
TRAVELLER

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS

HOMECOMING

On Alell, ferocity and beauty are inextricably entwined. The jungles shimmer a thousand shades of red and gold, but touch the wrong delicate frond with bare skin and the poison stinger will lash out faster than the eye can follow. The Alellian whisperhawk is beautiful even as it stoops on its prey from the green clouds. Even the sky of Alell is perilous; the shimmering auroras that stream across the heavens are caused by bursts of radiation from the primary star.

The planet was settled in the dying days of the First Imperium. It became fashionable for nobles to hunt the whisperhawk, the malicious, the vicious glittering lambdragon. They opened hunting lodges in the most scenic locations on the planet – atop the perilous glacial cliffs, in the heart of the Dranxi Jungle, in the savannah hunting grounds of the ferocious cadegeree. Each lodge had a staff of technicians, groundskeepers and servants to attend to every whim of the degenerate nobility.

And then the First Imperium collapsed.

Several hundred years later, when Alell was recontacted by explorers from the resurgent Imperium, the descendants of those hotel porters and safari guides survived to form a civilisation centred around those hunting lodges. The lodges are now walled cities, keeping out the lethal jungles...

– Checking In Indefinitely: A History of Alell, Tharsis Djar, Alell Free Press, 1101

Homecoming is the second 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. In **Section 1: Bodysnatchers**, the characters brought the body of Vlen Backett back from Regina. They may also have

recovered a curious statue and a set of data tapes from a smuggler's space station. If they failed to recover these items, then they can do so in this adventure. See **The Statue & The Tapes** sidebar.

This adventure takes place on Alell, 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 arrive on Alell with Backett's body, and bring it to the isolated village of Vaca Goya. There, they become enmeshed in a Backett family drama; one side of the family claim that Backett promised his starship to them, another that Backett owes them a fortune, and a third group argues that Backett was a member of their cult and that he signed everything over to them. As the characters are courted by these factions, a strange woman arrives, claiming to be Backett's wife. She is Arisa, an agent of Imperial Intelligence.

Backett's will is missing, but there may be a copy in Backett's old lodge in the jungle. After the funeral (or earlier, if they choose), the characters are sent to search the lodge for the will. This requires travelling through the dangerous jungles of Alell. After dealing with the native wildlife, the characters find the lodge – and the secret hangar beneath it.

In the hangar is Vlen's old spacecraft, the *Star Hunter*, and information confirming that he is involved in an alien conspiracy. Arisa calls in Imperial Intelligence, and marines are dropped onto the lodge. The only way to escape is to take the *Star Hunter* and flee the system...

The Statue & The Tapes

Before his death, Vlen Backett acquired a curious statue. The statue resembles a winged pillar made of a substance like ivory. It was recovered from a trader in the Boughene system centuries ago. The statue is of unknown, possibly Ancient origin, but it appears to be a work of art, not a technological device.

The tapes describe how the trader found the statue on a metal-rich asteroid orbiting the system's gas giant; they also note problems with the ship's transmissions in the G-band, just as Professor Ujinka theorised occur in the vicinity of an Ancient site. This is a clue that the characters should search the Boughene system for relics left by the Ancients.

There is also a note from Vlen, reminding him to acquire the professor's G-Band sensor system and use it to scan the Boughene system.

If the characters did not find the tapes in **Section 1: Homecoming**, they can still find this clue. While the statue is lost if they did not recover it from Regina, they can find a copy of the tape in Backett's lodge.

ARRIVAL ON ALELL

Read the following to the players.

From Regina, you travelled up along the Spinward Main towards Alell. It is a lonely trek – there's a string of systems between Regina and Alell where there are no starports worth a damn, so you fall into a routine. Jump in, scoop fuel from the gas giant (or refuel at an automated hydrogen harvester station in orbit), turn over, and fly out to the jump limit again. Repeat at the next system. Every day is the same, until it seems that your existence is as static and unchanging as that of the corpse in the cargo hold.

Finally, you jump into the Alell system. Your ship's sensors crackle under the buffeting of radiation from the system's sun; Alell orbits an angry, energetic star. You spin down in the planet's shadow to spare your hull. Beneath you, you can see the vibrant golds and reds of the jungles that cover most of the land area. In a few spots, you can make out densely packed lights – the walled Resorts of Alell.

The Resorts

Alell has no real Highport – there is a cargo handling station in orbit, a medical facility, and a rapid-response emergency services station for rescuing those lost in the jungle, but none of these receive visiting ships. The characters must land at Alell's starport, a cavernous building that looks more like a Mayan temple than a landing site for spaceships. The starport is a gigantic artificial cavern, big enough to swallow a warship. As the characters' ship enters the cave, it is sprayed with jets of chemical disinfectants and bathed in strong UV light as part of Alell's biological control protocols. The supporting pillars and walls are decorated with First Imperium friezes and bas-reliefs, testament to thousands of years of settlement here on Alell. Most of the art depicts the wildlife of the planet.

Before leaving the starport, the characters must pass through customs. Alell's wealth is its biosphere and so the planetary administration has instituted strict protocols to ensure that some alien insect or disease does not run rampant in the jungle. Importing lifeforms from offworld is forbidden. All visitors are tested, probed, scanned and disinfected before being allowed out in Alell; those with any form of genetic engineering, augmentation or other potential biological threat to the biosphere are forced to wear environmental suits while on Alell. Non-human sophonts and even some minor races of Humaniti are also classified as 'potential hazards' and so must wear suits. Only 'pure' Vilani and Solomani can walk openly on Alell. The environmental suits are a light-weight khaki-coloured overgarment, coupled with a light helmet that keeps airborne contamination to a minimum. The resemblance to a Victorian explorer in a pith helmet can be blamed on Solomani traditionalists.

Weapons are equally restricted on Alell. The only weapon that is permitted is the mister, a gas-based weapon that sprays a haze of caustic chemicals. All known species on Alell are harmlessly repelled by the mister chemicals. The mister spray is mildly damaging to human skin.

Technically, the characters are importing biological matter onto Alell, in the form of Vlen Backett's corpse. The customs official insist on scanning the corpse; when they do so, their sensors momentarily fail to register the corpse, and they have to repeat the scan. They blame this on a systems glitch, but it is actually because of the Ancient technology that is preserving Backett's mind.

Beyond the starport, in the city of Alell Startown, the characters can purchase passage to the small town of Vaca Goya. The usual method of travel on Alell is by flyer; the flyers carry built-in misters to drive off whisperhawks and other avians. If the characters have their own spacecraft, they must leave it in the starport.

The Jungle

The major settlements on Alell are either along the coast, or behind walls. There are smaller settlements, such as Vaca Goya, but these are relatively uncommon. The jungles of Alell are a perilous place to live.

The pilot of the shuttle is a woman named Rao; she can give the characters an introduction to Alell if they have not been here before. She knew Vlen Backett slightly, but does not have a high opinion of him. He always struck her as too secretive and aloof. In Alell's jungles, family and friends must come first. The place is too dangerous for lone travellers, so you must be able to trust your companions. For example, if the thrusters or mist sprayers on this flyer failed, then she would probably never make it to safety, so she has to be able to trust the mechanics back at Startown, or the flyer dispatcher at the control tower. Everyone on Alell learns to stick close – but she never got the feeling that Backett trusted anyone.

Once, Backett hired her to bring him into the middle of the jungle. She does not know what he wanted out there, but she dropped him off with a mister, and picked him up a week later. She admits that he was certainly a brave man.

Rao

STR 3 DEX 7 END 9 INT 9 EDU 7 SOC 5

Pilot (flyer) 2, Mechanic 1, Navigation 2, Survival 1, Gun Combat 0

During the flight to Vaca Goya, the characters have excellent views of the jungle through the chemical mists. It is a trackless wilderness, reminiscent of the Jurassic period on Earth. In places, the flyer soars between stands of trees that are taller than skyscrapers; in others, flocks of avians trail the flyer, filling the sky with vibrant colours. As the flyer approaches the village, the clouds overhead are backlit by the fabulous aurora of Alell, casting blood-red shadows on the ground below.

Vaca Goya

The little village of Vaca Goya is located on a hilltop, surrounded by a ring of metal poles. These poles

are topped with motion-sensitive mist sprayers. The village was originally founded because of a uranium deposit nearby; the mine is largely exhausted, and the primary industry is now forestry and farming. The population is under 1,000 people.

The flyer lands on the outskirts of the village, next to four other flyers. The pilot directs the characters to bring the corpse of Vlen Backett to the village hall, where a small crowd has gathered. They should present the corpse to a man named Porter Sajan, who is the local magistrate and spiritual leader.

