights lit up.

"It still works," he said.



"General, this is highly irregular," Sergeant Droman said as he hurried along behind the base commander. "It is not standard procedure for a general to address a group of new conscripts."

"I am aware of that, Sergeant," General Yrros replied shortly. "You'll soon learn that I *originate* standard procedure."

They entered a large assembly room near the base training facilities. Ten rows of new conscripts stood at attention in their crisp, brown uniforms. Yrros strolled casually across the front of the room.

The general addressed them without preamble. "The chaos of the dying Republic was a plague throughout the Known Galaxy. The advance of that disease was arrested when Emperor Palpatine came to power, yet many malignancies remain.

"You will become the sharp instrument to lance the boils of decay and corruption. You will be the antidote to the rampant

infection which yet persists.

"To do this, you must become the most disciplined force imaginable. The Empire has no use for sloppy, weak men. You will become *strong*," he shouted the word at them, "and *disciplined*." He squeezed a gloved fist before one conscript's face. The young man flinched.

Something about this conscript seemed familiar to Yrros. "What is your name, son?" He laid a hand on the boy's shoulder, deciding to make an example of him.

The young conscript relaxed and half-smiled as he looked up into the general's face. "Denel Moonrunner, sir."

"Wrong!" Yrros yelled. "Stand at attention! Wipe that smile off your face! And don't you ever look me in the eye, boy." The general was satisfied to see the conscript's face go white as he stiffened his stance and stared straight ahead.

Yrros poked a hard finger against the boy's chest. "See this number here?" He poked the service number printed above the conscript's left pocket.

"Yes, sir!" the boy shouted without looking down.

"What is that number, soldier?" He poked it again.

"FR-231, sir."

"Do you know what it means?"

"No, sir!"

General Yrros glanced back at Sergeant Droman. "Sergeant! Tell this boy what the number means."

"Yes, sir! F stands for first, R for Rhamalai," Sergeant Droman barked. "Two hundred thirty-one is your personal number. You are the 231st conscript in the first recruitment from Rhamalai."

"Repeat the number, soldier," Yrros ordered.

"FR-231, sir!" the boy shouted.

"Louder!"

"FR-231, sir!"

"I want your dear, sweet mother back in town to hear you say it, boy!"

"FR-231, sir!" the boy screamed.

"That is your name now, soldier," Yrros poked the boy's number one last time for emphasis. "And don't you forget it."

"No, sir; uh, yes, sir!" The boy's face was red but he didn't show any emotion otherwise. Yrros nodded.

The general continued addressing the group. "This designation identifies you as a member of the New Order, a select group of men

chosen to bring direction to the aimless confusion left by the former government. It is your password into a new existence, the key to gaining respect, power, and glory! Honor it well."

Yrros surveyed the group silently for a moment. No one moved. Satisfied, he turned to the drill instructor. "Sergeant, carry on," he said.



Nadra scurried down a long corridor in the Imperial base. Maybe she could steal a few minutes for herself if she ran on the way back to her work station. She glanced behind her as she hurried. If anyone discovered what she was doing—

Thump! She ran headlong into something, knocked herself off balance, and sat down hard on the floor.

A tired voice above her said, "Oh, excuse me, I didn't see you—Nadra?"

Pushing her hair out of her eyes, she looked up. "Denel!"



"Nadra! Are you all right? What are you doing here?" Denel reached out a hand and helped her to her feet. "You came flying down the corridor so fast."

"Shh, Denel! They shouldn't see us together." Nadra grabbed his sleeve and pulled him quickly down the side corridor from which he had come.

"Nadra, I was going the other way! We can't—"

Nadra clamped a hand over his mouth and dragged Denel toward a maintenance access closet. Glancing in both directions, she opened the door and pulled him inside. There was just room for the two of them amidst the piping and conduits. A status readout panel's blinking lights gave the closet an eerie glow.

Before Denel could say another word, Nadra threw her arms around him. "I'm so glad to see you!" she whispered fiercely.

"Me too." He said, yawning.

She looked up into his face. "You don't sound too enthusiastic. What's the matter?"

"Oh, sorry." Denel stifled another yawn. "I'm exhausted. I've slept less than five hours each night since I got here." He rubbed his eyes, then peered down, noticing her light blue uniform. "Civilian support, huh? I wonder how many people they left to run the town."

"Denel, listen," she said. "I need your help."

"Sure. What's up?"

"I just got word today. I've been trying to figure out what to do." Suddenly tears filled her eyes and clogged her voice. "My mother's scheduled to be terminated, tomorrow."

"What!" Her news shocked Denel fully awake. "Why?"

"She was brought in for treatment. Her condition is incurable, a genetic defect, they said." She could hardly choke out the words. "She'll only get worse and be in a lot of pain. It could drag on for years." The tears flowed freely down her face. "They said it's better to spare her the misery and humiliation."

"Oh, Nadra," Denel whispered.

"She seemed to be getting better, but they said it's no use. They'll let me visit briefly tomorrow, at 0800 hours. Then she'll be 'mercifully eliminated.'" Nadra broke down, sobbing quietly.

Denel cradled her in his arms. "Shh, Nadra. There must be something we can do." He was silent for a minute.

"Hey, listen. I have an idea." He shook her gently and lifted her chin. "I think there's a chance, but we haven't much time. Can you get access to a data terminal?"

"Yes." She calmed herself, wiping the tears on her sleeve. "I'm being trained to use them in my work. Why?"

"Perfect. We can get your mother and me out of here at the same time."

"But, I thought you wanted to be in the service?"

Denel sighed and looked away. "I believed the propaganda about the benevolence of the Empire. My father tried to tell me otherwise, but he would never explain why he distrusted Imperials. He once told me they record their own acts of war, then alter the evidence to place blame on the Rebels. I thought Dad was crazy, but, well, how else could they get those gruesome indoctrination vids we're forced to watch?" He shuddered. "And now this thing with your mother... I'm getting out. We'll need my father's help."

"Your father?" Nadra shook her head. "He can't fight an entire garrison."

"Just listen," Denel returned. "Go to my father tonight. I'll have things in place by the time you return in the morning. Now, here's what we're going to do."



Captain Tosh stood at attention before General Yrros's desk, waiting for the general to acknowledge his presence.

"You wished to see me, Captain?" Yrros said at last, looking up from his datascreen.

"Yes, sir," Tosh answered. "I'm concerned about the security situation. The sensory net to monitor civilian movements has not been completed, and the current security codes have not been entered into the main computer system. Even the heavy artillery targeting programs have not been installed yet."

"You do read your memos, don't you, Captain?" Yrros drawled.

"Yes, sir, every one."

"Then you're aware," the general went on, "that our top priority is to get food to our troops as soon as possible. All other tasks are secondary."

Captain Tosh couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Secondary? Even security? We'd be nearly defenseless if the Rhamalians chose to attack."

General Yrros keyed in a few more commands, then waited for the computer's response. He turned back to his security officer.

"Think for a minute, Captain. This planet was settled by a fanatical group of technophobes. These people have nothing but the most primitive weapons, there are no transports or communications to monitor, they have no technical knowledge to speak of. These techno-idiots cower like frightened coneys before us. One stormtrooper with a blaster rifle would be enough to strike terror in the hearts of the whole population."

"Yes, sir," the captain said, shifting from one foot to the other and back again.

"I can see you're uncomfortable without all your little toys in place," the general scoffed. "Let me assure you, it won't be much longer. In another day or two, more technicians will be available to complete the security net. Then you may activate all the technological terrors you need to protect yourself. Until that time, just stay alert."

"Yes, sir," Tosh replied.

"Dismissed, Captain." The general turned back to his datascreen as the security chief exited quietly.

"Now, where was I?" Yrros muttered to himself. "Ah, yes." A listing of the planet's citizens came up on the screen. He began to key in a request for a second list—the Empire's most wanted criminals. "Now, let's see if this planet holds any secrets."



"Our name is not really Moonrunner," Lorn told Nadra as they discussed Denel's plan in the Moonrunner's sitting room that night.

"We had to change our identities before we came to Rhamalai sixteen years ago," Artis explained. "We thought this planet was so remote, so undeveloped, that the Empire would never bother coming here."

Nadra looked from one to the other. "Well, who are you then?"

Lorn cleared his throat. "Perhaps it's best if you don't know everything yet. Let's just say I know a lot about the Imperial Army. General Yrros would like very much to get his hands on me, if he knew who I was."

Nadra was speechless.

Lorn changed the subject. "You know that our family came to Rhamalai when Denel was very young."

"Yes," Nadra agreed.

"And you know of the Rhamalian laws which guard against the spread of any off-planet technologies travelers bring with them. If a newcomer wishes to stay on Rhamalai, he must destroy his ship, his weapons and any other devices he may have."

Nadra nodded.

"When our family came here and decided to stay," Lorn went on, "we were told to dismantle our ship. But we didn't."

Nadra thought her heart had stopped. "You have a starship?" she gasped. "Where?"

"The *Refugee* is hidden in the Great Forest Valley."

"That's twenty kilometers west of here."

"Since Denel was nine years old, we've been taking trips out to the ship, and flying it occasionally. Denel's quite a good pilot, and gunner."

"That's why I could never come along on your family outings to the Valley!"

Lorn nodded. "We also have an Artoo unit aboard." He held up a small black box, stroking it lightly with his thumb. "This remote activates and sends commands to the droid."

"The what?"

"The droid," Lorn chuckled. "Droids are self-aware, intelligent machines. Artoo-Forbee is our droid's designation. He handles navigation and repairs, and can store all kinds of data, project holographic messages—"

"Holo-what?" Nadra interrupted.

Lorn sighed and sat back against the cushions. "We don't really have time to explain all this." He thought for a minute.

"Here's what we're going to do. I've already activated Forbee. He's on his way here with a couple of...safety devices. As soon as it's dark, Artis and I will ride Chaser to the *Refugee*. We'll intercept Forbee and send him to meet you at the edge of town. At his top speed, he should arrive just before dawn. We will continue on to the ship and get it ready for take-off."

"But what do I do with the...droid?" Nadra wasn't sure she liked this idea.

"Patience," Lorn patted her shoulder. "I'll explain everything, but time is short."



Her Imperial-issue chronometer read 0745 as Nadra approached the main gate with Forbee at her heels. "You there," one of the two guards shouted at her, "What are you doing with that droid?"

A prickle of sweat sprang up on her forehead. "You must be behind in your droid maintenance schedules," she replied with forced confidence. "This one obviously picked up a glitch. I found him wandering around town on my way here. Do you want me to take him to maintenance?"

Nadra held her breath as the guard examined the droid. She hoped the Imperial markings were authentic.

"Hmm. It has a standard restraining bolt. I don't have a report of a droid missing, but it's one of ours all right." He grinned at Nadra. "Unless you've been hiding an Imperial droid here for years," he laughed. He scanned Nadra lazily with a hand-held weapons detector.

Nadra smiled grimly. "Just direct me to maintenance," she said as the guard motioned her through the gate.

"Corridor A, level three." He dismissed her with a wave. As she moved on, Nadra heard him complaining to his companion. "If the security sensors were activated, we wouldn't lose stray droids like that."

As Nadra entered the base she motioned Forbee aside. She scanned the corridor. So far, all clear. "All right, let's have it," she whispered. From the top of the droid's black, domed head, a small datacard popped out. Nadra hid it in her sleeve. "Give me five minutes, then come to my work station. You remember the coordinates?"

Forbee's whistling reply sounded annoyed.

"Okay, I'm sorry," Nadra apologized. "I'm not used to working with droids. Just look busy. I won't be long." She left him in the corridor.

Her supervisor was busy with another trainee when she arrived. Checking to see that no one was watching, Nadra slipped the datacard into a port on her terminal. She keyed in a command, then removed the card and hid it again.

Suddenly her screen showed nothing but gibberish. The terminal beeped and squawked every time she hit a key.

"Having a problem?" the gray-haired, grim-faced supervisor asked as she strolled over.

"Uh, yes, ma'am," Nadra was quick to answer. "It just started. Shall I call for a repair droid?"

The woman punched a few keys with no result. "Yes. And be quick about it. We have a lot of data to process. General Yrros wants the last of these census records in the system today."

Nadra faked a call to maintenance, then sat back to wait. Two minutes later, Forbee appeared. He rolled up to her terminal and extended his coupling link to the interface jack. As Forbee clicked and hummed busily, Nadra hovered over the screen, blocking it from view. She saw Denel's personnel file appear. In the blink of an eye, Denel became a med-tech assigned to the infirmary.

Nadra slipped the datacard back into Forbee as he worked. She glanced at her chronometer. "It's time for me to visit my mother," she reminded the supervisor.

"Don't take all morning. You're expected back here by 0830. You weren't given that chronometer on your wrist just for looks, you know."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"I swear, training you Rhamalians to keep a schedule is impossible..." Her shrill voice drifted off as she stalked away.

Forbee continued working. Nadra gave him a quick pat as she passed.



Denel arrived at the medical unit just minutes before 0800. The med-tech on duty was completing her log entries at the central console before the shift change. She glanced up, a stern look on her round face, as Denel approached. Denel hoped he was wearing the stolen uniform correctly.

"Ah, Tech FR-231. You're a few minutes early. Promptness aids advancement."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Denel.

She punched up the duty roster on the screen. "Your first assignment is to take patient 89B11 to the termination room. You know where that is?"

"Yes, ma'am. Patient 89B11 to the termination room. Is the room prepped for use?" Denel hoped he sounded knowledgeable.

"Everything's ready. The patient has been tranquilized. You know the procedure?"

"Yes, ma'am. I've done it before." Denel's heart pounded. If she asked him any detailed questions...

