
TRAVELLER

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS

BODYSNATCHERS

Regina... It thinks it's so much more than it is. The heart of the Spinward Marches, the great spinward bastion of Imperial culture... billions of deluded idiots, who believe that if they dress and talk like a core-worlder, they'll be the same on the inside too. They don't realise they're a joke, a backwater, a non-entity in the grand scheme. The whole of the Marches could slip between the cracks of the bureaucracy on Capital if some clerk pressed the wrong key, and no-one would notice for a decade... and even when they found it, no-one would care.

I once jumped in and took a shuttle down to Credo, went to a bar and told people that I'd just come from Dagudashag and had they heard the latest gossip from court? In twenty minutes, I'd convinced them that wearing live chickens on your head was the big thing on Capital these days. Sold 'em my cargo full of frozen poultry for a hundred times the normal price... those were special haute couture chickens, you see. Very rare.

The rest of the planet remembers where it is. They remember the Long Night, and their culture has the scars and xenophobia you expect in the Marches, unlike the borrowed gaudiness of Credo. They still don't trust offworlders in parts of Regina, and if you go down the wrong street in certain cities, you may not come back. The datafiles tag the planet at Law Level 9 – sure... for offworlders, that's about right, but not for natives. They have their own ways that they didn't import from the core.

– *Personal Journal of Vlen Backett*

Bodysnatchers is the first adventure in the *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign. If you're a player, **stop reading now**. If you're a Referee, then you should first read **Section 0: Secrets of Secrets** to get an overview of the campaign. As discussed in that document, one of the player characters

(the Inheritor) must be related or friendly with a wandering traveller and merchant named **Vlen Backett**; news of Vlen's death is the plot hook that brings the characters to Regina and into the campaign.

This adventure takes place on Regina, in the Regina subsector of the Spinward Marches. The year is assumed to be 1105. The player characters are assumed to have their own ship; if not, then replace references to their own vessel with the passenger ship they arrive on.

Adventure Synopsis

The characters receive word that Vlen Backett is dead, and are requested to come to Regina to collect his body and personal effects. On arrival at the Highport, they are interviewed by the authorities, and learn that Vlen died under suspicious circumstances. From there, they travel down to Credo, where they obtain several leads about Vlen's death. These bring them to Professor Ujinka, of the University of Regina.

The characters meet Professor Ujinka, an expert on the Ancients. Shee describes an experimental technique for detecting Ancient sites, one that Vlen was very interested in funding. While the characters are meeting with the professor, they are attacked by assassins. These assassins give the characters a vital clue about Vlen's death – the crime lord Ven Yasha was responsible for the murder. Ven Yasha is a mysterious and elusive figure, but his second-in-command Harlen was the one who actually murdered Backett, and the characters set out to track him down.

The characters enter the criminal underworld of Regina Highport and find their way to Harlen's secret lair, where they must defeat his criminal goons in order to recover Vlen's stolen possessions.

1. DEATH NOTICE

There is no method of faster-than-light communication in the Imperium. Messages are carried by couriers or on the x-boat network in mail drums (high-density computer memory cores, containing quadrillions of bits of data) from one system to the next, and then transmitted by conventional radio or laser comms. Messages therefore propagate out from the origin at the speed of the courier (usually Jump-4). Travellers may pick up their messages at a starport, or send their ship identity code to the local communications relay and download any stored messages.

The Inheritor receives the following message. The datestamp is three days ago, plus one week for every four parsecs distances from Regina. The message is a high-priority one, and is electronically stamped with the seal of the Duchy of Regina, implying it is an important official message.

From: Pallod Norrim, Chief Inspector, Regina Public Order Commission

Subject: Chattels and corpus of Vlen Backett (deceased)

It is my sad duty to inform you of the death of citizen Vlen Backett, late of Regina/Alell, who died in Credo City, Regina/Regina. Before his passing, Backett had left instructions on file with the Public Order Commission that you should be considered his next of kin for the purposes of resolving his outstanding affairs on Regina, for taking possession of his belongings, and for the transport of his remains back to Alell. A sum of money has been deposited with the First Ducal Bank to cover any expenses.

In the name of his grace the Duke and in accordance with the Public Order Act of 527 (Amended), I hereby require and enjoin you to travel to Regina with all due haste to deal with the affairs and estate of Vlen Backett. In the event that you are unable to do so, you must reply to this message at soon as possible so that alternate arrangements may be made.

I wish to extend my personal condolences on the death of Vlen Backett. His body is being stored in a cryogenic facility in Credo City and will be transferred to your possession as soon as possible. Given certain irregularities with Vlen Backett's affairs, it is vitally important that you contact the Public Order Commission on arrival.

Sealed this day, 127 Standard, in the 1105th year of the Third Imperium.

– Pallod Norum

The message is properly sealed and is almost certainly genuine. As the characters make their way to Regina, they receive several other copies of the message; as a high-priority transmission, it has been copied to every starport and relay and will be held indefinitely. The journey to Regina is uneventful, unless the Referee wishes to throw in a side encounter en route.

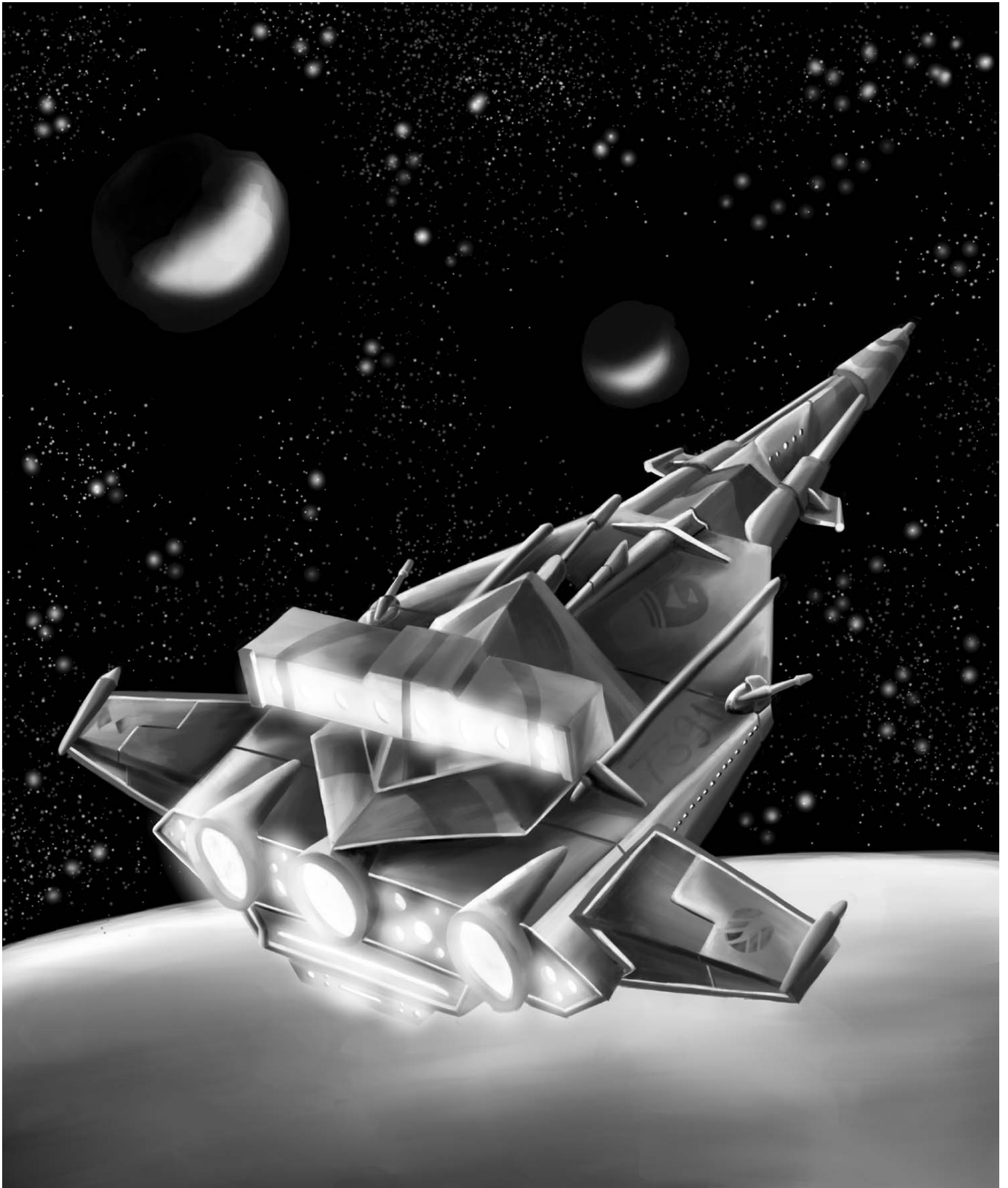
2. REGINA HIGHPORT

You jump into the Regina system, emerging from jump space some distance from the main world, as the jump shadow of the gas giant Assiniboia means that ships cannot always arrive close to the moon itself. Your navigation screen lights up with hundreds of contacts. Most are small traders and freighters, but as you come closer to the highport, you detect larger ships. Much larger ships. Up ahead, there's a convoy of megafreighters. You pass by these slow-moving titans; each one of them could swallow you ship five thousand times over at least. The names and port registrations are redolent of distant, exotic worlds far off in the core systems. These ships have been travelling for months, jumping along the Corridor.

Off to one side, there's a flotilla of Imperial warships, part of the sector fleet. They glitter in the darkness, but you can't get too close; there's a military interdiction zone around them. Even at a distance, though, they're a sight to behold. At the centre of the formation is the 200,000 ton Korrirak-class dreadnought Pride of Efate; your ship could fly down the barrel of that meson gun with plenty of room to spare on all four sides. A constellation of smaller warships surround the Pride, and you can see a swarm of troop transport shuttles making their way out from the highport to the flotilla along a military flight lane.

Regina is one of the most heavily-trafficked systems in the Spinward Marches, so as you fly closer to the Highport, you're assigned an approach vector to make sure you don't interfere with the courses of any of the other thousands of ships. Usually, a small ship like yours would get put into a holding orbit for hours until a docking berth became available, or you'd get sent to one of the smaller stations, but this time you're contacted directly by traffic control.

'This is Regina Control calling. We have you logged as a Public Order Commission special visitor, please confirm your identity.'



As soon as the characters confirm that yes, they are here because they were contacted by the POC, read the following.

There's a pause of a few seconds, and then the traffic controller comes back on the line. 'We're transferring you to a priority approach vector. Confirm reception of navigational data.' This new course will bring you right into the heart of the Highport immediately. This is the sort of treatment nobles and admirals get.

The highport swells from a dot to a sphere until it fills your entire screen. The station itself is a rough sphere of metal, but it's surrounded by rings of smaller stations, undocked ships, cargo depots, defense satellites, buoys and beacons. You weave between these obstacles until you drop into your assigned approach vector, which brings you to a secure docking berth on the ventral side of the station. The lights on board flicker for an instant as the support umbilical latches on your hull.

On disembarking, the characters are met by Highport security guards, who bear the Imperial Starburst proudly on their armour. The characters are asked to wait at the docking berth for a representative of the Public Order Commission. If asked, the guards say they have no idea why the characters are being given such unusual treatment; they are part of the Imperial security forces, and have nothing to do with the POC, whose jurisdiction does not extend to the extra-territorial starport.