Family Ties

If the Inheritor player character comes from Alell, he or she may already be aware of the family factions present at the funeral. In this case, the Referee should brief the player on the factions before the game begins. The characters' sympathy may lie with one of the antagonist factions, such as the Parads or Jocells.

THE HOMECOMING

The village hall is crowded with natives of the village, who are probably here for the free drinks, and a few visitors from the Resorts or from offworld, recognisable by their environmental suits. No-one seems especially saddened by the news of Vlen Backett's death; there are no tearful mourners or wailing widows. A tall man in some sort of ceremonial robes notes your arrival and hurries over to speak with you. 'I am Porter Sajan' he announces in a doleful voice, as if apologising in advance. 'I presume you have brought the body.'

Sajan takes the characters aside to explain the current situation to them. Tonight is a homecoming for Backett; tomorrow will be the burial and the reading of the will. Sajan asks if the characters have the will with them – this is the first time the characters have heard any suggestion that they should have a copy of any such documentation. Sajan claims that he was informed that Backett probably had a copy of the will with him when travelling offworld, but that they will deal with the matter tomorrow. There may be another copy of the will elsewhere. For the moment, the characters should just bring the corpse into the hall and then remember Vlen Backett.

Family Gathering

Once the characters have brought the body into the hall, they can socialise with the other mourners.

There are several groups present at the gathering, each of which have their own goals and memories of Vlen Backett.

Funeral Random Encounter Table

- 1: Porter Sajan or Arisa
- 2: The Backetts (1-2: Tomas, 3-4: Hans, 4-6 other)
- 3: The Jocells (1-3: Marisa, 4-6: Bard)
- 4: Yusul Parad
- 5: The Brotherhood
- 6: Drunken local

Porter Sajan

As the village porter, Sajan is one of the most important dignitaries in Vaca Goya. He takes his responsibilities seriously, and his primary goal here is to ensure that the funeral and related matters are handled smoothly and correctly.

Porter Sajan

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

Admin 1, Advocate 2, Broker 0, Carouse 1, Diplomat 1, Medic 0, Persuade 1

Playing Porter Sajan:

- Speak in a dour, dull voice.
- Try to defuse any confrontation, but otherwise stay quiet and uninvolved.

What He Wants:

- To get this whole affair over with as quickly as possible, with the minimum of fuss.

What He Knows:

- Sajan knows that Backett was involved in strange and possibly illegal business. He considered Backett to be a nuisance and an eccentric, the sort of person who brought troublesome offworlders to Vaca Goya.
- He hoped Backett was carrying a will with him; if they cannot find a copy of the will, then the legal arguments may drag on for years.
- He suspects that the Jocells are lying about their claim on the ship, but has no idea about the veracity of the Parads or the Brotherhood of Humaniti.

The Backetts

Backett's closest living kin; if no will is found, then they will inherit everything. The head of the Backett family is **Tomas Backett**, a local merchant, and his cousin **Hans Backett**, a hunter and trapper. If the Inheritor has any other family connections, they are also present. Tomas never liked Vlen, and is here

just to see the old charlatan properly buried. Hans believes that Vlen had a fortune hidden in his old lodge, and wants to make sure than no-one else gets their hands on it by legal means.

Tomas Backett

STR 8 DEX 4 END 9 INT 6 EDU 5 SOC 6

Animals (hunting) 1, Carouse 1, Persuade 1, Recon 1

Hans Backett

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

Animals (Veterinary) 1, Carouse 1, Gambler 0, Gun Combat (rifle) 2, Medic 1, Melee (Brawl) 1, Navigation 2, Recon 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2
Mister Rifle (2d6), Flak Jacket (4)

Playing The Backetts:

- Base your portrayal of these NPCs on the personality of the Inheritor PC. They are family, and so should have traits in common.
- Tomas sees himself as the chief mourner, and will be as dignified and polite as possible
- Hans is shifty and untrustworthy; he claims to be an experienced woodsman, but gives the impression that he would abandon you in the forest if he thought you would slow him down

What They Want:

- Tomas just wants the whole affair over with as quickly as possible, and to claim the remainder of Backett's estate. However, he would settle for no money if the Jocells, Parads and the Brotherhood went away.
- Hans wants to make any existing copies of the will disappear; if there's no will, it is more likely that the Backetts will get everything.

What They Know:

- Vlen's relationship to the family is a curious one; no-one is sure how old he is. Old Nairal Backett is nearly eighty standard years old, and he remembers being introduced to 'old Great-Uncle Vlen' when he was a child. There was speculation that Vlen used anagathic drugs, but where he obtained them is a mystery.
- Vlen had a lodge out in the woods where he kept souvenirs of his offworld trips, and where he took visitors from offworld.

The Jocells

The Jocells are another branch of the Backett family, the descendants of a cousin who left Vaca Goya to find work in the starport. They consider themselves to be cultured and cosmopolitan, and look down on their 'country bumpkin cousins', the Backetts. The

leader of the Jocell delegation is **Marisa Jocell**, an insufferable socialite. She is accompanied by her son, **Bard**, who spends his days fawning over offworld nobles and tourists. Marisa wants Backett's ship to give Bard an income.

Ten years ago, Vlen arrived at the starport in his private ship, the *Star Hunter*. At the time, Marisa was a clerk in the starport control office. He secretly contacted her and confided that he was being followed, and that he needed to hide his ship. Marisa agreed to alter the starport record and hide the ship in a disused hangar, and that in return, he would leave her ownership of the vessel when he died. According to her, Vlen agreed. Six hours after the *Star Hunter* was moved, an Imperial scoutship piloted by a strange officer named Gand Holcess arrived at Alell and questioned Vlen at length.

Marisa has the only existing copy of the original documentation associated with the *Star Hunter*'s landing that day; if she does not get the deeds to the ship, she threatens to turn this evidence over to the starport authorities and have the vessel impounded.

Marisa Jocell

STR 6 DEX 6 END 8 INT 7 EDU 8 SOC 8
Admin 2, Astrogation 0, Comms 2, Computers 1, Deception 0, Flyer 0, Sensors 1, Streetwise 0

Bard Jocell

STR 7 DEX 7 END 8 INT 4 EDU 6 SOC 8
Carouse 2, Deception 0, Gun Combat (rifle) 2, Navigation 0, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1. Hunting Rifle (3D6), Flak Jacket (4)

Playing The Jocells:

- Marisa is overblown and self-important, and is very used to getting her way. She preens and dresses as though she was a minor noble, and has ambitions far above her station.
- Her son Bard is thoroughly useless, interested only in hanging around with his wealthy offworlder friends and hunting.
- Both of the Jocells are overawed by anyone with higher social standing than them, and look down on anyone lower.

What They Want:

- Marisa wants Vlen's ship, the *Star Hunter*. It is not at the starport, and has not been seen in some years. She believes Vlen has it hidden somewhere in the jungle.
- Bard just wants to shoot rare animals in the forest. He has brought a technically illegal rifle

with him from Startown, in the hopes he can get out into the wilderness and blast away at the local wildlife.

What They Know:

- Vlen travelled offworld regularly, and preferred to avoid the eyes of the Imperium.
- At one point, six years ago, a scout named Gand Holcess was very interested in talking to Vlen.
- Gand Holcess is back on Alell, and unless they get the *Star Hunter*, they will let him know about Vlen Backett's mysterious death. Everyone involved may be arrested and questioned by the Imperium!

The Parads

The Parads are another family from Alell, unrelated to the Backetts. Ten years ago, Backett borrowed more than 1,000,000 credits from **Yusal Parad**, and kept promising that this debt would be honoured. Now, Backett is dead, and Yusal wants his money. Yusal is accompanied by two thugs.

The Parads are criminals with a fearsome reputation on Alell. Anyone who crosses them usually ends up dead; as usual, Vlen has done things in the wrong order.

Yusal Parad

STR 6 DEX 6 END 7 INT 10 EDU 10 SOC 6
Admin 2, Advocate 2, Broker 1, Deception 1, Diplomat 0, Gun Combat 0, Persuade 3, Streetwise 2
Concealed Armoured Vest (5)

Morgan The Bodyguard

STR 9 DEX 9 END 10 INT 6 EDU 7 SOC 4
Carouse 0, Deception 0, Gun Combat (pistol) 2, Melee (brawl) 2, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1
Snub Pistol (3D6-3), Concealed Armoured Vest (5)

Playing Yusal Parad:

- You consider yourself to be a very big fish. Anyone who does not give you due respect must be punished.
- You are restraining yourself out of respect for the funeral ceremony; normally, the thought of holding out on you would cause paroxysms of rage.
- Do not get your own hands dirty; you have hired goons for that.