"Very good," she replied. "The patient's daughter is to be allowed a short visit before termination. Don't let her prolong the parting. It's only more painful for both of them that way." She went back to her log entries as Denel breathed a sigh of relief.

Entering Charis's room, he saw that Nadra was already there. She was talking quietly to her mother, explaining what they were about to do.

"Do you think it will work?" Charis worried. "I don't see how we can get away from here. There are so many stormtroopers."

"We can't out-fight them, but we can out-think them," Denel answered. "The Imperials don't consider us a threat. Security is very relaxed right now. Just follow the plan and we'll be fine."

He glanced at Nadra. "It's time. Let's go." He lifted Charis and placed her on a repulsorlift stretcher. "Come on, Nadra. You take one side, I'll take the other." They slowly guided the stretcher out the door and down the hall toward the duty station.

When they rounded the corner, Denel gulped nervously. "Oh, no," he whispered. "The station tech from the night shift is still there." He listened for a moment. "She's giving a report to the incoming tech. I hope she hasn't mentioned Charis's termination yet." They slowed their steps as they approached.

The night tech noticed them. "Oh, yes," she began, speaking to the young man on day shift. "This is patient 89B11. She is scheduled for—"

An intermittent buzzing interrupted her as an indicator light began to flash on the station's status console.

"Medical emergency in hangar bay four," the night-duty tech explained. "Just get the rest of the report from the logs," she said as she hurried away.

Nadra and Denel looked at each other. "Forbee?" Nadra mouthed the word noiselessly. Denel shrugged.

The day-duty tech looked over the small group carefully. "Where are you taking this woman?" he asked.

"Patient 89B11 is scheduled for release today," Denel answered guardedly. "My orders are to bring these two to the surface vehicle bay and escort them home in a landspeeder."

The young man gazed into Charis's face. "She doesn't look well enough to go home. Let me confirm that." He punched a few keys, as Denel held his breath. "Her file won't come up," he muttered trying the procedure again.

"Come on, Forbee," Nadra whispered.

The station tech grunted. "Here it is now." He scanned Charis's file quickly. "You're cleared for release, ma'am. I hope you make a quick recovery at home."

"Thank you," Charis replied as Denel and Nadra began moving her down the corridor again.

When they arrived at the vehicle bay, Denel stopped just outside the entry. "We almost lost the game back there. We have to convince them that you're nearly well. Can you get up and walk?" he asked.

"I think so," Charis answered.

"Try to look stronger," Denel urged. "Can you make it across the bay to the speeders?"

"She's too weak, Denel—" Nadra said.

"No, it's all right, Nadra," Charis answered. "I can do it. Take my arm." Nadra helped her mother to her feet, as Denel stashed the stretcher in a supply closet.

They made it half-way across the cavernous vehicle bay before they were stopped. "Where are you going?" the sergeant in charge growled as he stalked up to them.

"I have orders to take these two home in a landspeeder, sir," Denel replied.

"Confirmed," the man said, punching the information into his datapad. "Speeder A23 is available." The sergeant pointed to the far side of the bay.

"Uh, I thought we could just take this one," Denel nodded his head toward a speeder no more than four meters in front of them. "It's much closer."

"You can take A23," the man insisted.

"But, this one's available and it's closer." Denel felt a sense of panic. If his carefully laid plans were upset now...

The supervisor towered over Denel. "I said—"

"Ohhh," Charis groaned as she fainted away to the floor.

"Mother! Mother!" Nadra knelt over her.

"What's the matter with her?" The sergeant shrank away from Charis.

"Nothing!" Denel snapped at him. "She's just barely recovered from an illness and needs to get home to rest." He glared at the man.

"All right. Take the closer speeder," the man relented, tossing a key card to Denel. "Just get her out of my area." He grimaced at Charis and stalked away.

Denel bent over Charis. To his surprise she opened her eyes and

whispered brightly, "How's my acting?"

It was all Denel could do to stifle a laugh. "Come on, let's go." He carried Charis the rest of the way to the landspeeder and placed her carefully in the back seat. He sat down at the controls with Nadra next to him.



General Yrros scanned his datascreen, deep in thought. He hoped checking the backgrounds of Rhamalian citizens would reveal a few criminals wanted by the Empire. So far, his hunch had not panned out. He decided to try the next person on the list before giving up. He tapped a few keys.

On his screen flashed a likeness of Lorn Moonrunner. Yrros read over the man's history. Nothing out of the ordinary here. But something nagged at him. The name sounded familiar. Ah, that was it. That new conscript he had used as an example the other day. His name was Moonrunner. He read the screen again. Yes, Denel Moonrunner is the son.

Yrros keyed in the conscript's file. Denel's picture came up next to that of his father. Again the general was struck with a sense of familiarity as he looked at Denel's face. Odd, he thought, the son looks nothing like the father, but looks like someone I've seen before.

Suddenly he knew. He punched in another command. Denel's likeness disappeared and Lorn's enlarged. Yrros tapped a few more keys. On the screen, Lorn Moonrunner's beard disappeared, his hair turned several shades darker, and his face narrowed considerably. A message flashed at the bottom of the screen.

"Identity match confirmed," Yrros read aloud. "Major Corvus Langlier," he chuckled contentedly. "I've been looking for you for a long time."

He thought for a moment, then flipped a switch on his intercom. "Major Vedder."

"Yes, sir," the voice came over the speaker.

"Locate Conscript FR-231. I want him brought to my office immediately."

"Yes, sir," came the reply. "Getting his location now, sir." The major was silent for a moment. "Uh, General Yrros?"

"Problem, Major?"



"Conscript FR-231 is on assignment, sir."

"On assignment?" Yrros questioned. "Major, fresh conscripts don't get assigned duties."

"Yes, sir, but the roster shows he's on med-tech duty. Transporting a newly released patient—"

"What!" The general jumped to his feet, knocking his chair backward. "Major, locate that man immediately! Do not let him off the base. Repeat, do not let him escape!"



Nadra breathed a sigh of relief as they cleared the gate. They were on their way. She turned to grin at her mother, but the smile died abruptly.

"Denel!" she shrieked. "Stormtroopers are running toward the gates!"

Just then the two guards at the gate opened fire.

"Get down!" yelled Denel as red laser bolts zipped past.

Several bolts hit their vehicle's engine compartment, and their velocity abruptly dropped.

Denel pulled the speeder behind a stand of large trees about thirty meters beyond the gate. "Here. You drive." He scrambled out while pulling Nadra into the driver's seat.

"But, I don't know how!"

"Don't argue. Hit the accelerator with your foot, steer with this," He placed her hands on the steering mechanism. "Take your mother and get out of here. I'll cover you." He pulled two blaster rifles from under the passenger seat.

"How did those get—?"

"No time to explain." Denel shoved a small cylinder into her hand. "Here's a comlink. Call the *Refugee*, they'll pick you up." He showed her how to switch it on and gave her a hard kiss. "Now, go!"

"But, Denel!"

"Go!" He shouted over his shoulder as he began to return fire, holding the stormtroopers back at the gate.

Nadra turned, hit the accelerator, and fled.



"They're powering up the big guns! We don't have much time!" Artis Moonrunner shouted to her husband from the co-pilot's seat of the *Refugee* as she listened in on General Yrros's command frequency.

"Better contact Denel now, before we get in visual range." Lorn concentrated on flying the modified yacht. The *Refugee* had never been tested in battle, and it had been years since he'd been in a fight.

Artis switched frequencies. "Denel? Son, can you hear me?"



The landspeeder limped along at half speed as Nadra entered the town. She zigzagged through a maze of streets and alleys, attempting to throw off any pursuit. She sped to the far edge of town before pulling into an abandoned stable. She jumped out and shut the huge door behind them.

All at once the little device in her hand squealed. Nadra twisted

its two halves until the squealing stopped.

"Hello?" she spoke into one end of it. "Hello? Can anyone hear me?"

"Nadra! Is that you? Where's Denel?"

Nadra was startled to hear Artis Moonrunner. "Denel's trapped in a stand of trees, just outside the garrison gate," she blurted into the small cylinder. "You have to rescue him!"

"But where are you, dear? Describe your location."

Artis's concern touched her, but Nadra cared more about saving Denel right now. "Just go get Denel. Mother and I are safe for now." She turned off the comlink to prevent any further argument.



"She switched us off!" Artis breathed, incredulous. "I can't locate her without a signal!"

"I guess we'll have to pick up Denel first," Lorn replied. "How long before the base turbolasers are ready to fire?" The *Refugee* skimmed over the last of the trees and came in low over the town. He could see blaster bolts flying between the garrison gate and a stand of trees nearby. Denel must still be alive.

Artis pressed the headset tightly against her ear, listening to General Yrros scream his commands. "Another two minutes until they're fully powered up." She listened a bit longer. "They've spotted us! They're scrambling the fighters!"

"I hope Forbee can complete his mission," Lorn muttered. "We won't hold out long against a squadron of TIE fighters."

He dove the *Refugee* low over the gates, flattening the stormtroopers against the ground. "I'm going to put her down right between Denel and that gate," Lorn barked. "You get ready to open the hatch while I keep them busy with the laser cannon." As the *Refugee* turned to land, Lorn opened fire with everything the ship had. He didn't even try to aim. Keeping those troops down was all that mattered. If only he could hold off their growing numbers.



When General Yrros entered the hangar deck, he noted that three TIE fighters were already being lifted to the flight deck at the

top of the garrison. "Get those lifts moving faster," he shouted to the deck officer. "We need those fighters in the air, now!"

The three lifts disappeared into the ceiling of the hangar deck where the fighters would be readied for takeoff. The general strode into the flight control center. "Are the tractor beams set for launch sequence?" he growled at the captain seated there.

"Yes, sir," the officer answered. "The pilots are powering up now. Ready for takeoff."

"Launch fighters." General Yrros watched three blips appear on the screen as the TIE fighters took off. The lifts began to descend for another load. He walked to the doorway of the control station. "Hurry it up there!" he shouted at the troops directing small tractor beams to move the fighters along the ceiling tracks to the lifts.

Just then, something bumped against his left leg. Yrros looked down. "What's this R2 unit doing here?" He turned to a trooper seated nearby. "Corporal. Take this droid down to maintenance. It's obviously malfunctioning."

"Yes, sir." The corporal examined the droid. "R2-4B, follow me." The little droid didn't respond. It bumped against the general again.

"It's got a restraining bolt. Go get a controller," General Yrros snapped at him. He watched as three more fighters were lifted to the flight deck.

The corporal returned quickly with the controller in hand. He aimed it at the droid's restraining bolt and pushed the power switch. But, instead of deactivating the droid, a small red indicator light on the restraining bolt began blinking rapidly.

"What's this?" The general bent down to examine it more closely. "This isn't a standard restraining bolt. It's...it's a detonator!"

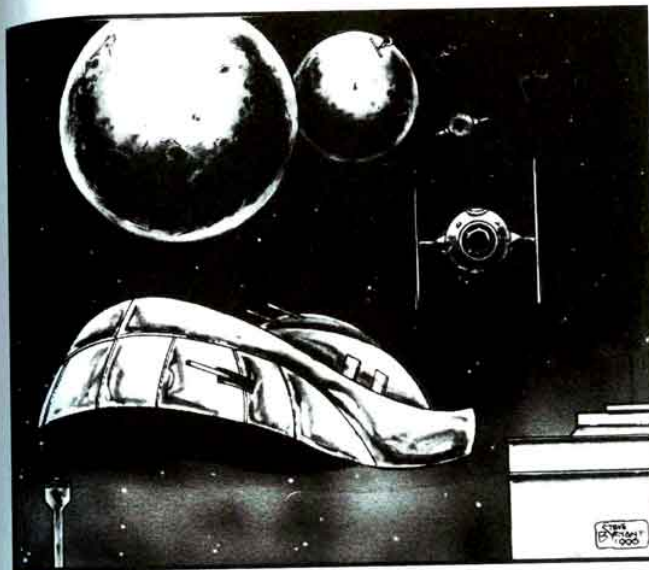


Denel saw the *Refugee* sweeping the gates with laser fire. Her hatch yawned open before the ship fully landed. He scrambled to his feet and ran up the ramp, leaving the blaster rifles behind.

They were in the air in seconds and Denel made his way up to the cockpit. "Just in time, Dad," he said, panting. "A couple of hovercrafts were leaving the vehicle bay."

"I saw them," his father said as they flew back toward town.

"We've got to locate Nadra," Denel added. "Can you get her on the comlink?"



"I'll try." His mother put on the comm headset again.

At that moment, three TIE fighters blasted into their airspace, shaking the ship from side to side.

"Shields up!" Lorn shouted. "Denel, take the laser cannon!"

Denel hurried to the aft gun turret. He adjusted the ship's intercom headset over his ears, and began tracking one fighter in the gun's sights. "Here goes!" he shouted. Blinding laser bolts hit the fighter amidships. The barrage blew the TIE out of the sky, but in the wake of the explosion came more fighters.

"Three more, Dad!" Denel shouted.

In the cockpit an indicator light came to life on the control panel. "Forbee's been activated!" Lorn hollered. He flipped the ship on its side and did a sharp turn back toward the base. "Timing's going to be close for this." He flew low over top of the garrison, the TIE fighters hot on their drive trails. The base turbolasers were tracking the *Refugee*, but with the fighters so close, they couldn't risk a shot. The ship passed over the base unharmed.

Suddenly a geyser of flame and black smoke erupted into the air, disintegrating the top levels of the garrison base. One TIE fighter

was caught in the explosion and obliterated.

Lorn struggled to keep control of the ship as the shock waves hit. "Forbee did it!" Denel hollered through the intercom.

