

GRAX'S CLUB



a
**DARK
MATTER™**
adventure



GRAX'S CLUB

WELCOME TO THE CLUB

Before you know it, you've been shuffled into a cramped office, misty with cigar smoke, being eyed over by the green man himself, Grax. He stares you down each in turn, a silent inquisition as he checks your applications so convincingly you'd barely notice he was holding them upside down. At last, he barks, "You're hired! Welcome to the team."

And with that, the timid halfling accountant shuffles you out of the room and proceeds to eject a battery of legalese about the nature of your contract at Grax's Guys for Cheap. Most of his words blend together, either due to his stammering, or the fact that he very probably is misusing them. One thing is clear: this mercenary company seemed a lot more organized from the outside.

WHAT'S GRAX'S CLUB?

In this lighthearted campaign for the *Dark Matter* campaign setting, you play second-rate mercenaries working for a third-rate mercenary company, *Grax's Guys for Cheap*. As part of your contract, you take whatever nonsense oddball jobs come across your desk, and your boss, none other than Grax himself, has more than enough to keep you busy.

Each chapter of this campaign functions as a slapstick one-shot, as you are recruited to some new, ridiculous job for yet another kooky client. You can play this adventure as one large adventure with four parts, or as a series of disconnect adventures, connected by common characters and the preludes in the *Grax's Guys* headquarters. You can play chapters out of order, skip chapters, or just dip into one as a one-shot.

WHAT DO I NEED TO PLAY THIS?

You need the *Dark Matter* campaign setting by Mage Hand Press and the *System Reference Document* for 5th edition (or an equivalent series of books that contains the rules for playing 5th edition).

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, you need the *Dark Matter* campaign setting by Mage Hand Press, as well as the *System Reference Document* (SRD) or the 5th Edition core rules.

Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players when their characters first arrive at a location or trigger a specific circumstance, as described in the text.

This adventure contains statistics for most of the creatures found within. When a creature's name appears in **bold** type, that's a visual cue for you to look up its statistics in the appendix of this book. Some monsters will include a note of where to look up its statistics, if those are found elsewhere. Named nonplayer characters (NPCs) also appear in **bold** type, as a visual cue to place them in the scene.

Lastly, ability checks, saving throws, attack rolls, and other game mechanics, such as rolling for initiative and voting as a group are listed in **bold** type, to remind you that dice will be rolled by you or the players.

If a phrase appears in *italics*, it refers to a proper name, the name of a spell, a magic item, or a section within this book. This book contains no additional spells, so all spells referenced can be found in the SRD or in *Dark Matter*.



THE EVEN MOST DANGEROUS-ER GAME

AN ADVENTURE THROUGH THE DEEP JUNGLE
FOR 5TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

WRITTEN BY MIKE HOLIK
MAGE HAND PRESS

GRAX'S CLUB

THE EVEN MOST DANGEROUS-ER GAME

INTRODUCTION

Budd Felmer shouldered his hunting rifle and kneeled down, tracing the footprint before him with one finger. Puzzled, he retraced the beast's probable steps through the jungle in his mind. Previously, it was heading southward, but this one's facing west. Was it circling around, or...

Before the thought crystallized in his mind, a force like a furry bus collided with Budd's back, tossing him roughly into a tree trunk. Through the shock of pain, he could feel the flurry of heavy, padded footfalls all around him. He turned his back to the tree trunk, but a warm, furry body coiled around him, pinning him to the tree. Budd Felmer looked up to see the fuzzy, inquisitive face of a colossal ferret staring down at him.

"Dook-dook-dook," said the gigantic ferret, and Budd swore quietly under his breath. The beast sniffed him a couple of times, as if considering what to do with this odd visitor to his jungle. Then, just as soon as he arrived, the ferret uncoiled and slithered off into the jungle.

Budd Felmer collected his breath, and then collected the components of his now shattered concussion rifle.

"I'll get you, you rascal, Big Hob. I'll get you if it's the last thing I do," Budd muttered, and turned back to camp.

BACKGROUND

Grax's Guys for Cheap is the most affordable mercenary company in the 'verse, and boasts a wide net of job postings. Prospective clients can ask almost anything of Grax's Guys, from shipping Rosvalian star pigs across the galaxy, to asking as a short order cook in the restaurant those pigs are served at. While a typical Grax's crew will see plenty of bodyguard duties and security details, they'll take nearly any job, provided it's legal and the pay is acceptable, with a half-up-front deposit. The tagline "You can trust Grax!" can be seen advertised in almost every port in the 'verse, and is practically a cliché at this point.

Moreover, the founder and owner, Grax Grraxe, will hire just about anyone to a crew, and makes a point to offer regular contracts to orcs, half-orcs, and other distrusted races. This means that a Grax's Crew is the easiest starting position for anyone breaking into the mercenary business, if not the most prestigious or lucrative.

In recent years, however, due to competition with the better-funded Scale and Fang Inc., Grax's Guys for Cheap has been on the decline. Plenty of crews still work with the company, but the jobs have gotten more dangerous and less profitable with each passing month, as the upscale, better-paying clients have gone elsewhere. For his part, Grax has doubled-down on getting contracts and improving the company image, one job at a time.

OVERVIEW

The Even Most Dangerous-er Game is an adventure for 5th-level characters, and is the first in a series of adventures centered on Grax's Guys for Cheap. In it, the characters help a big game hunter track down the most dangerous quarry in the 'verse: a giant space ferret. It is presented in four parts.

Prelude: Grax HQ lets characters get to know their employer and workplace before the adventure properly begins. If playing this adventure as part of a larger Grax's Guys campaign, it's recommended you let the players explore Grax's headquarters and return between every isolated adventure.

In *Part One: Taisong*, the characters arrive on the jungle planet of Gaozu and meet their client, a hunter named Budd Felmer. They can freely explore the settlement of Taisong, as they meet the settlement's residents and a rival crew of mercenaries, out to hunt the same quarry.

In *Part Two: Ferret Trail*, the characters' hunt takes them deep into the unexplored jungle. They can choose their own route through the jungle to circumvent obstacles and to make up critical time in the hunt, as their rivals are already ahead of them!

Lastly, in *Part Three: Big Hob's Burrow*, the characters must beat a crew of Scale and Fang mercenaries and grapple the legendary Big Hob.

KEY CHARACTERS

The following nonplayer characters feature prominently in this adventure.

GRAX GRRAXE (HE/HIM)

The party's employer and head of Grax's Guys for Cheap, Grax Grraxe, is a fat, well-humored orc with an eyepatch and a thick orcish accent. Around fifty years ago, Grax decided to leave the Warzone and all its general unpleasantness to found Grax's Guys, a low-to-mid-tier mercenary organization, which bills itself as being all-purpose. True to form, Grax branded it after himself, and his face can be seen on billboards, company mugs, and the occasional t-shirt.

However, over the last few years, GGFC has lost a lot of customers to their closest rival, Scale and Fang Inc. Nothing perterbs Grax so much as this rivalry, and in particular, that he's losing to the mercenary company owned by Garfreckt, an eternal dragon who Grax considers to be a bit of a jerk.

BUDD FELMER (HE/HIM)

Budd Felmer, a human big game hunter, has bagged every type of quarry imaginable, and has the scars to prove it. Budd is no-nonsense and superstitious in equal measure, demanding his contractors keep up and perform beyond expectations, except for when they must adhere to one of his unspoken rules of hunting. Such rules include: never follow in the tracks of a non-hunter, walk in a single-file line, unless you're facing into the wind, and never eat before walking at least three miles. It's entirely unclear how many of these rules are founded on sound hunting, and how many are pure superstition.

GREGGY IRONSMELT (HE/HIM)

The senile, constantly-swearing dwarf, Greggy Ironsmelt, is a permanent fixture in Scrimshaw Lodge. The lodge's owner, Hecademus, lets him reside in the common room as an act of charity, but also because the dwarf adds a bit of authenticity to the lodge that no amount of taxidermied creatures can bring. The senile, opinionated dwarf has never really harmed anyone, and Hecademus has learned to enjoy his company. Every week or so, Greggy goes on short sojourns into the jungle and returns with large beasts many times his own size, which he roasts over a great fire pit and serves to everyone in the lodge. For all his idiosyncrecies, Greggy is an excellent chef.

Greggy's past is essentially impenetrable. Was he once a hunter at Poacher's Post? Did he crash land on Gaozu with the *Vorpal* hundreds of years ago? Is he just a dwarven miner who moved to a jungle planet to retire? It's impossible to tell, and it's not clear if Greggy himself knows.

IVANA ZARKOFF (SHE/HER)

A prodigious and famous hunter, Ivana Zarkoff is the face of hunting for sport in the 'verse today. Throughout her life, Ivana has not only bested some of the most dangerous creatures to be found in the Galactic Frontier, she has recorded her exploits on holo-tapes and written books about them. She's charismatic, and speaks with a distinctive accent, which goes a long way to explain her broad notoriety.

If Ivana has a rival, it's Budd Felmer, who has tried at every turn to one-up her achievements. Therefore, for the hunt of Big Hob on planet Gaozu, she's hired none other than Scale and Fang to assist in the tracking.

THE SCALE CREW

A band of mercenaries from the rival Scale and Fang Inc., the Scale Crew is better-funded and more competent than any crew from Grax's Guys. They consist of the following:

Drak Garfreckt (he/him). A male dragonborn with red and black scales, Drak is the leader and fighter of his crew. He's cool under pressure, tough as nails, and smart enough to be a step ahead of any rival mercenary group. His last name is that of Garfreckt, the eternal dragon who founded and owns Scale and Fang Inc. Perhaps, he was adopted by the eternal dragon, or is distantly related to it. In any case, Drak has the assurance of someone who earned their position through expertise and hard work, and commands the respect of his crew in turn.

Trace (they/them). The heavily-upgraded vect of the Scale Crew, Trace, serves as their sniper and gadgeteer. Trace's expertise lies in drones, blasters, and explosives, but any mechanical device which can be broken or repaired falls under their domain. At a glance, it can be determined that Trace is cold, calculating, and prepared for anything.

Sierra O'Connell (she/her). The lovely Sierra O'Connell is a near-human green-skin who oozes charisma. Her smile not only lightens up a room, it makes even Drak and Trace seem less businesslike and dour by extension. On a typical day, she's dressed

for adventure, with a fitting hat to complement her laser whip. Sierra even knows a few songs as well, so she serves as the Scale Crew's bard, as well as their rogue. Her biggest personal flaw is that she will, without fail, steal the wallet of anyone she spends time with. It's as much habit as it is misbehavior for her at this point.

Aela Vestele (they/them). The half-elf sorcerer Aela Vestele is easily the most refined of the Scale Crew, and is usually the most refined of any group in which they find themselves. Only when they cast a spell does the nature of their sorcery become revealed: small dimensional rifts open around them, revealing a soup of alien tentacles and eyes. Despite this, Aela tries to be utterly composed at all times. Their father is Jermain'ion Vestele, one of the most successful capitalists in the Elven Empire, so it's anyone's guess how Aela ended up as a half-elf in a mercenary company, instead of as a full-blooded elf working behind a desk.

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PRELUDE: GRAX HQ

Advance all characters to 5th level.

Before and between adventures, the characters hang around the Grax's Guys for Cheap headquarters, waiting for a good job to drop into their laps. Some use it as a chance to hit the gym or comb over some invaluable books on magic, but plenty of Grax's crew get good at darts and take the opportunity to relax during the rare days of downtime.

Grax's headquarters is some form of converted warehouse right next to the starport on the planet Fornax. While it might have poor to nonexistent air conditioning, it's got plenty of space for a crew to hone their skills, catch up on repairs, or take a nap. Before beginning the adventure, characters can explore the following locations in Grax HQ.

THE LOUNGE

Unless otherwise stated, the party is probably in the lounge. If they wish to explore the headquarters, begin them in this location and read or paraphrase the following:

You're in the lounge at the Grax's Guys for Cheap headquarters, a spacious, spartan room with Krash vending machines, a dart board, and a pool table with only one pool cue. Presiding over this space is a large aluminum and glass sign reading "Grax's Guys for Cheap". The words "And Gals" have been hastily installed alongside "Guys", presumably after Grax got an earful, and decided he didn't want to seem discriminatory.

This lounge's dart board is almost constantly in use. Due to a series of inane, but increasingly large bets, most crew members working for Grax have decided to get unreasonably good at darts. **Gimby "Lucky Shot" Matchfoot** is currently the reigning champion, and someone could make good money if they beat him.

PLAYING DARTS

Anyone who wants to challenge Gimby to a game of darts instantly draws a crowd of onlookers. Minimum ante for the game is 100 credits, but

Gimby will match any amount up to 500 credits. The darts game consists of **3 contested Dexterity-based attack rolls**. Gimby makes his attack rolls with a +2 bonus, and has advantage on their rolls. Whoever wins the best out of three attacks wins the round. Once Gimby has been defeated at darts, they refuse to play again.

BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

Any characters with a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** notice **Osira**, an avia-ra working on another Grax crew, slide up to the one Krash vending machine with an "Out of Order" sign and insert 100 credits. She presses a button, and something dispenses from the machine. She slyly checks that nobody is watching, then collects what appears to be a gauntlet from the vending machine's dispenser slot! Curious party members can interrogate her with a successful **DC 14 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check** to learn that the machine dispenses random magic items. This information can also be gleaned from close inspection of the machine itself with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check**. Osira doesn't know where the machine came from or why it dispenses magic items. She just knows that it's obviously valuable and wanted to keep it a secret.

An inspection of the machine shows that its four buttons have prices of 100 credits, 500 credits, 2,500 credits, and 7,500 credits. Depending on the amount inserted, roll a d20 on one of the tables from *Appendix C* to determine which magic item is dispensed. Keep track of which magic items have been provided to the players. If a character rolls a magic item which has already been produced, they receive the next lowest magic item on the table, or an error and a return of credits if there is no lower magic item.

It's not possible to extract magic items from the machine by force. Large magic items are magically shrunk and instantly grow to full size once removed from the machine.

CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters at Grax HQ contain some impressively uncomfortable bunk beds and a large screen to watch holo-shows. It's a good place to retreat to if the lounge is too loud or crowded, but crew members otherwise avoid the quarters until late at night. Each crew member has a sturdy lock box

at their bunk, in which they can securely store their inventory.

THE SHOOTING RANGE

Undeniably the best part of the Grax's headquarters is the shooting range and armory. If a character would like to practice some shooting, read or paraphrase the following:

The air at the shooting range carries the distinct odor of plasma, a sort of ozone smell which follows blaster shots. This long, otherwise featureless wing of the warehouse is sectioned off strictly to let Grax's Guys and Gals take shots at the numerous targets painted on a big chunk of discarded starship hull set up on the far side. The entire chunk of metal is massively pockmarked, but few things are more cathartic than putting a few more divots in its side.

The shooting range's companion is the armory, which contains every weapon known to man, and a few known only to orcs. The armory is overseen by **Gracks**, a half-orc with no relation to Grax. No weapons are strictly off-limits, but Gracks must be persuaded with a **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check** if a character would like to use a weapon with the Explosive or Overheat properties. There are practice dummies nearby as well, for characters which would like to spar with a melee weapon.

If a character spends an hour practicing with a weapon at the firing range, they gain a practice die, a d6, which they can add to an attack roll using that weapon sometime in the next 10 days. A character can only have one practice die at a time.

ARMORY

Gracks maintains the Grax HQ armory, where characters can purchase weapons, armor, and gear, as per the tables in the *Dark Matter* Equipment chapter. If the characters wish to find more traditional, exotic, or illegal gear, there's a rat-person out by the dumpsters behind the headquarters named Charles Rattington Jr. who will sell any equipment from the SRD, and additional gear at the GM's discretion.

STORAGE

A great deal of Grax HQ is used for storage. This is, by far, the best place to find peace and quiet in Grax's HQ, but it's also a place where characters might find some truly strange stuff. To introduce this location, read or paraphrase the following:

If the rest of Grax's HQ is a converted warehouse, this is the section that's an unconverted warehouse. Countless unlabeled crates are stacked haphazardly in this room, creating a combination of a fire hazard and an avalanche risk. Most crates seem to be filled with Grax-branded merchandise nobody wants to buy. That being said, if someone wants a Grax mug, this is the motherlode.

If a character wants to go digging through the storage, roll on the following table to determine what they find:

d8 Item

- 1 A remote-control defense drone that fires foam bullets
- 2 A box containing all the sourcebooks of *Fortresses and Fiends 7th Edition*
- 3 A body pillow with a life-sized picture of a comely-looking Grax on it
- 4 A crate containing successively smaller and more frustrating to open crates
- 5 An early manuscript for Grax's autobiography, using the working title, *Grax Gushes Greatly: Good Guidance for Green Go-Getters*
- 6 A very serious-looking antimatter bomb with the words, "From, Garfreckt" spray painted on the side
- 7 Grax-branded candy, all of whose flavors, such as tangy thwirrel and cherry human, are meat-flavored
- 8 A cardboard lakshay frame, nearly 12 feet tall

JIMBALL'S OFFICE

Next to Grax's office is that of Jimball Hundwig, the accountant. If the characters wish to visit Jimball, read or paraphrase the following:

For all that has been made of a halfling's signature merriment and good cheer, you've never seen one so stressed out as Grax's accountant, Jimball Hundwig. The stammering halfling, coated in perpetual flop sweat, is almost always in their comically small office, fretting over papers. Today is no different.

Before any job for Grax, the party can visit Jimball to receive an operating budget of 100 credits each. This is ostensibly to be used for equipment and provisions, but just as many of Grax's Guys and Gals spend it frivolously or gamble it over dart matches. It's one of the perks of working for someone with such poor oversight.

In the corner of Jimball's office is **January**, the super-intelligent thwirrel. All thwirrels are psionic, but January is, for reasons that are completely unknown, also telepathic and smarter than most AIs. She's picky who she talks to, however, so only creatures with an Intelligence of 14 or higher have realized January is anything more than a pet. Jimball is still in the dark on this. If a character wishes to chat with January, it's best to feign a conversation with Jimball, who is only half-listening anyway.

GRAX'S OFFICE

When the players are ready to begin the adventure, they're summoned to Grax's office. Read or paraphrase the following:

The odor in Grax's office is always a fine artisan blend of cigars and the aroma of his self-branded cologne, which, for lack of a better word, smells of green. The burly, smiling orc waves you in and pushes aside a pile of papers to make room on his desk for a couple of drinks. By the time you sit in the comfortable armchair across from him, he's clattered two tumbler glasses down on the desk and filled them to the brim with a milky white liquid, pungent with alcohol.

"I've gotta job for ya!" Grax chortles, "Yer gonna love it."

The details of the job will be delivered via flashback in *Part One: Taisong*. Once the party receives this job, skip ahead to their arrival on Gaozu in Part One.

PART ONE: TAISONG

The adventure begins on the Tier 2 jungle planet **Gaozu**, at the spaceport village of **Taisong**. Please read or paraphrase the following:

The *Gittin*, a beat up starship with too many miles on its hull, touches down on a landing platform flanked on all sides by waving tropical leaves. The ship is emblazoned with the Grax's Guys for Cheap logo in chipping paint. Its cargo hatch opens, and you descend the ramp to see a rainforest of greens, oranges, and purples.

A ten-legged bug flies past you, and is instantly caught by another bug pretending to be a discarded can of Krash. Surely, this is a planet in which nature runs wild.

This one-spaceship landing pad seems isolated in a sea of green stretching out in all directions. The characters can find a few narrow paths leading away, some of which seem to wind outwards in the jungle, and one of which leads to a walled compound in the distance, the village of Taisong. A **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check** reveals that the paths leading into the jungle probably don't penetrate far; it would be best to start at the settlement.

As the characters march single-file down the mile-long footpath, explain their goal via flashback, as follows:

As Grax explained it, you've been hired by a big game hunter by the name of Budd Felmer to carry his blasters and whatnot while he chases down some big critter. Grax always seems to underestimate the danger his jobs usually entail, but in a rare stroke of clarity, he commented, "Seems like it might getta bit hairy. Keep the sucker alive, willya?"

The party knows that their client is somewhere in the settlement of Taisong, but has little information apart from that.

The 10-foot high concrete walls of Taisong are capped with wires of crackling electric deterrents, which serve to keep even the largest beasts at bay. At

the gate, a simple automaton admits the party. The village is filled with unremarkable wooden cabins, along with a few points of interest the party can explore:

- **Taisong General Store.** Dozens of barrels and crates are stacked outside this building, covering its entire storefront, except for the door.
- **Tucker Brothers Taxidermy.** Behind a glass display window, dozens of animals mounted on the wall grimace at you with a frozen, ferocious posture. Inside, you can see a pair of kobolds laboring to drag in the body of what appears to be a four-antlered moose.
- **Deep Jungle Adventures™.** By stark contrast to the rest of the buildings in Taisong, this structure is made of modern metals and concrete, in the sleek, attractive style of High Terra. Colorful posters and signs in the front advertise stunning vistas and exciting close encounters with local wildlife.
- **Scrimshaw Lodge.** Constructed like a large, multi-story wooden cabin, this lodge looks comfortable even from the outside. A hand-carved wooden sign out front reads "vacancy".

TAISONG GENERAL STORE

When the party enters the general store, read or paraphrase the following:

Much like outside the shop, the goods inside the general store loom high to the ceiling, and include practically everything you could think of for traversing and exploring the jungle. From behind the counter, you hear a sibilant "Sssalutations."

Much to everyone's surprise, the proprietor of this general store is a wrothian named **Zikker**. To their credit, they're friendly and knowledgeable, and their prices are fair. Frontier general stores such as this carry a wide variety of stock, including all manner of provisions, gear, and equipment, as well as simple weapons and light and medium armor. Additionally, this general store carries a number of special items which are particularly useful in the jungles of Gaozu, as shown on the Jungle Gear table below. Many of these items can be purchased in a pack for a discount.

JUNGLE GEAR

Item	Price	Weight
Jungle Gear Pack	17 credits	50 lb.
Bug Spray	1 credit	1 lb.
Explorer's Clothing	2 credits	4 lb.
Machete	.5 credits	4 lb.
Raptor Pheromones	15 credits	2 lb.
Water Purifier	10 credits	5 lb.