What He Wants:

- Money. A million credits, plus interest. His agreement with Vlen was a verbal contract, but Parad believes no-one in the village will dare cross him.

What He Knows:

- Vlen had connections to the interstellar criminal community. He worked with Ven Yasha, the infamous Reginan smuggler.
- Vlen was involved in smuggling Ancient artefacts. Those fetch a high price on the black market – if Vlen happened to have an Ancient relic or two, then those might serve as partial payment of Vlen's debt.

The Locals

The villagers of Vaca Goya are here for the free drink, but are a useful source of rumours and gossip about Vlen.

What They Know:

- Vlen was an odd bird, and you could never really trust him. He told the most marvellous stories about other worlds, though.
- He delighted in tricks and games. It would be just like Vlen to put a riddle or a puzzle into his will, or to hide the will itself somewhere in plain sight.
- Vlen definitely made a will. Either one of the Backett's destroyed it, or Vlen hid it somewhere.
- Porter Sajan knew Vlen quite well, and knows how tangled Vlen's affairs could get. He probably wants to keep everything simple, and would be willing to overlook some irregularities if it got the whole matter sorted more quickly.
- The Parads are criminals. Stay away from them, they're dangerous!

Later Arrivals

The other two factions at the funeral, the Brotherhood of Humaniti and Arisa, arrive after the player characters. Another flyer lands outside the village around an hour after the PCs, and the monks disembark. Arisa arrives in a third flyer soon after that.

The Brotherhood of Humaniti

The Brotherhood is an order of monks. A delegation of four monks, all dressed identically in green robes with shaved heads. The leader of these monks introduces herself as Aail. When she speaks, the other three monks chant a mantra as accompaniment. Aail explains that 'Initiate Zuu', known to the secular world as Vlen Backett, was a member of their order some years ago. He fled the monastery in the dead

of night and never returned – but as part of his initiation, he signed over all worldly goods to the Brotherhood of Humanity. It has taken the Brotherhood some time to find Zuu's homeworld, but they are here now to claim what is rightfully theirs.

Brotherhood Member

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

Art (chanting) 1, Life Sciences (genetics) 1, Medic 0, Persuade 0, Steward 1

Playing Members of the Brotherhood of Humaniti:

- The Brotherhood are an esoteric religious group who believe that all Humaniti must unite into one. They love and cherish each and every human in a distinctly uncomfortable way. Treat every human as though you want nothing more than to keep them safe *forever*, like a collection of butterflies.
- Non-humans are dangerous monsters who must be destroyed. Anyone who opposes the Brotherhood's deranged scheme of racial unity is probably a secret servant of non-humans.
- Never stop smiling. You have found the shining bliss of the ur-Human (or are deeply disturbed, depending on the observer).

What They Want:

- Everything Vlen Backett owns.

What They Know:

- Backett somehow found their secret monastery in Victoria/Lanth and applied for membership of the Brotherhood. They have a copy of Vlen's oath of membership, which does bear Backett's signature and identity imprint.
- He left the order after two weeks. Around the same time, their cherished relic, the Sceptre of Ur, also vanished. They have no proof that Vlen stole the Sceptre, but if he did, then it may still be among his belongings.

Arisa

Just as the homecoming is winding down and the villagers are beginning to depart, another flyer arrives. This is piloted by a woman in a black jumpsuit, with laughing eyes and the close-cropped hair of a spacer. She introduces herself as Arisa – Arisa Backett. Vlen, she says, was her husband.

In fact, Arisa is a Scout and an agent of Gand Holcess. His ship, the *Alahir*, is in orbit over Vaca Goya. Arisa will report any suspicious activity to Captain Holcess during the night.

Arisa

STR 7 DEX 9 END 7 INT 9 EDU 11 SOC 8

Admin 0, Advocate 1, Astrogation 1, Carouse 1, Comms 0, Computers 2, Deception 2, Diplomat 1, Engineer 0, Gunner (turret) 1, Gun Combat (pistol) 2, Investigate 2, Mechanic 1, Medic 0, Navigation 2, Persuade 0, Pilot (starship) 1, Recon 1, Sensors 2, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Vacc Suit 1, Zero-G 1

Body Pistol (3D6-3), Concealed Tailored Vacc Suit (8)

Playing Arisa:

- Her presence here is deliberately provocative; she has no evidence that Vlen was married, but decided that this was the best way to draw out any contacts or allies of Vlen's.
- She is a highly competent spy, who enjoys the challenging nature of her work. She hates boredom; better to be running from Zhodani border guards and dodging laser blasts than to be trapped behind a desk in some dull office.
- Her cover identity is as a flighty air-head, the sort who would be incredibly impressed by a battered scout ship and the romance of a traveller.
- Never hesitate, always act. Doing something is always better than doing nothing.
- Smile and touch people when talking to them. Arisa uses touch to secretly probe for hidden weapons or concealed electronics.

What She Knows:

- Secretly, Arisa knows that Vlen Backett was under observation by Imperial Intelligence, and that he is suspected of involvement in a mysterious conspiracy.
- Her cover story is that she comes from Rech/Lanth, an agricultural backwater rimward of Regina. Backett met her at the starport bar and married her after a whirlwind romance; he had to go away on business to Regina with Mr. Yosha, but promised her he would soon return and bring her home to Alell.

What She Wants:

- Information about Vlen; ideally, proof that he was involved in the mysterious conspiracy that Holcass suspects threatens the Imperium.

Arisa's Proof: Suspicious characters may ask for proof; Arisa has a 'genuine' marriage certificate from Regina. The certificate is real, even if she never married Vlen – Gand Holcass used his connections in the government to obtain the certificate.

Events at the Homecoming

This section of the adventure should be run in a freeform manner. Split the player characters up and let them mingle at the funeral. If the game drags, use any of the events below to get events moving again.

Hans Tries Bribery: Believing that the player characters have Backett's will, Hans Backett approaches whichever character seems the most underhanded and makes an offer. Hans has a cargo of five tons of rare furs and other animal products, with 10,000 credits a ton at least (+4 Sale DM on Rich or High Population worlds). He will trade that for the will. If the character refuses, or says that he does not have the will, then Hans assumes that the character is lying and has something to gain from the actual will coming to light. He then hints darkly that the jungles of Alell are dangerous for offworlders.

Shouting Match: An argument breaks out between one drunken local and Yusal Parad. The local accuses Parad of being a criminal and a murderer, and shouts that no one in Vaca Goya wants Parad's sort around here. Parad impassively ignores the local, and has his goons 'encourage' the drunk to leave the village hall. After that, the crowd subtly draws away from Parad, creating an empty, silent exclusion zone around him.

The Brotherhood and Porter Sajan: The Brotherhood of Humaniti approach Porter Sajan to discuss tomorrow's funeral arrangements. Aail wants Backett buried in accordance with the Brotherhood's teachings, where a sample of his DNA is taken for interment in the monastery archive, so that in future millenia all believers will be part of the Ur-Humaniti to come. The ceremony she proposes is six hours long, and involves denouncing 'all races, persons, governments, creeds, groups, species or thoughts that deny the essential unity of all Humaniti'. Porter Sajan is understandably nonplussed by this request, and looks to the player characters to help him deal with the cultists.

Arisa makes a scene: Arisa wants to provoke a reaction from the other mourners at the funeral. She goes around tearfully embracing her 'relatives', claiming that Vlen told her all about them. She tries to get the Backetts and the player characters talking, and may even attempt to draw player characters into compromising situations ('*will no-one comfort the young, emotionally vulnerable widow?*')

The gunshot: During the night, after most of the mourners have departed, a shot from a hunting rifle rings out over the village, narrowly missing the player characters. The shooter vanishes into the night. The characters may suspect Parad or Hans Backett, but it was actually Bard Jocell, who mistook the Inheritor for Tomas Backett.

Dealing with the Factions

If the players can eliminate the conflicting claims of the other parties, they will make life much simpler for themselves. The Jocells' claim on the *Star Hunter* can be thwarted by pointing out that Marisa is actually the one who committed a crime by abusing her position in the starport to hide the ship all those years ago. If the characters point this out, Marisa blusters and threatens them with informing Gand Holcass, but it is clear that she really has nothing to stand on.

Dealing with the Parads is more dangerous; their strength is their reputation as hardened criminals. If the characters are willing to face down the thugs, they can force the Parads out. Yusal will threaten the characters with the wrath of organised crime on Alell, but that will soon be the least of the characters' problems.