Lorn tried to throw the remaining TIE fighters off, but they could maneuver faster than the *Refugee*. He wondered how long his shield modifications would hold out.

Artis struggled with the comlink. "Nadra! Come in, Nadra. If you can hear me, please respond!"



From the doorway of the stable, Nadra pointed the landspeeder in the direction of the Imperial base. "Stand back, Mother. I'm going to let it go." She set the controls on what she hoped was autopilot, punched the initiator and hopped out. The two watched as it flew in a straight line for several seconds, then crashed into an abandoned warehouse, exploding in a huge fireball. "I hope that convinces the Imperials not to look for us," Nadra muttered.

As she switched on the comlink again, Nadra heard the sounds of battle over the tiny speaker. Suddenly a heavy blast rocked the old barn from side to side, spilling dust on their heads. "Oh, no!" Nadra moaned.

Artis's desperate voice, came on the heels of the blast "Nadra, can you hear me?"

Hope shot through Nadra's veins. "We hear you, *Refugee*. We're safe for now."

All at once, Denel's voice broke in. "Nadra, give us your location. We'll try to pick you up!"

"Denel, you have to forget about us," she said firmly. "It's you and your family the Empire wants." Nadra's eyes filled with tears. "Just leave. Get out of here!"

There was no response for a few seconds, but Nadra could hear the ship's guns blasting away at the Imperial fighters. The stable rattled and shook as the *Refugee* flew directly overhead, with the TIE fighters in close pursuit.

"Nadra, I'm not going to leave you. Give us a minute to locate your signal." She could hear the desperation in Denel's voice.

"We'll be all right. I know a place to hide," she responded. "Leave us and get yourselves to safety."

"Nadra, please!"

"Don't argue with me, Denel," she insisted, squeezing the comlink tightly. "There's no time. I won't tell you where we are. Just go!"

"Nadra," Denel's voice squeaked with emotion. "Take Chaser, and anything else you need. It's all yours."

"Take care of yourself and your family." Nadra wiped the tears running down her cheeks.

"I'll come back, Nadra. I'll come back when I can—"

Nadra switched off the comlink and dropped it to the dirt floor. With one swift stomp she smashed it under her heel.

The two women stared at each other for a minute. "Let's go, Mother."



Denel threw himself back against the gunner's seat in the aft turret. All his frustrations boiled to the surface. He screamed a fierce battle-cry as he caught another TIE fighter in his sights and blasted it. He succeeded in blowing away its port solar array, sending it spinning out of control.

The *Refugee* took a direct hit. "We can't make the jump to light speed in time!" shouted Artis. "They'll have our shields down before we can get away!"

"I've got one more trick up my sleeve," Lorn yelled back. "You take the ship. I need the comm system for this." Artis took over the controls as Lorn frantically slapped switches. "If I can just—"

Another blast pounded the ship.

"Shields are going down!" Artis hollered.

Lorn hammered out another signal. Suddenly the sound of blazing laser cannons ceased. Only the scream of the engines could be heard.

"Dad! The cannon won't fire!" Denel yelled through the intercom.

"It's all right, son," Lorn answered. "They can't fire back at us either." He resumed control of the ship. "The nav computer has the coordinates. Let's get out of here. Ready for hyperspace?" Lorn eased the hyperdrive controls forward, and the *Refugee* disappeared in a flash of light.



As they made their way slowly from Argona, Nadra saw four dark specks rising swiftly into the sky. When they were almost too small to see, the lead speck flashed and was gone. The defeated TIE fighters headed back toward base. "They got away, Mother," she breathed shakily. "I can feel it. They got away."



"How'd you do that?" Denel asked as he entered the cockpit. His father laughed and tapped his forehead. "A little program I was developing years ago, using comm signals as a remote guidance system for TIE fighters."

Lorn rolled his shoulders and stretched to relieve the tension. "Took the program with me when I left the Empire. Someone was wise enough to delete the recognition sub-routine from the core memory to the fighters' controls, but nobody knew I programmed a sequence to deactivate the weapons systems. Pretty effective." Lorn grinned at his family.

"Too bad we can't use it again," Denel said. "They'll figure out what happened in no time."

"Right," Lorn agreed. "I'm surprised they're still using the same firing command codes."

"And since the *Refugee's* weapons are Imperial issue, they shut down too."

"Right again son." They were silent for a few moments.

"Dad?"

"Yes, Denel."

"We will come back, when we can. Won't we?"

Lorn turned to look at him. "We'll do everything we can, son. I promise."



Charis Enasteri looked out the cottage window, across the yard to the paddock. She smiled as she watched Nadra feed handfuls of sweet grass to the black gorset. After her short experience under the Imperials, Nadra had shown signs of strength and insight. *She's going to be like her father after all*, Charis thought.

She pondered that fact as she observed her daughter. Somehow Nadra had known this abandoned cottage, only two days' journey from Argona, was a place the Imperials would never look for them.

The past weeks had been so peaceful, Charis felt she could finally relax. Her frightening dreams had stopped. Her health had improved, though she knew it was only temporary. They were happy here and Charis felt a return of hope. Perhaps some day Nadra would find her father.

"Neth," she whispered into the air, "your daughter needs you."

Roleplaying Game Statistics

Denel Moonrunner



Type: Hard working student

DEXTERITY 3D

Bows: short bow 3D+2, running 3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Planetary systems: Rhamalai 4D, survival: forests 4D, value: Rhamalan trade system 3D+2

MECHANICAL 4D

Beast riding: gorsets 4D+2, starship gunnery:

laser cannon 5D

PERCEPTION 2D

Search 3D, sneak: forests 2D+2

STRENGTH 3D

Climbing/jumping 3D+2, stamina 3D+1

TECHNICAL 4D

Starship weapon repair: laser cannon 4D+2

This character is Force-sensitive.

Force points: 1

Character points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Archaic woodcarving tools: chisel, file, knife, leather belt pouch

Capsule: Denel Moonrunner is 18 years old, 1.8 meters tall, with shaggy brown hair and clear gray-blue eyes. He has always been open and friendly, especially enjoying the company of Nadra Enasteri, his friend and neighbor since childhood. He enjoys target practice with her, using short bows he carved himself. As children they often played search and sneak in the forests on the west edge of Argona.

Denel sometimes feels unexplained urges, and gets premonitions of future events. His father's dismissal of those events taught Denel to keep them to himself. His dream was to attend the Raithal Army Academy, and he studied hard to that end, in spite of his father's discouragement. Denel was idealistic enough to believe he could change things, make a real difference in Imperial policy. When he got a taste of army life, however, reality ripped apart his dreams. He still hopes to make a difference somehow.

General Naem Yrros



Type: Imperial Base Commander

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 5D, blaster artillery 4D+2, missile weapons 4D+2

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Bureaucracy: Imperial 6D, intimidation 6D, law enforcement 5D+2, tactics: ground assault 6D, willpower 7D

MECHANICAL 4D

Ground vehicle operation: compact assault vehicle 5D, walker operation: AT-AT 6D

PERCEPTION 2D+2

Command 4D, persuasion 4D

STRENGTH 2D+1

Stamina 4D

TECHNICAL 2D

Blaster repair: blaster artillery 5D, ground vehicle repair 5D

Force points: 1

Dark side points: 3

Character Points: 15

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), comlink, datapad

Capsule: Naem Yrros has been a career Army man for most of his 54 years. He attended the Raithal Academy, taking top honors in his class and rising swiftly through the ranks thereafter. As a youth, Yrros's grim, unwavering dedication to his goals won him few friends, but much fearful respect, even from his superiors.

Yrros prefers to keep his feet on the ground and secretly distrusts space flight. He has a particular fondness for heavy artillery and is considered a brilliant tactician in ground assault operations. He has just recently been promoted to base commander.

Yrros is highly intelligent, though somewhat blinded by numerous prejudices. He considers the operation on Rhamalai to be beneath his capabilities. He wants only to complete the Rhamalian objective as quickly as possible, in hopes that he can move on to more active assault operations.

Nadra Enasteri



Type: Youthful Dreamer

DEXTERITY 3D

Bows: short bow 3D+2, thrown weapons: sling 3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Languages: ancient Zimchai 5D, willpower 4D+1

MECHANICAL 3D

Beast riding: gorsets 4D

PERCEPTION 3D

Search 3D+2, sneak: forests 3D+2

STRENGTH 2D

Swimming 3D

TECHNICAL 3D

First aid: humans 4D

This character is Force-sensitive.

Force points: 1

Character points: 8

Move: 10

Equipment: First aid guide, leather belt pouch, leather sling

Capsule: Nadra Enasteri is a petite seventeen-year-old with soft brown eyes and

golden-brown hair. She hasn't yet discovered most of her abilities, and sometimes feels unsure of herself. Her favorite activities are target practice with her close friend Denel, using Rhamalian slings or short bows, and riding bareback on Denel's pet gorset, Chaser.

She is idealistic—a dreamer—but very conscientious and loyal to family and friends. She has dedicated her young life to taking care of her dying mother, and is developing strength in self-sacrifice. She wants to attend the Bellorin Medical Academy on Seitia Prime, but has had to sacrifice her plans to care for her mother. Instead, Nadra has studied first aid at home, even mastering ancient Zimchai, the ancient language in which most medical and scientific terms are written. At times she resents her situation, but when she sees her mother in deep pain, and struggling to be less of a burden, Nadra's sense of care and compassion is renewed.

Lorn Moonrunner (Major Corvus Langlier)

Type: Trade Bureaucrat/Imperial Defector

DEXTERITY 2D+2

Bows: longbow 5D

KNOWLEDGE 3D+1

Bureaucracy: Imperial 6D, planetary systems: Rhamalai 6D, value: Rhamalian trade system 7D, willpower 6D

MECHANICAL 3D

Beast riding: gorsets 4D+1, space transports: SoroSuub 1550 space yacht 6D, starship gunnery 5D

PERCEPTION 4D

Bargain 6D, command 5D, persuasion 5D

STRENGTH 3D

Stamina 5D

TECHNICAL 4D

Computer programming/repair 7D, droid programming 6D+2, space transports repair: SoroSuub 1550 space yacht 6D+2

Force Points: 1

Dark Side Points: 1

Character Points: 12

Move: 10

Equipment: Barter and trade Rhamalian value guide, leather knapsack

Capsule: Lorn Moonrunner grew up in a poor family on an Imperial world. He loved the sense of control and order the Empire brought to his world. He admired the soldiers and officers he saw daily, and was able to attend the Raithal Army Academy through a scholarship program.

As a cadet majoring in computer programming, he heard stories of Naem Yrros and was overjoyed when he was assigned to work at the same base with the Academy legend. But as Lorn advanced to higher rank, he was exposed more and more to the cruel, dictatorial methods of the Empire. Working within the Department of Military Research he designed a program to remotely control TIE fighters and bombers. When Lorn discovered his program was to be used to obliterate planets which proved highly resistant to Imperial takeover, he defected from the Army, taking his untested program with him.

Recently he has worked as head of the Fair Value Control Department in the Planetary Trade Center on Rhamalai.

Rhamalian Gorset (Chaser)

Type: Equestrian herbivore

DEXTERITY 2D

Running 5D

PERCEPTION 3D

Search 4D+2

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 4D, jumping 4D+2, stamina 5D

Special Abilities:

Hooves: Do STR+1D damage.

Teeth: Do 2D damage.

Sense of smell: Gorsets have sensitive olfactory organs, allowing them to track scents (+1D to all search rolls involving the sense of smell).

Move: 18

Size: 1.4–1.6 meters at shoulder, 550–750 kg

Orneriness: 2D

Capsule: Gorsets are swift-running, hoofed herbivores native to Rhamalai. They are herd animals, roaming the plains in groups from five to 200. They are covered in tightly curled hair, extremely short on the body, but quite long at the neck and tail. They range in color from white to black, but most commonly are a uniform golden brown, blending in with the dry grasses of the Rhamalian plains.

Gorsets were easily domesticated by the original colonists. They are used for transport and provide the power to run most Rhamalian farm machinery. As beasts of burden, gorsets are capable of carrying 150–200 kilograms.

Adventure Idea

It is the day following the escape of Denel Moonrunner from the Imperial base on Rhamalai. Levels seven and eight of the base have been completely destroyed by the explosion, level six severely damaged. The remaining Imperial officers have tightened security in and around the base, but the situation is still somewhat chaotic.

The characters are Rhamalian conscripts being held in the Imperial base. They have been inspired by the fantastic escape of Denel Moonrunner and have concluded that they will not meekly submit to conscription. They are seeking a way to free themselves before they are shipped to a central training facility, one week hence.

Remember that native Rhamalians have little technological knowledge. However, they are adept at making and using primitive weapons, forest survival skills, beast riding, and bartering.

The Refugee

Craft: SoroSuub 1550-LEX
Type: Modified space yacht
Scale: Starfighter
Length: 30.4 meters
Skill: Space transports: SoroSuub 1550
Crew: 2, gunners: 1, skeleton 1/+10
Crew Skill: Astrogation 4D, space transports 4D, sensors 3D, starship gunnery 5D, starship shields 3D
Passengers: 6
Cargo Capacity: 25 metric tons
Consumables: 2 months
Cost: Not available for sale
Hyperdrive Multiplier: x1
Hyperdrive Backup: x12
Nav Computer: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D+2
Space: 6
Atmosphere: 340; 1,000 kmh
Hull: 4D+2
Shields: 2D+2
Sensors:
Passive: 25/1D
Scan: 50/2D
Search: 65/2D+2
Focus: 3/3D
Weapons:
1 Laser Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Scale: Starfighter
Skill: Starship gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1-5/15/30
Atmosphere Range: 100-500/1/2 km
Damage: 4D+2
2 Proton Torpedo Launchers
Fire Arc: Front
Scale: Starfighter
Skill: Starship gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1/3/7
Atmosphere Range: 50-100/300/700 m
Damage: 8D

Capsule: The SoroSuub 1550 is a mid-sized luxury yacht, once popular in wealthy circles. It has two decks. The lower engineering deck also contains a small cargo hold in the bow. The upper deck contains the cockpit, four luxury cabins, a well-appointed galley and dining space, as well as a state-of-the-art recreation lounge, complete with sonic whirlpool and transparisteel observation dome.