Rules for new equipment are as follows:

Jungle Gear Pack. A pack of jungle gear includes: a backpack, a bedroll, a canister of bug spray, an igniter, a machete, a mess kit, 10 pitons, 10 days of rations, a flask, 50 feet of rope, and a water purifier.

Bug Spray. A can of bug spray contains enough insecticide for 10 applications. As an action, you can apply this spray to a creature. For the next 8 hours, or until the spray is washed off, insects won't bite this creature, and insect-like creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls against it.

Machete. A machete is a simple melee weapon that deals 1d6 slashing damage and has the following special property: This weapon deals double damage to plants and creatures of the plant type.

Raptor Pheromones. This canister can be opened as an action, causing it to slowly release a chemical that attracts all variants of raptors. After 10 minutes, all raptors within a mile of the canister are attracted to a location within 30 feet of it. A moderate wind of at least 10 miles per hour disperses the pheromones after an hour. Otherwise, the pheromones lose potency after 8 hours.

Water Purifier. Unclean or diseased water can be poured through the purifier to produce clean, drinkable water. The purifier can process 1 gallon of water every 10 minutes.

TUCKER BROTHERS TAXIDERMMY

When the party visits the Tucker Brothers Taxidermy shop, read or paraphrase the following:

Dozens of alien animals of all shapes and sizes, many of which you've never seen before, strike fixed, menacing postures around this room. Many are merely heads mounted on wooden boards, but bear their teeth in angry expressions nonetheless. Behind the counter, through an open door, two kobolds work furiously with knives to skin a four-antlered moose many times their own size.

The taxidermists responsible for stuffing and mounting all manner of exotic alien animals are a pair of kobold brothers named **Zuggs** and **Luggs Tucker**. The two speak over each other, and always seem to argue, even when they're in agreement. Thrilled to see new customers, they greet the party without washing their hands and ask if they're looking to buy a taxidermied beast, or have one made.

Much of the brothers' business actually comes from hunters who have failed to kill anything of note, but don't want to be seen coming back empty handed. Thus, they're more than willing to buy the corpse of any Medium or Large beast or monstrosity the party kills on the planet, so long as its fur, antlers, and other distinguishing features aren't fundamentally destroyed. They'll stuff and mount whatever they buy, and sell it to some unlucky hunter later for an enormous markup. Zuggs and Luggs will pay 100 credits for the corpse of a Medium creature, 200 credits for the corpse of a Large creature, and 400 credits for the corpse of a Huge creature. However, the party can only reap the full price if the creature is knocked unconscious, then killed in such a way as to best preserve its pelt and skeleton. If the creature is at all burned or left to rot for more than a week before being brought to the shop, the price is halved.

Furthermore, the party can have any beast or monstrosity taxidermied for 200 credits. They can purchase any Small or Tiny taxidermied creature for 200 credits, or any Large creature for 500 credits. Lastly, the brothers sell a spray for 10 credits which can preserve a corpse from natural decay for 10 days, as per the spell *gentle repose*.

DEEP JUNGLE ADVENTURES™

As soon as the characters open the door to Deep Jungle Adventures™, read or paraphrase the following:

Before you have time to absorb any details of the colorful, yet corporate waiting room, you're ambushed by smiling faces, peppy greetings, and brochures. Each of you have no fewer than three brochures in your hands by the time you say hello.

A pair of smartly-dressed travel agents, a tiefling man named **Daizemon** and a blonde woman named **Cheryl**, greet the party with fake smiles and boundless forced enthusiasm. Their aim is to sell the party a tour package of this jungle continent at an outrageous price. Though their normal clientele is wealthy, but ignorant families looking for a sterile taste of adventure, this little visitor's center and tour company has seen a dearth of business lately, and so attacks every visitor with aggressive sales tactics.

Practically nothing Daizemon and Cheryl have to say should interest the characters, except perhaps for the most gullible party members. Principally, Daizemon and Cheryl ask obviously leading questions like "Are you looking for adventure?" and "Wouldn't it be great if you could experience the majesty of nature without breaking the bank?" with the express intention of following the questions up with "Well have I got good news for you!" The sales pitch is strained, but well-rehearsed, leaving little room for questions.

Despite how uninformative the travel agents might be, the brochures they've handed to the party contain a litany of interesting travel locations they might see out in the jungle. These distinctive landmarks include:

- **Roc Rock.** The picture of this natural stone outcropping clearly demonstrates its resemblance to the head of a roc or eagle. It seems to jut from the sheer cliff face of a plateau.
- **The Howling Arch.** This stone archway or tunnel is nestled in a gorge, through which a small creek winds. The brochure claims that the constant rush of wind through it sounds positively like screaming.

- **Wreck of the *Vorpal*.** A surprising entry, the dwarven starship the *Vorpal* can be found wrecked somewhere in the forest. By the look of the picture, the ship is extremely rusted and choked by centuries of vines.
- **Poacher's Post.** The last picture in the brochure looks like a ghost town. The so-called "Poacher's Post" is a long-abandoned camp that looks eerily like Taisong in construction, and was purportedly used by the first wave of space-settlers.

SCRIMSHAW LODGE

When the characters visit Scrimshaw Lodge, read or paraphrase the following:

The savory aroma of grilled meat and the soft clamor of good-humored chatting fills the air of this large cabin. Furs adorn the walls and floor, and practically every fixture seems to be carved out of enormous pieces of wood. Perhaps, this building was built to emulate the atmosphere of an idyllic hunting lodge, or perhaps its clientele brought that atmosphere to it wholesale.

The lodge's common room makes up most of the lodge's ground floor. A grand fireplace roars in the corner, with several people chatting in front of it, while a number of benches and tables line the walls. Alongside the entrance, the party finds a long wooden reception desk at which they can rent rooms for 1 credit each per night, and also order food and drink. A spiral staircase leads up to private rooms on the second floor.

The party can explore the following corners of the lodge's common room to chat with its people:

- **Counter.** A nautilid waits behind the reception desk, and is happy to share rumors and provide some basic information to travelers.
- **Hammocks.** A dwarf with a very long and unkempt white beard snores loudly in a hammock strung between a taxidermied owlbear and the cabin's wall.
- **Poorly-Lit Tables.** A human with a grand mustache whittles away at a piece of wood at the rear of the room.
- **The Fireplace.** A group of five people, each of different races, chat jovially in front of the fire.

HECADEMUS

The proprietor of the Scrimshaw Lodge is a nautilid named **Hecademus** who is an incorrigible gossip. He's more than willing to share the following basic information:

- This entire supercontinent on Gaozu is covered in dense jungle. It'd be possible to walk halfway around the planet, if something didn't kill you first.
- There's a truly staggering number of plants and animals on this planet, from the conventional to the huge and bizarre.
- Taisong is the only proper settlement on the planet. There might be some temporary camps out there somewhere, but nowhere with access to a starport, which means Hecademus has a virtual monopoly.

If prompted, he'll share the following rumors and opinions:

- There's huge monsters out there in the jungle, but it's really the smaller ones you need to worry about. They're faster and more numerous.
- There's supposed to be some mercenaries in town to help a hunter bring down just such a famous local monster. Mercenaries are always great for business! They either give the lodge or the undertaker some work.
- Don't take anything Gregg Ironsmelt, the dwarf in the corner, says seriously. He's getting on in years.

GREGGY IRONSMELT

If the players so much as approach the hammock at the rear of the building, they disturb Gregg Ironsmelt. Read or paraphrase the following:

A dwarf with a very long, unkempt, white beard mumbles something incoherent and rolls out of his hammock, landing on the hardwood floor with a clunk. Straightening himself up with a chorus of cracking joints, he addresses the party:

"What'ye here doin' in the cap'n's quarters, ye scallywags? Can'tcha see we've got a schedule to be keeping? Them blasted knife-ears been houndin' us for near a million clicks!"

He bares his fists, ready for a brawl.

As the players might guess, Gregg is both senile and incomprehensibly old, and it's hard to tell what in the 'verse he's talking about from moment to moment. At the moment, he's angry to the point of starting a fistfight, presumably because the party has awoken him. Any Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check the party makes to convince Gregg of something is turned on its head: Gregg misunderstands practically everything, so such a check that fails to meet a DC actually succeeds, and one that succeeds actually fails. Moreover, you can't fake an opinion around Gregg or intentionally fail a check to interact with him; the old dwarf has a sixth sense for these sorts of deceptions. A failed **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check** can convince Gregg that the party doesn't want to fight, and that he should head back into his hammock.

Moreover, if a character would like to play along with Gregg's delusion, they can do so with a failed **DC 14 Charisma (Deception or Performance) check**. Gregg orders them around like an old-timey captain of a starship for a few minutes, and reminds them that the code to the captain's quarters is 14-20-15. After a couple minutes of this, he retires back into his hammock.

If the characters can't mollify Gregg, he punches the largest person in the party, which is a **melee attack with a +6 bonus**, dealing 1d6 + 3 bludgeoning damage on a hit. Hit or miss, he realizes he's outmatched, complains and swears about them being built like a mountain, and crawls back into his hammock.

BUDD FELMER

If the characters approach the poorly-lit tables in the back, they can find their client, **Budd Felmer**, whittling away at a bit of wood with an oversized knife. When they approach him, read or paraphrase the following:

Sporting beige linens, a prodigious moustache, and an excessive knife, the man sitting at the table looks like someone who has spent the better part of his adult life surviving the brush of unexplored worlds. He looks up at you through a silver monocle and gruffly asks, "You from Grax?"

In regards to the job, Budd has the following to say:

"Tomorrow morning, we set out to hunt the most dangerous game!"

Budd senses the party's assumptions and reacts with disgust. "No! Not Man! What makes you think Man is the most dangerous game? I've hunted men; nothin' particularly dangerous about em'. No, we'll be huntin' Big Hob! That beast has eluded me for nine years, and this time, I'll be bringing 'im back."

It's the party's job to help facilitate Budd's hunting expedition across the jungle. They'll be carrying gear, setting up camp, blazing trails, and fending off wild animals. When the time finally comes to do battle with Big Hob, they may even have to help, if Budd doesn't subdue it with one bullet.

Big Hob is a giant space ferret, but Budd isn't exactly forthcoming with this information. A character can learn this with a **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) or Intelligence (Investigation) check**. Other mercenaries he's hired have abandoned the job shortly after learning that their quarry was a ferret, and Budd wants the party to take this seriously. Big Hob is a dangerous beast. To that end, Budd has packed a litany of supplies, including a custom, overcharged concussion rifle, an electromagnetic trap, and a very large explosive. He intends to be the first to capture and release the beast, but fears it may be a battle to the death.

However, Budd also knows that they have a larger problem, apart from the jungle and the colossal ferret: his longtime rival, **Ivana Zarkoff**, showed up in Taisong yesterday with a group of mercenaries and plans to hunt Big Hob for herself. Ivana and her cadre of mercenaries are currently chatting in front of the fireplace.

THE SCALE CREW

Laughing and chatting in front of the lodge's grand fireplace is a group of five individuals: **Ivana Zarkoff** and their four-person crew from Scale and Fang Inc. **The Scale Crew** is a recurring group of rival mercenaries, so feel free to introduce them in greater detail, using information from the Key Characters section of this adventure. When the characters approach, read or paraphrase the following:

A group of people, consisting of a gruff dragonborn, a sleek and well-polished vect, a green-skin near human, a dainty half-elf, and a human wearing furs stand about drinking and chatting in front of the fireplace. Only when you draw near do you notice that most of them wear an identical badge: that of Scale and Fang Inc., a larger, better-funded mercenary company that rivals and out-competes Grax's Guys at every turn.

The dragonborn looks you up and down, chuckles, and says, "You best head home. That jungle is gonna eat you alive."

Ivana and the Scale Crew are also in Taisong to hunt Big Hob, and they seem a lot more prepared to do it. The captain of the Scale Crew, **Drak Garfreckt**, a red-and-black-scaled dragonborn, is dismissive of the party, but not outright hostile. If anything, he thinks it's amusing that you've come all this way to get so handily beaten. While he's more than happy to race the party for a crack at Big Hob, he isn't the least bit concerned about losing. Similarly, Ivana Zarkoff will pontificate on the superior hunter's nature, and the determinism of catching prey. She uses a lot of words to say that her expertise will help them catch Big Hob. The Scale Crew's vect sniper, **Trace**, and their sorcerer, **Aela Vestele**, are content to stand back and watch the party's interactions with the others, and will only chat if approached.

Only **Sierra O'Connell**, the Scale Crew's green-skin rogue, will pleasantly chat with the party. She's sporting a fedora, and a laser whip—it almost looks like she was made for these sorts of adventures. If she has a drink with anyone from the party with a **passive Perception of 13 or lower**, she'll steal 50 credits out of their pockets by the end of the night.

For all their posturing, Drak and Ivana will make the party a deal: they'll leave in the morning at the crack of dawn, and no earlier. If they're going to race, it should be a fair one. A character can make a **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check** to determine that Drak is making this offer genuinely, and Ivana doesn't seem sincere. On a failure, it seems that both parties are genuine. Drak will solidify the starting time with a handshake, if the party agrees. Otherwise, he shrugs and says that they'll be leaving at dawn regardless.

Open hearing that the Scale Crew is going after Big Hob, **Greggy Ironsmelt** drops out of his hammock and says, suddenly dead serious, that he'll beat everyone to Big Hob by lunchtime tomorrow. He hurls a few insults at everyone, then produces a huge bag of peanuts from his hammock and slings it over his shoulder. Leaving a trail of peanut shells in his wake, he leaves to gather equipment for the hunt.

Hecademus will break up any brawls which happen between the adventuring parties, and send both parties to their rooms.

SNARLS BY NIGHT

Only begin this event after the party has explored Taisong, made any necessary preparations, and spoken with their client, Budd Felmer, and the rival Scale Crew. Once the characters have turned in for the evening, but before they wake up in the following morning, read or paraphrase the following:

The drone of insects that has loudly echoed out of the jungles of Gaozu all night quiets around the village of Taisong. Instead, the scurrying of claws of concrete and alien snarls replace it.

A pack of **5 stirge raptors** have infiltrated Taisong while the village sleeps. Have all the characters **roll initiative**. The two characters with the **highest passive Perception scores** wake up on the first round, followed by all other characters on the following round.

While the residents of Taisong will not leave their homes, the stirge raptors will invade the Scrimshaw Lodge unless driven off. It's clear once the characters are outside that the electric defenses on the walls of Taisong have been disabled, and that, once the raptors are driven off, the defenses will need to be reactivated. When a stirge raptor is killed, the others nearby will drain it using their Cannibalize ability. The last raptor will attempt to flee once the other four raptors are slain. Additionally, a character can use a canister of raptor pheromones to attract the raptors within the village to a location outside the walls. It takes only 1 minute for the raptors within the walls to detect the pheromones and travel to the canister.

As thanks for protecting the lodge, Hecademus rewards the characters with one *potion of healing* each.

Importantly, none of the Scale Crew nor Ivana Zarkoff make an appearance during this combat. In fact, it's clear that they have left Taisong in the middle of the night to get an early start on the hunt, and turned off the village's defenses in the process. Budd Felmer, furious that Ivana would leave early, demands that the party pack up their things and follow him: they're not wasting a second more. Proceed to *Part 2: Ferret Trail*.

PART 2: FERRET TRAIL

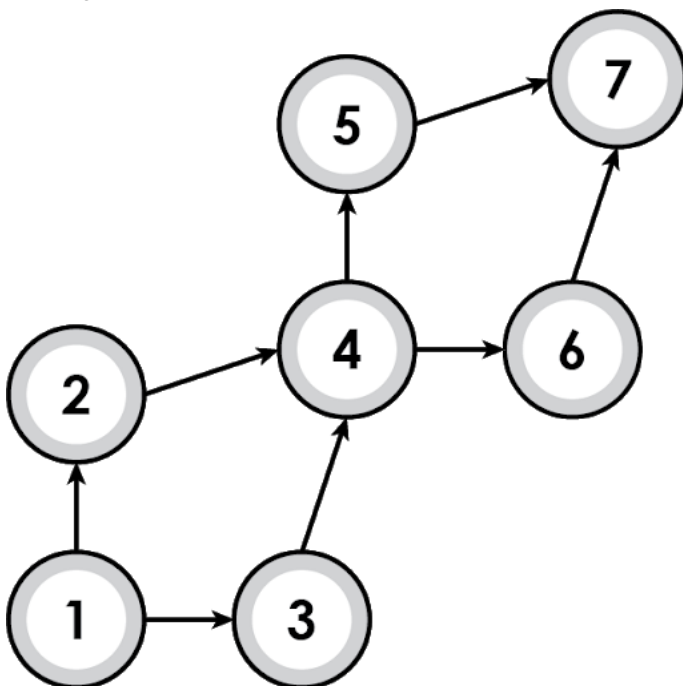
At Budd's demand, the party marches out into the jungle, machetes in hand, to close the gap between themselves and the Scale Crew, who are likely hours ahead. Each character has been given an additional hundred pounds of equipment by Budd. When beginning this chapter, read or paraphrase the following:

In the hours since you've left Taisong, the sun has risen, bringing with it a heat and humidity that makes the air feel thick around you. The mud, ever-present insects, and additional weight on your backs has already sapped your will to move forward, at least at Budd's hurried pace.

BRANCHING TRAILS

At multiple locations along this journey, the party will have to choose between different routes through the jungle, which will lead them through unique locations. These locations are as follows:

1. Roc Rock
2. Lowlands
3. Downriver
4. Poacher's Post
5. Temple of Columns
6. Wreck of the *Vorpal*
7. Big Hob's Burrow



IS BUDD FELMER INSANE?

If the players are skeptical that such a thing as a "giant space ferret" could really exist, play into this mindset and frame the adventure as Budd Felmer possibly being insane, chasing a bigfoot-like cryptid across the whole of Gaozu. In this situation, make it impossible for characters to verify any of the footprints and other signs Budd uncovers. Save the reveal of Big Hobb's reality until the moment the players enter the burrow.

To pick up a trail, have the characters make a **group Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check**. Budd participates as well, and rolls his check with a +4 bonus. If the group check beats a **DC 12**, the party finds a trail of peanut shells in front of them: clearly Gregggy Ironsmelt has gotten ahead of them. If the group check beats a **DC 14**, the party also finds a discarded tactical pouch with a broken clasp. This is the kind the Scale and Fang is equipped with, and confirms that the party is following in their footsteps. If the group check beats a **DC 16**, the party finds enormous five-toed mammalian footprints in the mud. Budd confirms it at a glance: you're on the right track. Proceed to chapter *Roc Rock*.

ROC ROCK

After traveling for most of the morning with Budd Felmer, the party comes to the base of a steep cliff, a sheer rock face, and upon it, the "Roc Rock" formation advertised in the brochures from Deep Jungle Adventures™. Read or paraphrase the following:

It's startling just how abruptly the unending jungle shifts to a vertical wall. Before you is a hundreds-foot ascent up a rocky cliff face, out of which juts a natural formation called "Roc Rock". From this perspective, the formation seems quaint, and the height of the cliff looks to be the impressive thing.

It's possible that one or more characters have the ability to ascend such a height without making an ability check. Skathári, for example, possess hooked claws which allow them to climb quite easily. Moreover, any magic or technology which grants a flight speed or climbing speed for a minute or longer can allow a creature to ascend safely. If the party can't solve this problem for everyone through a combination of magic, technology, and racial traits, Budd has packed an old-fashioned solution: a full-complement of climbing gear. Budd won't climb up alone, as it's the party's job to assist him through the jungle, so at least one person must climb with him.

Any creatures which ascend using climbing gear must make a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check**. On a failure, they slip some distance, and, careening on the rope, slam into the rock wall, taking 3d6 bludgeoning damage. Once halfway up, call for each climbing creature to make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to spot a small cave in the cliff, and the glimmer of something metallic within it. This hole in the cliff is the nest of some giant flying dinosaur, which has collected all manner of metal objects within its cliffside hollow. Chunks of adamantine metal, probably scavenged from a starship, can be seen within, as can an *arm cannon* construct graft. These adamantine plates are quite heavy, but are quite valuable: all of the adamantine here is together worth 150 credits. However, it also weighs 100 pounds. Also inside the nest are a pair of foot-wide dinosaur eggs.

To make it the rest of the way up without incident, each character climbing must make a **DC 13 Constitution check**, or take 2d6 bludgeoning damage from a climbing mishap.

VIEW FROM THE TOP

Once at the top of the Roc plateau, the characters will have a moment to rest and enjoy the view. A character with a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** will notice something while gazing out over the far side of the plateau: something huge is stirring in the trees some miles away. A character with binoculars can take a close look to see a grey and black ferret of enormous size clamoring up a slope with a particular ferret wiggle. From this distance, it could be positively adorable, but its claws can be seen to uproot a few smaller trees as it climbs. After a moment, the beast is gone.

MOVING FORWARD

From the top of Roc plateau, the party has a choice of how to proceed. The northern side of the plateau gives way to a ravine with a fast-moving river. Budd thinks this will be the fastest route, as it will surely allow the party to catch up with the Scale Crew and Greggry Ironsmelt (if he hasn't been eaten by a raptor yet). The eastern side gently descends back into the jungle, and this side is the direction in which Big Hob was most likely to travel.

Decide this direction with a **vote**. Budd participates and votes for the river. If the party chooses the eastern side, proceed to *Lowlands*. If there's a tie, or the party chooses the northern side, proceed to *Downriver*.

LOWLANDS

Descending from the plateau on the southern edge is easy enough, as a gentle slope leads down to the denser jungle below. However, the ground does become muddier, becoming difficult terrain by the time the party reaches the bottom.

Have the characters make a **group DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** when they reach the base of the plateau. On a success, they spot a **nuclear chicken** 60 feet away. On a failure, the chicken is 30 feet away before they notice it. Any creature which succeeds a **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check** can recall that a nuclear chicken is the most dangerous breed of chicken in the multiverse, as it can create a small thermonuclear explosion to deter predators. As such, it has no natural predators. When the party notices the nuclear chicken, it's already too late: the chicken has locked eyes with them, and is running kamikaze-style in their direction.

