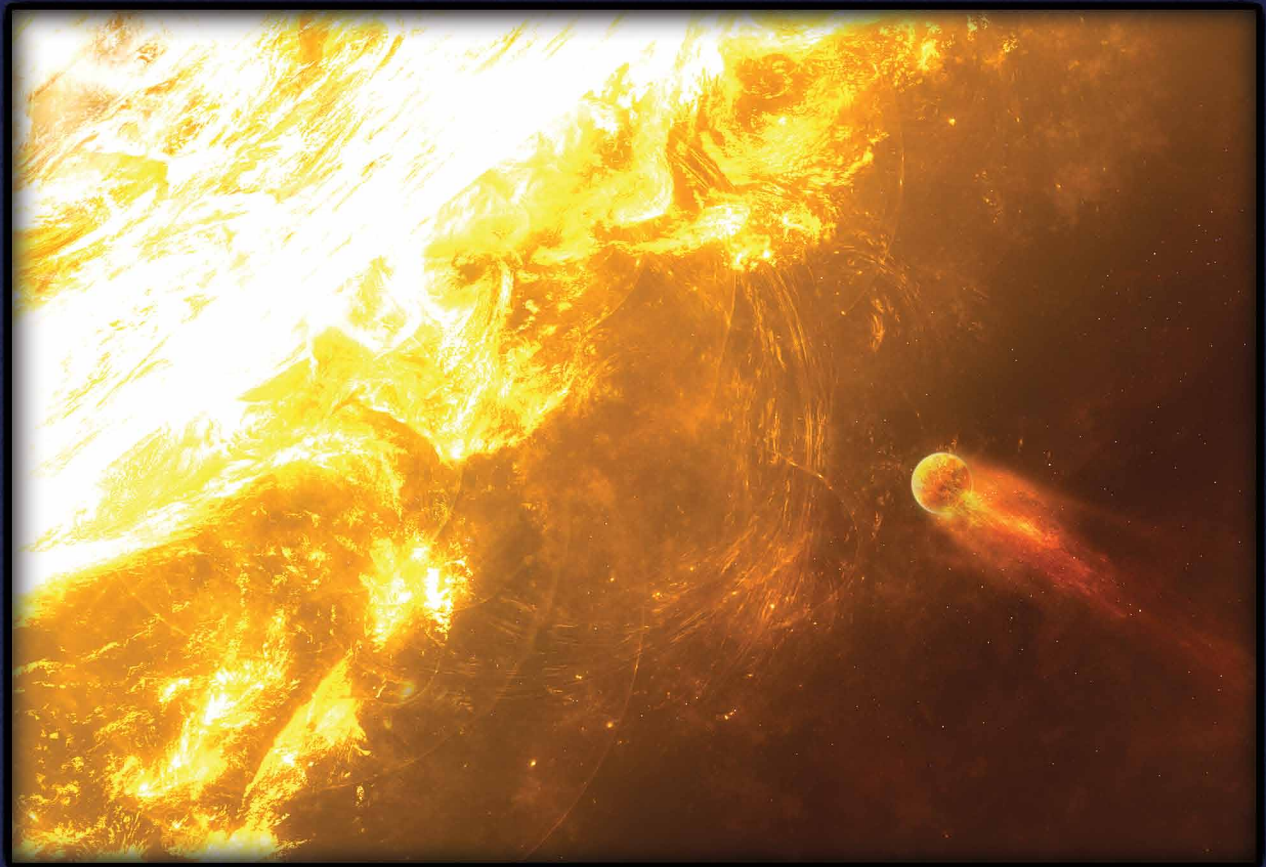


**M1** FOR THE *STARS WITHOUT NUMBER* ROLE-PLAYING GAME

# ***HARD LIGHT***

BY KEVIN CRAWFORD



*A KILLING LIGHT SHINES ON THE GRAVES OF A LOST RACE IN THE **HARD LIGHT** SYSTEM. CAN THE ADVENTURERS SURVIVE THE TREACHEROUS CORRIDORS OF **BRIGHTSIDE STATION** AND THE PERILS OF THE ANCIENT **SKY TOMBS**?*

[S.]INE [N.]OMINE  
PUBLISHING

*AN ADVENTURE FOR 4-6 CHARACTERS OF LEVELS 1-3*

# ***HARD LIGHT***

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The red giant Perdurabo burns at the center of the Hard Light system. It casts its lethal radiance out from the molten slag-droplets of the inner system to the charred debris that circles at the outer rim. It is monstrously hostile to all living flesh. The radioactivity emitted by the star is enough to burn through ship shielding in a matter of days and the only safety lies in hiding behind the scorched bulk of some lonely stone.

Brightside Station was built here fifty years ago, its materials brought up from the half-melted planetoid of iron and rock that serves as its shield against Perdurabo. It was a remarkably risky investment by the Geostellar Mining Industries, but Perdurabo offered wealth as well as death. The star emits tiny particles of novium amid its sleet of radiation. This rare substance is vital for the maintenance and upkeep of many pretech manufacturing devices, and GMI needed Brightside to serve as a refinery for its catcher drones.

The banks in GMI's home system were dubious about the project from the start, yet GMI's charismatic chairman, Jingfei Tang, was able to convince them that their loans were well-placed. She and her corporation would be rich beyond imagination once the novium shipments started to come in.

The banks believed it, too, until a routine audit demonstrated that Tang's son Gui had gutted GMI's accounts in a ham-fisted attempt at embezzlement. Despite his protestations of innocence, the banks moved in to foreclose on the newly-completed Brightside Station. As they knew nothing of mining and were in desperate need of a payoff to support the loans they'd made, they left the existing station director in place. Director Yash Dutta was god over his tiny Purgatory so long as he kept the novium shipments coming in.

It was just as Dutta had planned when he arranged to frame Gui Tang for the embezzlement. Once the money was in hand, he expected to skip Brightside for more civilized systems... but he hadn't counted on Jingfei Tang's family. Several dozen relatives made it very clear to Dutta that they were going to kill him for what he had done, whether or not they had proof sufficient for a court of law. Dutta's station became his prison, with him as his own chief jailer.

For fifty years, Dutta has kept Brightside operating in the teeth of every disaster and hardship that Hard Light could offer him. He calls Perdurabo "The Beast", and two generations of station personnel follow him in the name. It is an enemy, a hostile, ravaging god of white light and killing radiance, but they send their catcher drones out into the burning clarity every day to filter out the precious particles of novium. For some, it's the only life they've ever known.

The novium shipments are rich, but not nearly as rich as Jingfei Tang had anticipated. It is a struggle to make the bank payments, but Dutta works feverishly to ensure they are met. If he fails, he and the rest of the station's inhabitants are sure to be shipped off to parts unknown as the station is sold to some hungrier consortium. For many of the inhabitants, such a thing would be a hardship. For Dutta, it would be a death sentence.

But novium is not the only thing of note in Hard Light. Two years ago, a wayward novium transport was arriving under the shelter of the outer rim debris when their scanners picked up an anomalous asteroid. The captain dared to go closer, and an away team discovered that the asteroid had been carved out by ancient aliens. Within the pressurized interior, strange artifacts of glass and mineral fibers were found alongside the desiccated body of a humanoid alien lying in an ornate casket of transparent pseudo-quartz. A tablet within the sepulchre gave the astronomic coordinates of more of the well-hidden "sky tombs".

Since then, explorers and adventurers from nearby systems have occasionally made pilgrimages to Hard Light in order to plunder these ancient tombs. A representative from a major research combine has even set up permanent shop on Brightside simply to buy the takings from these ancient crypts. Still, the work exacts its own price in dead. More than one team of explorers has been lost forever in the depths of a sky tomb, and there are persistent tales of pirates and worse lairing in the pressurized safety of a looted tomb. A few of the ancient rocks are known to be inhabited by hermits or small, reclusive communities that care little for outsiders. They do minimal trade with Brightside Station for the necessities they require.

Within the station, tensions are growing. The bank always seems to be demanding more production, and Dutta drives his workers hard to make the quota. Some are beginning to grumble, and while transients are willing enough to leave on the next transport ship, those born and raised on Brightside are beginning to consider what life might be like without Dutta as Director.

These murmurs are cultivated by Roland Lomax, the station cargo chief and a bitter enemy of Dutta. He came here to Brightside one step ahead of out-system law, and he has no more future in the wider world than Dutta does. Yet he knows the dark truth behind Brightside Station's origins, thanks to a chance discovery by one of his pirate comrades. He holds the proof tightly, just waiting for the next novium transport to dock so he can show it to a bank auditor. If he plays his cards right in the meanwhile, the station will have no choice but to accept his promotion to Director. Then things will be run more to Roland Lomax's liking....

## BRIGHTSIDE STATION

The station itself is built along the old Bannerjee Twelve structural lines, a construction pattern popular since pre-Scream days for its cheapness, reliability, and ease of maintenance. The fittings aren't especially modern, and the living is primitive compared to more advanced stations, but the reliability is vital in the face of Hard Light's special dangers.

The station is an ovoid cylinder in shape, its habitable decks divided into three levels. The artificial gravity generators and maneuver jets dominate the "bottom" of the station, below the lowest habitable deck. Above them is the "lowdeck" with the cargo hold, station control room, docking bays, and refinery operations. Above that is "middeck" with station offices and businesses. At the top of the station is "highdeck", with the hydroponic bay, cafeteria, living quarters, and fusion power plant.

### Navigation on the Station

Brightside is relatively stationary above the dark side of the planetoid Aegis, with the bulk of the iron-carbon worldlet serving to shelter the station from the Beast's radiation. This positioning makes it difficult to use conventional dirtsider terminology like "north" or "south", so the natives of Hard Light use a different set of directions.

Aboard the station, "up" and "down" refer to the levels of Brightside Station, "fore" refers to the direction in which Aegis is orbiting, "aft" is the opposite, "inby" is toward the Beast and "outby" is away from the star. The orientation of the station means that "inby" corresponds to conventional north on the maps, "outby" is south, "fore" is west, and "aft" is east.

### Station Systems

Several systems are vital to maintaining life aboard Brightside Station. Combat aboard the station runs the risk of damaging some or all of these crucial systems, and not all of them can be repaired using only the station workshops.

The most immediately important system is the atmosphere refresher. The Brightside relies on the highdeck hydroponic bay to filter and freshen the atmosphere of the station, and the bay can support up to 200 inhabitants at once. Mechanical backup scrubbers are available in case something kills off the hydroponic bay, but the scrubbers are old and cantankerous, and require constant tending to function. It is impossible to mine or refine novium while tending the scrubbers, and it takes at least three months to regrow the hydroponic bay from seeds.

Food is also supplied by the hydro bay, with fruits, vegetables, and meat-analogs sufficient to feed 200 inhabitants indefinitely. Emergency rations sufficient to feed the same number of occupants for six months are kept in the cargo bay.

Water is used both for drinking and for reaction mass for the station's maneuver thrusters. The majority of it is kept in a vast tank running along the outside of the station's hull, though emergency stores are also kept in tanks on middeck and highdeck. The station's recirculators are fairly efficient, but heavy position corrections or a tank rupture may force the station to find and harvest an ice

asteroid ahead of schedule. Locating and assaying such asteroids is dangerous, and Dutta will prefer to enlist expendable outsiders to do the work.

The maneuver jets are old and primitive, but sufficient for the small, regular corrections the station requires to remain safely on the dark side of Aegis. If something wrecks the jets, however, the station will begin to drift out into the direct light of the Beast, and will leave the safety of Aegis' shadow in 72 hours. Once beyond the protection of the planetoid, the murderous radiation of the inner system will turn the station into a glowing tomb within 24 hours.

The refinery system is vital to producing the novium required by the bank contract. The entire process is fraught with radioactive buffer fluid, high energy extraction filters, and globules of molten lead. Any serious accident in the refinery section of lowdeck is apt to produce spectacular injuries.

The artificial gravity generators are beneath lowdeck, in the service level next to the maneuver jets. The station was originally designed to cope with periods of null gravity, but the decades of reliable operation have left the inhabitants careless. If the gravity cuts out without warning, the corridors and bays of the station will be filled with unsecured objects and floating globules of liquid.

The station's power comes from a fusion plant on highdeck. Ideas of using solar catchers were mulled briefly during construction, but nothing sufficiently cheap could survive constant exposure to the Beast's radiation. If the fusion plant goes down, emergency power can run the station's hydro bay, artificial gravity, and maneuver jets for 72 hours before things start to go downhill. By cutting everything except life support to highdeck and crucial maneuvering, the station can limp along for six months.

Finally, the station is equipped with a cruiser-class gravcannon for discouraging the attention of pirates and other unsavory sorts. The cannon is mounted on a sliding turret, so can fire in any necessary direction. A saboteur who gains control of the gun through the station bridge can even open fire on ships docked at a mooring stud or the umbilical dock.

### Mining the Novium

Novium extraction depends on the catcher drones, a fleet of two dozen small, unmanned system boats filled with highly radioactive buffer fluid. These drones are programmed to fly out into the Beast's light, absorb the incoming novium particles, and then return to Brightside Station. They dock at long iron mooring studs, where some unlucky miner in a heavily-shielded vacc suit then hooks up a transfer umbilical to pump out the fluid.

Within the station, mining chief Mary Tomlinson oversees the extraction of novium from the buffer fluid and its eventual recycling back to the catcher drone. The particles are then embedded within fifteen-kilo lead ingots. The ingots easily sell for 2,500 credits apiece back on more civilized worlds, and the mining station produces an average of two each day. Transport ships chartered by the banks arrive three to four times a year to take off the ingots.

The entire process is dirty, dangerous, and high in radiation. Medical chief Suyin Indrani is an old hand at repairing radiation damage in miners, but even she has her limits, and hooking up the catcher drones and handling the buffer fluid are duties often given as punishment to troublemakers.

## Laws and Regulations

Yash Dutta is judge, jury, and final court of appeals for lawbreakers on Brightside Station, though most minor matters are handled by his security chief, Livingston Roy. Most of the rules aboard the Brightside are nothing more than common law prohibitions against assault, theft, vandalism, and other predictable bans. Petty violators are fined 50 credits or forced to work a few days doing umbilical hook-ups for the catcher drones. Repeat troublemakers might face a public whipping. Serious criminals responsible for murder, rape, or the endangerment of the station's vital systems can expect to be pitched out of an airlock, though the lucky ones might simply be beaten, imprisoned until the next transport ship arrives, and then exiled off the station.

Wearing armor or bearing weaponry is forbidden on Brightside Station for everyone except the department chiefs and Livingston Roy's security staff. Knives and tools are overlooked, but using them as weaponry will aggravate any brawling offenses.

Inhabitants are expected to obey any orders given by a department chief or security staffer. Complaints of abuse can be lodged with Dutta, and he's usually reasonably fair about ensuring that the authorities don't push this too far. He knows how much damage a single disgruntled miner can do to the station, and he doesn't want to give Roland Lomax more grist for his complaints.

## Life on the Brightside

For permanent residents, Brightside life is fairly predictable. Work shifts are eight hours out of every twenty-four, and most inhabitants labor in the refinery or maintenance shops. Everyone aboard the Brightside is expected either to have some sort of employment or to pay their way in cash.

Outsiders pay a 5 credit per day "air tax", and can rent a bunk and footlocker in the transient quarters for 5 credits a day, with three meals a day in the cafeteria included. Permanent residents are usually assigned quarters, and pay about 3 credits a day for food and incidentals.

The work is hard, but well-paid by most standards. Refinery workers make 12 credits a day and require no special skills beyond a willingness to deal with occasional radiation accidents. Technicians with at least 1 rank of skill in Tech/Astronautics, Tech/Postech, or Science can earn 25 credits a day. Outsiders can get day labor at these rates by applying with Dutta at the station offices, but they won't be taken on as permanent residents unless Dutta's convinced they won't be trouble down the line.

Entertainment is largely self-provided. The station has an artificial park on highdeck, and a theater on middeck for concerts, plays, holomovies, and debates. The Midnight Sun on middeck serves up drinks and music, and the Clouds and Rain provides companionship at reasonable rates. Both businesses do roaring business when visitors dock, but the prostitutes have side jobs in the medical clinic or hydro bay during the slow periods.

Getting off Brightside can be difficult. The only reliable visitors are the novium transport ships that dock every three or four months, and they charge 500 credits for passage to the nearest system. Free traders might cut cheaper tickets, but there's no telling when one will show up, or where it will be bound. Not all of them are the sort to be burdened with excessive trustworthiness, either.

## Personnel on Brightside

One hundred permanent residents call Brightside home, about half of them born and bred there with the others being laborers who have come for the steady work. Population growth is small, partly because Dutta discourages having children aboard the Brightside, and partly because few couples care to raise a child aboard a semi-radioactive mining station. Still, ten children are aboard the station, with ages ranging from two to sixteen.

Of the remaining 90 adults, 52 are men and 38 are women. There are 22 married or permanently coupled pairs among them, some of them same-sex. A few of the immigrants from more repressive worlds bridle at this "unnatural behavior", but Dutta and the native-born Brightsiders soon teach them to keep those opinions private.

Twelve of the adults are security staffers working for Livingston Roy, with four of them on duty at any one time. One guards Yash Dutta, one guards the fusion plant, one in the station control room on lowdeck, and one walks a watch between the decks.

Fifty-one of the adults are miners or techs, working the refinery in three shifts. The usual shift is eight hours, but Dutta has recently pushed the work to ten-hour shifts with the assurance that it's a "temporary measure to keep up production". Not all of the miners are sure about that, and morale is low.

Nine of the adults are cargo handlers and maintenance staffers, keeping the station clean and moving the supplies and novium ingots around. Mary Tomlinson always personally oversees the novium transfers, and she, Dutta, and Roland Lomax are the only people with the codes to the secure bay where the ingots are kept.

Eleven of the adults are business workers, either minding the Midnight Sun, staffing the Clouds and Rain, or manning the counter at The Locker.

Seven of the adults are station officials, with Yash Dutta as Director. Their orders are to be obeyed, and smartassery and mining-barracks lawyers can expect little success with them.

## FACES OF BRIGHTSIDE

Brightside Station has one hundred permanent staffers, but some are more likely to be important to the PCs than others. The following people are some of the more significant staffers aboard the station, and people whom the PCs might be expected to help or hinder with their activities. Each one is listed with a description and a note on their major motivation.

### Jaffa Okoye

*A young, trim woman with lapis lazuli eyes, very dark skin, and slender hands scarred by her tools.*

Okoye is the Technical Chief of Brightside Station. She's faintly claustrophobic, and life on the station has aggravated it. She spends most of her time helping in the hydroponic deck, or in the artificial park when off-duty. She wants to get off the station, but she's too smitten to leave without Randall Bellows.