The Brotherhood of Humaniti has a genuine claim, but a character who succeeds at a Hard (-4) Advocate + Education check taking 1-6 hours can find precedent under Imperial law that such a document is illegal. The Brotherhood may have some rights to Backett's estate, but certainly not everything they want.

Arisa's marriage certificate is a forgery, but it is indistinguishable from the real thing. Under Alell law, unless a will is found, she will inherit the bulk of Vlen's estate.

Fake Wills

Creative or unscrupulous players may try faking the will, seeing as no real copy has come to light. Creating a forgery requires a Hard (-4) check of either Advocate, Deception or a suitable Trade. The forgery will not hold up to detailed analysis.

WHERE THERE'S A WILL

The next morning, everyone gathers for Vlen Backett's funeral. Despite the protests of the Brotherhood of Humaniti, he is buried in accordance with the local traditions of Alell. The body is taken from the village

hall to a green field within the mister precincts, where it is buried in an unmarked grave. The original settlers of Alell used the remains of their dead to cultivate 'safe' crops, when they did not know which plants in the jungle were edible. The tradition remains to this day – Backett's corpse will be allowed to slowly decay and feed the village green. (At least, it would if an Ancient ship were not already on its way to pick up his mind-state and reincarnate him.)

At the ceremony, Sajan gives a brief eulogy of Vlen Backett, and encourages anyone else who wishes to speak to do so. Unless the characters do so, no-one responds to his appeal.

Sajan's Eulogy: *What can be said of Vlen Backett?*

He was a mystery to his dying day. Everyone standing here knew him, but we saw only one small part of him. None of us knew the whole, and I do not think anyone ever did. Vlen went beyond the confines of our little world. He travelled further than anyone I have ever known, and saw things we cannot imagine. He had friends and comrades on a hundred worlds, and propped up the bar in a thousand starports. He was not always a good man, or a wise man, but he was always... surprising.

Vlen was a stranger in strange stars, and he brought a little of that strangeness back to enrich our lives.

Goodbye, Vlen. Life here in Vaca Goya will be much duller without you.

The Question of the Will

After the funeral, Sajan gathers the Backetts, Arisa and any of the other claimants together with the PCs and meets with them all in his house. He explains that no valid copy of Backett's will has been found, but he believes that there may be a copy in existence. He has searched Backett's house in the village to no avail; can anyone suggest another place it might be?

If the characters do not suggest Backett's jungle lodge, then Tomas mentions it as a possibility. Sajan requests that the characters travel to the lodge and search it for the will. The exact location of the lodge is not on record, so the characters will have to hack through the jungle and search the area. The lodge is likely to be covered in vines at this point, and may not be visible from the air.

Hans Backett immediately volunteers to go as a guide, and Arisa wishes to accompany the expedition too. If still present, then Yusal Parad says that he will send

one of his bodyguards, and Bard Jocell claims to be an expert woodsman and demands to be included. The characters can accept any of these fellow travellers if they wish.

Outfitting

Machetes and mister guns can be purchased in the village store, as can jacks, mesh jackets and flak jackets.

Full-body armour (Vacc Suits, HEV suits, some forms of combat armour, battle dress) provide complete immunity to mister attacks. Other armour provides no defence.

Native creatures of Alell who are struck by a mister attack must make an Instinct check, at a -DM equal to the damage inflicted, or flee.

Getting There

While there are several flyers parked in Vaca Goya, only Rao knows roughly where the lodge is. If the characters try flying, they must make a Difficult (-2) Navigation + Intelligence check to find the lodge. Success gives a +4DM to rolls on the wilderness encounter table.

Alternatively, the characters can just march out through the mister fields and head roughly in the direction of the lodge.

INTO THE JUNGLE

Less than half a kilometre outside Vaca Goya, you could have stepped a million years back in time. The jungles of Alell are still primal wilderness, and there is not a single trace of humanity here. You are surrounded on all sides by walls of golden-barked trees with blood-red leaves. You hack your way through the underbrush, cutting aside web-like ferns and vines like braided ropes. Insects – or the local analogues of insect life, ugly four-legged

things with eyes on their hips – scurry away from you or crawl over your legs.

You would have thought finding Vlen's lodge would be easy, but it quickly becomes apparent how swiftly the plants grow. Leave a vehicle out here overnight, and you will return to find it dusted in spores; leave it for a week, and it will be choked in vines. Leave it over a year, and it will be almost indistinguishable from the forest floor. Any of these little plant-covered hillocks could be Vlen's lodge.

Wilderness Encounters

Rolling on the Wilderness Encounter table below, adding the highest Survival and Navigation scores amid the group as DMs. (If no-one has Survival 0 or Navigation 0, then apply a -2 DM). Each roll represents an hour's travel through the jungle. Add a +1 DM for every previous roll on the table, representing the characters' progress along the trail.

| Roll | Encounter |
|------------|------------------|
| 0 to 4 | Minor Obstacle |
| 5 to 6 | Animal Encounter |
| 7 to 8 | Minor Obstacle |
| 9 to 10 | Animal Encounter |
| 11 to 12 | Major Obstacle |
| 13 or more | Discovery |

Minor Obstacle: The characters encounter a minor obstacle or hazard, such as a treacherous bog, torrential downpour, extremely thick vegetation or a steep incline. No skill roll is needed to navigate this obstacle, but getting through it saps 1D3 points of Endurance.

Major Obstacle: The characters run into a dangerous obstacle. Roll 1D6 to determine what sort of danger they encounter.

1. Steep Cliff. A 20-metre-tall shelf of shifted rock that runs as far as the characters can see. The only way forward is up. This requires a Difficult (-2)

| Weapon | TL | Range | Damage | Auto | Recoil | Mass (kg) | Magazine | Cost (Cr) | Ammo Cost (Cr) |
|---------------|----|----------------------|--------|------|--------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Mister Pistol | 9 | Gun Combat (pistol) | 1D6 | No | 0 | 1.5 | 20 | 75 | 10 |
| Mister Rifle | 9 | Gun Combat (shotgun) | 2D6 | No | 1 | 6 | 20 | 150 | 20 |
| Heavy Mister | 9 | Gun Combat (shotgun) | 3D6 | No | 2 | 10 | 20 | 300 | 30 |

Dexterity check to climb, taking 1-6 minutes. Failing with an Effect of -4 or more means the character falls from the cliff and suffers 3D6 damage.

2. Quicksand. One character chosen at random blunders into a patch of quicksand. The character must make a series of Average (+0) Dexterity rolls to climb out. Keep track of the character's cumulative Effect. A total Effect of 5 or more is needed to escape; if the cumulative Effect reaches -5, the character slips under the surface and begins to drown. Apply a -1DM to each subsequent check after the first to represent the character slowly sinking.

3. Poisonous Plants. One character chosen at random brushes past a dangerous plant and is stung. The character must make an Average (+0) Endurance check or suffer 1d6 damage to his Dexterity and 1d6 damage to his Strength.

4. Stinging Insects. A swarm of hungry flesh-eating insects emerge from a dead tree stump. Terran-descended creatures taste incredibly delicious to these insects. The swarm has an Endurance of 50; characters can either try to destroy the swarm with mister attacks or other area-effect weapons, or else flee. A character caught in the swarm takes 1D6 damage per round. Sealed armour protects against

the swarm attacks for some time, but the insects will eventually find a way in.

5. Mudslide. A tide of loose earth and watery mud slips downhill and threatens to engulf the characters. All characters must make a Difficult (-2) Strength check to stay standing. Those who fail are knocked prone and take 2d6 damage; those who fail with an Effect of -3 or more are swept away in the flood and become separated from the other characters.

6. Extreme Rains. A tropical storm breaks over the characters; they must either wait for the storm to pass (taking 2D6 hours) or else continue on, but lose any accumulated +DMs to their Wilderness Encounter rolls.

Animal Encounter: The characters encounter a dangerous animal. Roll 2d6 to determine which creature they encounter. Statistics for all such creatures are in the Library Data section of this adventure.