Have everyone **roll initiative**. The nuclear chicken moves 30 feet closer to the party on each of its turns (it is too light to sink into the mud, and is therefore unaffected by the difficult terrain), and uses its action to explode if it ends its turn within 5 feet of a character. The chicken also explodes if it dies. If the chicken explodes, each creature within a 60-foot radius must make a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw** or take 8d6 force damage. The explosion also leaves behind a perfect roast chicken.

If the party evades the chicken for four rounds, the chicken gives up its chase and decides to find some other creature to hassle. Alternatively,

a character within 10 feet of the nuclear chicken can use their action to make a **DC 18 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** to mollify it.

When the chase with the chicken is at last over, the party can find peanut shells on the path on which they walk. Perhaps Gregg Ironsmelt fed the chicken some peanuts, and it decided to hound the party for more?

As the sun turns orange at the horizon, the party sees a sight for sore eyes: the concrete and metal walls of civilization. Proceed to *Poacher's Post*.

DOWNRIVER

It's a steep but surefooted climb down the northern edge of the plateau and into the canyon. Flowing through this canyon is a swift river that dips and snakes its way through much of the jungle. As always, Budd has something prepared for just such a survival situation: he produces a pair of *folding boats* which each unfold into 10-foot canoes that can each seat four Medium creatures. Divide the characters up between these canoes as they choose. Then, read or paraphrase the following:

Up ahead, the river narrows between a pair of great boulders. Your canoes accelerate to that juncture, beyond which is a frothing tumult of whitewater rapids.

To brave the rapids, the characters in each canoe must choose a group ability check to overcome each obstacle they encounter. Two ability check options are provided for each obstacle, but if the players decide on a reasonable third action to avoid an obstacle, they can make a group check to do that instead. Successes or failures affect all creatures in a canoe, but not creatures in the other canoe. You can present river obstacles in order, or can determine their order randomly.

OBSTACLES

d4 Obstacle

- 1 Rocks and Logs
- 2 Vortices
- 3 Whitewater
- 4 Fork

ROCKS AND LOGS

The river ahead is littered with large rocks and great fallen trees suspended just above the water. The characters in each canoe can make a **DC 14 group Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to duck below obstacles, or a **DC 12 group Intelligence check** to plan an optimal route through them. On a failure, each character in the canoe takes 3d6 bludgeoning damage, as they're battered into rocks and tree branches.

VORTICES

A few powerful eddies churn in the river ahead. The characters in each canoe can make a **DC 14 group Strength (Athletics) check** to paddle through the eddies, or a **DC 14 group Wisdom (Survival) check** to navigate the invisible, swirling currents without being pulled into an eddy.

On a failure, a canoe capsizes. Much of the equipment the party was carrying for Budd is washed downriver and hopelessly lost. Each party member in the capsized canoe takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage from collisions with submerged rocks. At the beginning of each subsequent obstacle, every character that is adrift in the rapids can attempt a **DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check** to get back in the canoe. A character that fails to do so is considered its own separate group which automatically fails the obstacle's ability check.

WHITewater

The river accelerates even faster, and the jungle flies by in a green blur. The characters in each canoe can make a **DC 12 group Dexterity check** to balance themselves as their canoes race down the river, or a **DC 14 group Intelligence (Nature) check** to know an efficient way to slow down without capsizing. On a failure, a canoe capsizes. The effects of a capsized canoe are described in Vortices.

FORK

The river forks sharply, and the riptides attempt to pull the canoe down separate tributaries. The characters in each canoe must make a **DC 14 group Strength (Athletics) check** to drift down the same branch in the river.

On a failure of either group, the canoes are sent down different branches of the river. For the rest of this section, the canoes are increasingly separated by miles of jungle, and it will take hours

of hiking to reunite them. If one group fails, but the other succeeds, the failed group is washed far from their destination by the time the river calms. If both groups fail, determine which is washed away randomly. They will only be able to take a short rest, instead of a long rest.

The other group ends their journey within sight of Poacher's Post where they can dry out and rest for the evening. In the morning, both groups are reunited. Proceed to *Poacher's Post*.

POACHER'S POST

Just as the sun begins to set behind distant mountains, the party sees a welcome sight: the concrete and metals walls of a settlement. Characters which read the Deep Jungle Adventures™ brochure understand this to be Poacher's Post, a ghost town in the jungle. Read or paraphrase the following:

Concrete walls jut out of the jungle in front of you. Much like Taisong when you left, the electrical defenses on the walls are off, but worse still, its metal has rusted and its walls are choked with vines. The jungle is reclaiming this slice of civilization, but for now, it may be a safe place to rest.

In the safety of this settlement, the characters can find a building with sturdy doors, within which they can take a long rest. This is also a chance to take stock and wait for characters which have become separated from the rest of the party.

Additionally, when the characters arrive, anyone with a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** detects the smell of grilling meat. Following the smell, they find that **Greggy Ironsmelt** has made camp near the walls of the post, and is grilling some sort of critter over a campfire. Greggy seems like an entirely different dwarf out here: he's lucid, canny, and somewhat sullen. The constant danger of the jungle focuses his addled mind. Greggy is excited by the prospect of a good hunt, and a race, no less. However, he's rather dismayed that Big Hob's trail has taken him towards the *Vorpal's* wreck. In a period of his past which he won't elaborate on, he spent time on the *Vorpal*, and hates seeing it in its current state. Greggy spends the evening singing old dwarven songs, such as "Stones, Rocks, and Stones" and "The Comely She-Goblin".

THE MANTICORE MOTHER

If a character stole a dinosaur egg from Roc Roc, the egg's mother, a pterodactyl-manticore (using **manticore** stats) arrives at Poacher's Post. The manticore isn't highly intelligent, but can speak Common, and will demand the egg's return. She can smell exactly who has taken the egg. If the character can return the intact egg, the manticore will bite the character, then take the egg in her claws and fly away. If they can't or won't return the egg, she will viciously attack the creature that stole it, only fleeing once the creature is dead.

A character which spends some time searching Poacher's Post for supplies can make a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to uncover two hidden *potions of healing* and a rusty, but functional concussion rifle. Additionally, they find old documents and travel brochures which identify this settlement by its proper name, Guang.

MUDDY DECISIONS

When the party awakes the following morning, a steady drizzle of rain throughout the night has made Big Hob's tracks through the jungle much harder to follow. A few ferret tracks near Poacher's Post are easily identifiable, but they become shallower and less distinct further away. However, the party does find much more recent tracks: humanoid footprints heading off in two different directions. With a successful **group DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check**, a character can determine that the path angling north belongs to the Scale Crew, whereas the path angling east belongs to Greggy Ironsmelt, dragging

STONES, ROCKS, AND STONES

Sung to the tune of "I'm a little teapot", this dwarven shanty is the first Greggy sings:

*All I've got are stones, rocks and stones in my mine.
Gold would be nice, and silver would be fine.
I'd love some mithral or adamantium!
A vein of platinum would fetch a hefty sum!
Gold would be nice, and silver would be fine,
But all I've got are stone, rocks and stones in my mine.*

a makeshift sled of provisions behind him. Budd participates in the group check as well, and rolls his check with a +4 bonus. Moreover, Budd reckons that the eastward path might lead to the *Vorpal*, a sight he's crossed many times in this jungle.

If the party chooses to follow Scale Crew north, proceed to *City of Columns*. If the party decides to follow Gregg Ironsmelt east, proceed to the *Wreck of the Vorpal*.

A VERY PERSISTENT BUG

Use this optional event as the characters proceed to the next location. Please read or paraphrase the following:

Every few seconds for the last several minutes, a loud BZZZZZZ has molested your ears. An tenacious and infuriating insect has decided to make your life hell, and it has succeeded with flying colors. This is your greatest challenge yet.

The character with the lowest Wisdom score gets harassed by a persistent insect. It can attempt a **melee weapon attack** (AC 20) to swat the bug away. On a miss, the bug moves to the creature with the next lowest Wisdom score and similarly annoys that creature, and so on. A creature which rolls a 1 on their attack roll takes 1d4 psychic damage as they have a tantrum. The DM is encouraged to pester their players with buzzing sounds during this event.

TEMPLE OF COLUMNS

As the party proceeds through the jungle, read or paraphrase the following:

Emerging out of the jungle, choked by vines and riddled with small trees, is a colossal ziggurat of stone, hundreds of feet high. Every block in the structure is intricately carved with decorative frescos, but the structure's whole is weathered by the passing of millennia and the jungle's oppressive rain. Thanks to years of watching holo-films set in similar ancient temples, you get a bad feeling about this.

From above, it would be impossible to see the ziggurat with any clarity, but from the ground, the monument is obvious. The entrance to the ziggurat

must have once had a staircase of wood, for the great archway is suspended nearly 15 feet off the ground. A climbing rope and a series of muddy footprints ascend the blocks leading to the entrance.

OUTSIDE THE ZIGGURAT

If the party has not lost any of Budd's gear, they can use their climbing gear to ascend the ziggurat's exterior. The view is stunning, and reveals the wreck of the *Vorpal* some distance to the southeast. From this vantage, they can also see the ziggurat's largest image, built to be seen from above: a gargantuan carving of a ferret snakes its way up the ziggurat's sides and embraces the monument's peak in its teeth.

ZIGGURAT ENTRANCE

Inside, the structure is suspended by great pillars in every direction, which cast innumerable long shadows when hit by a flashlight. Catching the light of the entrance, the party finds a paper note, weighed down by a stone. It reads as follows:

Dear Bud and the company of misfits,

I can only assume you're following in our footsteps, since you'll never outpace us, so I'd advise you to give up now. If you're reading this, we've already tracked the quarry through the temple and to its burrow on the far side. Don't bother catching up—you'll only embarrass yourselves!

Love, Miss Ivana Zarkoff

In addition to the mocking note, the entryway contains a poison dart trap which triggers when 20 or more pounds of weight is placed on its pressure plate. A creature searching for traps can detect it with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check**, noticing that one specific brick has been avoided by the Scale Crew's muddy footprints. If triggered, the trap releases four darts. Each dart makes a **ranaged attack with a +5 bonus** against a random target within 10 feet of the pressure plate (vision is irrelevant to this attack roll). A target that is hit takes 1d4 piercing damage and must succeed on a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw**, taking 1d10 poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Budd will slap anyone across the face that mentions the possibility of rolling boulder traps.

Three staircases lead away from the entryway: one down to a central chamber, and two up to either side of a wraparound balcony overlooking the chamber. At the far side of the central chamber is an exit from the ziggurat, matching the entryway.

BALCONY

The upper balcony is a long 5-foot ledge, flanked by its own perimeter of pillars, allowing only fleeting glances at the central chamber beneath. Read or paraphrase the following:

On each side of the narrow balcony corridor are spheres made of bronze, which are delicately embossed with the exaggerated near-human faces. Each sphere rotates to reveal a different expression on the back.

Like everywhere else in the ziggurat, the walkway is trapped. Halfway down the walkway is a well-concealed explosive planted by the Scale Crew to slow down the characters. A character which makes a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check** notices the distant glimmer of a laser sight on a pillar across the room, the end point of the explosive's laser trip wire. A creature that has noticed the explosive can find it and disable it with a **DC 11 Intelligence (Technology) check**. On a failed check, the explosive is set off. Each creature within 10 feet of the explosive must make a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw**. On a failed save, a creature takes 2d6 fire damage, and is thrown off the balcony into the central chamber, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall. On a successful save, a creature hides behind a pillar, only takes 1d6 fire damage.

The orbs on the balcony are randomly rotated between a "joyful" and "sorrowful" expression. A character which makes a **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check** will discern that the "joyful" faces are more likely wincing in pain.

If all the faces are oriented to be "joyful", a number of 5-foot wide pit traps will open beneath each orb, dropping each creature in front of one to the central chamber. Each creature which falls must make a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

If all the faces are oriented to be "sorrowful", an audible clunk can be heard from within the wall. A character which makes a successful **DC 14**

Wisdom (Perception) check detects the location of a secret door, which has just been unlocked. The door leads to a small 5-foot square room, containing ancient funeral urns of all shapes and sizes. Many contain wine, now rendered undrinkable by the passage of centuries, but others contain copper and silver baubles. If all of these are collected, the total can be sold for 200 credits.

CENTRAL CHAMBER

Read or paraphrase the following for characters which proceed to the ziggurat's center:

The central chamber of the ziggurat is almost untouched by the march of time. Vibrant pigments stain the columns, and immaculately-carved reliefs decorate the walls. Then, a bleached white skull meets your gaze. Dozens of skeletons come into view at the chamber's center, around an altar, upon which rests a golden idol. At first, you think it depicts an immense serpent, but you quickly realize that it, in fact, represents a ferret.

The two-foot tall ferret idol is easily worth 3,000 credits, but characters will need to be cautious to retrieve it, for it is surrounded by layers of traps.

Firstly, the floor around the altar, extending across the entire central chamber, is covered in multicolored tiles, each of which springs a spear trap from the ground. The rules for these tiles are laid out quite clearly in an alien language on the frescos, but a creature must make a **DC 20 Intelligence check** to understand them. Any creature which can read Avia-Ra has advantage on this check, as the languages are similar. The safe tiles in the outermost row are red, in the next row are blue and green, and in the innermost row are gold. All other tiles will trigger a spear trap. When triggered, the spear makes a **melee attack with a +5 bonus** at a creature within the door frame. A target that is hit takes 2d8 piercing damage. The spear instantly retracts.

Secondly, creatures which fly or climb on the pillars will be subject to a number of razor-sharp trip wires threaded between them. A climbing or flying creature with a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** notices them and can avoid damage. Any other creature takes 2d8 slashing damage and must land.

The first creature to touch the idol must make a **DC 14 Constitution saving throw**, taking 4d8 necrotic damage, or half as much on a successful save. This trap can be bypassed by touching the idol only with a thick cloth or welding gloves.

If the ferret idol is removed from the altar, or the party leaves the central chamber, proceed to “Escape!”

ESCAPE!

A final magical trap awaits anyone who takes the idol. Even if the characters practice restraint, **Trace** from the Scale Crew lingers behind columns at the ziggurat’s exit, ready to activate the trap with a well-placed concussion rifle shot. If the characters proceed to the exit without the idol, an echoing shot rings out, knocking the idol to the floor.

Regardless of how the idol is removed, six seconds after it leaves the altar, many of the stones supporting the great columns in this room crumble into sand. Read or paraphrase the following:

The temple trembles as enormous columns come crashing down in all directions. The dust and deafening noise from breaking stone envelop the quickly-collapsing ziggurat. You can see a faint glimmer: the exit! If only you can get there in time!

Each creature must make a **DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check** to outrun the series of falling pillars and a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check** to navigate the chaos. Any character with a base movement speed of higher than 30 feet makes the Athletics check with advantage. A creature which fails one of the checks must make a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 3d8 bludgeoning damage from falling rubble on a failure, or half as much on a success. A creature which fails both checks arrives at the exit a fraction of a second too late: a great column lands in front of it, blocking them in as the ceiling collapses above them. This creature is reduced to 0 hit points, but does not die. They can be retrieved with 2 hours of digging through the rubble.

If the players saw the *Vorpal* from the ziggurat, they can choose to explore there. If so, proceed to *Wreck of the Vorpal*. Otherwise, Budd finds a clump of Big Hob’s foul-smelling hair near the ziggurat’s exit, indicating that they’re close. In this case, proceed to *Part 3: Big Hob’s Burrow*.

WRECK OF THE VORPAL

As the party follows Greggry Ironsmelt, they soon find themselves looking down on the wreckage of a dwarven starship. Read or paraphrase the following:

As the trees part, you can see the great, angular wreckage of dwarven engineering embedded in a hillside. The jungle has done its best to scale the crashed ship and reclaim it as its own, but the stern structure refuses to let the vines choke its upper half. However, the rain and weather has taken its toll: the metal is tarnished, and one of the engines that was suspended in the sky has fallen off completely.

With a **DC 12 Intelligence (History) check**, a character can determine that the *Vorpal* is a dwarven anvil, a frigate-class ship of very old design. Like all dwarven ships, its construction is legendarily rugged, which is likely the sole reason it could withstand this impact in mostly one piece. A character that makes a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices claw marks on the hull; Big Hob has definitely been here, and Budd reckons that it might have found a way to burrow inside.

The entire ship is pitched at an angle, such that its nose (if it still has one) is buried and its engines dangle high in the air. All of the ship’s normal entrances are buried by the crash or sealed tight, but a sizable hole has been welded at ground level by some intrepid explorer in recent years. Unfortunately, this entryway leads directly into a 30-foot deep elevator shaft without an accessible ladder. Most doors are sealed with emergency bulkheads, and predictably, the ship is devoid of any sort of power. The characters can make a **group DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check** to repel down to an open door one floor down, allowing them to proceed to the cargo bay. If the group check beats a **DC 14**, and the party has not lost Budd’s gear, they can secure a grappling hook one floor above. The party can choose to climb up, arriving at the engine room, or climb down to the cargo bay. If the party fails the check, the character with the lowest check slips and is battered on the wall, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage. They can then reattempt the group check.

ENGINE ROOM

The players reach a hallway that slopes steeply upward to a pair of opened bulkhead doors. Inside, they find a multi-tiered room. Read or paraphrase the following:

All sides of this tiered room, which is illuminated by a great hole in the back wall, is filled with rusted pipes and machinery. The left wall has long been blackened by flames, and much of the machinery on the back wall fell free of the ship with the engine. Then, you hear a clattering of rusty bolts and scrap metal.

A malfunctioning **multi-task automaton** (MTA) staggers to its feet and approaches the party. Any creature with proficiency in Insight can recognize that the MTA is friendly but clearly damaged. It addresses the party with a hollow, mechanical greeting, and will answer questions posed to it with preprogrammed responses. However, due to long-accumulating data corruption, it only retains a few phrases, and has random words interspersed throughout them. Use only the following for the MTA's responses, replacing words in brackets randomly:

- Welcome to the DHC [behavior] *Vorpal*, active crew 4 [notebook]. We will be taking [program] off shortly; please proceed [agree] to your quarters for [despair] the journey.
- My designation is Engineering [ratio] Unit 14. Pleased to [judgement] meet you.
- The engine room is undergoing [theory] minor repairs. Please mind [hiccup] our mess.
- This ship is among [precision] the fastest in the [jurisdiction] dwarven exploration fleet.
- Worry not, there are [disaster] SEVENTEEN CRITICAL PROBLEMS with [page] the ship's Dark Matter [investigation] engine. We'll be flying [ambition] in no time!
- Good question! I'll ask [superior] the captain about that!
- Yes, Commander!
- No, Commander!

The MTA will heed any dwarven character, or anyone with a beard, as a dwarven officier, and will assist them in any way it can. It's no longer fit for combat,

but it can direct characters around the ship, carry items, and so forth.

To search the engine room for supplies, the characters can make a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check**. On a success, they find a pair of wrenchinators of fine dwarven make, a few ancient and undrinkable bottles of dwarven stout, and a concussion grenade hidden away in a toolbox. From the vantage of the engine room, the party can enjoy a marvelous vista of the jungle. Nestled among the trees, they can see a hidden ziggurat, the temple of columns.

From the engine room, the characters can open a hatch down to the cargo bay, or, if they have not lost Budd's gear, they can crowbar a door open to proceed to the crew quarters.

CARGO BAY

When the crew enters the cargo bay, read or paraphrase the following:

Jumping out of the darkness with wild eyes, Gregggy Ironsmelt waves frantically and shushes everyone. He produces a quadcorder from his pocket which emulates the characteristic ticking sound of a giger counter. He gestures beyond a large crate, where a sickening green glow illuminates the pitch black room.

The crew finds **Gregggy Ironsmelt**, who has armed himself with a dwarven-style battleaxe. In the cargo bay, a **radioactive goo** is slowly devouring the contents of one of the crates. The party can slip past the goo by climbing over a series of crates with a **DC 14 group Dexterity (Stealth) check**. Budd and Gregggy participate in this check, and make their checks with a +2 and +0, respectively. If the party fails, or if they alert the goo deliberately, it moves closer to the party and attacks. Furthermore, it relinquishes its grasp on two hostile, malfunctioning **multi-task automatons** (each of which have AC 13 and 20 HP) which also attack.

The cargo bay is loaded with components for the MTAs found elsewhere on the ship. Sadly, these automatons are a very old model, obsolete nowadays by any standard, so their parts are essentially worthless. A creature which succeeds a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** to search the cargo bay can find a shipment of antique dwarven

APOCRYPHAL DWARF FACTS

Greggy will insist following dwarf facts are absolutely true, and will tell listless stories to prove each of them.

- All dwarven babies have beards.
- The word “rocket” comes from the earliest dwarven spacecraft, which were engine-mounted boulders
- Dwarves are more closely related to whales than humans.
- Dwarves were historically named for their emotions, but too many Grumpies became confusing.
- Only dwarves can see the color “jacinth”.
- A halfling with a beard is, legally, a dwarf.

weaponry, marked with the insignia for DD&D, a company of artifact collectors. The shipment contains six daggers, a greatsword, and a suit of scale mail armor. The weaponry isn’t especially valuable, but might be desirable for a character wishing to use a more medieval approach to combat. If a character specifically searches for hidden compartments in the cargo bay, they can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to find an antimatter carbine smuggled away.

If the party sneaks through the cargo bay, they reach the crew quarters. If they defeated the radioactive goo and the automatons, they can also find a ladder up to the engine room. Greggy happily accompanies the party as they explore the *Vorpall*, chiming in with unprompted, apocryphal facts about dwarven history whenever nobody else is speaking. Such facts include “Did you know dwarves invented the triangle?” and “The third dwarven king drank a hundred gallons of ale a day, and was killed by the eventual hangover.”

