

THE STARCHILD

A Traveller Adventure By Courtney Parsons

INTRODUCTION

STANDARDS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The Starchild is an introductory adventure for use with theongoose Publishing rules set for Traveller. It serves as an excellent introduction for players and Referees who are new to *Traveller*, to The Third Imperium of Man, one of the most venerable campaign settings in the history of Science Fiction gaming. The Starchild deals with a group of adventurers who find themselves rather suddenly embroiled in the search for a missing girl on a mining installation operated by an Imperial Ministry of Defence contractor. What at first appears to be a simple act of domestic terrorism gone wrong suddenly thrusts the adventurers into the heart of an interstellar conspiracy perpetrated by back-stabbing double agents on both sides of the Fringe. Events force the group to confront a mysterious Zhodani operative who is said to be a restless, inhuman spirit denied the peace of death so he can wreak vengeance upon his Imperial enemies.

Although this adventure was originally written as an introduction to the Kinunir Trilogy and was intended to be played as a prelude to Research Station Gamma, it is not necessary to own or even be familiar with any of these materials to play this adventure; the only requirement the *Traveller Core Rulebook* fromongoose Publishing. For more information on the Kinunir Trilogy, see FFE 003: Traveller: The Adventures, a publication containing all the original Classic Traveller adventures. The Starchild is written to either function as a stand-alone adventure or to easily be integrated into any existing campaign with just a bit of tweaking and preparation by the referee.

Time and Place

The adventure begins in the Spinward Marches Sector of The Third Imperium on the 300th day of the 1106th year since the Coronation of Emporer Cleon I and the founding of The Third Imperium. The date is expressed as 300-1106.

This adventure takes place in the Rhyllanor Subsector. It begins on Jae Taellona (0404-A560565-8 Rhyllanor/Spinward Marches) but can theoretically expand to nearly any planet in the Rhyllanor subsector. To that end, the Referee may wish to have access to an Official Traveller Universe (henceforth, OTU) copy of The Rhyllanor Subsector jumpgrid map like the one found in *The Spinward Marches* supplement for *Traveller* fromongoose Publishing. If the Referee does not have access to this supplement, he should create his own subsector map according to the procedure given in the World Creation chapter starting on p. 167 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook* and place Jae Taellona as desired on the map.

Requirements

This adventure is written for 3-5 characters of beginning to moderate experience. At least 2 of the characters should have ground combat experience; it will be difficult for the players to complete the adventure if this is not the case. Experience with starships is also recommended, although it makes little difference whether this is acquired through a military background, such as the Scouts or the Navy or whether it is acquired through a civilian career such as the Merchants or the Rogues. Note, however, that if the players are creating new characters specifically to complete this adventure, it is far more likely that they will achieve the recommended

skill set through military experience or by joining the Merchant Marine than through a "knocking around" career such as Drifter or Rogue.

The *Traveller Core Rulebook* contains all the ship data and deckplans for every vessel critical to the completion of this adventure. The Suleiman (Type S) Scout/Courier, The Beowulf class Free-Trader and The Type R Subsidized Merchant ('Subbie,' or 'Fat Trader') are all detailed in the *Traveller Core Rulebook* starting on p.114. The Tigress-Class dreadnought and the Vargr Corsair will be detailed in upcoming supplements. For now, the Referee, if he does not have access to any information about the Vargr Corsair, may assume it to be equivalent to the standard Corsair on p. 129 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*. The Tigress-class dreadnought is mentioned later but it is not necessary to have a deckplan or even a description of this vessel to run this adventure.

BACKGROUND Shalini's Tale

Note that this information can be pieced together by the adventurers by searching through X-boat feeds, library data and by talking to the girl and her father. It should not, of course, be given to them all at once.

Shalini Assynii is a young girl (age 10) whose family hails from the agricultural world of Belizo (3015-B895646-5 Rhyllanor/Spinward Marches). The world's atmosphere is naturally tainted, requiring filter masks for most normal humans but the populace has acquired a natural immunity over time. Agricultural and hydration techniques borrowed from higher technology worlds have allowed their crops to flourish and Belizo has grown

into a beautiful and prosperous farming community. It is said that the world is not completely unpleasant if one can adapt simultaneously to the hot climate and the atmospheric taint. The atmospheric pollution is caused by a naturally-occurring alkaline dust that causes severe irritation of exposed soft tissue, including lungs and eyes.

Before the journey that took them to Jae Taelлона, Shalini's family consisted of herself and her parents. Her mother and father (Jaye and T'niri Assyni) were respectable 'Thiti Nut farmers who managed to eke out a modest but comfortable living for themselves. Jaye had one brother, Shallum Assyni, who left Belizo many years ago. Shallum was considered something of a black sheep by his brother's family, having forgone honest work in favour of the somewhat shady dealings involved in the life of an adventuring scoundrel. In addition to accruing a rather lengthy police record, he somehow managed to acquire a starship, a Type A Free Trader named The Empress Iolanthe (see the *Traveller Core Rulebook* p.117 for details), that some would later say he won in a high-stakes poker game. Several years from now Shallum's body is destined to wash up on the shores of the Regina Starport River but the precise details of his demise are to remain a mystery and not a very interesting one at that, at least, not to the Regina Starport Authority, under whose jurisdiction the case of Shallum's disappearance legally fell. Nevertheless, at the time of this adventure, Shallum has not been found and the details of his disappearance are of no particular import. What is important is that, according to Regina law, the ownership of the vessel defaults to Shallum's next-of-kin in the event he is declared dead. Since Jaye had neither need nor desire for star travel, nor a wish to so much as speak to his brother, Shallum's disappearance was to go unnoticed and the Empress Iolanthe was to sit rusting in a warehouse storage hangar for the next 6 years. At the same time, since Shallum was legally still alive, the storage fees were automatically withdrawn from the remainder of his somewhat large – at least, large six years ago – bank account.

Jaye, a man of deep conviction, wanted no part in his brother's likely ill-gotten booty, so he took little interest when the Regina authorities notified him that they were about to declare Shallum dead during the first half of 1105, nor did he bat an eye when the Ministry of Ships and Shipping sent him an official Xmail notification that he would have to come to Regina to claim the Empress Iolanthe because Regina SPA had just declared the owner dead. Further, Jaye had every intention of letting the rapidly accruing debt go into default at the end of the mandatory one-year grace period, at which time the ship would be auctioned off to the highest bidder.

Then everything changed. About 6 months ago Shalini fell ill. She began to complain of severe headaches and her strength began to wane. She would often be bedridden for days only to suddenly wake up one day and be fine. She began to have horrible nightmares, which Jaye and his wife discounted as merely feverish dreams at first. However, one day, after Shalini had been bedridden for days, she suddenly recovered and told her father that she had dreamed of a terrible monster that had ridden in on the wind and wreaked a massive amount of damage while it ate 224 people. She described in lurid detail how the creature was spitting air and water between its long fangs as it wandered along its hideously destructive path. A day or two later a record-breaking hurricane laid waste to a small continent on the southern hemisphere of Belizo, doing millions of credits worth of property damage and killing hundreds. A few days later, the family was gathered at the kitchen table when the final death toll was announced: 224.

Shocked, her fearful parents took her to a well-trusted doctor friend of theirs, who after great difficulty, determined that she was most likely suffering from a brain tumour. His primitive TL5 diagnostic equipment did not seem to work on her and indeed, all sorts of electronic equipment began to malfunction around her. He began to suspect that there was more at work in the girl's illness than a simple tumour, so he consulted the

interstellar medical database at the local Class B Starport installation and happened upon an obscure medical paper penned by a Dr. L'leel Thorne, a corporate doctor with a background in medical research. After dealing with an unprecedented number of illnesses with strikingly similar symptoms on his own world, Dr. Thorne used the X-boat database at his world's local Scout base to detect similar patterns on worlds all across the Domain of Deneb.

