

Philosophy

Episode II of the Below the Belt Trilogy A One-Round Living Force Tournament

By August Hahn

Exploration of the asteroid belt is still going strong, with claim staking and new discoveries every day. All at once, part of this wild, new frontier seems to vanish. Something or someone is casting dark shadows over part of the asteroid belt and unless you can solve “riddles in the dark”, shadows are only the beginning... This is best played after “*Philanthropy*” and before “*Philology*” and is suitable for heroes levels 1-9. This scenario features intense role-playing, and is recommended for mature role players.

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Below the Belt 2: Philosophy is a standard RPGA Network tournament. A four-hour time block has been set aside for this event but the actual playing time will be about three and a half hours.

It is a good idea to ask each player to put a name tag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom and the hero's name, species and gender at the top. This makes it easier for players to keep track of who is playing which character.

Scoring the game for RPGA points: The RPGA has three ways to score this game. Consult your convention coordinator to determine which method to use:

1. *No-vote scoring:* The players write their names and numbers on the scoring packet grid, you fill in the top of the grid. That is all. No one is rated. This method is used for people who are just playing for fun.
2. *Partial scoring:* The players rate the game master and the scenario on their player voting sheet, but don't vote for other players. The game master rates the scenario and completes personal and event information, but does not rate the players as a team or vote for players. This method is used when there is no competition, but the convention coordinator wants information as to how the game masters are performing, or the game master wants feedback on his or her own performance.
3. *Voting:* Players and game masters complete the entire packet, including voting for best player. If this method is used, be sure to allow about 15-20 minutes for the players to briefly describe their characters to the other players, and about 5-10 minutes for voting. This method is used when the players want to know who played the best amongst them, or when the adventure is run in tournament format with winners and prizes. Multi-round adventures usually require advancing a smaller number of players than played the first round, so voting is required for multi-round adventures.

When using Voting, rank the players in order of your voting choice while they are completing their forms, so that you are not influenced by their comments on your abilities.

A note about the text: Some of the text in the scenario is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in ***bold italics***. It is strongly recommended that you paraphrase the player text, instead of reading it aloud, as some of the text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters.

Hero Earnings

At the beginning of the round, if the heroes are employed, they receive their pay. No matter how much time has passed since the previous round, they receive pay for one week. Heroes who are not employed but who have profession or craft skills may roll against those skills to see how much they have earned from their profession or craft in the last week. Use the method in the core rules (Craft: pg. 72 *Check result times 20 credits*; Profession: pg. 80 *Check result times 50 credits*). Note that players may use only one of the above methods and must choose which before rolling (Employment, Craft or Profession). There is no pay for unskilled labor in the LIVING FORCE campaign.

Issuing Force and Dark Side Points

Issuing Force Points: When heroes perform cinematically heroic actions, don't forget that you may issue a Force point for such activities. Because this is a heroic campaign, we expect heroism - and encourage judges to reward it. In the course of a standard LIVING FORCE event, there are many opportunities for heroism. If a LIVING FORCE hero performs in a way that is heroic, dramatic, and cinematic, then a Force Point is definitely in order. Our favorite story involved the hero at the premiere, who leapt from a moving speeder, grabbed a vine, and swung on that vine to attack someone in another moving speeder. THAT is dramatic, cinematic heroism!

Not everything is that extreme, and you don't have to jump from a moving speeder to earn a Force Point, but if a hero does something that makes you, the judge, say, 'Wow,' then they should probably get a FP.

The core rules (pg 157) define "Dramatic Heroism" as follows:

To qualify as an act of dramatic heroism, an action must fulfill three criteria:

- It must accomplish a significant task in the defense of good or the defeat of evil;
- It must occur at a dramatically appropriate time (usually the climax of the adventure); and
- It should require significant risk on the part of the hero.

Issuing Dark Side Points: Unfortunately, it is impossible to produce an exhaustive list of all the possible ways people can get Dark Side points. There are just too many ways that the beginnings of "evil" can manifest themselves.

To quote the Dark Side book... "Evil is not always easy to recognize. An innocent act may ultimately result in great suffering. An act of revenge may save the lives of millions of people. The pure at heart can lash out in anger. Evil may lurk beneath a mask of virtue. Whether an act is evil or not often boils down

to a question of motivation, and motivation can be hard to identify.

"When a Gamemaster is in doubt about whether to award a Dark Side Point to a character, he or she should consider the character's motives: Did the character act out of anger? Hatred? Cruelty? Vengeance? Pride? Did the character choose an option simply because it would allow her to spill an enemy's blood? Was greed or envy involved? Jealousy?" (Great section, beginning on page 41, which illustrates the problem fairly precisely.) The GM must assess the motivations of the character, and if those motivations derive from the base emotions that are the path to the dark side, then a DSP is appropriate.

General Notes to the GM

When running this adventure, or any *Star Wars* adventure, keep in mind the *Star Wars* adventures should seem like the *Star Wars* movies. The action should flow quickly and the players should not get caught up in too many details of what they are doing. Describe things in sweeping statements, and recall scenes from the movies when necessary to help players visualize what is going on. More than anything else, have fun.

The point of LIVING FORCE is not to kill characters. If you believe a combat is too tough for a group you are running, scale it down. If you believe it is far too simple, scale it up – within reason. Do your best to keep fights cinematic and interesting, and if someone dies because they made a glorious sacrifice, that's fine. But let's not have any "dumb" deaths. That's not what *Star Wars*, or LIVING FORCE, is about.

This is an adventure for low- to upper-level LIVING FORCE heroes, and therefore heroes levels 1 through 9 are appropriate. If a player brings a higher-level hero to your table, explain that he or she must use a lower-level hero to play in this event. If your players do not have heroes, help them create new ones (see your event coordinator for hero creation instructions).

GM Overview

A shadow is nothing to fear, unless that shadow is a mile wide and can drain the life out of you with a single touch. That kind of shadow is the essence of fear; and the people of Cularin may learn this very soon...

As seen in the first episode of the *Below the Belt* trilogy, there are some asteroids in the Cularin system with dark secrets and hidden dangers. One of these asteroids is at the heart of the suspense in this episode.

The stage was set long before the scenario begins. Several asteroids from the same doomed planet as the one the heroes explored in "Philanthropy" are scattered through the belt like dark jewels. Most, like the one in

this scenario, are completely non-functional and uninhabited.

At least, this one was uninhabited. The planet Almas did not always house an academy for the Jedi. Once, it was overshadowed by a dark order known as the Sith. The temple they built on Almas still radiates the foulness of the Dark Side of the Force; the same power that let these Sith crush this system in their iron grip until they were driven out and purged.

The Dark Side does not limit itself to one system, nor is it banished as easily as its mortal pawns. The darkness of rage, anger, and fear spreads much wider than the reach of any dictator. As the battles raged over Almas, the Dark Side reacted by calling out to something akin to itself; something dark, something in the shadows.

Drawn to the conflict and the power of the Force, this Shadow traveled the vast distances of deep space to come to the Cularin system. Unfortunately, the journey took so long that the war that spawned such hatred and darkness was over before the Shadow creature could arrive.

Weary from its long voyage, the shadowy creature took refuge in one of Cularin's asteroids. The dark stone had a resonance with the Force and though it was completely devoid of life, there was a cracked sphere of crystal and force-attuned metal within it. This would be quite sufficient as a way to contain the Shadow's essence until it could regain its full power.

In this way, many years passed. The asteroids, never frequently traveled, could not provide enough power or life to sufficiently awaken the Shadow. Thus, it slept and with each passing decade, that sleep grew deeper. Indeed, it would have remained asleep forever except for three factors.

The first is the Jedi Academy on Almas. It has been a beacon of the Force for some time now; a beacon that even the Shadow can feel in its deep slumber. Though the Shadow is a creature of great darkness, it has begun to feel the pull of the light side of the Force. Some of its great evil has waned and while it is still deeply tainted, it is not the horror it once was. This change began to rouse the Shadow.

The second is the Confederation Rock Run. This land rush, with its highly-charged emotions and starships traveling throughout the belt has provided the Shadow with what it needed most; energy.

Still, even the Rock Run would not have been enough to awaken the Shadow. The third factor landed on the Shadow's lair-asteroid one week before the scenario begins. A mining and survey ship belonging to the Metatheran Cartel touched down and began exploring the ruined complex within the asteroid.

They awakened the Shadow and have paid for their invasion dearly. Disturbing its lair carelessly has turned the vessel holding the essence of the Shadow into a

prison.

Now the Shadow is rousing, draining power from any ship passing by as it tries to fully rise from its deep slumber and free itself from what the Cartel's bungling has done to it. Every moment pinned inside the ruined core drives the Shadow closer to madness.

The Shadow is no longer truly evil, but it is trapped and is willing to do whatever it must to break free. If that means the flying boxes of metal that keep flying past its lair must be drained dry and sent smashing into unforgiving rocks, so be it...