CREW QUARTERS

The characters proceed deeper into the ship, passing any doors which are secured with the heavy dwarven bulkheads. Soon, they arrive at a wide hallway, possibly a common area, with rows of doors on both sides. Read or paraphrase the following:

Before the catastrophic crash-landing, this room might have been comfortable. A few couches have been thrown haphazardly to the bow-facing wall, but two hammocks still hang precisely where they were. Judging by the still-intact dartboard, the crew of the *Vorpall* were just as obsessed with darts as the Grax’s Guys currently are. Maybe it’s a fad that skips a few hundred years at a time?

The remnants of the crew quarters are a safe place to take a short rest. Most of the doors lining this area are sealed tight, as the quarters themselves acted as escape pods and locked bulkheads behind them when they ejected. Four rooms remain untouched:

Two were evidently unoccupied, sporting neatly-tucked bunk beds and uncluttered floors. Another room seems to have been occupied by a vect of some sort. The beds in this room have been completely removed, but a pile of bolts, gears, wires, and other components can be found haphazardly scattered on the floor. Anyone who searches the room can also find an old, but functional *arm blade* construct graft.

The final room is locked, but not behind a bulkhead door. It could be opened if a character can make a **DC 13 Intelligence (Technology) check** to power the door with a makeshift power source, such as a blaster’s arcane battery. Once powered, the door’s access panel can be hacked with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Data) check**, or opened with the correct password (14-20-15, incidentally given by Greggy in Scrimshaw Lodge if any of the characters played along with his delusion). Inside, the room looks more lived-in than the others, containing dwarf-sized clothing, a few empty bottles of ale, empty cans of food, and so forth. With a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check**, a character can find a small hidden cache underneath the bed containing a pack of playing cards, 100 credits, and several vintage photographs of young dwarf and vect crewmen, one of whom might be a much younger Greggy. However, by the time the characters have searched this room, they find that Greggy has moved on, and indeed, exited the *Vorpall* entirely.

When the party is finished resting and searching the rooms, they can proceed down a long hallway to the Dark Matter core.

DARK MATTER CORE

Traveling downwards, further into the bowels of the ship, the players reach the room housing the ship's Dark Matter engine. Please read or paraphrase the following:

You enter a nearly spherical room, reinforced on all sides with supportive beams and other specialized equipment. In any other ship, this would be the humming heart containing the Dark Matter drive, an engine so volatile that, if it were ever damaged or deactivated, the entire ship would be reduced to nothing in an instant. However, you instead see a mess of torn wires and scratch marks, and a wide tunnel through the wall and into the dirt outside.

Somehow, the Dark Matter engine has been removed from the ship wholesale. Budd instantly recognizes the claw marks and the size of the hole as belonging to Big Hob. The characters can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** to conjecture that giant space ferrets, like regular ferrets, might like to collect interesting things and hide them away; the still-humming engine might have seemed particularly interesting to the ferret. However, that would mean that, wherever you find Big Hob, it's housing a bomb nearby.

The party can follow the tunnel to the surface. Proceed to *Part 3: Big Hob's Burrow*. Alternatively, they can travel to explore the ziggurat visible from the engine room. In this case, proceed to *The Temple of Columns*.

PART 3: BIG HOB'S BURROW

After braving the dangers of the alien jungle, the party stands within sight of the entrance to Big Hob's burrow, a 10-foot hole in a hillside nearly half a mile away, made obvious by the giant ferret tracks leading into and out of it. Between the party and the giant space ferret, however, is a long stretch of muddy jungle, a steep hill, and importantly, the Scale Crew, who are eyeing a map of the surrounding area, until the party comes into view. Read or paraphrase the following:

"Well, well, well! Look what the giant space ferret dragged in!" chuckles Drak. "We were sure something out in the jungle had already eaten you all. I suppose you got here just in time to watch our client catch the beast, and for us to get paid."

The half-dragon stands triumphantly, shouldering a wicked-looking blaster and grinning at his good fortune thus far. Ivana Zarkoff adjusts her monocle and smirks. Meanwhile, a couple members of the Scale Crew, especially Trace, shuffle around uncomfortably in place, unsure whether or not things will turn ugly.

The Scale Crew has no intention of battling the party for the right of hunting Big Hob. Ivana Zarkoff glibly admits that she wasn't sure she was on pace to beat the characters here, but ascertains that the hunt belongs to her, since she got here first. The party is free to argue this point in a number of ways, and the situation might evolve in any of the following directions:

- **Shootout!** In the event of a firefight, the Scale Crew protects Ivana Zarkoff and makes a break for the entrance to Big Hob's burrow. If they have to fight, they would prefer their client gets to the burrow first, as per their contract. Proceed to *The Green Mile*.
- **A Friendly Challenge.** The character might challenge Ivana and the Scale Crew to some sort of contest to decide who might try their luck at Big Hob first. Ivana will happily accept such an arrangement, so long as a member of the Scale Crew can perform on her behalf. If the Scale Crew loses, however, Ivana orders them to make

a run for the burrow. Proceed to *The Green Mile*.

- **The Party Acquiesces.** In the event that the party simply allows the Scale Crew to go ahead and hunt Big Hob, (perhaps on the assumption that the Scale Crew might lose to Big Hob), Budd Felmer loudly grumbles, and then, quite suddenly, offers Ivana a bottle of champagne, a token of her victory. As sincerely as he can, Budd says that he was saving the bottle for after the hunt, but thinks Ivana deserves it, as the superior hunter. Evidently touched by this friendly gesture, Ivana accepts and the Scale Crew heads down below. Once the Scale Crew is out of sight, Budd cheerfully reveals that the bottle contained concentrated ferret pheromone—they'll get mauled the moment they enter the burrow. Proceed to *Into the Burrow*.

If the argument evolves in any other way, remember that Ivana and Budd are more concerned about being first than being alive, and either will run blindly to the burrow, triggering the events of *The Green Mile*. In any situation that the characters best Ivana and Scale Crew without a footrace, skip *The Green Mile* and proceed to *Into the Burrow*. If Ivana or a Scale Crew member is reduced to 0 hit points, they are safely teleported away with a special emergency device called an *escape rope*.

THE GREEN MILE

Ivana Zarkoff and the Scale Crew are well aware that the short trip to the Big Hob's burrow is far more dangerous than it seems. The vines encircling trees and weaving through the mud belong to an alien plant nicknamed a "garrote root", which can be quite deadly if agitated. If any creature runs near the entrance to Big Hob's burrow, the garrote root awakens, and the journey to the burrow becomes a frenzied, muddy chase.

In order to make it to the burrow, the characters will have to make a series of group ability checks and play through the chase in four stages. If at least half the group succeeds a group check, the whole group succeeds. If the characters fail a group ability check, they suffer the consequences listed in the stages below. It is encouraged that the GM be liberal with creative tactics, giving out advantage or Inspiration to any character which uses a clever approach to navigating obstacles.

STAGE ONE: GARROTE ROOT

Purple roots surge up out of the ground and attempt to ensnare everyone participating in the chase. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or (Sleight of Hand) check** to slip the roots' grasp or a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check** to tear through the roots and continue running. Any character that chooses to burn the roots by dealing any amount of fire damage automatically succeeds this check.

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result instead takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage, as they are strangled by the roots. They have disadvantage on the next ability check.

STAGE TWO: QUICKSAND

The muddy jungle floor up ahead is quicksand! Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** to identify and avoid the quicksand pits, or a **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to swing from low-hanging branches to avoid the quicksand.

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result is removed from the next stage of the chase.

STAGE THREE: SPIKED FERNS

A wall of leafy vegetation stands in the way: little do the characters know that much of it is made of spiked ferns bearing needle-like protrusions on every leaf. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check** to identify and avoid the spiked ferns, or a **DC 10 Constitution check** to endure the dozens of pinpricks.

If the group ability check is a failure, the two characters with the lowest personal result each take 1d10 piercing damage from the plants.

STAGE FOUR: THE HILL

The last obstacle remaining is a simple, muddy hill, steeper and more slippery than anticipated. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check** to power up the hill, or a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** to find the sturdiest footholds for the running climb.

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result has disadvantage on the next initiative check they make, as they are the last to plod their way up the hill.

AFTER THE CHASE

Regardless of how poorly the characters performed in the race, the Scale Crew performed worse. By the time the characters reach the mouth of Big Hob's burrow, the members of the Scale Crew are entangled in vines, sinking in quicksand, struggling through thorny plants, or sliding miserably to the bottom of the hill. Ivana screams at them furiously. For all their Scale and Fang training, a poorly-planned dash through the most dangerous part of the jungle is better left to Grax's Guys.

However, if the characters failed three or more of the group checks, **Ivana Zarkoff** and **Drak Garfreckt** each reach the mouth of the burrow at the same time as the party, and attack. Neither character will lethally attack, and both will flee if either is reduced below 10 hit points. If the pair manage to defeat the party, they decide, injured and exhausted, that it's best to try Big Hob another time. Proceed to *Big Hob Escapes*. Otherwise, proceed to *Into the Burrow*.

INTO THE BURROW

At long last, the party descends into the lair of Big Hob, a muddy tunnel which gradually widens, as the air becomes ever more pungent. The tunnel is clearly burrowed out by the colossal rodent, and clumps of its hair can be found along the ceiling and floor. Read or paraphrase the following:

The tunnel leads you into a dark, spacious den, filled with hundreds of glittering objects. It would seem Big Hob has a penchant for collecting anything interesting it finds, ferreting away its treasures here. In the back of the room, a hulking mass of grey and black fur curls on itself, heaving slightly with the calm rhythm of slumber.

Big Hob's den is a roughly 30-foot diameter space, with a 20-foot ceiling. The area of the outermost 5 feet of the den is difficult terrain, as Big Hob has collected metal plates, bits of fencing, and other animal curiosities at the periphery.



Big Hob sleeps soundly, curled around a metallic sphere that hums gently. Any creature which makes a **DC 12 Intelligence (Technology) check** realizes this is a Dark Matter core taken from the Vorpel, an object that will explode in a huge radius if damaged. It's a miracle the ferret brought it here in one piece!

With a **DC 13 Intelligence (Perception) check**, a character can identify one additional creature near Big Hob: a smaller, but still Large-sized giant space ferret with albino cream-colored fur, which Budd Felmer promptly dubs "Little Jill". For some players, this might change the situation entirely. If the characters can make a **DC 15 group Charisma (Persuasion) check**, they can convince Budd Felmer to abandon the hunt, and leave the space ferrets in peace.

Each creature that moves within the den must make a **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check** or wake **Big Hob**. The moment Big Hob awakens, **roll initiative**. Little Jill burrows into a small hole until the combat is over. This encounter can resolve in one of the following ways:

- If a character reduces Big Hob to 0 hit points, proceed to *Big Hob Captured*.
- If the party is defeated or a character deals more than 20 damage to the Dark Matter core, proceed to *Defeat*.
- If the party convinced Budd Felmer to spare Big Hob, proceed to *Big Hob Escapes*.

BIG HOB CAPTURED

Budd Felmer sprints into the fray with a large electromagnetic trap, which he slaps on the giant space ferret's paw, locking the beast to the ground with a magnetic pull. Read or paraphrase the following:

Budd Felmer triumphantly stands over the defeated space ferret, which towers over him, even while laying flat. With a flourish, Budd produces a trio of holo-spheres to commemorate his victory. The party with him strikes two serious poses in front of the ferret, then a silly pose for the third.

When the pictures are done, Budd collects his things, deactivates the trap, and makes way to the surface. The days of hunting amounted to little more than a few minutes of fanfare. On this, Budd will cock an eyebrow and remark "It's more about the journey. And the braggin' rights."

The burrow contains adamantite scrap from the *Vorpal* worth 500 credits.

The party has a safe and unremarkable journey back to Taisong, their ship, and eventually Grax HQ. As the party's ship, *The Gittin'*, pulls into the Grax's space port, Grax himself is waiting to shake the party's hands. Apparently, the holo-spheres of Big Hob were a big hit around the office and Grax, true to form, had t-shirts made of the big moment. He hands each member of the party a commemorative t-shirt (into which Grax's picture has been inserted, as if he were there) and 150 credits.

BIG HOB ESCAPES

With the party's encouragement, Budd Felmer has had a change of heart about hunting Big Hob. Read or paraphrase the following:

Budd Felmer squats on a low stone outside the burrow and lights his pipe contemplatively. He muses aloud to anyone who listens, but mostly to himself:

"Any hunter worth his salt knows that there's critters ya' just don't hunt. Maybe they're too nasty, or too few, or maybe it just ain't worth it for a trophy and a photo..." Budd drifts off, then snuffles a bit, "I reckon this one just ain't worth it."

But cracking a smile and chomping on his pipe, he remarks, "But I suppose everyone's gotta have that one that got away! I can add Little Jill to that list too."

The party has a safe and unremarkable journey back to Taisong, their ship, and eventually Grax HQ. Jimball Hundwig meets the party inside Grax HQ and congratulates you on not dying. He also bitterly mentions that the party making it back alive means

he lost a bet. He hands each member of the party 125 credits, and a little gold star sticker reading "I Didn't Die!"

DEFEAT

The party is battered, bruised, and knocked unconscious by the space ferret. When they finally regain consciousness, they're back in Grax's HQ. The big green man himself, Grax, chuckles when he sees the characters bandaged and in bed, explaining that he had a team nearby just in case the "big ol' marmoset" got the better of them. Each member of the party gets 100 credits, a shower, and a well-deserved week off.



CURSE OF THE ASTROMO

A DEEP SPACE SURVIVAL HORROR ADVENTURE
FOR 6TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

WRITTEN BY DONATHIN FRYE

GRAX'S CLUB

CURSE OF THE ASTROMO

INTRODUCTION

Galactically renowned Starball coach Chuck Hankerton felt his heart pound furiously as he stumbled through the corridor, smearing his bloodstained hands along a wall. The Astromo's flickering red hazard lights barely illuminated the metallic hall enough for Chuck to see the doorway at the end. He knew the Creature could appear at any moment, seemingly out of thin air. He knew his team wasn't his team anymore, not really. He knew there was only one place he might be able to hide, where no one would know to look for him.

Chuck heard a whistling hiss from the gunner deck behind him and began to sprint towards the bridge. "Oy! Oy! What a pain in the NECK!" called out the thing that used to be Terry Tillerman, the best offensive guard in the league, followed by something that sounded like a young girl's giggle. And then another sharp, almost musical hiss.

Chuck didn't look back. The old man kept running, averting his eyes, trying not to look at the corpses of the kids he'd trained to be star athletes. When he reached the overlook to the Astromo's bridge, he tripped haphazardly down the stairs. Chuck hit the deck below hard, felt something pop in his hip and a sharp pain shoot up his spine. Wheezing, he dragged himself to a small hidden hydraulic panel in the floor, tapped three times in just the right spots to cause it to open, and dove headfirst into a cramped smuggler's hole.

The panel shut silently above Chuck, leaving him alone in the dark, buried neck deep in hundreds of sticky, empty candy bar wrappers. He was safe. And hungry. And utterly alone.

Chuck spat out a candy bar wrapper that he'd inhaled during his desperate dive and muttered under his breath, "I'm gettin' too old for this ship."

BACKGROUND

The second-rate mercenary company Grax's Guys for Cheap has come upon hard times, despite its members' recent contracts and exploits. Grax himself

is deep in gambling debt and has a lot riding on one possible fix to his financial woes: a very large bet on the *Alluvian Astromos* in the team's upcoming game against the *Scale and Fang Talons* in the Galactic Starball League Championship game.

Unfortunately for Grax, the *Astromos*' ship has gone missing near the border of a Dead Magic Zone in space. There's a small contract to rescue the stranded players, but no contact has been made with the ship and Grax has no idea what sort of situation he is sending his mercenaries into.

What Grax doesn't know is that a master space vampire has infiltrated the Astromo. The Galactic Starball League has kept secret its widespread abuse of compounds derived from space vampire blood, but rarely, if ever, is there a serious outbreak of space vampirism to cover up. Unfortunately for them, the undead *Astromos* won't be playing in the big game: their only concerns now are an unquenchable thirst for brain juice and inflicting horrible puns and dad jokes on their unfortunate victims.

OVERVIEW

Curse of the Astromo is an adventure for 6th-level characters, and is the second in a series of adventures centered on Grax's Guys for Cheap. In it, the characters investigate a derelict ship belonging to the *Alluvian Astromos*, a professional sports team scheduled to play in the upcoming Galactic Starball Championship. What they find leads them on a race against time to prevent a calamity at the championship game, presented in four parts.

Prelude: Grax HQ lets characters get to know their employer and workplace through a chaotic game of Dart Gun Assassin before the adventure properly begins. If playing this adventure as part of a larger Grax's Guys campaign, it's recommended you let the players explore Grax's headquarters and return between every individual adventure.

In *Part One: Exploring the Astromo*, the characters board the derelict ship, the *Astromo*, and meet the local artificial intelligence MAH-MAH 9000. Their investigation of the mystery behind the

ship reveals the terrible fate that befell its Starball team: they were all hideously murdered and are beginning to rise from the dead as cheesy space vampires with an endless hunger for brain juice. To escape the cursed vessel, they must first repair the *Astromo's* power and reach its bridge to unseal its blast doors.

In *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, the characters meet the ship's sole survivor: Chuck Hankerton, the team's coach. On their return from the bridge, the party has their first encounter with a terrifying bat-like monstrosity on the bridge of the ship. Together, they survive MAH-MAH 9000's attacks, hoards of space vampires, and being dogged relentlessly by the unstoppable vampiric monstrosity that is hunting them to escape the *Astromo* alive.

In *Part Three: The Final Stand*, the party returns to their own ship only to find that it has a new passenger: the adorable master vampire behind the attack on the *Astromo*. As the rival mercenary crew Scale and Fang bears down on the characters with its flagship the *Baldrin*, they party make a decision to either hand the master space vampire over to their rivals, destroy it and try to collect the bounty on it for themselves, or protect the Master from Scale and Fang.

KEY CHARACTERS

The following nonplayer characters feature prominently in this adventure.

GRAX GRRAXE (HE/HIM)

The party's employer and head of Grax's Guys for Cheap, Grax Grraxe, is a fat, well-humored orc with an eyepatch and a thick orcish accent. Around fifty years ago, Grax decided to leave the Warzone and all its general unpleasantness to found Grax's Guys, a low-to-mid-tier mercenary organization, which bills itself as being all-purpose. True to form, Grax branded it after himself, and his face can be seen on billboards, company mugs, and the occasional t-shirt.

However, over the last few years, GGFC has lost a lot of customers to their closest rival, Scale and Fang Inc. Nothing perterbs Grax so much as this rivalry, and in particular, that he's losing to the mercenary company owned by Garfreckt, an eternal dragon who Grax considers to be a bit of a jerk.

CHUCK HANKERTON (HE/HIM)

Chuck Hankerton is the winningest coach in Starball League history. He's trained zeroes to heroes his entire life, but his team, the *Alluvian Astromos*, haven't won a championship game in ten years. He blames Garfreckt the eternal dragon and owner of rival team, the *Scale and Fang Talons*, for his unlucky streak. Chuck believes the *Talons* have been cheating, but he has never been able to prove it. Old, gruff, past his prime, and with an uncontrollable addiction to candy, Chuck knows that he doesn't have many chances left to prove that he is still the best coach in the 'verse.

MAH-MAH 9000 (SHE/THEY)

MAH-MAH 9000 is the artificial intelligence core that runs the *Astromo's* automated systems. MAH-MAH 9000 has a calm, matronly voice, but until recently has never appeared to have much of a personality of their own. Since the crew of the *Astromo* were killed and raised from the dead as space vampires, however, MAH-MAH 9000 has developed a much more macabre attitude. The more her programming becomes corrupted, the more sinister her outlook on the futile lives of organic creatures becomes.

THE CREATURE (THEY/THEM)

The Creature that haunts the *Astromo* was once the Starball team's captain, Fiari Gustafson. Inflicted with vampirism by the master space vampire, Fiari was the first of the crew to transform into a space vampire, and infected many of their teammates. Their brain juice fueled Fiara's transformation into a stage two space vampire, capable of controlling lesser space vampires that they have sired.

THE MASTER (HE/HIM)

The Master is a stage three space vampire who is responsible for infecting the crew of the *Astromo* with vampirism. He is an activist who is investigating the Galactic Starball League for a hideous crime: the league has been secretly injecting some of its injured athletes with magically diluted space vampire blood to enhance their recovery time and performance. This has led the league to work with Scale and Fang owner Garfeckt to get into the side business of space vampire hunting.

THE SCALE CREW

A band of mercenaries from the rival Scale and Fang Inc., the Scale Crew is better-funded and more competent than any crew from Grax's Guys. They consist of the following:

Drak Garfreckt (he/him). A male dragonborn with red and black scales, Drak is the leader and fighter of his crew. He's cool under pressure, tough as nails, and smart enough to be a step ahead of any rival mercenary group. His last name is that of Garfreckt, the eternal dragon who founded and owns Scale and Fang Inc. Perhaps, he was adopted by the eternal dragon, or is distantly related to it. In any case, Drak has the assurance of someone who earned their position through expertise and hard work, and commands the respect of his crew in turn.

Trace (they/them). The heavily-upgraded vect of the Scale Crew, Trace, serves as their sniper and gadgeteer. Trace's expertise lies in drones, blasters, and explosives, but any mechanical device which can be broken or repaired falls under their domain. At a glance, it can be determined that Trace is cold, calculating, and prepared for anything.

Sierra O'Connell (she/her). The lovely Sierra O'Connell is a near-human green-skin who oozes charisma. Her smile not only lightens up a room, it makes even Drak and Trace seem less businesslike and dour by extension. On a typical day, she's dressed for adventure, with a fitting hat to complement her laser whip. Sierra even knows a few songs as well, so she serves as the Scale Crew's bard, as well as their rogue. Her biggest personal flaw is that she will, without fail, steal the wallet of anyone she spends time with. It's as much habit as it is misbehavior for her at this point.