2-3: Cadgeree

4-7: Lambdragon

8-11: Whisperhawk

12: Maleficient

| Cadgeree | Habitat | Strength | Dexterity | Endurance | Intelligence | Instinct | Pack |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|----------|--------|
| Flying Carnivore (Pouncer) | Jungle | 4 (-1) | 18 (+4) | 5 (-1) | 1 (-2) | 10 (+1) | 2 (-2) |
| | Stealth 2, Recon 1, Melee (claws) 1 | | | | | | |
| | Thrasher (3D6), Armour 1, Number Encountered 1d3 | | | | | | |

| Lambdragon | Habitat | Strength | Dexterity | Endurance | Intelligence | Instinct | Pack |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|----------|---------|
| Walking Herbivore (Intermittant) | Jungle | 18 (+4) | 8 (+0) | 14 (+2) | 1 | 7 (+0) | 12 (+2) |
| | Survival 3, Recon 2, Melee (tail lash) 1 | | | | | | |
| | Teeth (2D6), Armour 2, Number Encountered 4d6 | | | | | | |

| Whisperhawk | Habitat | Strength | Dexterity | Endurance | Intelligence | Instinct | Pack |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|----------|---------|
| Flying Herbivore (Filter) | Jungle | 5 (-1) | 10 (+1) | 11 (+1) | 0 (-3) | 12 (+2) | 11 (+1) |
| | Stealth 2, Melee (brawl) 0 | | | | | | |
| | Engulf & Suffocate, Armour 0, Number Encountered 4d6 | | | | | | |
| Maleficient | Habitat | Strength | Dexterity | Endurance | Intelligence | Instinct | Pack |
| Walking Scavenger (Hijacker) | Jungle | 14 (+2) | 15 (+3) | 13 (+2) | 1 (-2) | 9 (+1) | 9 (+1) |
| | Stealth 3, Recon 1, Melee (claws) 1 | | | | | | |
| | Teeth (3D6), Armour 1, Number Encountered 3D6 | | | | | | |

Discovery: The characters come across a sign that they are on the right path. There are three discoveries, which are encountered in the following order.

- 1. The Landing Strip:** The characters find a flat area of ground. It is heavily overgrown, but it is clear that you could land a flyer here if necessary, and that a few hours work with cutting tools would turn the area into a workable landing site. There is an old path leading towards a nearby hill. As the characters travel along the path, they find a sealed hatch in the ground. This hatch cannot be opened by any tool the characters possess – it is part of the defence system of the lodge.
- 2. The Body:** In the hollow of a tree, nearly hidden by a curtain of vines and moss, a character glimpses white bone. There is the skeleton of a human, dressed in the tattered remains of an Alellian encounter suit. There are several bullet holes in the chest of the suit, but no sign of any identification or equipment. The body is at least a decade old. The characters will never discover who this was, but it is a hint that Vlen Backett was not a saint.
- 3. The Lodge:** The characters finally discover the lodge.

THE LODGE

It takes you a second to recognise this place as a building. The jungle has almost reclaimed Vlen's old lodge, and creepers cover almost every inch of the walls. The roof bows under the weight of moss and vines, but the place still seems structurally sound. After cutting away the vegetation over the door, you find the interior is quite intact, and the environmental seals have kept the plants and moisture at bay.

The main room of the lodge is crammed with all manner of junk. Papers, books, data terminals and scribbled notes cover piles of curios from offworld. In one corner, a packing crate has spilled its contents of shiny nuggets of some exotic ore all over the floor; in another, there is a framed painting that must have been made by a species with a greater colour sensitivity than humans. Hanging over the fireplace is a collection of weapons that are probably grotesquely illegal.

Arisa sighs and sits down. 'Vlen told me about this place. I dreamed of it...' She starts flicking through documents, her eyes glimmering with tears.

Two-Legged Predators

If the characters are accompanied by NPCs, then there is added danger.

Hans Backett: Hans is an excellent woodsman, but he wants to eliminate anyone who might have a copy of Vlen's will. If possible, he will try to convince the characters to turn back and give the lodge up for lost; if they keep going, he will take advantage of any environmental dangers to eliminate rivals.

Bard Jocell: Bard is an idiot who believes himself to be an excellent tracker. He will boast to the characters about his experience in survival and hunting, and try to get them to use his Survival and Navigation skills instead of theirs. He will also pursue any wild beasts the group encounters.

Parad's Thug: Morgan, the 'bodyguard', is actually the most trustworthy of the potential expedition members. He is quiet, professional and uncomplaining. Of course, he will threaten to shoot anyone who suggests giving up and returning to Vaca Goya. Having both Hands and Morgan in the party is a recipe for a firefight.

Arisa: Arisa pretends to be a clueless farmgirl, but she does have some survival training, and will put these skills to work if she thinks the group is in danger. She will encourage the characters to get to the lodge as quickly as possible. She is also carrying a location beacon, transmitting her location to a squad of Imperial marines who are her backup. The marines are tracking the characters from the skies; their battle dress suits have built-in grav belts, so the marines are holding position above the clouds, waiting for the signal.

Once the characters start searching through the contents of the lodge, they find the following clues.

The Computer

Vlen's computer system is a surprisingly advanced (TL14) one, imported from offworld. A Difficult (-2) Computers + Intelligence roll taking 1-6 minutes lets a character access the system; a Very Hard (-6) check is required to get access to the encrypted files.

The easily-accessible files are Vlen's notes from his travels. He has obviously travelled all over the Spinward Marches and beyond. It is not easy to determine exactly what Vlen was doing on his voyages; while there are a few references to trade, the cost of the trip greatly exceeds any profit from speculative trade. Despite that, Vlen seems to have access to virtually unlimited funds. On some worlds, he visited scientific institutions or met with political and corporate leaders; on others, he just wandered the countryside, visited museums, prospected in the asteroid belt, or did not record his activities.

If the characters manage to access the encrypted files, they hear an unimaginable complicated hubbub of recorded voices, as vast amounts of data scroll across the screen. The computer has a copy of the intercepted data from Regina (Ven Yasha's hidden space station in Regina can intercept and decrypt even 'secure' Imperial transmissions). This is a treasure trove of information.

There is a similar, smaller interception device monitoring transmissions at Alell starport. As soon as the characters start looking at the secure files, it flashes up a series of intercepted messages between a vessel in orbit and the starport authorities – give the players Handout #1.

Ancient Research

One wall contains books and notes on the Ancients, gathered from a hundred worlds. There is everything from scholarly dissertations and ponderous tomes on archaeology to secret military reports and lunatic fringe rantings. Professor Ujinka's previous works on the Ancients have pride of place. One file is a list of Ancient artefacts held in various museums and research institutions across the Imperium and beyond – and Vlen has notes on each one of them, including whether or not the artefact is genuine. How Backett knows this is unclear.

The Sceptre: Wrapped in a tattered blanket is the Sceptre of Ur, the relic stolen from the Brotherhood of Humaniti. This relic is a half-metre long object made of a greenish stone that is strangely warm to the touch. It is engraved with strange markings reminiscent of Droyne glyphs.

The Statue: One holophoto depicts a strange, semi-abstract statue that resembles a winged pillar. If the characters recovered the statue from Ven Yasha's station on Regina, they recognise it as the same piece. According to the metadata on the holophoto,

the picture was taken at an auction house on Rhylanor.

The Data Tapes: Attached to the photo are a set of data tapes, describing how the statue was discovered in the Boughene system. See *The Statue and the Tapes*.

Weapons

The weapons above the fireplace are decorative, but opening a closet reveals an arsenal of heavy weapons. Backett has a pair of gauss pistols, a plasma rifle, an ACR with underslung RAM grenade launcher... and a FGMP (TL15). Even the pistols are illegal on Alell, while that Fusion Gun is illegal anywhere in the Imperium. There is also an aerosol injector with four doses of combat drug, and a TL14 Tailored Vacc Suit.

Identity Cards

One folder contains Vlen's identity papers, certificates and other documentation – as well as the documentation of a dozen other identities. All of the photographs are of Vlen, but according to these documents, he is also a spice miner on Keanu, a bartender on Rhylanor, a diplomat, a mechanic, a minor noble... and he is also Ven Yasha of Regina. The dates on the identity papers range between twenty and *six hundred* years ago.

The Will

Under a pile of old *Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society*, the characters find a copy of Vlen's will. It leaves everything to the Backett family. His spaceship goes to 'any of his kin who are willing to fly the damn thing'. The one curious thing about the will is that it specifies Backett's burial conditions – he must be interred 'as whole as possible, preferably in a non-metallic coffin, no more than two metres below the surface'.

The Trapdoor

In the bathroom of the lodge is a trapdoor in the floor. This trapdoor leads to a narrow set of stairs, which goes down to the cavern below...

Beneath the Lodge

As you reach the bottom of this staircase, which was apparently cut out of the bare rock with a laser, harsh electric lights come on automatically. You are standing at the edge of a cavern that has been outfitted as a ship's hangar. A battered but apparently functional starship stands before you.

The name 'Star Hunter' is emblazoned on the rear engine cowling.