When Lorn Moonrunner left the Empire he substantially modified

his yacht, renaming it *Refugee* as befitted his status. Two proton torpedo launchers have been installed in the cargo hold. Also, the whirlpool has been drained and covered over with deck plates, concealing a space large enough to hold four people comfortably. The overhead observation dome has been replaced by a laser cannon turret. Lorn also modified the hyperdrive and sublight engines, shields, sensors, and hull to near-peak capability, making this seemingly frivolous personal yacht into a formidable starfighter.

Rhamalai

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type 1 (breathable)
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Forests, plains, mountains
Length of Day: 30 standard hours
Length of Year: 246 local days
Sapient Species: Humans
Starport: None/Imperial base
Population: 11 million
Planet function: Separatist society, agriculture
Government: Communal/Representative
Tech level: Feudal/Pre-industrial
Major Exports: None
Major Imports: None

Capsule: When a group of religio-political dissenters called Cherishites wished to break away from the Republic and form an independent, non-technological society, they were given the planet Rhamalai to colonize. Refusing contact with the rest of the Republic, the settlers were mostly forgotten.

The original 500 colonists began their society as an experiment in communal living, surviving off the land in harmony with nature as their beliefs dictated. As the population grew, groups of settlers broke away to form new villages. Over its 400-year history, the economy of Rhamalai has changed from primitive subsistence (still common in outlying areas) to a pre-industrial society governed by a complex system of guilds whose members own their trade or industry cooperatively. Only recently have Rhamalians begun to think globally, electing Argona as their capital city, and endorsing a Planetary Trade Directorate to facilitate a fair trade and barter economy.

Rhamalai is ideal for agriculture and animal husbandry. Trades such as stoneworking, metalworking, and carpentry are also common. The terrain includes richly forested lowlands and river valleys, high mesa plains where rainfall is less abundant, and lightly forested mountain ranges.

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Scouts' Dispatch

From the datafiles of Captain Korren Starchaser, New Republic Scout:

Two motives drive most of the scout teams I know: curiosity or greed. A lot of the time, the Scout Service employs the former—people of all descriptions who just love being the first to find or to know something. These types tend to have deep respect for the planets and peoples they discover, and go to great lengths to avoid interfering in local matters any more than to gather samples and information. To them, this life is a calling, not a trade.

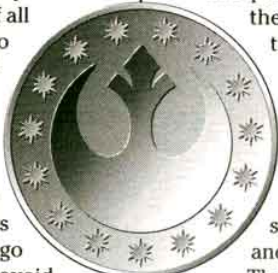
There are, however, a number of other mercenary scouts and claim-jumpers who don't care about what they find, so long as they turn a profit for themselves and their employers. While the Scout Service usually weeds out these beings in

training, you can find these low-lives in any shady cantina or outpost across the galaxy, pawing the plunder gained from their latest exploitation. And, unfortunately, while true scouts do their best to avoid them, sometimes there's no other option than to stand your ground and take them on.

The recent discovery of Kriekaal is proving to be just the kind of test to determine which side a scout belongs on.

The Kriekaal System

Outwardly a barren and desolate area of the galaxy, the Kriekaal system consists of an elderly orange star and two planets. The nearest world, Ahug, is too close to the sun to support



conventional life and is composed of molten metal oceans and a highly toxic atmosphere. The unremarkable nature of the metals and the dangers posed in exploring the world make further study a distant possibility at this time.

It is the second world, Kriekaal, which attracted the initial attention of Korren's scout team and has been the focus of the building tensions in the system. Farther away than Ahug but still closer to the sun than most worlds, Kriekaal is a larger-than-average world that boasts a heavy duranium core, giving the planet increased gravitational pull. Sensor scans indicate that while Kriekaal was once a collection of metallic oceans like its sister planet, the top layers cooled over many centuries, forming a thick "skin." Still moved by the restless metal oceans underneath, proto-continents broke apart and haphazardly floated over the stretches of molten duranium. The planet is still cooling today, albeit rather slowly, and it will be many thousands of years before the molten oceans and floating continents solidify completely.

Despite such intensely hostile conditions, life made its way onto Kriekaal in the form of low-order lichens and reptilian creatures, well adapted to the planet's toxic atmosphere and

intense heat. As far as Korren and his team can determine, however, only one form of life—reptilian sentients called the Krieks—has developed any kind of civilization, although Korren admits that large areas of the world remain mostly unexplored due to the unique resources such exploration would require.

It is one of these same regions, however, that is the cause of the tension in the Kriekaal system. If the preliminary scans are correct, a large metallic mass lies buried in the cooling region of one of the younger continents, a mass that Senni has speculated could once have been a starship or outpost of some kind. The basis for this speculation came when Kay-Oh, as part of the team's first contact procedure, discovered and translated a Kriek legend about a race of starpeople who visited their world. These aliens came to make the land their own, only to be swallowed up by the vengeance of Br'lai, the goddess of the ocean fires, whom the great shaman Ssiskor provoked to fury.

Intrigued by this legend—which might be interpreted as an Old Republic colonization effort—Korren ran a scan over the general area the Krieks had located as the site of the starpeople's efforts and turned up a large metallic mass about

three dozen meters down into the still-cooling metal lake on Raltez, a relatively new continent near the southern planetary pole. Intense scanning was made impossible by the magnetic interference of the pole and the beginnings of a massive heat storm, but Korren's scout team was able to confirm that the mass—whatever it was—definitely resembled something constructed and not simply a random fusion of metal. Deeming the find worth investigation, Korren transmitted the news of the discovery along with the details of first contact with the Krieks.

Unfortunately, while the information was being examined by the Scout Service, a processing error placed the "Further Investigation Warranted" order among the "Open Cases" section, and in a flash this unusual assignment had been made available to scouting freelancers and mercenaries around the galaxy, as well as to Scout Service staff. While the error was quickly corrected, the news had already attracted unsavory attention in the form of several mercenary scout groups which have come to Kriekaal looking to unearth the mysterious object. Since Korren's team had already moved on to another system, these scouts have a head start

on the follow-up team that the Scout Service intends to dispatch.

■ Kriekaal

Type: Hostile volcanic nightmare
Temperature: Searing
Atmosphere: Type IV (environmental suit required)
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Gravity: Heavy
Terrain: Duranium oceans, cooled ore and slag islands
Length of Day: 18 standard hours
Length of Year: 105 local days
Sapient Species: Krieks (N)
Starport: None
Population: 454,000
Planet Function: Homeworld
Government: Tribal
Tech Level: Stone

Capsule: Kriekaal is a large planet with a heavy duranium core that contributes to the planet's gravity. (For the effects of Kriekaal's heavy gravity, see the *Star Wars Planets Collection*, page 21.) There are 12 land masses of cooled duranium large enough to be called continents on Kriekaal, with two more forming at each of the respective poles. Immense heat storms originating from the southern polar regions sweep the planet at semi-regular intervals of about three months, although a hot season exists when Kriekaal spins closest to its sun—several storms per week are not uncommon. The duranium which makes up the molten oceans is fairly pure, and would fetch a decent amount of credits if it were correctly mined and sold to the right market.

The settlements of the native Krieks are scattered and relatively sparsely populated, most of them either along or north of

the equatorial region. Despite the large number of recognized tribes, the planet's harsh climate serves to keep the overall population of Krieks small. According to preliminary reports, even this small amount of life should not be possible. Some theorize that the lifeforms of Kriekaal were somehow transplanted there—if this is true, however, there is no evidence of such a move. Other than the curious lichens on which the Krieks feed, there is no evidence of other higher lifeforms existing on Kriekaal, not even evolutionary ancestors to the Krieks.

Native Life: The Krieks

In searching for answers about the mysterious find on Kriekaal, scouts may overlook the most important aspect of the planet: its native sentients, the Krieks. Korren and his team managed to compile a fairly thorough report on the customs and traditions of this curious species during their first contact efforts, and found the Krieks to be very friendly and open-minded. Even the initial meeting, a time of tension and superstition with most species, went along with almost no problems, which is perhaps the most bizarre thing about the world.

Krieks themselves are reptilian creatures who measure 1.2 to 1.5 meters at the shoulder and are about three meters long.

Although they prefer to stay low to the ground and travel on all fours, Krieks are capable of standing and walking short distances upright, using their wide tails for balance. They have also developed retractable opposable digits on their foreclaws and are capable of somewhat fine manipulation with them.

Krieks have a thick armored shell which resembles the heat ablative paneling used on starships—the constant pressures of the increased gravity combined with the intense heat levels has made them into walking heat and pressure shields. Like most shelled reptiles, they are capable of withdrawing into their shells, their preferred tactic when faced with combat. Their necks are long and light, however, and have powerful muscles for digging in crevices for the lichens which make up most of their diet.

Their vision is quite good, extending into the infrared range, as is their sense of touch, which has become attuned to the vibrations of the shifting metals beneath Kriekaal's surface. A typical Kriek greeting consists of not only a verbal exchange but also a series of vibrations made by tappings of their foreclaws, and can seem a very intricate process to outsiders.

Kriek Culture and Society

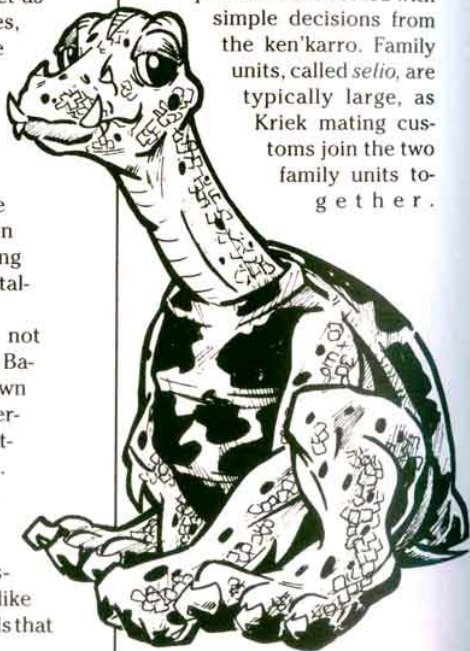
Kriek culture revolves around the veneration of the goddess Br'lai—who oversees the fiery oceans—and of T'kor—the god of the heat storms that sweep the planet. Small sacrifices of lichens are made before attempting to cross the molten oceans, or in the wake of a heat storm. Wandering Kriek *kulai*, or shamans, accept a life outside the tribe in exchange for closer communication with the gods. They are also known to act as advisors to the tribes, although their advice tends to be very naturalistic and direct. They are respected and slightly feared by most Kriek—one of the greatest offenses in their society is refusing to offer a *kulai* hospitality or aid.

Though they are not capable of speaking Basic, Krieks have shown an aptitude at understanding and translating the language. Their language is based on intricate guttural sounds combined with displays of the tattoo-like carvings on their shells that

act as an autobiographical record of the life and deeds of each individual Kriek.

Kriek society is tribal in nature, with each particular tribe claiming a section of one of the vast continents as its own. Each tribe is headed by a patriarch known as the *k'lar* and a small council of advisors, male and female, called the *ken'karro*. Warriors known as *ken'kali* guard the tribe's lands. Disputes seem to be small and relatively bloodless, however, and private

problems are solved with simple decisions from the *ken'karro*. Family units, called *selio*, are typically large, as Kriek mating customs join the two family units together.



Krieks' names derive largely from their ancestry and grow longer through the years—great moments in their lives are added on to their names, resulting in names that can take several minutes to recite.

As best Korren and his team could determine from their hosts, the Krieks recognize 12 continents and 43 tribes, although small sub-tribes exist among the particularly large tribes.

The largest tribe, the Kherkhaman, has claimed the entire northern continent of Dekok for themselves, and their tribal leader is given at least grudging respect by the other tribes.

Currently, with the recent death of that tribe's last patriarch, the mantle of leadership has fallen on a relatively young Kriek known as Kavakoderakanbnuarria, which means "bringer of the mountain of the glorious tribe Kherkhaman" and is sometimes—though never formally—shortened to Kavakoder by his subjects. Open-minded and idealistic for his kind, it was Kavakoder who received the scouts during their first visit, remembering his grandmaker's tale of how the starpeople had come so long ago. He is very willing to receive more visitors and has managed to convince

most of the tribe that the off-worlders are mostly harmless. However, the recent arrival of the mercenary scout groups and their rude treatment of his people has started to fray the Krieks' pacifism, a situation Kavakoder would like to see remedied before it is too late.

The Kriek tribes are sedentary, not migratory, and live in small villages constructed of cooled ore slag blocks. The villages are located far enough away from each other that the Krieks have plenty of room to forage for lichens. If a tribe becomes too large for an area, several families are chosen to undertake a quest to find a new village location and create a new tribe.

Although the tribal leaders rarely move far from their villages, young Krieks—known as *koti*—are given a wide range to go where they please within tribal boundaries. Most Krieks travel by foot, since traveling over the duranium ore seas is difficult, yet possible. Using thin metal membranes made at the edge of bubbling ore pools, the Krieks construct large gliders. The contraptions ride the massive heat updrafts generated by the duranium seas. The gliders are generally regarded as a last resort by the Krieks, and they use them on the rare occasions they must travel far to other

tribes or to scout out new land for growing tribes.