The adventure begins after the Shadow's feeding frenzy has stretched on for a week. It has been draining ships of a little power long before that time, but now the situation has worsened. Any vessel straying within a certain distance suffers complete electrical failure.

The heroes are caught in this web of darkness like a dozen other ships. They have a small amount of power left in a disconnected generator, but it isn't enough for them to escape the deadly pull of what lies at the center of the sea of silent ships; a black asteroid surrounded by an aura of sinister shadow....

Encounter 1:

The scenario opens with the heroes, all collected on either one of their ships or on a small transport belonging to a transport company on Cularin. They have just completed a side job and are on their way back home when the power dies across the ship.

The sudden lurching causes a stroke of luck; a hero disconnects one of the redundant generators as he or she is jostled across the deck.

All attempts to restart the engines fail, and as the heroes watch in horror, the grim truth of their fate is made clear. Another ship, traveling much faster than they were when the power failed, careens past them into an asteroid. The fireball leaves no hope of survivors or rescue.

Looking around, the heroes can see a dozen other ships nearby, all similarly trapped. From the look of things, every vessel out here is just as stuck. Not even ship's lights are active, so everything is shadows and starlit silhouettes.

The scene ends when another ship tries to use emergency power of its own. Their engines die almost as soon as they come on, but it's enough for them to veer straight into the path of another ship. Without power to maneuver, both ships collide and detonate.

Encounter 2:

The heroes discover that while they have no power to move, they are not stationary either. Their ship is drifting, like all the others, towards a black asteroid at the heart of a shadowy aura. Unless they think of

something to do, they crash into the asteroid and are destroyed.

While they consider their dwindling options, the first attempt at "dark contact" occurs. The Shadow in the asteroid reaches out psychically, but at this distance, only Force-Sensitive characters can feel it.

The message comes like a dream. The heroes that receive it are suddenly gripped by sheer terror and the sensation of being trapped. Darkness overcomes them and they are struck unconscious for a few minutes by the shock.

They are the lucky ones. People still conscious on the ship get to see the crew of another ship, completely overwhelmed by the images of the Shadow, blast open their own landing ramp and get pulled out into space.

By now, the fear should be mounting...

Encounter 3:

The heroes' time comes. Their ship approaches the asteroid at a lethal speed, the sheer black face of rock looming over them. They are not, however, doomed to die here; quick thinking can save them and if that fails, the dark presence has plans for them and saves them itself.

The quick thinking way is to use the tiny burst of energy left in their ship to slow their descent just as they hit. This works and allows them to land just as their generators fail completely.

The Shadow has also, for reasons of its own, chosen the heroes to survive. If they do not save themselves, it acts on their behalf. Darkness surrounds their ship the instant before they crash and when it fades, they find themselves landed safely on the asteroid's surface.

Nearby, another ship is not so lucky. Even as the heroes are saved, a second vessel impacts the asteroid several hundred yards away and detonates. Above it, illuminated briefly in its dying flames, a dozen other ships await the same fate.

Encounter 4:

This encounter begins with another telepathic contact from the Shadow. It starts like the last, a tangled mass of dark images and raw terror. In the midst of the madness, perceptive heroes catch glimpses of caverns and exploration.

The Shadow is trying to convince the heroes to enter a cavern mouth near the ship and come to it. If they leave their ship and enter the asteroid, the images recede and the heroes can think freely. Otherwise, the contact grows more intense and darker until they either enter the cavern or succumb to madness.

Once inside, the heroes find a large chamber with a wrecked ship and a circular door. The door has been welded shut and the ship has been taken apart *from the inside*. Four corpses are found here, one still clutching

the welding laser and lying next to the doors. All of the fatal wounds look self-inflicted.

Little can be learned from the ship, but a search of the bodies turns up identification credentials marking them all as flight crew for the Metatheran Cartel. One has identification showing him as an executive in charge of “resource investigation”.

Encounter 5:

Once the heroes get through the circular door (which requires either brute force or some clever thinking), they enter the asteroid and in so doing, touch the presence of the Shadow directly. It passes over each of them in turn, reacting to their minds and any taint of the dark side within.

When these visions clear, the heroes find themselves much deeper inside the asteroid than they remember going. This fugue state continues for some time, with sections of corridor blurring together with images and dreams sent by the Shadow to guide them towards its chamber of imprisonment.

Unfortunately for the heroes, the dark side lingering within the Shadow itself is as insane as the visions have been. It does not want to be freed, as it is feeding off the fear and isolation the Shadow feels.

As the heroes delve deeper, the darkness builds up around them and comes alive in an attempt to destroy them before they can reach the asteroid’s core. Shadowy creatures assail the heroes, aided by a possible ally; any hero with dark side points may join the shadow minions in a murderous frenzy.

This encounter finally ends with the heroes, assuming they survive, reaching the blasted door of the central chamber and stepping inside. Only once they are within that room the shadow attacks stop.

Encounter 6:

The heroes have reached the core chamber. There, they find two bodies, both Caarite, and a tangled mass of silver, dark steel, and broken crystals. The ruined sphere has a roiling dark energy pulsing within it, apparently trapped by the few jewels that still glow with a sickly black energy on the broken cage.

Small tendrils of shadow leak outward and touch any hero without dark side points. To them, the Shadow imparts an image as free of insanity as it can; the primal need to be free.

Any hero with dark side points who attempts to approach faces a deadly storm of crystal shards as the Shadow tries to defend itself from what it has finally realized is the power keeping it here; the dark side of the force.

What happens here is entirely up to the heroes. If they free the Shadow, it moves past them like a dark wave and escapes the chamber. As it goes, it sends out

images of freedom and gratitude.

If the heroes do not free the Shadow, it tries desperately to convince them to do so. The door to the chamber closes and becomes as black as night, seemingly impervious to any attempt to cut through it.

The worst thing the heroes can do is attack the Shadow. In a rage of betrayal and frustration, it falls firmly back under the control of the dark side and attacks the heroes. If this happens, running is likely their only chance of survival.

Whether the heroes somehow manage to force the dark force Shadow to flee or abandon the combat in an attempt to save their lives, the Shadow tears free of its prison and surges out into the night.

Conclusion:

The Shadow is free; whether it is for good or ill is still yet to be seen. The heroes find a number of small rewards waiting for them in their accounts from the crews of the ships they saved. One reward in particular is rather sizable and purports to be a payment in gratitude from the Metatheran Cartel.

No explanation is offered for this payment or why the Cartel is grateful. What was it doing there? What happened in the asteroid and why were two dead Caarites in the core with the Shadow? Some questions remain unanswered as the scenario draws to a close.

Important Note to Judges: Madness, indistinct images, and the sense of growing apprehension should be the tone for most of the scenario. Once the Shadow is seen directly, things should become manic and confused. Make the heroes uneasy. Make them doubt their motivations. The decision to free or fight the Shadow should not be an easy one.

Even once the heroes have made their choice, they should have reasons to doubt it later. Don’t give them any indication of right or wrong. Just run the last encounter and the conclusion, and then end the scenario.

A Note of Caution

This scenario is one of psychological horror, and there is potential for it to be too emotionally intense for some players. Judges need to exercise judgment and back the pressure down if it seems that any of the players are becoming particularly upset. Read your table; be attentive to their reactions, in and out of character. Turn the psychological heat up or down depending upon their reactions. If you strike too close to home and the players (not the heroes they play) become too frightened, upset or anxious, call a break and let things cool down. Despite the unusual tone, this is still a *Star Wars* adventure, and above all it should be thrilling and fun.

At the beginning of the scenario, before you begin the opening crawl, have each player fill out the survey and one of the player cards. The information on these forms is critical to you for running the adventure.

Opening Crawl

The asteroids of Cularin have been opened to exploration; an act that brings great promise, great adventure, and great danger. Amid the drifting stones, darkness awakens. In its wake, more darkness spreads. Darkness that, unchecked, could cover all of Cularin, ending all light and life in its hunger. It is a time for heroes, even unsuspecting ones...

Encounter 1: Surrounded By Shadows

Key ideas of this encounter: The heroes find themselves trapped while returning from an errand. They learn that their ship is nearly powerless and drifting. The danger of their situation becomes explosively clear.

The adventure opens with the heroes returning from a delivery mission for Renna's Transport Service. With increased pirate activity in the Cularin system, it has become the order of the day to escort important cartage.

If any of the heroes have their own ships, let them decide which one of theirs is being used currently. If none of them have a vessel but one or more of them have the skill to use one, they are in the *Olendahu*, an old but serviceable YT transport on loan from Renna. If neither scenario applies, they are flying with an old (and rather space-crazy, but harmless) pilot named Keb Nevrunn (Pilot +11) in his top-of-the-line (thirty years ago) light cruiser, the *Lunatic Fringer*.

Note to the Judge: Have fun with Keb. He's getting older and he knows it. He's a bitter, surly, wisecracking old fringer with a critical eye and a heart of gold. Renna and he have been friends longer than she'll admit or he remembers.