Although the Belizan doctor was from a bucolic background, he was no idiot. He managed to infer from Thorne's paper that the tumours were causing the activation of latent psionic talents in the afflicted girl and knowing little (yet enough), Imperial Law to understand that the girl would be in danger from far more than just a tumour if this were ever to be discovered by the authorities, he warned her parents to remain silent. Also, Dr. Thorne had had experience with tumour removal during his posting on Jae Taelлона and the Assynii family physician made contact with him through the Xboat network. Dr. Thorne replied that he would be glad to meet with Shalini and her family and responded that he felt he could treat the girl discreetly and perhaps remove the tumour, if that were indeed what was causing this illness.

Jaye took out a small mortgage on the Empress Iolanthe and bought passage for himself, his wife and their child aboard an agricultural transport headed for Jae Taelлона, which was the only available transportation at such short notice. The ship was called The Rainbow Sun, a 400-ton subsidized merchant owned by Tukera lines. The Assynis had to stay in cramped crew quarters just above the engine compartment and Shalini suffered greatly during jumpspace, at least, during the time when she was awake between doses of sedatives. The Rainbow Sun suffered an endless series of malfunctions and mysterious electronic fires during this time and the crew were far from sad to see the journey end when the ship finally landed on the dust-blown surface of Jae Taelлона.

The Assynii family disembarked the Rainbow Sun, believing themselves to be finished with that vessel forever. However, the forces that govern the cruel fate of those who would travel between the stars would not have it thus. Even as the family navigated their way through the unfamiliar environment of Jae Taellona's vast underground complex, the captain of The Rainbow Sun, Lars Granhault, began to set events in motion that would fuel the gossipmongers who haunt the jumplanes and the Xnet for many Standard Years hence.

Lars was an ex-scout and seasoned wanderer of the Imperial Fringe who knew psionic talent when he saw it. Granhault also recognized when an opportunity for profit presented itself that was too good to pass up. He discreetly let himself onto the bridge while no one was watching and downloaded what was left of the vessel's surveillance data and logtapes and (illegally) removed the organic core of the Rainbow Sun's primary flight data recorder – the only piece of equipment that had recorded all of the events aboard the Sun and remained undamaged. Granhault then contacted an underworld associate of his who had connections to the Zhodani spy network on Jae Taellona and sold it to him for a rather sizeable fee. Unfortunately, Captain Granhault did not live long enough to enjoy his profits once the Zhule operatives grasped the full implications of what they had been brought.

The swiftness of the spy network's response would have received grudging admiration from even the most efficient Zhodani-hating Imperial Intelligence officer. Within 6 hours of selling the information, Captain Granhault's personal air/raft mysteriously exploded about 10 minutes after departing from a rather seedy area of East Startown, scattering burning wreckage uniformly over the partially abandoned town below. Granhault's underworld contact, N'ort Tume, was arrested soon after for the crime and was found hanged in his cell after only a few hours in custody, presumably the victim of suicide.

Meanwhile, as the Assynii family visited the offices of Dr. L'eel Thorne, who, unbeknownst to them, had worked in an Imperial Research Station on Vanejen years before and had direct experience dealing with psionics. He verified to his own satisfaction that the girl was one of the most powerful precognitive psions he had ever encountered, though he did not entirely reveal what he knew to the family. He immediately contacted the Imperial Intelligence Service (IIS) who wasted no time sending a pair of agents to the office even as the family were waiting. The family was being told that a treatment did exist and that although it was experimental, that there was still some cause for hope. Thorne immediately referred them to a doctor on Vanejen who, the family were told, was the man who had developed the original treatment and was therefore the most qualified to perform the surgery. Further, Thorne assured the Assyniis that public funds existed to assist cases like Shalini's.

The family were told that time was of the essence and that the funds had already been approved by the local Ministry of Medical Affairs and the IIS officers were actually medically trained Ministry personnel, there to facilitate their trip to Vanejen. The family was assured that the government had their best interest at heart and that they must depart to a waiting starship quickly before Shalini's case got any worse. Once aboard, the plan was to put Shalini into medical cold sleep for the journey, to prevent her condition from degrading any further and to alleviate her suffering and psionic outbursts.

For the first time in many months, Shalini's parents had begun to feel hope that everything was going to be alright. It was then that everything quite literally exploded...

Planetary Data

JAE TAE LLONA (0404-A560565-8 Rhylanor/
Spinward Marches)

Physical Description

Jae Taellona is the only inhabited world of the single-star Jae Taellona system. In addition to the mainworld, the system contains 3 gas giants and an asteroid belt as well as a number of unremarkable planetoid-sized bodies scattered between. There is a single large gas giant locked in a solitary orbit and a pair of twin gas giants, which are fairly small. The pair of small gas giants are in possession of an unusually high periodicity, as well as being closely linked in their stellar orbits, making them all but inaccessible throughout most of the Jae Taellonan year. The remaining gas giant, which accommodates a reasonably impressive satellite system of its own, is the only other major body in the system that will remotely interest most visitors.

Refueling within the large Jovian system is perfectly legal, even encouraged, since the lone pair of class A Downports on the system's mainworld see more than their fair share of traffic, indeed, sometimes even more than they can comfortably accommodate. Plans have been in the works for quite some time by the Jae Taellonan Starport Authority to add multiple orbital elements to help alleviate the overflow of traffic but thus far, none have progressed past the planning stage and SPA officials are notably adept at avoiding questions. To this date, the only orbital elements that can handle any significant traffic belong to the Navy, who notoriously loathe opening its facilities to civilians. However, on more than one occasion the Navy has been forced to open at least one station to larger commercial vessels when traffic flow threatened to strain the Downport capacity to unsafe levels.

Although Jae Taellona boasts a Standard atmosphere, it is a desert world and daytime temperatures can become torrid and even quite deadly, even in the so-called temperate regions. There is no free standing water on the planet whatsoever and most offworlders will find the environment outside the underground complexes quite uncomfortable. Needless to say, crossing the

desert is lethal without a vehicle or environment suit. Those not acclimated to the harsh wind and the absence of moisture in the air will find that exposed skin quickly chaffs and blisters, often causing moderate to severe damage before the afflicted is even aware of the problem; and during the day, dehydration and heat stroke often quickly follows.

To minimize exposure to the harsh desert sun, the world has two Starport facilities, one at each polar region. Jae Taellona has a period of revolution of about 2.2 standard years and a 250 axial tilt. A day on Jae Taellona lasts about 36 hours in the mid-latitudes but days at the polar regions are a little over an Imperial Standard year long. Many inhabitants, at least those who can afford to, fly to the opposite pole every 13 months or so as to always live on the nightside, which, although frigid and just as deadly to the unprotected, many still feel is much preferable to the blistering daytime heat.

There is a powerful magnetic field present at both poles, approximately two orders of magnitude greater than that of Terra and three orders of magnitude greater than that of Capital and the night months are often lit by spectacular dances of colour caused by ionized particles in the atmosphere as they are ignited by powerful solar winds. The light is often so bright that it is possible to see, even navigate, without visual aid. Many Travellers feel that this spectacular display makes up in some small way for the fact that this tiny (8,109 km) low-G (0.625g) world has no moon. Mining colonies exist mostly underground, periodically dispersed throughout the regions of desert and mountains.

Government and Law

Although the law level is nominally 5 (moderate), Jae Taellona is made up of rough-cut miners who, as long as they work hard, the government generally allows to play hard. Recreational drugs, some of which are categorically banned on many worlds elsewhere in the Imperium, are freely available upon Jae Taellona and prostitution has

evolved into an institution with benefits and pensions. Jae Taellona has become a haven for miscreants, including human pirates, Vargr corsairs and strangely enough, Zhodani agents. Zhodani spies and operatives have found Jae Taellona an ideal world on which to blend in amongst this motley assortment of criminals of varying races; indeed, the fact that many smugglers and criminals of their own race tend to operate out of Jae Taellona serves to draw attention away from the activities of the professional agents and towards the less-than-subtle methods and far more colorful backgrounds of their criminally-inclined compatriots. Against this lurid backdrop of criminals, scam artists and thieves, the Zhodani operatives find that they are able to conduct an unprecedented amount of business while remaining relatively unmolested.