### Livingston Roy

*A slightly pudgy, dark skinned man of perpetual good cheer. He's always toying idly with a knife.*

Roy is the Security Chief of Brightside Station and second-in-command after Yash Dutta. He pines for Jaffa Okoye, but the tech chief only has eyes for Randall Bellows. The man is polite and cheerful, but otherwise distant to everyone else but his good friend Yash Dutta. He wants to win Jaffa Okoye's affections and keep Dutta in charge of Brightside Station.

### Marion Hardlee

*A lean woman fashioned of rawhide and sharp edges, her gray hair pulled back tightly into a bun.*

The owner of the Midnight Sun, the only bar on Brightside and the only establishment licensed to sell liquor. She is a hard, humorless woman who doesn't think much of anyone on the station, least of all her no-good husband Ranse. She'll point out his piloting services to strangers. She wants to go back to civilization, but is afraid Ranse would leave her if she were to give him anywhere to go.

### Marius Rochambeau

*A shock-haired young man with a perpetually absent-minded attitude, dataslab in hand.*

Rochambeau is a scientific representative for Stoltmann & Haar, a research company that pays for sky tomb artifacts. The rates are not terribly good for most artifacts, but much of what they buy would be hard to move elsewhere. He finds his work demeaning to his ambitions as a xenarchaeologist, and he wants to find something remarkable so he can get back to civilization.

### Mary Tomlinson

*A tall, raspy-voiced woman with short hair and a badly-scarred right arm.*

She is the Mining Chief of Brightside Station and third-in-command. Tomlinson is responsible for running the refinery process on lowdeck and overseeing the transfer of buffer fluid from the catcher drones to the station. It's dangerous work, and the driving pace helped cause the accident that scarred her arm. Dutta won't let her take time for a skin transplant, and the unrelenting pace is turning her against him. She doesn't especially care about the station's bank debts or the quota of payments they've demanded. She wants to slacken the pace of mining.

### Randall Bellows

*A slim blonde, with beautiful teeth and astonishing physical grace. Laughs often.*

Bellows is one of the prostitutes working at the Clouds and Rain. He's popular with the men and women who like their company pretty and aren't looking for sweet nature; his mercenary instincts aren't hidden nearly as well as he thinks they are. Jaffa Okoye has fallen hopelessly in love with him, and he strings her along, waiting until he's certain he's exhausted the potential of the station before leaving with her- and then leaving with her money at the next convenient stop. He wants money, and is convinced the universe owes it to him after all he's had to do.

### "Ranse" Hardlee

*A grizzled old system pilot with a squinty gaze and patches of melanoma on his face.*

Ransom "Ranse" Hardlee is the husband of Marion Hardlee and pilot of the *Leadbelly*, a system boat turned roughly brick-shaped by the layers of lead shielding on it. Nothing else on Brightside Station can handle the Beast's radiation for so long, so Ranse gets most of the retrieval jobs on catcher drones that die in orbit. He also hires his piloting services to sky tomb explorers. He wants to get away from his harridan wife but can't bear to leave her for good.

### Roland Lomax

*A fat man with a wide grin, pasty complexion and steel-gray eyes. His hands are perpetually sweaty.*

The Cargo Chief of Brightside Station, in charge of storing and transporting the cargo that comes in and out of the station. He also serves as the unofficial quartermaster, and runs the gear shop known as "The Locker" on mid-deck. He wants to displace Yash Dutta as director of the station and is quite willing to kill anyone who gets in his way. He's recently got his hands on proof of Dutta's involvement with the embezzlement of GMI's funds, and is waiting for the chance to spring it on a bank auditor.

### Suyin Indrani

*A small, buxom woman in her thirties, with dark almond eyes and straight black hair.*

She's the Medical Chief of Brightside Station and owner of the Clouds and Rain brothel. She's not on the menu, and patrons who press excessively can expect very rough treatment at security's hands- and no anaesthetic after. She's never entirely lost a native sense of romance, and dislikes being reminded of the commercial element of her business; Lomax's crassness has gotten him banned from the Clouds and Rain. She wants to make good romantic matches among the occupants of Brightside.

### Yash Dutta

*A tall, dark, flinty-eyed man with close-cropped hair and an unblinking gaze. Somewhere past seventy but still vigorous.*

Dutta is the Director of Brightside Station and absolute monarch within its confines. He dislikes Roland Lomax and suspects him of plotting to cause an "accident", though he really doesn't take him as seriously as he should. He's a good friend of Livingston Roy, and trusts him implicitly. He wants to maintain control of Brightside Station and remain safely away from his past.

## Lowdeck Facilities

### L1 Gear Locker

A dozen elderly but meticulously maintained service vacc suits are kept in this gear locker. These vacc suits are designed for rough maintenance service, and grant AC 5 to the wearer, at the cost of a -2 penalty to any hit rolls or skill checks reliant on physical motion. A wearer with Exosuit skill can cut this penalty in half.

Two of the suits are intended for cleanup use in case the catcher drones spill the radioactive buffer fluid they use to snare the novium. These suits are covered in heavy leaded shielding, and increase the interval between radiation saving throws to the next increment of time- a once per minute roll becomes a once per hour roll, a once per hour roll becomes a once per day roll, and so forth. These suits are even more unwieldy than the others. Wearers take -6 to hit rolls and -4 to any skill checks involving movement. Exosuit skill cuts this penalty in half.

Aside from the vacc suits, there are numerous ordinary tools and maintenance supplies in the locker. An adequate Tech/Postech or Tech/Astronautics tool kit could be assembled from the contents, and a laser cutting torch can also be found under a pile of flexible ceraplast sheets. The torch can cut a human-sized hole through an interior bulkhead in five minutes, or half an hour for cutting through the station's outer hull. The laser cutter requires a Type B power cell for every fifteen minutes of operation. The beam's focal point is too clumsy to use effectively as a weapon.

### L2 Prep Room

Lavatories, showers, and personal lockers are available here, along with food preparation equipment and an announcement board for shift notices. Few employees keep anything of particular value in their lockers.

### L3 Pressure Dock

This vast compartment is dominated by the huge sliding panel on the outby hull wall of the station. Most frigate-sized or smaller craft can safely land within the pressure dock, even those not built to handle the rigors of atmospheric entry. Once safely inside the station, the numerous robotic working arms along the bulkheads can assist in unloading cargo and servicing the ship. Refueling does not take place within the pressure dock; a pump umbilical is run out on the mooring studs in order to minimize the risks of handling the refined hydrogen.

Several wheeled cargo sleds are racked along the bulkheads. The Brightside doesn't usually deal in more than a few hundred tons of cargo yearly, and bulk cargo handling tools have never been necessary for loading the novium ingots or unloading supply crates.

### L4 Processing Filter Bay

The buffer medium is circulated through the spiral filter matrix in the center of this room, progressively heated, chilled, and bombarded with a dozen different kinds of energies. The matrix is old and brittle from constant use, and five points of damage are enough to break a hole in it. If the matrix is in use, the ensuing

spray of glowing buffer medium will force a radiation save every round. If the unlucky victim is wearing a vacc suit, they need make a save only every minute.

Once the buffer medium has been filtered, it's returned to the holding tank to be pumped back into the catcher drone. The extracted particles of novium are routed on to the smelter.

### L5 Refinery Intake

Intake of novium particles from the catcher drones is handled at this control room. The drones are programmed to link up to a dedicated mooring stud and pump the liquid buffer medium through the stud's umbilical. The controls here are necessary to ensure that the highly radioactive buffer medium ends up safely in the shielded holding tanks. Carelessness or sabotage could spray the entire station exterior with the viscous medium, forcing a radiation resistance check every minute for anyone outside lacking a specially shielded vacc suit.

### L6 Smelter

Here the extracted novium is embedded in lead ingots, each weighing roughly fifteen kilograms and counting as three items for encumbrance purposes. An average of two ingots are produced each day, and someone who managed to acquire a few could easily sell them on most TL 4 planets for roughly 2,500 credits per ingot. Mary Tomlinson runs the refinery operation from this room, and keeps a hawk's eye on the ingots. As soon as the lead is cool from the casting, one of Livingston Roy's security guards escorts a tech and the ingot to one of the locked storage bays in the cargo hold. The ingots are never moved from the storage bay without Tomlinson's presence, and she inventories them at irregular times during the week. Cargo ships chartered by the bank arrive to pick up the ingots every three or four months.

If someone were to sabotage the smelter or damage it while it was in operation, a spray of molten lead would pose an distinct hazard to anyone in the room. Anyone within six meters of the damage or sabotage would have to make the easier of a Luck or Tech saving throw or else take 1d10 damage from the fine mist of molten metal.

### L7 Station Bridge

At least two staffers and one of Livingston Roy's security men are on duty here at all hours, monitoring system readouts and scanning the Hard Light system for any unexpected visitors. The radiation output of the Beast makes such scanning extremely difficult. Any attempt to scan outside of Brightside's region suffers a -4 on the skill check.

In theory, anyone with control of this room can control any of Brightside's automated systems, including its life support, power, and maneuver jets. Instant access requires the correct passcodes, however, which are changed on a weekly basis. Without the passcodes, hacking the system requires at least Computer-0 skill, ten minutes of effort, and a skill test at difficulty 10. Each point the check is failed by adds another ten minutes to the time required before the hack is successful. Characters who roll 6 or less simply can't break the encryption.

For prudence's sake, Yash Dutta has installed an emergency override in the backup bridge up on highdeck. Someone with a metatool and the Tech/Postech skill can try to physically bridge the override and regain control with a skill check at the same time and difficulty as the hacking check above.

While the station bridge can give potentially lethal commands to the ship's systems, any blatantly unsafe order will be automatically announced to the entire station, and a delay of five minutes will be given before the command is carried out. Someone who can retake or override the bridge can then cancel the command. The board is designed to make the "cancel lethal order" override blatantly obvious even to the least technically proficient onlooker.

### **L8** Umbilical Dock

Cruisers and some exceptionally ungainly frigates are too large to dock in Brightside's pressure dock, so the station can send out a flexible umbilical connection to the loading port on such craft. It's been years since Brightside's seen a visit from anything that couldn't use the pressure dock, so this area is now cluttered with numerous pieces of broken extraction gear and other large, bulky space trash. The detritus makes excellent cover during firefights or attempts at stealth.

### **L9** Warehouse

The cargo hold includes storage bay rooms for those who want extra security on their cargo. Cracking the security on the cargo doors requires a Security skill test at difficulty 9, while opening a storage bay requires a check at difficulty 10. Entry into the warehouse is restricted to Roland Lomax and the cargo handlers beneath him. Only one set of cargo doors is ever open at once— either to the umbilical bay, the pressure dock, or the elevator core. A cargo handler stands watch at the door whenever cargo is being shifted. Lomax is an ugly boss, and the handler turnover is substantial. One might be persuaded to turn over his access codes if he or she had reason to believe that they'd have a fast ship off Brightside immediately thereafter. Only Lomax, Dutta, and Mary Tomlinson have codes to the storage bay where the novium is kept.

### **L10** Workshop

The thousand and one parts and fittings that need to be replaced for the station's smooth operation are fabricated here, and broken gear is repaired and refurbished. Not everything necessary can be fashioned here, but Brightside can get by with no more than a few tons of replacement supplies and raw materials shipped in yearly. The equipment here is sufficient for any ordinary exercise of the Tech/Postech or Tech/Astronautic skills. Jaffa Okoye spends most of her work hours here; she can usually be persuaded to allow others to use the equipment under her supervision for a bribe of fifty credits a day. Jaffa will not permit weapons or explosives to be made in the workshop.

## Middeck Facilities

### **M1** Armory

This locker is sealed more securely than most doors on the station, requiring at least Security-0 skill, five minutes, and a check against difficulty 10 to pop it open. Each point by which the test is failed adds another five minutes of required time before the door is successfully opened. Failing by more than two points sets off a station alarm on the bridge.

Livingston Roy keeps the security staff's equipment locked away here when not in use. The armory's total contents include fifteen stun batons, fifteen semiautomatic pistols, fifteen armored undersuits, 600 rounds of ammunition, 24 type A power cells, two medkits, six Lazarus patches, ten suits of woven armor, two combat field uniforms, six shotguns, and two combat shotguns.

The twelve security personnel draw stun batons and pistols when on duty and wear the armored undersuits almost all the time. In case of a riot or attack, the heavier equipment is broken out and used with elan.

### **M2** Clouds and Rain

The station brothel is run by Suyin Indrani, and gets most of its traffic when the novium transport ships dock. One of Roy's security people works as a bouncer during heavy business periods, but such services are rarely needed; even the roughest spacer is rarely stupid enough to get into trouble on a station that offers him no place to run. The locals provide the most reliable business.

The lobby is fitted out in a vaguely faux-Japanese style, with multicolored plastic paneling and decorative wall paintings. Mirrors cover the aft wall to increase the seeming size of the room, and assorted items of plush pseudo-mahogany furniture are fastened to the station deck. A bar along the aft wall dispenses non-alcoholic drinks and snacks after a credit swipe.

The employees have some of the nicest personal quarters on the station, and live here rather than in the bunk quarters on the top level. During station emergencies that involve more casualties than the medical center can handle, the employees bunk topside while their rooms are given over to the injured.

### **M3** Medical Clinic

Suyin Indrani spends most of her time here when she's not supervising the Clouds and Rain. The clinic usually handles minor illnesses and the occasional STD, but it retains much of the medical equipment necessary for a mining station. Accidents are rare, but when they happen they usually produce severe injuries.

The clinic has medical bays sufficient to keep ten casualties under close observation. Another ten cold sleep pods can be used to freeze victims until room opens up in the medical bays. The clinic has standard TL 4 medical supplies, and two of the prostitutes at the Clouds and Rain are apprenticing under Suyin for their medical certifications, but the medical services are largely oriented toward patching wounds, fixing radiation exposure, and curing common diseases. Exotic poisons or sicknesses might well baffle Suyin and her assistants.



Medical care is free to station employees. Visitors can expect to pay fifty credits for an office call and light work, or a hundred credits a day for intensive medical care. Those who can't pay can work off their debt. Yash Dutta has no qualms about spacing those who refuse to either work or pay.

**M4 Public Lavatories**

These banks of lavatories and showers are the main hygiene facilities on the station, and can be found in use at all hours.

**M5 Station Offices**

The business end of the station is run out of these offices, and Yash Dutta usually holds court here for eight to ten hours out of any day. A security guard is with him whenever the office is open, along with two or three clerks or technicians tending to the day-to-day operation of the station's finances and engineering. Other offices are set aside for Jaffa Okoye, Livingston Roy, and Mary Tomlinson, though none of the three spend a great deal of time in them.

Yash is willing to give spot labor to visitors, with unskilled workers getting dirty, somewhat dangerous labor in the refinery and cargo holds for 12 credits a day, while someone with at least one level of Tech or Science can get more complex technical work for 25 credits a day. Aside from day labor, Yash is always interested in employing skillful and discreet help to sort out some of the problems that crop up on Brightside.

**M6 The Locker**

This shop is Roland Lomax's domain, stacked high with crates full of imported snacks, pornography, non-alcoholic beverages, music chips, and all the other staples that make life on a mining station minimally tolerable. Aside from the luxuries, he also maintains a modest selection of gear for explorers interested in investigating the sky tombs, as listed in the sidebar. If he doesn't have it, he might be able to get it by arranging a special production run with Jaffa Okoye down in the workshops, but only if the gear is the sort of thing that a mining station's design computers might be expected to have as a manufacturing template. Even if it can be arranged, the price will be at least twice what the book cost lists.

Lomax is willing to buy used gear from the PCs if he has some reason to suspect it's salable, but starts at 20% of its book price. PCs that look "useful" to his plans to usurp Yash Dutta might get as much as 50% for their goods. Lomax can afford to buy 7,500 credits worth of used gear.

**M7 The Midnight Sun**

This cantina is the only establishment permitted to sell alcoholic beverages, and does a roaring trade with spacers and the thirsty locals. This monopoly is a constant source of aggravation to Roland Lomax, who is correctly convinced that Yash Dutta has imposed it simply to slap him down. The fact that other spacers get away with bootlegging hydroponic hooch with near impunity does nothing to lessen Dutta's sharp eye on Lomax's trade. Marion Hardlee is the owner-manager of the bar. The bar is occupied by a half-dozen patrons at any given hour, with the downshift often featuring live entertainment from a band made up of off-duty miners. Approval is demonstrated with thrown credit chips, while less popular groups are pelted with plastic bottles.

**M8 Theater**

This large room serves multiple entertainment purposes. Public performances of plays, concerts, or debates go on several times a week to relieve the tedium of the station. When the transport ships come in, the girls and boys at the Clouds and Rain occasionally put on burlesque shows that are enthusiastically attended by most of the station. Shows are usually free, though donations for an exceptionally fine performance are customary.

The theater is also equipped as the crash room for mid-deck. In the case of a disastrous hull breach or industrial accident, up to two hundred people can fit into the theater, and the entrance is equipped to serve as a pressure-sealed airlock. Emergency air supplies can support the inhabitants for as long as a week, and the raised theater stage doubles as the holding tank for a significant amount of the station's water storage. A panic box contains medical supplies and four well-kept vacc suits.

**M9 Maintenance Rooms**

These cramped, machine-filled rooms allow access to maintenance ducts and power couplings. Bannerjee Twelve model stations such as the Brightside are exceptionally reliable, however, and few techs ever have need to come down here. As a consequence, these rooms are quite popular for much-needed privacy aboard the station. The doors are usually locked, but many locals have or can borrow keycards. Opening the lock without the benefit of a keycard requires a Security check at difficulty 8, with one try possible per PC.

*The Locker's Inventory*

<i>Weapons and Armor</i>	<i>Price</i>	<i>Qty</i>
Woven body armor	500	2
Vacc suit	125	6
Monoblade	75	2
Semi-automatic pistol	100	2
Shotgun	100	1
Laser pistol	300	1
<i>Equipment and Ammunition</i>		
Ammunition	1/round	400
Backpacks, TL 4	60	6
Bioscanner	400	1
Lazarus patch	30	10
Medkit	100	3
Metatool	220	2
Navcomp	700	1
Power Cell, Type A	15	10
Pressure Tent	125	1
Rations, one day	8	50
Rope, TL 4	50/20 m.	200 m.
Survey scanner	300	2
Toolkit/Astronautic	700	1
Toolkit/Postech	400	1

# Highdeck Facilities

## H1 Backup Bridge

This bridge is equipped with smaller, more primitive versions of all the controls and monitors available in the station bridge on lowdeck. The station can be operated as normal from this compartment, though the work is clumsier and more difficult. This bridge only engages if the station bridge has been damaged, or if Yash Dutta triggers the physical override hidden under a false panel of disconnected dials. Yash and Livingston Roy believe they're the only two people to know about the override, but Roland Lomax has also learned of it from a station tech who discovered it by accident. The tech suffered a tragic mishap in the cargo bay shortly thereafter, and Lomax is considering how best to use his knowledge.