Take some time and let the heroes role-play for ten minutes or so to get them nicely in the space faring mood. They've just come off a good run and they are probably looking forward to getting home. If some of them don't know each other, have them make introductions. Keb is useful for this, as he doesn't remember names very well (except for attractive human or near human females; for those, he makes a special effort).

When everyone seems comfortable and ready to proceed, read or paraphrase the following:

It has been a long trip back. Your courier run wasn't complicated, but since it took you past the asteroid belt, it's been a difficult flight both ways. All of the prospectors and explorers darting in and out of the asteroid clusters haven't made things any easier.

The best path through has been to scan ahead for traffic and hit the least overrun spots in a path through the field. The plan worked on your way out to drop off your package and things have looked hopeful for your route back to Cularin.

Halfway through the field, you found yourselves in a nearly abandoned section of rocks. No comm signals ahead are a good indication that you can move through the area without fear of collisions or complications.

Let the heroes discuss a bit among themselves. Role-playing may still be going strong and introductions may not have completed yet. Pick a conversation (if any) to interrupt after a few minutes with:

Moments after your ship's proximity sensors pick up metallic alloys and ship signatures nearby, everything goes dead. The lights across your ship go out and every instrument panel fails.

Your engines shut down. Emergency thrusters fire to slow you down before they fail as well. After a moment's powerless drifting, you come to a stop. Your ship sits motionless in the black depths of the asteroid belt...

Unfortunate things have just occurred. The heroes are likely to want to investigate immediately. Before they can, read this text to them:

Another ship, moving on nearly the same course you were, surges past you, its engines dying in a triple plume of fading blue light. Traveling far faster than you were, the transport careens into the darkness and vanishes.

It reappears almost immediately, silhouetted in a billowing cloud of fire and shattering steel. Unable to turn to stop, the ship has slammed into an asteroid and exploded. The impact of its destruction sends the looming stone off in another direction before it can claim your lives as well.

The fire fades almost instantly, leaving only the glimmering fragments of glass and metal to bear silent witness of the ship's passing.

The heroes are likely now very well motivated to learn about their predicament. Call for skill rolls as you see fit (Repair and Engineering skills would be appropriate, but the heroes may come up with others), but ensure that over the course of a few frantic minutes,

they discover the following:

- The engines have failed completely. They do not seem to be getting any power or fuel.
- The fuel problem is due to the ship's loss of energy. The batteries have been drained by an unidentifiable source and are sitting with less than .5% of their power capacity left.
- The power left in the ship, if it could somehow be fed directly into the engines, might restore maneuverability for a few seconds or move the ship a thousand meters before it fails and the ship goes dead again.
- No powered system on the ship is working. Droids are also inert, their internal power packs depleted. A tiny amount of energy remains in them; barely enough to maintain their memories... for now.
- Weapons with power cells have lost significant energy, but they still function. During the course of this adventure, a d20 roll of 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 on an attack results in a depleted power cell.
- Life support is on reserve, operating on the dregs of a secondary power cell. 10 hours of functioning life support remains.
- They are not the only ship stranded. Looking outside, they can see over a dozen vessels similarly drifting in the dark ocean of the asteroid belt. None seem to have any power.

Heroes may begin panicking now. Even if they don't, the next section of text may shake their resolve. The scene should end with every player at the table acutely aware of the seriousness of their situation.

Looking out the port side window, you can see the other vessels trapped with you in this black Sargasso. Past them, a single asteroid looms against the starred background of the night.

It is very dark, perhaps basalt or black shale, and it seems to lie in the center of this sea of powerless ships. That is not the only unusual thing about the asteroid.

As you drift, you see the star field behind it darken and wink out completely. The asteroid is surrounded by some sort of black aura; a shroud of deep shadows.

Let the heroes react to this, then continue:

A ship closer to the asteroid than yours suddenly flares to life. Lights flicker on along its hull as its engines ignite and it hurtles forward in a desperate attempt to escape.

A second later, its power fails again. The ship goes dead, still moving swiftly. Its path sends it

shearing into a second vessel. Both erupt and they are torn apart by tremendous fuel explosions.

As both ships burn, the field around you is lit momentarily. You see the shadowed forms of the other ships around you. The only thing that isn't illuminated is the asteroid.

It seems to drink in the light, growing even darker as the blaze dwindles and dies...

This scene ends here. Proceed to Encounter 2.

Encounter 2: The Shadows Within

Key ideas of this encounter: The heroes learn more about the predicament they are in and that life support may not be their greatest concern. The Shadow tries to communicate, but sends only fever dreams.

The idea of this scene is one of mounting paranoia. The heroes are certain to be thinking of things they can do to power the ship, escape the pull of the dark miasma, or just send a communication as a warning. Unless the plan is foolproof, the power-leeching effect of the asteroid dashes them completely. The characters may well feel powerless; at this stage, that is acceptable.

If *players* feel helpless, try to convince them that all is not as it seems and to bear with things until the end. Do *not* tell them that they escape or give away the solution to this trap, but try to console them that they are not in a no-win situation.

The first ten or twenty minutes of this encounter should be taken up adjudicating heroes and their attempts to quantify the situation or try to escape it. Let them try anything under their power, even Force abilities, but all have the same unhelpful result. (Point of note; should the heroes actually come up with something that does manage to move them the 50,000 kilometers they need to escape the dark zone, let them succeed and determine the adventure based on their actions from there. If they personally do not return to the asteroid and enter it within 24 hours, the scenario is over for them. A special experience award has been set aside for escaping the dark Sargasso, but heroes that do not complete the rest of the scenario receive NO OTHER award, including the payoff from the Metatheran Cartel.)

Three exceptions exist to every attempt meeting with total failure; farseeing, see force, and move object. Farseeing, regardless of its intended purpose, always subjects the force user trying it to a fever dream as described later in this encounter. The force user is at a circumstance penalty of -1 to all force use until the end

of this scenario because of the severity of the dream images.

Move Object fails, but it can confirm that something “else” is moving the ship. Attempts to move the ship with the force meets with an extremely powerful source of resistance. The attempt fails, but the force user can tell that the power holding the ship is also slowly drawing it towards the black asteroid. (It is essential to the mood of this scene that the realization of the ship’s inexorable movement towards the asteroid is revealed. If a force user does not sense it, let a hero with Navigation or Piloting skills figure it out)

See Force is automatically successful and reveals a massive aura of Force energy permeating the dark zone around the ship. Nothing more can be determined save that although the energy is dark-side in nature; there is something “strange” about it. Further inquiries using See Force reveal no additional information.

When the heroes have worked through their attempts to work out a solution, proceed to the text below. The heroes are likely exhausted, frustrated, and perhaps even terrified. This section isn’t exactly going to comfort them, but their anxiety has drawn the Shadow’s attention, which, ultimately, may save them or damn them, as their actions determine.

It comes like a wave. Your ship, already dark save for the dim starlight outside the ebon cloud, slowly becomes pitch black. First, the bridge and cockpit, then the hull from stem stern, and finally the engines are plunged into absolute darkness.

A few moments later, the shadow fades. It leaves as it arrives, from one end of the ship to the other. Nothing lingers behind except a faint chill and patterns of frost on the windows and instrument readouts.

Even the sternest, most literal minded among you can not shake the feeling that “something”, some presence or awareness, just passed over your vessel like footsteps over a grave...

Unfortunately for any force-sensitive characters in the group, the words “nothing lingers behind” is not entirely true. Their minds were open to the darkness of the Shadow as it examined their ship. These heroes should be given the Shadow Nightmare handout immediately after you finish paraphrasing the text above. (This handout also applies to heroes using Farseeing during this encounter, as mentioned above.)

After each player that receives it has read the handout, have the hero make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 15). Failure causes the hero in question to be struck unconscious for 1d4 minutes. Success merely means the hero is stunned for 1 minute, unable to think coherently until this time has passed.

Any hero at a window when this contact occurs can see that the same deeper darkness seemed to move over other ships nearby at the same time. Even if said character is a force-sensitive, let him or her notice the Shadow before lapsing into the nightmare.

Now, wait a few minutes while the heroes discuss what just occurred. The ship is now 5 degrees colder than it was. Frost has formed at the corners of every console and window, and some of their number may have just been left staggered by some insidious and horrifying vision. They have a lot to talk about.

When it looks like they are wrapping up, interrupt a hero’s sentence with this:

A kilometer away, a light catches your notice. A blaze of energy tears out of one of the other ships trapped out here with you. What looks like a spread of blaster fire punches holes in the ship’s landing door and trickles out into space like dying stars.

Moments later, vacuum rips open the pierced door and pulls the bay’s contents, several writhing figures, out into space. None of them try to catch the edges of the landing ramp or make their way back into the ship. Instead, they seem to madly welcome oblivion.

As the shadow Sargasso quickly obscures the dying from your sight, it would seem oblivion welcomes them as well.