This is Vlen Backett's personal ship, originally built as a military scoutship. The *Star Hunter* is fully fuelled and ready to fly. Better yet, the ship's security systems are disabled, so the characters can just fly it out of the cave and into orbit.

Statistics for the *Star Hunter* are on page 17.

The cave mouth is concealed by hanging vines and roots, making it virtually invisible from orbit. The characters can easily clear the obstacles away, or just fly straight through them.

Weapons Systems

Also in the cave is a computer terminal attached to a large grey metal structure. A quick examination reveals that it is the control system for a defensive network, similar to the one surrounding Professor Ujinka's house on Regina. Whatever this system is controlling, though, has a lot more firepower than Ujinka's drones.

The weapon system is currently monitoring half-a-dozen small targets that are holding station 2,000 metres above the lodge.

RAPIER STRIKE

At a suitably dramatic moment (either when the will is found, or when the characters uncover the *Star Hunter*), Arisa secretly signals for her backup to arrive.

'ATTENTION! SURRENDER IN THE NAME OF THE EMPEROR!' booms an electronically-boasted voice from outside. An armoured figure drops down out of the sky – an Imperial Marine, in full battle dress and carrying a huge plasma weapon. Another two marines hover nearby, like angry angels.

The marine strides towards the house, the ground shaking with each step he takes. You spot more marines swooping low over the house to land on the far side. There are at least six marines out there. You're surrounded.

NPC Reactions

If any of the NPCs from Vaca Goya accompanied the PCs, their reactions are as follows:

Hans Backett: Hans panics when he sees the marines land, and assumes (correctly) that old uncle Vlen must have been a criminal or a terrorist or a spy or something. He flees into the cavern under the lodge and out through the cave mouth, where he is grabbed and arrested by a marine.

Bard Jocell: Jocell is confused by the whole matter. He has no idea who the marines are, or just how outmatched the characters are. He wanders out to berate them about intimidating Imperial citizens.

Morgan: The criminal leaps to the conclusion that this trap is meant for him, and believes the characters are undercover agents sent to lure him. He attempts to take the weakest or highest Social Standing PC hostage.

Arisa: Arisa hangs back, hoping the PCs will surrender. If they show signs of trying to flee, she drops the false farmgirl persona and reveals herself as an Imperial Intelligence agent. She pulls out her hidden pistol and attempts to force the player characters to surrender.

Negotiations

If the characters try talking their way out, they are patched through to Captain Gand Holcress of the *Alahir*.

'Surrender, or face the consequences. I have an Imperial Writ giving me the right to restrain and question you. Failure to comply is an act of treason. Vlen Backett may have gotten away, but I'm damned if I'm going to let you out of my grasp.'

The characters can question or plead with Holcress at this point, as the marines close in. Likely questions:

What the hell is going on?: *Vlen Backett was suspected of sedition and conspiracy against the Imperial government. You are potential accessories to his crimes. Surrender!*

We surrender!: *Remain where you are. Place all weapons on the floor in front of you and make no threatening moves.*

We Don't Know Anything About Vlen Backett!: *That has yet to be determined to my satisfaction.*

It All Goes Wrong

Some players may skip right to stealing the *Star Hunter* and trying to escape at this point, or turning

the ship's turret guns on the marines. Others may grab Chekov's FGMP and start blasting away.

Even if the characters *want* to surrender, they are not going to get that option. Backett installed a defence system to deal with unwanted attention from either the Imperium or agents of a rival Ancient, and it is powerful enough to obliterate even a marine in battle dress. When the firefight starts, read the following:

There's a subsonic thud that runs through your spine as a projectile is launched from somewhere under the lodge. A bright projectile soars into the sky, then arcs around and heads straight for one of the hovering marines. He tries to dodge the incoming missile, but it's too fast. The sun is momentarily outshone by a harsh white light, and shards of hot metal rain down from above. Thud, thud, thud. More missiles launch. The marines scatter, and their weapons spit plasma fire into the air.

One globule of sun-hot plasma scorches past the lodge, blowing a hole in the roof and far wall. There are more explosions outside as the area turns into a war zone.

Imperial Marines

STR 8 (13) **DEX** 8 (12) **END** 9 **INT** 9 **EDU** 8 **SOC** 6
Battle Dress 2, Gun Combat (rifle) 2, Heavy Weapons 2, Melee (brawl) 2, Recon 2, Sensors 1, Tactics (military) 1, Zero-G 2
Laser Rifle (5D6+3) or PGMP (12D6), Battle Dress (18)

There are five surviving marines. Each round, roll 1D6; if it is under the number of marines, one marine is obliterated by Backett's defenses. The walls of the lodge provide XX cover against attacks, but remember that fusion weapons treat such walls as soft cover. The natural rock of the cavern is hard cover. Player characters who stand and fight with the marines are likely to be incinerated in short order.

The marines are now uninterested in taking prisoners. From their perspective, the PCs suddenly attacked them with unknown weapons. Protecting themselves is their first priority, and if they are doing to do that by levelling the lodge and the surrounding countryside, so be it. Encourage overly brave player characters to flee through the trapdoor into the cavern below.

If the characters fall back to the cavern, they can use the *Star Hunter*'s weapons on the marines.

This Pile of Carbon Used To Be Me

Players whose characters get incinerated in this fight will have to generate new PCs. Alternatively, if they wish, they can take over Morgan, Bard Jocell or Hans Backett.

Surrender Is An Option

Players who are overawed by the presence of Imperial marines and the implication that they are rebelling against Imperial authority may wish to surrender. Try to avoid this by having Vlen Backett's automated defences go off just as the player is about to surrender.

Taking the Hunter

Getting the *Star Hunter* prepared for take-off requires a task chain:

Average (+0) Mechanic + Education (1-6 minutes) to check systems
Average (+0) Engineering (P-Plant) (10-60 seconds) to bring the fusion reactor up to full power
Average (+0) Engineering (M-Drive) (10-60 seconds) to charge the grav plates
and finally
Routine (+2) Pilot (starship) (10-60 seconds) to fly the ship out of the cavern and into the air.

If the Pilot check is failed, the pilot scrapes the *Star Hunter* off the cavern, inflicting damage equal to the negative Effect of the check.

An Average Sensors + Intelligence check picks up the *Alahir* in orbit; the violent electromagnetic activity of Alell's upper atmosphere makes it difficult to get precise readings, but it looks as though there is a window to fly past the larger ship and make it to the hundred-diameter jump limit and escape. Alell is an unusually dense planet, so it has a correspondingly small jump limit. The electromagnetic distortions also make it difficult for the *Alahir* to blast the *Star Hunter* with its weapons.

Desperate Flight

Before the characters can escape, though, they have to deal with other hazards.

Whisperhawks: As the ship lifts off from the jungle, it disturbs a flock of native avians, including several whisperhawks. A sizeable portion of the precious and

rare ecology of Alell flies straight into the path of the ship. The pilot must make a Difficult (-2) Pilot + Dexterity check to dodge the flock, or else can plough straight through them.

If the character chooses to dodge, and succeeds, he is able to spin the ship and avoid the avians. If he ploughs through, or fails the Pilot check with an Effect of -3 or less, then birds are splattered all over the nose of the ship, inflicting a single Exterior Hit. If the pilot check is failed with an Effect of 4 or more, he not only hits the flock of birds, but also sends the ship into a spiral heading towards the jungle. He must make a second Average (-0) Pilot check to avoid crashing (a crash inflicts 1d6 hits on the ship).

The Marines: Read the following to the players. *The ship flies into a bank of thick cloud, and you hear a pair of thumps from the hull.*

Two marines were stationed in reserve in the clouds, hovering there supported by grav belts. They have just landed on the hull of the *Star Hunter* and are making their way across the ship to the nearest airlock. There are several ways to force the marines off the ship:

- Spinning the ship: Pilot + Dexterity vs the marine's Zero-G + Dexterity
- Using the jump grid to demagnetise the hull: Hard (-4) Mechanic + Intelligence
- Shooting the marines with the turret weapons: Difficult (-2) Gunnery + Dexterity; a miss means the blast hits the ship
- Tackling the marines as they come in the airlock: Melee (brawl) + Strength vs the marine's Melee (brawl) + Strength

Incoming Fighters!: A trio of fighters dive towards the *Star Hunter*. These fighters are under orders to disable the *Star Hunter* without destroying it, so they will target the ship's fuel tanks and jump drive. The fighters are light ten-ton fighters (see page 95 in *High Guard*), and will retreat after a few rounds of combat – they do not want to destroy Captain Holcess' only lead.

ESCAPE!