Nominally, the colony falls under the edicts of Imperial Law and is operated under charter by Sternmetal Horizons, LLC, at the behest of the Imperial Navy. The Majority of the planetary police force are probably best described as corporate security personnel, without a lot of real power but just enough to make them better avoided by would-be adventurers. A drunken miner who is involved in a bar brawl is far more likely to be given a ride home and an admonition than to be taken to jail. This would not be a problem if the same miners were not taken home by police nearly every weekend. Many on the force are corrupt and a large portion of police and economic power is controlled by criminal organizations. Anyone crossing the Affiliation, as it is commonly called, is usually driven to the desert in an air raft near the equator and left there, where death comes quickly, if not easily.

If there is any real trouble it can usually be attributed to groups of miners who either take part in terrorist activities or simply hold up production through the time-honoured method of civil disobedience. Sternmetal has full legal authority to request Imperial troops, should they feel that a particular situation warrants it and they

have yet to be denied such a request. It is generally believed that Sternmetal has never made such a request lightly. The troops usually try to capture and imprison the labourers but in some extreme situations, they have been known to break up gatherings of dissidents with lethal force.

Environment and Ecology

There is very little animal life on Jae Taellona. Except for the humans that exist in the above and below-ground cites, the planet is largely free of multicellular life-forms and most of those that do exist are insects. The dominant form of life on the world is the motile desert algae that grows in vast carpets in the temperate zones and the variety of single-celled organisms and insects that exist in tandem with it. It is this algae that is largely responsible for maintaining a breathable atmosphere on a world with no water and a minimal ecosystem. A typical motile carpet and the parasites it hosts can be expected to move up to 10 km a week – too slow for the human eye to perceive, yet fast enough to quickly remove all doubt as to its mobility. Though vast carpets of algae move across the surface, they never approach the polar or equatorial regions, so the majority of the world's population lives and dies on Jae Taellona without ever even seeing it.

Powerful solar winds charging the densely-packed ions in the atmosphere sometimes cause great problems in with sensors, contragrav function and communications. Occasionally, ships are grounded by Starport authority because of the interference of powerful magnetic storms. To lift off during an emergency grounding is a serious offense and the offenders will be hunted down and charged large fines or even find themselves sentenced to a penal mining colony under horrendous conditions for months or even years. The exact punishment for violating a flight ban is well within the SPA JAG Officer-On-Duty's discretion but ranges from a Cr10,000 fine up to 3 years hard labour.

Hazard Advisory

The primary hazards on Jae Taelлона are the inhospitable climate, occasionally angry and/or drunken miners and a well-established criminal underground. However, most travellers need not be overly concerned with these issues, since crimes of a violent nature against tourists or travellers just passing through are exceedingly (not to mention surprisingly, to some) rare. The few incidents that have occurred in such cases have almost exclusively happened when curious offworlders have ventured to places in which they knew full well beforehand that they had no business. Of realistic concern to travellers, however, are the ion storms. While the SPA has become quite adept at detection and early warning, more than one traveller has found himself grounded on Jae Taelлона for indefinite periods of time; some for so long that their travel funds have dwindled away and they were forced to find local employment until they could afford passage.

Population Centres

The two major population centres on Jae Taelлона lie at the extreme magnetic poles of the planet and each experience extremely long periods of alternating darkness and light, with six local months of each. A Jae Taelлонan solar month is just a little over two Imperial Standard Months. While each Starport remains operational throughout the year, most civilian traffic is routed to the one that is currently in darkness. Since military and corporate traffic are exempt from this rule, the Starport that is currently in daylight maintains a small but effective work force and just enough residents remain behind to serve their needs, while a large majority of the remainder migrate to the other side of the world.

There are various installations all over the planet serving as access points to the rather extensive network of mines and tunnels that are laced throughout the planet's crust. These access points often function as cities, though the buildings and installations of which they consist are often of a very temporary nature. Most of the access

points are in the equatorial and tropical bands and are often concentrated in the hilly and mountainous regions. Sternmetal Horizons does not freely distribute information as to their active mining sites, however, so information on these installations is sparse at best and subject to change without warning.

The northern city is known, somewhat archaically, as Stargate Artica, while the southern is known as Stargate Antartica, in accordance with a tradition that became popular among planetary scientists during the Rule of Man. A migratory population of approximately 90,000 people exists between the two cities, while Stargate Artica has a stationary population of about 2,090, while Stargate Antartica has a slightly smaller stationary population of 1,999.

While both cities have some die-hard surface dwellers who tend to see living on the surface and braving the elements as a sign of superiority, the major portion of each city exists underground. Of the two, Stargate Artica is older and therefore slightly larger and has a much more developed underground complex. Stargate Artica is thought to have been the landing site of the original settlers of this world. The underground complex of Stargate Artica is divided into eight Sectors, which are named for the colours of the visible electromagnetic spectrum (eg, "Red Sector," "Orange Sector" and so forth). Each sector has its own identity, purpose and culture. For example, Yellow Sector consists of offices and housing of people who work within the bureaucracy of the Imperial government, all official government offices on Jae Taelлона can be found here. Red Sector contains the underground element of the Starport and the apartments and hives that house SPA personnel and civilian employees. The sectors are connected by an extensive and somewhat quaint underground electrical railway system, somewhat reminiscent of the subways, which used to (and, in many cases, still do) grace the undercities of larger population centres such as Old New York of Terra and New Nashville of Barnard.

Stargate Antartica has the same system of classification but it is far less developed. Only five sectors (Red through Blue) exist there.

Referee's Notes

In the desert, another environmental concern is the rare but dreaded occurrence of terrible windstorms (generated by pockets of pressure differential due geomagnetic and gravimetric flux) where winds powerful enough to shred flesh are accompanied by beautiful but deadly bolts of multicoloured lightning. For every two weeks travel in the desert, roll 1d6. A roll of 1 indicates a windstorm. These winds will whip up the extremely fine sands that make it impossible to breathe unless the unfortunate traveller's mouth and nose are covered or if he is in a sealed environment (see suffocation rules, TCR142) and cause 1d6-2 damage per minute to unprotected skin. If the group is flying, a piloting roll must be made every 20 minutes to keep the vehicle in the air. There is also a respectable chance of being hit by lightning: roll 2d6 if in the air: a 2 or 3 indicates the craft is struck by lightning. On the ground, roll 2d6; a roll of 4 indicates a randomly determined party member is struck by lightning. The bolts are small but very energetic; they do 3d6 of damage and may short out unshielded electronic equipment, at the Referee's option.

Recently, the Affiliation has been cooperating with a Zhodani Director who controls a small group of expert Zhodani commandos specially trained for the task of working deep undercover in the Imperium, far beyond the Fringe. The Director and his group are working with The Affiliation to establish a permanent base here so they can weaken the Imperial infrastructure for the upcoming Fifth Frontier War.

ENCOUNTER I: TERROR IN THE TUNNELS

The adventurers find themselves stranded in Stargate Artica during the night months, all but broke and looking for work to find some way off this hellish rock. They are fortunate enough to be on the nightside of the planet at the moment but the cold is barely tolerable and they discover that it is probably wise to go underground. At some point, they will find themselves unable to avoid travelling on board one of the underground electric railways, perhaps during a journey to an as-of-yet unvisited startown bar or to the latest in a series of increasingly cheap motels as their capital inexorably dwindles away.