## H2 Chapel

This bay is kept prepared with a number of slide-out panels and folding altars for most of the common religions within several spike drive drills of Hard Light. Religious services tend to the informal but sincere, with about half the permanent inhabitants being fairly devout in their religion. The loneliness, isolation, and danger of duty at Brightside Station moves many of its inhabitants to look for spiritual solace. The station has no official clergy, though there are station inhabitants who can qualify for those who aren't too fussy about accreditations. A rabbi, an imam, a Protestant pastor, a Roman Catholic priest, and a Hindu priest all have small followings among the staff. Tensions are minimal; troublemakers are assisted into a broader appreciation of ecumenism by Livingston Roy's security personnel, if necessary.

## H3 Fusion Plant

The station's power is produced by this small, reliable postech fusion plant. While the Beast kicks out enormous amounts of energy, the infrastructure necessary to extract the solar power without melting down the equipment was more than the station's designers wanted to handle. One tech is constantly on duty here to monitor the plant, along with a security guard to ensure that no one meddles with it.

## H4 Heavenly Hash Cafeteria

The station cafeteria, serving three hundred meals a day, and more when trading ships dock. The ship's cook, Joshua Yang, is a rail-thin Reformed Neo-Vegan barbecue enthusiast who does wonders with the tank-grown meat substitutes produced by the hydro bay. The limited range of foodstuffs grown in the hydro bay cramps him somewhat, but the miners' complaints about the food are desultory and more in the line of tradition than necessity.

A few banks of cookers are kept available for those who want to make their own meals, and Joshua has side deals going with a few other station cooks who sell their services to other station personnel. The one thing Joshua won't tolerate is the use of "his" kitchen for cooking real meat, egg, or dairy products, and doing so is liable to get an adventurous cook permanently banished. This has resulted in a few illicit restaurants run sporadically out of peoples' quarters, where miners can get a "real" cheeseburger. Joshua's always complaining to Livingston Roy about these get-togethers, but the security chief is amenable to a little beef-based bribery to look the other way.

## H5 Hydroponic Bay

Most of the station's food is produced here in long troughs of force-grown gengineered vegetables and meat substitutes, while depleted atmosphere is cleansed and refreshed through banks of specially-designed oxygenating lichens. The hydro bay can support up to two hundred people indefinitely, provided someone with sufficient Tech/Medical is available to do common bio-maintenance. With only a hundred permanent residents aboard the station, meals are relatively cheap and abundant, though somewhat monotonous.

If some accident or disaster takes out the hydro bay, there are stored rations in one of the sealed cargo bay storage lockers sufficient to feed 200 people for six months. Backup mechanical oxygen scrubbers can produce a minimally tolerable atmosphere for up to 200 people indefinitely, but they are prone to regular breakdowns without constant, laborious tech maintenance.

## H6 Park Plaza

Vines and flowers in hydroponic planters decorate this large room, with the ceiling set to project an image of a clear blue sky. The deck is covered in grass-like turf substitute, and a large fountain made up to appear as a natural spring flows on the far side of the plaza. The plaza is a popular spot for those in need of relief from the station's confines, and Jaffa Okoye practically lives here when not on duty. The vine-shaded close at the outby side of the plaza is known as "the lovers' nook", and custom keeps people away from it when the artificial stone by its entrance has a piece of clothing draped over it.

The park plaza is also set up as highdeck's crash room, much as the theater is on middeck. The fountain tank provides water and the vines can keep up to two hundred people breathing for a week before the strain kills them. A large, rectangular artificial rock in the lovers' nook contains medical supplies, some emergency dry rations, and a pair of well-kept vacc suits. The plaza's entrance is reinforced for use as a pressure-sealed airlock.

## H7 Public Rest Rooms

These banks of unisex lavatories are kept in heavy use.

## H8 Transient Quarters

This cramped room is less comfortable than the permanent quarters, and are stacked with bunks and simple footlockers to house the transient population of short-haul workers or tomb explorers. Each room has bunks and lockers for eight occupants, and minimal room for anything else. A bunk costs 5 credits a day, though on slow months Yash will let a rich adventurer rent the entire room for 20 credits a day or 100 credits weekly.

## H9 Residential Quarters

These quarters were originally intended to serve twice as many permanent occupants, and so are relatively capacious compared to the usual run of space station accommodations. Single workers and junior techs bunk two to a room, while married couples and senior staff have their own quarters. Swing-down bunks and furniture that folds down onto the deck increase the available free space when necessary, and folding panels can be used to divide the room for minimal privacy. Prisoners are locked into a bare room here.

Space in the Hard Light system is extraordinarily hostile. The massive radiation emissions produced by the Beast will kill a spacer in minutes if he's not adequately shielded, and the energies wreak havoc on most forms of radio communications. Anyone who means to get around in Hard Light needs to remember a few important facts.

## Radiation Poisoning

Hard Light is constantly bombarded by radiation from the red giant at its core. A spacer with only a vacc suit between him and the star needs to make a Physical Effect save every minute. Failure means the victim loses one point of Constitution. If the character's Constitution modifier goes down due to that loss, they immediately lose a number of hit points from their maximum equal to their current level. A character reduced below Constitution 3 dies and cannot be revived by biopsonics or Lazarus patches.

This damage can be cured by a TL 4 medical clinic such as that on Brightside or in a medbay-equipped ship. Each point lost requires 48 hours of medical care before being restored. Brightside will give free medical help if the injuries were incurred in working for the station, but otherwise chief medic Suyin Indrani will bill 100 credits a day for such treatment. Friends can expect a substantial discount.

Wearing a special shielded suit like those worn in a ship's power room cuts the radiation risk, forcing a roll only once per hour instead of once per minute. These suits are clumsy, however, and inflict a -2 on all to-hit rolls and skill checks involving movement. Characters with the Exosuit skill halve these penalties.

Even a starship's radiation shielding is not permanently effective in resisting the Beast's light. Most starship shielding will break down after 72 hours of exposure, forcing radiation saves on an hourly basis thereafter. If the ship can get to safety by docking with the Brightside or hiding behind a large asteroid, the buffer system will have time to purge itself, restoring one hour of endurance for each hour spent in safety.

The only sure safety against the radiation lies in hiding behind a large body of mass, such as an asteroid or planetoid. Characters safely buffered by at least fifty meters of rock can avoid radiation poisoning.

## Radio Blackouts

Radio communications are almost worthless in Hard Light. The background emissions scramble any message beyond a dozen meters or so, forcing spacers to communicate either with comm lasers or by plugging in to a length of comm hardline. In a pinch, characters in vacc suits can communicate by pressing their helmets together to allow the vibration of spoken words to transfer through the faceplates.

## Ship Scanning and Detection

The noise makes detecting starships remotely even more difficult than usual. A ship that is broadcasting its position can be automatically located, but detecting a silent ship outside of the scanner's own region suffers a -4 penalty to the skill check, in addition to any penalty that may be caused by a ship's stealth profile. Locating a sky tomb in the debris cloud of the outer rim is a matter of pure luck without knowing the general coordinates. In consequence, the tomb maps located in certain of the crypts are extremely valuable, and some explorers intentionally destroy them after taking down the data in order to sell the locations to other adventurers.

## Ranse Hardlee and the *Leadbelly*

It's likely that the PCs will eventually enlist Ranse Hardlee and his shielded system boat *Leadbelly* to get them out to a sky tomb. Hardlee is a soft touch, partly because he wants to get away from his wife back at the station as much as he wants to turn a profit on his guide work. He'll give the first trip free to explorers, and afterwards charge them 250 credits to charter the *Leadbelly* for an expedition.

The *Leadbelly* has been refitted with extremely heavy shielding, and can endure the direct light of the Beast for up to a week before the buffer fails. Ranse earns most of his money doing retrieval on catcher drones that die out in space; he'll stuff the explorers in the retrieval bay and let them sort out their own rations and necessities on the trip out and back. The cockpit of the *Leadbelly* is sealed off from the retrieval bay, and any attempt to hijack the ship will encourage Ranse to open the bay doors in deep space.

The *Leadbelly* requires two days for a trip to or from a sky tomb, and Ranse is willing to wait for up to three days for explorers to return from within. Under no circumstances will he leave the cockpit of the *Leadbelly* or risk himself or the ship, though he's inclined to be cooperative about requests that don't involve risk. The *Leadbelly* has a docking umbilical that can seal directly to a sky tomb's external pressure door, allowing the characters to directly enter the tombs from the ship without requiring a vacc suit.

Ranse will also take people out to the hermit settlements that have sprung up in some of the cleared sky tombs, but only if he's convinced that the PCs are "decent people", and that their business in the settlement isn't the sort he'd regret facilitating. Roland Lomax has pestered him often to take him out to the Empty Grave settlement, but Ranse is old enough to have seen Lomax's kind all too often. He knows the cargo chief does things out there that a decent man shouldn't help. If the PCs can convince him that they have a worthy reason to visit the "artist's colony", he might be willing to take them, however.

If it becomes important, you can use the usual statistics for a shuttle for the *Leadbelly*, though it lacks a spike drive. Ranse has also bolted on a multispectral laser to help discourage unfriendly attention.

# THE SKY TOMBS

The sky tombs were discovered only a scant two years ago, and there has been no real archaeological or xenological study of them performed yet. The only people who have made a concentrated effort to explore them have been adventurers and freebooters with minimal interest in the society or history of their creators. If the PCs take an interest in the details of the sky tombs, it's very possible they will be the first people to actually discover much of the information revealed here.

## History of the Tombs

Long before mankind had learned to work metal, the system of Hard Light was place of sacred pilgrimage for the aliens known as the Ushans. These part-plant, part-mammalian humanoids had an elaborate and peaceful society built around the worship of the light which nourished them. The first Ushan ship to discover Hard Light immediately recognized in its star a symbol of the destroying love of God, the blazing purity of passion that dissolved all mortal distinctions in its burning radiance.

The Ushans built a great Sun Temple in orbit around the Beast, using their superior techniques of radiation shielding and light manipulation to allow the pilgrims to survive the divine spectacle. The High Priest of the temple welcomed visitors from throughout the peaceful domain of the Ushans, and Hard Light became one of the chief spiritual centers of the Ushan polity.

The first sky tombs were constructed 8,000 years ago, during the First Dynasty of the Sun Temple. Those Ushans interred in these tombs wished to escape the cycle of rebirth common to their race and spend the rest of eternity basking in the light of the Godstar. At first, only High Priests were accorded this honor, but as time went on more and more pious lay people were able to win places in the tombs.

The Second and Third Dynasties of high priests followed in the ensuing 5,000 years, until the peaceful Ushans had the misfortune to encounter the ravenous hordes of the Chittik. These beetle-wasp sentients ruthlessly enslaved the Ushans for use as hosts and slave labor. With no talent for war, the Ushans were soon brought low. The Chittik permitted them their religion and a few sad trappings of their former dominion, but the sky tombs constructed during this Decline were touched with the darkness of their plight.

Ushan history was brought to a close with a great rebellion 1,000 years ago. After millennia of suffering under the Chittik, the Ushans finally abandoned their pacifistic faith to fight back against their tormentors. The attempt was a disaster; the Chittik easily crushed their rebellious slaves. Having fatally compromised their faith and lacking even success to justify it, the remaining Ushans committed mass suicide by casting themselves into the flames. The Sun Temple launched itself into the heart of the Godstar and whole worlds of Ushans had their skies darkened by the blaze of burning pyres.

This self-immolation robbed the Chittik of their hosts. Unable to adjust to the sudden loss of their slave-prey, the Chittik too followed the Ushans into collapse. Here and there, small pockets of both races may still survive, but they are unknown to the modern world.

## Tomb Structure

Sky tombs are built into large carbon-iron asteroids that float in the thick debris field that fills Hard Light's outer rim region. The exterior of the asteroid is largely untouched, and the only hint that something is unusual about the rock is in the docking port and pressure annex jutting from the outby side of the asteroid. This docking port is the only access to the tomb, unless intruders are prepared to excavate sixty or seventy meters of rock to get in.

The interior of a sky tomb is warm, slightly humid, and maintains pressure and a breathable atmosphere. Tombs are powered by sophisticated solar power arrays embedded in concealed light shunts on the surface of the asteroid. A tomb can scrub the atmosphere for up to a hundred inhabitants before the system starts to suffer overload. Recyclers capture and filter water, but the tombs aren't able to refresh water supplies depleted by removal or loss. Ceilings average 3 meters, but some chambers rise much higher.

The ancient Ushans detested darkness, and so tombs are invariably well-lit unless something has damaged the light shunts that transfer the radiance from the asteroid's surface. Many tombs also have engineered plant life as decorations and solace for visitors. Some such plants have altered over the course of long millennia.

The tombs were originally intended for the visits of loved ones and reverent pilgrims, and so accommodations were made for them. During the darkness of the Decline, the Chittik forced the Ushans to install facilities for Chittik caretakers to monitor visitors. Some of these facilities are still functional, and in some sky tombs the Chittik remain still in their cold sleep pods, waiting for the next visitors to open the door to the tomb.

## *Sunskimmers*

A very few sky tombs have concealed sunskimmer bays, with doors that fold open to reveal a pressurized docking bay. These small system craft use starlight as a catalyst to their internal engines. Sunskimmers aren't equipped with spike drives, but for purposes of statistics they can be treated as shuttles with an effective spike drive rating of 3 for travel times within the system and Armor 25 against lasers. The glassy ceramic structure of the sunskimmers leaves the interior of the skimmer constantly lit by the Beast's light, but it filters out harmful radiation perfectly. Sunskimmers can remain in Hard Light's space indefinitely without risking radiation poisoning for their passengers. A pilot with Vehicle/Space-1 or better can puzzle out the controls on a sunskimmer. Flying one is at a -1 penalty to skill checks until the pilot has had a week to familiarize himself with the controls.

Sunskimmers never need to be fueled, but any repairs or maintenance costs twice as much to accommodate the alien technology. The base sale price for a sunskimmer is 200,000 credits if the players can somehow figure out how to get it out of Hard Light. Doing so will require a cruiser-sized ship with at least 200 tons of free space or a fighter-scale ship bay. Alternately, the characters can simply strap it to a frigate-sized ship and accept a -3 penalty on the spike drill check on the jump outward.

## The Ushans

The Ushans were a largely human-like race of peaceful sapients that flourished some 8,000 years ago. Their leisurely exploration eventually discovered Hard Light, and the system became a prime pilgrimage site for the pious Ushan light-worshippers.

The Ushans were a unique blend of algal plant symbiote and mammalian organism. Their bodies were capable of remarkably efficient conversion of sunlight into energy, and they required only water and small amounts of minerals in order to grow and maintain health. In appearance they strongly resembled humans, albeit with leafy head growths and occasional symmetrical patches of bark-like skin. Their coloration ranged from a very pale jade to a green so deep as to be almost black.

Ushan life cycles were a blend of mammalian and plant traits. Their species had both male and female genders, and genetic variance was promoted by conventional mammalian sexual interchange. However, reproduction was not something that happened for living Ushans. Only when an adult Ushan died and was buried did their genetic material mix to form the sprouting of up to ten woody buds that eventually opened to reveal Ushan infants. These infants were helped by lactation from a female Ushan to assist in their initial growth spurt, but within a year they could maintain growth with no more than minerals, water, and light. Such was the nature of this reproduction that many Ushans inherited some portion of their predecessor's memories or personality.

Ushan life spans were similar to those of humans, and largely spent in peaceful cultivation of other plant life or the construction of elaborate stone or glass structures. Ushan society was defined by their keen awareness of how different they were than other animals on their homeworld; while beasts were forced to kill and devour living things to survive, the Ushans required only light. They viewed this as a sign of God's special favor to them, and held as sacred the distinction between those who kill, the Eaters, and the pure and holy Ushans.

## The Chittik

This peaceful existence ended when the Ushans encountered the Chittik. These ferocious beetle-wasp beings viewed the Ushans as nothing more than a magnificent source of hosts and slave labor.

Chittik are roughly human-sized, with a segmented body, four compound eyes, six limbs, chewing mandibles, and a flat, beetle-like torso that terminates in a forward-curling, scorpion-like ovipositor. They have two legs for walking and four for manipulating, each manipulator-leg ending in a three-fingered hand. They are omnivores, though they prefer meat.

Chittik are almost entirely female, save for a few sluggish drone males that serve to fertilize the females. Reproduction requires the oviposition of hundreds of small eggs into the body of a host mammal. The paralytic venom of the Chittik is useless on mammals not native to their world, so victims generally must be restrained by other means. The eggs gestate for two weeks before hatching and eating their way out of the host.



Most Chittik spawn are mindless insects that fail to develop into fully-grown Chittik. Rich nervous tissue can improve the odds of a given hatchling's development, so sentient mammals are preferred for hosts. The Ushans proved ideal for the Chittik, because the ravaged remains of the host could be planted again and grow a new crop of hosts in turn. A full-grown Ushan could serve as host to several hundred Chittik eggs. The Chittik did not always wait for an Ushan to grow, though they considered it preferable.

Psychologically, the Chittik have no interest whatsoever in non-Chittik sentients. They are tools and prey and nothing more. At the height of their power, several Chittik polities struggled with each other, each led by a Swarm Mistress who had the unflinching allegiance of her unnumbered progeny. The Chittik inability to negotiate or trade with other sentients helped their downfall; when the Ushans immolated themselves, the other neighboring sentients were too ready to fight the Chittik, and did not provide an adequate number of hosts in time to stave off societal collapse.

Chittik have short life spans. A hatchling can grow to full size in a year, but a Chittik will die within thirty years of hatching.

## CREATING A SKY TOMB

This supplement includes all the necessary pieces to create and stock a wide range of sky tombs for your players to explore. A few sample tombs are provided for your use, but the following process demonstrates how to take the individual pieces and reassemble them into any number of enigmatic alien crypts for the enjoyment of your players. All you'll need are your dice, a pencil, and some graph paper.

### Choose the Dynasty

The first step in creating a sky tomb lies in deciding which dynasty of High Priests created it. There are three major dynasties that built tombs in addition to those of the waning millennia of the Decline during Chittik rule. Each dynasty had its own characteristic construction traits, and you can use these traits to personalize the rooms and corridors of a station. The additional flavor will help players begin to recognize similarities between tombs of the same dynasty and help give them a sense of distinction and variance among the tombs.

First Dynasty tombs are characterized by sharp geometric shapes along interior walls—squares, triangles, and rectangles interlaced in intricate, spiky patterns. Light bars run along the ceilings, and there is a strong smell of cinnamon in the atmosphere. Furnishings are very square and angular. The pale plastic compound used for fittings and furniture has yellowed and decayed, a leprous sort of blistering forming on the surface. These blisters weep a caustic chemical if broken by rough contact, doing 1 point of damage to anyone touching the object. First Dynasty Ushans preferred hard angles and non-representative art to emphasize the fact that their creations required no use of parts from living creatures.