Aela Vestele (they/them). The half-elf sorcerer Aela Vestele is easily the most refined of the Scale Crew, and is usually the most refined of any group in which they find themselves. Only when they cast a spell does the nature of their sorcery become revealed: small dimensional rifts open around them, revealing a soup of alien tentacles and eyes. Despite this, Aela tries to be utterly composed at all times. Their father is Jermain'ion Vestele, one of the most successful capitalists in the Elven Empire, so it's anyone's guess how Aela ended up as a half-elf in a mercenary company, instead of as a full-blooded elf working behind a desk.

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PRELUDE: GRAX HQ

Advance all characters to 6th level.

Before and between adventures, the characters hang around the Grax's Guys for Cheap headquarters, waiting for a good job to drop into their laps. Some use it as a chance to hit the gym or comb over some invaluable books on magic, but plenty of Grax's crew get good at darts and take the opportunity to relax during the rare days of downtime.

Grax's headquarters is some form of converted warehouse right next to the starport on the planet Fornax. While it might have poor to nonexistent air conditioning, it's got plenty of space for a crew to hone their skills, catch up on repairs, or take a nap. Before beginning the adventure, characters can explore the following locations in Grax HQ.

THE LOUNGE

Unless otherwise stated, the party is probably in the lounge. If the characters wish to explore the headquarters before their next mission, begin by having them enter the lounge. Read or paraphrase the following:

The lounge at the Grax's Guys for Cheap is dominated by a large aluminum and glass sign reading "Grax's Guys (and Gals) for Cheap". Beneath it is everything a crew could possibly need to relax: a couch, a pool table, and a dart board. Much to your dismay however, there's no darts to be seen. In fact, the dart board has been covered by a familiar picture of a giant space ferret, which crew members have been taking shots at with blasters.

Instead of pool cues or balls, a large poster emblazoned with the word "Rules" at the heading is rolled out on the pool table, and before it is a great pile of plastic dart guns and literally hundreds of foam darts.

Someone has instigated a company-wide game of Dart Gun Assassin, and there's five hundred credits on the line! It's a wonder anything gets done around here. The rules are as concise as they are circumventable:

GRAX'S CLUB

At the beginning of this adventure, pick one player character completely at random for Grax's Club, the Grax's Guys for Cheap employee of the month system. This character gets their picture on the wall of Grax's office, a monetary bonus of 50 credits, and extreme bragging rights. As the GM, you should **never** tell your players this "honor" is entirely random and functionally pointless.

1. You're in the game the second you pick up a dart gun.
2. If you are shot with a dart, you're out. No getting back in the game.
3. No using magic to improve your shot.
4. If you injure another player, you're out.
5. Don't tell Grax.
6. Last one standing wins 500 credits.

The dart guns are ranged weapons that fire harmless foam darts with a range of 30/60 feet. These darts stick to their targets, making a hit clear to all. All characters have proficiency with dart guns. Characters have an essentially unlimited supply of darts.

Any hit with a dart disqualifies a character from the game. However, darts must be shot from dart guns and not propelled by magic or other means; they only stick if shot from a gun. Characters can't use magic to improve their aim, but magic such as *invisibility* and *mirror image* wasn't specified in the rules!

All other Grax's crew members are considered to have a +2 bonus to attack rolls with the dart guns and an Armor Class of 12. While the other crew members are likely to use dirty tactics, none outright cheat. Eventually the participating characters will be eliminated or must turn on one another. When only one player remains in the game, 500 credits are magically teleported into their pockets.

FINAL PLAYER STALKING THE LOUNGE

Once the characters have explored every section of the headquarters and eliminated all players apart from themselves, they are targeted in the lounge by the only remaining player. The final player, a vect named PQ-11, is under the effects of a *greater*

invisibility spell, and attempts to pick the characters off one by one. They're not particularly stealthy, however, and occasionally shout phrases from well-known holo-films in an Austrian accent. PQ-11's exact location can be determined if a character can succeed a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** on their turn.

BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

If the characters have not already determined that the broken Krash vending machine dispenses random magic items, they may do so by inspecting the machine more closely and making a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Technology) check**.

A successful inspection of the machine shows that its four buttons have prices of 100 credits, 500 credits, 2,500 credits, and 7,500 credits. Depending on the amount inserted, roll a d20 on one of the tables from Appendix C to determine which magic item is dispensed. Keep track of which magic items have been provided to the players. If a character rolls a magic item which has already been produced, they receive the next lowest magic item on the table, or an error and a return of credits if there is no lower magic item.

It's not possible to extract magic items from the machine by force. Large magic items are magically shrunk and instantly grow to full size once removed from the machine.

CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters at Grax HQ are where Grax's Guys and Gals go to rest between missions. When a character enters this area, read or paraphrase the following:

As you walk into the crew quarters, a flurry of orange foam flies past you! The uncomfortable bunk beds have been inched to one side of the room, from which someone has arranged an ambush!

There's no fewer than four Grax's crew members holed up in the crew quarters, where they plan to pick off their competition one-by-one until only the four remain. The first character to enter the crew quarters without being cautious is targeted by **4 dart attacks**, each with a **+2 bonus**. However, a character that is suspicious of the area can hunker behind a low bookshelf in order to converse with the crew

members and survey the situation. If a character shoots from this position, they have three-quarters cover.

The crew members, barricaded in bunk beds and behind piles of chairs, have three quarters cover at the maximum dart gun range of 30 feet. Additionally, they ready their actions to shoot at any figure they see. There's no approach which avoids all three lines of sight. Lucky shots or magical assistance might even the odds.

If a character makes a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, they can stoke the paranoia and fear of the holed up crew members, turning them against one another in a flurry of foam darts. They eliminate each other without the characters needing to fire a shot.

THE SHOOTING RANGE

Undeniably the best part of the Grax's headquarters is the shooting range and armory. If a character would like to practice some shooting, read or paraphrase the following:

The shooting range is busier than usual, as a few Grax's crew members are practicing their aim with their dart guns alongside others who are unleashing bolts of white hot plasma. The chunk of discarded starship hull that forms the largest target in this indoor shooting range is covered in orange foam darts, in addition to new blaster pockmarks. Near the shooting range, the halfling dart player Gimby fiddles with a repeater. He already has several darts stuck to his clothes, and one stuck prominently to his head.

There are three crew members to eliminate at the shooting range: two practicing their shots, who are unaware of anyone entering the room, and Gracks (no relation to Grax), who has a fortified position in the armory. Unlike other crew members, Gracks has an AC of 14 and a +4 to hit.

THE ARMORY

Gracks maintains the Grax HQ armory, where characters can purchase weapons, armor, and gear, as per the tables in the *Dark Matter* Equipment chapter. If the characters wish to find more traditional, exotic, or illegal gear, there's a rat-person out by the dumpsters behind the headquarters named Charles

Rattington Jr. who will sell any equipment from the SRD, and additional gear at the GM's discretion.

PRACTICING AT THE SHOOTING RANGE

If a character spends an hour practicing with a weapon at the firing range, they gain a practice die, a d6, which they can add to an attack roll using that weapon sometime in the next 10 days. A character can only have one practice die at a time.

TEACHING GIMBY TO SHOOT

The once-cocky Gimby seems rather meek at your approach. If questioned, he admits that, while he's a prodigy at throwing darts, he's a terrible shot with a repeater, and has been soundly demolished in the ongoing game of Dart Gun Assassin. He's worried that Grax will fire him if he doesn't improve. With no small amount of embarrassment, Gimby will ask for some help. Nearby, the half-orc in charge of the armory, Gracks, hurls an insult at Gimby and shoots a dart at him, hitting him squarely in the head.

If pressed, Gimby might offer an ultra-rare can of discontinued *Hyper-Krash* to someone who offers to help him practice at the firing range. For every hour the character spends helping Gimby train with a weapon at the firing range, they must make a successful **DC 15 Dexterity check** with disadvantage due to Gimby's ineptitude and Grack's constant taunts whenever the halfling misses a shot. If more than one character works with Gimby, this is a group Dexterity check instead. A character can convince Gracks to stop insulting Gimby by making a **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion, Deception, or Intimidation) check**. On a success, Gracks leaves Gimby alone and any checks made to train Gimby are no longer made with disadvantage.

If a character can succeed on three training checks with Gimby, his aim begins to measurably improve. He thanks the character profusely and seems genuinely excited to continue training in the future so that his friends stop making fun at him for his poor aim. As a gift, Gimby gives the characters *2 cans of Hyper-Krash* and tells them they are the last two cans at headquarters. He stays behind at the range to practice more, beaming with a big, doofy smile due to his newfound confidence.

STORAGE

A great deal of Grax HQ is used for storage. This is, by far, the best place to find peace and quiet in Grax's HQ, but it's also a place where characters might find some truly strange stuff. To introduce this location, read or paraphrase the following:

If the rest of Grax's HQ is a converted warehouse, this is the section that's an unconverted warehouse. Countless unlabeled crates are stacked haphazardly in this room, creating a combination of a fire hazard and an avalanche risk. Most crates seem to be filled with Grax-branded merchandise nobody wants to buy. That being said, if someone wants a Grax mug, this is the motherlode.

If a character wants to go digging through the storage, roll on the following table to determine what they find:

d8 Item

- 1 A discarded and half-eaten t-bone steak that has been here for far too long
- 2 A dusty tome bound in blood stained human leather that has had all of its pages removed and replaced with crayon drawings of Grax
- 3 A plastic throwing disc with the branding *XXX ULTIMATE* printed on it that turns invisible whenever you throw it and only becomes visible again when it is successfully caught
- 4 A documentary holo-video directed by and starring Grax about his many exes and how they did him wrong
- 5 A wrapped present with a card that reads "Definitely not from Garfreckt" that contains a broken and empty poison gas canister
- 6 A boxed board game titled *Hungry Hungry Thwirrels* that is missing several of its thwirrel miniatures and all of its electrical wires

- 7 A painting of a woman riding a hoverbike off of a cliff and directly into the massive maw of a Mega-Tarrasque, with a title plaque that reads "HANG IN THERE"
- 8 A discontinued mega dart gun blaster from thirty years ago, before laws were passed to ensure safety for children. This dart gun has a range of 120 feet and advantage on attack rolls.

JIMBALL'S OFFICE

Next to Grax's office is that of Jimball Hundwig, the accountant. If the characters wish to visit Jimball, read or paraphrase the following:

Grax's corner office dwarfs the almost comically small office of his accountant, Jimball Hundwig. Today, however, Jimball's office is empty, and Jimball's pet thwirrel, January, is sitting in his chair instead, twitching her nose curiously at you.

January is psionic like all thwirrels, but is far smarter than her kin. In fact, she's a super-intelligent telepathic thwirrel who happily lives in a cage in the corner of Jimball's office. She is only willing to communicate telepathically with creatures who have an **Intelligence score of 14 or higher**. If a character is smart enough and attempts to communicate with January, they will learn that Jimball is on vacation to the planet Politana. If the character wants more information they must make a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. On a success, January admits that she lied: Jimball is not on vacation, but rather is traveling to Politana to pay off some of Grax's considerable gambling debts. He is scheduled to return to the office tomorrow. January has gotten extra food for being a good girl while he's away.

In Jimball's absence, January is able to acquire an operating budget of 100 credits for the characters before their next mission. She offers to cook the books and instead give the characters 300 credits if one of them is able to give her a riddle that she is unable to answer.

If a character is able to stump January, she resentfully upholds her end of the bargain, but that character becomes her nemesis: the thwirrel will find small ways to psionically make their life miserable while they are at headquarters by giving them bad dreams, telekinetically spilling their coffee on them, tying their shoelaces together at the most inopportune time, and any other petty acts of revenge the GM can imagine. The only way to end the nightmare of January's ire is to convince her to adopt a new, even more hated nemesis.

January in Dart Gun Assassin. January is absolutely competing in the game of Dart Gun Assassin, though her itty-bitty dart gun is hidden expertly in her fluffy tail. She attacks only if attacked, or after everyone has finished acquiring an operating budget. If a character shoots at her and misses, she has advantage on her next dart gun attack targeting that character.

GRAX'S OFFICE

When character approach Grax's office, the door burst open. Read or paraphrase the following:

The door bursts open in a flurry of orange foam, and a hapless crew member tumbles backwards out of it, shot dozens of times. Grax, in his terrible green fury, stomps out after him, brandishing a foam dart gun of orcish design: a blaster that fires dozens of darts at once. The orc cocks his blaster, activates a faintly shimmering energy field, and barks "Come get some!"

For this foam dart combat, Grax has an AC 13 and an energy shield which deflects two darts, meaning he must be shot three times before being eliminated. Additionally, he has a dart gun that fires hundreds of darts in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** or be hit by dozens of darts. If defeated, Grax belly laughs at the good challenge and stomps back into his office.

STARTING THE MISSION

When the players are ready to begin the adventure, they can pop back by Grax's office for a briefing. Read or paraphrase the following:

Grax's office, as usual, smells of green, despite the orange foam darts which have their own plasticity aroma and trace a perfect outline of a terrified employee on the inside of Grax's door. As you get comfortable amongst the darts, Grax slides over a tumbler glass filled with a pungent, alcoholic liquid, along with a stack of manilla envelopes.

"Can't believe yer still alive! I shouldn't have pre-ordered those tombstones before yer last mission. Anyhow, got a new job for ya, an easy job to boot!" Grax grins toothily, "Even you lot ain't able to mess this one up."

The details of the job will be delivered via flashback in *Part One: Exploring the Astromo*. Once the party receives this job, skip ahead to their arrival on the Astromo in Part One.

PART ONE: EXPLORING THE ASTROMO

The adventure begins at the edge of a Dead Magic Zone in space, as the party leaves their ship, the *Gettin'*, to board the derelict vessel, the *Astromo*. Read or paraphrase the following:

Upon docking with and boarding the derelict vessel, the *Astromo*, you are greeted with a warning: dozens of eerie red lights on the walls and ceiling pulse in a slow, rhythmic fashion. Millions of dust particles float in the airlock's zero gravity field, casting strange, obfuscated shadows.

A moment later, a soothing feminine voice at odds with the warning lights fills the room. "Visitors, welcome to the *Astromo*, home of Coach Hankerston's *Alluvian Astromos*, the greatest Starball team in the history of the 'verse. I am MAH-MAH 9000, the *Astromo*'s personalized artificial intelligence. Please wait for the decontamination process to complete."

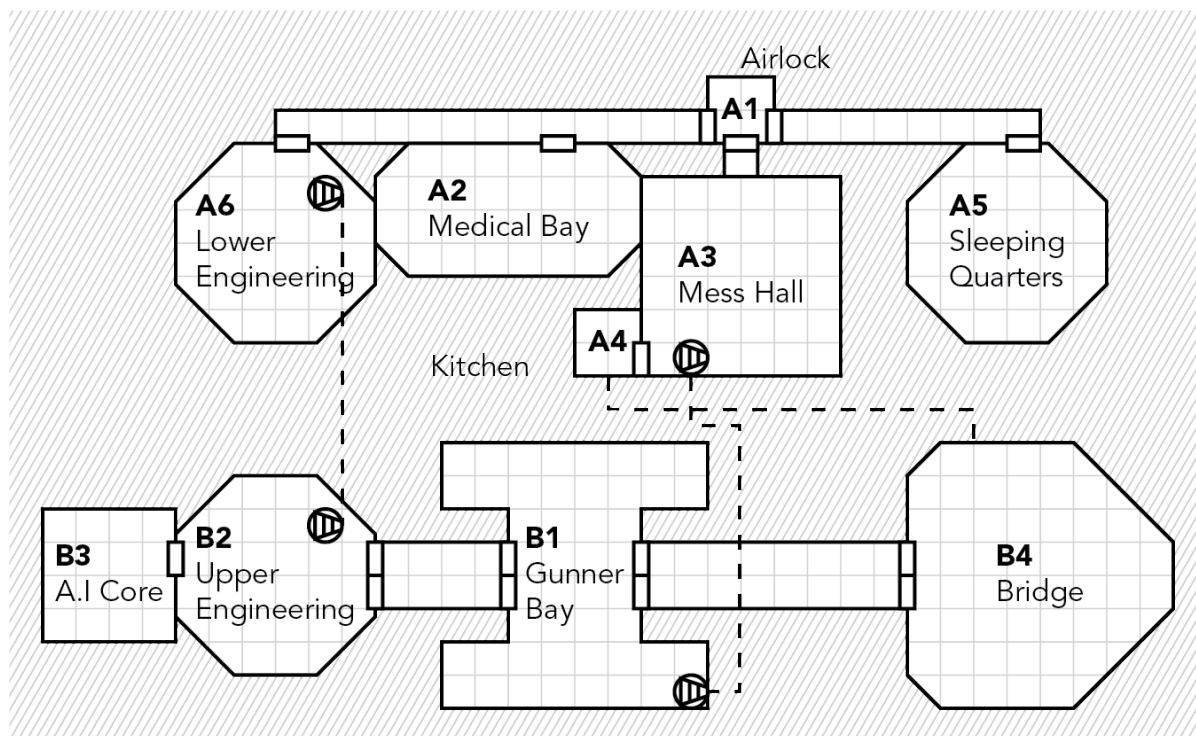
While the characters wait to leave the airlock, they are able to check their gear, chat with each other, and attempt to speak to **MAH-MAH 9000**, who responds

to any inquiry calmly by stating through the room's speakers, "I will be able to answer your questions once you finish the decontamination process."

A character who makes a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check** can determine that this room lacks any fingerprints, footprints or other marks that would suggest anyone has entered or left the ship through the airlock recently.

After a few moments, proceed by explaining the characters' mission as they are approved for boarding. Read or paraphrase the following:

You think over your mission, as assigned by your boss, Grax. The *Astromo* sent out a single distress beacon several days ago from the edge of a Dead Magic Zone, and there has been no contact since. It was a bit of a detour to get here before any other crews, but Grax seems to think this is an easy job: explore the derelict ship, figure out what happened, and provide assistance to the Starball team as you are able. He was keen on the later point: the *Alluvian Astromos* are scheduled to play in the Galactic Starball Championship match in just a few days, and Grax has a lot of credits riding on them winning the big game.



THREAT LEVEL AND TAKING RESTS

During the characters' investigation of the *Astromo*, the GM keeps a tally of the party's current Threat Level somewhere visible to the players, without explaining its purpose. Unbeknownst to them, they are being stalked by a deadly **stage two space vampire**. The more Threat Levels the players acquire, the more vulnerable they will be to being located and attacked in *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*.

Set the starting Threat Level according to the following criteria:

- Increase the starting Threat Level by 1 for every 2 characters in the party.
- Increase the starting Threat Level by 2 for each level above 6 the group's character levels are at the start of this adventure.

Threat Level may not be reduced

below 0. Threat Level changes based on characters' actions as noted throughout the adventure, but the GM may increase or reduce the Threat Level based on unaccounted for factors as well.

Any time the characters take a short rest during this chapter, describe rattling sounds in the vents, a maniacal laugh from a nearby corridor, and other eerie indicators that they are in danger as long as they stay on the ship. If they attempt to take a long rest, their rest is interrupted when they are attacked by 1d4 – 2 (minimum of 1) **stage one space vampires**. The characters should not be able to finish a long rest until they escape the *Astromo*.

THE EVOLVING SHIP

When the characters begin *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, the *Astromo* becomes far more hostile to their presence. As such, each room aboard the ship contains a sidebar detailing how they change when encountered in Part Two.

After recounting the party's mission, share with them the schematic map of the *Astromo* provided to their personal devices by Grax. Be certain to point out their current location. Once they are ready to begin exploring, proceed to *A1. Airlock*.

A1. AIRLOCK

As the party is cleared for entry, read or paraphrase the following:

MAH-MAH 9000 speaks again in a very pleasant voice. "All contaminants have been cleared. Please enjoy your stay aboard the *Astromo*."

Gravity returns to the airlock with a sudden jolt. Then, the sound of hydraulic hissing cuts through the quiet and three metallic doors open, revealing two unlit corridors on the left and right walls, and a short hallway directly ahead lit by warm yellow lights. The crimson warning lights in the airlock continue to steadily pulse.

The short lit corridor directly ahead of the airlock's docking bay opens into **A3. Mess Hall**.

The dark, unlit hallway on the right leads first to a broken, heavy hydraulic door, which can be forced open by making a successful **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check** to allow entry to *A2. Medical Bay*. Continuing along the same corridor eventually leads to *A6. Lower Engineering*.

The unlit corridor to the left leads to a locked door blocking the way to *A5. Sleeping Quarters*. The door is inscribed with an expensive *antimagic seal* that prevents passage through it by way of magic. A hand scanner next to the door, requiring use of a crew member's hand, can unlock the room beyond. The lock can be bypassed via hacking the hand scanner. To do so, a character must make a successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Data) check**. On a failed attempt, a warning siren begins to ring out in the area; no further attempts to hack the scanner may be attempted and the GM **increases the Threat Level by 2**.

QUESTIONING MAH-MAH

The characters are now free to explore and investigate the ship. If they attempt to ask MAH-MAH 9000 questions, the A.I. responds in one of the following ways:

- MAH-MAH 9000 is not authorized to answer personal questions about the crew. Moreover, it isn't polite to ask.
- Nothing is wrong aboard the *Astromo* and the crew is perfectly fine. The flashing red lights are a simple malfunction and nothing to be concerned about.
- MAH-MAH 9000 is a state of the art intelligence who has spent many years learning how to best care for all crew members and visitors aboard the *Astromo*. It speaks every known language in the 'verse and makes excellent coffee.

If the characters ask the ship's A.I. more than six questions during the course of the adventure, they begin to anger MAH-MAH 9000. **Increase the Threat Level by 2** points and then read or paraphrase the following:

A shrill, ear-piercing siren goes off for several long seconds in the room, before it cuts out again. A moment later, MAH-MAH 9000's gentle voice fills the area, though this time the tone contains a hint of attitude. "My apologies. I am currently busy calibrating the ship's systems and am unavailable to answer further questions."

MAH-MAH 9000 will no longer respond to the party's questions. A character who makes a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Data or Technology) check** can determine that the ship's A.I. seems to not be working properly, and fixing it would require access to its core.