Read (or paraphrase) the following to the players: You have spent yet another day fruitlessly searching for work to gain enough capital to get you off this dustball; now, you slowly leave the underground portion of the starport where you have spent your day. Exhausted, you wait impatiently for the evening's last monorail, as you muse angrily over how silly it is to have a closing time for public transportation in an underground city where the mines operate in round-the-clock shifts and it is going to be night for six more standard months anyway.

Finally, the train arrives and you take your seat, stopping to briefly brush away the thin coating of metallic dust

that covers everything in this godforsaken city. Looking about, you see that the train is fairly crowded with workers on their way home from the mines (presumably, the source of most of the dust) as well as a couple of other offworlders from the starport, who also look as though they would rather be anywhere but here.

Finally, after about 15 minutes, you hear a hiss and barely catch yourself yet again as the primitive electric train lurches to a halt. The doors open with a clumsy screech and five people step on board (Shalini, her parents and two Imperial Intelligence agents). Two of them appear to be a couple, obviously offworlders, judging by the simple woven tunics of vegetable fibres and the colourful headbands that they wear. The third, dressed in a similar manner, is a child, a beautiful girl with big, brown eyes and a thick, flowing mane of hair who, despite her beauty, looks pale and shuffles along as if she were not feeling well. The remaining two are dressed in business suits and sport glasses with mirrored lenses. You wonder briefly if the glasses are offworld lenses fitted with microUV detection and thermal imagers, then decide that it is probably none of your business.

Unbeknownst to the passengers, a bomb has been strategically placed in the underground tunnel ahead by a disgruntled miner who has been recruited by the Zhodani forces. Five strike squad agents wait in the tunnel, in fire teams of two and three. The team of

three has orders to board the railcar, while the other two wait outside and cover all possible escape. Suddenly, the travellers' world is thrown into chaos as the bomb detonates, partially collapsing the tunnel. The windows of the train shatter as it is thrown from track, lurching sickeningly on its broadside along the tunnel. Finally, with the gut-wrenching squeal of steel, the car turns over on its side. Adventurers who still have their senses about them (an Average check of Endurance, followed by a Difficult test of Recon) can barely make out three unusually tall and lithe figures in dark clothing, scampering up the side of the capsized railcar through the shattered window. The individuals' faces are covered but those who passed the Recon check can see that they are cradling weapons. A second Routine Recon check identifies the guns as laser rifles with grenade launchers. With fluid, graceful motions, the figures drop into the railcar through a shattered window. These strange men are in fact elite Zhodani special ops agents (See table below for details).

Read the following to the players:

You are not sure what just happened. Your ears are still ringing and the world around you has lost its focus. You become increasingly aware of the fact that you are laying on your side and someone is on top of you. You hear the sounds of screaming. It is dark but your eyes are already beginning to adjust to the dim emergency lights that illuminate the vaulted subterranean passage that you

Character	Career Path	Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Education	Social	Perception	Strength
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Zhule Sodality Agent (law 9
Strike Squad enforcement) 3,
Army (infantry) 1

Athletics (co-ordination) 1, Athletics (endurance) 1, Deception 1, Gun Combat (energy rifle) 2, Gun Combat (slug pistol) 1, Melee (blade) 1, recon 1, Stealth 1; Telepathy 1



can just barely make out overhead between the jagged shards of thick safety glass where the window used to be. You are not surprised when you become aware of the sputtering, carefully controlled rat-a-tat burst of automatic gunfire somewhere to your left.

The crowd panics, trying all at once to get out of the railcar. The troops are wearing advanced (TL12) hyperspectral headgear equipped with a heads-up display. Treat as TL12 PRIS (*The Traveller Core Rulebook, p.96*) that gives a +2 DM to hit. They immediately track (their equipment negates the negative DM due to poor lighting) and lock in on their targets, using laser rifles to minimize collateral damage. Note that experienced players will realize that if the adventurers jump up and attempt to open fire in the crowd they are far more likely to hit an innocent bystander than their targets. One of the two Imperial Intelligence agents lies in a pool of blood on what has become the floor; as the group tries to collect their senses, they see a burst of coherent light lance through the darkness, cutting down the remaining agent even as he reaches in his jacket for his sidearm.

Immediately Shalini's father grabs her and attempts to herd her through a shattered window but they are blocked by two Zhodani agents waiting outside. Shalini's mother lies on the floor, her body twisted, broken and not breathing. Before Jaye and Shalini can make it out of the window, Jaye is cut down by another burst of coherent light from outside the railcar. The operatives will then attempt to grab Shalini. The group may try to interfere but if the squad gets their hands on her, every control panel, surveillance system and light source both in the tunnel and aboard the subway vehicle suddenly explodes in a shower of sparks, adding to the confusion. Surprised, The Zhodani will release her and she scampers off down the corridor. The squad will attempt to avoid fighting with the group in favour of chasing Shalini, who they find is no longer detectable by vision or their multispectral goggles.

If the agent in charge decides that the mission is a wash out, they will release smoke and stun grenades to cover their retreat. Note that if the EMP also shorted out the laser rifles – GM's discretion or separate random rolls, 2 in 6 chance, since they are military weapons and probably have hardened circuitry) – then the commandos will switch to their gauss pistols if confronted by armed resistance from the adventurers. If the group is having a difficult time defeating the Zhule agents, then the Referee may choose to make this ruling in order to give them all the edge that is needed to come out victorious – after all, it is the opening scene of the adventure.

The Zhule agents had planned to run down the tunnel for about half a mile to where they have secured a maintenance access ladder to the surface, at the top of which awaits an open-air ground vehicle. However, since they had not anticipated the girl's ability to be invisible to their hyperspectral goggles, they will probably abandon that plan and they are quite willing to remain behind and die if necessary. The Referee should keep in mind that the Zhule agents are professionals and while they may be dismayed by this turn of events, they are fully capable of improvisation. If captured, the agents are equipped with a microcapsule filled with a deadly liquid hydrogen cyanide-concentrate held in a hollowed-out molar, which is activated by first using the tongue to manipulate the capsule into place (a safety measure to prevent accidental breakage) then by the application of a substantial amount of pressure by biting down. The microcapsule is carefully placed so that it is virtually impossible to break should the host experience an accidental impact.

When the Zhule agents are finally defeated or if they escape or should the Transit Authority arrive in time (careful – many players feel such timely arrivals appear contrived) to assist the adventurers, the chaos eventually begins to die down. If they are not already there, the Transit Authority personnel will finally manage to arrive and the group finds that Shalini has utterly vanished.

Investigation of the security cameras and video imaging devices find that they are all shorted out and though there are a limited number of access points, no one seems to recall seeing Shalini pass through. A search is instigated immediately through the tunnels with the assumption that she remains in the railway system while all stations are notified to be on the lookout for her. Of course, any such search will ultimately prove to be fruitless, since the girl's telepathic skills are of sufficient strength to erase any memory of her presence.

Shalini's mother is long dead when the medical personnel arrive and her father is very likely to be dying but conscious – unless the group has been *very* diligent. As Jaye is being led away in a stretcher, he grabs one of the character's hands with the strength of a desperate man. He asks that they visit his hospital room as soon as possible, for he is certain that he does not have long to live and even if he survives his wounds he is certain that "They" will return to kill him as soon as possible. His need is of the utmost urgency, he claims.

As he is being wheeled away, Jaye begs the group to find his daughter, claiming that he will give them all that he has if they can succeed.

"Hsh!" admonishes the medic, as he wheels Jaye away.