A few minutes later, four agents of the POC arrive, led by Pallod Norrim. He signs an electronic chit confirming that he has taken custody of the PCs from the starport security staff, then requests that they accompany him to the Regina Territorial Zone attached to the station, where they can discuss the matter of Vlen Backett.

Pallod Norrim

Norrim is portly, but light on his feet, the mark of a man who has spent many years in the slightly lower gravity of a space station. He is dressed in a POC uniform, a green militaristic outfit with crystal-blue epaulets and a blue cap; hanging at his side is a personal computer, which he hardly ever uses. He speaks slowly and deliberately, enunciating every word of his Galanglic to ensure offworlders can follow his accent. He is the chief representative of the POC at the Highport, so his job exists in the tangled grey area between Imperial and planetary law.

Pallod Norrim privately thinks of himself as a beekeeper. The offworlders swarm around him, buzzing and flitting back and forth in what seems like chaos, but really, they are following very simple rules as they search for what they need and defend against threats to their hives. He must wear protective garments – the strict application of Regina law – to defend against their stings, but as long as he takes basic precautions, the bees are essentially harmless. He has dealt with tens of thousands of cases over his long career, and no matter how strange the circumstances are (aliens and travellers seem to delight in bringing in added complications to quite simple cases), he has found that they almost always boil down to one of a handful of problems. Someone lied, someone got drunk, someone quarreled with another. Just let the bees buzz until they have exhausted themselves, then sweep them up and fix the problem.

Then, in Pallod's private classification system, there are wasps. Wasps look like bees at first glance, but they are more aggressive and keep stinging. He suspects Vlen Backett's case might be a wasp; more complex and more damaging than a simple murder enquiry. Therefore, he intends to swat the case as soon as possible.

Pallod Norrim

STR 4 DEX 7 END 8 INT 9 EDU 9 SOC 8

Admin 2, Advocate 4, Broker 2, Diplomat 2, Investigate 3, Persuade 2, Streetwise 2

Playing Norrim:

- Speak clearly, but never actually say anything. Couch everything in polite phrases and diplomatic vagueness. Never say 'no' when you can say 'not at this time'; never say 'yes' when you can say 'I shall certainly endeavour to do so, circumstances permitting.'
- Never get angry or raise your voice, unless you are exerting your authority.
- Stroke your moustache thoughtfully.
- Look straight at the person you're talking too. Keep your shoulders squared and your back straight.

The Public Order Office

Inspector Norrim escorts you through a maze of corridors to a small shuttle. The shuttle detaches from the highport and crosses to another, smaller space station only a few kilometres away. Your shuttle nestles into a bay alongside several interceptors in police livery and docks once more. A short elevator ride takes you into the heart of the Public Order Commission offices.

Norrim shows you into his office – blandly functional, with a large holoportrait of Duke Norris on the wall – and sits down behind his desk. The hardwood desk is a imposing antique, and must have cost a small fortune to ship into orbit. The inspector activates a privacy seal as he addresses you.

‘It is the belief of the Public Order Commission that Vlen Backett was murdered. The circumstances of his death certainly suggest foul play; Backett was found in the Traveller’s Aid Hostel in Startown. He had been shot with a low-calibre projectile weapon – presumably a silenced one, as no-one heard the gunshot. He was taken to the Tan Shalve medical centre, where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

No weapon was found at the Hostel, and the room was sprayed with an aerosol chemical solvent that destroys most forms of forensic evidence. The case is under investigation, of course, but such things take time.’

Norrim pauses and taps at his personal computer for a few seconds, bringing up a document on screen. ‘According to the physician, tests on the blood of Vlen Backett showed a high level of Tusal, an illegal narcotic. Traces of the drug were also found on Backett’s clothing and in his luggage. His belongings were scattered across the hostel room, implying a hasty search.’

The inspector looks straight at you. ‘If you have any information pertinent to this case, now would be the time to volunteer it.’

Norrim obviously suspects that Vlen Backett was a drug smuggler, and that he was killed when some deal went wrong. The player characters obviously have no idea about Vlen’s recent movements. Once the inspector is convinced that they have nothing useful to tell him, he sighs and tells them that they can collect Backett’s corpse and belongings from the Credo Public Order Office, on planetside. There is a travel bond in Backett’s name for the sum of 100,000 credits; more than enough to bring the body home.

The characters may have questions for the inspector about the case – see *Section 3, Investigations in Credo* for more details on Backett’s movements. Norrim answers questions reluctantly and in the vaguest possible terms, stonewalling the characters if possible; it is an ongoing case, he cannot comment or speculate and so on. Frustrate the players and make them want to follow up the investigation on their own by making it clear that Norrim will be of

no help to them. (Norrim is not unsympathetic, but he believes the matter of Vlen Backett should be handled by the Public Order Commission alone.)

Heading Planetside

Shuttles depart from the Highport to the planet every hour. The shuttles land at Regina Downport, in the middle of Startown. From there, the characters can catch a monorail into Credo, or head to the Traveller’s Aid Hostel, or pursue other investigations.

3. INVESTIGATIONS IN CREDO

You crowd onto a shuttle to the surface. About half the passengers are Regina citizens; the rest are fellow travellers and spacers. There’s a hubbub of strange accents and languages, and you catch fragments of gossip about galactic affairs. One newly-arrived traveller from the core worlds peers around him and wonders out loud if any of you are Zhodani spies; another claims to be a cousin of the Emperor, and would anyone like the honour of buying him dinner, for he has temporarily mislaid his wallet and his starship. A few seconds later, a pair of Public Order Commission Officers appear, grab the panhandling prince, and melt away into the crowd once more.

The shuttle detaches from the Highport and falls towards the surface. You pass over the spine of another megafreighter; off to one side you see a brightly coloured Aslan spice merchant heading for the jump line. A trio of fast interceptors fly alongside your shuttle for a few moments before peeling off, their grav plates flaring brightly in the shadow of the freighter.

And then you’re out in open space, and you can see the planet below.

Or, more accurately, the moon. Regina is the moon of the gas giant Assiniboia, and the ruddy-yellow crescent of the gas giant dominates the viewport. Below you is Regina itself; you’re spinning down towards its nightside, and you can see the lights of the cities spread out like a constellation. There you can see the edge of the coast, marked by a brighter line of lights and then a great darkness. There are the lights of Credo City, a bright halo surrounding an even brighter core, and there’s Atora – the two cities are growing together into one continent-spanning metropolis.

Between the two is Regina Downport, and Startown. Your shuttle cuts through the atmosphere and flies

over Startown; you glimpse narrow streets crowded with neon between the huge bulk of warehouses and fuel depots.

After landing, you step out onto those neon streets and look up. It's just after local dawn. Assiniboia hangs above you like an accusing eye. A Public Order Commission Officer at the starport gates gestures towards you. 'Move along, citizens! No loitering. No loitering in Startown.'

The key clue that the characters need to pick up in this section is the message from Professor Ujinka; everything else is just background information. You can draw this section out or compress it as much as you like.

There are three events that take place during this investigation – meeting detective Oday, possibly realising that the characters are under observation, and the ‘official’ end to the investigation. Oday can meet the characters at the hostel or the morgue; run *We're Bring Watched...* whenever the action lulls. Finally, Chief Inspector Norrim contacts the characters just before they head to meet with Professor Ujinka.

The Morgue

Inspector Norrim told the characters that Backett's corpse and belongings are stored in the Credo Public Order Office; it is a colossal building, made out of black synthstone; characters may recognise it as a perfect copy of the Imperial Ministry of Justice headquarters on Capital. There are always huge crowds outside the POC Office, thanks to the Reginan custom of Assumption of Custody. The characters have to queue behind angry citizens, offworlders demanding compensation for wrongful arrest, or people trying to cope with the choking bureaucracy of Regina. A successful Admin check lets the characters get through the paperwork in a reasonable time; otherwise, they are shuttled from department to department for hours.

Eventually, they are escorted to the morgue, where Backett's body is stored. The characters must give the name of a ship for the body to be transferred too, but they can lie if they want to see the corpse for themselves. They may also request a copy of the forensic report.

The Body: Only a cursory examination of the body was carried out, as the cause of death is very clear. Vlen Backett was shot in the heart. A successful Medicine or Gun Combat skill notes that the wound is

surprisingly clean and only minimal damage was done – there's no exit wound at the back, and the damage is extremely localised. (In fact, Backett arranged for his own death; minimising the damage ensures that his resurrection will go smoothly. He has cybernetic implants (TL20+) that protect his brain even in the event of death. These implants are undetectable except by dissecting his brain, and Backett has defence mechanisms to protect him in such an eventuality.)

The body is stored inside a cryo tube.

The Forensic Report: The forensic report confirms what Pallod Norrim told the characters; Vlen Backett was killed by a gunshot from close range, probably a low-velocity snub pistol.

Blood tests do show a high level of Tusal in Backett's bloodstream; at that level, he would barely have been able to stand, let alone fight back.

Backett's Belongings: Backett's possessions at the time of death amount to the following:

- Sundry clothing and toiletries
- 13,400 credits
- A TAS membership card
- Used tickets for middle passage on board the *Great Eastern* travel liner from Rhylanor to Regina
- A personal comm

The Traveller's Aid Society Hostel

There are so many visitors to Regina that the Traveller's Aid Society operates several hostels. The largest and most prestigious is on the Highport station, but there are four more hostels located in other cities on the surface. ‘Hostel’ conjures up images of dormitories and budget accommodation, but the TAS Hostels range from cramped, mildewed hellholes to luxurious clubs. Most of the Regina hostels are exceedingly well-equipped and comfortable, on a par with the best hostels.

The one exception is the ‘Regina Down’ hostel. Technically within the Credo city limits, this hostel is really part of Startown. It is hundreds of years old, and looks it – the building's exterior is shabby, the concierge computer is outdated and forgetful, and the beds have exotic parasites from all over the sector.

To get into the hostel, the characters need to either have a TAS member in their party, or use Vlen Backett's card. They may also try to persuade the staff that they should be allowed in, using Persuade, Deception or Carouse.

The Murder: The TAS Staff have already been interviewed by the Public Order Commission, and have little further to add. If the characters insist, they go over their testimony again.

- Backett was an infrequent visitor to the hostel; he would show up every few years, stay for anything from a few days to several months, and then vanish again.
- He arrived three days before his death.
- On the night of the shooting, Backett returned to the hostel with three other men. TAS members are allowed receive visitors at the hostel, as long as they vouch for their guests. All three provided identity cards; the POC have since confirmed that all three cards were forgeries.
- Backett seemed nervous, but not intoxicated or especially worried.
- Poor-quality security camera footage of the three is available. Two of the figures are clearly visible; they are big, dangerous-looking thugs. The third visitor was standing behind the other two and no details can be made out, other than his reddish hair.
- They ordered drinks to be brought to the room.
- Two of the visitors remained in the corridor outside, as if on guard. After an hour, one of them left the hostel and returned forty-five minutes later.
- Two hours later, the three visitors left in a hurry. Before they left, one of the visitors called the front desk and reported a spillage in Backett's room. When the cleaning robot arrived, it discovered Backett's corpse and raised the alarm.
- Around the same time, there was an unexplained power surge that knocked out computer and surveillance systems in the area. The origin of this surge has yet to be discovered.