You break atmosphere, leaving the bloody world of Alell behind you. The Alahir laboriously turns to pursue you, wallowing in the gravity well below, but there is no way they can catch you now.

At least, not with interceptor fighters or boarding shuttles. You're still well within range of their lasers and particle beams, and no longer have the protection of the planet's atmosphere.

Captain Holcess hails you. 'Star Hunter, stand down now. I don't want to blow you out of the sky, but if you give me no other choice...'

You're still a hundred thousand kilometres away from the jump limit.

What do you do?

Let the players decide what they want to do next. Once they make a decision, read the following text.

Your sensors light up. There's something else out there, something that sent a burst of energetic particles cascading through the system. It's like the burst associated with a ship, a really big ship, jumping in, but it happened well within the jump limit... which should be impossible. You can't see anything out there, but your sensors are telling you that something bigger than a warship is out there.

The Alahir seems equally confused. You pick up bursts of unencrypted transmissions between her and the starport – and then communications and sensors go dead, drowned out in a flood of static. A section of the atmosphere below is warped by an invisible force that whips up a cyclone.

If you're going to jump, this may be your only chance.

The Son has arrived to collect Vlen Backett's mind. The characters will encounter the Ancient again in **Section XX**, but for now they can use it as cover to escape. Jumping out of the Alell system ends this adventure.

THE STAR HUNTER

The *Star Hunter* is Vlen's personal ship. It is a heavily refitted Far Trader, with part of its cargo capacity replaced with fuel tankage and an upgraded real-space drive, and sensor suite. While there is no Ancient technology in the *Hunter*, it is built with cutting-edge components and is much more capable than its battered appearance suggests.

The original Far Trader's manoeuvre drive and power plant have been replaced with Type-D drives, giving it a range of jump-2 and 4g of acceleration. There are six staterooms, usually equipped for double

Handout #1: Intercepted Messages

X-From: Captain Gand Holcess, ISS *Alahir*

X-To: Alell Starport Control

X-Priority: Gold

X-Encrypt: Meson Secure-8

ASPC: Transferring you to the administrator now sir. Full encryption activated.

ASPC: This is Alell Actual, go ahead.

ALAHIR: Administrator, this is Captain Gand Holcess of the *Alahir*. I need to appraise you of an ongoing operation within your airspace.

ASPC: Is this part of the Scout Service, or is it military? We're reading your identity beacon as a scoutship, but -

ALAHIR: I'm afraid it's classified, administrator, but yes, we're armed and there may be weapons fire.

ASPC: Are we under attack?

ALAHIR: No, this is effectively a police action.

ASPC: A police action... with potential naval weapons discharge?

ALAHIR: I'm afraid so.

ASPC: What do you need from us, Captain Holcess?

ALAHIR: We have an agent en route to you via shuttle. We need you to facilitate her passage through the starport, and to provide her with documentation. There's also a security detachment - they'll need a briefing on the area around Vaca Goya, and their movements are to be kept off the records.

ASPC: Anything else?

ALAHIR: We may need you to shut down all travel and keep all ships grounded if the targets attempt to escape.

ASPC: I'll make the arrangements.

ALAHIR: Do you have a ship called *Star Hunter* berthed at the moment?

ASPC: Checking... no. She's been here before, and she's registered to Alell, but she's not in the port right now. Last docking was...fifteen months ago.

ALAHIR: Never mind. Holcess out.

X-From: Captain Gand Holcess, ISS *Alahir*

X-To: Team *Rapier*

X-Priority: Gold

X-Encrypt: Tightbeam Laser Secure-8

ALAHIR: Rapier, sitrep?

RAPIER: Rapier-one, sir. Targets have located a structure. Scanning with d-meters - picking up a large natural cavern directly below, plus a metal object. Big enough to be a ship.

ALAHIR: Give me a firing solution for that ship.

RAPIER: Sir, targeting data is being problematic because of the auroras.

ALAHIR: All right, we'll pick them up as they break atmo if they get past you.

RAPIER: Acknowledged, *Alahir*.

ALAHIR: Wait for the signal, then secure the structure. Non-lethal weapons only, please.

RAPIER: Sir.

ALAHIR: Holcess out.

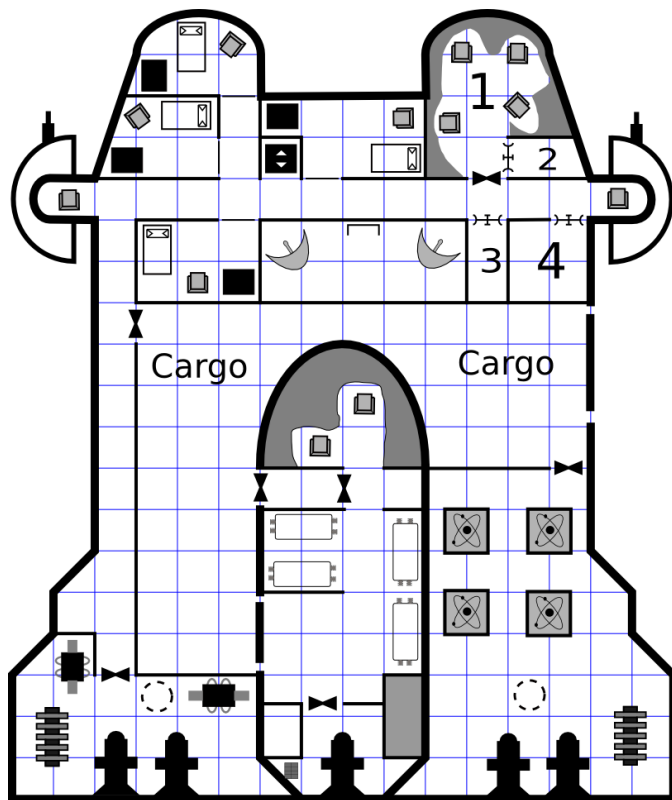
occupancy. The ship has enough fuel for a month of normal operations, plus a two-parsec jump; three tons of high-capacity fuel reproprocessors allow it to quickly cycle scooped hydrogen.

The *Star Hunter* carries a 20-ton launch and an air/raft. When docked, the launch's cargo bay opens into that of the main ship, increasing the *Hunter's* limited capacity to 43.88 tons.

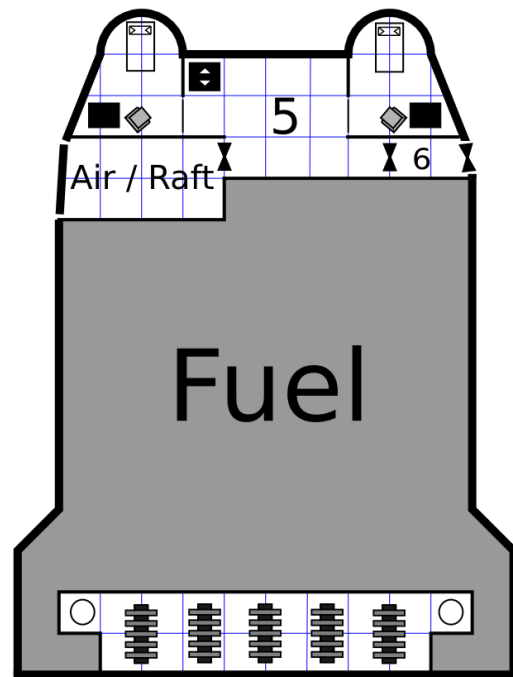
For defence, the *Star Hunter* has crystalliron armour and two double turrets. The aft turret has a sandcaster and a missile rack loaded with smart missiles; the forward turret has a pair of beam lasers. The ship's library is bizarrely empty, as if someone had recently blanked it and replaced it with a standard-issue TAS database.