Second Dynasty tombs are notable for circles and curves and soft arcs, both in wall decorations and in room layouts. Light fixtures are globes embedded in the walls. The curved furnishings are very brittle, and collapse into jagged shards under pressure. Even the script used during the Second Dynasty was rounded and flowing, and it is difficult to tell that both it and the sharp glyphs of First Dynasty writing are from the same language. Second Dynasty builders preferred more organic shapes to indicate respect for the divine shapes that living creatures embodied. The air often has a scent like that of roses.

Third Dynasty tombs are by far the most ornate, with walls covered with carvings of Ushans in the pride of life on a world with two suns. They are never shown eating, but instead are shown tending plants, building structures, beguiling lovers, and conversing in gardens. Structures are more squared, but less rigorously so than in the First Dynasty, and the glyphs are a straightened, simplified form of Second Dynasty writing. Light is seemingly sourceless, emitted from countless hair-fine light shunts that pump safe visible light directly from the surface of the asteroid. The air has a faintly metallic taste to it.

Tombs built during the Decline are stark, utilitarian structures devoid of ornamentation. Their rooms are austere and simple and the furnishings are mere extrusions of stone from the asteroid itself. Hidden in nooks and concealed places are occasional lines of

hurriedly-cut script giving the laborer's name and some message to be passed down to a hopefully brighter day. The air is dry in these tombs, and many have the tell-tale signs of Chittik inhabitation.

### Build the Tomb Map

Included in this supplement is a sheet of 36 tomb geomorphs arranged in six rows of six. The top row shows entrance layouts while the bottom six show corridors and rooms. To build a map, take your graph paper in hand and decide how large the tomb should be. 3 rows by 3 columns of tiles is usually a minimum, while 7 x 7 is probably as large as one tomb should be.

Next, roll 1d6 or choose from among the six entrance geomorphs. Draw in this geomorph along the bottom row of your map, probably in the center column. Then choose or roll 1d6 twice to find the column and row of the next geomorph to place, and draw it in wherever you think it fits best on the map. Repeat the process until you've filled out your tomb map. You should feel free to trim and change the geomorphs as necessary to suit your purposes, adding corridors or clipping exits as convenience recommends.

The entrance to each sky tomb has a short mooring dock that leads up to a heavy pressure door and airlock. The doors are usually unlocked, but can be sealed from within by residents. An intercom inside the airlock allows for communication with those on the other side. Forcing a door requires either explosives or an hour with a cutting bar; laser cutters are almost useless on Ushan structures.

### Stock the Rooms

Once you've drawn your map, you'll probably have at least 9 rooms to fill with something interesting. The sky tombs were intended not simply as crypts, but also as places of pilgrimage for those devotees who wished to revere the ancient dead. Facilities and places meant for their accommodation are normal to the tombs. You can use the room dressing table in the *Stars Without Number* resource section, or you can use the tables on the following pages. You should be ready to tweak descriptions and details to fit the flavor of the dynasty to which the tomb belongs.

### Identify Residents

Sky tombs filled with the relics of a dead race can be very interesting, but the tombs are often more lively if they have more active occupants. Many tombs were staffed with Chittik guardians who slept in cold sleep pods until the tomb was opened for the next batch of Ushan pilgrims. Those woken after such a long sleep may not understand what has happened to their empire, but they can recognize humans as likely prey.

Conversely, very human threats can inhabit the sky tombs. The tombs are safe, dry, pressurized environments that have enough room for all manner of miscreants and hermits. A tomb that has been opened might well have pirates, outlaws, or worse hiding out until the heat has died down in more civilized systems.

# SKY TOMB CONTENTS

The following list of tomb chambers gives an idea of some of the contents that might be found in an Ushan sky tomb. To stock your own sepulchres, you can either roll on the table below or pick rooms that fit the feel of a given tomb.

1D6	1D10	ROOM TYPE
1-2	1	Antechamber
	2	Blooming Chamber
	3	Breeding Cell
	4	Caretaker's Quarters
	5	Chapel
	6	Chittik Barracks
	7	Cold Sleep Pods
	8	Communications Control Room
	9	Control Room
	10	Crypt
3-4	1	Docking Bay Controls
	2	Dormitory
	3	Empty Room
	4	Feasting Room
	5	Fountain Room
	6	Garden Chamber
	7	Holo-audience
	8	Larder
	9	Library
	10	Maneuver Jet Controls
5-6	1	Map Chamber
	2	Medical Facilities
	3	Meditation Room
	4	Memorial
	5	Offering Vault
	6	Power Room
	7	Refueling Controls
	8	Sculpture Garden
	9	Storage Room
	10	Workshop

## 1 Antechamber

Decorated with glass sculptures and faded paintings in the style of the builders' Dynasty, these antechambers were intended for groups of pilgrims to wait comfortably until there was time and privacy to offer reverence to the holy remains interred in the tomb. Furnishings line the edges of the room, and most of the decorations reference the tomb's occupant and his or her noble theological accomplishments in life.

## 2 Blooming Chamber

Some Ushans preferred to die in the sanctified company of the tomb's occupant. This chamber is dominated by a large circular trough of soil in which the newly-dead Ushan was buried and

tended until their infant pods had opened. The decor of the room tends to emphasize motifs of budding, flowering, and the rise of dawn.

## 3 Breeding Cell

Occasionally a Chittik tomb guard was permitted or instructed to spawn new supplies of hatchlings. These cells were retrofitted into existing chambers. Heavy restraints and a steady flow of water for hydrating the hosts were important to the Chittik purposes, and a large trough of earth was usually kept for "planting" the Ushan remains afterwards. The infants that budded afterward were usually eaten as delicacies, though a few were usually spared to be sent back to the Sun Temple for raising as future hosts. The walls of the breeding cells are usually faintly scratched with last messages from the prisoners to those who might come after.

## 4 Caretaker's Quarters

While most tomb pilgrims viewed the cleaning and upkeep of the tomb as a natural part of their pilgrimage, some tombs had resident caretakers. These rooms were once the personal quarters for such a caretaker, with a hammock-like bed suspended from the ceiling on one side and a number of cabinets and shelves to hold their personal possessions. Most clothing and trifles will crumble or collapse with any significant handling, but a few stone or glass items might survive. Useful tools or intact books might have been left behind by their former owners.

## 5 Chapel

Pilgrims often felt the need to perform various rites of purification and preparation before gazing upon the holy remains of those buried in a sky tomb, and this chapel was designed to satisfy their needs. Ushan altars are always above the viewer- in this case, molded into the ceiling in the shape of a stylized sun, always lit almost too brightly to behold. A flowing trough of water is present in operational tombs for purification ablutions, and a number of books constructed of thin sheets of synthetics are stored in a cabinet on the far side of the room. Most of these books will crumble to shards on handling, but a few scraps of religious poetry and theology may survive.

## 6 Chittik Barracks

While less often-visited tombs might have cold sleep pods for the convenience of their Chittik monitors, popular tombs occasionally have dedicated barracks for the guardians. These rooms are always dark, in sharp contrast to a normally-operating tomb's interior. Circular beds rest on the floor, along with multiple layers of thin synthetic blankets for the Chittik, who preferred to burrow into their bedding. Occasionally functional Chittik weaponry can be found racked here. The beetle-men were always casual about weapon security because of the Ushans' unbroken pacifism.

## 7 Cold Sleep Pods

The tedium and wait between pilgrim visits was intolerable to many Chittik guards, and so some tombs were equipped with cold sleep pods to contain the monitors when their services were not necessary. Most pods were programmed to open only when the tomb was entered. There will usually be 2d4 pods, each containing

a Chittik warrior. Their weaponry may or may not have survived the millennia in functional condition. The Chittik will be confused at the date readout on their pods, but they are intelligent enough to realize that something terrible must have happened to their kind. Human prisoners might be captured for interrogation, or they might imagine them some strange variety of Ushan to be used as provender and breeding hosts. Interrogation is unlikely to be fruitful, though Chittik could learn to speak human languages in time.

## 8 Communications Control Room

A few tombs were equipped with FTL laser communications systems for quick consultation with the Sun Temple. The controls for the comm panel resemble those described in the Control Room entry, but late-era tombs were also equipped with dual-language interfaces to allow use by Chittik guards. A canny linguist might be able to get hints on equivalent words in the two languages. Careful exploration of the comm system might also unearth a basic translation primer intended to ease communication with newly-discovered species. With such a Rosetta stone, a linguist with two weeks of determined study can learn enough of the language to express basic concepts, and can spend skill points on the Language skill to become fluent in Ushan. Note that while the language is essentially the same throughout Dynasties, the script changes with each Dynasty, and must be puzzled out for each era. The speed and difficulty of this will depend on the amount of example text available.

## 9 Control Room

This room is given over to banks of controls used to manage the tomb's power, atmosphere, lighting, and other operational concerns. Almost all tombs were built to function without oversight for millennia, but someone who gains access to a control room can selectively shut down power in other rooms in the tomb. Figuring out which controls do which things can be potentially hazardous.

First Dynasty controls are square slider-blocks that are moved left and right and pushed in at various points to indicate choices in response to a monitor displaying Ushan text. Second Dynasty controls are round dials which are pushed in to acknowledge a choice. Third Dynasty tombs use joystick-like controls that are twisted to select a choice from the monitor. Each era uses a writing style appropriate to its era, so figuring out what one message means doesn't necessarily help with a tomb of a different dynasty.

If you need to come up with a random result for their meddling, roll 1d6: 1- the lights go off or on in the control room, 2- the tomb's entrance pops open or closed, with depressurization occurring in three rounds, 3- a blaring klaxon begins to sound, and if nothing is done roll again in three rounds to see what happens, 4- an error message is spoken in ancient Ushan by a feminine voice, 5- all power is cut to all systems except the control board, 6- all door locks in the tomb suddenly spring open- or lock shut if the door was closed but unlocked.

## 10 Crypt

Here the honored dead of the Ushans sleep forever in their coffins of perfectly transparent glass. The bodies within are withered yet recognizable, and are usually clad in vestments of pearlescent woven synthetics that crumble to dust if touched. If such a preserved corpse

were to be planted in a growing medium- such as that available in the Brightside's hydroponic bay- the Ushan would sprout into 1d10 young Ushans within a month.

Crypt rooms are always extremely well-lit unless the asteroid's light shunts or solar power catchers have been badly damaged. Decline-era crypt rooms are stark, with milky, bubbled glass instead of the perfectly transparent caskets of earlier ages. Third Dynasty tombs favor wall reliefs of the dead Ushan's accomplishments among the living, most of which revolve around some sage religious teaching that has meaning only to other Ushans.

## 11 Docking Bay Controls

This bank of panels is much like those described in the Control Room entry, save that it controls the opening and closing of a massive pressurized docking bay built into the side of the asteroid. The bay door is artfully concealed as part of the asteroid's surface, but yawns open to show a docking deck large enough to safely shelter eight fighter-class hulls, two frigates, or one cruiser-class ship. The deck itself is pressurized when the bay door is closed. If you add this room, you should take care to include a stairway down to the deck area, which is generally no more than a large ring of artificial gravity walkways around the zero-gee mooring area. At the GM's discretion, a sunskimmer might still be docked in the bay.

## 12 Dormitory

While Ushans had no need for food beyond a few minerals, they required sleep much as other mammals might. Dormitory rooms tend to be dominated by a single central column with multiple "branches" running across the ceiling, and multiple hammock-like beds hanging from these branches. Ushans preferred to avoid sleeping on objects placed on the floor or ground, as it was reminiscent of death and planting. The hammocks are quite fragile and will fall apart with any kind of rough handling.

## 13 Empty Room

Perhaps the builders intended something for this room that they never had the chance to construct. For whatever reason, it is bare and somewhat unfinished, without the decorations to be seen elsewhere in the tomb.

## 14 Feasting Room

Some tombs were equipped with larders for the Chittik guards; other tombs simply encouraged them to select provender from among the pilgrims that arrived. These rooms are fitted out with multiple tables with restraints, small cutting implements, and assorted long-decayed Chittik seasonings and spices. The Chittik preferred to eat their meals alive as a reminder of their hatchling stage; it provided them with a feeling of safety and security. Simple tourniquets, gags, clamps, and compresses are usually stacked near the spices. The room itself is usually still decorated in the style of whatever Dynasty built the tomb.

## 15 Fountain Room

Benches in the Dynastic style circle a large fountain at the center of this room. In well-kept tombs, a steady plume of feathery water is jetted from a basin carved in a style appropriate to the Dynasty. In less well-maintained tombs, the basin is empty or cracked, or the



floor of the room is a half-meter deep in stagnant water. The entire room might be flooded in the case of a major malfunction, hurling a torrent of water on the next explorers to open the door.

#### **16 Garden Chamber**

Gengineered vines and flowers fill the irrigated planters in this room, all designed to maintain a steady state of growth, death, and reseeding even in the absence of tenders. For some garden chambers, this has worked perfectly. For others, a background radiation leak might have killed everything in the room, or rendered it hazardous to explorers. If Chittik or other sapient life forms live in the tomb, they may have begun to eat the plants, which are coincidentally edible to humans. A single garden chamber of 6 x 9 meter size can feed up to five people indefinitely, if unpleasantly.

#### **17 Holo-audience**

This room was originally fitted out to provide a pilgrim with the opportunity to experience a little of the revered occupant's presence and teachings. On entering the room, a perfect image of the tomb's occupant will step out from behind a screen to greet the visitors in Ushan. The image will gesture an invitation to the nearby seats, and will maintain attention on the visitors as it launches into an extensive religious homily in Ushan, pausing now and then to allow the listeners to reply. If it recognizes certain Ushan keywords, it will drop into a brief discursion on the point. All of it is remarkably lifelike, as the Ushan talent at manipulating light leaves the hologram with an appearance impossible to distinguish from life without actually feeling the insubstantiality of the image. The image will pause regularly to allow listeners to politely depart, but the amount of theological material each image is capable of reciting is sufficient to supply an attentive audience for years.

#### **18 Larder**

Some tombs were furnished with foodstuffs for the Chittik guards assigned to monitor the pilgrims. These rooms were stacked with the provisions most satisfying to those Chittik unfortunate enough to be assigned such arduous duty; haunches of preserved Ushan flesh sealed in opaque plastic. The preservation method was remarkably effective, and the first package opened will reveal the perfectly preserved head of a young Ushan girl. As only adult Ushan remains sprouted offspring, Chittik preferred to eat children rather than "waste" hosts.

#### **19 Library**

Rows upon rows of Ushan books fill this room, all of them fashioned of thin slabs of synthetic. Complex data storage methods were generally avoided by Ushans, as such devices were prone to failure long before simple objects. The divine truths contained within these books was far too important to trust them to unreliable machines. Many of the books are crumbling and unreadable, but others have many pages of text in whatever script is appropriate for the Dynasty that built the tomb. Illustrations are limited, but a few hints of association can be picked up from the texts. If a character speaks Ushan, these books are enough to gain a familiarity with the script of that Dynasty.

#### **20 Maneuver Jet Controls**

A few sky tombs were located in potentially unstable regions of the debris belt, and required the installation of maneuver jets in case of impending collision. These jets are concealed under thin rock facades that blow away immediately before the jets are triggered. The jets use the tomb's water supply as reaction mass, and there's generally enough such fuel to reach any one other location in the system after two weeks of travel. If the tomb moves at only half that speed, there will be enough fuel to reach two locations. Dry tanks require a hundred tons of water to refuel them.

The controls themselves take the same form as those found in the Control Room described earlier. Meddling with the controls without being able to read the Ushan writing will set off a loud alarm klaxon throughout the tomb. If the PCs can't figure out how to cancel the order within four rounds, the maneuver jets will fire, almost certainly in an unhelpful direction.

A tomb can be used as a flying ram, but it is glacially slow compared even to a system boat. A ship can always evade the tomb, and an armed station such as the Brightside can blast it to pieces long before it gets close enough to ram. Against another tomb, however, a collision will likely destroy both structures.

#### **21 Map Chamber**

Ushan holy men and women usually belonged to a particular theological dynasty, with three major ones defining their culture and style of architecture. As a token of respect, some tombs included memorial rooms depicting the holy figures that inspired and guided the Ushan buried there. In addition to sculptures of these figures, there is always a square tablet in the center of the room showing marks and symbols that someone with Navigation-1 or better can immediately recognize as representing the location of several other points in the outer rim debris field. These points are the tombs of the present deceased's spiritual forebears.

The Ushans destroyed as many of these maps as possible to prevent the Chittik from learning the location of their dead. Human explorers might have destroyed more to safeguard their knowledge.

#### **22 Medical Facilities**

Some of the more lushly-appointed tombs even had on-site medical facilities to tend to pilgrims who became ill. These facilities tended to be fairly minimal, as Ushans had multiple religious prohibitions against antibiotics. The drugs in the injectors here have all long since degraded into worthlessness, and the Ushan equivalent of Lazarus patches and medkits have fallen to brittle pieces. On the wall, however, there is often a molded synthetic panel depicting the Ushan life cycle from budding to death.

#### **23 Meditation Room**

This room invariably is dominated by a massive view screen that wraps around the walls, floor, and ceiling of the chamber. In functioning tombs, this view screen will give a perfect view of the Beast, with those present seemingly standing in empty space. Ancient kneelers and cushions on the floor are oriented toward the spectacle. Malfunctioning tombs may give a garbled picture, or have the focus accidentally swapped to a different room in the tomb rather than an exterior view of the star.

## 24 Memorial

The Ushans hated to acknowledge the existence of the Chittik, even after they had been enslaved by the beetle-men. Still, a passionate need to remember the dead brought about rooms such as these, dedicated to the memory of those consumed by the Chittik. Their insectile overlords tolerated these memorials, viewing them as simply one more piece of proof that the Ushans were meant only to be used and devoured.

The walls of a memorial chamber are covered with thousands of small plaques, each a few centimeters square. On each plaque is an etched and sometimes colored picture of an Ushan, with a name and a birth date beneath. There is never a death date; the Ushans refused to contemplate the manner of death of those destroyed by the Chittik. Sometimes small possessions or toys beloved by the dead were left behind as well, remaining for a time before being sent starward.

## 25 Offering Vault

The Ushans were relentlessly pacifistic, but the urges of theft were not unknown to them. In light of that and the desire to show due respect to offerings made to the dead, some tombs had vaults specially dedicated to holding valuables. For tombs known to the Chittik, these vaults will always be empty of anything of utilitarian worth; only Ushan glass-art, paintings and sculpture will remain, though these things may be worth something to humans as well. Tombs with locations that were successfully hidden from the Chittik might contain useful devices as well.

The door to an offering vault is always very thick and sturdy. Ushan talent in light manipulation makes laser torches useless against these doors; explosives or cutting bars might be able to get through it with sufficient noise and time, though explosions will probably destroy any fragile art within. Picking the lock can be accomplished with a Security check against difficulty 8, with only one attempt possible.