There are several inconsistencies in this story that neither the police nor the TAS staff can explain. The three visitors are criminals working for Ven Yasha, who is an alternate identity of Vlen Backett. Backett suspected that he was under observation by Imperial Intelligence, and that they were worrying close to discovering his secrets. Backett decided that the best approach was to have himself 'killed'; his Ancient masters could resurrect him later. The whole murder was staged for the benefit of Imperial intelligence.

One of the thugs left after an hour; he went out to purchase several doses of the illegal drug tusal; partially to dull the pain of being shot for Backett, but also to throw the police off the trail. Asking around outside with a Difficult (-2) Streetwise check lets the characters pick up a rumour that a drug dealer called Darrian Jak sold a lot of tusal on the night Vlen Backett died.

The anomalous detail of the killer calling for the cleaner before leaving was to minimise the amount of time Backett spent outside of cryo; the mysterious power cut was caused by an Ancient device in the possession of the killers. See **Assassins!**, page XX for more details.

The Message: While the characters are in the TAS hostel, a message arrives at the front desk, addressed to Backett. As Vlen's next of kin, the characters can take this message.

To: Vlen Backett, care of the Regina Down TAS Hostel
From: Professor Iaros Ujinka, Department of History, University of Regina

Subject: Meeting
Dear Vlen,

I have returned from Beck's World, and am now available for that meeting we discussed at your convenience. If you would care to visit me at my home on Dancado, I shall be delighted to receive you and discuss topics of mutual interest.

Yours,
Professor Ujinka

Detective Oday

Detective Oday is another Public Order Commission Officer, although he is currently on 'medical leave' pending psychological assessment. For years, Oday has been on the trail of a semi-mythical criminal named Ven Yasha. He is convinced that Ven Yasha is being hundreds of unexplained crimes and murders on Regina, and may be the secret leader of the Ine Givar in this Sector.

Oday is unstable and jittery; his skin is pock-marked, a side effect of the mood stabiliser drugs he takes to stay functional. He is extremely paranoid and nervous, and takes absurd precautions against being overheard. His condition has deteriorated in the last year, his delusions grown worse. He is an embarrassment to the Public Order Commission, and has been placed on leave while the legal machinery is put in place to force his retirement.

Oday suspected Vlen Backett of being part of Ven Yasha's organisation; now that Backett is dead under mysterious circumstances, Oday believes that Backett must have been murdered under Yasha's orders. Chief Inspector Norrim kept Oday well away from the Backett case, so Oday is forced to stalk the characters until he gets a chance to talk to them.

At an appropriate juncture – say, when one of the characters splits off from the rest of the party to attend to some business – he encounters Oday. Read the following.

‘Don’t look over.’

There’s a man leaning against the wall nearby. He’s got a hat drawn down over his eyes, and he’s facing away from you, talking into his hand-held comm – but you can see that the comm unit is turned off.

‘I know who killed Vlen Backett. I can help you find him. There’s a bar down in Startown, the Flotsam. Meet me there at 10pm. Make sure you’re not followed.’

The Flotsam: If the characters wish to keep this appointment, they can find the Flotsam easily enough. It’s a run-down spacer’s bar in the shadow of the Downport; it smells of spilled beer and that curious metallic tang that clings to people who have spent months in recycled atmospheres. There is no sign of Oday initially – the ex-cop is lurking atop a warehouse across the street from the bar. He is paranoid enough to watch the entrance to make sure the PCs are not followed. Once Oday is convinced that none of Ven Yasha’s agents followed the characters, he enters the bar and joins them.

The strange man shuffles over to your table, shooting glances over his shoulder. His eyes dart around the room, as if marking the exits. He grabs a chair and moves it over to one side, so he can sit with his back to the wall.

‘The name’s Oday. Detective First Class. I’m armed, by the way, don’t make any sudden moves.’ He grins suddenly, as if his face just spasmed.

‘Have you ever heard of a man called Ven Yasha? He’s got his finger in every cargo that comes through Regina. I’ve been trying to find a way into his organisation for years, looking for him to slip up. He’s bribed half the Commission, and he’s got spies everywhere.

I think he killed Vlen Backett, or ordered his death anyway. I don’t know what Backett was up to – maybe he was one of Yasha’s couriers, or something, but he was involved. I’m not involved in the case – and isn’t that interesting, no ulterior motives there I’m sure – and you can’t rely on the rest of the POC. They couldn’t find Assiniboia at midnight.’

If the characters have not already visited the TAS Hostel, then Oday suggests trying there; if they have the clue sending them to Professor Ujinka, he encourages them to follow up on that. Oday has connections, and can help the characters if they go after Ven Yasha. He does not know where Ven Yasha’s current base of operation is.

Detective Oday

STR 6 DEX 7 END 7 INT 7 EDU 8 SOC 6

Advocate 2, Carouse 2, Deception 1, Gun Combat (handgun) 1, Investigate 2, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1

Body Pistol, damage 3D6-3

Playing Oday:

- Be nervous. Look over your shoulder a lot, glare suspiciously at anyone who asks you a personal question.
- Mumble under your breath.
- Lean in close, in a conspiratorial way.

Likely questions:

Why would Ven Yasha have Backett killed? *Yasha’s obsessed with protecting his organisation. Anyone he doesn’t trust, he kills. That’s my guess. That, or Backett had something that Yasha wanted.*

Is Yasha involved in tusal dealing?: *Drugs? You think Ven Yasha is dealing drugs. You have no idea of the scale this guy operates on, none whatsoever. The only drug he deals in is power. Yasha’s interested in politics and technology, not getting high.*

Why are you off the case? *Damn bureaucrats! They’ve got me on medical leave. Psychologically unstable. Paranoid. Mood swings. Delusions of persecution and conspiracy. Violent tendencies. Lying bastards.*

Contacting Inspector Norrim

The characters may wish to contact Inspector Norrim, either to find out if there is any progress on the case, or to ask him about Detective Oday. He steadfastly refuses to comment on the investigation into Backett’s death (if the PCs volunteer information about Professor Ujinka or some other clue, then Norrim ‘takes it under advisement’ and passes the lead onto Imperial Intelligence). As for Detector Oday, he tells the characters that Oday is medically unfit for duty and should not be trusted

We're Being Watched...

The characters are under observation by agents of Imperial Intelligence. These spies are working for Gand Holcess (see **Section 0**). There are two agents trailing the characters around Regina; they picked them up at the Highport and have been on their tail ever since. The agents are **Hargid Voss** and **Stej Lanner**. Their orders are to watch the characters and not to interfere unless absolutely necessary.

Call for occasional Recon rolls; if a character gets an Effect of 5 or 6, he gets the feeling he is being watched. Two successes in a row lets the character spot the tail; the players can set up task chains to boost their chances of finding the tail (say, Streetwise to intuit the layout of the city and find good places to turn the tables on the agents; Stealth or Deception to trick them and so on). If spotted, the agents fall back; if there is a risk of being captured, they alert the Public Order troops and have the area closed down.

Use the two agents to make the players increasingly paranoid as the game goes on, and to foreshadow the involvement of Gand Holcess in the next few missions. Other nasty tricks the agents can try:

- Breaking into the characters' accommodation and planting listening devices
- Accessing the characters' computer files and tapping their communications. The agents have allies in the Public Order Commission, so they can exert considerable political influence and bend the rules
- Follow the characters around and question people they meet

The Crime is Solved

At an appropriately surprising juncture, the characters are contacted by Chief Inspector Norrim. He has important news – a standard Assumption of Custody sweep has identified Backett's killer. The inspector explains that they used the security footage from the TAS hostel to create a profile of the likely murderer – short, red-haired, involved in the tusal trade, and potentially violent. The Public Order Commission pulled in a score of suspects and questioned them all, and one of them is going to be charged with the crime.

The accused killer is a small-time tusal smuggler and thug called Darrian Jak; he is not actually a Darrian, but he has elfin features that are reminiscent of that hybrid culture. He denies murdering anyone in the TAS Hostel, but the POC can tie him to half-a-dozen other violent incidents and he has no alibi for that night.

Secretly, Chief Inspector Norrim knows that Jak is innocent of that crime; pinning the Backett murder on the thug ends his involvement with Imperial Intelligence. Metaphorically, it is shooing that troublesome wasp out the window.

The characters can react to this news as they wish. It is obvious that Darrian Jak is not the actual killer, and that the police are dropping the case for some mysterious reason; do they press on secretly, or complain to the authorities?

4. PROFESSOR UJINKA, I PRESUME

Professor Iaros Ujinka is an elderly member of the archaeology and history faculty at the University of Regina. Characters who have Social Science (history) 1 or connections in that field may have heard of Iaros; she is an expert on the Ancient civilisation. She was highly respected in the field until an incident twelve years ago. There is an Ancient site on the planet Inthe, six parsecs antispinward of Regina. This site is officially a state secret, although its existence is common knowledge among researchers and tourists. Ujinka and several of her colleagues fought a high-profile legal battle with the Scout Service to have the Inthe site opened up to civilian researchers; the case dragged on for years until it was eventually resolved by the Archduke of Deneb himself, who sided with the Scouts. Relations between the University and the government were severely scarred by the whole affair, and Ujinka's reputation suffered greatly. There were even allegations that she helped thieves break into the Inthe site to steal buried artefacts.

According to the Regina news networks, she has been offworld on a research mission for three years; the University of Regina has several off-world dig sites related to the Ancients. Now, she has returned.

Calling Ahead

The players might contact Ujinka via comm instead of visiting her house; if they try this, she is shocked by the news of Backett's death but still insists that the characters come visit her, so she can discuss Backett's business with them privately.

The Estate at Dancado

Professor Ujinka has a large home in the countryside outside Credo City, in the region called Dancado. Technically, Dancado is the private property of the Duke of Regina, but a few respected families are permitted to lease land in the estate and live there. The house has been in Ujinka's family for generations.

As the Dancado region is part of the duke's private domain, air/cars and other flyers are restricted to a limited number of flight paths. The standard mode of travel is by charmingly old-fashioned ground car, or even by riding. The characters can hire a ground car in Credo City; once they are out of the press of the multi-level city, the drive is a pleasant one, winding its way through the forests of Dancado. The trees here have adapted to their environment; each of them has two sets of leaves. One set is for absorbing sunlight from Regina's primary star; the other set of grey fronds is for feeding on reflected light from Assiniboia. This is unsettling for any non-natives, as the trees squirm sometimes to pick up more of the wan light from the gas giant.

Call for a Difficult (-2) Recon check as the characters drive to Ujinka's house. If a character succeeds, he catches the occasional glimpse of a POC air/car that seems to be keeping pace with them. This air/car belongs to Hargid Voss and Stej Lanner, the two Imperial Intelligence agents who are following the characters.

Ujinka's home is surrounded by a high fence enclosing several square kilometres of garden. When the characters drive up to the gate, they are scanned by an automated security system that confirms their identity. A successful Recon roll notes the presence of armed drones lurking in the trees; such weapon systems are illegal on Regina without extensive special permits, and are certainly an impressive amount of firepower for a private residence.

The short avenue up to the house winds through the trees. There are several strange pieces of sculpture in the grounds; a character with Social Science (history) 2 or Art (sculpture) 1 recognises them as copies of Ancient structures. The house itself an impressive structure on the edge of an artificial lake.