There is virtually nothing the heroes can do for the crew of the *End Run*, a cargo hauler formerly on its way to Genarius. Driven mad when the force adept aboard suffered the Shadow Nightmare while in telepathic contact with them all, the crew routed their ship’s remaining power to an internal security cannon and blew out their own bay to escape the “screaming dark”. Death is nearly instantaneous for them.

With another ship’s demise and nightmares echoing in their thoughts, the heroes are likely feeling trapped, alone, and afraid. Do not discourage such feelings, but more swiftly to the next encounter. It allows the heroes to do something to rescue themselves if they pay attention and think quickly.

If not, the Shadow rescues them itself, but the scenario’s difficulty increases as a result. Either way, the heroes survive; at least for a little while.

Encounter 3: Shadows of the Soul

Key idea of this encounter: The heroes make it, one way or another, to the surface of the black asteroid. In the process, they may have another brush with the

shadowy sentience within it.

Do not give the players too long to dwell on their predicament now, unless they insist on discussing it among themselves. They are in a tight spot and there does not really seem to be any easy out of it. They have just witnessed several deaths, and theirs seem to be imminent. It is, no pun intended, a grave situation and some players may wish to indulge in the role-playing opportunities this presents. Do not deny them the chance to do so, but do not let the action drag either.

When the timing feels right, move into this section of text, paraphrasing as need be. If heroes are pointedly not watching what is going on outside, that is fine, but someone on their ship is likely watching. This text section is for them.

The time has crawled past. An hour has passed now since the shadows crawled across your ship, and nothing has offered much hope that the next one won't be your last. Already, you have covered more than half the distance to the black asteroid and although you don't feel like you are moving very fast, your ship's momentum will dash you apart on its stony surface all the same.

You know this because you have already seen it happen. A tiny personal shuttle, probably belonging to one of the diplomatic families of Cularin, was pulled into the side of the black asteroid and vanished in a flare of white flame.

Now, morbidly, you can do little but watch as another ship drifts to its doom. The bulky transport has loomed closer and closer to the monolith for nearly five minutes now and any second, it will shatter on its unforgiving black face.

Just as the moment of doom arrives, you see the transport react suddenly. Its maneuvering thrusters all fire along its port side. The jets of fire turn the ship and bring it parallel to the asteroid's surface. Then, you see the glimmer of landing engines touch off, trying to slow its descent.

They wink out almost as soon as they ignite. The ship's power obviously depleted, the transport cannot slow itself enough to avoid the inevitable. It crash-lands on the asteroid and breaks up in a shower of metal and glass.

The heroes have witnessed another shocking demise, but it should give them an idea of how to land safely. The transport (which was the *Oonlanau*, a Sullustan convoy freighter sometimes freelancing for Renna) had the right idea, but it wasted too much energy with the maneuvering jets. A partial turn and full-braking thrusters could work and if any hero can make a Piloting check (DC low tier: 12/mid tier: 16/ high tier:

20), this idea occurs to them.

Making this work requires figuring out a way to tap the tiny reserve of power left in the engines. This is a Repair or other appropriate check (DC low tier 12/mid tier 16/ high tier 20). The heroes can try these rolls up to three times each (the Piloting to come up with the right plan, the Repair check to get the engines working) before their time expires and they hit the asteroid.

While the heroes are working on a solution (or languishing without a plan) you may wish to send the Shadow Nightmare back to examine them again. This time, any hero with more than one force point or one or more Dark Side points receives the vision, regardless of force-sensitivity. This time, the vision cannot knock anyone out, but it may well leave him or her shaken. Once the sending has passed, proceed on.

If the heroes succeed at getting their ship ready for the landing maneuver, use encounter 3-A. If they try but do not make the rolls required, paraphrase 3-B. If the heroes have not been able to come up with a plan and they would crash into the asteroid, use 3-B.

Note: A third option, 3-C, exists. This ending only occurs if the "heroes" have been cold, ruthless, and utterly uncaring of their plight and the deaths of others. Every hero must have acted like this, otherwise 3-A or 3-B occurs. Alternately, if every hero has dark side point(s) and is unrepentant of them, 3-C occurs. There are consequences when you act out of rage and hatred. This is one of them.

3-A: Safe Landing

White-knuckled and nervous, you engage the engines and watch the remaining power dwindle away appallingly fast. The ship banks just enough to turn the way you need it to. Immediately, you shift the power to the braking engines and try to slow your fall. At first, there is no effect and the low energy hazards blaze across every console.

Then, just as the engines cut out and go dead, your descent drops enough for the stabilizers in your vessels landing struts to absorb the shock of impact. The whole ship shudders violently, but when the shaking stops, no one is hurt.

Somehow, miraculously, you made it down safely. The immediate danger has passed.

Move to Encounter Four immediately after the heroes congratulate themselves on a narrow escape.

3-B: A Shadowy Savior

The asteroid rushes up to crush your ship in its dark embrace. At the speed you are hurtling towards it,

death seems certain. Nothing has worked, no miracle or power of the Force has provided your rescue, and no hope remains.

The ship turns over one last time, showing a full view of the black surface below. As it does, the shadows all around grow absolute. A chill pervades everything, freezing you to the bone.

Then, as quickly as it overwhelmed you, the darkness recedes. You lie sprawled across the deck of your ship, not mangled in a twisted mass of broken metal. The vessel is intact and has come to a stop. Somehow, you have landed safely on the asteroid.

How, and perhaps more importantly, why still remains to be seen.

Move to Encounter 4 after the heroes have a few moments to reflect on their narrow and unexplained escape from certain death.

3-C: Cold Comfort

Remember: This ending only occurs if *every* hero in the party has unrepentant Dark Side points and/or has been acting in such a cold, vicious manner that the word “hero” hardly applies to them. If you as a GM have any doubts about using this ending, *then don’t.*

Some say the universe rewards people with exactly what they deserve. The righteous are rewarded, the wronged are avenged, and the terrible are given terror themselves.

As the darkness of your own lives comes crashing up through you in the form of an unforgiving death among the stars, you have only the emptiness of your merciless, brutal lives to bear witness to your demise.

You die as you lived -- cold and alone.

The scenario ends here. Move to the award summary and scoring. The author sends his condolences for the aftermath of using this ending. Good luck.

Encounter 4: A Shadow’s Welcome

Key ideas of this encounter: The heroes discover an entrance to the asteroid near their landing site and are “invited” to explore it by the same force that trapped them here. They discover several things on their way in.

Moving the heroes from their ship to the nearby tunnel should not be difficult. They have been trapped aboard their “doomed” vessel and are likely to be eager to get out of it.

The Shadow is eager for them to leave their ship as

well. To encourage them to do so, it sends the following mental image to them a few moments after they land.

The dark shadow returns, moving swiftly over your ship and over your minds. All of you can feel it now, a cold and alien presence that seems to bore through you and freeze your souls as it moves past. This time, instead of passing over the ship and vanishing, the shadows pool near the exit doors and become a black vortex of lightlessness.

As it does, a mental barrage assaults your senses. You see glimpses of high-vaulted ceilings, massive spans of metal, dark places underground, and shadows deep enough for legends to hide. The smell of a tomb assails you. Then, the images fade, leaving behind only a splitting headache.

The shadow remains behind, and it does not seem dormant. The swirling shape narrows along its sides, until it has practically become a column of darkness. Those of you nearest to the shadow see that it has taken on a roughly humanoid shape. No face exists, nor do any limbs or features. It is a caricature, nothing more, but it is definitely a form of some kind.

The black shape lingers at the docking ramp, then moves straight through it and out onto the surface of the asteroid beyond. A frozen afterimage remains on the metal doorway, literally steaming as it freezes the air around it.

Beyond, the shape begins to move away from the ship and around a rocky outcropping. As it does, it passes over the scattered wreckage of those less fortunate than you. It does not even seem to notice the carnage as it fades from sight.

Be sure to paraphrase that text if the heroes try to interact with the shadow-form. Direct contact without wearing environmental gear inflicts 1 wound point instantly without a saving throw. Under no circumstances does the shape respond to the heroes, vanishing if it comes under attack by energy weapons (which would be foolish inside the ship, but might occur). Lightsabers cause it to pause before vanishing, but it still disappears.

The Shadow creature in the asteroid is trying to communicate as best it can with the heroes, urging them to follow it. It repeats the sending (the shadows forming into a manikin and leaving the ship) up to three more times before the life support in the ship fails. Each time the shadow remains, the images grow clearer and more urgent, but the pain of the message does 1d4 vitality damage to each hero (active Force Defense negates this damage).

If the heroes steadfastly refuse to leave the ship and remain trapped aboard while their life support runs out, they perish in the cold of space. More likely, they

risk leaving the vessel to either follow the shadow or try to salvage what they can from the nearby wreckage. Assume that whatever ship they are using contains appropriate environmental suits. Regardless, read the following when it is appropriate.