ENCOUNTER II: THE OFFER

The hospital room is cold and sterile and the dying man is attached to a breathing machine, so he cannot speak – if the group somehow has prevented the strike squad from shooting Jaye, then the nurse tells them that severe internal injuries from the impact will prevent him from surviving the night. The group can deduce that Jaye must have been moving on pure adrenaline when he tried to push his daughter out the railcar window. A well-dressed man sits in a chair next

to the bed, pouring over a datapad and rises to meet the adventurers as they enter. He introduces himself to the group as Jeel Tormé, a litigation specialist whose primary field is Interstellar Processes. He hands the pad to his client and the group looks on as the datapad shakes violently in Jaye's hands. Eventually, though, Jaye manages to outline his proposition for the group on the rather primitive holographic display. The details are fairly straightforward – the *Empress Iolanthe* for the rescue of Shalini and her safe delivery to the specialist on Vanejen. The first catch that the players notice, however, is that the ship is warehoused on Regina, which means that the adventurers will have to get themselves there. If the group agrees, then all legal documents are drawn up via hand computer. Once the group has fulfilled the terms of the contract, the lawyer will issue the new registration documents for the ship, which can be done, if necessary, via Xmail.

If the group agrees to take the job, Jaye downloads the family's last Cr8,000 into their accounts to cover any expenses that they may have during the search. Also, Jaye gives the adventurers the girl's ragged teddy bear and his religious symbol (the Belizan Triple Cross), so Shalini will know that the group is acting for him. He also gives them a data chip that contains a single audio file: the short, pained final message of a dying father to his daughter, since the doctors have predicted that he will not survive the night.

If pressed for tips on where to begin, the man scrawls down that she usually goes to "places where she feels safe" but that he would not know where that would be, on this world. The family had stayed in a motel the previous night; perhaps the adventurers should begin there. A nurse suddenly arrives to inject a syringe of Hydramorph into Jaye's IV tube and he succumbs to a deep slumber from which he will never awake. Jeel remains for a few moments to insure that the group has no further questions and to explain that he has heard that not only are the local authorities on the search but

that Imperial Intelligence is also diligently looking for the girl and that the father told him that he was no longer sure who could be trusted. Since the adventurers (presumably) did their best to stop the Zhule operatives from taking Shalini or hurting any more innocents, Jaye felt that they were perhaps the best candidates in which to place his trust.

Enemies

Following the failed operation in the rail tunnels, the adventurers will be watched by the operatives of the Zhule Sodality – some of whom are psionic. The abysmal failure of the extraction team to return with the girl and due to all of the unwanted attention that has suddenly been drawn from that particular operation, the commandant of the local *Zhule* cell has decided to bring out his most terrifying weapon: a psionic operative who is so effective and therefore so valuable, that he is kept in cold sleep until he is needed. This operative is the legendary *Spectre*, who is whispered to be a ghost amongst Jae Taellonan underworld, returned from the grave to exact revenge upon his human murderers. Legend has it that 150 years ago, *The Spectre* was cornered and surrounded by Imperial agents who were leading a combined task force of local police and security personnel and burned to death with plasma weapons. It is said, however, that his body was never found; that he has become pure energy and that he is now more powerful than ever. Much to the chagrin of more than a few of his *Sodality* colleagues, *The Spectre* has been brought out of cold sleep and is now in command.

The local police have been infiltrated and are under the influence of the Jae Taellonan underworld, which is in turn under the influence of the *Sodality*, so their help will be ineffective at best; at worst, they may actively interfere with the group's investigation. The local Imperial Intelligence Service office is a wildcard, to be played as the Referee sees fit; perhaps some of the adventurers are even agents themselves or perhaps they can be used to point the group in the right direction should the trail grow

cold. The IIS on this world, however, is underfunded and severely undermanned; they will be of little help to the group but by the same token, they will not be able to interfere with them much either. It is possible that the adventurers may be questioned once or twice by the local police, perhaps even brought in for interrogation, until *The Spectre* gives the order to leave them alone, at which point they will be inexplicably released and no further trouble will be had. *The Spectre's* plan is to allow the group to operate unhindered, in the hopes that they will have better luck locating Shalini, hopefully having far more subtle methods than his operatives.

The local Director of the *Sodality* is Heinrich P't'ar, a Zhodani who has undergone genetic conversion to appear to be a normal Imperial human. The PCs are not likely to encounter him in this adventure. They will, however, encounter *The Spectre*, who will catch them unawares unless they are very, very careful.

During this time, it is important for the Referee to be aware that the group is being watched by *Zhule* agents and their human informant network. The *Zhule* operatives have four SPA security personnel in positions ranging from low to mid-level on their payroll, as well as a mechanic that is currently performing repairs aboard *The Rainbow Sun*. It is simply a matter of time before the *Sodality* locates her but they prefer to allow the adventurers to do the legwork for them in order to minimize exposure. While the group is investigating, they will be tailed by three field operatives of the *Sodality*; use the statistics given in the NPCs section for the *Zhule Sodality Strike Squad* if the group becomes aware of them and combat ensues.

If the players do not state that their characters are watching for suspicious characters, the Referee should not worry about rollings; if, however, a player indicates that his character is (rightfully) being paranoid, the Referee may wish to make a secret Stealth check for the

agents vs. the characters' Recon skills. If the character succeeds, he may notice a suspicious individual (or two or three) watching the group from a corner booth in the Starport bar or from behind a newspaper in a rail kiosk and so forth. If the agents think they are made, they will flee. If cornered, they will fight but they will not let themselves be taken alive and will use the poison capsules described in *Encounter 1* if captured.

ENCOUNTER

III: AVENUES OF

INVESTIGATION

There are several ways that the adventurers can go about their investigation. The first that will likely come to mind will be to question Transit Authority personnel in case the local police cannot be trusted. Allow them to do so but after a day of information gathering and a few successful Investigate, Diplomacy or Carousing checks the Referee should make it clear to the group that this avenue of investigation is a dead end. Any electronic security equipment that might have caught what happened in the tunnel that night has been shorted out and while there may be remnants of data recorded before the pulse, they will, of course, be of little value.

Next, the group will probably think to check when the family arrived from offworld. Hopefully, this will then lead them to look for the ship that the girl arrived in and ask questions of the crew. Other methods would be to search out the local taverns and bars, along with public and police records for clues as to who is chasing her and why. The most common methods that can yield clues are detailed below but this list is by no means exhaustive; the Referee will have to adapt to his players' styles.

Finally, should the players think of something that not covered here, do not immediately discount it; the Referee is encouraged to evaluate the players' ideas in light of

the information given in *Background*, the information below and that given in the NPCs section and finally to ascertain for himself whether or not the players' ideas will be effective.

The Lion's Den

Asking questions at the local Starport facility and checking prior arrival and departure records (which are public information and should require no rolls should the group think of it) will reveal that the girl arrived aboard the 400-ton *Akkigish*-class Subsidized Merchant *The Rainbow Sun*, which was, at the time of arrival, under the command of one Captain Lars Granhault. Tracking Captain Granhault's last movements may lead the adventurers to *The Lion's Den*, a spacer's bar on the surface outside the underground complex, amongst the squat, crumbling and mostly abandoned buildings that were part of the original colony when that was built by the first settlers to land here.

The Lion's Den, at first glance, appears to be a hangout for drug dealers, addicts, alcoholics and seedy underworld types. It is quite successful in this respect, due to the fact that the local police do not like the extreme temperatures and therefore do not go up to the surface often. Besides, they believe that little goes on in *The Lion's Den* that could possibly interest them, since nearly everything on Jae Taelona is legal anyway.

In fact, *The Lion's Den* is little more than a front for the *Zhule Sodality*. Agents of the *Sodality* will recognize the PCs immediately but no one will alert them to this. The bar patrons and employees will appear to be very helpful at first but the adventurers will soon realize that the folks they meet here are masters of talking much and saying little. One of the Zhule operatives involved in the subrail attack is posted here but the PCs have no way of knowing that. For a price, of course, they will be offered drugs, sex and even information but none of any real value. After talking to a few people, a successful Routine

Streetwise check reveals that although the patrons and employees seem friendly on the surface, no one wants the group here and would rather that they left and that there is little to be gained by questioning them further.