Map of the House

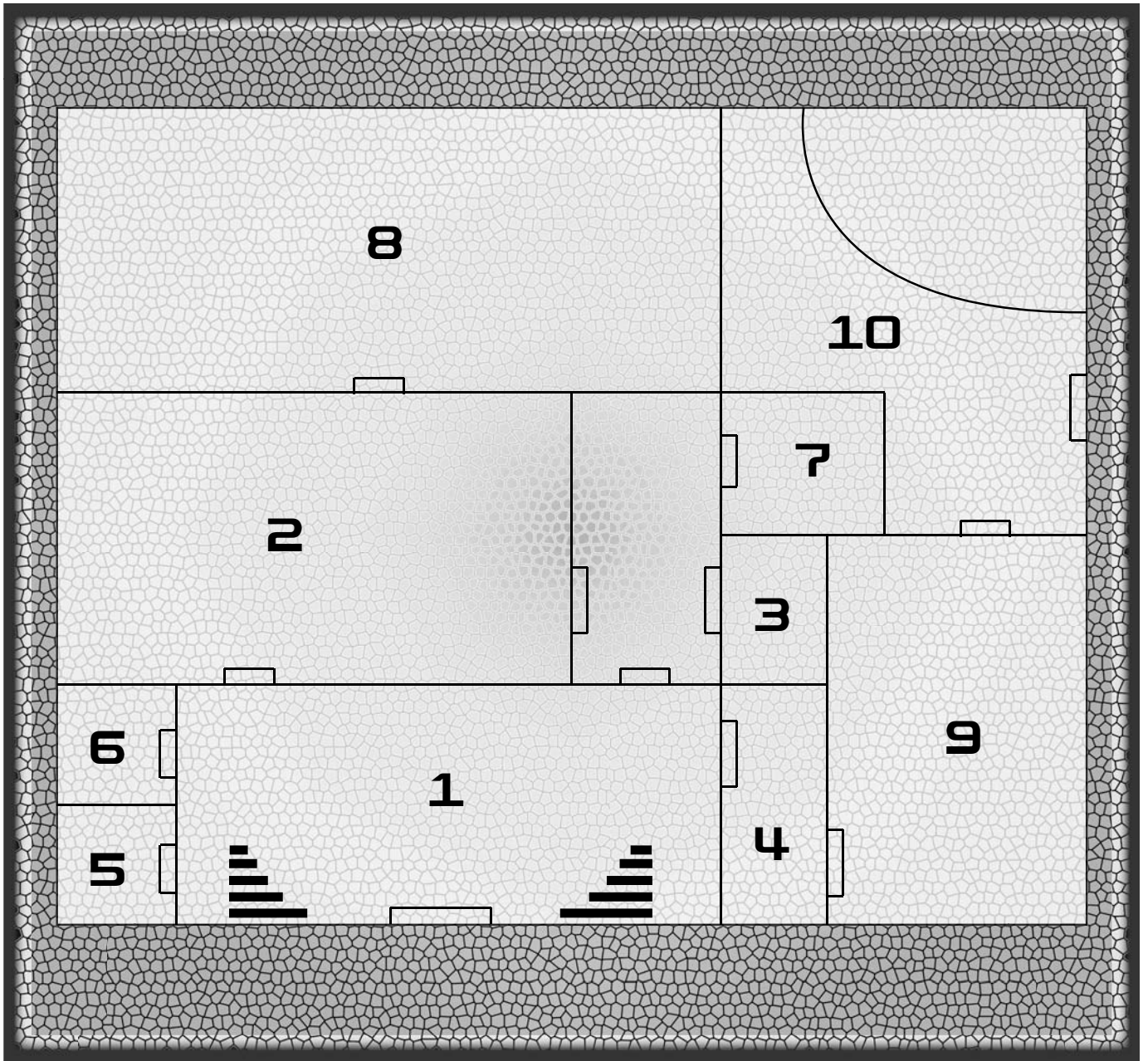
The house is packed with Ujinka's collections of curios, old furniture, and antiques. Ujinka is the only human resident; there are six family robots who have been part of the household for more than three centuries, and who were the only entities living here for the last four years.

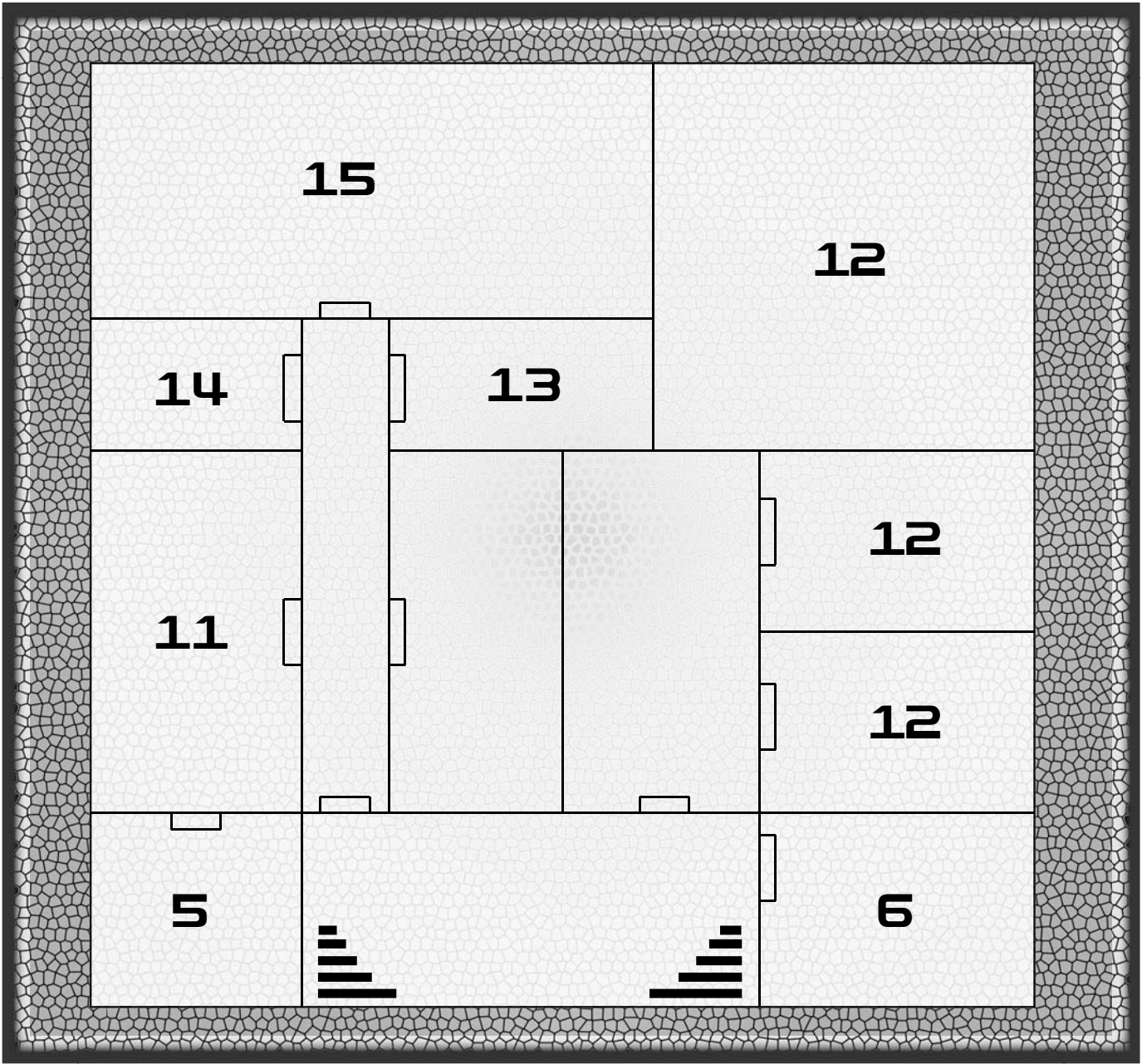
- 1. Entrance Hallway:** There is a control panel by the front door to control the locks and gate access.
- 2. Dining Room:** This room has not been used in more than a decade; Ujinka eats at her desk when she remembers to eat at all.
- 3. Kitchen:** The kitchen systems are all more than a hundred years old and are rarely used; there is a budget automated food prep machine on one countertop where Ujinka makes her meals. She still eats like a grad student.
- 4. Utility Room:** This room contains the house's computer core, including the controls for the security drones. The house's fission cell is under the floor.
- 5. Bathrooms**
- 6. Storerooms:** Filled with junk and old furniture.
- 7. Holoroom:** Old homes on Regina sometimes have holorooms, a chamber lined with holographic projectors used for communications or entertainment. Very old-fashioned.
- 8. Library:** An eclectic mix of data storage media, from data crystals and holowafer to chemical dyes on wood pulp.
- 9. Carport:** Contains the professor's automated groundcar.
- 10. Boathouse:** Contains a rowboat and a pair of water-walking pads (highly buoyant gyro-stabilised footwear). The professor likes to take walks out on the lake when pondering some archaeological problem.
- 11. Autodoc:** The professor lives alone and is quite elderly; her physician insisted she purchase a home autodoc system.
- 12. Bedrooms**
- 13. Study:** The professor's study.
- 14. Workroom:** Used for examining artefacts.
- 15. Lounge:** Where she receives the player characters.

The Security Drones: The professor has a suite of four security drones slaved to the house computer. She obtained a special license to possess such a potent security system for a private dwelling. The drones are all equipped with stunners and laser carbines. While the characters are speaking with Ujinka, one of the drones cruises past the window of the lounge and hovers there for a moment before continuing its patrol.

Tea and History

A robot servant opens the door. 'Professor Ujinka will be with you momentarily. Please follow me to the lounge. Please mind your step.' It's not possible for a robot butler to sniff snootily, but this one makes a good attempt. The hallway beyond is packed with shipping crates and boxes; it is like a small freighter dumped its cargo on the mansion.





You're led into a large room; the whole east wall is transparent, overlooking a lake. On the wall are holos of planets the professor has visited. She's been all over the Marches.

'Hello, I'm a Heterogenous Catastrophist. Er. Sorry. I've spent far too much time lately arguing with archaeologists. I'm Iaros. Excuse the mess, I'm just back from offworld.' Professor Ujinka enters. She's at least a hundred standard years old, but moves with the energetic hyperactivity of someone who has just undergone a course of anagathics. She seizes the hand of (whichever PC is Backett's inheritor) and squeezes it with her callused hands. 'My sincere condolences. Vlen was a remarkable fellow, truly remarkable. Please, sit down. Can I have the machine get you something?'

Professor Ujinka's robot servants provide food and drink for the characters. After some small talk, the professor explains how she knew Vlen Backett.

'Finding Ancient sites has traditionally been a rather hit-or-miss affair. Either the site is so large that it is obvious from orbit, or it is so well hidden that they are discovered only by chance. All of the surviving intact sites are virtually impossible to detect using conventional sensors – there are no electromagnetic emissions, no thermal signatures, no gravimetric traces. They're effectively invisible.

Some years ago, I obtained a spacer's diary, where he described an anomalous disturbance in the g-band of his ship's communications system when they were in orbit of Yori – and there's an Ancient site on Yori. I looked into the matter, and there are a handful of other cases where other vessels reported similar G-band problems that all correlated with known Ancient sites. I believe that under certain conditions, a G-band signal can be distorted by some aspect of Ancient technology.