Not far from your ship, in the direction the passing Shadow traveled, a dark cavern leads into the interior of the asteroid. It is vast, but it seems to have once had some sort of constructed metal covering. Now, all that remains of that entrance are the ribs of ancient steel that jut up out of the sheer stone around you.

Somewhere in the depths of the tunnel, a faint light can be seen. It isn't constant, but seems to pulse in some sort of regular rhythm.

Any hero with Starship Operations or Navigation skill can recognize the light's pattern as a distress beacon. The signal is a visual pulse of light normally used in conjunction with a communication marker on disabled ships in need of aid.

If this doesn't pique the heroes' curiosity enough to investigate immediately, the shadow sending returns to the mouth of the cavern and remains stationary for a few moments before vanishing again. It does not understand sentient life enough (yet) to mimic gestures or speech, but it is learning.

A note on Salvage: Amid the ship's parts strewn here along the asteroid, there is nothing of any real use to the heroes. All of the electronics have been fused and drained and no power packs with a usable charge exist.

Once the heroes choose to investigate the tunnel, they find that it slopes sharply downward and requires climbing skills or aid to navigate. The heroes get a chance to use their athletic skills here, but don't penalize them overmuch if they do not have high skill checks. Scare them a few times if they miss Climb rolls, but in the end each of them should make it safely to the bottom of the cave. There, they see the following:

The cavern ends in a massive, dome shaped room with a vaulted ceiling. The light seen earlier is coming from the distress beacon of a wrecked ship near the center of the metal-plated floor. Unlike the other ships you have seen die out here; this one does not look to have crashed. Instead, all of the catastrophic damage done to this vessel seems to have been purposefully inflicted.

The beacon flashes one last time, then fades out completely. With a spray of sparks, the emergency bulbs along its length short out and burst. In the sudden light, a few other things become visible.

Four bodies lie sprawled around the chamber.

One is at the base of the trashed ship's landing ramp. Two others are huddled together next to a landing strut. The fourth is next to a circular doorway on one side of the vault. That door looks welded shut and the body has what looks like a welding laser clutched in its lifeless hand.

From here, the heroes can investigate the scene and learn the following:

- The ship is completely ruined. It has no power left at all and the main navcomp is shattered beyond repair. (A Repair check at DC 10 confirms that this damage had to have been deliberate.)
- All four bodies are Caarites, short pig-like sentients who usually only come to the Cularin system to work for the Metatheran Cartel.
- Every body has self-inflicted wounds that resulted in its death. (A Treat Injury check at a DC 10 to determine this).
- Three of the bodies have identification noting them as flight crew for the ship, which checks out as the MCT *Nuurglat*.
- The fourth body's identification shows him to be Niim Stroolg, a Metatheran Cartel executive in charge of "resource investigation". Any hero with Knowledge: Business knows the title is one given by the MC to personnel who oversee mining and excavation operations.
- The Caarite welding the doors shut did not get very far before turning the laser on himself. The doors could likely be pried open.

Nothing else is of any help here, and all of the equipment is powerless and dead. Let any feasible plan for getting the door open work, allowing the heroes access to the next Encounter. If they seem utterly lost and have no way to force the door, the Shadow allows power to return to the doorway and in a shower of strange glimmering lights, and the circular portal irises open.

Note: Players who ask if this place reminds them of the complex from *Below the Belt 1: Philanthropy* should be answered in the affirmative. This place did not come through the eons as well as the cavern structure from that module, but it is obviously from the same culture.

Encounter 5: Shadows of the Heart and Mind

This encounter can be a lengthy one, easily taking a full hour to run. Be certain to read it carefully before attempting to run it, as its freeform nature can be confusing.

The intention of the previous encounters was to terrify and alienate the heroes. Now, as they draw closer to the Shadow, the tone of this encounter is madness and confusion. If you run this scene correctly, heroes should reach Encounter 6 utterly bewildered and more than a little “freaked out”.

This can be a fun encounter from a Gamemaster perspective, as you get to try and get inside each hero’s mind to see what makes him or her feel and act the way they do. As the Shadow, you get to push buttons, pull strings, and torment each hero alone and in groups until they are all near the breaking point.

Make them question their loyalties, force them to examine their motivations, and test their convictions. By the time the heroes reach the Shadow’s Aerie, they should be unsure of everything; even themselves...

A Warning: This is an invitation to mess with the heroes, *not* the players. Be careful not to push anything too far, and be sensitive to the mood at the table. It is perfectly acceptable to call for a break if tensions run too high. This scene should be emotional, but it should not prompt an emotional meltdown. If things go too far, calm the scene down and move on to Encounter 6 once everyone is ready to play again.

Encounter 5 starts simply enough, with this text:

The door opens to reveal an essentially circular tunnel leading into the darkness beyond. Sections of the smooth walls glow with an eerie light, but not every stone panel is illuminated. Some look dark and lifeless. The dim radiance is enough to show that the corridor turns off to the left in the distance. No other features or doorways are evident.

There are other doors, but none of them work and the Shadow being is obscuring them from sight in an effort to bring the heroes to it as quickly as possible. The corridor is a twisting, turning maze of tunnels and while it could be mapped out, it is much easier just to explain to the players that they are exploring and run the action of this scene as it occurs. When the heroes are walking in a lighted section, there is no sound of any sort, as if the heroes have completely lost their voices. Make sure the players communicate with each other’s characters non-verbally only.

While they travel, the Shadow begins looking into their thoughts and memories in a heavy-handed attempt to understand them and communicate. Every time you begin to run one of the scenes, tell the heroes that they have moved into a shadowy section of corridor, one that is unlit by the glimmering stone panels or filled with utter silence. Just as sound returns to the heroes, the Shadow’s telepathic intrusions just as efficiently prevent them from communicating.

Stress to the players that while their heroes know that these scenes are occurring involuntarily, they feel

utterly real while they are occurring. Encourage good role-playing throughout this encounter.

Each of these scenes occurs in whichever order you deem appropriate. If the heroes act out any of the emotional tags to these scenes before you run them, shift to that one immediately. The heroes may pick up on the empathic nature of the Shadow in this way, or they may be utterly lost in the vortex of emotions that it causes. Either way, the following scenes play out through the hero’s minds, bodies, and actions. (Note that Force Defense automatically blocks out the urges and images the Shadow sends, but doing so upsets the Shadow greatly. Read *Anger* for more information on that.)

Curiosity: The Shadow is curious about the heroes, but even curiosity is a new concept for it. Thus, it should be one of the first things it tries to explore in others.

Pick two heroes. Tell their players that they have just been seized with an intense need to explore the personal possessions of the other. Let them role-play out this investigation, letting them know that they cannot truly resist this impulse and must simply satisfy the need to know everything they can about what the other hero is carrying.

While this is occurring, a third hero feels the need to talk about his or her childhood with any other fourth hero (or just to himself or herself if only three heroes are present). While the hero talks, he or she must ask personal questions about the fourth hero’s childhood, which must be answered as completely as possible.

In addition, heroes beyond the four affected are free to act as they wish during this sending. The Shadow is just as curious to see how bystanders react to what it is doing as anything else.

This sending is fairly mild, and ends once the two exploring heroes finish going through everything in easy reach on the other.

Confusion: This was the first emotion felt by the Shadow, and it is eager to explore it further. To do so, it inflicts confusion on the heroes to see how they react and what they think while they suffer it.

Start calling heroes by the wrong names. When the heroes try to act in some way, have them perform some completely different action. Even their own thoughts betray them here, and if they try to think or say something, change it seemingly at random. Describe nonsense images and incongruous smells that only affect some of the heroes. Be as utterly confusing as you can be to the heroes, altering their perceptions until nothing makes sense any more.

Avoid repetition. If you have already described

the corridor ahead as the stomach of a snake, with rib bone poking out at strange angles and the smell of buttered flowers everywhere, be sure to use a different image if another hero asks to look at the corridor.

Rampant chaos should be the order of the day and if players get confused too, make sure they understand it is all part of the scenario and that it is much, much worse for their characters.

Hope: The Shadow has felt this, and the utter loss of it, several times outside the asteroids in the ships it has trapped. It does not understand what this emotion is, but it seems important.

Choose a hero at random. Have that player experience something that gives that hero hope, something treasured by him or her as a beacon of comfort when all seems lost. The hero begins to think about this hope, feeling the warmth and solace that it provides.

Then, just as suddenly, it is stripped away. Describe something horrible happening to it and destroying it utterly. The hero is convinced that somehow the thing that gives them hope is gone forever. All the hero's hopes are dashed in an instant and he or she is left with nothing.

The other heroes sense what is occurring and "see" everything the chosen hero does, sharing in the elation and loss. It does not seem quite as real to them, since it is drawn from someone else's mind, but the experience is still wrenching.

Note: This is the emotion that, along with Fear, killed the Caarites in the landing bay. Convinced that a rescue would never come and that the Cartel had abandoned them to die, they lost all hope.

The same could happen to the heroes here, but the Shadow needs them alive and if it looks like the heroes are going to do something fatal, it switches emotions immediately.