THE STAR HUNTER

| | | | Tons | Cost |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|------|-----------|
| Hull | 200 Tons | 4 Hull | | 8800000 |
| | Streamlined | 4 Structure | | |
| Armour | Crystalliron | 4 Points | 10 | 1600000 |
| Jump Drive | B | Jump 2 | 15 | 20000000 |
| Manoeuvre Drive | D | Thrust 4 | 7 | 16000000 |
| Power Plant | D | | 13 | 32000000 |
| Bridge | | | 10 | 1000000 |
| Computer | Model/3 | Rating 15 | | 2000000 |
| Electronics | Very Advanced | | 5 | 4000000 |
| Weapons | Hardpoint #1 | Double Turret | 1 | 500000 |
| | | Beam Laser | | 1000000 |
| | | Beam Laser | | 1000000 |
| | Hardpoint #2 | Double Turret | 1 | 500000 |
| | | Sandcaster | | 250000 |
| | | Missile Rack | | 750000 |
| Fuel | 56 Tons | One jump-2 and 4 weeks of operation | | |
| Cargo | | | 38 | |
| Ammunition | 3 Tons | 2 Tons smart missiles | 2 | 60000 |
| | | 1 Ton sandcaster | 1 | 10000 |
| 6 Staterooms | | | 24 | 12000000 |
| 0 Low Berths | | | | |
| Extras | | | | |
| | Fuel Processor | | 3 | 150000 |
| | Launch | | 20 | 13569000 |
| | Air/Raft | | 0.59 | 210000 |
| Software | Manoeuvre/0 | | | |
| | Library/0 | | | |
| | Jump/2 | | | 200000 |
| | Evade/1 | | | 1000000 |
| | Fire Control/1 | | | 2000000 |
| Maintenance Cost (monthly) | | | | 8991 |
| Life Support Cost (monthly) | | | | 18000 |
| Total Tonnage & Cost | | | 154 | 197843990 |



1. Bridge
2. Ship's Locker
3. Sandcaster Barrel Storage
4. Missile Storage
5. Common Area
6. Airlock



| | | | |
|---------------|--|--------------------|--|
| Chair | | Fuel Processor | |
| Bed | | Fusion Power Plant | |
| Locker | | Jump Drive | |
| Access Hatch | | Manoeuvre Drive | |
| Hatch | | Iris Valve | |
| Hatch Floor | | Iris Valve Floor | |
| Hatch Ceiling | | Iris Valve Ceiling | |
| Hatch Both | | Iris Valve Both | |
| Low Berth | | Sensors | |
| Escape Pod | | Spinal Mount | |
| Lift | | | |

THE ALAHIR

According to the registry of Imperial Scout Ships, the *Alahir* is officially a 'heavy scout' designed for extended missions into perilous regions of space, mapping pirate sectors, performing observations of hazardous stellar phenomena and other tasks that a basic scout ship could not accomplish. There are only two other ships of this design in the Marches.

The *Alahir* is a thousand-ton Jump-4 ship, capable of 5g acceleration. She carries four smaller craft – a modular cutter for fuel scooping and cargo transfer, and three Light Fighters (on some scouting missions, these ten-ton fighters are replaced with more probe

drones or a 50-ton surveyor in a docking cradle). The prow-mounted particle bay gives her surprising punch for a scout ship, while the six turrets give ample protection. Her armour is augmented with radiation shielding, and her computer systems and sensors are hardened.

On board, the ship carries enough fuel for more than a month of standard operations and a single Jump-4, as well as extra fuel for the fighters and cutter. The *Alahir* has twenty staterooms; her usual crew includes six pilots, one navigator, six engineers, ten gunners, twelve marines and six scientists along with other deckhands and specialists.

LIBRARY DATA

Alell

Population: 400,000,000

Law Level: 12

Tech Level: 10

Originally settled by the descendants of hotel staff, Alell has become a rich and influential world despite its extremely dangerous native wildlife. The population is clustered into a small number of fortified cities, although modern technology makes it possible to live in more rural areas. Alell's primary industry is tourism; secondary exports include wood, furs, pharmaceuticals and other material harvested from the jungles that cover 30% of the planet's surface area. Alell has a Class B starport whose original structure dates back to the First Imperium, and is considered an excellent example of *fin-de-siecle* Vilani design.

Brotherhood of Humaniti

A quasi-religious group that arose following the confirmation of the Solomani Hypothesis that all Humaniti stems from a single source. The Brotherhood believes that all humans should come together as one species, united under a common government. As such, any government or institution that opposes such radical unity is an enemy of the species and must be destroyed. Since its inception, the Brotherhood has moved towards mysticism, attributing increasingly unlikely supernatural powers to 'true Humaniti', the ur-race that was destroyed when the Ancients divided Humaniti into different 'tribes'.

Cadgeree

The cadgeree resembles a winged snake with a spiked tail. Cadgeree are extremely effective predators, who attack by hurling themselves down on prey from a great height, embedding their tail spikes deep into the foe's flesh. The serpent then thrashes wildly, snapping the spine of its victim with ease. Cadgeree usually attack smaller creatures, but have been known to attack humans when hungry.

Hos (Staff)

Term used to denote an inferior or servant in Alell culture; derived from old Vilani dialect term 'hos'ai', servant or staff used in the catering industry.

Lambdragon

Large herbivore common to the Alell jungles. Lambdragons slowly graze through the forest, eating from the treetops. They have few natural predators, due to their size and the protection of the pack. The term 'lambdragon' was given to them because of their

percieved gentleness, but attacks by lambdragons are not impossible. The creatures have surprisingly sharp teeth for a herbivore (more accurately, they have two sets of teeth – an exterior set of flat teeth for feeding on leaves, and a retractable set of sharper teeth used in defence and mating rituals), and a stampede of lambdragons can flatten a tank.

The creatures reproduce by depositing egg sacs in hollows in trees. The larval lambdragon feeds on the interior of the tree, and 'hatches' when the weakened tree collapses. The passage of a large herd of lambdragons can cause sizable seismic tremors, causing trees to fall and thus bring new dragons into the herd.

Malificent

Infamous and mysterious predators of the Alell jungles, maleficients are fast and brutal creatures. They are jet-black in colour, although markings can be seen under ultraviolet light. They travel through the trees by means of tentacles, snaking along the canopy in search of prey. Little is known about their biology, but some scientists believe that they are not originally native to Alell.

Siu (Guest)

Term of respect used on Alell, derived from old Vilani dialect term 'Siu'ch', meaning guest or honoured visitor.

Whisperhawk

One of the most common sights in the jungle, whisperhawks are beautiful avians with prodigious wingspans. The hawk's wings are both locomotion and feeding organs – whisperhawks feed by digesting the insects that are caught in the sticky underside of the wings. A flock of hawks can glide across the jungle canopy at twilight, catching hundreds of thousands of insects as they fly. The buzzing of the trapped insects and the susuruss of the wind gives the whisperhawk its name.

They are notoriously stupid creatures, and have been known to attack humans and vehicles (as well as flagposts, fences, houses and even small trees).

If threatened, whisperhawks attack by wrapping their wings around a larger foe and trying to smother it. A character engulfed by a whisperhawk can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to 1D6 plus his Endurance DM; after this time, he takes 1d6 damage per round.

THE ALAHIR

| | | | Tons | Cost |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------|-----------|
| Hull | 1000 tons | Hull 20 | | 100000000 |
| | | Structure 20 | | |
| Armour | | Crystaliron, Radiation Shielded | 50 | 270000000 |
| Jump Drive | P | Jump 4 | 75 | 140000000 |
| Manoeuvre Drive | S | Thrust 5 | 33 | 68000000 |
| Power Plant | S | | 43 | 112000000 |
| Bridge | | | 20 | 5000000 |
| Computer | Model 5/fib | Rating 25 | | 15000000 |
| Electronics | Very Advanced | | 5 | 4000000 |
| Weapons | | | | |
| | Hardpoint #1 | Particle Bay | 51 | 20000000 |
| | Hardpoint #7 | Double Turret (Sandcaster/Missile Rack) | 1 | 1500000 |
| | Hardpoint #3 | Double Turret (Sandcaster/Missile Rack) | 1 | 1500000 |
| | Hardpoint #4 | Double Turret (Beam Laser x2) | 1 | 2500000 |
| | Hardpoint #5 | Double Turret (Beam Laser x2) | 1 | 2500000 |
| | Hardpoint #6 | Double Turret (Pulse Laser) | 1 | 1500000 |
| | Hardpoint #2 | Double Turret Pulse Laser) | 1 | 1500000 |
| | | | | |
| Fuel | 1 Jump-4, 6 Weeks of Operation | | 484 | |
| Cargo | | | 88 | |
| Ammunition | | 4 tons sand, 6 tons missile ammunition | 10 | |
| | | | | |
| 20 Staterooms | | | 80 | 10000000 |
| 0 Low Berths | | | | |
| Extras | | | | |
| | Fighters x 3 | | 30 | 29511000 |
| | Cutter | | 50 | 19458000 |
| | Probe Drones | | 5 | 2500000 |
| | Fuel Processors | | 2 | 100000 |
| Software | Jump Control/4 | | | 400000 |
| | Manoeuvre/0 | | | |
| | Library/0 | | | |
| | | | | |
| Maintenance Cost (monthly) | | | | 50677 |
| Life Support Cost (monthly) | | | | 60,000 |
| Total Tonnage & Cost | | | 1000 | 550760000 |