■ Krieks

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

Special Abilities:

Sense Vibrations: Krieks are attuned to movements and vibrations and can sense approaching objects in contact with the ground up to 60 meters away on their homeworld. Using this ability requires a Very Easy *Perception* roll. If a Kriek is removed from his natural environment this sense still functions, but requires a *Perception* roll with a difficulty based upon the amount of ground vibrations present in the area (i.e., Moderate for an average city street, Heroic for an area near starship take-offs).

Enhanced Vision: Krieks can see into the infrared spectrum with no difficulty and are capable of crude night vision. They suffer no penalties for darkness as long as there are available heat sources to navigate by.

Natural Armor: A Kriek's shell is capable of withstanding extra punishment from pressure and energy, giving them +1D against physical and energy attacks.

Toxic Atmosphere: Krieks live in an atmosphere with amounts of metals and gases considered toxic by most

species, and cannot survive without assistance in atmospheres other than Type IV.

Story Factors:

Pacifism: Despite the existence of a warrior class of Krieks, their duties are mostly ceremonial, as the Krieks in general are a very quiet, gentle people. When faced with combat situations, most Krieks withdraw into their shells to wait out the danger.

Primitive: Krieks are capable of fairly complex metalworks, but are still at a tribal stage of society and have not developed the higher learning necessary to achieve many of the "modern" galactic skills. Krieks cannot start with any skills representing anything beyond their homeworld's Tech Level except for languages and alien species, which they are rapidly learning.

Move: 6/8

Size: 1.2–5 meters tall, 3 meters long

Equipping Kriekal Expeditions

Scouts attempting exploration of Kriekal for any period of time had best come prepared for the strains of high gravity and the extremely high temperatures on the planet's surface, not to mention the toxic atmosphere and the effects the metallic oceans have on repulsorlift

Adventure Idea

The characters are sent by the Scout Service to do a follow-up survey of Kriekal and to rectify any volatile situations the data leak caused. When they arrive, they find a slew of ships in orbit, with crews running the gamut from legitimately concerned xenoscholars to lowly space scavengers (see the "Outside Forces" section below for details). The characters must walk a diplomatic tightrope as they sort out legitimate and phony research claims, patch up the relations with Kavakoder and his people, and attempt a more detailed study of the planet, in particular the mostly unscanned southern continents. They must deal as non-violently as possible with dedicated scientists, agitated Krieks, the environmental hazards of Kriekal, and all the mercs and pirates who won't take "no" for an answer.

engines. The rewards of contact with the Krieks and the mysterious object are potentially great, but so are the risks involved. Fortunately, with the right preparations, most of these risks can be dealt with.

Any starship landing on Kriekal should have heavy-duty heat ablative paneling attached to the hull—especially if the scouts plan on lifting off again after arrival. Korren's team was able to improvise such paneling by concealing the *Jedi Dreamer* in a cave and covering it with natural metal debris, but such protection is temporary at best, and cut the length of the team's visit substantially. Extra heat ablative panels are not hard to find at most starports, particularly ones that service older star-

ships. The ablative panels can be installed for about 600 credits and an Easy *space transports repair* roll. They are, however, vital to any long-term visit to Kriekal.

The same heat levels are obviously detrimental to most lifeforms not native to Kriekal. Combined with toxic levels of metals and gases in the atmosphere, and increased gravity, life is very difficult for offworlders. A standard suit of scout's Bulk Exploratory Armor (BEA), modified with extra heat sinks, ablative paneling, and heavy shading devices for the eyes, will enable a scout to deal with the intense heat. (For more information about the BEA, see *Galaxy Guide 8: Scouts*, page 45.) The suit's full oxygen-recycling

ADDENDUM/PERSONAL STARCHASER, KORREN/CAPTAIN ..

The first contact mission with the Krieks was one of the most successful of its kind I've ever been a part of. Not only were the natives curious and friendly, they were so curious and friendly that they initially set off warning bells in my head. After all, there's an old scouting term for that kind of native population—LES, or Likes to Eat Scouts.

However, my fears have turned out to be entirely unfounded. From all Kay-Oh has gathered, the Krieks are indeed mostly the same peaceful and gentle race that greeted us when we set down the Jedi Dreamer. I fully recommend that the New Republic consider further relations with them in the future.

system and onboard air supply will allow a scout nearly indefinite breathing time. Filters and breath masks do not function for very long, as the oxygen content of the atmosphere is almost negligible and the amount of filtration power required to refine enough to breathe from it is enormous.

A pilot's pressure suit worn under the BEA can offer relief from heavy gravity stress. Of course, an air-conditioned BEA

can make for a more comfortable scout, and extra liquid rations are a necessity to stay healthy in the long term. The cost of modifying a BEA to the terrain is about 350 credits, a price that scouts would be well-advised to pay.

Finally, instrumentation requires some modification to function properly, as the intense magnetic fields of Kriekaal—particularly over the metallic oceans—disrupt the processes



of mechanisms such as sensors and navigational systems, and interfere with computer and recording systems. An unprepared vessel or one with weak sensors and computers will find herself blind shortly upon entering the atmosphere. The severe magnetic forces can also wipe computer memory if it isn't properly shielded. While a capable sensor operator and strong sensors can overcome most of the interference, a much simpler solution is to have basic magnetic shielding installed. The *Jedi Dreamer*, having had such a modification done a while ago, was able to escape what would have been several life-threatening situations by engaging this shielding, and Korren highly recommends it to other explorers.

Basic Magnetic Shielding. Cost 1,200, requires Moderate *space transports repair* roll to install. Cancels out all low-level magnetic fields and disturbances within 20 meters of the ship.

Preliminary Findings

While the Kriek tribes have an understanding of metallurgy and are capable of fairly impressive metalworks, the main discovery on Kriekaal has been the evidence uncovered about the mysterious object lodged in a

still-cooling metal lake near the southern pole. This structure is responsible for the sudden interest in the system, and is the catalyst for the imminent conflicts all the seasoned scouts can sense are coming.

The object itself is almost 600 meters long and 300 meters wide, although any definite shape it might once have had has been lost to the molten metal slag that conceal it. It is located underneath the surface of the cooling lake, precisely 34 meters down, but seemed at the time of the report to be rising at a pace of roughly a meter every three days, perhaps due to volcanic stresses incurred by the cooling metal that traps it. At this pace, whatever is buried in the metal lake should be surfacing, at least in part, within the next several weeks.

The area surrounding the object is one of the most treacherous on Kriekaal, the cooling metal "island" roughly 22 kilometers across and about 18 kilometers wide. At this time the island is quite unstable, with frequent small earthquakes and volcanic activity. Small pockets of liquid duranium still dot the island, acting as superheated quicksand to anyone unfortunate enough to walk into them.

The southerly pole's extreme magnetism is also increased by

the molten oceans. Many of the destructive heat storms which sweep Kriekaal originate near this pole. The radiation here is so intense that even most magnetic shielding and repulsorlift engines fail in moments, making attempts to reach the site by starship or landing craft close to impossible. Anything more than short-range communication would also be difficult, which means that any investigating teams would be cut off from outside assistance. Should a heat storm be encountered en route, the odds of any ship surviving are quite slim. Several groups from orbit have already attempted conventional landings and were lost on the planet's surface. This has kept the others at a distance for now, but the moment any successful landing method is discovered the scouts and mercenaries waiting to tap Kriekaal's riches will rush in.

ADDENDUM/PERSONAL GUNDEEB, MOWA ..

Despite our best efforts, the attempts so far to further probe the nature of the southern pole anomaly have been unsuccessful. According to the Krieks, the worst heat storms of their year are coming, and this makes sensor readings impossible. Korren has ordered us to pack up our gear and be ready to leave at 0800 tomorrow so we don't get trapped by the storms. However, the crew is hesitant to leave—Korren and Senni appear to have made friends with several Krieks, both to learn more about the world and foster good will.

As for the anomaly, however, the Krieks are uninformed, and only give negative responses—if any at all—to our inquiries. I have spoken with several of their ken'karro myself, all of whom know nothing. Strange, in a way—something that large must have made quite a stir falling out of the sky...

The Kriek Factor

None of this situation would exist if anyone had stopped to ask the Krieks the necessary questions. With the exception of Korren's team, the Krieks have so far met only rude mercenaries or haughty scientists, all of whom failed to even consider that the reptilians might be able to help them discover what's trapped in the molten lake.

To the minds of the Krieks the answer is very simple, although not without dangers.

If scouts show proper respect and prove their friendly intentions, Kavakoder could reveal the Kriek method of glider travel over the metal oceans. He might also offer to outfit and accompany the scouts on the journey with some of his warriors. If other tribal leaders are approached the same way, they might comply, albeit with much more hesitation and without sending

Adventure Idea

One of the Krieks knows the truth concerning the mysterious object, although he is reluctant to say so—he is called Malketh, and he is the kulai advisor to Kavakoder. Naturally Force-sensitive and believed by the tribe to be the living voice of Br'lai, Malketh has dreamed for the past several nights of horrible destruction brought upon the tribe by starpeople hunting the object, and is certain that the object is not the thing they believe it to be.

The characters encounter Malketh alone on the edge of his village after meeting with Kavakoder one night, deep sorrow etched on his features. When questioned, however, he is noncommittal and evasive. By morning the characters discover he has left the village, leaving the Kriek rune for "truth" on the ground of his hut. The Krieks insist that the characters help pursue Malketh, to bring him back before a coming heat storm and find out what is the cause of his sorrow. If the characters find him, they must decide whether or not to continue the hunt for the object, or stay and protect the village from the coming destruction....

guides to assist the scouts. Barring exceptional Force powers or (keeping in mind the climate of the world) some remarkable low-tech ingenuity on the scouts' part, the Krieks and their gliders are the only reasonable route to the molten lake, something which well-meaning groups could eventually discover one way or another.

In the race for the buried "treasure" of Kriekaal, the galaxy may be ignoring the true wealth of the world—its peaceful and generous native race.

Outside Forces

Of all of the groups vying to get the first crack at the Kriekaal discovery—shady scouts, enterprising mercenaries and haughty xenoscholars—none can compare to the sadistic mercenary group darkly known as the Happy Blasters. The name is a reference to the group's usual response of shooting everything. The small group intends to either the first to reach the object first or kill those who do. They accept no compromises and allow no one to stand

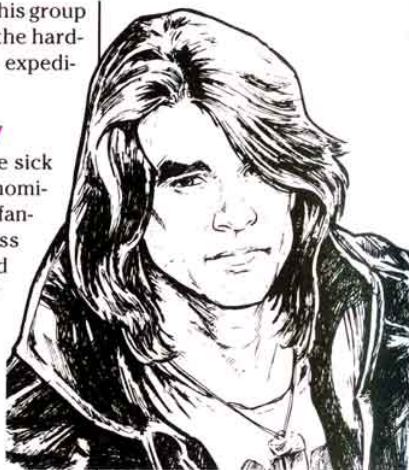
in their way. Defusing this group of pirates is probably the hardest part of any future expedition of Kriekaal.

Salem Victory

Salem Victory is one sick individual. Although nominally a smuggler, he fancies himself a ruthless mercenary. He has led his crew into many bloody shoot-outs from Bepin to Brentaal and back again.

The Happy Blasters acted as New Republic operatives several times before their criminal history was made known—even then they exhibited excessive levels of violence carrying out their missions. All of them are now wanted for various crimes, from murder to sabotage, and should be approached with extreme caution.

Salem himself is extremely cocky and willing to take on anyone or anything, an arrogance fueled by his admittedly impressive piloting skills. He has a penchant for hunting both creatures and sentient beings—it is rumored he keeps many trophy heads sitting above the controls of his custom freighter, the *Starcat*. As a rule, he has no respect for any kind of authority, doesn't hesitate to say what he



wants or act on what he says, and takes insults to himself and his ship very badly.

Salem's interest in the Kriekaal discovery is almost strictly financial—the Happy Blasters are being paid a handsome sum to retrieve the object by a very wealthy and private individual who doesn't care how they obtain it, just that they do. This individual is also willing to supply the gang with anything they need to complete their mission, and has already equipped both them and their vessel for the extreme conditions on Kriekaal. The credits and gear alone would be enough for him, but Salem is also interested in seeing how the situation with

the Krieks breaks down...maybe a new trophy or two can be culled from this mess as well.