Now, it's not as simple as just tuning your ship's radio to the G-Band. It's only under certain conditions, and I'm not sure what those are. I applied for funding, but the university said my proposal lacked evidence. So, I went ahead anyway, of course.

There's another dig on Beck's World. My assistant Juni is there now, and she's working to isolate the G-band conditions. I contend that with funding and time, we will be able to develop a workable method for finding as-yet-undiscovered Ancient sites.

I mentioned this to Vlen... four years ago, I think. He said that he might be able to provide a ship and funding for the initial phase of experiments – in exchange for a share of the bounty on any sites found. Now, I'm not sure if you are in a position to keep to this arrangement, but if you have access to a ship, then we can see about continuing the project.' Ujinka claps her hands together enthusiastically.

Playing Professor Ujinka:

- Be enthusiastic! Jump from topic to topic, be interested in everything.
- Talk with your hands. Gesture wildly.
- Occasionally, stop to catch your breath. Remember you're a hundred years old, despite the life-prolonging drugs.

Likely Questions:

• Do you know who might have murdered Vlen?

Murdered? Vlen was murdered? Oh my stars! I had no idea! No... I mean, I know that Vlen moved in dangerous circles sometimes, but... murdered? Why?

• Do you know Ven Yasha? *Only by reputation. He's a collector of Ancient artefacts. An unscrupulous one, too. I know he tried to bribe one of the University dig teams back in '77, when we first opened up Beck's World. I understand he lives here on Regina, but I wouldn't deal with him. I'd love to find out exactly what's in his collection, though.*

• How does your G-Band Detection system work? *Not very well, yet. Juni's the real expert on it. Once she can consistently detect the site on Beck's World, we'll adapt the system for use on a scoutship or something and poke around a bit! I think Vlen had some idea about where to look first.... oh, poor man. I suppose that died with him, unless he left a note or something?*

• Where have you been for the last few years?

Hither and yon, hither and yon. Mostly Beck's World – there's an Ancient site in the caves there. I also went to a conference in Deneb; that's quite a trip. I gave a talk on Heterogenous theory.

While the characters are talking to the Professor, run the next encounter.

5. ASSASSINS!

Vlen Backett knew Imperial Intelligence was on his trail, and decided to clear up all loose ends as part of his temporary death. Killing off the Vlen identity would put an end to Intelligence's investigation of the Ancient Sons.

Professor Ujinka's research was a topic of great interest to Vlen. If the professor had hit upon a method of locating hidden Ancient sites, it could be useful to Vlen's master. His offer of funding the professor's research was genuine. However, the professor was also a threat to the secrecy of the Ancient Son, and her technique could be perfected much more quickly by Vlen's master anyway. Therefore, Vlen decided to have the professor eliminated as soon as she returned to Regina. Two assassins in Ven Yasha's employ are en route to murder Professor Ujinka.

What Vlen could never have predicted was that the player characters would pick up the professor's message from the hostel and be present when the assassins attacked.

Ven Yasha's Men

The two assassins are named **Gaius Labre** and **Mort Kinson**. These are the two thugs who guarded Vlen Backett's room in the TAS Hostel. They are both burly, intimidating bruisers with augmented physiques. They are armed with gauss pistols and snubbers, but their most dangerous weapon is an Ancient device loaned to them by Ven Yasha. This device suppresses electronic devices within a short range. They used it to escape the TAS Hostel after 'murdering' Vlen Backett, and they are about to use it to bypass the professor's security systems.

Their plan is to shut down the house, break in and murder the professor. They will then steal any Ancient artefacts to make the motive for the crime appear to be burglary.

Once an electronic device is suppressed by the Ancient device, it can be reactivated with a successful Difficult (-2) skill check taking 1-6 minutes (use the most appropriate skill for the device in question, usually Mechanic). The assassins are aware of this phenomenon, and can reactivate their weapons almost instantly.

Each assassin has a flak jacket, a gauss pistol, a snubber, a flick-knife, a burglary kit, and a commdot. They have a ground car parked in the forest some distance away.

From the moment the power to the house is cut, the characters have only a short time to prepare. Ten rounds (sixty seconds) after the power is cut, the two thugs arrive at the house. They see Professor Ujinka at the window and shoot her with a gauss pistol

burst. Five rounds after that, Labre bursts through the front door while Kinson circles around to the back and enters through the boathouse.

Read the following to the characters.

The professor stands up and wanders over to the window. 'The conference on Deneb really showed how little we understand about the Ancients. Do you know they found a site near the Solomani sphere that had -'

The lightglobes in the walls dim. The holoscreen on the wall goes dark. Outside, something falls into the lake with a splash.

'Emperor's beard! Haven't the household robots been maintaining this place at all?' grumbles the professor. 'U4! Come in here!'

The robot in the hallway outside doesn't respond. She fumbles for her pocket comm. 'It's dead too. All the power's gone. Everything's just shut down.'

She glances out the window. 'Hey, there's some-'

Suddenly, there's a hole in the window... and another hole in Professor Ujinka's chest. A bloody rose blossoms on her robes, and she topples to the floor.

Downstairs, you hear the front door smash open. What do you do?

Fighting the Assassins

The characters may be unarmed; even if they have weapons with them, any weapon above TL6 is sufficiently complex to be disabled by the Ancient device. Ujinka has no firearms in the house other than the disabled security drones, although she does have a pair of antique broadswords from the Sword Worlds. The characters can use melee attacks or try trapping the thugs.

As soon as the thugs kill the professor, or if they encounter significant resistance from the PCs, they flee – their mission was to kill one old woman, not murder half-a-dozen travellers.

Gaius Labre

STR 9 DEX 6 END 9 INT 5 EDU 6 SOC 3

Gun Combat (handgun) 2, Melee (Brawl) 1, Recon 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1

Physical Characteristic Augmentation (Strength +1, Endurance +1)

Gauss Pistol: 3D6, Auto 4

Flak Jacket (6)

Mort Kinson

STR 9 DEX 8 END 7 INT 6 EDU 7 SOC 3

Gun Combat (handgun) 1, Melee (Brawl) 2, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1

Physical Characteristic Augmentation (Strength +1, Dexterity +1)

Gauss Pistol: 3D6, Auto 4

Flak Jacket (6)

Combat Elements:

- Don't let the players know this is an attack until the thugs show up. The power cut should be presented as a weird event, not the precursor to an attack.
- The characters are unarmed and facing hardened killers with vastly superior weapons. A frontal attack is suicide. The one advantage they have is numbers.
- Use the map of the mansion – the player characters should be sneaking around rooms, moving from one floor to another via the windows, diving into the lake and so on.
- While a good Mechanic roll can be used to reactivate a handgun, the best tactic is to make it down to the utility room and reboot the house's computer, then reactivate the drones. The four security drones are heavily armed and can easily blast the thugs.
- The players will recognise the thugs as the two from the TAS Hostel.

Chasing the Assassins

As soon as the assassins retreat, they split up and flee through the forest towards their groundcar. Characters in pursuit must make Dexterity checks against the assassins. Keep track of the cumulative Effect of both sides; the first side to beat the other's total by 5 or more wins.

If the characters win, they get to catch one or both of the assassins before they reach the groundcar. If an assassin wins, then he makes it to the car before the characters reach him – not that it does him much good. The Imperial Intelligence agents who were trailing the characters are waiting there. Any pursuing player characters arrive just in time to see a POC air/car taking off at high speed.

If *both* assassins made it to the car, then Labre is captured by the Intelligence agents while Kinson is left for the PCs. The criminal is so shocked by the POC's presence that he can be captured easily.

Interrogating the Assassin

Kinson's reaction to the PCs depends on how the fight in the house proceeded. If the PCs were easily overwhelmed, then Kinson assumes that they will just

turn him over to the Regina police and says nothing. If, however, the PCs fought back successfully, then Kinson assumes they are hardened travellers and mercenaries who are used to dealing with problems themselves and tries to cut a deal with them.

If Detective Odoy is with the characters, then he offers to interrogate Kinson.

Playing Kinson:

- Growl and hunch your shoulders. Move like the world is made of delicate glass and that you like breaking things.
- You're terrified – not only have you been caught red-handed at a murder, but you have also failed Ven Yasha. You are a dead man either way. You can try to hide your fear through bravado and aggression, or bargain for a way out.
- Give the impression of barely-contained violence at all times. Even when trapped, Kinson is always only an instant away from trying to strangle his interrogator.

Kinson's Story: Kinson reveals the following information under interrogation.

- He has worked for Ven Yasha irregularly for fifteen years as a guard or legbreaker. In all that time, he has never met Ven Yasha directly – he was always hired by Ven Yasha's aide, Harlen.
- Harlen contacted Kinson and Labre several weeks ago, and ordered them to keep an eye on some traveller called Backett. They were to watch over him and make sure he was not being followed.
- On the night Backett was murdered, he and Labre accompanied Harlen to the TAS Hostel, where they met Backett. Backett and Harlen seemed to know each other quite well. Labre and Kinson stood guard outside while Harlen talked with Backett.
- At one point, Kinson was sent out to purchase a considerable amount of the drug tusal. He has no idea why – Harlen never used the stuff. Kinson knew a dealer, Darrian Jak, and obtained the drug from him.
- Soon after Kinson returned, Harlen shot Backett, and they fled the scene. There was no sign of an argument beforehand.
- Harlen stole two items from Backett's room – a statuette, and a datatape.
- In their escape, they used a device that somehow suppressed electronic devices nearby. They just called it 'the gadget'; he doesn't know where it came from or how it works, but it was one of Harlen's most prized possessions. They used the gadget on this job, too, when they were sent to assassinate Professor Ujinka.
- He has no idea why they were sent to kill some old academic, but they were told to make it look like an accident and steal whatever they could from the house.

•He does not know where Harlen is based, or where the stolen items are. He contacted Harlen through a contact in Startown, a Llellewyoly named Exceedingly Discreet. The Dandelion operated out of a brokerage called Winter Shipping; the password for getting to see the Dandelion is 'seventeen tons of flax' – just mention that at Winter Shipping, and they will let you in to see Exceedingly Discreet.

Aftermath

As Professor Ujinka is dead, then the characters must turn Kinson over to the authorities, or they will be suspects in the crime themselves.

It is possible, at this stage of the adventure, that the player characters might decide to wash their hands of the whole affair and give the matter over to Chief Inspector Norrim. If they take this course, then the Ancient statuette and the data tape will be lost. You can reintroduce these clues in the second section of *Secrets of the Ancients*, in Vlen Backett's cabin on Alell.

The Public Order Commission denies that they arrested Labre, and say they had no air/cars in that area. In this matter, they are telling the truth; those were Imperial Intelligence agents, not POC officers.

If present, Odoy strongly advocates dealing with Ven Yasha directly, instead of going to the Public Order Commission. This Llellewyoly is his best lead for finding Ven Yasha, or at least this Harlen.

6. STARTOWN NIGHTS

Startown. The freighters and tramp jumpers and free traders of a hundred worlds end up at Regina, and all their drifters and transient passengers, hitchhikers and stowaways end up here. A no-man-land between cities, claimed by neither the Imperium, or Credo, or Atora. A neon strip of clubs and bars, a smuggler's haven, a lawless frontier on a lawful world.

Assiniboia is full overhead as you arrive back in Startown, glaring down at you. Somewhere in Startown, there's a Dandelion who can lead you to the murderer.