Fear: There has been a lot of this around the Shadow, but it still doesn't understand what causes it or where it comes from. The heroes are about to be unwilling test subjects for a lesson in fear.

Read the questionnaire each player filled out and choose the one fear that would be the most visual and visceral to act out.

Inflict this fear on the heroes as viciously and as suddenly as you can. There should be no warning or indication that anything is wrong until the object of the fear occurs as startlingly as possible. Don't let the heroes escape it easily either. Intensify the fear as much as you can without actually killing any heroes with it, though it is perfectly acceptable to make some heroes think that others are dead until this sending

ends.

Adjudicate any combat that occurs as a result of this fear (if any), making the fear subject as invulnerable as it needs to be. It shrugs off damage because the entire episode is purely mental.

When the fear ends, if the characters have engaged in combat, let a few of them have wounds from the other heroes' weapons as if they'd struck each other and not the "enemy".

Get as intense with this scene as you feel is appropriate for the group of heroes present, but keep in mind that the Shadow wants them all alive.

Anger: The Shadow being is born of the Dark Side of the Force, but it has drifted far enough away from its origins that anger and hatred are no longer innate parts of it. It remembers knowing them though, and wishes to understand them again.

Choose two heroes. Force users are immune to this effect, as the Shadow can sense the Force in them and deliberately does not wish to provoke the Dark Side in them. Anyone else is fair game, though, with the Shadow having a preference for heroes who are either obvious best friends or ones with existing tensions between each other. Every other hero (save for Force users) becomes convinced that both of the affected heroes have become dangerously unstable and if they interfere, the two turn on them. Force users are free to act as they see fit.

The two heroes become convinced that the other is a betraying, deceitful, vile creature that is moments away from killing the entire group. If there are already tensions, play these up until both heroes are in a killing frenzy. Then, have them fight each other until one suffers wound damage.

The Shadow ends the effect immediately at this point, letting both combatants and all the observers come to their senses. If one of the heroes is killed during this fight (which should only occur if a single blow took them to 0 wounds *and* they failed their Fortitude save), he or she stays dead. The Shadow cannot resurrect the dead, nor does it feel inclined to. Loss is an interesting emotion to explore as well, as is remorse.

Love: Not every emotion the Shadow has seen is a dark one. It is curious about the softer reactions people seem to have to each other, and it needs to understand these most of all.

This can be a very intense scene and if the current group of heroes (and their players) does not seem appropriate to run it, skip this one. Otherwise, have fun and wreak some havoc.

The Shadow selects three heroes, trying to stick to defined gender roles, as the heroes themselves

understand them, and triggers images within their minds of the people (or kinds of people, if they are not currently in a relationship) they love. The other two chosen heroes then appear to the loved one and a rival for his/her/its affections. Species means nothing to the Shadow, so the heroes involved may not even be close to compatible.

All three heroes experience this simultaneously so each one may see the other two as completely different beings than they do. Encourage the players involved to role-play this out as much as they like, with the uninvolved heroes watching in utter confusion.

As with *Anger*, the Shadow stops this emotional sending if anyone involved experiences real damage.

Memories: The Shadow is curious about more than just emotions; it needs to understand the minds of sentient beings and how they relate to their environment. It begins searching through the heroes' memories to learn how communication and interaction works.

Go from hero to hero, invoking memories of talking, reading, arguments, debates, and even screaming matches if they seem appropriate. Never say, "You remember communicating with someone." Actually run tiny dialogues or rants appropriate to each hero. Get personal with a few of them, even delving into private knowledge the hero has never shared with anyone else before. Use the information on the questionnaire to build these vignettes.

Make sure everyone gets involved on this one. Even Force users are being pulled into this one, though as usual, active Force Defense blocks it.

The Force: The Shadow may be a living aspect of the Dark Side of the force, but its distance from that malevolent energy has rendered it somewhat ignorant of the Force's nature. It feels a deep and abiding need to learn more about it.

Choose one Force user in the group (if any). This hero immediately starts using every power he or she has ranks in, one after the other, on any target handy (this means other heroes, as there are likely no other targets present). Each power must only be used for one round, but it must be used fully with no holding back on its effect.

Vitality costs still apply, though the Shadow supplies any vitality necessary to keep the Force user conscious through the process (the hero can not be dropped below 1 vitality point, regardless of how much he or she has to spend to use his or her powers at their fullest extent).

Dark Side points gained through the use of those powers that inflict one on the user are real and must be recorded immediately, though no DSPs are earned

otherwise as the Force user's actions are involuntary.

This means that Force users with powers like Force Grip, Throw Lightsaber, and Force Lightning are about to have a really bad day. Unfortunately, that is the consequence of choosing such powers as character knowledge.

Once this display is over, the hero regains control of his or her actions.

Other Emotions: If there is time left in the round to do so and you have other ideas for situations to place the heroes in, do so. Keep in mind that death is *never* the Shadow's intention, though conflict might be acceptable if it teaches something.

When all of these emotional and mental probes end, the heroes find themselves in the hallway leading to the Shadow's lair and prison. Unfortunately, entrance is not going to be easy. The power of the Dark Side here is not going to give up its prisoner without a fight. The energies of fear and hate have given the Dark Side strength enough to try and strike down the heroes before they take another step.

Move to the following combat immediately, giving the heroes no time to think or cope with what has just occurred (unless the players need a similar break, as mentioned before).

The shadows rise up in the corridor ahead, taking on hauntingly familiar forms. While they have no color or features, the dark shapes look like a twisted mockery of your own group.

They raise tenebrous black weapons and rush towards you, murder and death echoing all around them as they open fire.

The Shadow, trying to save the heroes, allows power to flood back into the hallway. All of the heroes' weapons regain energy and can be used again, which is good as they must now face what might be their greatest challenge yet; themselves.

This combat has two twists. First, use the heroes' statistics (gathered on the attached Player Cards) for the opponents, but disregard their vitality scores. As dark side constructs, they only have Wound scores, but every attack has a 50% chance of passing through them harmlessly. Also, any energy weapon used by a Shadow-opponent inflicts the same damage as its real counterpart, but the effect resembles force lightning (even lightsabers, which look like blades of crackling white-blue energy).

The second twist is this; any hero with Dark Side points must make a Will saving throw (DC equals 10 + number of DSPs). If the save is failed, the hero must fight on the side of the shadow-foes for as many rounds as he or she failed the save by. Once that time is up, the hero can act normally. No DSPs are earned for

acting under this compulsion, though a great deal of guilt might be.

This has the potential to be a very deadly fight. Heroes who fall here receive a +1 morale bonus to their Fortitude saves against death as the Shadow tries to save them. Any heroes who nearly die in this fight but make their Fortitude saves are made aware that the Shadow saved them.

Once this combat ends, the way is clear to enter the heart of this shadow maze. Proceed to Encounter 6.

Encounter 6: A Web of Shadows

Key idea of this encounter: The heroes have found the being responsible for all of this turmoil, death, and destruction. Their reactions determine their own fate and that of the shadow being.

The heroes may take some time before proceeding into the Shadow's chamber. They may be extremely disoriented, wounded, or just need a moment to catch their breath. It might be a good time to call for a break, but only do so if you have an hour or more left in the slot. If you have less than an hour remaining, press on as soon as you can.

The circular door to this room is blasted outward, a sharp ring of twisted black metal shards. The chamber beyond is vast, a round cyst too dark to see clearly.

Only the vault's main feature can really be seen at all -- a strange wire framework of metal and crystal. The lines of this spherical cage have also been twisted, with several links between the cracked crystal nodes completely severed and others bent at awkward angles.

Within the cage, something stirs. Something nebulous and black roils in the heart of the dark crystal prison. It does not seem to have solid form, but its formless darkness is too dense to see through clearly. Tendrils of shadow writhe past the wire mesh, but as they brush past the four remaining intact crystal nodes, they break up and vanish.

The heroes have now seen the master at the heart of this maze, and it has now seen them. Initial reactions are extremely important to note here. Hostility is be met in kind, as is curiosity.

If the heroes investigate the rest of the chamber, the Shadow does not stop them. They find the following once they actually enter the room.

Eerily illuminated by the four glowing crystals on the

cage, two bodies can be seen in the room. Two Caarites lie sprawled on the ground, one still clutching a blaster.

Both are obviously dead, with burn marks through the chest of the one without a blaster and a look of utter terror on the other.

These are the last two members of the Cartel team, and they are responsible for awakening the Shadow in the first place. They argued over who was going to return to the Cartel and claim credit for the discovery of this place and its valuable salvage. One Caarite ended the other's argument with a spray of blaster shots to the back.

Unfortunately, not all of the shots hit what the Caarite surveyor was aiming at. One stray shot struck the cage and the resulting energy surge through the ancient lattice overloaded it and caused it to warp and twist, leaving it as the heroes now see it. The power flux also shocked the long-dormant Shadow awake.