## 26 Power Room

Some tombs have solid-state solar power converters built into the structure, and so lack any specific locus for power generation. Other tombs rely on a more efficient but more fragile central converter to power the tomb. Inflicting more than five points of damage on a power converter will irreparably damage it and kill all power to the tomb. The atmosphere will go stale within two hours, and the pressure doors at the entrance will no longer seal correctly once slid open. Gravity will also fail, leaving the tomb filled with debris.

First Dynasty power converters resemble crystalline cubes with controls fixed above numerous squared “cables” that run from the converter to the nearest walls. Sliding the controls will cut power to that particular room or system. Second Dynasty power converters resemble discs rotating a few inches above a glowing blue crystal pedestal with several markings around its rim. Pushing down on the floating disk so that its rim touches the edge of the pedestal will activate or deactivate that power feed. Third Dynasty converters are floor-to-ceiling bronze-colored pillars with inset tabs that slide in and out of labeled notches, routing power to or away from different systems. Decline-era power converters are large, corroded alloy panels with cables that plug in and out of the power feeds.

## 27 Refueling Controls

The sunskimmers that the Ushans used for travel within a system had no need for fuel, but occasionally a pilgrim ship equipped with spike drives would have use for a convenient refueling point without having to make the multi-day trip in to the Sun Temple. These controls manage the extrusion of a fuel umbilical from the asteroid’s body. The umbilical plug requires an Astronautics tech to convert it for use on human ships, but the purified hydrogen that the asteroid creates out of its water supply is quite serviceable for fueling human spike drives. Most asteroids carry enough water to fuel many ships before supplies start to flag, but asteroids that have run dry will need to have liquid water shipped in.

The controls for the refueling equipment vary depending on the Dynasty that built the tomb; details are listed under the Control Room entry. Random meddling with the controls has a 20% chance of causing a sudden, uncontrolled jet of liquid hydrogen to be shot into near space. Any shuttle docked nearby will be covered in it, and the frozen liquid will have to be chipped off the loading door before the ship can be entered again.

## 28 Sculpture Garden

A statue stands at every grid intersection on the room map, each one depicting an Ushan of importance to the tomb’s occupant- wife, husband, parent, teacher, or other dear one. The style of the statue depends on the Dynasty; First Dynasty statues tend toward blocky Cubist works focusing on points of mass on the statue. Second Dynasty statues are abstract, flowing figures that use stylized lines and curves to denote male and female. Third Dynasty statues are distinctly representative and detailed. Decline-era statues are little more than roughly-shaped pillars. All statues have names and titles carved at their base.

## 29 Storage Room

Racks of drinking vessels, spare hammocks, cleaning supplies, and boxes of the minerals Ushans needed for health are all the usual contents of storage rooms. Many of the boxes show images of Ushan life on their homeworld, with two bright suns and pictures of Ushans building temples, fashioning art, and using the product happily. Decline-era packaging will show nothing but stark identification lettering.

## 30 Workshop

Small tools, half-assembled devices, and other parts of a tomb in need of maintenance are usually spread out in this workshop. The laser cutting tools fixed to the walls are remarkably effective, and work twice as fast as anything humans make, but they cannot be removed from the workshop without destroying them.

Ushan technicians and artisans were possessed of a level of expertise much like that of post-Scream humanity. Their society was peaceful and sedate, with little interest in technical advancement or matters unrelated to theology and simple enjoyment of life. Still, the Ushans possessed remarkable skill in the manipulation and channeling of light. Illumination was both nourishment and a symbol of the divine, and while their tools were never intended for use as weaponry, some have more functionality than their makers intended. Marius Rochambeau on Brightside Station will pay up to 20,000 credits for Ushan artifacts. Finding buyers on different worlds can be more difficult, but they might fetch almost twice the price if sold directly to an interested collector.

**Everlights** are small, thumb-sized crystals that give a constant, unwavering illumination out to thirty meters. Everlights require no power, but they cannot be deactivated short of smashing them. Marius will pay 50 credits for each everlight recovered.

**Glass Cable** is found incorporated in some Ushan structures. The cable is transparent, extremely flexible, and strong as TL 4 rope. The optical qualities of the cable are such that a person can look at one cut end and see a bubble-eyed view of whatever is occurring in front of the other end. A simple magnifying lens is helpful but not mandatory. Marius will pay 50 credits for each ten meters.

**Mantles of Light** are flowing Ushan garments fashioned of myriad tiny glass-like threads, all oriented to channel the ambient light into a luminous halo around the wearer. While beautiful to look at, they also render the wearer very difficult to injure with laser weaponry. Attackers user lasers treat the wearer as if they were AC 1, though the mantles are only AC 7 against other attacks. The mantles need to be fastened snugly to the wearer to channel the light correctly, and so cannot be worn with other forms of armor. Marius will pay 1,000 credits for a mantle of light.

**Penitence Wraps** are thin, tough weaves of glassine fabric, one side smooth and nondescript while the other is covered in lamentations and declarations of repentance for sins of acquisitiveness and pride. When the edges of the cloth are brought together, they cling snugly. Originally used for self-mortification, penitence wraps render a wrapped wearer or object almost invisible as light is channeled around them. The wrap must be sealed completely for it to function, and it is impossible to see outside of it. Noticing a wrapped object or person is very difficult; if they are still, it's normally a Perception skill check against difficulty 10, and impossible at more than 20 meters distance. Marius will pay 2,000 credits for a penitence wrap.

**Radiation Sinks** are small belt-mounted discs that appear white when wholly unused. When worn by a human-sized creature and powered by an Ushan power cell, the disk will absorb harmful radiation. Each time the wearer fails a radiation saving throw, the disk absorbs the radiation harmlessly and a wedge turns black on the disk. When the tenth radiation save is failed, the power cell is drained and the sink becomes useless. Marius will pay 500 credits for a completely unused sink.

**Shimmerglass art** is composed of a very tough, luminous glass cut and shaped to form intricate patterns of refracted light. During the Decline, Ushan artisans secretly fashioned some pieces of art to serve as keys. Messages encrypted in seemingly ordinary religious texts could be viewed through these works of art, revealing the secret location of sky tombs, hidden fastnesses, or supply caches. Some messages required multiple pieces of art to be overlaid. Marius will pay 1d6 \* 100 credits for any given piece of shimmerglass art.

**Stickbeams** appear as cigar-sized tubes with rocker switches on one side and power indicators striped beside. When the switch is depressed, a narrow, bright-green beam projects out to a maximum distance of 100 meters. If the switch is rocked back, the object is smoothly levitated toward the holder, and a push forward sends the object away out to the maximum range. The force is minor, and cannot manipulate objects that weigh more than ten kilograms. An Ushan power cell fuels up to 20 uses of the stickbeam. Marius will pay 500 credits for each stickbeam.

**Ushan Cutting Torches** are small, hand-held laser cutting tools. The lasers are programmed with automatic safeties that turn them off immediately if they threaten to damage organic materials of any kind, but they can deliver 2d6 damage per round to inanimate objects. A standard interior bulkhead can have a man-sized hole carved in it with five minutes of work, and a ship or station hull can be pierced with fifteen minutes of cutting. The torches use Ushan power cells, and last for fifteen minutes of steady use with a full cell. Marius will pay 500 credits for a cutting torch.

**Ushan Power Cells** are small, bullet-shaped cells designed for insertion into powered Ushan equipment. A tech with Tech/Postech-1 or better can retrofit the cells into a type A power cell housing, where it will provide twice as much power as a comparable human cell. Ushan power cells cannot be recharged by human technology, however, and Ushan tech cannot be powered by human power sources. Marius will pay 20 credits for each power cell recovered.

## Sky Tomb XP Rewards

The following adventures assume XP rewards equal to the value of the credit chips, valuable commodities, and Ushan artifacts pulled from the tomb. Human gear salvage is not counted for XP rewards. Assuming the PCs pillage each tomb completely, the total reward in the Empty Graves is 3000 XP, the Cold Tomb offers 4820 XP, and the House of Echoes grants 6420 XP, as the Sun Tower artifact should not be counted for XP purposes. These awards can be adjusted up or downward to accommodate larger or smaller PC groups.

Characters who glean carefully can come away with substantially more money from selling looted human gear, even given the limited prices that Roland Lomax pays for salvage. Still, you should not be too concerned about character wealth. They need 500 credits apiece just to buy passage off the station, after all, in addition to their air taxes and other incidentals.

## EMPTY GRAVES



Brightside Station is the largest and most self-sufficient of the settlements in Hard Light, but it is not the only one. The sky tombs offer safety and privacy for all manner of occupants, and some find it useful to have a bolt hole amid the outer rim debris.

Empty Graves is one such pirate nest, ruled by the invidious, shock-bearded Captain Ramsley. Raiders from nearby systems can dock to sell their loot and captives to unscrupulous merchants and partake of some of the questionable recreations to be had in a den of soulless space reavers. The privacy of visitors is ensured by the Beast's background radiation and the numerous asteroids in the debris field. It is all but impossible to detect an incoming ship unless the craft doing the scanning is also in the outer rim.

Empty Graves is known to Brightside Station, though the settlement is supposedly an "artist's colony". The ramshackle system shuttle that makes the trip in monthly to buy supplies gives no contrary impression, but the locals on Brightside are fairly certain that very bad things happen out on Empty Graves. As long as the visitors pay in cash and keep their trouble off the station, Dutta and the other chiefs would just as soon ignore them.

Roland Lomax has warm ties with the pirate den, and usually makes a trip out in their system shuttle every month or two. Given his ban at the Clouds and Rain and his own uncouth tastes, Empty Graves offers him the kind of entertainment he can't get in a civilized establishment. It was on one such trip that a boozy pirate showed him a Geostellar Mining Industries dataslab that he'd picked off a dead lifeboat he found in Hard Light. Though the pirate didn't realize it, it was an itemized record of Yash Dutta's embezzlement and the ruin it caused GMI. Lomax bought it as a "souvenir".

Now Lomax works to cement his power base on Brightside in preparation for a fascinating meeting with the bank auditor that always arrives with the novium transport. In the meanwhile he continues his monthly trips to Empty Graves.

The pirates of Empty Grave are likely to be willing to deal with PCs unless the characters give obvious signs of trouble. Those who seem to have business to do or who want to sample the settlement's dubious pleasures will be allowed three days' leave to do so before a 10 credit per day per head air tax is levied. If Lomax finds out they've been to Empty Grave, he'll make it privately clear to them that he does not want the settlement's nature discussed, and that a failure of discretion would result in tragic accidents. If proof of the settlement's nature does come out, Lomax will be humiliated and lose much of his support among the miners. This won't stop him from trying to overthrow Dutta, of course.

The pirates have a rusty, driveless system shuttle docked on the asteroid that they use to make runs to Brightside. The shuttle is stolen, of course, and utterly unsalable along normal lines. Dutta would be willing to take it off the PC's hands for 10,000 credits, however, assuming that they don't want to use it for their own explorations.

### Map Key

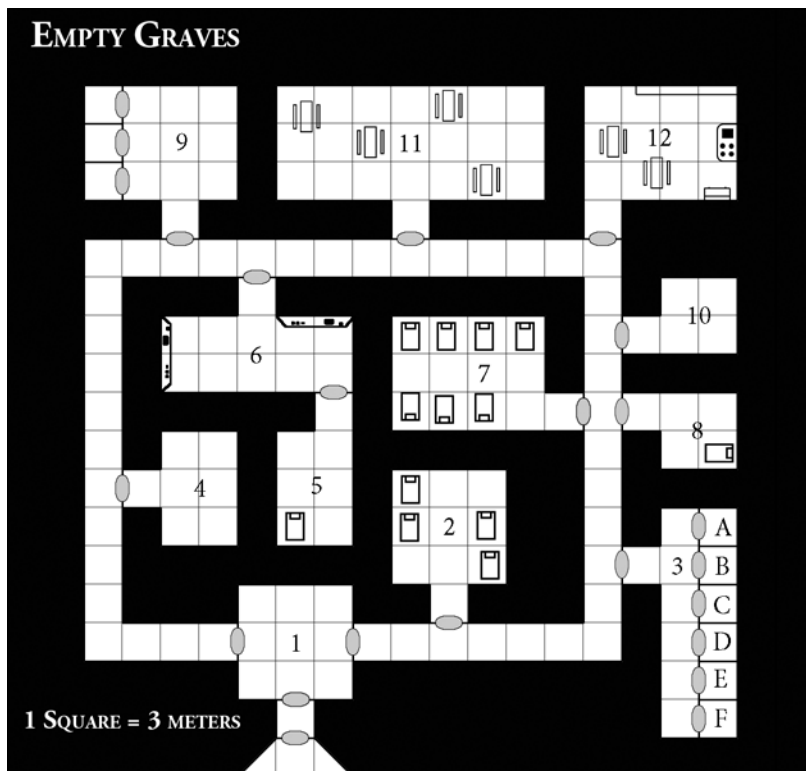
#### 1 Entrance

The pirates will assume that any unannounced visitors are either fellow pirates or merchants. They'll maintain their "artist's colony" facade until after a ship has docked and its passengers have debarked. The pirates won't allow more than a half-dozen newcomers in at a time. After the visitors get a good look at what Empty Graves actually is, those who accept it in stride will be allowed to do business, while those that look to be overly-righteous tourists will be attacked.

#### 2 Guest Barracks

Visitors are lodged here amid grubby bunk beds and walls of First Dynasty Ushan bas-reliefs long since defaced by bored pirates.

## EMPTY GRAVES



### 3 Vault

This chamber was once an offering vault until the pirates repurposed its storage cells as holding cells for their hostages and plunder. Cell A contains four Ushan shimmerglass icons worth 100 credits each. Cell B contains three heavy crates of valuable industrial alloys worth 500 credits, each crate counting as eight encumbrance items. Cell C holds stacks of clothing taken from their victims, including an Ushan Mantle of Light. Cell D contains Thad Bowman, a teenage boy who has spun an elaborate lie about being a rich merchant's son. Cell E holds Sofia Lucullo, a skilled pilot taken when her ship was boarded; the pirate's leader, Captain Ramsley, wishes to persuade her that her future would be better as a pirate than as meat for Gerta, but Sofia remains stubbornly resistant. Cell F is empty.

One pirate is always on guard in this room, and only Captain Ramsley has the keys to cells A-C. Both he and Gerta have keycards to cells D-F. Opening the cells without the keys requires a Security check against difficulty 8, with only one attempt per PC.

**Pirate:** HP 3, Att +2/1d6+1 pistol, AC 5 woven armor, Save 15+, Morale 8

### 4 Lavatories and Showers

Showers and toilets have been installed in this former storeroom for the benefit of the pirates and their prisoners.

### 5 Captain Ramsley's Quarters

Stolen silks, plundered trifles, and the detritus of years of thieving decorate this room in barbaric opulence. 900 credits worth of gaudy baubles and credit chips can be found by a thorough plundering. Captain Ramsley is here when not holding court in room 11.

**Ramsley:** HP 20, Att +4/1d8+1 monoblade, AC 4/combat field uniform, Save 14+, Morale 10.

### 6 Comm and Refueling Controls

One pirate technician is always on duty here, monitoring the asteroid's exterior for visitors and communicating with any ships that hail. The asteroid's refueling facilities are also controlled from here. A locker along the back contains four vacc suits and tool sets for Astronautics and Postech technicians. The tech's camera also monitors room 1, and he can hit a tomb-wide alarm if needed.

**Tech:** HP 6, Att +3/1d6+1 pistol, AC 9, Save 15+, Morale 8

### 7 Common Barracks

Seven double-bunk beds serve the needs of the pirates here. Three can usually be found here at any hour. The lockers here contain two pistols, 40 rounds of ammunition, two suits of woven armor, and 200 credit chips.

**Pirates (3):** HP 3, Att +2/1d6+1 pistol, AC 9, Save 15+, Morale 8

### 8 Privacy Room

This room is set aside for pirates in need of a private nook for conversation or relaxation. A grubby cot stands in the corner next to a chipped glass Ushan washing basin.

### 9 The Pens

Gerta, a leathery-faced pirate woman with a stun baton and pistol runs the Graves' brothel with the help of a pair of pockmarked assistants. The half-dozen inmates are all hostages with no ransoms anticipated, and Gerta couldn't be more indifferent to their use so long as she is paid.

**Gerta:** HP 8, Att +3/1d6+1 pistol, AC 7/armored undersuit, Save 14+, Morale 9

**Thugs (2):** HP 3, Att +2/1d4 club, AC 9, Save 15+, Morale 7

### 10 Larder

Rations and common supplies are kept here. Long Toby and Captain Ramsley both have keycards. Opening the lock without them requires a Security check at difficulty 7, with one attempt possible per PC.

### 11 Playroom

Pirates drink and roister around tables in this former First Dynasty Ushan crypt, with the occupied glass coffin of High Priestess Helani used as a dice table, a cigarette stuffed between the corpse's lips.

**Pirates (3):** HP 3, Att +2/1d6+1 pistol, AC 9, Save 15+, Morale 8

### 12 The Cookhouse

Long Toby, a rail-lean cook with a perpetual scowl serves up reheated rations from a jury-rigged solar cooker array at the end of the room. If attacked, he'll bellow for help and hurl a pot of boiling stew at the nearest enemy, doing 1d4 damage unless the victim makes a successful Evasion save.

**Long Toby:** HP 8, Att +3/1d4 knife, AC 9, Save 14+, Morale 8

# THE COLD TOMB

The vast majority of the sky tombs were carved out of stony iron asteroids, but here and there an Ushan architect thirsted for something more exotic. The Cold Tomb is one such creation, a Second Dynasty tomb cut from the core of a massive iceball. In its prime, the Cold Tomb was a wonder of the sector, with the Beast's light pouring through the ice to scatter on the carefully-driven prismatic reflectors the architect had planted in the iceball.

With the Decline, the careful maintenance the tomb required was no longer possible. The Chittik had no reason to permit their slaves such frivolous effort, and while pilgrims still came to the tomb, they were fewer. The beetle-men installed automatic defenses against interlopers and let the tomb decay. Dust and debris has clouded the surface of the iceball and damaged the solar collectors. Power is only a trickle of what it should be.

As a consequence, the temperature regulators have slowly failed over the years. The corridors and rooms of the Cold Tomb have filled with dark, icy water and the chambers have silted with the slow decay of millennia. Yet despite this, the deathless Chittik guardians wait patiently in the black water for the opening of the tomb's door. These mechanical warders have their duty, and they will execute it.

## An Icy Doom

Vacc suits are rated for underwater operation, but the cold water is a much more effective leech of heat than the vacuum of space. A vacc suit needs to swap in a fresh type A power cell every thirty minutes or the PC will start to suffer hypothermia. Every five minutes without heat, the PC must make a Physical Effect saving throw or else lose 1 point of Strength and Constitution. A character reduced below Strength 3 cannot move, and one reduced below Constitution 3 will die. Attribute point losses to hypothermia can be restored by an hour's warmth and treatment by a medkit, or else a day's recovery if a medkit is lacking.