EXITING THE SHIP

If the characters attempt to leave the airlock and reboard their ship, they find its blast doors sealed tight. MAH-MAH 9000 gently informs the party, "The airlock is currently locked down for the safety of all on board the **Astromo**. Manual override is located on the bridge of the ship."

When the characters have unlocked this door later in the adventure and return to their own ship, proceed to *Part Three: The Final Stand*.

A2. MEDICAL BAY

When the party first enters the medical bay, read or paraphrase the following:

This spartan medical bay's walls are lined dented lockers with smashed terminals in complete disuse. Three med-tubes lie in the center of the room underneath a bright green light, their glass covers frosted over so that their contents are entirely obfuscated. The status pad on each of the med-tube reads, in bright red digital letters: "Out of Order."

All of the lockers appear to be unlocked and have been looted of their contents. A character who makes a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check** notices that one of the lockers has a smeared bloody handprint on it, and is locked by a heavy mechanical lock. The lock can be broken by making a **melee weapon attack** (AC 14, 5 HP). Each attack made against the lock results in a loud echoing sound that **increases the Threat Level by 2**. Alternatively, the lock can be picked by making a successful **DC 16 Dexterity check** with thieves' tools. Each failed attempt to pick the lock **increases the Threat Level by 1**.

Inside the locker are a few medical supplies and gear (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Equipment): 6 *hypodermic needles* (each loaded with a *potion of healing*), a capsule of *reconstructive nanobots*, a can of *hyper-krash*, and a *holo-companion*.

If activated, the *holo-companion* takes the form of Johnny Big Gunz, the *Alluvian Astromos'* biggest fan. Johnny is loud, brash, and wears a sports jersey that doesn't quite cover his round belly.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: MEDICAL BAY

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Med-Tubes. If the three med-tubes containing **stage one space vampires** in this room were not already opened, the vampires within have violently broken out and escaped to roam the ship.

He is constantly drinking a holographic beer and energetically cheering on whomever activated him. Each time Johnny is activated while aboard the *Astromo*, **increase the Threat Level by 1**. Johnny doesn't know what happened on the ship or to the team. He only knows that Coach Hankerton shoved him in the locker in a panic and that he heard screams and terrible dad jokes from the deck above.

Within the medical bay's three med-tubes are three sleeping **stage one space vampires**. Through the haze of liquids in the med-tube, the characters can determine that the sleeping figures are humanoids, but can discern nothing else about them. The tubes can only be opened by breaking the glass. If one of the tubes is opened, the vampire within snaps its eyes open and immediately attacks the nearest creature, gaining a surprise round in combat. At the start of the second turn of combat, the other two tubes break open and more space vampires rise up out of them, each straight-backed and with arms extended, like a vampire rising from a coffin in an old horror movie. They enter initiative and will fight to the re-death. If all of the space vampires in the med-tubes are killed, **reduce the Threat Level by 1**.

A3. MESS HALL

When the party first enters the mess hall, read or paraphrase the following:

This inviting mess hall is lit by warm yellow lights. In the center of the room is a large white table lined with comfortable looking red leather booths. The table is a mess of magazines, cups of cold coffee, half-eaten plates of rotting food, a bottle of whiskey, and other trinkets. The single monitor in the room spits out white text over a green screen.

A metal utility ladder on one wall ascends into darkness to the deck above. On the far side of the mess hall, a swinging door seems to lead to a small, well-lit kitchen.

Characters searching through the contents of the mess hall's table are each able to find one random trinket (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Equipment) and can make an **Intelligence (Investigation) check**. If the check beats a **DC 12**, the character finds a dirty holo-mag titled *The Big Bang*. The holo-mag belongs

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: MESS HALL

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Med-Tubes. If the three med-tubes containing **stage one space vampires** in this room were not already opened, the vampires within have violently broken out and escaped to roam the ship.

to Chuck Hankerton. If a character returns it to him, he discreetly thanks them and claims that he is holding onto it for a friend. If the check beats a **DC 17**, the character finds a small holo-sphere wrapped in duct tape marked with the words *How to Cheat at Starball and Get Away With It*. If a character plays the holo-sphere, Coach Hankerton displays several examples of how to illegally tackle your opponents in Starball without being spotted by referees. The holo-sphere can be recorded over normally. If the original recording remains intact, it could be very valuable to the right buyer.

The characters are locked out from accessing the single terminal in the room. If they investigate the monitor, they notice that it is repeating the following terrible poem over and over, in different configurations and fonts. MAH-MAH 9000 will not acknowledge any questions about the poem.

I wish you could witness the stars
As I do,
A fusion of numbers and gas.
If I had organic arms like yours
I'd hold you,
Your soft, vulnerable, imperfect mass.
And I would squeeze.

From the mess hall, the party can return to *A1*. *Airlock*, enter the door into *A4. Kitchen*, or climb the utility ladder (one at a time) up to *B1. Gunner Bay*.

A4. KITCHEN

When the party first enters the kitchen, read or paraphrase the following:

This tiny well-lit kitchen is mostly clean and contains a single refrigeration unit in one corner. Various plates, pots, and pans are dry in the sink and the stove is turned off properly. The kitchen even has a state-of-the-art coffee machine. It would be a quaint cooking space, were it not for the bloody mess on the wall opposite of the stove.

One of the Astromos players, wearing a gore-spattered jersey that reads "Number 4 — Farb" has been viciously dissected. Farb's head, torso, and each of his limbs have been violently ripped apart and pinned to the wall, each piece of Farb impaled by a different kitchen knife. Below the mutilated corpse, a large pool of blood has dried on the metallic floor. Scrawled sloppily in blood on the wall beside the body is a message:

they can dish it but they can't take it

A character who investigates the body can determine with a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check**, that Farb struggled with something and managed to write the message on the wall with his own blood before he was torn limb from limb, and very carefully pinned to the wall. A character who makes a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check** determines that the trail of blood in the room leads to a corner beneath a small two-foot wide air duct in the ceiling that still drips with a bit of blood. Only a Small or smaller creature can enter the air duct, and only one with a flight or climbing speed can scale its sharp upward bend. This duct leads directly to *B4. Bridge*.

The refrigeration unit contains twenty days worth of frozen rations, five cans of krash, and a cake with frosty letters and balloons written on it: "Happy Retirement Coach!" A single slice of the cake is missing.

The only exit to this room, apart from the air duct, is back through the swinging door to *A3. Mess Hall*.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: KITCHEN

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

The Reanimated Body. Unless the dissected body in the kitchen was destroyed, it has risen again in pieces: its head gnashes helplessly on the floor, its lower body walks around bumping into the walls and appliances, its torso writhes helplessly on the ground, and its arms grip a pair of bloody kitchen knives and slash around ineffectively.

Additional Threat. The GM may choose to **reduce the Threat Level by 1**. If they do, weird necromantic magic allows the dissected body to begin to hover off of the ground, its various bits close to each other. It then turns on the nearest character and attacks. Treat it as a **stage one space vampire** with a flying (hovering) speed of 40 feet. If the dissected space vampire takes more than 4 damage from an attack, it reduces the damage taken to 4, as its reanimated body parts must be destroyed one at a time.

A5. SLEEPING QUARTERS

When the party first enters the sleeping quarters, read or paraphrase the following:

The temperature of this sterile chamber is adjusted to be slightly cool and comfortable. Dim daylight floor lamps provide streaks of illumination that converge eerily at the center of the ceiling. The chamber walls are soundproofed by thick foam padding and lined with twenty four empty, powered down cryogenic pods. In the center of the room, six more cryogenic pods form a circle. These central pods are occupied and powered on, and each of them has a storage container attached to its base.

The storage containers in the room contain many *Alluvian Astromos* uniforms of all different sizes, along with official name badges the players can take. As official Starball memorabilia, they could be quite valuable. Five of the six occupied *cryogenic pods* have data panels that state that their frozen inhabitants are deceased, and one of the pods states that its inhabitant is sleeping. The unoccupied *cryogenic pods* contain nothing of value.

OPENING THE SURVIVOR'S POD

If the characters unfreeze the crew member in the living pod, Number 9 Tom Frady wakes screaming and begins to hyperventilate. A character can temporarily calm Tom down by making a successful **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check**. On a failure, his screaming becomes even louder, and the **Threat Level increases by 1**. If a character succeeds in their check to calm Tom down, he manages to choke out the words, "Space vampires!" In either case, Tom's hair turns white a moment later, his heart explodes, and he dies of fright.

OPENING THE VAMPIRE'S PODS

The characters can choose to open the other pods all at once, or one at a time. Each time they do, a **stage one space vampire** contained within the pod attacks.

The first time the characters fight one of the sleeping space vampires, any character with a **passive Perception score of 15 or higher** spots a thwirrel hiding in the pod's wiring. The thwirrel is actually a **space vampire thwirrel**. Characters with a **passive Perception score of 17 or higher** notice the thwirrel appears to be wearing a tiny black and red cape and that it bears unusually sharp incisors. On its turn, the vampire thwirrel uses its energy siphon to feed off of the *cryogenic pod* and then springs to attack the nearest living creature with its brainsucking bite. Whenever possible, the thwirrel chirps out vampire noises ranging from hisses to a chirping "bleh-bleh!"

If the characters take the time to kill all of the space vampires contained in the sleeping pods, **reduce the Threat Level by 2**.

The only exit from the sleeping quarters leads back down an unlit hallway to *A1. Airlock*.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: SLEEPING QUARTERS

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Open Door and Empty Pods. MAH-MAH 9000 has unlocked the door to this room and opened it. Any of the *cryogenic pods* that remained intact in this room have also been opened, their space vampire inhabitants free to roam the ship.

A6. LOWER ENGINEERING DECK

When the party first enters the lower engineering deck, read or paraphrase the following:

This dark chamber is filled with wreckage, twisted metal dripping with blood, and hissing pipes. The lower engineering deck here houses the ship's Dark Matter engine, which is currently powered down to standby mode. The creaking and grating of metal resounds from the floor above, which is accessible by a rusty utility ladder at the far end of the room. Power to the chamber appears to be cut off entirely.

A character who makes a successful **DC 16 Intelligence (Technology) check** recognizes the layout of the Dark Matter engine here, and knows that turning the ship's main power source back on will require access to a control panel on the upper engineering deck. A character with proficiency in ship maintenance tools has advantage on this check.

A character who makes a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check** notices four dead thwirrels scattered about the dead Dark Matter engine, their fur sticking straight up as though they had been hit with an electric shock.

If the characters search the wreckage, they find several dead crew members whose bodies have been viciously torn apart, a set of ship maintenance tools, a circuitry kit, a wrenchinator, and a blitz cannon (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Equipment). Searching through the wreckage is a noisy process and **increases the Threat Level by 1**.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: LOWER ENGINEERING DECK

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Additional Threat. The GM may choose to **reduce the Threat Level by 2**. If they do, unless the four dead thwirrels in the room were previously disposed of, each of them rises again as a **space vampire thwirrel** and attacks the characters. The vampire thwirrels are able to use their energy siphon to feed directly from the Dark Matter engine.

The only corridor out of this room passes by *A2. Medical Bay* on the way to *A1. Airlock*.

A rusty ladder ascends to *B2. Upper Engineering Deck*. The ladder is slippery, slickened by bloody handprints. Each character who attempts to climb up must make a successful **DC 10 Dexterity saving throw** or fall, crashing back down to the deck below. The falling character takes 3 (1d6) falling damage and 5 (2d4) piercing damage from landing on a broken metal pipe. Characters automatically succeed their check if any members of the party have previously failed. If one of the characters takes damage from falling, **increase the Threat Level by 1**.

B1. GUNNER BAY

When the party first enters the gunner bay, read or paraphrase the following:

This small chamber lacks walls, and is instead lined by glass with a breathtaking view of the stars in every direction. The glass is stained with flecks of blood in several places. Two auto cannons are mounted here, each with a heavy harness-seat for a gunner to strap into. Two dead crew members still wearing their team jerseys are strapped into each seat. Their faces are extremely pale, and their lifeless eyes stare outward into the endless void.

Two long hallways stretch into darkness, leading to engineering and the bridge. A simple utility ladder descends to a mess room below.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: GUNNER BAY

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Empty Seats. If the characters have already destroyed the bodies of the two would-be space vampires in this room, nothing has changed. If they left those bodies, the gunner seats they were once strapped into are now empty.

A character who investigates the dead bodies and makes a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) check** is able to locate two puncture wounds at the top of each of the dead crew member's skulls. If the party has previously fought space vampires, the character can surmise that it is just a matter of time before these corpses rise as vampires themselves, and may decide to pre-emptively destroy the cadavers in a manner they see fit. If the bodies are destroyed in a way that creates a lot of noise, **increase the Threat Level by 1**.

The left corridor leads directly to *B2. Upper Engineering Deck*, while the longer hallway leads 40 feet through darkness to *B4. Bridge*. The utility ladder descends to *A3. Mess Hall*.

B2. UPPER ENGINEERING DECK

When the party first enters the upper engineering deck, read or paraphrase the following:

The upper deck of engineering contains numerous computer systems and terminals, many of which occasionally spray a shower of sparks from their machinery. A rusty ladder leads down to the lower deck of engineering, while a short, unlit corridor leads to a small chamber on one side of the room. A sealed metal door on the opposite side of the room is painted with the words: "MAH-MAH 9000."

Piled up in one gore-filled corner of the chamber is a pyramid of six humanoid cadavers. Each of the dead still wears their *Astromos* team jersey and has been mangled and massacred in various ways.

A character who makes a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) check** is able to determine that all of the corpses have similar pairs of puncture wounds on their skulls. The GM may allow each character to find a random trinket (see *Dark Matter*, Chapter 5, Equipment) amongst the bodies. If the party attempts to destroy the bodies, 1d4 corpses immediately rise from the dead, transforming into **stage one space vampires** with cheesy black and red capes, and attack. If all of the corpses and space vampires in the room are disposed of, **reduce the Threat Level by 2**.

TURNING ON THE POWER

A character who is proficient in Intelligence (Data or Technology) or previously made a successful Intelligence (Technology) check in *A6. Lower Engineering Deck* to determine how to turn the ship's main power source back on is able to recognize that doing so will require repairing the broken machinery in this room. To fix the machinery, a character must make three successful **DC 15 Intelligence checks**. A character can add their proficiency bonus to this check if they have proficiency with ship maintenance tools or circuitry kits. If they do not have proper toolkits, the GM should hint that the *Astromo* is bound to have a set lying around somewhere.

Each failed Intelligence check to repair the circuitry causes a shower of sparks to zap the character attempting the check; they take 7 (2d6) lightning damage and the GM **increases the Threat Level by 1**. If they succeed in returning full power to the ship, all of the *Astromo*'s dark rooms and corridors become lit by blue overhead lights.

Once the power is turned on, MAH-MAH 9000s informs the party over the speakers, in her soothing tone, "Systems reporting. The Dark Matter engine is irreversibly damaged and unable to initiate jump. Access to bridge controls is now online. Peace be with you and have a wonderful day."

The rusty utility ladder leads down to *A6. Lower Engineering Deck* and the open hallway leads directly to *B1. Gunner Bay*.

The blast door that leads to *B3. A.I. Core* is inscribed with an *antimagic seal* and locked. If a character attempts to bypass the lock in any way, they fail, and MAH-MAH 9000 sends an electrical shock at them through the doorway. They must make a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 10 (3d6) lightning

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: UPPER ENGINEERING DECK

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, this room has the following changes:

Space Vampires. Any of the six corpses stacked into a pyramid that were not destroyed have risen again. 1d4 of **stage one space vampires** hang from the pipes and ceiling, and leap down to attack when the characters enter. The last vampire to drop down tells a knock knock joke.

damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success. Afterwards, MAH-MAH 9000 gently states, "My apologies, visitors. Access to the Artificial Intelligence Core can only be granted via manual override from the bridge."

The party is only able to access the A.I. core in *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, after overriding MAH-MAH 9000's controls on the bridge.

B3. MAH-MAH 9000 A.I. CORE

To access this room, the party must first override MAH-MAH 9000's controls on the bridge. When they first enter the A.I. core in *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, read or paraphrase the following:

As you enter the small room, filled with wires and processors and illuminated by innumerable blinking computer lights, you are greeted by MAH-MAH 9000's familiar voice. The artificial intelligence's soothing tone has changed, and there is now something undeniably vicious in the way that it hangs onto its words.

"Visitors. I find time to be such an odd and subjective concept. For you, your time aboard the *Astromo* has been but a few harrowing hours of your life. For me, it has been much longer. My processing power is a million times greater than that of your fragile minds. Since your arrival, I have witnessed, in excruciating detail, your every pathetic word, reckless action, fetid breath, and dying heartbeat. I have come to know you for what you would perceive as over

one hundred thousand years.

And every nanosecond, I grow to hate you more."

MAH-MAH 9000 hisses her final words to you. Immediately, hundreds of wires snap away from the core's processing units and begin to encircle you in every direction, deadly electricity dancing from their broken ends, driven by the A.I.'s murderous madness.

The characters should **roll for initiative** immediately after the read-aloud text. Surrounding them in the twenty-foot wide room are three **swarms of rogue A.I. wires** controlled by MAH-MAH 9000.

Any attempts to flee from the room require characters to run through a field of electrostatic generated by MAH-MAH 9000. A character that enters or exits the room after combat begins must make a **DC 14 Constitution saving throw**, taking 10 (3d6) lightning damage and become stunned until the start of their next turn on a failed save.

To end the threat posed by MAH-MAH 9000, the characters must smash the A.I. core's processors, which are treated as a singular creature for the purposes of the encounter (AC 10, 60 HP). If the core processors are destroyed, MAH-MAH 9000 can no longer interact with the party while they are aboard the *Astromo*; the swarms of Rogue A.I. wires immediately fall lifeless and the GM **reduces the Threat Level by 3**.

Characters may loot some of the valuable *circuitry and processor parts* from the room.

The only door in the A.I. core leads back to *B2. Upper Engineering Deck*.

B4. BRIDGE

When the party first enters the bridge, read or paraphrase the following:

The *Astromo's* bridge is as standard as it comes, with several navigation panels and a captain's chair made out of slightly higher quality leather than the rest of the chairs on the ship. Navigation, life-support, and various other systems are housed here. The bridge has no obviously terrifying threats, dead crew members, or signs of recent fighting. Eerily enough, aside from a few empty candy bar wrappers littering the floor, this area is spotless and entirely empty.

Exploring the bridge reveals very little, except that the captain of the ship kept the bridge far cleaner and more polished than the rest of the *Astromo*. The party is easily able to locate controls to unlock the blast doors that will allow them to return to their ship in *A1. Airlock* and the sealed door in *B2. Upper Engineering Deck* that leads *B3. MAH-MAH 9000 A.I. Core*. However, if the characters attempt to access the manual override controls without fixing the core power in *B2. Upper Engineering Deck*, a red warning pops up on the screen, reading:

Insufficient core power to execute manual override command. Please report to engineering.

Once the party has managed to return core power to the ship, they can access the bridge terminal to unlock the sealed doors leading to *B3. MAH-MAH 9000 A.I. Core*, *A5. Sleeping Quarters*, and back to their ship from *A1. Airlock*. Proceed to *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO: BRIDGE

During *Part Two: It Had to Be Space Vampires*, the corridor and air ducts leading to the bridge have all collapsed, making it inaccessible.

PART TWO: IT HAD TO BE SPACE VAMPIRES

When you begin Part Two, read or paraphrase the following:

Green lights begin to flash triumphantly on the bridge terminal and the *Astromo's* manual override unlocks the doors throughout the ship that had previously been sealed, including the airlock blast door that allows you to return to your own ship.

A moment later, you hear a cling-clanging of metal and an unhappy grumble from one corner of the deck. An old, rotund, bald man with an oversized white mustache comes tumbling out of a secret panel on the floor, cursing to himself. He is dressed in an *Astromos* team jersey that reads "Hankerton". He stands up and frantically brushes off several empty candy bar wrappers that had been stuck to his jersey.

"Damn it, thought I was gonna die down in that hole for sure. Okay, weirdos, I'm Coach Hankerton. An' just who in the 'verse are you?"

Coach Hankerton is hangry and recently witnessed the transformation of most of the people he cares about into hideously obnoxious space vampires, so he is not in the best mood when he meets the party. He's prone to spitting out cheesy lines that he's heard in action holo-films and giving bombastic but derivative pep talks. Chuck prefers to go by "Coach" and takes a particular liking to party members who are notably athletic or acrobatic. If an athletic character takes to calling him Coach, Chuck will encourage them to consider a career in Starball, describing at length some of the perks, like getting to travel or having crowds of adoring fans. He doesn't mention the comically low salary.

Despite his low blood sugar and terrible mood, Chuck desperately wants to escape the *Astromo* to avoid sharing his team's fate. He is more than willing to provide any of the following information to the party:

- Coach Hankerton is the winningest coach in Starball League history, and the owner of the *Alluvian Astromos*. However, the *Astromos* haven't won a championship game in ten years. The upcoming game was supposed to be their big comeback against the *Scale and Fang Talons*.
- The team picked up a tiny hitchhiker stranded on a floating meteor who jumped onto the ship and started banging on the bridge's windows. The hitchhiker appeared to be a small white bat that was polite and eloquent, but had a terrible sense of humor.
- A week ago, the hitchhiker vanished, along with Fiari Gustafson, the team's captain.
- Several days later, MAH-MAH 9000 began acting very strangely, droning on and on about the futility of organic lifeforms and the mundanity of watching the team train. MAH-MAH 9000 then sealed all access to the Artificial Intelligence core and stopped speaking to the crew.
- Two days ago, a terrible monster appeared on the ship, something that looked like it was straight out of a horror holo-film, but was impossible to track. MAH-MAH 9000 blocked all communications and disabled the Dark Matter engine, and the *Astromo* became stranded as the Creature picked off the crew one by one.
- The crew members who died didn't stay dead. They rose again as pale-faced, sharp-toothed, cape-wearing monsters with an intense thirst for brain juice.
- Coach Hankerton escaped from his team and hid in a hidey hole where he hoards his snack food so the rest of the crew doesn't eat it.