The Plan

The characters need to come up with a strategy for dealing with Harlen and Ven Yasha. What approach best suits their skills?

• **The Direct Approach:** March into Winter Shipping, force the Dandelion to tell the characters where Harlen is, make their way to Harlen's station, and go in guns blazing to avenge Vlen Backett.

• **The Stealthy Approach:** Sneak into Winter Shipping, find out where Harlen is, and then sneak onto the cargo launch that goes to Harlen's station.

• **The Deceptive Approach:** Pretend to be criminals interested in making a deal with Harlen and Ven Yasha in order to get invited to the station.

• **The Investigative Approach:** Spy on Winter Shipping, note that a launch travels from Winter Shipping to a small station in orbit. Make their way there.

Harlen

Vlen Yasha's proxy at the Regina base is Harlen, a former scientist at Kaldi Research, who was recruited because of his expertise in telecommunications. Harlen suspects that Ven Yasha is in contact with 'higher powers' – either the Ancients, or another super-advanced alien race – and believes that if he serves Ven Yasha with fanatic devotion, his master will one day reveal these secrets to him. Harlen is a cold individual, bordering on sociopathy. He relates poorly to other human beings, preferring the company of machines.

• **The Devil's Bargain:** Use the captured Kinson as a bargaining chip; get the information they need in exchange for Kinson's life.

The Word on the Streets

Characters with the Streetwise skill or with underworld connections or allies can hit the streets and pick up rumours at this point. Call for a Streetwise roll, and give a character who succeeds a number of rolls on the rumour table equal to the Effect of the roll. The same rumour can be obtained from multiple sources.

Winter Shipping

Finding Winter Shipping is easy enough – the brokerage is located at the edge of the Imperial

Roll (2D6)	Rumour
2	Here's a weird rumour for you. A ship showed up at the Highport a few weeks ago, the <i>Alahir</i> . Registered to the Scout Service, but it's not a standard scout design. The captain of the <i>Alahir</i> had a lot of meetings with Inspector Norrim, and I've seen a lot of offworlders running around in POCO uniforms since then.
3	The POCO are up in arms about some Imperial police force taking over some murder inquiry. What I heard is that the guy who was killed was a Zhodani spy, and the whole thing's now a matter of state security.
4	You know Gaius Labre? He's dead. They found his body up in the Dancado Woods. What I hear is, he crossed Ven Yasha.
5	Looking for work? There's good money to be made smuggling in tusal, if you've got a ship...
6	Wild or blatantly false rumour – Ven Yasha is the Duke of Regina, there are Zhodani spies in the Highport, overdosing on tusal gives you psionic powers, and so on.
7	The Dandelion? I've heard of him. He works at Winter Shipping. Those bastards bankrupt good honest spacers. Don't go near them.
8	It's dangerous to ask too many questions, friend.
9	Winter Shipping – they're over by the Downport. Good place to go if you need a loan, or if you've got a hot cargo that you need to shift before POCO shows up.
10	Harlen? Red-haired guy, right? I've heard of Harlen. He's a fixer. Deals in smuggled goods, weapons, alien tech. He's got a base in orbit somewhere.
11	Ven Yasha? I've heard he travels the galaxy, and that he's got organisations on every world from here to the Outrim Void. He shows up every few months, and if you don't have his cut ready for him, you're dead. He's completely ruthless.
12	Ven Yasha's dead. It's true. Someone shot him a few weeks ago.

extraterritoriality zone (the company owns buildings on either side of the zone border, and moves records and cash back and forth depending on which side is currently investigating it for fraud. The brokerage specialises in speculative traders; more accurately, it specialises in swooping in on poor merchants who are down on their luck. (*'Behind on your mortgage payments? Unable to pay your crew salaries? Unexpected repair bills beyond your means? Winter Shipping is here to "help" by buying your cargo at a massive discount, in exchange for prompt service and no questions asked.'*)

Kinson thinks that Exceedingly Discreet has criminal connections on the side, and that Winter Shipping is a legitimate business. In fact, Winter Shipping is owned by Harlen. There are three members of staff at the Downport side – Exceedingly Discreet itself, the broker Marid, and warehouse manager/security guard Olso. Exceedingly Discreet keeps track of shipping and spots potentially opportunities for the company; Marid actually makes the deals, and Olso transfers cargoes to the warehouse. The company also has a small station in orbit, where Harlen keeps 'hot' goods. A cargo launch travels between the starport and Harlen's station as needed.

Marid: The 'receptionist', Marid is a sultry woman with the charms of a noble consort and the legal mind of a piranha. Let your guard down around her, and she will convince you to sign over your cargo, your ship and your firstborn children to her. She is Harlen's protégée – he intends for her to take on a bigger role in their criminal organisation in time to come.

Marid

STR 6 DEX 9 END 5 INT 8 EDU 7 SOC 5
Admin 1, Carouse 3, Deception 2, Gun Combat 0, Persuade 2, Streetwise 1
Stunner, 2D6

Olso: Olso is an ex-convict; he spent twelve years on a prison on another of Assiniboia's moons, doing hard labour in 1.86gs. He is a formidable hand-to-hand combatant, but is slow to react. He calls Marid or Exceedingly Discreet when confused.

Olso

STR 12 DEX 5 END 10 INT 3 EDU 5 SOC 4
Athletics (strength) 2, Mechanic 1, Melee (brawl) 1, Melee (bludgeon) 2, Pilot (small craft) 1, Streetwise 1, Vacc Suit 0
Improvised Club, 2D6-2

Exceedingly Discreet: One of only a handful of Dandelions on Regina, Exceedingly Discreet delights in playing games. It has only a limited conception of human legal systems, or finance for that matter. It considers its job within Winter Shipping to be part of a great game, where staying one step ahead of the authorities and finding potential opportunities for the firm are both part of the fun. Employing the Dandelion lets Harlen keep all sorts of potentially embarrassing or illegal information off the computer system; Exceedingly Discreet's alien brain contains thousands of records about criminal activity and Ven Yasha's activities.

Exceedingly Discreet

STR 4 DEX 8 END 4 INT 9 EDU 11 SOC 4

Admin 3, Broker 2, Comms 1, Computers 2, Steward 1, Streetwise 1

Exceedingly Discreet sleeps in a chamber above its office ('sleeps' is technically a misnomer, but it enters a nocturnal dormancy phase and embeds itself in a nest during this time, withdrawing its tentacles into its body.)

The Winter Shipping Facility: The facility consists of three buildings. There is a small office in Startown itself, where Marid works, and another small office on the starport side, where the Dandelion monitors shipping. These two offices are connected by a secret passage that runs under the Downport fence, allowing the company to move goods across the extraterritoriality line without starport customs noticing. Also on the starport side is a small warehouse, where Olso works. Near the warehouse, the company keeps a 20-ton cargo launch for surface-to-orbit transfers.

Investigations at Winter Shipping

The players may wish to investigate Winter Shipping before approaching Exceedingly Discreet.

Business Reputation: (Broker or Streetwise + Int, Average, 1-6 hours) Winter Shipping has a reputation for predatory business practices. Usually, they buy cargoes from desperate merchants, but they sometimes deal in smuggling or stolen goods.

Casing the Office: (Recon + Int, Difficult, 1-6 hours) There are two Winter Shipping Offices; one is on the Startown side of the Downport, the other is on the far side of the fence. The Starport one is closed; there is a sign on the door redirecting people to the Startown branch. There must be a secret passage

between the two buildings, though – the character sees Olso enter the Starport office and come out at the Startown side.

Hacking: (Computers + Edu, Difficult, 1-6 hours) The company's security system is not that hard to crack, but their computer system has next to nothing of interest. They must have a separate server with the really juicy files that is not connected to the network. The character does find a roster and flight plan for cargo launch flights; the cargo launch travels between the Highport and Regina Down every few days, but some of the flights take several hours longer than they should – the launch must be taking a detour somewhere in orbit.

Security Systems: (Investigate or Engineer (electronics) + Int, Difficult, 10-60 minutes) The office's security systems are not especially impressive; it should be easy enough to shut down the alarms and break in. Actually deactivating the alarms requires another Average check, taking 1-6 minutes. If a character tries to disable the alarms without first examining the security system, it is a Hard check instead.

Making the Approach

Startown: If the characters enter via the Startown office, then read the following:

The inside of the Winter Shipping office is a lot more impressive than its unprepossessing exterior. You could be in the lobby of a high-class corporate office. The floor is polished marble; the walls are decorated with holos of shining merchant ships in flight. The one slightly incongruous element is the well-stocked minibar in one corner. Sitting behind the desk is a stunningly beautiful woman, who smiles warmly as you enter.

'I am Marid. How may I serve you?' she purrs.

Marid will try to pump the characters for information about who they are and what they want. Initially, she will deny any knowledge of Harlen, and mentioning Ven Yasha's name will instantly put her on her guard.

If they use the passphrase given by Kinson, then she presses a hidden control in her desk, and one section of the marble floor slides open, revealing a ramp. 'Just proceed down the tunnel. Exceedingly Discreet is waiting at the far side.'

The ramp leads to a tunnel that runs under the starport fence. It was originally a utility duct, and there are still old pipes embedded in the concrete



walls. Half-way along the tunnel is a door into a storeroom. Currently, the storeroom is empty except for a pair of old gin bottles and a crate of Dandelion food.

Call for Recon rolls as the characters proceed down the corridor; those who succeed notice that one of the pipes is much newer than the others. This pipe has concealed gas vents along its length.

If Marid suspects the characters, then she activates a security system while the characters are in the tunnel. Read the following.

The ramp at the end of the tunnel slams shut – and so does the ramp at the far end. You’re trapped. A voice echoes down the tunnel from a hidden speaker. ‘Ok, talk fast or I’ll flood the tunnel with poison gas. Who are you and what do you want?’

Marid is not bluffing; at the flick of a switch, she can pump an anaesthetic gas into the tunnel, knocking the characters unconscious. If she suspects they are POCO agents or another threat to Harlen, then she interrogates the characters, then gasses them. Quick-witted players may be able to talk Marid into letting them see Exceedingly Discreet; otherwise, see the Gas Attack sidebar.

At the far end of the tunnel is an identical concealed ramp, leading to the Starport office.

Gas Attack

Characters in the tunnel when the gas is released must make an Endurance check each round. In the first round, the difficulty for the check is Easy (+4), in the second round it is Routine (+2), then Average (+0), Difficult (-2) and so on. Failing the Endurance check means the character falls unconscious. If the entire group is knocked out, then they are brought to Ven Yasha’s station for interrogation.

A character may make a Hard (-4) Mechanic + Education check taking 10-60 seconds to disable the gas vents.

Note that Exceedingly Discreet is immune to the effects of the gas.

Via the Starport: The starport side office of Winter Shipping is shut, with a sign instructing visitors to go around to the Startown office (only a few dozen metres as the grav-belt flies, but getting there requires a long walk along the fence, passing through the

security checkpoint, and then another long walk back down the street). The door is locked and alarmed. Olso, Marid and Exceedingly Discreet have passcards.

If the characters try forcing this door, the alarm will be raised. No new business is conducted via this office; it is only used for smuggling or dealing with existing clients.

Breaking & Entering: The characters may prefer to break into the office at night; to do so successfully, they have to overcome the security system. Finding the control to open the secret passage requires a Hard (-4) Investigate + Intelligence check taking 1-6 minutes.