The first things it sensed were betrayal, greed, and death. Its Dark Side nature instantly reacted and it boiled up out of the broken cage in a ravenous wave of black energy. The Caarite died almost instantly.

The twisted cage stopped the Shadow's feeding frenzy short. No longer intact, four nodes of crystal remained and they were enough to set up a form of containment around it. The Shadow railed against them, but it could not free itself. Reaching out to the other intact minds it sensed nearby (the rest of the Cartel surveyors), it tried to bring help.

That attempt ends disastrously. Once they died, the Shadow became desperate to both feed and free itself. The dark aura around the asteroid and the "Sargasso" of dead space are its way of drawing energy. The insane contacts it keeps making with the heroes' minds are its way of trying to ask for help.

Moments after the heroes find the Caarite bodies, the Shadow tries again. The defeat of the Dark Side constructs has temporarily drained most of the Dark Side energy from the Shadow, leaving it free to act normally. The following occurs to any hero without DSPs (Dark Side Points). Those with even one DSP are not contacted, but see this occur:

Spiraling tendrils of energy surge out of the shadowy cloud and touch each of you. For a moment, a chill shock runs through your body, and then you are no longer aware of your surroundings. The round chamber seems to fade away as the Shadow fills your senses.

Heroes with DSPs see those affected by the Shadow go motionless until the contact stops. This only takes a few seconds, but the unaffected heroes are free to take any single action they wish. Trying to free a fellow

hero from the Shadow's vision only works if the hero with DSPs makes physical contact. As the Shadow does not wish to touch the Dark Side for fear of losing control again, it pulls back from a hero with one or more DSPs.

Attacking the Shadow or the mesh also ends the contacts for everyone, but not before the vision below is implanted in each hero touched.

The Vision: The sending each hero receives is different, but they all follow the same theme. Take each player, one at a time, away from the table for a moment and describe them seeing themselves "freeing" something. It can be as innocuous as opening a jar or as detailed as sneaking into a pet shop and opening a womprat's cage, but tailor each hero's vision to them personally. Tell each player that it feels like a memory, even if it isn't a real one.

Force-sensitive heroes get an even clearer vision. They see the Shadow for what it really is, a sentient being of pure energy. It calls out to them in their own voices, saying, "Free... Freedom... Destroy..." Of course, the hero might misinterpret the word "Destroy" as a threat, but the Shadow does not really understand communication yet.

Both Force-sensitive and non Force-sensitive characters (even those with Force Defense active) get one last vision as well: the vision of a massive blaster drawn and aimed right at them, then exploding into a million fiery sparks. This is the Shadow's way of trying to say that it doesn't want to hurt them.

What happens next depends entirely on the actions of the heroes. The Shadow waits as long as the heroes wish if they are discussing what to do peacefully, but it immediately reacts to being attacked. It also reacts to the heroes trying to leave by erecting a "shimmering black wall" over the exit to the room. This wall is not invulnerable, but it has hardness 10, wounds 50 and if the heroes try to turn energy weapons on it, the Shadow absorbs all the energy in the room again.

Trying to communicate with the Shadow works, but only barely. All it can really do at this point is resend *the vision* with different imagery each time. The Shadow wants free so desperately, it cannot really perceive anything else. A Force-user with Telepathy can communicate in a more direct sense with the Shadow, but it still cannot converse rationally. All a Force-user sees with Telepathy, regardless of what he or she asks or says, is an image of the four intact crystals, the word "Free", and a sudden rush of hope and desperation.

Attacking the Shadow is not a good idea, as is any hero with DSPs trying to touch the cage. Attacking the Shadow is described below. DSP heroes trying to touch the cage suffers an assault of flying metal and crystal shards as the Shadow tries to force them back.

This automatically hits for 2d6 damage; this is vitality damage unless the hero fails a Reflex saving throw (DC: 14). A failed save means the damage is applied to Wounds instead.

If the Shadow is attacked, it reacts with confusion for one round (it does nothing, essentially), defends itself for three rounds (uses defensive Force powers and resends *the vision* to all non-DSP heroes each round), and finally attacks on the fifth round. It does not want to hurt the heroes, but it will if it must.

Run this combat using the statistics below for the Shadow, but keep the following in mind: the Shadow is immobile and can be easily hit, but any attack that hits it has a chance of passing through it (50% miss chance). If an attack misses this way after the first round, the Shadow guides it into one of the four remaining crystals shattering it instantly.

Note: The Shadow has not turned off the energy to the heroes' weapons, since they most likely need that energy to break the crystals of its prison. It is so desperate to be free. It leaves those weapons active even if the heroes are attacking it. Only if it falls below 30 Vitality does it use its Control Energy power to turn off all the heroes' energy weapons.

The Shadow: Alien Energy Force Adept 16; IM: +5; Defense 10 (immobilized, otherwise 24); Spd 0m (currently trapped, 240 m flight otherwise); VP/WP 148/20; Attack +17/+12/+7 melee (2d6 tendril strike), +17/+12/+7 ranged (2d4 crystalline shrapnel) (normally, the Shadow alien does not have a ranged attack, but long exposure to the debris in this chamber provides one); SQ immaterial (50% miss chance, immune to critical hits (treat criticals as normal hits)), force user, force weapon +2d4, force talisman +4 (does not currently possess one), dark aura, control energy, slow hyperflight ¼ ; SV Fort +12, Ref +12, Will +15; SZ L; FP 10, DSP 8; Rep 0; Str 0, Dex 20, Con 20, Int 25, Wis 20, Chr 5.

Skills: See Force +16, Intimidate +10, Fear +16, Force Push +16, Force Grip +16, Hide +10, Force Stealth +16, Force Lightning +16, Telepathy +12, Affect Minds +14, Farseeing +15, Heal Self +10, Heal Other +10

Feats: Force Sensitive, Alter, Sense, Control, Heroic Surge, Deflect Blasters (can use tendrils to accomplish this instead of a lightsaber), Absorb Energy, Weapon Finesse - Unarmed

Dark Aura: This ability has a range of 100 kilometers and allows the Shadow alien to use any of its mind-affecting Force powers within that distance without expending Vitality points or allowing the target a saving throw. The aura manifests as an intense shadow lingering over any solid surface within the radius. This field also obscures the Shadow alien from Farseeing, adding +10 to the DC.

Within 1 kilometer of the Shadow alien, this dark aura allows the Shadow alien to create shapes of energy. At any one time, the alien can create up to 1000 cubic feet of these shapes, not all of which have to be contiguous. Any shape created in this way has Hardness 10, Wounds 50. Destroyed shapes can be recreated once each round as a standard action.

Control Energy: When activated, this power has a range equal to 1 kilometer times number of rounds the user concentrates and has no upper range limit. Any source of energy within this power's range can be turned off or on, controlling the devices they are attached to as free actions or drained to provide sustenance as the user sees fit. Power sources can be affected individually without affecting others in range and any number of sources can be manipulated or drained at once.

Slow Hyperflight ¼: Outside the atmosphere of a planet, the Shadow alien can fly at ¼ hyperspace speed. This cannot be used underground or within any structure, even if the structure has no atmosphere of its own.

In combat, the alien Shadow uses lashing attacks with tendrils and dark side force powers to attack. It has a powerful "energy depletion" field as well, which severely limits the equipment options of those who would harm it.

If the four crystals are shattered, the Shadow breaks free. What happens at this point depends on how the heroes reacted to it. If combat occurred, read 6-A. If the heroes freed it intentionally or it escaped in some other non-hostile way, read 6-B.

If the heroes manage the very unlikely task of destroying the Shadow creature, it breaks up and fades away with a backlash of psychic agony. This stuns the heroes for a moment as all of its darkness explodes out at once. Paraphrase 6-A in this case.

Fleeing is also a likely option. Heroes who flee are not attacked, but the agitation of combat (or of having saviors so close yet not being freed) has awakened the Shadow sufficiently to free itself. With a scream of shattering crystal, it tears its way out of the prison and escapes the asteroid, again paraphrasing 6-A.

Once either entry has been read, paraphrase the last section of text in this section and move to the Conclusion.

6-A: Fighting Back the Night

The shadowy creature lurches up and out of the tangled cage as the last crystal shatters. Anger and rage scream around you as the massive tempest of darkness races past and down the corridor.

As it leaves, a shimmering curtain of absolute darkness appears behind it, cutting off the hallway and covering its escape.

The heroes can follow it, but the Shadow's flight speed and the wall allow it to elude them. Once out of the asteroid complex, the Shadow lifts off into open space and disappears into the depths of the Cularin system.

As the Shadow leaves, the field of powerlessness goes with it. The Sargasso effect begins to break up, freeing the trapped ships and returning power within a few minutes. The heroes, assuming they survived the battle, have just one more obstacle to face. Proceed to the last text box in this encounter.

6-B: Setting Shadows Free

As you destroy the last crystal, the Shadow whirls around itself and rises up out of the wire sphere. Sections of black steel collapse in on themselves as the creature hovers above you all.