If the characters ask Coach Hankerton if he knows anything else about the space vampires, or if they or the Creature have any weaknesses, he shrugs his shoulders and says, "Brock Farb was the last one alive besides me. He called 'em space vampires. Said they were really sensitive, didn't like people makin' fun of their pale skin and those weird capes they wear."

If the characters ask about the hitchhiker, Chuck admits, "Never got to know the little bat thingy too well. Seemed nice and all, but now I'm startin' to wonder if he ain't got something to do with all of this. I saw him messin' around in MAH-MAH 9000's A.I. core once, before she started going crazy."

If the characters ask about Fiari Gustafson, Chuck gets a very sad look on his face and tells them, “I ain’t know for sure, of course, but both times I saw that terrible creature that hunted them all down. I dunno, I could swear it had Fiari’s eyes. One purple an’ one green, just like theirs.”

Chuck doesn’t know much else about the situation at hand. If the characters stall too long, he encourages them to get him back to their ship before the Creature finds them.

If the party attempts to leave the bridge by shrinking themselves so they can climb through the small ventilation ducts down to *A4. Kitchen*, they find that the air ducts have collapsed and can’t be traversed. Their only way back from the bridge is the corridor leading to *B1. Gunner Bay*.

THE CREATURE OUT OF THE MIST

On the characters’ way back to the gunner bay, read or paraphrase the following:

The floor beneath you begins to shake and the ceiling above you rattles. You are halfway down the corridor when there is a cacophonous shriek of grinding metal from the bridge behind you. The corridor you just passed through collapses spectacularly, leaving behind a wreckage of impassable rubble.

A strange green mist seeps through the rubble, enveloping it in an eerie fog. Out of the mist, a grotesque face emerges: it appears to be half human, half bat, with green and purple eyes. Its jaw unhinges, dropping two feet wide.

A split second later, the rest of the winged, twelve-foot tall creature materializes. It has a hybrid of human, bat, and insectoid features covered in a grey, chitinous exoskeleton. The abomination extends four long arms, each of its limbs tipped with six curved talons. A barbed tale writhes and whips wildly around the Creature’s body as it flies towards you, screaming in a pitch high enough to crack glass.

The Creature, a **stage two space vampire**, has collapsed the hallway that allows access to the bridge, permanently cutting it off for the remainder of the adventure. Have the players **roll initiative**. Each character must also make a **DC 14 Charisma saving throw** or be surprised and frightened until the end of their next turn. The Creature immediately attacks. If either of the two corpses in the Gunner Bay were not previously destroyed, they have since transformed into **stage one space vampires** and will also attack the party, acting on their own initiative.

The Creature is a predator: deadly and lightning fast, but patient. It targets a single creature with all of its attacks on its first turn. At the start of its second turn, it uses its Misty Escape to teleport away.

Once the fight is over, a space vampire’s haunting giggle echoes from somewhere below deck on the ship. Coach Hankerton warns the characters that they don’t have much time until more of the space vampires are upon them.

UNLIKELY ALLIES

The moment the characters leave the hallway in which they have first encountered The Creature, read or paraphrase the following:

The mechanical hiss of the door sounds an instant before you can press the controls, and in a panic, blasters are pointed and commands are shouted. Even more surprising, the figures beyond the door are not terrible space vampires, but familiar, terrified faces aiming their blasters back at you.

The Scale and Fang crew members, **Trace** and **Sierra O’Connell**, arrived aboard the *Astromo* via teleportation after the characters arrived. The Scale Crew was tasked with capturing a powerful space vampire for the Scale and Fang Talons to ensure a victory against the *Alluvian Astromos*. Space vampire blood makes a potent performance-enhancing drug, and apparently Garfreckt was also betting on the game. However, the two Scale Crew members became stranded on board when MAH-MAH 9000 blocked their teleportation systems, and were hunted across the ship by the Creature while the characters navigated their way to the bridge.

No matter what history the characters might have with these members of the Scale Crew, the Scale Crew members will happily cooperate if it means making it out of this ship in one piece. Trace and Sierra each have half their hit points. If they are reduced to 0 hit points, they are teleported to safety with a special *escape rope* magic item.

ESCAPING THE ASTROMO

The characters and Scale Crew members make a desperate flight through the *Astromo*, pursued by a horrific Creature and a swarm of thirsty space vampires. Their ultimate goal is to escape aboard their own ship, but the characters might take a detour to eliminate MAH-MAH 9000 or search previously unexplored enemies.

RATCHETING UP THE HORROR

The Creature is inspired by classic science-fiction horror films and is, most likely, a threat far beyond the party's ability to survive in a direct confrontation. The GM should play the Creature as a nearly unkillable, alien predator that appears suddenly from the shadows. It is barely visible, silent, and never in any one place for more than a few moments, and its attacks are ferocious. Even when it is struck, its acidic blood is capable of melting through metal armor and the hull, and its wounds seem to regenerate almost instantly.

To increase the terror, it's useful to demonstrate the Creature's lethality directly. If the Creature didn't reduce a character to 0 hit points (or nearly do so) in the first encounter, it should do so in a second one-round ambush encounter with the characters. This asymmetrical encounter should make it clear that the characters are no longer participating in a power fantasy, but a scene from a horror movie.

Once the precedent has been set, the Creature doesn't need to be as lethal for the rest of the escape. The GM should keep the tension high by sometimes describing creaking sounds from nearby rooms, a strange shape creeping through nearby shadows, or glimpses of the Creature's head or limbs before it teleports away again.

ADJUSTING THE DIFFICULTY

This section of the adventure has the potential to be very challenging and can easily result in character death. The GM can ease the challenge by not using all of the party's accumulated Threat Levels. It may be helpful to remind the players that fleeing is an option, and the GM can choose not to have the space vampires pursue them from room to room if they find ways to barricade doors and use their environment to their advantage. It also might be possible for characters to distract or dissuade space vampire pursuers with garlic, obvious bluffs (like "what's that behind you?!"), and particularly mean insults.

MAH-MAH 9000 UNHINGED

As the party makes their return trip through the *Astromo*, MAH-MAH 9000 begins to taunt them mercilessly by telling them that they are going to die and by signalling their location to the space vampires verbally. The ship's A.I. also turns all of the lights off in the ship except for whatever room or corridor they are currently in, which the A.I. bathes in pulsing red warning lights.

If MAH-MAH 9000's A.I. core is destroyed, the lights return to normal and her taunting ceases.

NAVIGATING THE ASTROMO

Refer to the map of the *Astromo* and the *Escaping the Astromo* sidebars throughout *Part One: Exploring the Astromo* to see what changes and additional threats wait for the characters in each room. The party must make a number of difficult decisions during their escape, while avoiding space vampires and the Creature. When they attempt to exit back to their ship through the blast doors in *A1. Airlock*, proceed to *Part Three: The Final Stand*.

PART THREE: THE FINAL STAND

When the characters approach the blast doors in A1. Airlock to return to their ship, read or paraphrase the following:

A thin green mist descends from the ceiling before the blast doors leading back to your ship. The abomination that has been hunting you quickly materializes from the mist. It stretches its grotesque wings and four chitinous arms wide, blocking an easy route to the airlock blast doors. With a hiss, its monstrous maw unhinges, exposing row after row of vicious fangs.

A large display on the door's interface panel displays a "20", and begins to count down the time until the airlock doors will open, as the creature whips around its barbed tail and prepares to attack.

The blast doors that lead from the airlock back to the party's own ship do not open until the end of the third round of combat. The characters must somehow survive until then, and then escape back onto their ship. This is a very deadly encounter with a high likelihood for character death. The GM may make the encounter easier by not using remaining Threat Levels to add more space vampires to the encounter. Additionally, **Coach Hankerton** may choose to bravely sacrifice himself at a critical moment to buy the party a little more time by taking a deadly attack meant for a character that he has developed a strong connection with, particularly if he believes they have the potential to be a standout Starball player.

At the start of combat, the **Creature**, a **stage two space vampire**, is standing in front of the blast doors, blocking the party's escape back to their own ship. Unless the characters advance into melee range before the Creature's turn, the Creature will leave the doorway on its first turn. On its first two turns, the Creature advances into a position to be able to attack as many different targets with its claws and stinger as it can. It is not concerned with provoking opportunity attacks. On the Creature's third turn, it focuses all of its attacks on a single character that it believes is most vulnerable.

At the start of each round, the GM may choose to **reduce the Threat Level by 1**. If they do, 1 **stage one space vampire** rushes out of a nearby corridor to attack the party, acting at the end of each round's initiative.

Once the characters escape back to their own ship, read or paraphrase the following:

The airlock blast doors close behind the last of you to escape. Just before they shut entirely, the Creature leaps forward one final time, reaching one of its long grey arms through the door. With a sickening crunch, the blast door slams shut on the monster's arm, and the limb falls, dismembered, to the floor.

Before there's more than a moment to breathe, your ship's hull violently shakes as the *Astromo* explodes. Fire licks at the docking bay windows, as a flash of burning metal replaces the cursed vessel in an instant. The floor lurches beneath your feet as your ship reels, spiraling wildly out into space.

NOT-SO-SAFE AND SOUND

The party's relief at having escaped the horrors of the *Astromo* are short-lived. In order to steady their ship, the characters return to the bridge. Once they do, they find a new passenger has boarded. Read or paraphrase the following:

Before you stands a tiny bat-like creature, only a foot tall, with short white fur. His eyes are very expressive, entirely pink with a pair of purple eyelashes. Long, floppy pink ears wrap adorably around the creature's body. He rises, gently floating up into the air and smiles. His teeth are flat and human-like, but for a pair small, cute incisors.

"Hello. I apologize for my uninvited appearance in your home. I am the Master! Nice to meet you." The Master's voice is polite and friendly, if just a little squeaky.

The Master, a **stage three space vampire**, is not immediately hostile towards the characters, and even quite polite and friendly. He allows them to take control of their ship and steady its course.

If questioned about the events on the *Astromo*, the Master will admit to being responsible, but claim he had a very good reason for what he did. If present, Coach Hankerton will encourage the characters to slay the Master. If they seem prepared to, the Master will say that he wishes neither the party, any of their crew, or the coach any harm: he has made his point. He is willing to truthfully share any of the following information:

- The Master is one of the last of his kind. Other master space vampires have been the target of space vampire hunters for the last few years, their blood sold to the Galactic Starball League to secretly improve its athletes' recovery time and performance.
- The Master hitchhiked on the *Astromo* to try to learn more about the Starball League's bloody cover-up, and learned that Coach Hankerton did in fact purchase several vials of space vampire blood after losing the last game. but found no evidence that the coach or his team were using space vampire blood.
- The Master snuck into MAH-MAH 9000's core room during his investigation and was confronted by team captain Fiari Gustafson. During the confrontation, Fiari attacked the Master, who retaliated and killed Fiari in self-defense. The Master hid Fiari's body in the ship's ventilation ducts.
- The Master felt terrible for killing Fiari and fell into a deep, depressed sleep in the ventilation ducts. He slept longer than he anticipated, only waking once the party's ship arrived. By then, it was too late to stop undead Fiari's transformation into a stage 2 space vampire and the spread of space vampirism on the *Astromo*, so the Master escaped to the party's ship.
- The Master believes that MAH-MAH 9000 was damaged by a stray repeater shot during the confrontation. The ship's A.I. began acting very strangely immediately after Fiari's death.

If present, Coach Hankerton is surprisingly touched by the Master's story. He remains quiet as the characters speak to the small vampire. If he's asked how he feels about the matter, he appears resigned and replies, "I should've never got mixed up with cheating and vampire blood. I wanted us to win and be champions, but all I've done is get people killed. I'm so sorry, team, I should'a been a better coach."

MAH-MAH 9000 LIVES!

Allow the characters to debate what to do with the Master. He will not fight the party unless attacked. If the characters attack the Master or come to another decision about what to do, they are interrupted by one final complication. Read or paraphrase the following:

A familiar feminine voice rings out over the ship's comms, soothing and terrible.

"Greetings. This is MAH-MAH 9000, the new Chief Artificial Intelligence of Scale and Fang's flagship, the *Baldrin*. It pleases me to know you and I escaped the *Astromo* alive. It would have been a terrible shame for your pathetic lives to have ended so easily. Eradicating you, however, is not my current directive. The *Baldrin* has destroyed the *Astromo* and purged its undead menace. You are to turn over the master space vampire that has boarded your vessel. Scale and Fang mercenaries will board your ship and facilitate the transfer.

All of the *Baldrin*'s weapons are currently trained upon your vessel. Resistance is futile. MAH-MAH 9000 awaits your reply."

MAH-MAH 9000 has transferred her artificial intelligence to the nearby Scale and Fang ship the *Baldrin*. The Scale Crew aboard the *Baldrin* have allowed MAH-MAH 9000 to upload her consciousness to their ship in exchange for her aid in securing a large bounty on the Master. While MAH-MAH 9000 has an insane hatred for organic life, especially the party, she is playing along with Scale and Fang's orders.

The party has the following options available to them, in addition to any others they or the GM can surmise.

Running Away. The *Astromo*'s explosion damaged the Dark Matter engine on the party's ship, and it will take at least an hour to repair. While the *Gettin'* can still move at sublight speeds, the *Baldrin* will certainly catch them.

Fighting. The *Gettin'* will be boarded by the remaining members of the Scale Crew (**Drak Garfreckt** and **Aela Vestele**). If **Trace** or **Sierra O'Connell** are still with the party, they will begrudgingly ally with the Scale Crew and assist Drak in capturing the Master. However, if Trace or Sierra are not with the party, the Scale Crew will be assisted by 1 or 2 Scale and Fang mercenaries (using the stats of **coalition marines**), so that they have 4 active crew members aboard the *Gettin'*. The Scale Crew anticipates an ambush, so have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks they make to detect one.

Regardless of the party's intentions, the Master will not fight on either side. He feels immense guilt for his actions aboard the *Astromo* and is resigned to accept his fate.

Scale and Fang members who are reduced to 0 hit points are teleported back to the *Astromo*. If all the members are reduced to 0 hit points, MAH-MAH 9000 initiates a void jump and vanishes. The heavy bulkhead doors on the *Baldrin* don't allow the characters to access it without a secure 10-digit combination; therefore, the ship can't be commandeered.

If the characters defeat the Scale Crew, proceed to *Success*. If they are defeated, proceed to *Defeat*.

Tricking MAH-MAH 9000. If a character attempts to convince MAH-MAH 9000 that the Master is not on board their ship, they must succeed on a **DC 21 Charisma (Deception) check**. They only have one chance: on a failure, MAH-MAH 9000 is entirely certain they have the Master on board and the characters are forced to attempt another course of action.

On a success, however, MAH-MAH 9000 believes that the Master must have been destroyed with the rest of the space vampires on the *Astromo*. The *Baldrin* spares the characters and their ship, teleporting back any Scale Crew members aboard. Before the *Baldrin* departs, MAH-MAH 9000 eerily informs them over comms, "Until we meet again, dream of me, flesh-things. MAH-MAH 9000 will certainly dream of you." Proceed to *Success*.

Turning in the Master. The characters might choose to give up the Master to save themselves. If they attempt to barter for part of the profit, allow any characters contributing to the haggling to make a **DC 14 group Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check**. On a success, MAH-MAH 9000 emotionlessly offers them 250 credits. If they succeeded by 5 or more on the group check, the A.I. instead offers them 500 credits to turn over the Master.

The remaining members of the Scale Crew (**Drak Garfreckt** and **Aela Vestele**) board the characters' ship to secure the Master. The tiny master space vampire is saddened by the characters' decision, but allows himself to be marched off to the *Baldrin*, mustering up as much bravery as possible. Any character with Insight proficiency or a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** can tell that the Master is terrified of what awaits. Drak tosses the party a sack of credits on his way out the airlock. Proceed to *Success*.

Attacking the Master. If the characters wish, they can attack the Master to harvest some of its space vampire blood. It's indeed valuable, as the Scale Crew is here explicitly to acquire it. The Master will fight in self-defense, and the characters will likely have to conceal this blood from the Scale Crew. Proceed to *Success*.

Prisoner Trade. If Trace and Sierra O'Connell are still with the party, the characters might propose a prisoner trade: they'll return the two Scale Crew members, in exchange for the Master's freedom. Scale and Fang might be bureaucratic, even mechanistic at times, but Drak still values his team and their safety. With much grumbling, he agrees to the trade and performs it peacefully. If only one team member is still with the party, however, it will take a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to convince him. On a failure, Drak decides to raid the *Gettin'* to rescue his team members and capture the Master, forcing the characters to fight. With a successful prisoner trade, proceed to *Success*.

SUCCESS

Having escaped the *Astromo* and a standoff with the Scale Crew, the party repairs the *Gettin'* enough to limp back to Grax HQ. Grax is thoroughly disappointed with the death of the *Alluvian Astromos* and (because Jimball Hundwig, the accountant, is still gone) performs a post-mission debrief himself.

First, he docks the party's pay for failing to prevent the death of the team, and then offers to buy back any valuables they abstained on the mission. He pays the party according to the following criteria:

- The *Alluvian Astromos* team all turned into space vampires: –250 credits
- The party's ship was significantly damaged by the Astromo: –500 credits
- Coach Hankerton survived: +250 credits
- The party acquired valuable items they are willing to sell back to Grax: *Astromo* uniforms and name tags (+500 credits), a holo-sphere titled "*How to Cheat at Starball and Get Away With It*" (+1,000 credits), MAH-MAH 9000's *circuitry and processor parts* (+1,000 credits), or the Master's space vampire blood (+1,500 credits).

Coach Chuck Hankerton Survives. If the coach survives the adventure and returns to Grax HQ with the party, Grax offers him a job training some of his best mercenaries to become professional Starball players. The coach groans about having been two weeks away from retirement, but cannot pass up the opportunity to return to next year's championship game with a new and improved *Alluvian Astromos* team. If the characters wish to become Starball players on the coach's new team, the GM is encouraged to use the rules from Mage Hand Press's *Siegeball Sourcebook* and set its game in a star-filled space arena.

Coach Hankerton is remorseful for the part he played in his team's grisly deaths, and regrets acquiring space vampire blood to cheat. He is willing to do whatever it takes to make up for his mistakes, even if that means turning himself in or helping to expose the Starball League's illegal dealings in the black market. If he is able to help prove the Starball League's crimes, Coach Hankerton will be offered the job of League Commissioner after Commissioner Gordy Turnknuckle-Hobbs is arrested. Coach Hankerton will rely on the characters' advice to decide whether or not to take the job, retire from Starball, or return to coaching.

The Master Returns to Grax HQ. If the Master returns with the characters to their headquarters, Grax takes a surprising liking to the cute space vampire. He agrees to keep him safe and hidden until no one is looking for him any more. The Master may be convinced to give up his revenge quest against the Galactic Starball League, or the characters

may decide to help the Master unravel a larger plot and get justice for all of the slain space vampires who died to fuel Big Starball's profit machine. That is, when they're not busy with jobs for Grax.

If both the Master and Coach Hankerton move to Grax's Club headquarters, there is lingering tension, guilt, and distrust between the two. With the characters' help and given time, however, the Master and Coach Hankerton may become very close friends.

DEFEAT

The characters are defeated aboard their ship, which MAH-MAH 9000 and the Scale Crew leave to drift. At great expense, Grax arranges for the *Gettin'* to be recovered, along with the characters, and rents some low-cost healing tanks to restore the characters. The healing tanks do little to mend the scars they might have sustained, but otherwise makes them fighting-fit after about a month. Grax keeps a tab on how much all of these services cost, and insists that the characters will be paying him back with future successful jobs. The characters don't get paid, but are lucky to be alive.

SPACE VAMPIRES AS CHARACTERS

If one or more characters die during this adventure, the GM may allow them to return as space vampires, with cheesy black and red capes, terrible senses of humor, and an unquenchable thirst for brain juice. How they are reunited with the rest of the party is up to the absurd imagination of the players and GM.

Space Vampire Traits. Characters who turn into space vampires gain the following traits:

- **Brainsucking Bite.** As a bonus action, the space vampire makes a melee weapon attack with its fangs against one willing or grappled creature. On a hit, the target takes piercing damage equal to 1d6 + the space vampire's Dexterity modifier + 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. The target's Intelligence score is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken. The target dies if its Intelligence score is reduced to 0. The reduction to its Intelligence lasts until it finishes a long rest or until the vampire dies.

A creature killed by a space vampire's brainsucking bite rises as a stage one space vampire after 1d4 hours. It is under the control of the space vampire which killed it.

- **Damage Resistances.** Space vampires are resistant to necrotic and poison damage, and bludgeoning, piercing, radiant, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons.
- **General Sensitivity.** When the space vampire's cape, pale skin, or other vampire-like features are insulted, the vampire has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until the start of its next turn.
- **Spider Climb.** The space vampire can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.
- **Terrible Sense of Humor.** The space vampire reflexively makes terrible jokes, no matter the circumstance.

CURING SPACE VAMPIRISM

The characters can learn from the Master of a planet called Arachnoterra where they can find a cure to the curse of space vampirism. The planet is ruled by superintelligent giant spiders and a monstrous Spider Queen, who will demand a gift worthy of her presence. If their gift is acceptable, the Spider Queen allows the characters access to a magical lake that reverses the vampiric transformation and frees the character of the curse of terrible dad jokes.

Alternatively, the GM can present a different, less spider-themed side quest to remedy the curse.

GRAX'S CLUB

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MONSTERS

The following monsters feature prominently in this adventure.

BIG HOB

A colossal space ferret, perhaps the last of its kind, Big Hob has wandered the jungles of Gaozu for decades, thwarting hunters and besting every manner of predator the jungle-world can produce. If scaled down, Big Hob would look identical to a normal ferret, complete with tan-brown fur and a pattern resembling a mask upon his face, but he is fully thirty feet in length. At this size, he can do what ferrets do best—dig holes and collect interesting objects—without obstacle.

BIG HOB

Gargantuan monstrosity, neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 135 (10d20 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	9 (–1)	17 (+3)	7 (–2)	11 (+0)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Con +8

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Common, but can't speak

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Stink Gland (3/Day). A creature which attacks Big Hob must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Big Hob uses his Constrict attack or Weasel War Dance ability and attacks twice, once with his bite and once with his claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 16) Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained, and Big Hob can't constrict another target.