Salem Victory

Type: Depraved Smuggler

DEXTERITY 3D+1

Blaster 5D+1, brawling parry 4D, dodge 4D+2, melee combat: vibro-knife 5D, vehicle blasters 3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Alien species 4D, intimidation 3D+1, law enforcement 5D+2, planetary systems 4D, streetwise 4D+2, survival 2D+1

MECHANICAL 4D

Astrogation 4D+1, space transports 7D+1, starship gunnery 5D+1

PERCEPTION 3D+2

Command 5D+1, con 5D+2, search 4D, sneak 4D+2

STRENGTH 2D+1

Brawling 4D+1, stamina 3D+2

TECHNICAL 2D+2

First aid 3D, space transports repair 6D+1

Dark Side Points: 1

Character Points: 7

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, BEA suit (modified for Kriekaal), heavy blaster pistol (5D), survival pack, vibro-knife (STR-1D), 300 credits

Starcat

Craft: *Starcat*-class Freighter

Type: Custom-built light freighter

Scale: Starfighter

Length: 32.8 meters

Skill: Space transports: *Starcat*

Crew: 2

Passengers: 6

Cargo Capacity: 65 metric tons

Consumables: 2 months

Hyperdrive Multiplier: x1

Hyperdrive Backup: x12

Nav Computer: Yes

Maneuverability: 2D+1

Space: 6

Atmosphere: 330; 950 kmh

Hull: 4D+2

Shields: 2D+1

Sensors:

Passive: 10/0D

Scan: 25/1D

Search: 40/2D

Focus: 2/3D

Weapons:

2 Concussion Missile Launchers

Fire Arc: Front

Skill: Starship gunnery

Fire Control: 1D

Space Range: 1–2/8/15

Atmosphere Range: 100–200/800/1.5 km

Damage: 7D

3 Double Laser Cannons

Fire Arc: Turret

Crew: 1

Skill: Starship gunnery

Fire Control: 2D+2

Space Range: 1–3/12/25

Atmosphere Range: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km

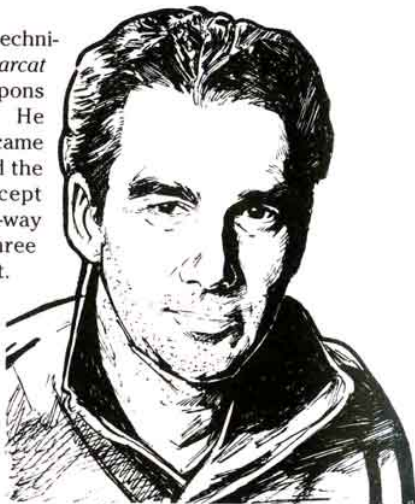
Damage: 5D

Capsule: The *Starcat* is the brainchild of Salem and Dapp, who put it together with the idea of arming a freighter as heavily as possible without losing all its cargo potential. What they came upon in final design required some bloodshed and an enormous amount of swindling and stealing to put together. Thanks to a tech contact of Dapp's on Nar Shaddaa (who disappeared after the work was finished), the ship was put together soundly and does not suffer from many of the quirks that hand-crafted ships usually have. Proof against any kind of internal or mechanical tampering comes from Mac's extensive security programming, which has turned the inside of the ship into a maze of deadly intrusion countermeasures. (Mac has designed the ship to self-destruct if anyone attempts to fly her without giving an appropriate coded response, among other precautions.) However, if the ship has an Achilles heel, it is the massive amount of power required to maintain the ship's blatantly illegal weapons systems, which draw a considerable amount of energy when operational. All in all, the *Starcat* is an extremely dangerous vessel and should, like its crew, be approached with extreme caution.

Mac

Mac is the gang's technician, and keeps the *Starcat* and the group's weapons in working order. He doesn't say where he came from before he joined the Happy Blasters, except that it's an out-of-the-way little place about three hours from Coruscant. He keeps his past to himself. In fact, he's with the gang more out of technician's curiosity than anything else. Salem offered him all the tools and materials he could ever want in return for turning the interior of the *Starcat* into a fortress, an offer he enthusiastically accepted.

Since then he has used his prodigious knowledge of computers and security to make the *Starcat* one of the most well-defended vessels around. He has equipped the starship's interior with force fields, blaster traps, and even the armed torso of an old security droid which monitors the hallways. Mac operates these defenses from his small quarters in the engineering section of the ship. Unknown to Salem and the others, Mac has a master override ready to defend these quarters in the event of trouble.



Mac is calm in all situations, eager to try out new technology, and is not typically as vicious as the other Blasters (in fact, they usually leave him behind to guard the ship). However, he has a definite vindictive streak. Right now he is organizing the team's efforts at eradicating a small species of harmless but clumsy reptilian humanoids, the Fyrsprus, after the alien technicians botched several past repair attempts on the *Starcat*.

Mac's interest in the Kriekaal discovery is scientific—he wants to know the what, why, and how about the object and its origins. The fact that he's getting paid for all these things is nice, but

not necessary. Of all the Happy Blasters, Mac is perhaps the most approachable. But his knowledge of security still makes him a dangerous foe to any group.

Mac

Type: Cool Technician

DEXTERITY 2D

Blaster 3D, dodge 2D+1

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 4D+1, streetwise 5D, value 4D+2

MECHANICAL 3D+1

Astrostation 4D+1, repulsorlift operation 4D, sensors 4D+2, starship shields 4D+1

PERCEPTION 2D+2

Bargain 5D+2, forgery 4D+1, investigation 3D, search 4D+1, sneak 3D+2

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 2D+1, stamina 3D

TECHNICAL 4D

Blaster repair 5D+2, computer programming/repair 8D+1, demolition 6D+1, droid repair 5D+1, first aid 5D+2, repulsorlift repair 6D+2, security 7D, space transports repair 7D

Character Points: 5

Move: 10

Equipment: Blast vest (+1D physical, +1 energy), blaster carbine (5D), BEA suit (modified for Kriekaal), comlink, datapad, portable computer, survival pack, 250 credits

Wilko Brenggar

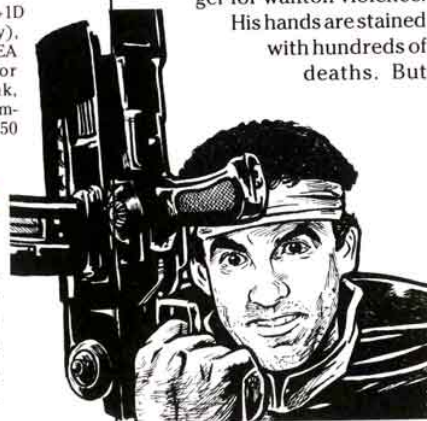
Wilko is completely insane. Found wandering through a spaceport randomly shooting Imperial personnel, the crazed human's style attracted the atten-

tion of the Happy Blasters, who decided a psychopath would be just the thing to scare their enemies and do the worst fighting for them. They offered him a position aboard the *Starcat*.

Since then, Wilko has been almost single-handedly responsible for a great deal of the carnage now associated with the Happy Blasters. He keeps himself in peak combat condition to the exclusion of almost anything else, and has dedicated every hour of the day to either bodybuilding or weapons practice. He doesn't know anything about the Krieks, or the object, or even the Scout Service—he simply knows that there's probably fighting on the horizon, and that's always good news to him.

Nobody knows for certain how Wilko developed his hunger for wanton violence.

His hands are stained with hundreds of deaths. But



in his mind he has found refuge from guilt only one way—Wilko completely believes in the theory of reincarnation. He is convinced he was once an Imperial captain, an Ithorian scout, and slaver, among others, and often refers to himself in the third person, leading the rest of the team to believe he's not quite sure who he really is anymore. Lately his insanity has spread to include a firm conviction that upon his death he will instantly possess another body and rejoin the Happy Blasters once more, and because of this belief he has absolutely no fear of death.

Wilko kills by what he calls "the rules"; that is, he kills anyone or anything he or the team deems a threat, quickly and without mercy, and will continue fighting until either his opponents are dead (or "moved on," as he refers to it) or he himself is slain. Only the other members of the Happy Blasters are safe from his rampages—but slowly even they are becoming targets in his eyes....

■ Wilko Brenggar

Type: Insane Pirate
DEXTERITY 4D

Blaster: blaster rifle 6D+2, brawling parry 5D, dodge 6D, grenade 5D+2, melee combat: vibro-axe 6D+1, melee parry 5D+2, thrown weapons 4D+1
KNOWLEDGE 2D

Intimidation 5D, survival 4D, willpower 4D+1

MECHANICAL 2D+1

PERCEPTION 3D+1

Sneak 4D

STRENGTH 4D

Brawling 5D+2, stamina 6D

TECHNICAL 2D+1

Blaster repair 4D, demolition 6D

Force Points: 1

Dark Side Points: 4

Character Points: 2

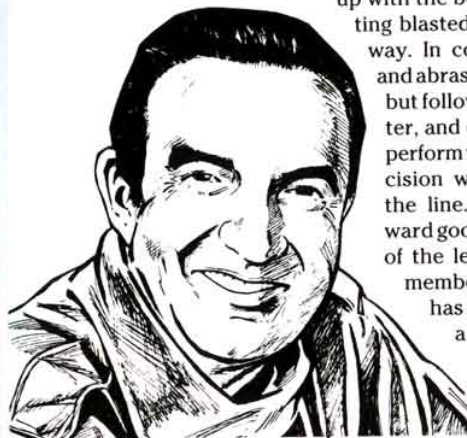
Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster carbine (5D), blaster rifle (5D), block of detonite (5D), BEA suit (modified to Kriekaal), comlink, heavy blaster pistol (5D), survival pack, thermal detonator (10D), vibro-axe (STR+3D+1), vibro-knife (STR+1D).

Dapp Solus

Dapp is a large, burly man who never quite grew out of the pirate games he used to play as a child. Problem is, he still plays just as rough, and now he's got the size, muscle, and experience to make it really hurt.

Dapp is native to the lower levels of Nar Shaddaa. When he was growing up he spent too much time in the yard watching the smugglers and pirates who called the city home go about their business. When he was old enough, he stole a ship and wandered the Outer Rim to play pirate. He had been relatively successful at this trade for several years when Salem Victory approached him and asked if he would like to help him design the *Starcat*, a prototype "armored freighter" that the young smuggler was putting together. In return, Salem offered him a place on the crew and a sizable



up with the boarding party getting blasted in some unusual way. In combat he is loud and abrasive to his enemies, but follows plans to the letter, and can be counted to perform with practiced precision when the job's on the line. Despite his outward good nature, he is one of the least approachable members of the crew. He has never had a use for authority of any kind.

Dapp's reasoning behind Kriekaal is

simple: he gets to recover something new and valuable, get paid for doing it, and maybe even blast some people on the side. Who knows, maybe a customs ship might even show up—it's been a long time since the last one....

share of the loot they would earn together. It didn't take Dapp very long to accept the offer, and between the two of them and the parts they stole, a formidable starship—and an even more formidable partnership—was formed.

Since then, Dapp has acted as Salem's first mate and strong-arm man, and has been largely responsible for keeping the team under control. His jovial manner and enthusiastic perspective belie his deadly fighting skills—he often tells a joke just before he blasts victims. Dapp is also the creator of the "gag" he and Salem play on any Imperial Customs officers who try to board the *Starcat*; individual ploys vary, but it usually winds

■ Dapp Solus

Type: Veteran Cyborg Pirate

DEXTERITY 3D+2

Blaster 5D+2, blaster: blaster rifle 7D+1, brawling parry 4D+1, dodge 5D+2, grenade 4D, melee combat 5D

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Intimidation 4D, languages 3D+2, streetwise 5D+1, survival 4D, value 4D+1

MECHANICAL 3D+1

Astrogation 4D, repulsorlift operation 4D+2, space transports 4D+1, starship gunnery 5D+1

PERCEPTION 3D+1

Command 4D, con 3D+2, gambling 4D+2, sneak 4D

STRENGTH 3D+2

ADDENDUM/PERSONAL

STARCHASER, KORREN/CAPTAIN ..

Groups like the Happy Blasters give this trade a bad name. Almost anyone can tell you about disasters these types of mercenaries have caused, incidents like the Benkal Plagues or the water crisis on Orronan, but not many people can remember the name of the scout who discovered their world or who charted the territory they live in. With the exception of the scouting finds that the holomedia deems impressive enough for broadcasting, our work is very quiet to the galaxy at large. Vital, but quiet.

That's why the growing interest in the Kriekaal system and the potential of its discovery must become known as a "victory" for the Scout Service. We must prove to the holocameras that decent scouts are the rule, not the exception, and that such assets as dedication and talent can beat out blasters and bullying, that befriending native populations is better than trampling them down. We must win respect in a galaxy that needs people to look up to right now.

Brawling 5D, stamina 5D+2

TECHNICAL 2D

Blaster repair 4D+1, security 4D,

space transports repair 5D

Character Points: 4

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster rifle (5D), BEA suit (modified for Kriekaal), comlink,

cybernetic right arm (+1D Strength, has a retractable vibro-shiv and hold-out blaster inside), 2 grenades (5D), survival pack, vibro-sword (STR+3D)

This issue's "Scouts' Dispatch"

was written by Peter Woodworth and illustrated by Scott Neely.

ISB Intercepts

Welcome to another installment of ISB Intercepts, where we answer questions our loyal readers have sent in about *The Star Wars Roleplaying Game*. Eric S. Trautmann, a West End Games *Star Wars* editor and one of the co-designers of the latest versions of the rules, has assembled some answers to queries we have recently—and not so recently—received. These questions largely concerned the status of products that have been announced as “upcoming” and have yet to appear. As with any publishing program, there are always unforeseen events, any of which can delay or cancel the production of a given book. While we always try to provide readers with the most accurate information available about our upcoming releases, circumstances have occasionally necessitated product cancellations. The following information is intended to clear up any confusion we may have inadvertently caused.

Q: In a West End Games' 1994 catalog, an item called *The Jedi Sourcebook* was listed, but I haven't seen it on the shelves? What happened to it?

A: We've received literally thousands of letters and phone calls about *The Jedi Sourcebook*; obviously loyal fans are highly interested in such a product. Unfortunately, there is one fairly major stumbling block to a definitive work on the Jedi Knights—the upcoming *Star Wars* prequels. While Lucasfilm has granted approval in concept for such a book, we are concerned about the emphasis on Jedi skills and training. Since information on the films and their content resides solely with the higher echelons of Lucasfilm, we didn't want to produce an expensive hardcover sourcebook that may be rendered obsolete as soon as new movies

are released (thereby wasting our time and consumers' money). Rest assured that—as soon as possible—the long-delayed *Jedi Sourcebook* will see print, but only after we are sure that it is accurate and does not contradict any plans George Lucas has for his upcoming films.