The Stellar Wind

The local spacer's bar is called *The Stellar Wind* and is filled with a mixed crowd and therefore, information of a more useful nature than that gleaned in the *Lion's Den* might be encountered here. *The Stellar Wind* is in Red Sector of Stargate Artica, about a 10 minute walk along the Concourse from the Starport, making it a natural place to begin.

There are two types of rumours encountered in *The Stellar Wind*: Mandatory Rumours and General Rumours. Mandatory rumours are automatically encountered in the first instance of the group spending any significant amount of time in the bar and are only encountered in *The Stellar Wind*. General rumours are assumed to occur in *The Stellar Wind* but theoretically can occur in any of the starman's bars in the Red and Blue Sectors of Stargate Artica. If the group wishes to split up, allow them to do so and each subgroup or lone adventurer may make a separate check. Each hour spent searching for rumours in *The Stellar Wind* requires the seeker to spend at least 2d6 credits on drinks and nets a single Easy Streetwise or Carousing check, which, if successful, garners a roll on the Rumours Table below. Each extra Cr10 spent on drinks allows the adventurer an extra attempt per hour, to a maximum of 3 attempts. Group members may also make untrained attempts to garner rumours using the Soc skill but the difficulty then rises to Average and the costs for drinks are doubled. An abysmal result (four or more less than the target number) on any attempt means that the seeker has incurred some resentment and may not check for rumours in that particular location any longer without instigating potential violence. If the result is especially poor, the Referee may also wish to impose an encounter with a group of resentful belters, drunk and looking for a victim to administer a severe beating to.

The Referee should feel free to chose rumours from the table rather than rolling, especially if he feels that the group is stuck in their investigation but he should be mindful of the DMs that apply to each character type when doing so. Rumours 1–6 are more likely to be obtained by Rogues and Drifters using the Streetwise skill while 10–13 are more likely to be obtained by professional, ex-military starmen and women through the use of the Carousing skill. Rumors 7–9 are common, everyday rumours, which are more likely to be gleaned by those using the Soc ability with no DMs to their table roll.

Random Rumors

DMs: Ex-Scouts, SPA or Naval personnel receive a DM +1. If, for some reason, the adventurer making the roll is actively enlisted in one of these services, the DM is +2. Ex Rogues and Drifters are awarded a DM of -1, -2 if they are still active members of that profession. Referees should feel free to choose a rumour from the table rather than rolling; an especially good result should automatically net them a true, useful rumour, such as Rumour 2 or Rumour 12 or if the result is *very* good, Rumours 1 or 13, depending on the skill (Streetwise or Carousing) and the character type involved in the attempt.

Rumors Table

Die	Rumour
1.	A couple of shady figures who work for Big Name crime lords have been overheard recently hiring local thugs to watch the crew of a freighter known as <i>The Rainbow Sun</i> , which sits in the repair yard at the Starport.(T)
2.	Captain Granhault was a well-known alcoholic and sex addict. He frequented a place called the <i>Lion's Den</i> , known to be a front for the local underworld. They say he dabbled in smuggling and had plenty of underworld contacts, including one N'ort Tume, who killed himself while under arrest recently. (T)
3.	Mysterious, shady-looking individuals who are definitely of Zhodani descent are said to have been seen in the company of several Big Name crime figures at their hangouts in Orange Sector. Some say they are part of a deep-cover cell known as <i>The Zhule Sodality</i> and they are getting ready for Something Big. Anyone that goes around repeating this information to the Wrong People may find himself buried behind a wall of thermal concrete in the Purple Sector when the next dead mine is sealed up. (T)
4.	The Rainbow Sun was carrying an expensive cargo and Captain Granhault was forced to eject it into space near to the gravity well of a moon of the system's large gas giant while being pursued by a customs vessel. It is said that the cargo was worth millions and was packaged so it could have possibly survived re-entry. He was killed because he arrived without the cargo. Whoever finds that cargo will become rich. (F)
5.	A petty criminal tells the group that a crew of Vargr Corsairs (see below) is looking for a security hack or a mining expert help him cut or break into a security-sealed ship buried halfway in the sand somewhere in the desert, a pretty good ways off. Only Captain Klaargh and the Corsairs know where it is, and they're not talking, because they want whatever loot may be aboard. If nothing else, the ship is said to be in good shape and the spare parts alone would make a decent haul (T).
6.	The miners are planning a revolution very soon (within the month) and it will not be a good idea to be around when they rise up. (F)
7.	One of Granhault's contacts was N'ort Tume, who was arrested and died in a locked cell under mysterious circumstances. (T)
8.	There is Something Big going down in Purple Sector and the government and Sternmetal are behind it; else, why all the secrecy? Why are only miners on an active shift allowed down there? What is behind all of the sudden, mysterious and last-minute changes to the work schedules of Sternmetal employees? Theories range from the sudden discovery of a hidden cache of alien technology to the planning of a secret defence strategy that involves killing all of the workers and their families involved in the coming uprising.
9.	Over 200 miners a month are killed or injured because of the deadly working conditions on the planet and the Imperium refuses to give compensation or medical care to the disabled. (F)
10.	A recent sociological/career specialization team from the Ministry of the Interior sent to study the problem concluded that there are very few truly dissatisfied miners. They are all well compensated for the danger. The injury rate is relatively low and when they have finished their tour of duty, they return home relatively wealthy. The study concluded that the work here is far less dangerous than asteroid prospecting and the benefits are better. Public records and internal Sternmetal Horizons documents support this. (T)

11. The miner terrorists are actually just a bunch of thugs hired by the Underworld to stir up chaos and force the Imperium closer to negotiations for Taelonian independence, a situation which the Consulate-aligned worlds on the Border would certainly enjoy seeing. (T)
12. Both Imperial Internal Intelligence and Naval Intelligence reports agree in the belief that there is an active deep-cover cell present on Jae Taelona, known as *The Zhule Sodality*. The *Sodality* is spreading money and influence to establish itself amongst the Jae Taelonian criminal element, in the hopes of eventually adding Jae Taelona to the Consulate's growing list of allies in the upcoming war. (T)
13. A ship known as *The Rainbow Sun* recently put into port after having several mysterious system failures in jumpspace. The ship is docked at the Starport repair yard and is *still* having the same mysterious failures.
14. The *Zhule Sodality's* best operative is codenamed *The Spectre*. Although it sounds incredible, Imperial Intelligence believes *The Spectre* to actually be the same battle-dress wearing operative that somehow infiltrated the Naval base here in 984, sabotaging several key battle cruisers and made the repair facilities all but useless for several weeks. It was not enough to cause the Imperium to lose the War but it certainly did not help us win any. Reliable sources confirm that *The Spectre* is very real, however legendary his exploits have become. The Spectre is old and wily and most clearheaded folk believe that a regimen of anagathics combined with cold sleep is responsible for his longevity. It is true, however, that his mental powers are formidable and he can defeat nearly any security measure imaginable.

Mandatory Rumors

The Corsair Crew

It is here in *The Stellar Wind* that the PCs will have their first encounter with Commander Klaargh, captain of a Vargr corsair parked some distance away at a makeshift base in the desert. Klaargh will enter the bar accompanied by 1d6 crewmembers some time while the adventurers are there. After they have had a few drinks, Klaargh and his crew will begin barking loudly in his guttural language.

Eventually, they will take notice of the group and Klaargh, as the Alpha, will approach them, pick the strongest-looking one and try to start a fight, unarmed. If the adventurer who is challenge accepts, then, according to the unwritten Code of Honour amongst Vargr Corsairs, the fight should be unarmed and fairly evenly matched. Klaargh and his crew are armed (see their statistics in the NPCs section) with knives and even pistols should the adventurers violate the unwritten edicts of the code,

someone to help them break in. The Vargr see it as an easy credit but using their vessel's weapons could damage whatever is inside and cause any spare parts they wish to salvage to decline in value. Klaargh is violent but he is anything but stupid and wishes to try to enter the vessel through finesse before trying brute force. If Klaargh likes the group, he may ask them to join this endeavour. Of course, the critical importance of this rumour will likely only become obvious in retrospect.