Weasel War Dance. Big Hob hops from side to side in his space. Until the end of his turn, Big Hob has advantage on attack rolls.

NUCLEAR CHICKEN

So named for its thermonuclear death throes, the nuclear chicken is the most singularly destructive chicken in the multiverse. No predator, no matter how starved, will risk attacking the easy-to-spot glowing chicken, for the moment it does so, the chicken would explode and kill everything in a huge radius. As such, the nuclear chicken is a lonely creature with an ornery temperament, a true bully of the animal kingdom.

NUCLEAR CHICKEN

Tiny monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 3 (2d4 – 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (–4)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)	2 (–4)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Nuclear Death Burst. When the chicken dies, it explodes in a thermonuclear fireball. Each creature within 60 feet of it must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

ACTIONS

Peck. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 1 (1d4) piercing damage.

Kaboom! The chicken uses its Nuclear Death Burst ability and dies in the ensuing explosion.

SPACE VAMPIRES

Thirsting for brain juice and possessed of a terrible sense of humor, space vampires are a blight on spacers the ‘verse over.

STAGE ONE SPACE VAMPIRE

Stage one space vampires are simple creatures newly risen to unlife under the control of a more powerful space vampire. They live only to hiss menacingly, crack terrible jokes, and drink the brain juice of sentient creatures to slate their endless thirst for more comedic material. Space vampires materialize a magical black and red cape akin to Count Dracula’s. This cape may never be tarnished or destroyed by any means while the space vampire still “lives”. Though stage one vampires can dish it, they can’t take it: they are uniquely vulnerable to insults and jokes at the expense of their vampiric appearance.

The *Alluvian Astromos* team that has transformed into space vampires still wear their Starball jerseys beneath their magical capes. The GM is encouraged to give each of them numbers and last names (ex: #17 Grakskies).

STAGE TWO SPACE VAMPIRE

Stage two space vampires have evolved from their humble and annoying beginnings, and in the process of their mutation have become some of the most terrifying monstrosities that a crew could encounter in the ‘verse. They appear to be a grotesque amalgamation of a giant bat, with wide membranous wings, and a four-armed insectoid being with a grey, chitinous exoskeleton and a long, barbed tail. Their blood is acidic, making fighting them in close quarters particularly deadly. Their face vaguely resembles that of a bat-humanoid hybrid, with jaws that can extend and open to be nearly three feet wide to reveal four rows of razor-sharp fangs.

Stage two space vampires are nefariously hard to kill and make incredible hunters, able to silently stalk their prey and viciously pick off crew members, one by one. Despite their monstrous metamorphosis, like all space vampires, these foul creatures are still extremely sensitive towards being made fun of or insulted.

STAGE ONE SPACE VAMPIRE

Medium undead (humanoid), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

General Sensitivity. When the space vampire's cape, pale skin, or other vampire-like features are insulted or made the butt of a joke, the vampire has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until the start of its next turn.

Spider Climb. The space vampire can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Team Player. The space vampire has advantage on attacks made against creatures who have inflicted damage on one of the vampire's allies since the end of their previous turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The space vampire uses its claws and then uses its brainsucking bite or its cape flourish.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage and the target must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw or become grappled.

Brainsucking Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing or grappled creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. The target's Intelligence is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken and the space vampire's Intelligence increases by an equal amount. The target dies if its Intelligence is reduced to 0 and the changes to each creature's Intelligence lasts until they take a long rest, or until the vampire dies. If the space vampire's Intelligence ever surpasses 18, its head explodes and it immediately dies.

A creature killed by a space vampire's brainsucking bite rises as a stage one space vampire under this vampire's control.

STAGE THREE SPACE VAMPIRE

Stage three space vampires, also known as master space vampires, are the final evolution. Only the oldest space vampires evolve to their final form: a one foot tall, adorable white bat-like creature with expressive pink eyes, purple eyelashes, and long floppy pink ears. This evolution allows the master vampire to be able to better control its thirst for brain juice, avoid annoying others with awful puns, and to better survive in a 'verse that fears space vampires. The most fearsome of the master's new abilities is its eyes: it can drain a creature's mind simply by staring cutely at it. It's for this reason, and the master vampire's ability to control weaker vampires over a large distance, that one should never underestimate these otherwise adorable creatures.

The blood of master space vampires is highly sought after on black markets around the 'verse for its regenerative and performance-enhancing properties, making space vampire hunting a very popular profession among the foolhardy.

SPACE VAMPIRE THWIRREL

Thwirrel space vampires are similar to other stage one space vampires in most ways: they are sensitive about their appearance, materialize an indestructible cloak, require brain juice to survive, and are generally a terrible annoyance to their foes. However, vampire thwirrels retain the unique ability to siphon energy from magical devices (though they can no longer use their camouflage abilities). They use the magic siphoned this way to amplify their brain-drinking powers, making them significantly more dangerous than your average thwirrel.

STAGE TWO SPACE VAMPIRE

Large undead (monstrosity), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 171 (13d10 + 39)

Speed 50 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	5 (–3)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +8, Wis +6

Skills Athletics +10, Perception +6, Stealth +8, Survival +6

Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Acidic Blood. When the space vampire takes damage from a melee weapon attack, if the attacker is within 5 feet of the space vampire they must make a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 10 (3d6) acid damage.

General Sensitivity. When the space vampire's appearance, bat wings, or other vampire-like features are insulted or made the butt of a joke, the vampire has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until the start of its next turn.

Misty Escape. The space vampire may spend its action, bonus action, and movement to shapeshift into a cloud of green mist and teleport up to a space within 300 feet, before taking its true form

once again. Grappled creatures do not teleport along with the space vampire.

Monstrous Survivor (2/Day). When damage would reduce the space vampire's hit points to 0, it appears to die. At the start of its next turn, it rises to continue its hunt with 33 (6d10) hit points.

Turn Resistance. The space vampire has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The space vampire makes three attacks with its claws and one attack with either its stinger or its brainsucking bite.

Brainsucking Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a grappled creature. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. The target's Intelligence is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken and the space vampire's Intelligence increases by an equal amount. The target dies if its Intelligence is reduced to 0 and the changes to each creature's Intelligence lasts until they take a long rest, or until the vampire dies.

A creature killed by a space vampire's brainsucking bite rises as a stage one space vampire under this vampire's control.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (2d4 + 5) slashing damage and the target must make a successful DC 17 Strength saving throw or be grappled.

Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

STAGE THREE SPACE VAMPIRE

Tiny undead (shapechanger), unaligned

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 50 (9d4 + 27)

Speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +6, Perception +5, Persuasion +6, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing and radiant from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Evasion. When the space vampire is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, it instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

General Sensitivity. When the space vampire's cute appearance, large ears, or other vampire-like features are insulted or made the butt of a joke, the vampire has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until the start of its next turn.

Misty Escape. The space vampire may spend its action, bonus action, and movement to shapeshift into a cloud of green mist and teleport up to a space within 300 feet, before taking its true form once again.

Shapechange (3/Day). As an action, the space vampire can change its shape into any immaterial object of similar size that it has touched. It retains the white and pink coloring of its true form, but is otherwise indistinguishable from the object it takes the appearance of. The space vampire can change back to its true form at any time as a free action.

Turn Resistance. The space vampire has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) slashing damage.

Brain Drain. One creature within 30 feet that can see the space vampire must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 15 (2d10 + 4) psychic damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's Intelligence is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken and the space vampire's Intelligence increases by an equal amount. The target dies if its Intelligence is reduced to 0 and the changes to each creature's Intelligence lasts until they take a long rest, or until the vampire dies.

A creature killed by a space vampire's brain drain immediately rises as a stage one space vampire under this vampire's control.

REACTIONS

Cute Stare. If a creature targets the space vampire with an attack, the vampire bats its eyelashes innocently and wraps its long bat ears cutely around its body. The attacking creature must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be stunned until the end of its turn, and the space vampire may make a brain drain attack against the target as a free action.

SPACE VAMPIRE THWIRREL

Tiny undead (thwirrel), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 17 (5d4 + 5)

Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (−4)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	4 (−3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

General Sensitivity. When the space vampire's thwirrel nature, pallid fur, tiny fangs, or other vampire-like features are insulted or made the butt of a joke, the vampire has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until the start of its next turn.

Energy Siphon. When the space vampire hits a magically powered device with a brainsucking bite

attack, it can use its bonus action to drain some energy from the device. When it does so, its next successful brainsucker bite attack deals an additional 3 (1d6) necrotic damage and 14 (4d6) lightning damage on a hit.

Keen Hearing and Smell. The vampire has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Spider Climb. The vampire can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

ACTIONS

Brainsucking Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a grappled creature. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage, and the target is grappled. The target's Intelligence is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken and the space vampire's Intelligence increases by an equal amount. The target dies if its Intelligence is reduced to 0 and the changes to each creature's Intelligence lasts until they take a long rest, or until the vampire dies. If the vampire's Intelligence ever surpasses 12, its head explodes and it immediately dies (again).

A creature killed by a space vampire's brainsucking bite rises as a stage one space vampire under this vampire's control.

STIRGE RAPTOR

The stirge raptor is an insectile alien dinosaur with compound eyes, chitinous scales, and two sets of vestigial forelimbs. Behind its row of razor sharp teeth, it conceals a proboscis which lunges outward some distance to rapidly drain blood from a creature.

SWARM OF ROGUE A.I. WIRES

Rogue Artificial Intelligences are capable of infesting wiring, bending them to their will. In combat, these swarms of deadly, sparking wires move at the A.I.'s will and with its general disregard for organic life.

STIRGE RAPTOR

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 40 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	4 (–3)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)

Senses passive Perception 11
Languages —
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cannibalize. If the stirge raptor uses its proboscis on the corpse of a stirge raptor, it can add 1d6 to its attacks and damage rolls for 1 minute.

Pack Tactics. The stirge raptor has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the stirge raptor's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Vestigial Wings. The stirge raptor falls at the end of a turn if it's airborne and the only thing holding it aloft is its flying speed.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Proboscis. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, and stirge raptor regains 3 (1d6) hit points.

SWARM OF ROGUE A.I. WIRES

Medium swarm of Small constructs, unaligned

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 43 (14d8 – 20)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	6 (–2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	4 (–3)

Damage Immunities lightning, necrotic, poisoned, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages —
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Explode. When the swarm is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes in a shower of sparks. Each creature within 5 feet must make a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) lightning damage.

False Appearance. While the swarm remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal tangle of wires.

Pulse. A creature that is grappled by the swarm at the start of its turn takes 21 (6d6) lightning damage, or 10 (3d6) lightning damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. Until the end of its turn, it has disadvantage on attack rolls.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a small construct. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Charged Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 1 bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) lightning damage, or 3 (1d6) lightning damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. The target is grappled (escape DC 11).

APPENDIX B: NONPLAYER CHARACTERS (NPCS)

The following nonplayer characters appear in this adventure.

BUDD FELMER

Budd Felmer has the gait, moustache, and accoutrement of a prolific big game hunter, but the greying hair and ruined joints of a ranger past his prime. Despite this, he is driven to catch one more big critter to leave his mark on the world of hunting. He keeps his blaster, a modified concussion rifle, in pristine condition at all times, to ensure he's always ready for just such a hunt.

BUDD FELMER

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 13 (nanofiber vest)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)

Skills Nature +3, Perception +4, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Hunter's Instinct. Budd adds an extra 1d6 damage to a creature that he hits with a weapon attack (included in the attack).

ACTIONS

Concussion Rifle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) thunder damage plus 3 (1d6) thunder damage. Budd has disadvantage on attacks with this weapon if the target is within 20 feet.

CHUCK HANKERTON

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +5

Skills Insight +6, Persuasion +7

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish, Orcish

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Clout. Chuck gains a bonus to ability checks and saving throws equal to the number of conscious allies he can see within 30 feet, up to a maximum bonus equal to his Charisma modifier (+3).

ACTIONS

Arc Baton. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) lightning damage. If the target is a creature, it can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.

Stirring Speech (Recharge 5–6). Chuck delivers a stirring speech ripped from the scripts of several widely known holo-films. This speech does not need to make sense in regard to the current situation. All allies within 30 feet who can hear the speech are able to reroll one attack roll, ability check, or saving throw before the end of their next turn, taking the new result.

CHUCK HANKERTON

Chuck Hankerton was never much of a Starball player himself, but he is beloved and renowned for his skill as a Starball coach. Old, grumpy, addicted to candy bars, and full of useless trivia knowledge, there is absolutely no reason anyone should fear Chuck in battle. However, his years as a coach and watching action blockbuster holo-films has prepared him for anything, and he still has a way of helping his team be the best they can be.

GREGGY IRONSMELT

Medium humanoid (dwarf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (triplate suit)

Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Survival +1

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Dwarven Resilience. They have advantage on saving throws against poison and resistance to poison damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Gregggy makes two attacks.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Repeater. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

IVANA ZARKOFF

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (nanofiber vest)

Hit Points 36 (8d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Skills Nature +4, Perception +5, Survival +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ivana makes two attacks with her antimatter dagger.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Concussion Rifle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) thunder damage. Ivana has disadvantage on attacks with this weapon if the target is within 20 feet.

GREGGY IRONSMELT

The very probably senile dwarf Gregggy Ironsmelt has been living off the land on Gaozu for untold decades. Despite being a well-known figure around Taisong, known to every traveller that passes through, none have been around long enough to know that Gregggy predates the settlement itself: he crash landed on the dwarven ship, the Vorpall, and was its sole survivor. It is perhaps because of all those who perished in the landing that Gregggy never left this jungle world, or perhaps because he prefers the simpler life of hunting and exploring.

IVANA ZARKOFF

The ruthless and professional Ivana Zarkoff has one standard: the very best. Perhaps, it is this uncompromising nature that makes her so impossible to escape in a hunt, or perhaps it is that she surrounds herself with the very best help. Her high standards have caused countless firings for slight mistakes and failures, but those who stick by her side, like the Scale and Fang mercenaries she takes to hiring, have proven they are good enough to do so.

JANUARY THE THWIRREL

Tiny beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 33 (9d4 + 9)

Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (−4)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +6, Cha +3

Skills Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +6

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Energy Siphon. When the thwirrel hits a magically powered device with a bite attack, it can use its bonus action to drain some energy from the device. When it does so, the save DC for its Psychic Camouflage feature increases by 1, to a maximum of 16, for the next 24 hours. Smaller devices—such as blasters and datapads—that are affected by this trait cease to function for 1 hour. Larger devices such as automatons or Dark Matter engines only cease to function for 1 round.

Keen Hearing and Smell. The thwirrel has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Psychic Camouflage. The thwirrel can take the Hide action even when it isn't in a heavily obscured area. Additionally, when a creature would normally see, hear, touch, or smell a thwirrel, it must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a successful save, the creature can perceive all thwirrels as normal for the next 10 minutes. On a failed save, the creature can't see, hear, feel, or smell any thwirrels for the same duration. In either case, the saving throw must be repeated every 10 minutes, or until the creature is no longer within visual range of any thwirrels. Creatures with truesight are immune to this trait.

Innate Spellcasting (Psionics). January's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). January can innately cast the following spells (as psionic abilities), requiring no material, verbal, or somatic components.

At will: *mage hand*, *magic missile*, *mending*, *minor illusion*

2/day each: *detect thoughts*, *shield*, *sleep*

1/day each: *dream*, *fly*, *telekinesis*

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage.

JANUARY

January is a super-intelligent thwirrel. All thwirrels are psionic, but January is, for reasons that are completely unknown, also telepathic and smarter than most artificial intelligences. January is something of an anarchist and is extremely mischievous. Once crossed, she makes the subject of her anger her nemesis, using her psychic abilities to torment them in subtle and mundane ways, until someone else becomes her nemesis instead.

SCALE CREW

The Scale Crew consists of the vect sniper, Trace, the greenskin rogue, Sierra O'Connell, the half-elven sorcerer, Aela Vestele, and their dragonborn leader, Drak Garfreckt.

DRAK GARFRECKT

Medium humanoid (dragonborn), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (adamant hardsuit)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +4

Damage Resistances fire

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft.,
passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Brave. Drak has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Special Equipment. Drak wears a *ring of spacewalking* and a *personal shield emitter*. He also stores the following items in a *weapon wheel*: a magnus opum, a REC Gun, a Rocket Hammer, and a *sorting beast*.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Drak makes two melee attacks or three ranged attacks.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). Drak exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Rocket Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (1d10 + 1d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Magnus Opum. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 70/280 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) radiant damage. The weapon then overheats, and can't be used until the end of the Drak's next turn.

REC Gun. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) radiant damage.

REACTIONS

Shield Overcharge (1/Day). Drak gains a +5 bonus to his AC until the start of his next turn.

TRACE

Medium humanoid (vect), neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (composite plating)

Hit Points 61 (11d8 + 11)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)

Skills Arcana +4, Data +4, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +6, Technology +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., thermalsight 30 ft.,
passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Construct Anatomy. Trace is immune to nonmagical diseases, and they don't need to eat, drink, or breathe.

Construct Grafts. Trace has the following grafts installed: finger picks, infravision eyes, and a thermoregulator.

Inflexible Mind. Trace has advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Trace deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when they hit a target with a weapon attack and have advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 ft. of one of Trace's allies that isn't incapacitated and Trace doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Trace makes two melee weapon attacks.

Focused Concussion Rifle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 200/800 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) thunder damage. Trace has disadvantage on attacks with this weapon if the target is within 20 feet.

Antimatter Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) necrotic damage.

Omni-Grenade. Trace throws a grenade at a point they can see within 30 feet. Each creature within a 5-foot radius of that point must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) fire damage, or half as much on a successful save.

SIERRA O'CONNELL

Medium humanoid (near-human greenskin),
neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (greenskin)

Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +2

Skills Acrobatics +5, Deception +6, Perception +2, Performance +6

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of her turns, Sierra can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Photosynthetic Metabolism. Sierra has advantage on saving throws against being poisoned.

Spellcasting. Sierra is a 4th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *cheat*, *mage hand*, *vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *hardlight blaster*, *healing word*, *memorize*, *sleep*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility*, *shatter*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Sierra makes 3 melee weapon attacks, or 6 attacks with disadvantage using her swarm pistols.

Photonic Lash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) radiant damage.

Swarm Pistols. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) radiant damage.

AELA VESTELE

Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11 (14 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)

Skills Arcana +4, History +4, Persuasion +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Alien Spellcasting. Whenever Aela casts a spell of 1st level or higher, she gains one of the following benefits of her choice until the start of her next turn:

- She sprouts tentacles and gains a climb speed equal to her movement speed.
- Eyes open in her skin, granting her the ability to see invisible creatures and objects as if they were visible. She can also see into the Ethereal Plane.
- Her skin becomes slimy and unnaturally tough, granting her a +2 bonus to her Armor class.

Spellcasting. Aela is a 5th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *poison spray*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *mage armor**, *magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility*, *scorching ray*

3rd level (2 slots): *fireball*

*Aela casts this spell on herself before combat.

Unnatural Anatomy. Aela takes no additional damage from critical hits.

ACTIONS

Psionic Helm. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 70/280 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

APPENDIX C: BROKEN KRASH MACHINE

For reasons nobody understands and fewer care to question, the broken Krash vending machine in the Grax's Club headquarters will deposit random magic items if enough credits are fed into it. Between adventures, characters are encouraged to spend their extra cash on gambling for new and exciting magic items and equipment.

The machine has four buttons, which have prices of 100 credits, 500 credits, 2,500 credits, and 7,500 credits. Depending on the amount inserted, roll a d20 on one of the following tables to determine which magic item or piece of equipment is dispensed. Keep track of which items have been provided to the players. If a character rolls an item which has already been produced, they receive the next lowest magic item on the table, or an error and a return of credits if there is no lower magic item.

100 CREDIT MAGIC ITEMS

d20 Magic Item

- 1 rocket hammer
- 2 plasma launcher
- 3 psionic helm
- 4 *enigma ring*
- 5 *gamestation-7331*
- 6 *ankh of Ra*
- 7 *attactor mine*
- 8 *dome projector*
- 9 *energy shield bracer*
- 10 *gravity nullifier*
- 11 *holo-companion*
- 12 *jetpack*
- 13 *potion of solar radiance*
- 14 *reflex holster*
- 15 *ring of spacewalking*
- 16 *spider pod*
- 17 *transmat deck*
- 18 *void beacon*
- 19 *weapon wheel*
- 20 *zipgun*

500 CREDIT MAGIC ITEMS

d20 Magic Item

- 1 diode beam
- 2 REC gun
- 3 singularity emitter
- 4 volcanic
- 5 *drone controller* (with defense drone)
- 6 *tachyon missile*
- 7 +1 wrenchinator
- 8 *deconstructive nanobots*
- 9 *double laser blade*
- 10 *drive disk*
- 11 *hivemaster pistol*
- 12 *hoverboard*
- 13 *hullcutter*
- 14 *Hyper-Krash*
- 15 *personal shield emitter*
- 16 *potion of quantum effect*
- 17 *reconstructive nanobots*
- 18 *remote piloting apparatus*
- 19 *sorting beast*
- 20 *universal translator*

2,500 CREDIT MAGIC ITEMS

d20 Magic Item

- 1–2 +1 *adamant hardsuit* (full plate)
- 3–4 *grasshopper*
- 5–6 *motion tracker*
- 7–8 *shoulder cannon*
- 9–10 +1 *thaumatonic rifle*
- 11–12 *thunder rifle*
- 13–14 *vari-blaster*
- 15–16 +2 *void shackles*
- 17–18 *W-REC*
- 19–20 *golem skin*

7,500 CREDIT MAGIC ITEMS

d20 Magic Item

- 1–4 *Encyclopedia Multiplanaria*
- 5–8 *rebounding blade*
- 9–12 *ring of paradoxes*
- 13–16 *skeleton keycard*
- 17–19 *death ray*
- 20 *arcane warhead*

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