Raising the Alarm

If the characters try to break into Winter Shipping, or if they threaten the staff, then the alarm is raised. As soon as the siren sounds, Olso runs from the warehouse to wherever the alarm was triggered, while Exceedingly Discreet retreats into the tunnel. Marid remains in the front office, but readies her illegal stunner if required.

The Starport Police arrive 2D6 minutes after the alarm is raised. Marid or Exceedingly Discreet can shut down the alarm if convinced the threat is passed. The alarm will also be shut down if there are illegal goods on the premises that are not hidden in the concealed tunnel.

Conversations with Exceedingly Discreet

The Llewellyn unfolds like a blossoming plant, unfurling long sensory-tubules in your direction. Strange colours play over its central mass, and it activates a small communications device attached to its central stem. In a musical voice it says ‘I am Exceedingly Discreet. What is your title at this time, strangers?’

Exceedingly Discreet controls access to Harlen; criminal business proposals and other offers are vetted by the Dandelion before being passed on. If the characters want Exceedingly Discreet to refer them to Harlen, they need to convince the alien that they have something to offer. Exceedingly Discreet will question them extensively on their proposal.

Alternatively, they can tell the truth about why they are here. Exceedingly Discreet is also ambitious, and covets Harlen’s position. If the characters tell Exceedingly Discreet about the botched assassination

of Professor Ujinka, and that they can tie Harlen to the killing of Vlen Backett, they can convince the alien that Harlen is making poor decisions and needs to be replaced.

Playing Exceedingly Discreet:

- Hold yourself upright. Extend your arm towards whoever you are speak to.
- Address everyone by their full title at all times. Invent titles if they do not have formal ones. (*'Yes, Overly Talkative Navigator...'*)
- Try to find logical contradictions and holes in whatever the players say. Nitpick mercilessly.
- Never raise your voice or speak in anything other than a gentle, lyrical tone.

Topics of Conversation: The Dandelion speaks evasively about almost every topic, but the characters can extract the following information.

Harlen: He is really just a caretaker, who keeps the Regina operation ticking over when Ven Yasha is not present. Exceedingly Discreet considers Harlen to be short-sighted and a poor tactician; his one saving grace is that he is extremely loyal.

Ven Yasha: The mysterious master of the organisation. Exceedingly Discreet has never met Ven Yasha, but respects him deeply. The Dandelion believes that Ven Yasha must be a powerful precognitive, or else has contacts in the very highest levels of the Imperium; how else could he have such influence and reach?

Kinson: The Dandelion dismisses Kinson and Labre as 'blunt instruments. Disposable thugs.'

Professor Ujinka: Ven Yasha ordered her death. It makes no sense. The value of Ancient artefacts is enhanced by greater understanding of Ancient technology.

Imperial Intelligence: Exceedingly Discreet is aware that Imperial Intelligence agents are on Regina. The *Alahir* recently departed the system; Gand Holcess is the captain of that ship. The purpose of the visit is a mystery to Exceedingly Discreet, but it suspects that Holcess holds a special portfolio within the intelligence services, most likely to do with existential threats to the Imperium.

Vlen Backett: Exceedingly Discreet believes Backett is a messenger for Ven Yasha; it has correlated orders from Ven Yasha with visits by Backett. Presumably, he was killed because he brought bad news. It knows that Harlen retrieved a statuette and a data tape

from Backett's room in the hostel. These items were transported to Harlen's station.

Getting to the Station

The final part of this mission takes place on Harlen's secret orbital base. How do the PCs get there?

- Exceedingly Discreet can either give them the co-ordinates of the base, or else send them there on the cargo launch
- They can stow away on board the cargo launch
- If the PCs track the movements of the cargo launch, they can locate the secret base and travel there themselves
- PCs incapacitated by the knock-out gas may be brought there for interrogation. In this case, they wake up just as the launch is approaching the station.

7. VEN YASHA'S STATION

The corporate megafreighters that make the lonely trek across Corridor carry their cargoes in gigantic shipping containers, some of which are hundreds of d-tons. The smaller freighters and tramp ships that convey this cargo on from Regina to the frontier worlds cannot handle these huge containers; much of the work done at the Regina Highport involves breaking the cargo down into smaller loads. Empty containers are either filled with goods for export back to the core worlds... but there is not always sufficient cargo to justify sending a fully loaded megafreighter back again. A percentage of cargo containers are left behind at Regina. These unused bulk containers are towed to a holding depot in a higher orbit, waiting for the day they are needed once again. Some have been waiting for centuries.

The container yard is a maze of floating containers and navigation buoys. Few ships ever visit here, except for the tugs and shepherds that keep the containers in position, and scavengers hoping to find some abandoned cargo or scrap metal. The whole zone is considered hazardous, due to the sheer number of containers and other debris floating in space.

Hidden amid this maze is Ven Yasha's station. A bribe paid to a long-dead shipping clerk meant that three large containers were removed from the starport's database. Over the years, these containers have been transformed into a hidden space station, a smuggler's base within a short reach of one of the busiest starports in the sector. From the outside, the station looks like three shipping containers lashed together – the docking ports, station-keeping thrusters and defence turrets are all concealed.

The station's primary purpose is supporting smuggling; goods are stored in the station's vaults before being transferred to the Highport or the surface. The money from smuggling funds other schemes on behalf of Vlen Backett's Ancient master, such as monitoring the Regina communications networks for clues and rumours about other Ancients. The station has a cutting-edge interception system, capable of tapping into even coded Imperial transmissions.

Getting to the Station

If the characters are on board the cargo launch (either as passengers, stowaways or prisoners), read the following:

The launch doesn't head for the Highport; instead, it heads out of Regina's atmosphere on a course for a Lagrangian point between the planet and the gas giant. Due to the gravitational intricacies of the Assiniboia system, the point is only semi-stable, but anything left there should remain in place for several years. As you get closer, you see a constellation of metallic objects glittering in the sunlight; they're cargo containers, thousands of them. Most are docked into long lines and cubes, but a few are drifting free and untethered. The launch weaves around these obstacles and gives into the heart of the container yard. You pass by navbuoys and warning beacons before coming into a trio of old containers.

The launch dips under the containers and comes to a halt. You drift closer and closer to the corrugated metal... and then a concealed hatch in the container opens, and the launch docks. The hatch smoothly closes beneath the keel of the launch. You're in.

If, however, the characters are following the launch or tracked its movements, read the following: *The launch's course takes it to a container storage yard orbiting Regina. The yard is full of abandoned shipping containers, kept here until they can be reused or repurposed. It's a big space of empty metal boxes, and you pick up signals from automated warning buoys informing you that it's a navigational hazard and that you are not to enter the yard without permission.*

Following the launch's course leads you to a trio of linked containers. There's no sign of the launch – but a detailed sensor scan of the container picks up what could be a concealed docking port. As you scan the container, a hatch in its side opens, and a turret rises out. Twin laser cannons swivel around to target you.

Vlen Yosha's Stationary

Hull 1 Structure 3

Armour 2

Weapons: Pop-up double Turret with twin pulse lasers (2D6).

Inside the Station

The station is divided into three sections – the port container, middle container and starboard container. There are small airlocks linking each of the containers to the next. These airlocks can be overridden with an Average (+0) Mechanic + Int check, taking 1-6 minutes. There are security cameras at each airlock. The whole station is made of scavenged industrial parts and prefabricated components; chains and cables hang from the ceilings, the lights flicker in time with the stutter of the power plant, and the air smells of oil and burnt wiring.

Only the middle container has gravity (1g standard); the port and starboard containers do not have artificial gravity.

The **port container** is where the smuggled goods are stored, and it is all most visitors to the station ever see. The lower half of the container is an unpressurised space dock; the upper half is a cavernous cargo hold capable of holding up to 200 tons of cargo. A cargo airlock connects the two halves.

The **middle container** is the station's operations centre. On the middle level, connecting to the other two containers, is a long corridor connecting to living quarters, life support and other basic facilities. The lower section of the middle container contains a small fusion power plant to power the station, and the defence turret. There are also four escape pods. The upper section of the container is Harlen's office and living quarters.

Finally, the **starboard container** has the station's computer core and the communications interception technology. If the characters examine this (using Comms or Engineer (electronics) or Computers), they quickly realise the scale and complexity of the monitoring equipment. The interception device is *at least* TL14, and parts of it are in advance of anything that the characters have ever heard of (TL16 or more!). The interceptor can not only eavesdrop on every communication that goes through Regina, it can decrypt the Imperium's most secure messages.

The Crew

In addition to Harlen, there are 1d6+2 other crew on board at any time, mostly smugglers who use the station as a base (and also pass on rumours and intelligence information to Ven Yasha's organisation). These crew members wear vacc suits and carry sidearms while on board the station. None of them are permitted to enter the starboard container.

Smuggler

STR 6 DEX 6 END 8 INT 5 EDU 7 SOC 4

Gunner (turret) 1, Gun Combat (handgun) 1, Recon 1, Zero-G 2

Snub Pistol, 3D6-2

Vacc Suit (6)

Getting to Harlen

The characters' route to Harlen depends on how they got to the station.

As Prisoners: The characters are taken at gunpoint by the station crew up to Harlen's office. Once Harlen realises who the characters are, he has them returned to the surface immediately before activating the station's self destruct.

As Guests: The characters are escorted to Harlen's office by guards. Whatever their proposal is, Harlen rejects it, claiming that the organisation is 'in transition' and cannot undertake any new criminal schemes at the time. When Harlen recognises the characters, he activates the self-destruct.

Sneaking In: When the shuttle docks, the crew unload its cargo bay through the cargo airlock. Characters can either ambush the crew, or sneak out via the airlock. From the main cargo bay in the port section, the characters can either open the airlock into the central container, or cut through the walls. Alternatively, they could disguise themselves as guards.

Boarding Action: Once the characters have disabled the defence turret, they can storm the station by cutting through the walls or storming the airlock. Alternatively, Harlen can contact their ship via a video link, and the confrontation between the characters and Harlen can take place remotely.

Confronting Harlen

Read the following:

Harlen's office resembles a scientist's workroom more than the lair of a murderous criminal. He peers at you from behind a desktop terminal; around him are smaller screens displaying some sort

of technical readouts and communications logs. There is a curious piece of statuary on the desk, resembling a winged pillar. Harlen himself is small and slight, with reddish hair that flops over his pale eyes. The lethal-looking gauss pistol at his shoulder is an odd contrast to his demeanour.

Harlen considers most of Regina's criminal fraternity to be beneath contempt, and he has no time for the posturing, threats and bravado that are part of most criminal negotiations. He prefers to speak directly and concisely.

Harlen

STR 5 DEX 7 END 6 INT 11 EDU 11 SOC 8

Admin 2, Advocate 1, Comms 4, Computers 3, Engineer (electronics) 2, Gun Combat 0, Sensors 2, Vacc Suit 1, Zero-G 0

Neural Comm, Wafer Jack

Gauss Pistol: 3d6, Auto 4

Vacc Suit (6)

Playing Harlen:

- Look at everyone as through they are samples under a microscope. Blink as little as possible.
- Say exactly what you mean. Do not prevaricate.
- All other sophonts are morons. Most are useless morons; a small few, like Exceedingly Discreet, are useful morons. The only thing you respect is superior technology.
- Ven Yasha is your connection to this superior technology; you believe that if you serve him loyally, the secrets of the universe will be revealed to you – and you will do *anything* to win that prize. Smuggling, spying, murder, genocide... all these are crimes on a *human* scale. You aspire to the cosmic.