Aside from the chill, communications are complicated by the fact that radios do not function underwater. Communication in the tomb relies on hand signals, lengths of comm hardline plugged in between suits, or pressing helmets together to let the vibrations of speech carry through. Visibility underwater is limited by the murky water. A character can see no more than ten meters in any direction.

Some players might try to think of some way to dry out the tomb before entering. Whatever method is used would have to be very slow and gradual, bleeding off only small amounts of water at once. Rapidly pumping out the interior would cause the iceball to blow apart from the quick pressure changes. It's possible that a slow method of bleed might work to empty the tomb, but most hooks meant to get the players to the iceball won't give them the month they need to drain the tomb safely.

Players may also recognize the value of the iceball as a water source. The ice can be mined for that purpose, but the entire tomb must be explored first; a cutting laser that hit an unmapped pocket of water would have explosive consequences to the iceball. The liquid water could be pumped out directly, but as noted above it would have to be a very slow process.

Modern lasers and projectile weapons are designed for operating in hostile environments, and so they will work underwater. The water is murky, but it doesn't quite qualify as hindering laser weaponry. Use of grenades and other explosives is extremely dangerous underwater; the pressure wave will extend twice as far and do twice as much damage. Substantial explosives use runs the risk of destroying the whole tomb.

Movement is cumbersome underwater. All movement rates are cut in half due to the water's resistance. The streamlined shape of the Chittik drones allows them to move at normal speed. Thrown objects have only half ordinary maximum range. Characters can swim upward at one-third their normal movement rate. Many rooms have very high ceilings due to the flux of erosion and refreezing, with some rising as high as 20 meters.

A character's vacc suit may be cut by a danger in the tomb or by a hit from a Chittik drone's claws when they have 10 or fewer hit points. Such a hit has a 50% chance of cutting a vacc suit in addition to whatever damage may be done. Characters can patch a vacc suit with one of its emergency sealing patches, but the cold water that enters a suit will severely strain the suit's heating element and immediately drain the power cell. A character must replace the cell within five minutes or they will begin to suffer hypothermia.

Lazarus patches and medical assistance can be applied to a character in a vacc suit, as they are equipped with emergency med ports for standardized pharmaceutical sprays. Biopsionic help also functions normally. Any medical attention beyond resuscitation and basic healing will require an air-filled area, however.

## Map Key

### 1 Entrance

The rounded benches that line the walls of this chamber are as brittle as thin glass. Plaques showing High Priest Ilmanu in the pride of life are embedded in the ice of the wall, but the millennia of freezing and thawing has left them almost buried, only dark outlines beneath several centimeters of ice. A rug of woven Ushan glass fiber is beneath the thin layer of silt on the floor, worth 300 credits to a salvager. As soon as all of the PCs have entered the tomb the Chittik drones will lock the pressure doors. If one or more characters insist on remaining outside, the Chittik will trigger the lock as soon as a PC ventures beyond the entrance room.

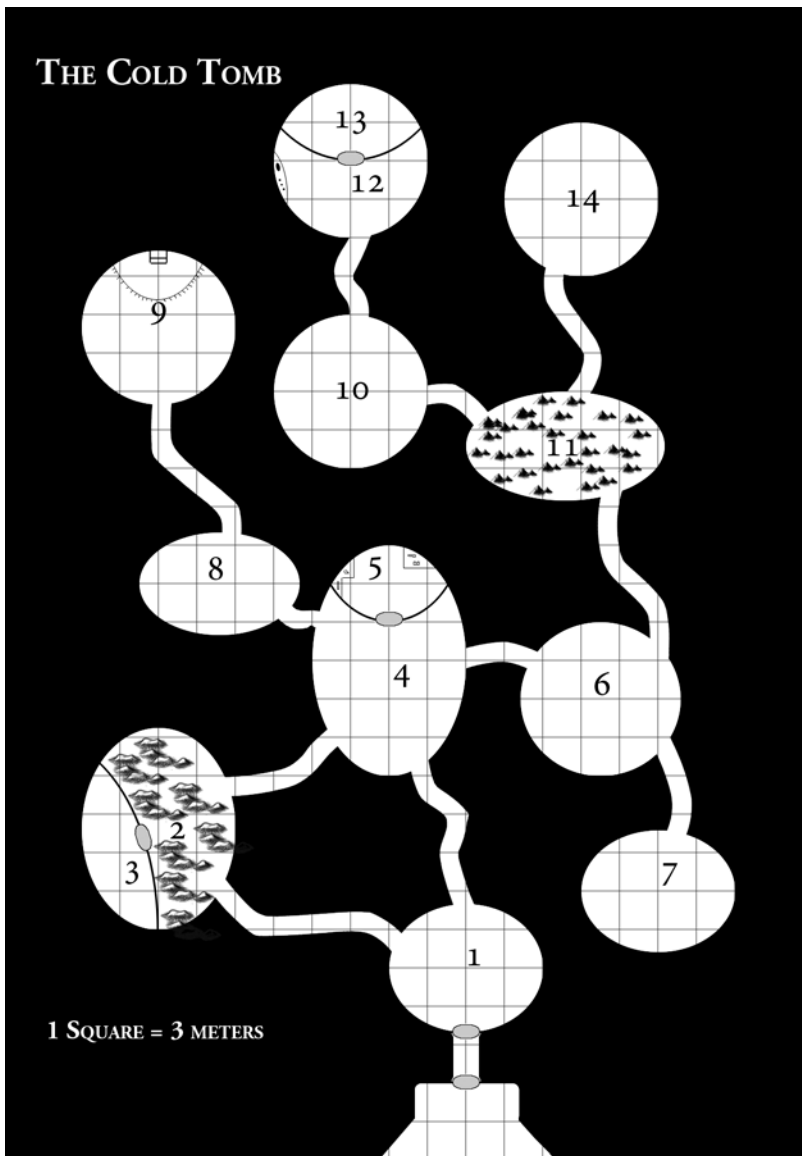
### 2 Dead Sargasso

This chamber was a garden once, and the preserved fronds of dead vines and the withered blossoms of the engineered plants now wave slowly in the torpid current. It is impossible to see more than a meter through the growth.

### 3 Blackened Sun

Once a meditation chamber, this rounded room is dominated by a vast, stylized sun carved into the far wall's ice. The centuries of slow freeze and thaw have distorted it into a misshapen, half-melted shape crusted with bulging growths and pockmarks. Entrance into the room will activate a half-ruined illumination system that

## THE COLD TOMB



directs light through the ice icon. The distortions send wild shadows through the room, blotches like a leprous face behind the glowing ice. Four shimmerglass icons decorate the walls of the room, each one roughly the size of a human forearm and worth 200 credits to a buyer.

### 4 The Icy Dead

The frozen corpses of those Ushan slaves unfortunate enough to have sought shelter in the Cold Tomb have been embedded in the walls and floor here. They were left here by the Chittik drones, as the guardians lack any specifically authorized location for corpse disposal. There must be at least thirty corpses of all ages frozen in piles here, some partially embedded and others almost wholly entombed. The long immersion has left the corpses unable to sprout.

### 5 Repair Workshop

The ice tomb required more maintenance than was usual for an Ushan sky tomb, and so this small room was devoted to the tools and supplies necessary to keep it running. Much of the equipment has decayed under the centuries of immersion, but an Ushan cutting torch and a half-dozen Ushan power cells are still intact in a waterproof case on the aft workbench. The torch will not function underwater but can endure immersion without damage.

A cabinet on the wall is partially sealed by ice. If chipped free, it can be opened to reveal an Ushan thermal suit occupied by the waterlogged corpse of its wearer, killed when the drones shut down the tomb and “stored” where his suit belonged. The suit itself is worthless, but careful investigation will reveal a sheet of folded synthetic on which is sketched a rough map of the tomb annotated by Second Dynasty script indicating maintenance troubles.

### 6 Vortex Pump

Motion in this room will activate an emergency pump on centered in the middle of the floor. This twelve-centimeter hole creates an enormously powerful suction, though the water drained promptly pours back into the tomb elsewhere. Characters in the room must all make Tech saving throws; the character who fails it by most is dragged over the vent and plugs it with his or her body. If all save, they managed to grab on to furniture or brace themselves in time. The vent shuts off after one round, but a trapped character remains sealed to the pump inflow. Freeing a trapped character requires either an hour of very careful chipping at the ice or a more abrupt yank that will tear the victim’s suit.

### 7 The Book Clouds

A sluggish pump sets a slow, whirling vortex of decayed synthetic book pages and ring-pierced bindings circling in the darkness of this silted library. It is impossible for a character to see anything not directly adjacent to them while in the room. A Chittik drone clings to the ceiling here, and will make a raking attack at one of the characters sixty seconds after the first PC enters the room, surprising the character unless the victim makes a Perception check at difficulty 10. Characters that explicitly look up will see the drone on the ceiling; otherwise only the character being attacked will get a glimpse of it. PCs will get one round to attack the drone in return before it races out of the ruined library toward room 14. Any character not within arm’s reach of the drone has an automatic 50% chance of missing due to the limited visibility, no matter their hit roll.

**Chittik Drone A:** HP 12, Att +5/+5/1d4+1 each claw, AC 5, Save 14+, Morale 12

### 8 Murky Map

Stone statues of Ushan High Priests stand around the periphery of this room, the silt halfway to a visitor’s knee. At the center of the room, a few inches below the silt’s surface, is a meter-square stone table depicting the location of four other sky tombs- all of them known to the Chittik, and so perhaps equipped with their own guardians.

### 9 Silted Crypt

The glass sarcophagus of the High Priest Ilmanu has maintained its seal against the water, though it is crusted over with a thin layer of opaque mineral salts. A character who scrapes away the salts will be able to see the perfectly preserved corpse of the Second Dynasty hierarch and the functional Mantle of Light he wears.

The sarcophagus can be lifted and moved by characters with a total Strength score of 20; the air sealed in it help gives it buoyancy.

The floor of the crypt is knee-deep in a silt of soft, clinging dark muck. Substantial activity will churn up the muck, giving lasers a -4 penalty to hit and blinding everyone in the room.

### 10 Drowned Sculpture Garden

A pseudo-algae bloom has left the stylized Ushan statues here bearded in long sheets of clammy, opaque plant life. A current from a failing pump leaves the algae sheets slowly billowing in the murky water.

### 11 The Pearl Razors

A crate of Ushan mineral supplements was carelessly left here during the last days of the tomb. The millennia of immersion has reacted with the minerals to create a vast number of lacy, delicate, razor-sharp crystalline growths along the floor, wall, and ceiling of this room. A character that attempts to enter the room without destroying the growths must make an Evasion saving throw or find their suit sliced by a crystal and suffer 1d4 damage.

Destroying the growths is simple, and they shatter into tiny, harmless particles, but if characters smash them with a melee weapon, they run a 20% chance of a suit cut for every 3 x 3 meter section they clear. Crystals can be smashed with ranged weaponry, but it requires ten rounds of laser or projectile ammunition per 3 x 3 section cleared. Prudent characters may gather up detritus from elsewhere in the tomb to throw at the crystals; the water slows impact, but the crystals are extremely fragile.

The Chittik drones are intimately familiar with the crystals, and can pass through them freely without danger of injury.

### 12 Control Room

Round, Second Dynasty-style knobs and buttons cover the control panel on the fore side of the room. A view screen gives a slightly murky view of the asteroid's exterior and the entrance area. Most of the controls no longer do anything, but one readout shows a straight horizontal line above an orange knob. If the knob is turned, the line will become a circle and the outer pressure doors will unlock. Someone conversant in Second Dynasty Ushan script can read enough of the board controls to figure out how to safely pump out the ice tomb in only five days.

A locked, air-tight cabinet is frozen to the aft wall. A successful Security check at difficulty 8 will open it, or ten points of damage inflicted. Inside are the artifacts the drones gathered from the tomb in preparation for collection by their masters. The contents include an Ushan stickbeam, a penitence wrap, six Ushan power cells, and twenty meters of coiled glass cable.

**Chittik Drones B and C:** HP 12 and 16, Att +5/+5/1d4+1 each claw, AC 5, Save 14+, Morale 12

### 13 Chittik Drone Bay

The tomb's complement of automated Chittik guardian drones are stored here, inert until the exterior door of the tomb is opened. Security feeds give them a clear idea of the number of intruders, and their instructions are very clear about exterminating any non-Chittik who enter the tomb. The drones do not have true AI, but they are very familiar with the terrain of the tomb and can control some of its functions from the nearby control room- such as sealing the pressure door after the intruders have entered. The drones prefer to strike quickly and retreat, and will stand and fight only when the intruders reach the control room.

### 14 Concert Chamber

Characters near this room will hear a low, melancholy music emanating from the chamber ahead, the sound vibrations transmitted through the water by an ancient speaker system. On entering the room, characters will behold a hologram of an Ushan woman dressed in elaborate robes, singing a funeral lament for the dead High Priest Ilmanu. The water distorts the projection in disquieting fashion, her perfectly lifelike seeming suddenly distorting and bulging. The interference often creates multiple replications of the image around the room, shapes suddenly appearing before the characters only to fade away a moment later.

If a Chittik drone has retreated to this room, it will attack intruders and fight to the death. The shifting holographic images do not confuse the machine's sensors, but the PCs suffer a -2 to hit from the leaping images and sudden distortions that ripple around them.

### Chittik Guardian Drone

Armor Class	5	No. Appearing	1-4
Hit Dice	2+2	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+5/+5	Movement	30'
Damage	1d4+1/1d4+1 claws	Morale	12

Guardian drones are autonomous guard robots that the Chittik employed in places that required no sophisticated monitoring. The guardians are well-equipped for the execution of any non-Chittik that violate the area. Guardian drones do not have true AI, but they can carry out direct, simple instructions from any living Chittik.

The drones appear to be man-sized constructs of glossy black plating and sharp edges, beetle-like and resembling a Chittik in shape. They have three pairs of legs- one for locomotion, one for manipulation, and one equipped with brutal claws. Well-maintained guardian drones can omit their claw attacks to fire an integral projectile weapon that does 1d10 damage at +5 to hit with a range of 50/100. The drones in the ice tomb have long since used up their ammunition for this weapon, and will only use their claws.



The first reported discovery of a sky tomb was two years ago, in 3198, when an errant novium transport picked up an anomalous asteroid in the outer rim. The locals on Brightside Station believe that this was the first discovery of a sky tomb; in actuality, several pirate ships have stumbled across tombs in the past few decades, but none of them survived to pass along word of their discoveries.

The House of Echoes is one such tomb. A passing pirate frigate discovered the Third Dynasty crypt in 3181, and dispatched a small party to investigate the interior. When the explorers never returned, the ship's captain elected to come back later with a stronger party. He never got the chance, as he and his ship were blasted to perdition by a defense boat in a neighboring system three weeks later.

The pirate exploratory crew had awoken the Chittik monitors from their millennia of cold sleep. The insectile guardians captured the pirate interlopers and methodically interrogated them for news of the outside world before impregnating them as hosts for a new generation of Chittik. The pirates died hideously, but the new spawn would have time to plant the remains of the Ushan High Priest Amuran interred here and grow a new crop of Ushans for the next generation to parasitize. In the meanwhile, they could wait for another human ship to find them and "convince" its pilot to take them to the concealed Chittik stronghold-tomb that was originally the monitors' base in the Hard Light system.

The ten Ushans grown from Amuran's remains shared something of the High Priest's memories of the glorious Third Dynasty, but they were raised in the creche of the Chittik. Fed on light, watered, and isolated from their keepers, they were intended simply as breeding stock for their Chittik masters. Once they were adult, they could be parasitized and their remains planted to begin anew the ancient cycle of master and host.

These Ushans, however, had been raised without the relentless pacifism of their former culture. The Chittik overestimated their natural peacefulness, and when the first two of them were culled out of the group for breeding, the remaining eight plotted rebellion. When next the Chittik arrived to collect more Ushans, the young prisoners attacked and killed several of the insectoids before retreating to a far corner of the tomb.

When the PCs first arrive at the tomb, the situation inside will be a tense standoff between the Chittik and the Ushans. The remaining six Ushans are fortified within the High Priest's burial area in the northeast part of the tomb, while the Chittik largely control the western end. Two of the Ushans have recently given forth new swarms of hatchlings, while two more Ushans have been captured and parasitized.

The interior communications and monitoring equipment was badly damaged in the fighting, and the Chittik will have no idea that a ship has docked at the tomb until the PCs actually encounter them. The immediate response of discovered Chittik will be to flee to their leader, Tik-Bzurr, and inform her of the new hosts. The Chittik will attempt to capture the PCs alive for interrogation and eventually use as hosts those not required for operating their spaceship. The Chittik learned English from the pirates before consuming them,

and may try to talk intruders into letting down their guard.

The Ushans may well take the opportunity in the chaos to strike at the Chittik, but they will be wary and fearful of humans unless convinced that no harm is meant to them. All of them remember and speak a late dialect of Ushan. They are armed with clubs, knives, and improvised melee weaponry, though three of them have Chittik projectile weapons.

The Chittik still have several functional projectile weapons of their own and hundreds of rounds of ammunition, along with the Chittik equivalent of stun batons intended for subduing Ushan hosts. They are acutely aware of their limited numbers, and will tend to retreat if they take casualties. The Chittik will only use lethal weaponry in dire need; they vastly prefer to capture prey with their stun batons.

## Map Key

### 1 Entrance Area

The entrance area is unguarded and empty save for walls of bronze alloy inscribed with bas-relief images of reverent Ushan pilgrims.

### 2 Garden Chamber

Wildly extravagant blooms of red and orange and purple hang from fruited vines, a narrow, winding path leading through the thick foliage toward the northern exit. Many of the fruit plants look to have been harvested recently. The fruit itself is bland but edible.

### 3 Cold Sleep Pods

Areas 3A-3D each contain two empty Chittik cold sleep pods. The blackened metal and spidery construction of the pods are a sharp contrast to the Ushan decorations worked in bronze panels on the walls.

### 4 Chittik Barracks

The Chittik monitors rest here on low circular pallets, sleeping on their bellies. Four sleeping Chittik will be here on the PC's first entrance, assuming they make no undue noise in entering.