For fans looking for more information on the Force and the Jedi, check out the *Tales of the Jedi Companion* and *The Jedi Academy Sourcebook*. Both are currently available in hobby, game and book stores (or can be ordered directly from West End).

Q: In an interview in issue number five of the *Star Wars Adventure Journal*, Bill Smith stated that a sourcebook on L. Neil Smith's Lando Calrissian novels was in development. What is the status on that project? And what about a sourcebook on Brian Daley's *Han Solo and the Lost Legacy* novel?

A: *The Adventures of Lando Calrissian Sourcebook* has—like *The Jedi Sourcebook*—been indefinitely postponed. The questionnaire printed in the *Star Wars Gamemaster Handbook* generated a huge response and one very strong message became clear almost immediately: the Lando Calrissian novel sourcebook consistently scored very low on the list. The project has been shelved so we can devote more time to the products fans most wanted to see.

The *Han Solo and the Lost Legacy Sourcebook* has run into some delays on our end, largely because fan demand for it has been lower



than for other projects. However, fans of the Han Solo novels take heart: a new series of books by acclaimed novelist A.C. Crispin is in the works. The *Han Solo and the Lost Legacy Sourcebook* may appear in some form in the future, but as of now has no place on our schedule. In addition, a campaign boxed set detailing the Corporate Sector is tentatively scheduled for mid-1998 (though that date is subject to change).

Q: Will West End ever produce a map of the *Star Wars* universe (preferably one that includes all of the planets featured in the novels, comics and game books)?

A: Probably not. From what I've been told, Lucasfilm has requested that we not produce such a product. (Apparently, we proposed one several years ago.) The main concern about such a map is that—with the vast amount of new material being produced—it would become obsolete quickly, and may cause continuity problems with the materials developed by other *Star Wars* licensees. Several readers have suggested a huge "gazetteer" which is a much more feasible solution to the "mapping" needs of most fans; rest assured, we're working on it.

Q: In *The Jedi Academy Sourcebook*, there are several references to *The Courtship of Princess Leia Sourcebook*, but I can't find it. Is it out yet?

A: Material originally intended for *The Courtship of Princess Leia Sourcebook* will not be a stand-alone product. In the interests of providing the best value to our loyal fans, information from Dave Wolverton's novel will appear in *Cracken's Threat Dossier*, along with source material on several of the other novels. The tentative list of novels covered in *Cracken's Threat Dossier* includes: *The Crystal Star*, *The New Rebellion*, *Children of the Jedi*, *Before the Storm*, *Shield of Lies*, and *Tyrant's Test*.

The main reason we decided on this format is the volume of new novels being produced; rather than reprint the game stats for the movie characters again (we've already run them something like 15 times), we decided to broaden the focus of the sourcebook. Only new information will be included in *Cracken's Threat Dossier*, covering a broader range of topics: new ships, new aliens, new droids, new characters and new ways to use them all in your roleplaying sessions.

Q: Why isn't there an "ISB Intercepts" in every issue of the *Adventure Journal*?

A: Put simply: we don't get enough mail. The questions in this month's "ISB Intercepts" have been gathered over a period of two years. If you want to see more feedback from us (and we would be delighted to hear from you), drop us a line! Tell us what you like and want to see more of in the *Journal* and the rest of West End's *Star Wars* products. If there is something you didn't enjoy or understand, let us know. We do read each and every letter that comes in and we take your comments very seriously. While it is impossible to please everyone, we're trying to cover a broad range of material; hopefully, you'll find *something* you like. If not, let us know!

You can write to us at the following address:

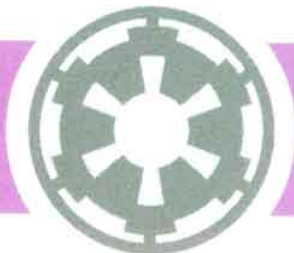
ISB Intercepts
c/o West End Games
RR 3 Box 2345
Honesdale, PA 18431

Q: Does West End Games have a web-site?

A: Not yet. However, we can receive e-mail. The West End editorial department can be contacted at WEGEdit@aol.com. If you are trying to contact a specific editor, please indicate his or her name in the "Subject" or "Regarding" box.

Illustrators interested in contacting West End's art department can e-mail us at WestEndArt@aol.com. Again, if you need to contact a specific artist, please include the name in the "Subject" or "Regarding" box.

Finally, if you would like to be added to West End's catalog mailing list or have questions about ordering products directly from us, contact our sales department at WEGSales@aol.com. Please address any inquiries to "Carl Klinger."



About the Authors

John Beyer is an ex-Navy brat, ex-Coast Guardsman who absolutely fell in love with *Star Wars* on opening day. He's currently working for UPS and spends much of his free time sleeping and working on roleplaying game ideas. John keeps his friends busy subjecting them to adventures for *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game* and *The World of Indiana Jones*.

Kathy Burdette is a freelance writer and artist living in Virginia enjoying the life of a shiftless science fiction addict. In her spare time she writes short fiction, works part-time at the College of William and Mary, and shipjacks light freighters from the local starport.

Laurie Burns has contributed several short stories to *The Official Star Wars Adventure Journal*. When not staring into space daydreaming about the *Star Wars* galaxy, she's crouched over the computer producing and publishing a West Coast horse magazine, writing short stories, and chatting on-line about all things *Star Wars*.

Drew Campbell—a former resident of Milwaukee, Wisconsin—is a self-described "actor-magician-musician-writer-coffee drinker." Drew has been playing and gamemastering the *Star Wars* roleplaying game for 10 years and has recently completed work on *Cynabar's Fantastic Technology: Droids*, his first published *Star Wars* material. Drew currently resides in California (not far from where the Battle of Endor actually took place) where he works as a computer technician. He hopes one day to write an "About the Author" bio without feeling silly.

WANTED FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE EMPIRE: Paul Danner. *Species:* Human. *Gender:* Male. *Age:* 23. *Homeworld:* Earth. *Bounty:* 17,873 credits. *Crimes:* Production of Unlawfully Creative Short Stories (six counts in *The Official Star Wars Adventure Journal* alone!), Conspiracy to Entertain the Public (recently released *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* supplement, *Hives of Scum and Villainy*), and Wanton Disregard for Deadlines (additional 10,000 credits posted by West End Games editors). If you spot this individual, contact the proper authorities immediately. He is armed and considered humorous.

Jean Rabe lives in rural Wisconsin, wedged between a cornfield and a dairy farm. She is the author of several fantasy short stories and novels, including *Dawning of A New Age*, the first novel in the *DragonLance Fifth Age* line. She is the editor of two science fiction gaming magazines—*JTAS: The Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society*, and FASA's *MechForce Quarterly*. And in her spare time she proofreads computer game manuals. She worked for TSR for many years as the coordinator of its Role-Playing Game Association Network. Prior to that she was a newspaper reporter and news bureau chief covering courts and police in the Midwest.

Brian Smithson has always enjoyed the aliens created by Industrial Light and Magic, West End Games, Bantam Books and Dark Horse Comics. His "Alien Encounters" article is his first contribution to the *Journal*.

Michael A. Stackpole is an award-winning roleplaying and computer game designer who has done work for Flying Buffalo, Inc., Interplay Productions, TSR, Inc., West End Games, Hero Games, Wizards of the Coast, FASA Corp., Game Designers Workshop, and Steve Jackson Games. He has more than 18 published novels to his credit, the most recent being *The Bacta War*, the last in his four-part *Star Wars X-Wing* series.

Eric S. Trautmann began his professional writing career on such projects as *The Politics of Contraband* and *Galaxy Guide 9: Fragments from the Rim* and has worked as an on-staff editor and designer for West End Games since mid-1995. A native of Malone, New York (not the end of the world, but you can see it from there), Eric wrapped up the *DarkStryder Campaign* with *Endgame*, and is rather excited not to be working on droids anymore.

M.H. Watkins is a part-time freelance writer, a part-time educational assistant, and a full-time mother of two from Minneapolis. She spends her free time avoiding housework, researching her writing, and *skiing* the Internet (it's Minnesota, after all). In an all-male family, including the dog and the bird, she is surprised to be the only hardcore *Star Wars* fan.

Peter Woodworth is an avid reader and roleplayer from Cherry Hill, New Jersey. 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.

Timothy Zahn is the author of *Heir to the Empire*, *Dark Force*

Rising and *The Last Command*, all *New York Times* best-selling *Star Wars* novels. He is rumored to be working on yet another *Star Wars* novel (or two...). Tim has been an avid supporter of the *Journal* and West End Games—his contributions to *The Official Star Wars Adventure Journal* include "First Contact" in *Journal* #1 and "Mist Encounter" in *Journal* #7. He also helped design and lend support to the *DarkStryder* campaign.

About the Artists

"Who do I have to kill?" was **Steve Bryant's** response when asked if he wanted to do *Star Wars* work for West End Games—leading to his work in *Galaxy Guide 12: Aliens—Enemies and Allies*, *Heroes and Rogues*, and *The Official Star Wars Adventure Journal*. In addition to the movie trilogy, Steve cites Al Williamson's seminal *Star Wars* work as a major influence. A former art director for Game Designers Workshop, Steve currently works freelance and lives in the suburban wilds of Chicago with his wife and four companion animals.

Matt Busch began drawing "stick" TIE fighters at the age of four. Aside from the *Star Wars Adventure Journal*, Matt has contributed to other *Star Wars* sourcebooks for West End Games. As an entertainment illustrator living in Los Angeles, he has worked on many television commercials, books, magazines, comics and trading cards. He has also worked on many advertising campaigns for motion pictures, including the recent film *The Devil's Own*. When asked where he gets his talent, Matt claims that, "The Force runs strong in my family..."

A veteran artist in the roleplaying and collectable card game industry, **Liz Danforth** has produced artwork for dozens of companies over the past 20 years. Her latest work has appeared in expansions for *Magic: The Gathering*, *Middle-Earth: The Wizards and the Battletech CCG*.

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.

Pablo Hidalgo is a freelance artist from Winnipeg, Manitoba, who specializes in illustration and animation. He is a member of the Manitoba Society of Independent Animators, and co-instructs animation courses for young people. He has a disturbing amount of *Star Wars* trivia kicking around in his head, and does a mean Lobot impersonation.

Scott Neely is a self-taught artist from Pennsylvania who has grown up with *Star Wars*. "I've always been fascinated by the story and the ships," he said. He started his art career doing freelance work, then moved into advertising art.

Chris Trevas is an illustrator and graduate from the Center for Creative Studies in Michigan. He has been a *Star Wars* fan since the beginning and enjoys depicting new characters and situations from that far away galaxy. While currently working in the gaming industry, Chris' artwork can be found in many projects for West End Games, including *The Official Star Wars Adventure Journal*, the *Shadows of the Empire Sourcebook*, and *The Star Wars Introductory Adventure Game*.



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Cynabar's DROID Datalog

Version 4.7.110

Cynabar/37:8:1:04/Hut • Welcome to the latest installment of Cynabar's Droid Datalog. I was frankly stunned at the interest generated by the last version (which hit the newsnets about a month ago). The Datalog was originally just a fun experiment for me; since so many smugglers own or traffic in droids, it seemed logical to distribute information concerning automata (information geared toward all you "freelance law-breakers" out there.

Where possible, I've screened the responses to the droid entries, and they are as accurate as far as I can determine. But, given how most smugglers operate, I'd take the information contained herein with a grain or two of salt. Remember the old smuggler's axiom: "If it looks too good to be true, it probably is."

Droid Classifications

Droids are classified into five degrees, as follows:

- **First Degree Droids.** Droids of this type are generally designed with mathematics, medicine or science in mind and are usually teamed up with an organic counterpart. As such, first degree droids have more sophisticated personality programming and can be expensive. (The 2-1B surgical droid is an example of a first degree droid.)
- **Second Degree Droids.** This type of droid is designed purely for function, typically in the areas of engineering and maintenance.

Often, second degree droids have only the most basic of personality programming. (The famed R2-series astromech unit is an example of a second degree droid.)

• **Third Degree Droids.** The most common models to be seen with organic beings are third degree droids. Such units are designed to specialize in social sciences: protocol, education, diplomacy, and so forth. (The 3PO-series protocol droid is an example of a third degree droid.)

• **Fourth Degree Droids.** This type of droid is designed for combat applications (and is illegal in virtually every system in the Empire). Assassin droids and other forms of combat automata, while banned in the Empire, are occasionally used by legitimate military forces. (The IG-series assassin droid is an example of a fourth degree droid.)

• **Fifth Degree Droids.** Similar to more primitive robotic units, fifth degree droids are usually designed for menial duties: salvage, sanitation, mining, and cargo hauling. Fifth degree droids are very common, largely due to their low cost. (The ASP-7 is an example of a fifth degree droid.)

Droid Personalities

There are five basic categories for classifying droid personality types: none, simple, elementary, advanced and complex:

• **None.** The droid has no personality. While such a droid can communicate, it will typically respond with simple "yes" or "no" answers; more complex communicative skills are often beyond the ability of zero-personality droids. Fifth degree droids are typically devoid of personality matrices. (A standard cargo lifter requires no personality or creativity. It must simply take commands and perform its programmed duties.)

• **Simple.** Droids with simple personality matrices are seldom required to spend time with organics. Personalities of this type can usually be described in a single word: ornery, cruel, timid, fearful, and so on.

• **Elementary.** Droids that occasionally interact with organics are usually programmed with elementary personality matrices. For example, astromech droids that are required to interact with a single pilot for short periods of time typically have elementary personality modules.

• **Advanced.** Droids that are required to interact with organics on a fairly regular basis (such as medical or surgical droids) often have advanced personality programming. This type of personality allows the droid to engage in limited conversation (typically for the purpose of information exchange) and simple pleasantries.