Stolen Goods: The statuette and data tapes stolen from Vlen Backett's hostel room are on Harlen's desk in plain view. The statuette is of Ancient origin; the tapes describe how it was found in the Boughene system by a trader back in 703. For more on these tapes, see **Section 2** of *Secrets of the Ancients*.

The complication: When communications interception showed that Imperial Intelligence suspected Vlen Backett, Harlen suggested 'killing' Vlen. This would throw Gand Holcess off the trail, and let Vlen report to his superiors back on Alell. The player characters, knowing nothing about Backett's true identity, would serve as couriers. The whole scheme is predicated on the Vlen identity remaining completely separate from that of Ven Yasha.

Now, through Professor Ujinka and the botched assassination, the player characters are very close to tying Backett to Ven Yasha – and if they can do it, so can Imperial Intelligence. Once Imperial Intelligence discovers the station, then the whole conspiracy collapses; they will find the communications interception array. Harlen cannot allow this to happen.

As soon as the characters reveal themselves, or as soon as Harlen realises who they are, he uses his neural comm to activate the self destruct sequence. (If the PCs are prisoners, then he first orders the guards to send the characters back to the surface in the cargo launch). Read the following:

‘Oh. Hmm.’

Harlen blinks twice. ‘This is... suboptimal.’ He closes his eyes and concentrates for a second. All the screens around him go black. Somewhere far below, a synthesised voice announces ‘destruct sequence activated. Detonation immanent. All hands to escape pods.’

‘This is not the end’ mutters Harlen. He slumps against the wall, refusing to move. His expression is unreadable in the light of the self destruct countdown.

Self Destruct

Time to Detonate: The station explodes within three minutes of Harlen’s command. During this time, the characters need to fight their way past the panicked guards and smugglers and find their way either to an airlock, an escape pod or the cargo launch.

SELF DESTRUCT SEQUENCE

Round	Event
1	Self destruct sequence begins.
5	Computer archives are erased.
10	The smugglers head towards the escape pods and cargo launch.
15	Gravity shuts down
20	Lights shut down.
25	Airlocks open; the station begins to decompress
30	The station explodes.

Running the Escape: Do not run this scene as a conventional fight scene; it is a chaotic scramble for a way off the station. Throw in secondary explosions, sudden bursts of fire from smugglers, random fluctuations in the station’s gravity and other complications. The players should feel like they are fleeing barely ahead of impending doom.

Remember that characters without the Zero-G skill suffer penalties in the port or starboard sections of the station, or in the middle section once gravity fails.

Escaping the Station: Harlen wants the characters to escape, but if they do die here, then the job of transporting Backett’s corpse back to Alell will just fall onto some other relative. The PCs’ death is not, to use Harlen’s terminology, an optimal outcome but it is an acceptable one. However, he does not want any of the other crew to escape, as the smugglers know too much. Therefore, the only escape pod that works is the one the characters take. As they flee the station, they will see the other escape pods are locked in place. Alternatively, the characters can head to the cargo launch and use that to fly back to the surface, or grab vacc suits and hurl themselves out an airlock. With a big enough jump, the characters can push themselves out of range of the explosion.

8. BRINGING THE BODY HOME

Back on Regina, the characters are at a dead end. With Harlen’s death, they have no more leads in the investigation of Vlen Backett’s death. They could possibly pursue Professor Ujinka’s aide, Juni, on Beck’s World, but first they must return Backett’s corpse to Alell...

LIBRARY DATA

Ancients

Colloquial name for a species of aliens that lived 300,000 years ago. Comparatively little is known about the Ancients. They are believed responsible for transplanting Humaniti from its original homeworld of Terra (see **Solomani Hypothesis**) and scattering the species across hundreds of planets. They are also believed to have uplifted the Vargr from Terran canines. The Ancients had an exceedingly high level of technology, and many of their artefacts are millennia beyond even cutting-edge Imperial science. Estimates of high end Ancient technology place them beyond TL25.

Several Ancient sites have been discovered across Charted Space, especially in the Spinward Marches. Curiously, the technology at these sites varies considerably, suggesting different Ancient groups pursued radically different paths of development. Furthermore, most Ancient sites show signs of damage consistent with orbital bombardment or other violence; there are also anomalies in other systems that can be explained only by the use of weapons that destroyed entire planets. These facts, coupled with the sudden disappearance of the Ancients from known space, have given rise to the **Ancient Extinction Theories**.

Ancient Extinction Theories

The Ancient race vanished abruptly some 300,000 years ago. This sudden extinction is a mystery to archaeologists, who have developed several competing theories to explain it. Mainstream theories are divided along two axes – the Heterogenous/Homogenous axis and the Catastrophist/Gradual Decline axis. The Homogenous Ancient school believes there was a single Ancient culture that expanded and then vanished; the Heterogenous school argues there were multiple competing cultures, or a series of empires, or even multiple races that achieved high technology levels in the Ancient time period. The Homogenous theories explain the similarities between Ancient sites, commonalities in architecture, the use of Droyne as pets or servants and so forth. The Heterogenous theories seek to explain the wild variations in Ancient technology and architecture, the lack of any clear structure to Ancient territory, and the sudden end of their civilisation.

The Catastrophists hold that a single terrible event ended the Ancient hegemony. Various candidate apocalypses have been advanced; Homogenous Catastrophists point to disease, a hostile alien race or a strange accident that wiped out Ancient civilisation. Heterogenous Catastrophists also suggest a civil war could explain the sudden disappearance. Gradual Declinists argue that a super-civilisation would be more robust, and that the Ancients must

have slowly declined in vitality and viability over a period of millennia.

Assumption of Custody

Under Regina law, the **Public Order Commission** has the power to detain suspects for up to a month without trial. Assumption of Custody is a process where multiple suspects of a crime are detained and questioned; these ‘suspects’ might just have been in the area of the crime, or match a profile, or even be randomly swept off the streets. Those Assumed into custody are innocent until proven guilty. Assumption is held to be a civic service, and while a small stipend is available to those who are Assumed, it can still cause considerable inconvenience. Critics of the policy note that most citizens of Regina are never Assumed, but certain groups – known criminals, transients, uneducated youths, travellers – are regularly detained by the POC.

Credo

Capital city of **Regina**, with a population of 87 million. Located on the eastern edge of the continent of Noncredo. Credo prides itself on its cosmopolitanism – it has a high transient population, including many visitors from the core worlds. Fashion and culture on Credo are heavily influenced by these visitors, leading to tension between Credo and the more traditional cities on Regina. The city is sometimes called ‘little Capital’, a mocking reference to Credo’s mimicry of Imperial high culture. Despite its cultural pretensions, the curious and strict legal system of Regina is still in effect here – laws must be voted on by the entire population, and the justice system is as bureaucratic as is enthusiastic, without being efficient in either field. See **Public Order Commission**.

Dandelion

See **Llellewyoly**.

Dancado

Forested region north of **Credo City**; private property of the Duke of Regina.

Lagrangian Point

One of five points in a three-body orbital configuration where a small object affected only by gravity can be stationary relative to the two larger bodies. In the Assiniboia system with its multiple moons, there are several semi-stable points beyond the five classic libration points.

Llellewyoly

The Llellewyoly are a minor race native to Junidy in the Aramis sector of the Spinward Marches. They are nicknamed ‘Dandelions’ or ‘Dandies’, as they resemble a two-metre-tall version of a Terran plant, with five stalk-like limbs that are used for

manipulation, movement and sensing. Llellewyoly are highly intelligent and have excellent memory recall and organisational skills, possibly as a result of their incredibly complex social structure. A Llellewyoly possesses dozens of formal titles simultaneously, and addressing it by the wrong title is a grievous insult. They are rarely encountered outside their homeworld.

Kaldi Research

Kaldi is a private corporation with two main branches. The bulk of Kaldi's assets are employed in fixed installations that undertake research on contract for corporate bodies and planetary governments. A much smaller proportion of Kaldi's effort is placed into the operation of a number of laboratory ships that travel throughout the Marches and beyond, either hiring out their services to whomever needs a general research team or engaging in ongoing studies.

Public Order Commission

The local police force of **Regina**. The planet has a Law Level of 9, banning most personal weapons. The Public Order Commission Officer are also empowered to detain individuals or confiscate items that are judged to be 'disruptive or damaging to public order and safety'. In the past, this has been used to control technologies or restrict the movement of visitors to the planet. In practice, the POC is much more lenient in the most cosmopolitan cities; visitors to the less trafficked regions of Regina are advised to exercise caution.

Regina

Population: 732,000,000

Law Level: 9

Tech Level: C

The capital of Regina Subsector and the seat of the Duchy of Regina, this is one of the most important worlds in the entire Spinward Marches. It is a bulwark against Zhodani aggression, and the largest trade hub in the sector. Vessels travelling along the Spinward Main from the core worlds often offload their cargoes at Regina, leaving smaller local traders to carry the goods on to the lesser systems. Regina Highport sees more traffic in a day than some lesser systems see in a decade.

Technically, Regina is a moon, not a planet; it orbits the gas giant Assiniboia, which itself orbits the locus of the primary star Lusor and its companion star Speck. There is a third star in the system, a red dwarf on a long eccentric orbit...

Regina Highport

This Class A starport is one of the largest ports in the entire sector. Over 80% of the cargo that passes

through **Regina** is destined for other worlds in the sector, so most of the port is given over to cargo handling and warehousing. The port itself is located in geostationary orbit over Regina Downport and **Startown**, which is located half-way between the cities of **Credo** and Atora.

University of Regina

Commonly used to refer to any of several prestigious academic institutions on Regina. Collectively, the University of Regina is the largest and most successful higher-level education and research facility in the Spinward Marches.

Solomani Hypothesis

The theory that Humaniti originally evolved on the planet of Terra, the home of the Solomani. According to this theory, the **Ancients** transplanted primitive humans to other worlds in the galaxy, most notable the homeworlds of the Vilani and Zhodani. Genetic evidence has largely confirmed the Solomani Hypothesis, although some scientists and religious groups advocate other origins for Humaniti, such as parallel evolution or divine intervention.

Startown

The region around the old Regina starport, now the primary Downport. This strip of bars, cheap hostelryes, raucous entertainments and less savoury businesses is notoriously violent, corrupt and profitable. Technically, Startown is divided between the nearby cities of Credo and Atora; both blames the other for the state of Startown.

Tusal

Tusal is an illegal narcotic. It is usually sold in the form of tablets, although some prefer it in its less processed, undried form as a wad to be chewed. Tusal is derived from a seaweed. The origin of the drug is unknown, but it is believed to have been imported from the Vargr extents a century ago, and is now grown on various worlds along Corridor sector. A dose of Tusal produces mild euphoria and intoxication; a very strong dose can dull pain receptors and cause unconsciousness. As a Tusal user can remain functional while under the effects of a low dose, many addicts chew six or seven tablets per day to remain in a constant drugged haze. Tusal is especially associated with menial jobs and the unemployed, as an otherwise dull life of drudgery can be made pleasant by the drug. Long-term effects of Tusal addiction include respiratory and digestive problems and a high incidence of stomach cancer.