**Chittik (4):** HP 5, Att +3/1d4 claw, AC 7/chitin, Save 15+, Morale 10

### 5 Refueling Controls

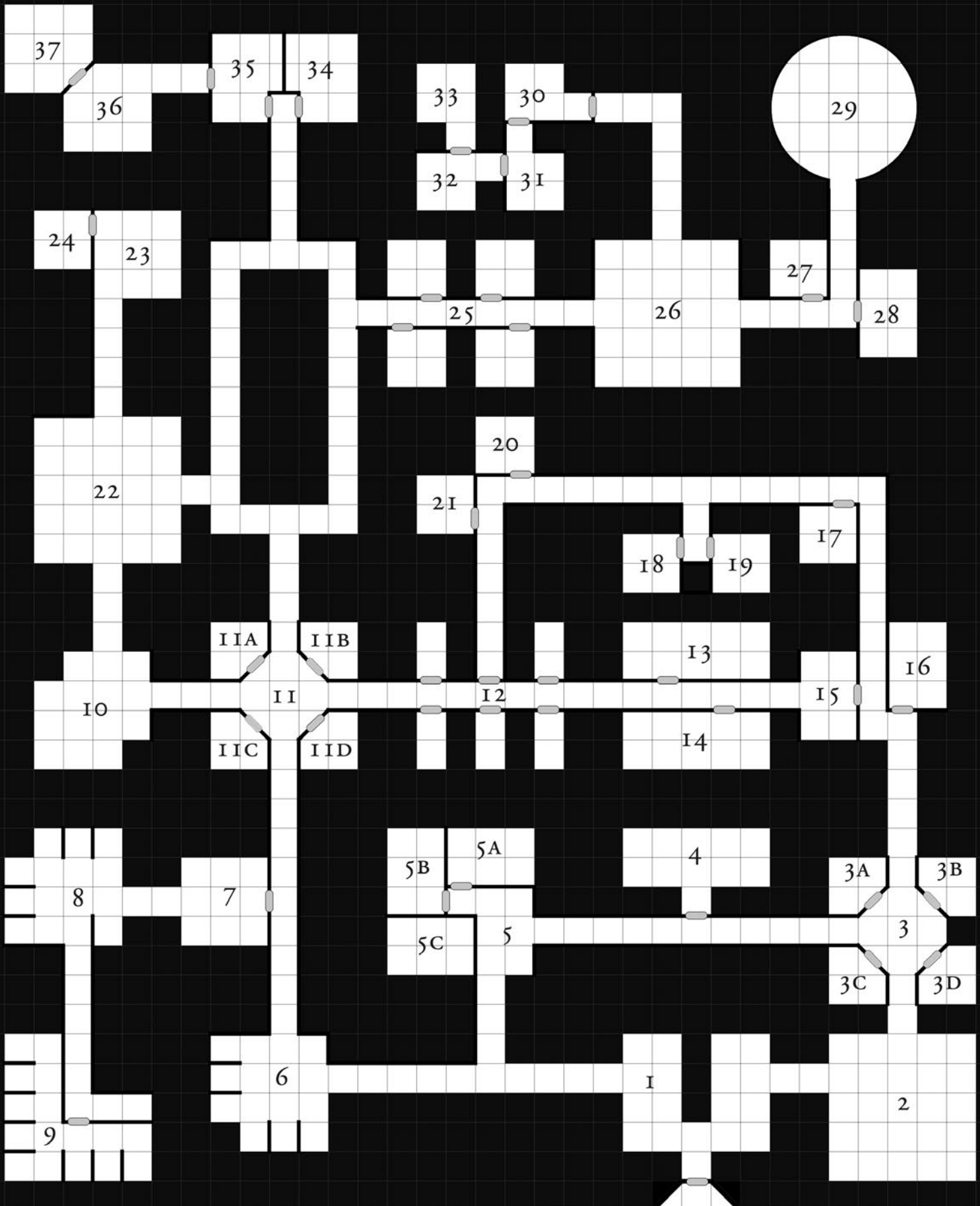
Room 5A contains fuel line couplers designed to match the Ushan refueling cables to standard human ship intakes. Room 5B contains reference manuals for refueling various Ushan and Chittik craft.

## *The House of Echoes and its Contents*

This sky tomb was assembled using the random generation process outlined earlier, and most rooms were picked or rolled off the sky tomb room selection chart. The tomb key includes notes on any unusual features in a given room, and any creatures that might normally be encountered there. For a fuller description of the features of a given room, you can consult the *Sky Tomb Contents* section earlier in this module.

# THE HOUSE OF ECHOES

1 SQUARE = 3 METERS



Most are so decayed that only hints and outlines can be made out. Room 5C contains flow controls for the tomb's water supplies, and can cut off the water to any of the tomb's rooms; the Chittik have yet to think of using the controls to parch the escaped Ushans.

#### **6 Antechamber**

Originally intended as an antechamber for pilgrims waiting their turn to offer respects to the High Priest Amuran's remains, this room is now empty of everything except the wall bas-reliefs.

#### **7 Guard Room**

A force of Chittik guards are ensconced in this barren room to ensure the breeding chambers beyond are not disturbed.

**Chittik (2):** HP 5, Att +3/1d8 stun baton, AC 7/chitin, Save 15+, Morale 10

#### **8 Place of Husks**

The dried husks of the seven Chittik that have died in the tomb since first awakening are kept here, resting in state atop low improvised biers. The air has a harsh, acidic smell. A single small white disk has been placed on the top of three of the hollowed exoskeleton; they are Ushan radiation sinks, each of them containing a fresh cell.

#### **9 Breeding Cell**

Opening the door to this room will release an ankle-depth swarm of Chittik hatchlings, cockroach-like creatures that will crawl voraciously over any non-Chittik intruders. The bites are painful but harmless. A pair of long tubs filled with earth contain the buried remains of these hatchlings' hosts, while two living Ushan hosts have been sealed inside coffin-sized opaque plastic boxes. Small perforations in the boxes will allow for the hatchlings that eventually spawn from them to escape, while being too narrow to allow the hungry spawn outside to enter. A liquid drip from a wall faucet keeps the two Ushans hydrated. The Ushans are relatively early in the implantation process, and show no outward signs of it; within a week their abdomens will begin to swell, and after another week the hatchlings will eat their way out. If rescued, they will require medical attention at Brightside Station if the eggs are to be extracted without killing the hosts.

#### **10 Garden Chamber**

This little-used room is filled with columns of spongy lavender plant life, all exhaling a steady flow of purified air. Hidden at the back is a small satchel left by an ancient pilgrim containing two small shimmerglass icons worth 250 credits apiece.

#### **11 Memorial**

Room 11A is filled with at least a thousand dried seedpod rattles, infant swaddling wraps, and small toys, each labeled with an Ushan child's name. Room 11B has a holoprojector cycling through images of 23,544 Ushans, projecting each one for ten seconds with remarkable vividness. Each projection is labeled with the victim's name in Third Dynasty glyphs. Room 11C is filled with thousands of prayers for the dead, each one written on a small slip of crumbling synthetic "paper" fastened to a colored bas-relief tile of the dead Ushan. Room 11D is partly filled with prayers, but also includes two pieces of Chittik exoskeleton on which someone has drawn

the faces of two Ushans- the dead planted in room 9, memorialized by the surviving Ushans in room 29. They yet retain hope for the other two.

#### **12 Storerooms**

Ancient drinking vessels, faded synthetic cloth, a few venerable musical instruments of brittle, wood-like synthetics, and other commonplaces fill these five storerooms. Folded neatly under one of the crumbling white sheets is a Penitence Wrap.

#### **13 Blooming Chamber**

The earth has been scooped from the circular central trough and transported to the basins in room 9.

#### **14 Power Room**

These controls are old and unreliable. Manipulating them has a 20% chance of inflicting a shock that does 1d6 damage as if it were a stun baton. Resting on one of the tables near the control panel is an Ushan stickbeam and three Ushan power cells.

#### **15 The Bone Niches**

Decorative Ushan statuettes once stood in the niches on the northern and southern walls of this room. They are now occupied by the split and marrow-sucked bones of the pirate away team that first discovered the tomb. A small golden locket among the bones has a tiny holo-portrait within of a young man embracing a beautiful young woman. The locket is worth no more than 5 credits.

#### **16 VIP Withdrawing Room**

The ornate decorations here were originally intended to delight the occasional important pilgrim who wished to visit the tomb. They could wait here for their turn, apart from the common crowd.

#### **17 Old Breeding Cell**

Before the Chittik had the chance to refit room 9 for their purposes, they implanted the captured pirates here. Nothing remains from those days except for a few lines of scratching on the carved wall, recording the names of the pirates Anna, Big Joaquin, Hawkins, and Sigur, the August 17, 3181 date of their capture, and the half-illegible comment "...r gona wait for nother and fill them up too. Pray the Serpent's Tooth comes back. Pray they don't get her too."

#### **18 Holo-Audience**

A holo-audience of High Priest Amuran welcome any visitors, looking up from his yellowed desk to greet them in genteel Ushan tones before commencing a lengthy disquisition on religious matters. A shimmerglass religious mandala hung upon the wall would be worth 500 credits to Marius Rochambeau.

#### **19 Library**

The books all revolve around High Priest Amuran's particular school of theology, and most of them crumble in the reader's hands.

#### **20 Mutant Garden**

Opening the door emits a puff of toxic spores from the fungal infestation within. Anyone breathing within 20 meters of the doorway must resist Powder Lung, a Toxicity 9, virulence 2

infestation with an interval of one hour. Each failed save adds a -1 penalty to all hit rolls and physical skill checks from coughing, wheezing, and respiratory congestion. Four failed saves means death.

### 21 Comm Control Room

The system originally installed in the tomb actually has a functioning FTL comm laser capable of penetrating Hard Light's background noise. In order to communicate via a comm laser, however, the exact location of the target recipient must be known, and the Chittik base in the system isn't responding to queries. If the PCs can figure out how to use the comm controls, however, they're likely to know enough to correctly locate Brightside Station and open communications. Careful reading of the initial settings might also clue the players in to the location of the long-abandoned Chittik base in the system.

### 22 Dormitory

Banks of decaying Ushan hammocks depend from the ceiling to serve any overflow of pilgrims.

### 23 Sculpture Garden

Pilgrims relaxed here and took the mineral powders they needed amid these sculptures of glass and stone. The centerpiece is a remarkable shimmerglass depiction of High Priest Amuran worth 1,000 credits if the PCs can lift and carry it out. Hauling it requires a combined Strength score of 30.

### 24 Food Powder Storage

Cases of the assorted mineral powders that Ushans need for sustenance are stored here, along with decorative serving trays. The minerals are fairly common and an Ushan requires no more than a few ounces daily to maintain health, but the Ushans in room 29 have none at present.

The Chittik also tossed the pirate's weaponry and armor in here, none of it well-suited to Chittik use. Lying loose on a shelf are 35 rounds of ammunition, a revolver, three semiautomatic pistols, a combat shotgun, an armored undersuit, two suits of woven armor, and a combat field uniform. All are in somewhat ill-preserved condition, and together they will require a few hours to clean, polish, and mend to usefulness, with the exception of the revolver, which will work perfectly well as-is.

### 25 Storerooms

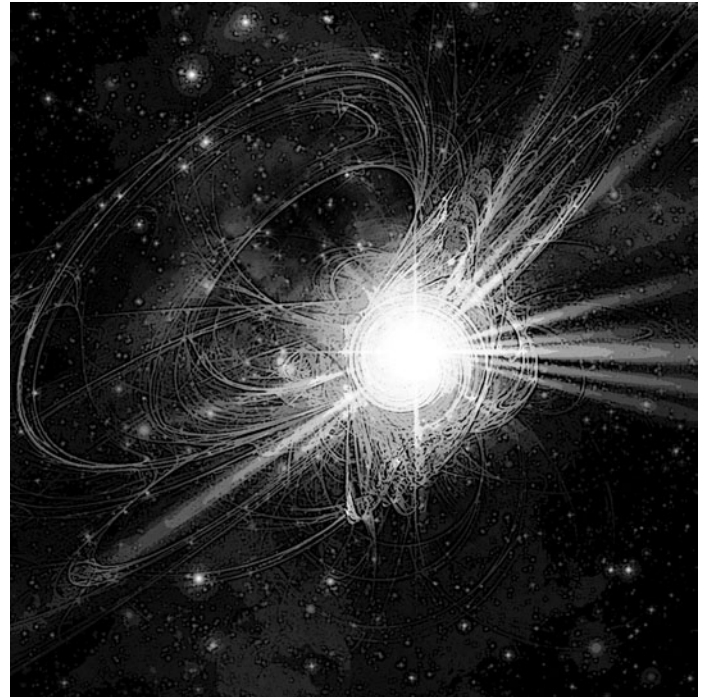
Vestments, prisms, and other religious artifacts were kept in these storerooms. Several of the artifacts are beautifully done in shimmerglass, with the best three being worth 350 credits each.

### 26 Meditation Chamber

A pillar of brilliant crystal glitters with near-blinding radiance at the center of this large meditation room. The floor is covered with multiple crumbled, circular cushions.

### 27 Map Chamber

A pair of nobly-featured Ushan statues gaze down on the broken stump of a defaced map table. No hint of tomb locations can be gleaned from it.



### 28 Larder

The Chittik found it amusing to place their larder of Ushan meat next to the High Priest's burial chamber. Most of it has been eaten since they have awoken, but a plastic-wrapped Ushan infant remains on one shelf as a treat Tik-Bzurr was saving for later.

### 29 Crypt of High Priest Amuran

The glass coffin of the high priest is empty now, and this high, vaulted chamber has nothing more than the elaborate bas-reliefs to adorn it. The surviving six Ushans have retreated here out of a vague sense of safety. They are armed with three stolen Chittik missile weapons, and have placed a large mirror at the crook of the southern hallway to get warning of visitors. The crystal coffin provides excellent cover should they need to shoot from behind it, and three dead Chittik have been pushed to the far side of the room as proof of their success thus far. A fountain on the far wall provides water, and the room is well-lit as any of the other chambers, but they lack the mineral powders the Ushans use as food, and will be too weak to fight within a week.

The Ushans will be frightened of strangers, but humans look enough like Ushans to somewhat disarm them. They are desperate for help against the Chittik, and will attempt to convey the danger and horror of the insect-people, as well as the fact that four of their comrades have been captured already. The Ushans might be convinced to fight alongside the PCs, but it would require deftly convincing them both that the PCs were friends and that the PCs had enough strength to overcome the Chittik. The Ushans speak no English, complicating negotiation.

The leader of the Ushans is a young female who has named herself Imaya, along with her three male companions Kettish, Ibram, and Mettan, and the two other females Sadri and Loor. Imaya, Kettish, and Ibram wield stolen Chittik projectile weapons, while the other three carry clubs and crude cleavers. The Ushans know the horrors that await prisoners, and will under no circumstances surrender.

**Imaya:** HP 10, Att +1/1d6+1 gun, AC 9, Save 14+, Morale 12  
**Ushans (5):** HP 4, Att +0/1d6+1 gun or 1d4 club, AC 9, Save 15+, Morale 12.

### 30 Forbidden Vault Entrance

This door to this vault antechamber can be opened with a keycard kept by Tik-Bzurr or by a successful Security test at difficulty 9, one attempt per PC. Within, a Chittik defense drone will power up one round after the first attempt at picking the door lock; if the PCs succeed on the first try, they'll have one free round of action before the robot comes alive. This drone is much like that listed in the Cold Tombs, except its projectile weapon is fully functional.

**Chittik Drone:** HP 12, Att +5/1d10 gun, AC 5, Save 14+, Morale 12

### 31 Chamber of Imprecatory Cautions

The walls here are carved with stern Ushan figures and elaborate warnings that the careless use of the contents of the vault may imperil the user's soul and risk placing him or her among the Eaters, a mere beast in Ushan flesh.

### 32 Place of Spectral Forewarning

Figures that appear to be grotesque amalgams of Ushan and human rise from the floor to gesture warningly at the intruders as they intone promises of deadly peril for those who approach the contents of the vault with an impure heart. The holoprojector algorithms were programmed to interpolate the features of intruders with randomly-generated older Ushans, giving the impression of their own ancestors rising up to warn them away. Human faces confuse the projector badly, and the shapes it conjures are more than a little monstrous- and appear completely real, like all other Ushan holograms.

### 33 Vault of the Sun Tower

Within this vault chamber, a simple golden ring a half-meter across rests on a pedestal, four blunt feet on its lower side and a silvery touch-strip along the top. The object is the Sun Tower, a marvelous artifact designed by the High Priest and detailed at the end of the section.

### 34 Medical Facilities

These few simple medical tools were little-used even before the tomb was abandoned. An Ushan cutting torch is in one of the cabinets, next to an Ushan power cell.

### 35 Guard Room

Chittik stand guard here to defend their leader. Tik-Bzurr and her guards will not come to their aid should they hear combat outside, but will instead prepare to make a last stand within her nest-chamber.

**Chittik (2):** HP 5, Att +3/1d8 stun baton, AC 7/chitin, Save 15+, Morale 10

### 36 Feeding Chamber

The tables here are spattered only with fruit juices and vegetable husks, the Chittik having been long deprived of fresh meat.

### 37 Tik-Bzurr's Lair

The leader of the Chittik nests here with her most trusted guardians. If given less than five rounds to prepare, the trio will be standing in the center of the room, Tik-Bzurr using the two other Chittik as body shields as she fires on the PCs. If the players give her more time to prepare before entering, however, she will have tipped over synthetic furniture to form a firing barricade that will inflict -2 to hit on anyone attempting to hit her or her guards with a ranged attack. If the PCs have gotten this far, Tik-Bzurr abandons any hope of taking them alive.

Several pieces of Chittik rank-jewelry are embedded in Tik-Bzurr's carapace, black and red jewels inset in a golden alloy. Marius Rochambeau will pay 200 credits for it if the PCs pry it loose. A pair of Ushan everlights adds further to the stark, functional interior of her nest, with its sleeping platforms and a few synthetic tables.

**Tik-Bzurr:** HP 12, Att +4/1d6+1 gun, AC 7/chitin, Save 14+, Morale 12

**Chittik (2):** HP 5, Att +3/1d6+1 gun, AC 7/chitin, Save 15+, Morale 12

## *The Sun Tower*

This exotic artifact was created by High Priest Amuran at the height of his inventive powers. The device itself appears to be a thin golden circlet one half meter in diameter, with five blunt feet on the bottom side and a silver touchstrip on the top. When the circle is placed on a flat surface and the strip is touched, a billowing white radiance will begin to radiate from the artifact and gradually harden into a tower of tangible white light over the course of five minutes. The tower is fifty meters high and ten in diameter, and is pierced with transparent windows and a membrane-like "skin" over the entrance. A central "elevator" column of light lifts occupants to the various floors, each of which is outfitted with a number of white-light furnishings appropriate to Ushan needs. The atmosphere inside the tower is perpetually clean and breathable, and the internal temperature remains steady and comfortable at any external range between boiling lead and frozen nitrogen. The tower walls are as durable as hull plating, and have Armor 10 against non-Gunnery weapons. It takes 20 points of damage to knock a human-sized hole in a wall. The tower remains up until the circlet at its base is moved or deactivated, whereupon it slowly fades out over the course of five minutes, gradually lowering its non-integral contents to the earth. The Sun Tower requires no external power source.