Images of freedom, elation, and pure, childlike joy flood your thoughts. Memories of laughter ring through your minds as tendrils reach out and touch each of you in silken gratitude.

Then, the ephemeral Shadow moves swiftly down the corridor and disappears. As it does, the darkness in the chamber seems to leave with it...

The Shadow alien is free, and it is grateful for the rescue. The heroes may still have their doubts about what they have done, but the sense of joy that leaves with the creature should help lighten their mood.

The field of power draining leaves with the creature, freeing all of the trapped ships and letting energy flow normally again. The heroes are free, once they overcome one last obstacle. Read the text below, and then move to the Conclusion.

The Shadow has given each of the heroes the only reward it can offer for its freedom. Its power over the Force is still tenuous, but its long captivity has made it expert at manipulating raw energy. Each hero receives a Force point as the Shadow suffuses him or her on its way out. Alternately, at your discretion, the Shadow takes a Dark Side Point from one or more of the heroes provided they have been trying to atone and took steps to role-play this fact during the scenario.

Dim patterns of light begin to flare around you and down the hallway after the creature as it flies away. Energy is returning to your weapons and your surroundings.

Unfortunately, while the sight of power flowing once more may be a welcome one, the shattered complex around you does not apparently feel the

same way. No longer able to handle the raw energy that once surged here, the corridors begin to fragment and break up.

Around you, sections of the ceiling begin to plummet to the ground. In another minute, this entire place is going to cave in completely.

Run this as tense as the players want to make it. If you wish, ask for reflex saves from the heroes, but ensure that even with poor rolls, they escape the complex and make it back to their ship.

Once back in their vessel, they must take off quickly before the rock they've landed on gives way and they plunge into a suddenly yawning pit in the side of the asteroid. Again, make this a close call but don't penalize the heroes too badly for poor dice rolls. They have been through a lot, and they deserve a break.

Conclusion

Your ship hurtles away from the black asteroid as it begins to break up. All around you, other ships also tumble in every direction. Power returns to each of them and their engines leave glowing trails into the depths of space as they make their escape as well.

Your communication array lights up with a dozen different transmissions, each one an emphatic "thank you" from the crew of the doomed ships. You have saved a lot of lives today and these people are not going to forget it soon...

You have one last surprise waiting for you when you get back to Cularin. Each of you has a message waiting for you when you arrive home. "We are grateful for your help. Consider this a gift," is all the recording says in a flat, mechanical tone.

Moments later, your main financial account notes a 5,000 credit deposit. The point of origin for the deposit is orbital and traces back to the Metatheran Cartel.

Apparently, being a hero really can pay, but why? What did you do that aided the Cartel? What do they know, and why were they in that asteroid? More importantly, perhaps, where has the Shadow gone?

Here Ends Philosophy

Experience Point Summary

Experience is calculated as follows for Living Force events.

- 1) Experience awards in Living Force are not made for achieving objectives, but instead for successfully completing an adventure of a given length. Thus, if the heroes survived and

accomplished the primary goal of the adventure, they receive full Adventure Experience (600 xp for core LF plot scenarios, 350 for non-core LF scenarios).

- 2) Assign discretionary role-playing experience (0-400 points). These should reward accurate character portrayal throughout the adventure, not just how well the PC interacted socially. Do NOT automatically award max role-playing XP; consider carefully how well the players stayed in character. This is your opportunity to reward appropriately cinematic behavior, so use it!

Adventure Experience Award:

Did the heroes meet the Shadow and end its Sargasso effect around the black asteroid? If so, each hero who survived receives 600 xp.

Adventure Experience:	600 XP
Roleplaying Experience:	0-400 XP

Total Possible Experience:	1,000 XP
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If the heroes did not complete the scenario because of time constraints, but were "on the right track," you may award ½ adventure experience. If the heroes succeeded in somehow escaping the Sargasso and informed the authorities of its dangers, award them ¾ adventure experience.

Loot Summary

If it's not on this list, the PCs cannot keep it. This is a house rule that overrides what they may actually acquire in the scenario. Certificates are not supplied for standard equipment, but it should be assumed that any equipment the heroes find which is not listed here cannot be kept or is non-functional for one reason or another.

There is nothing of monetary value to be gained from this scenario, aside from the payoff of 5,000 credits from the Metatheran Cartel.

The Force point gained (or the Dark Side Point lost), if any, should be documented by the GM on each hero's log sheet.

There are no certified items resulting from this scenario.

Player Handout 1: The Shadow Nightmare

It begins with darkness. Your perceptions fade to black and every sound dims to nothing. The rasp of your own breathing, once thunderous in the empty halls of your powerless ship, grows whisper quiet and then falls silent. Nothing exists around you; you are suspended in a timeless, lightless void. All sensation, even the feel of your own body, begins to drift away until you are left with only oblivion.

Then comes the rush of light. Blazing like fire, you are struck blind by the brilliance of it. Like a hundred suns exploding before you, radiance overwhelms you and in its unrelenting intensity, the pain of sight becomes too much for you and everything plunges back into blackness.

Sounds come next. First, your thoughts echo in your mind. Fear, perhaps, of the danger you and your companions are in. Or is it hatred of whatever force holds you captive? No, it must be contempt at your own vulnerability and helplessness that roars through your consciousness. When breathing begins again, it is the ragged gasps of terror that you hear. They grow louder and louder, deafening in their extremes of silence and sheer screams. Screams? Yes, that is what you hear. Your own voice, screaming into an endless night that offers only silence in return.

Taste, smell, and touch all come in a chaotic whirl after you finally stop shrieking. Or do you? Perhaps you have become deaf as well as blind now. It is impossible to tell. You taste the bitter tang of blood in your mouth, your own from where your screams have torn your throat raw from within. You smell the sweat of desperation; no hope. No hope. Never any hope. Death awaits you, and you can feel its claws at your back. That is what you feel, the looming specter of your own mortality. So brief the years, so swift the end as it comes.

One by one, the images shatter into your mind. Fragments of destruction, images of explosions, and the final moments of the dying again and again force themselves into your mind. You cannot escape them, and you cannot look away. You are surrounded, trapped in a nightmare of darkness and unforgiving light.

The end comes. The captive captures and the shadow sheds its own light in the burning light of brief lives. So much fear, so much empty hatred. Is darkness all that is? Is fear and hatred all that exists? Can anything else *be* in the depths of an ancient night?

A mind teeters on the brink of an abyss. One side plummets into the growing darkness; the other side beckons a new beginning and the promise of something beyond the cycle of rage. As the moments pass, the darkness seems brighter than the light, and the promises grow too quiet to hear. Perhaps they are merely lies, deceptions of a desperate need.

A mind teeters on the abyss. Is it yours?

DM Aid #1: Player Questionnaire (one per player)

Hero Name: _____

Class(es) / Level(s): _____

Force Points / Dark Side Points: _____

Primary Motivation: _____

Loves and/or Desires: _____

Fears and/or Phobias: _____

Why my hero chooses a life of adventure: _____

When my hero dreams, it is most often: _____

When my hero has nightmares, it is most often: _____

If your hero has Dark Sides points, what did he or she do to get each one? _____

DM Aid #2 – Player Record Cards (two sheets per table)

Hero Name	
Init Mod	Def
VP/WP	
Species	Gender
Class(es)	Lvl(s)
Force Pts	<u>DSP's earned/current</u> /
Base Melee	Base Missile
STR	INT
DEX	WIS
CON	CHA
 Player Name	 RPGA#

Hero Name	
Init Mod	Def
VP/WP	
Species	Gender
Class(es)	Lvl(s)
Force Pts	<u>DSP's earned/current</u> /
Base Melee	Base Missile
STR	INT
DEX	WIS
CON	CHA
 Player Name	 RPGA#

Hero Name	
Init Mod	Def
VP/WP	
Species	Gender
Class(es)	Lvl(s)
Force Pts	<u>DSP's earned/current</u> /
Base Melee	Base Missile
STR	INT
DEX	WIS
CON	CHA
 Player Name	 RPGA#

Critical Event Summary

Below the Belt 2: Philosophy

1. Did the heroes come up with a plan that actually allowed them to escape the Sargasso without interacting with the Shadow alien?

Yes

No

2. Did the heroes suffer the effects of encounter ending 3-C?

Yes

No

3. Did the heroes set the Shadow free, correctly surmising that it would not harm them if they did so?

Yes

No

4. Did the heroes all die in combat with the Shadow alien?

Yes

No

5. Did any heroes keep the reward money from the Metatheran Cartel? If yes, record hero's names, player's names and RPGA numbers below.

Convention Coordinator:

To report these results (for events during the month of July, 2002 only), you may US mail them to:

RPGA - LIVING FORCE, P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707

Or email to: LFPlots@living-force.net

Or fax to: (425) 687-8287 Attention LIVING FORCE Critical Events

Check <http://www.living-force.net> for other methods.