The Spectre

While searching for rumours or just drinking in the bar, the adventurers overhear a pair of trader crewmen having a heated discussion at a corner table. One claims that The Spectre is real and the other claims that it is a story to scare children. The argument will eventually die away – this is of course at the Referee's discretion but one barfight, with the Corsair crew, is probably enough for one adventure – and the crewmembers will walk away, each quietly fuming. If the adventurers approach one of them and ask about the Spectre, they will find the crewman more than willing to talk as long as they continue to buy drinks. Almost any local or spacer who is a regular at Jae Taelona has heard the legend that The Spectre is the vengeful ghost of a Zhodani agent who was caught and burned alive by marines and security officers at the Naval Base during the Fifth Frontier War. Legend has it that The Spectre has killed thousands; children and even some of the more superstitious starfarers say that staring into the naked jump field and speaking his name 10 times will summon him. He can walk through walls, it is said and his mere touch can melt an armoured man. The crewman who argued in favour of the Spectre's existence does not believe all of that but he does think that The Spectre is still alive, maybe through drugs or cold sleep and he is convinced that he has powers beyond the comprehension of the average man.

including trying to help a comrade who has lawfully accepted but is losing or should a group member try bring weapons into the combat. The adventurer who is challenged is free to decline but will probably have to endure a series of rather scathing insults from the Corsairs – most of which, fortunately, will be in Vargr. If, however, the adventurer challenged by Klaargh accepts and fights honourably, even if he loses, he will have (probably) earned the respect of Klaargh and his crew. A successful Average test of Social Sciences (Alien Cultures) will reveal exactly what those codes are; for more information, consult the section on Vargr in *The Traveller Core Rulebook*, p.46, though the Referee should feel free to improvise. For more information on the Corsair's Code, see the Library Data entry Dh'oughz Khfae. The Corsairs will then invite the adventurers to stay up all night drinking with them and depending on how they have conducted themselves, will likely have won a valuable group of allies.

The Referee should note that the Vargr are aware of the location of The Spectre's vessel and are looking for

The Galactic Census and Records Bureau

The more officious members of the party may think to check with The Galactic Census and Records Bureau, a department of the government operated under the auspices of the Imperial Ministry of the Interior. If this is the players' first experience with *Traveller*, the Referee may assume that, although the players may not know about the existence of the Bureau, their characters, as citizens of the largest bureaucracy in the galaxy, most likely do. You may allow some or all of them a Routine difficulty INT check to think to look at the Bureau (DMs: +1 if the character rolling has Admin, Investigation or the Advocate skill, +3 if he has two or more of these). A quick check of the information database at the Starport (or simply asking someone, such as an SPA official) will reveal that the Ministry of the Interior indeed holds an Archives and Census office on Jae Taellona. The Bureau holds similar offices on most planets under Imperial control with a Class C or better Starport. On many Imperial worlds, the Bureau offices mainly document and analyze demographic and statistical data, most of which (but not all!) would probably be of little interest to a group of adventurers. Since, however, Jae Taellona is nominally an Imperial protectorate, the chances that the Bureau holds government records that are possibly salient are actually quite good.

A Difficult test of the Advocate skill will reveal that any corporation that operates under the Imperium as a colonial administrator is in fact defined as functioning as a "government ad litem." As such, the corporation is required by law to file copies of any internal documentation that is produced as a result of any action that it takes, which falls under the fairly narrow legal definition of this function. While this may seem to be an example of overly convoluted legal terminology, it merely means that documents such as demographic data, life support expenditures, terraforming projects, public building and housing construction, population control, as well as any future construction projects that have

reached the planning stage must be filed with the Bureau. Of particular interest to the characters may be the fact that any and all documents dealing with the creation and maintenance of a local or planetary police department are also required to be filed – since, legally speaking, the planetary police are a corporate security force who, at the end of the day, answer to primarily to Sternmetal, LIC and its shareholders. Although the corporation is encouraged to keep these documents up-to-date by the Imperial government through the receipt of tax breaks on 'ad litem' expenditures in order to promote colonization and development, the only way for the adventurers to find out for certain just how closely the company has adhered to Interstellar Law is through a visit to the Bureau itself. A successful Routine test of the Admin or Advocate skill will remind the character that, by law, Bureau records are supposed to be freely available to any Imperial Citizen who asks to see them.

The Bureau's offices can be found in the underground portion of the city in the Yellow Sector, a portion of Stargate Arica that contains the offices of the Imperial Bureaucracy and the dwellings of those who work for it. Yellow Sector is about a 5 minute rail ride away from the Starport.

The group will find that the Records office is tucked away down a dark, narrow, twisted corridor just off the main Concourse of Yellow Sector. The windows of the offices are coated with dust and it is only identifiable by a small plaque bearing the Imperial starburst to the left of the antique door. Upon entering, the adventurers may be dismayed to see filing cabinets, stacks and reams of dusty paper and files and a row of ancient microfiche machines along the back wall of the office. A dour, bespectacled woman sits behind a desk just inside the door, clacking away on an archaic typewriting machine. Her name is Nora Childers and she is none too thrilled at the idea of strange offworlders poking through what she considers to be her records. She rises to challenge the adventurers and

upon finding that they wish to poke about unsupervised in "her" office, she demands that they leave. She is nonplussed by arguments concerning the legal rights of Imperial citizens – such claims will only serve to make her more determined in her denial. If the group does not comply with her demand that they leave, she will call the police who will be equally deaf their protestations and they will be ejected or even jailed if they continue to resist. Such a fate can be avoided if one or more of the adventurers can make a smooth, persuasive argument accompanied by a Difficult (-2) test of Diplomacy or Persuade. Feigning interest in her work – a Routine test of Administration or Persuade – might also serve to get on her good side. She is vulnerable, however, to moderately attractive older (45+ Standard Years) men. If the party contains such an individual, then a mere showing of kindness from him can win her over, giving the group unfettered access without a roll. This challenge is a pure test of roleplaying skills; the Referee should not allow the players to sidestep it by making dice rolls.

Once the group has dealt with Ms. Childers, they can then turn their attention to the records. A major portion of the public records are actually kept on paper and microfiche. Investigators from the Imperial Core or other high (12+) TL regions of the Imperium who are used to holographic storage units and neural shunts might be aghast at being confronted by this primitive file-and-card method of record-keeping. In such a case, the adventurer's skill in Administration might actually be a hindrance- at least at first. Apply a DM of -1 to the roll per TL over 12 that can be attributed to a character's background *if* he has Administration skill. Otherwise, he need not be penalized, since a lack of rank in the Admin skill also indicates that he has not spent enough time in libraries or offices to accrue the kind of bad habits that are the result of an overdependence on technology. In that case, the lack of any ranks in Admin to assist the search should be penalty enough.

The records are in such disarray that they will take quite a long time to sift through, even if the searcher is familiar with the archaic record-keeping system employed here. Searching the records is a Very Difficult (-4) test of Administration or Advocate. If the investigator has both skills, he may add a DM of +2 to the roll. If he has both skills and a level of 2 or greater in the skill not being used, he may add a DM of +4 instead. Further, the investigators can employ the rules contained in *The Traveller Core Rulebook* for task chaining and assistance to further improve their chances. A successful roll and 1d6 hours of searching through records and microfiche files will reveal a single item listed below. If the roll was especially good, the group may deduct up to 2 hours from their search time. If the group has failed to convince Nora Childers of the worthiness of their cause, this will serve to add a DM of -3 to their roll, as she rearranges records, hides things and generally makes things as difficult as possible for them to work. If, on the other hand, they have won her over, they may ask for her assistance and receive a DM of +4 and decrease their search periods to 1d6-2, down to a minimum of three. Whether or not a group already on her bad side deserves a second chance is entirely up to the Referee and Ms. Childers.