• **Complex.** Droids with complex personality matrices are generally required to interact with organics. Often this personality is so convincing that the droid appears to possess sentience. Protocol droids, for example, can realistically simulate fear, pain, annoyance and other emotions.

(For more information on droid degrees, droid personalities, and droid modification guidelines, see pages 3–48 of *Cynabar's Fantastic Technology: Droids*.)

First Degree Droids

■ 2-ZH Surgical Droid

Model: Industrial Automaton 2-ZH Surgical Droid

DEXTERITY 1D

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Alien species 3D+1

MECHANICAL 2D

PERCEPTION 3D

(A) Injury/ailment diagnosis 4D+2

STRENGTH 1D

TECHNICAL 3D

First aid 6D, (A) medicine 7D

Equipped With:

- Computer interface tether (5 meters long). When connected to medical mainframe, 2-ZH droids receive a +2D bonus to all medical skills
- Analytical computer
- Surgical attachments
- Hypodermic injectors (4D stun damage)
- Medical dispensers

Move: 4

Size: 1.5 meters tall

Cost: 3,000 (used)

Capsule: The 2-ZH medical droid is almost identical in function and appearance to the more-mainstream 2-1B series; aside from its rather unappealing green color 2-ZH droids are virtually indistinguishable from their civilian counterparts. The 2-ZH is the military designation for the unit, which sees service in Imperial prison medical bays. The 2-ZHb (which is also similar to the 2-1B series, save for its vibrant blue color) is in service on Imperial capital ships and as a subsidiary medical tool for planetside garrisons.

Availability: 2, R

Personality Matrix: Elementary

Darvis/37:2:2:17/Mrl• Don't be entirely fooled by the 2-ZH's advertising...while there is no question that it is an excellent unit, I've heard that several of the key programming modules have built-in obsolescence. You may end up replacing SkillWare every couple of years.

Shieljar/37:2:2:18/Dur• What do you expect? Cynbot Galactica manufactured it for the Empire, so naturally they wanted a lock on an upgrade market!

Claron/37:2:2:31/Svi• Quit whining, gang! The, uh, "unofficial military unit" (translation: mercs—Cynabar) I'm with has used a 2-ZH for ages without problems. The medical officer told me a shipment of 2-ZHs was 'jacked somewhere near Kothlis. Maybe the twitchy versions you're complaining about are from that shipment. I hear there's a big market for contraband medical gear...

■ MD-5 GP Medical Droid

Model: Industrial Automaton MD-5 General Practitioner Medical Droid

DEXTERITY 2D

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 5D, humanoid biology 5D

MECHANICAL 2D+2

Sensors 3D+2

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 4D, investigation 4D+1, search 4D+1

STRENGTH 2D+1

TECHNICAL 3D

First aid 6D, (A) medicine 8D

Equipped With:

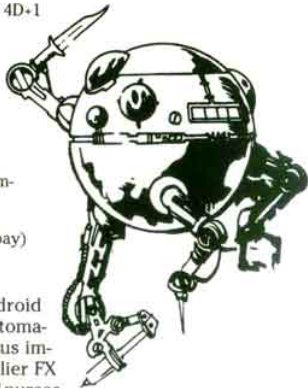
- Computer interface tether
- Medical diagnostic computer
- Analytical computer
- Surgical attachment
- Hypodermic injectors (4D stun damage)
- Medicine dispensers

Move: 7 (within confines of its medical bay)

Size: 1.6 meters

Cost: 3,700 credits

Capsule: One of the first true "droid doctors" produced by Industrial Automaton, the MD-5 has had a tremendous impact on the medical field. The earlier FX series were little more than glorified nurses and paramedics, but they did lead to wider acceptance of droids in the medical field. The most common MD models (still in use today) are the MD-0 diagnostic droids, the MD-3 pharmaceutical droids, and the MD-5 general practitioner droids.



One design quirk has never been corrected in the MD-series droids: its initial programming matrix was created for a security unit. During the MD-series development, the budget for IA's security branch was curtailed. Rather than completely discard the security division's development work, the programming module for a prototype law-enforcement droid was modified to serve in the then-unfinished MD-series. Several of the law-enforcement protocols are still in place on the MD-5 series, hardwired into the main programming matrix.

Availability: 1

Personality Matrix: Advanced

Vox/37:9:1:12/Hun• The MD series are cheaper than most security droids, so you'll save some credits by purchasing one and replacing its medical module with the security chip. Not only does the MD make a halfway-decent security droid, it may lull a potential intruder into a false sense of security. After all, who would be worried about a medical droid?

Gunman/37:9:2:09/Kot• You're kidding, right? You can give an MD security protocols, but it is still a medical droid. It has poor targeting, no onboard weaponry, low-grade sensors and a stubborn refusal to employ lethal force when necessary. Upgrading the hardware to performance-grade security attachments will cost as much as a stock G-2RD.

Krella/37:9:4:11/Byb• Gunman has a point, but he's overlooking the element of surprise. A modest sensor and targeting upgrade and the addition of a heavy stun weapon can make an MD into an effective security droid...at an affordable price.

■ MK 8001 Attendant Droid

Model: AccuTronics MK 8001 Attendant Droid

DEXTERITY 2D

Running 2D+1

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Alien species 3D, cultures 3D, languages 3D+1

MECHANICAL 1D+1

Communication 4D, ground vehicle operation 2D+1, hover vehicle operation 2D, repulsorlift operation 2D+2, sensors 2D

PERCEPTION 1D+1

(A) Injury/ailment diagnostics 3D

STRENGTH 1D+1

TECHNICAL 2D

First aid 6D

Equipped With:

- Humanoid body (two arms, two legs)
- Two visual and auditory sensor recorders (human range)

- Vocabulator speech/sound system
- AA-1 VerboBrain

Special Abilities:

Medical Database: The MK 8001 is equipped with a medical reference database listing nearly 50,000 common bacteria and diseases. Search and retrieval subroutines can access information to permit advanced first aid treatment of severe injury or illness in a crisis situation.

Medical Support Link: Attendant droids can maintain direct communication links with the nearest medical facility and are capable of two-way transmission of data using planetary communication grids.

Move: 7

Size: 1.6 meters tall

Cost: 3,000 credits (new)

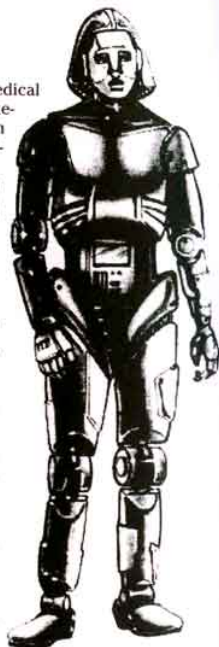
Capsule: AccuTronics (a former subsidiary of IA) pioneered the use of droids for "family-oriented" purposes, something most traditional marketing schemes ignored. The MK 8001 was designed to act as a combination guardian/nanny for the young or the infirm. The MK 8001 can diagnose injuries, and—in crisis situations—take appropriate action. A built-in comlink connects the droid to emergency facilities and the unit's "independent action" programming allows for rapid decision-making in dangerous situations.

In addition, the MK 8001 has a sophisticated personality module, making the droid more of a "companion" to its owners than a simple machine. The MK 8001 learns rapidly from those it is assigned to assist, absorbing an organic's personality quirks and preparing appropriate responses. Overall, the MK 8001 has had an outstanding performance record and is still AccuTronics' top selling product.

Availability: 1

Personality Matrix: Complex

"KesselRunner"/35:8:1:13/Nar• This droid really isn't really designed for utility, but you can make tons of credits by selling them to wealthy families with children. The trick is finding a source for these things that won't cost you the skies.



■ S2R Science Droid

Model: TelBrinTel Science Research Droid

DEXTERITY 2D

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Scholar: chemistry 6D, scholar: physics 6D, scholar: science 7D

MECHANICAL 1D

PERCEPTION 2D

STRENGTH 1D

TECHNICAL 2D

Equipped With:

- Enhanced protocol chip
- Molecular microscopic eyepiece
- Olfactory sensors (+1D on any *Knowledge* roll to identify any odor)
- Two fine control manipulating arms (+1D to any *Dexterity* roll which requires precise movement)
- Suspension system (+2D on any *Dexterity* roll which requires smooth movement)
- Endosystem (provides six ports for additional accessories. These could include additional arms, injection needles, work surfaces, and small tools.)

Move: 8

Size: 1.9 meters

Cost: 12,500 credits

Capsule: Originally designed to Imperial military specifications, the TelBrinTel science research droid was intended for use in the Empire's chemical/biological weapons projects. In addition, S2R droids (the military designation for this type of unit) researched new armor and power-guidance systems, helping increase efficiency in the mighty Imperial Navy.

These droids feature an extremely advanced protocol chip (in order to facilitate "creative brainstorming" sessions with organics), a high-powered, multi-spectrum microscope ocular module, a sophisticated olfactory analysis package, and extremely gentle and stable locomotive systems (particularly useful when manipulating unstable chemicals and other dangerous compounds).

These droids have proven extremely successful in the military, and TelBrinTel has recently introduced a civilian model, the S2R(A). The S2R(A) performs most of the same functions, though a hardwired security protocol has been added: the droid cannot knowingly work on weapons or projects with military applications.

Availability: 2, F

Personality Matrix: Complex

Toria/33:1:2:12/Cst• Yes, I've seen some of these droids modified to eliminate the restriction of working on military projects. However, while I have no direct proof, I have heard that TelBrinTel included secret programming that automatically goes into effect when any modifications are made. From then on, the droid purposely alters all chemical formulas to include ingredients that render the particular concoction inert.

Ranger/34:2:1:12/Cha• In regards to Toria's message, I can verify that counter-modification programming. The Rebel Alliance has paid me well to slice into similar droids and remove the safeguards. (Seems that every time the Rebs

need some kind of explosive fabricated, the blasted things go right to work...making soap.) Unfortunately, the designers at TelBrinTel are hot; the subroutines are very subtle, deeply ingrained and very difficult to locate.

Second Degree Droids

■ 87-RM Scouting Droid

Model: Serv-O-Droid 87-RM Scout Collector Unit

DEXTERITY 1D

Melee combat 3D, melee parry 4D

KNOWLEDGE 1D

MECHANICAL 1D

PERCEPTION 1D

Search 3D

STRENGTH 6D

Lifting 8D

TECHNICAL 1D

Equipped With:

- Repulsorlift floaters
- Two grappling claws
- Shields
- Flash-freeze unit

Special Abilities:

Claw Attack: The collector droid can use its claws in self-defense. They do 3D damage in melee combat. A successful hit means the target has been restrained and will be dumped next round into the flash freeze chamber.

Flash-Freeze: The droid flash-freezes its specimens. After a couple of minutes of cryogenically controlled hypothermia, the sample is flash-frozen for the return trip. A character captured by the droid but rescued within two minutes can be revived using first aid techniques for cold exposure (on a Moderate *first aid* roll). Only three attempts can be made (once per hour) and failure to revive the character results in an incapacitated wound status. Success means that the frozen character is treated as wounded for 1D hours, but recovers completely after this time has elapsed.

Shields: The collector droid has limited shields worth +2D against energy attacks. If a creature touches the outer shell of the collector droid, it can concentrate its shields into a contact stun of 5D damage, but only once per combat round.

Move: 7

Size: 2.5 meters tall

Cost: 4,350 credits

Capsule: Serv-O-Droid created the 87-RM to assist colonists and scouts during the initial stages of a planet's exploration. 87-RM droids perform cleanup duties after scout droids locate and stun target specimens. The collectors rumble along with a steam condensation trail behind them, picking up stunned units with their two large claws and placing them inside their gaping maw at the top of the droid for flash-freezing. They have repulsorlift generators underneath which maintain an elevation of one meter.

Availability: 2, F

Personality Matrix: Simple

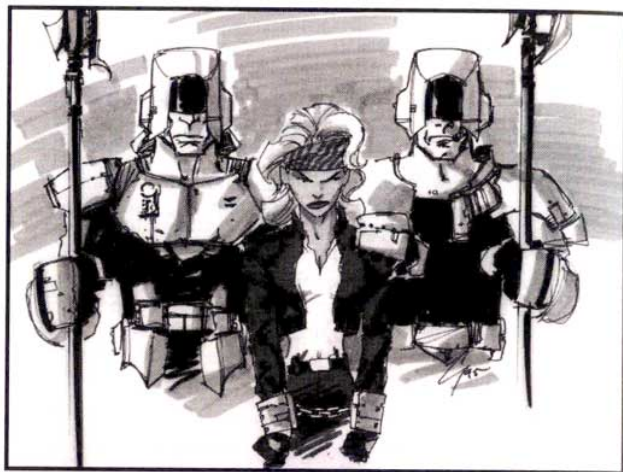
Drev/35:6:17/Elr• The Empire discontinued use of this droid model after one unit went crazy and clawed something like 300 colonists on Corva Yag (out near Minos Cluster, I think).

Thanik/35:8:1:04/Bak• According to a public safety brief, that unit had some kind of counter-programming inserted to cause it to go crazy. My vote is that the Rebels sabotaged it.

Toria/35:9:1:8/Cor• I'm not so sure...the Imperials would have blamed the Rebellion like crazy if they had anything to do with it. I wonder if the Imperials were testing some kind of new weapon or droid programming protocols that led to the malfunction. Or maybe the colonists stumbled into something they weren't supposed to find (a hidden base or staging area)?

Cynabar's DROIDS Datalog

This particular version of Cynabar's Droid Datalog was sliced by Drew Campbell and Eric S. Trautmann.



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