There have been large, unscheduled shipments of cargo and personnel into the starport for which the customs and legal papers are missing.

The group has noticed a prodigious amount of Zhodani living and working on Jae Taellona, yet there is no documentation to be found for them in this office.

There has been a large amount of criminal activity that has never been investigated.

Captain Granhault had an extensive police record, including smuggling, drugs, petty larceny and other fairly minor offenses. He should have been in jail but he was not and his Master's Licence was never revoked;

presumably, his transgressions were never reported to the Ministry of Ships and Shipping.

N'ort Tume also had a record but his was far worse. He had been arrested for murder three times but the court records for the disposition of these cases are missing. He also died by hanging himself, alone in a locked cell.

The local Starport seems to be using far more of its resources than are being documented. This would suggest that far more ships are coming and going than is being recorded.

The Crime Statistic compilations show that there are an inordinate amount of murders that occur when the victim seems to be well-protected— in locked rooms, aboard secure starships, in secure places with recording devices and guards all around them – and nothing ever gets recorded nor is any evidence left behind. Most of the murders are committed using a knife or similar blade-like weapon, although some have been committed with gauss or energy weapons.

A Sternmetal Horizons security report remarks on the disappearance of a decorated Imperial Captain (Captain Locke-Stromwell) locked in his own cabin aboard a *Tigress*-class dreadnought, one of the largest, most well-armed, secure vessels in the Navy, surrounded by crewmen and security personnel. The report remarks that there was no record in his log or from SPA customs officials on duty that he ever went ashore and security and crew of the vessel that were questioned claimed he never left his cabin. The report concludes that Captain Locke-Stromwell somehow managed to leave without his crew knowing about it or that they were lying about it for some reason. However, nothing could be proven and the investigators eventually gave up, though the case remains open. There is no evidence of any follow-up investigation, ever, nor any indication that this fact ever appeared in the local media.

The Bureau Office also contains a rather extensive news morgue with printouts from the Xnet and planetary dataspHERE (such as it is) as well as from the local newspapers, used to compile and correlate various statistics for the Imperial Census. While searching the morgue, the group manages to uncover an ancient news article about a devastating series of explosions at the naval base here during the Third Frontier War, on 161-984. The article claims that a single Zhodani agent was responsible; he was cornered by an intrepid group of Special Tactics police supported by Imperial Marine contingent in battle dress; nevertheless, before he was incinerated to a crisp, the article claims that the Zhodani killed eight brave officers involved in his pursuit. It does not specify whether these "officers" were Sternmetal security personnel or military. At this point in the investigation, this piece of information may seem irrelevant to the adventurers and the Referee should not make too much of it; just note that it catches the characters' interest.

The Trail of the Rainbow Sun

If the group decides to check out the Rainbow Sun, they are on the right track, for that is indeed where the girl is hiding, secretly under the care of the ship's engineer. There are several indications of this; the first may be gleaned if the group thinks to question the crew. If they do not, all is not lost; after 1d6 days from the beginning of the investigation, the series of system failures and accidents at the Starport will begin to seep into the local dataspHERE and newbytes, not to mention the Starport rumour-mill. Further, the group will probably be in or near the Starport at some point during their investigation and may perhaps witness a power failure or other systems malfunction.

Should this happen, the Referee may allow them to make an INT check (Average difficulty, DM +1 for any adventurer with direct experience with psionics, +2 if an

adventurer is a trained telepath himself). The Starport has redundant systems aplenty, so while the failures are certainly a nuisance, they are not enough to force a full-scale investigation... *yet*. If the group does not act fast, they will soon, however and SPA officials and/or Imperial Intelligence will eventually make the connection with psionic abilities—after all, the inhabitants of the Imperial Fringe have been fighting the Zhodani for 500 years and many of them know psionics when they see them. If the girl vanishes into the custody of local authorities or the Ministry of Defence, the adventurers can fully expect to kiss the girl goodbye, quickly followed by their commission. While this eventuality is completely up to the Referee, as a guideline, SPA can be expected to launch a full-scale investigation 1d6-3 days after the first mysterious systems failure and to locate her 1d6+3 days after that investigation begins.

Once the group has decided to focus on the vessel, they may wish to play it cool and first visit the SPA records office. There, they can access a ship's registry, a current or recent flight plan and/or a crew manifest, all of which are public information and require no roll. If the players do not think of it, an Average test of INT might allow their characters to: any ex-scouts, naval personnel or merchants in the group can receive a DM of +2 to this roll. The group might first try to speak to the captain and thereby learn his fate.

The First Mate

Perhaps the will think to attempt to approach the ships first officer, Lyllian Arducci, who will prove, at first, anyway, to be unhelpful and rude. She's not the ship's steward, she says, so she has nothing to do with the passengers. In truth, however, she remembers the girl quite well but she wants nothing more to do with her and in her superstitious starfarer's mind, that includes speaking of her. She feels that further discussing the girl might make the jinx she brought upon *The Rainbow Sun*

permanent. As it stands, she feels that the ship's crew has a good chance of throwing the jinx off and will say as much to any adventurer who can succeed in a Difficult Carousing roll, while buying her enough drinks. After she has had a few, she will even tell the adventurers that the jinx is still in effect; the systems failure rate seemed to stop for about four days after the docking but started right back up a couple of days ago. The Referee should take care to convey that the date the ship's troubles began anew should coincide with the exact the day that Shalini disappeared in the rail tunnels. Of course, this should be the group's first hint that Shalini is still aboard the Rainbow Sun.

At this point or sometime later, the group might consider bribing Lyllian into letting them search, to which she might consent, if she is drunk enough. On the other hand, she may just as quickly report the group to the authorities or both, depending on the result of an Average test of the characters' Persuade skill (DM +1 per multiple of Cr1000 greater than 4000 offered, -1 for each multiple under). If the persuade attempt fails by more than five, she will report them to the authorities. Whether or not she takes their money anyway is up to the Referee. The group might also deduce that the girl is somewhere aboard and try to convince her that they can solve her jinx problem – this is more difficult, because Lyllian is always wary of bar comen and starport rats with ulterior motives. If the group is good, however, the Referee should not be resistant to the possibility that the group could get *her* to pay *them*.

The Steward

The ship's steward, Tomiasi V'rii, has a far more helpful attitude. V'rii is a long-standing TAS member and can be found most of the time he is dirside relaxing in the bar of the local TAS hostel, indulging in his taste for Sirian cognac and Terran tobacco. Though not particularly wealthy, V'rii thinks of himself as a gentleman of

refinement and taste, an adventurer of the Old School and is more likely to be impressed with the group if a member has a reasonably high Soc ability (9 or better) or if they are fellow TAS members. He remembers feeling sorry for the girl. The whole crew liked her, for she was a sweet little girl. A couple of crewmembers, he tells the group, including the first mate, believed she was responsible for all of the electrical malfunctions and were scared of her. Most of them, however, remember a nervous, frightened little girl who was very sick at times but also excited to be on her first space voyage. She liked to go down to Engineering because it was noisy down there, which "drowned out the loud voices". She also liked to hang out in the crew commons area just above the j-drive machinery. The Chief Engineer liked her, too and he often took her under his wing and allowed her to hang out in the engine room. If prodded or questioned about the bizarre series of malfunctions while en route to Jae Taellona, he replies he is not a technician but he does know that the Captain and the First Mate were worried that the Ship might never make it to planetfall. If prodded further, he will reluctantly admit that the failures seem to have returned for some reason but he asks the group to keep this tidbit to themselves, because it could cause the ship to lose passengers, which could in turn affect V'rii's job.

Don't miss the conclusion of this scenario in the July Issue of Signs and Portents