While lovely and useful, it is exceedingly dangerous to activate the Sun Tower in an enclosed space. If triggered in an area too small to contain it, the tower will briefly pause in expanding, but each round after the first, there is a 5% cumulative chance that it will explosively collapse, doing 1d100 damage to any object or person within ten meters of it, with half damage on a successful Tech save. Each such collapse has a 20% cumulative chance of burning out the Sun Tower. Marius Rochambeau is willing to pay 15,000 credits for the artifact, as he sees it as his ticket off Brightside Station.

## JUDGMENT DAY

For fifty years, Yash Dutta has dodged the consequences of the disaster he brought down on Geostellar Mining Industries. With his embezzlement pinned on Jingfei Tang's son Gui and the proof of his theft conveniently mislaid, Dutta has slowly grown confident that his only real peril is in failing to provide the bank with their novium quota.

Two months ago, Roland Lomax was drinking in the pirate den of Empty Grave when a table mate showed him a dataslab he'd picked up from an abandoned system shuttle in Hard Light. According to the pirate, the boat was an old GMI work boat that appears to have fallen prey to the Beast's radiation. The former pilot was a GMI auditor who had discovered Dutta's manipulations, and was trying to rendezvous with a transport ship before it docked. He timed his rendezvous poorly, and died from radiation poisoning before the ship ever drilled in. The only point of interest to the pirate was the fact that the auditor's dataslab still functioned after fifty years of emissions bombardment. Finding a lack of pornography on the slate, he sold it to Lomax for the price of night with Gerta's girls.

The pirate failed to understand what he had found, but Lomax immediately realized what the numbers meant. If he could show this to one of the auditors that always arrived with a bank transport ship, Dutta would certainly be fired and ejected from the station. If he arranged things properly beforehand, Roland Lomax would be the only possible choice for his replacement. The next transport in is due within two months, and Lomax plans to be ready when it docks.

Judgment Day is a scenario that a GM can play out between expeditions to the sky tombs. Pieces and elements of it can pop up as PCs interact with station residents, the whole coming to a head as the transport ship approaches. If the PCs do nothing to interfere with his plans, Lomax is very likely to succeed in usurping Dutta. Successfully resolving the situation in favor of whatever director the PC group chooses to back awards each character 750 XP.

### Lomax's Allies

The cargo chief has busied himself with building a power base among the other personnel over the past few years, but this new evidence has pushed him to work more openly to enlist supporters. Dutta doesn't take the man seriously and is likely to pay for it. Several station chiefs would currently welcome a Lomax administration.

Technical Chief Jaffa Okoye has had promises from Lomax that he'll find some reason to make sure Randall Bellows is forced to leave the station. The claustrophobic tech chief is desperate to get off Brightside Station, but she won't leave without her "true love"-and Bellows shows few signs of any quick departure.

Marius Rochambeau, the representative for the Stoltmann & Haar research corporation, also wants to get off Brightside Station, but he can't do that until he's got something marvelous to show his superiors, something that would require his personal presence to deliver and explain. Dutta has no interest in Marius' wishes, but Lomax has promised to assign a team of Brightside workers to tomb exploration.

Randall Bellows, Jaffa's male escort and beloved, is willing to support Lomax. He knows the cargo chief is ready to bribe him to leave. Lomax also knows Bellows plans to simply peel and dump Jaffa as soon as they're somewhere convenient for his disappearance, but he sees no reason to disillusion the technical chief.

Mining Chief Mary Tomlinson considers Lomax a slimy toad, but takes him for a fundamentally weak man whom she can control. She's bitter towards Dutta for the relentless work schedules of late and the injury her arm suffered in fulfilling his quotas. She doesn't recognize the ruthlessness beneath the fat man's unctuous exterior or his willingness to kill to get his way.

Aside from these NPCs, Lomax can also count on the firm support of thirty of the miners and technicians, with tentative approval from another 20 workers. None of the cargo handlers or workers at the Locker will have anything to do with him; they know him too well. Other workers have heard rumors about him being a bad boss, but Lomax blames it all on the help, and most of the miners are fed up with Dutta's increasing quota demands.

### Dutta's Supporters

Yash Dutta is an institution on Brightside Station, the Director ever since it was built fifty years ago. Half of the personnel on Brightside were born here, and have never known any other leader. He's weathered threats and potential mutinies before, but the past decade of quiet and his own advancing age have left him careless of the threat building around him.

Security Chief Livingston Roy is Dutta's strongest supporter, and the most important. He is an expert combatant and his twelve security staffers are all firmly loyal to him. As a boy, he was trapped in the refinery during a buffer fluid spill and would have died had Dutta not risked his own life to save him. His loyalty to Dutta is beyond reproach, and Dutta trusts him implicitly.

Medical Chief Suyin Indrani is also a firm supporter, though more out of loathing toward Lomax than enthusiasm for Dutta. The cargo chief has abhorrent appetites and an unforgivable habit of contempt toward her girls and boys. Alone of the station chiefs, she recognizes the ugly core of malevolence in Lomax, but the other chiefs just tend to chalk it up to Suyin's known tenderness about the monetary aspects of her trade.

The owner of the Midnight Sun bar, Marion Hardlee, is also in favor of Dutta's continued rule, though much of that comes from Lomax's obvious and burning resentment toward her alcohol monopoly on the station. If he were ever to become director, she expects her livelihood would shortly vanish. By extension, her husband Ranse the shuttle pilot also has a vested interest in Dutta's continuing good offices.

Among the remaining staffers, Dutta has a hard core of support consisting of 20 workers, with another 20 modestly enthusiastic about him. Most of his supporters are cargo handlers, office workers, and maintenance techs. He's not a popular man with the miners.

## Lomax's Preparations

Dutta lets Lomax sell a few guns at The Locker for those planning on exploring the sky tombs. Unbeknownst to Dutta, Lomax has laid in a substantial supply of firearms and ammunition. His work as cargo chief makes it easy for him to smuggle in the weapons and store them where it won't be found. Cases containing two dozen shotguns, 2,000 rounds of ammunition and ten suits of woven armor have been planted in the cargo hold under the emergency rations. Station files list the crates of "religious texts" as belonging to a fictional trading company that never came to pick them up; if discovered, Dutta will suspect Lomax but won't have clear proof of his culpability.

Lomax has been circulating among his supporters, advising them that if "a situation arises", he'll need their support. To his less committed supporters, he's played down any talk of violence or mutiny, assuring them that "an orderly process" will be followed and mentioning Dutta's long years of service and need for a respectable retirement. To the hard core, he's had fewer comforting words, painting it as a coming struggle for their freedom and decent treatment.

Rumors fly aboard the station, and even players are apt to overhear talk about Lomax's conversations, as if he were expecting something big to happen soon. Lomax himself is likely to approach the players to sound them out about their feelings about Dutta, playing up his complete control over the station and how hard the miners are worked. If they show signs of a mercenary inclination, he might consider trying to enlist them as guards. Unarmed ones, of course, until the proper moment. Lomax is not a trusting man, and he won't readily tip his hand to strangers. He especially won't reveal the location of the dataslab, currently hidden inside a maintenance panel in the umbilical dock.

Suyin Indrani is likely to be the first to contact players from Dutta's faction. She'll encourage them to get inside Lomax's plans and find out what it is that he's expecting, as well as to talk to people to find out where they stand. She'll mention Lomax's monthly trips to Empty Grave as being suspicious, but note that Ranse Hardlee doesn't care to take people out there, and any visit would immediately tip Lomax off that the PCs are likely working against him. That, and there's no telling what Lomax might be willing to do when outside the station's laws.

If players can convince Livingston Roy that they're on Dutta's side, the security chief can quietly get them access to almost any locked area on the ship, barring the novium storage bay. Roy can't blatantly break the regulations in favor of the PCs without incurring even more unrest, but he had his security personnel can develop the occasional useful fit of blindness or negligence.

If the players come out openly against Lomax, the cargo chief will start to sweat. Adventurers are notoriously violent and unpredictable people, and he's not sure just what the PCs would be willing to do. A few local bruisers will be enlisted to punch a little discretion into the PCs. Roy can arrest them for brawling and assault, but the thugs will take care not to do more than break a few bones. This is unlikely to dissuade the PCs, but Lomax's nerves will start to force him into mistakes as events come to a head.

## A Situation Out of Hand

If everything goes smoothly, the novium transport will arrive in two months. As usual, a bank auditor will be aboard to check the station's books. Lomax will present the auditor with the dataslab. The auditor won't require more than an hour to sort out Dutta's involvement, and will immediately order the transport's captain to arrest and imprison Dutta aboard the ship. Livingston Roy and his men would be willing to fight to prevent this, but Dutta would order them to stand down. The director is old, tired, and will not want Roy to die for his sins.

The bank auditor will take a vote among the station crew, and Lomax will win as temporary director, a position the bank will confirm with the next transport to arrive. For the first four months Lomax will appear to be a much more clement boss, until the next novium transport finds production down 30%. Lomax will be informed that he either gets the production up or gets exiled, and he'll respond with a brutal work regime worse than anything Dutta imposed. Workers will be enslaved, Lomax's favorites will become prison guards, and the station will spiral down into a festering hellhole within the year. Those opposed to Lomax will be subject to his loathsome tastes, and anyone not smart enough to get off the station with the next transport after his promotion is going to regret it. The station itself will likely collapse inside two years, possibly explosively.

Of course, the player actions are likely to complicate this tidy scenario. If the players bring proof of Empty Graves' nature as a pirate den, Lomax will be disgraced. Jaffa Okoye and Randall Bellows will still stick with him, but mostly out of desperation or greed, respectively. Tomlinson will realize that Indrani was right about Lomax's malevolence, and Marius Rochambeau will reconsider the value of Lomax's promises. Only 20 of his hard-core workers will still support him- not enough to win the election for interim director. Mary Tomlinson will be elected.

If the dataslab is stolen or destroyed, Lomax will have no proof, and be unable to give the evidence to the auditor. Even if the slab is simply stolen and not destroyed, his frustration will overwhelm his patience.

For whatever reason, if Lomax is not acting director by the time the transport ship leaves, he'll launch an open rebellion. Only his hard-core supporters among the miners will fight for him. Okoye, Bellows, Tomlinson, and Rochambeau have no intention of getting in a gunfight. A few of Dutta's supporters might fight back, but they're largely armed only with improvised weaponry. Livingston Roy and the security staffers will be his main opponents, as will Suyin Indrani, who is an unusually good shot herself. Marion and Ranse Hardlee will just want to keep their heads down.

If Lomax defeats Dutta's supporters in open combat, things will degenerate much more rapidly. Lomax will need to produce huge amounts of novium to convince the bank to accept this fait accompli, and those who failed to fight for him will be enslaved by those who did. Copious examples will be made of resisters, and within a year the station will have collapsed into bloody anarchy.

## NOTHING BUT TROUBLE

Lomax's machinations and the mysteries of the sky tombs are all useful diversions for PCs, but it can occasionally be tricky getting them involved in these situations. Included here are a number of hooks for snaring PCs into the adventure.

### Arriving on Brightside Station

There are a number of ways the characters can end up on Brightside Station. The default assumption of the adventure is that PCs don't have access to a ship of their own, so with that in mind, here are a few ways to get them aboard the station:

- The PCs are hired as security staff for a novium transport. When the ship arrives at Brightside Station, several badly-injured miners need to be taken off and the players are left behind to make room. The transport captain promises them passage back on the ship's next trip, and arranges with Dutta to give them free room and board until then. If you choose this hook, Lomax is at Empty Graves when the transport comes in, discovering the data slab that will set his plan in motion.
- The PCs are commissioned by a wealthy industrialist to get him two novium ingots to repair a damaged pretech mold. He'll provide passage in on a tramp freighter and will send it back two months later to pick up the PCs and the novium, along with up to 8,000 credits in payment for the novium. Anything the players don't spend in acquiring the ingots, they can keep. Dutta doesn't want to sell any novium outside the bank's contract, however, and will want some favors done to convince him otherwise.
- The PCs find a fifty-year-old share of ownership stock in Brightside Station. Some financial research shows that the bank foreclosed on the station 50 years ago, but that the stock can still be redeemed for a portion of the station's assessed value- which nowadays, amounts to 8,000 credits. They need to personally submit the share to the director of the station, however, and Dutta hasn't got that kind of money lying around in petty cash. If the PCs help him out with a few things, though, he can find the credits.

### The Work Never Ends

Once aboard Brightside Station, the locals have plenty of their own troubles to share with newcomers, and some people will find it useful to ask for help from strangers who can be expected not to understand exactly what it is they're getting into. Here are a few hooks that might turn up:

- The Beast has been unusually active this past month, and Brightside Station has had to expend a lot of water as reaction mass for its maneuver jets. They need to survey a new ice asteroid ahead of schedule, and get it mined within three weeks or else the hydroponic bay will die off. The PCs are hired for 500 credits apiece to do the dangerous work of surveying the only feasible iceball. As Ranse Hardlee comes up alongside it in the *Leadbelly*, the players discover the exterior entrance to the Cold Tomb. They need to explore it fully before the miners can safely start to cut in.

- Livingston Roy is smitten with Jaffa Okoye, but she only has eyes for Randall Bellows. Roy is convinced that Bellows is up to no good, and draws one of the PCs aside to offer 300 credits for proof that Bellows is toying with Jaffa's affections.

- Dutta's having trouble with the refinery equipment, and it will be months before a parts request can go out on the next transport. The parts the refinery needs can probably be scavenged from a mining ship, but Brightside Station doesn't use manned mining boats, and hasn't for 50 years. The only one that was brought in was abandoned after a maneuver jet failure, and it's still floating out there in orbit around the Beast. The frigate-sized system ship is now practically glowing with radioactivity, but if the PCs go out there and navigate the rusting, radioactive, somewhat explosive interior to salvage the core filtration module, Dutta will pay them 500 credits apiece and give them free room and board until the next transport comes.

- Notes found on a pirate corpse speak of the last voyage of the *Serpent's Fang*, a pirate ship destroyed in a nearby system some 19 years ago. The pirate had learned from an old tracking report that the ship stopped briefly at what must have been a sky tomb before rendezvousing with its doom. The pirate was convinced that it left a cache of plunder there. Following his coordinates will bring the PCs to the House of Echoes.

### Trouble Comes To You

Of course, the wider world has a habit of intruding into even the most isolated corners of the galaxy, and Brightside Station is no exception. Here are a few unfortunate complications that can arise for its citizenry:

- Shen Tang always knew that his grandmother had been ruined by the machinations of Yash Dutta, even if he could never prove it. His father was practically a beggar, but Tang has fought his way to leadership of a pirate frigate. Now he's ready to dock under the guise of a badly-damaged free trader, debris still drifting from his hull. Once he's aboard, he and his men will attack the control room as a fragment of debris outside turns out to be a hull-clamped maneuver jet. The jet will fire briefly, putting Brightside on course to leave Aegis' shadow in 72 hours. If Dutta doesn't surrender the station to Shen Tang within that time, the pirate will cheerfully allow its crew to be irradiated by the Beast as the raiders finish plundering the station and departing in their own ship. Resisters will need to recapture the control room to fire the Brightside's maneuver jets, or else engage in risky outside operations to manually trigger them.

- One of Lomax's people sabotages the refinery to force a slowdown of production- but he's too effective, and the buffer fluid contaminates the ship's atmosphere filters. Round-the-clock work by the techs is holding back the station from disaster, but there's no more than two or three weeks before the filters are totally compromised and the Brightside becomes a radioactive tomb. The PCs need to get a hundred people off of Brightside before the station becomes uninhabitable, and will probably have to find a suitable sky tomb in time for the *Leadbelly* to get the station crew and supplies over there. Meanwhile, Lomax is using "the accident" to condemn Dutta for pushing the equipment too hard.



Below are combat statistics for some of the important NPCs and enemy types found in Hard Light. The statistics given are their normal equipment when found by PCs. Those NPCs without special entries should use the ordinary worker stats for combat.

## Livingston Roy

---

HP: 20    AC: 7/undersuit    Skill: +3    Morale: 12  
 Atk: +5/1d4+1 knife    Save: 13+

---

Roy has limited actual combat experience, but is expert at containing rowdy miners. During an actual mutiny, he'll don a combat field uniform (AC 4) and pick up a combat shotgun (+5/3d4 damage).

## Randall Bellows

---

HP: 8    AC: 9    Skill: +2    Morale: 6  
 Atk: +2/1d4 knife    Save: 15+

---

Randall cares for nothing beyond his own skin and his own profit, and will fight only if his life is at stake.

## Ranse Hardlee

---

HP: 12    AC: 9    Skill: +3    Morale: 8  
 Atk: +2/1d4 knife    Save: 15+

---

Ranse is a canny old system pilot and expert at flying the Leadbelly. He avoids risking his neck whenever possible, but he has a suit of woven armor (AC 5) and laser rifle (+3/1d10 damage) in his quarters.

## Roland Lomax

---

HP: 20    AC: 9    Skill: +3    Morale: 11  
 Atk: +4/1d6+1 pistol    Save: 13+

---

Lomax gives an impression of oozing, unctuous camaraderie to his acquaintances, but he's a hard man beneath who knows how to use the pistol he carries. He'll break out a shotgun (+4/3d4 damage) and a suit of woven armor (AC 5) from The Locker if things get ugly.

## Shen Tang

---

HP: 25    AC: 7/undersuit    Skill: +3    Morale: 11  
 Atk: +5/1d4 knife    Save: 13+

---

This pirate chief will quickly don woven armor (AC 5) and snatch up a combat rifle (+6/1d12 damage) before beginning his crew's attack on the station.

## Suyin Indrani

---

HP: 15    AC: 9    Skill: +2    Morale: 9  
 Atk: +5/1d6+1 pistol    Save: 13+

---

While ostensibly just a frontier physician and madame, Indrani spent eight years as a medic in a merc unit. She has her old combat field uniform (AC 4) and combat rifle (+5/1d12 damage) in her quarters, and she'll use them if the station is attacked.

## Yash Dutta

---

HP: 16    AC: 7/undersuit    Skill: +3    Morale: 10  
 Atk: +4/1d6 laser pistol    Save: 13+

---

Dutta's main skills are financial and interpersonal, though he's been in combat before and knows how to use a laser pistol. One of Roy's security people guards him at all times.

## Chittik Monitor

---

HP: 5    AC: 7/chitin    Skill: +1    Morale: 9  
 Atk: +3/1d4 claw or 1d6+1 gun    Save: 15+

---

Some Chittik were assigned to monitor the pilgrims that visited the sky tombs, and given cold sleep pods to hold them between arrivals. These monitors will awaken when the tomb is opened, and while briefly disoriented, they will be amply ready to attack invaders. They use their claws in combat, or alien Chittik guns with a range of 20/40, 4 rounds per magazine, and 1d6+1 damage on a hit. Chittik usually carry 20 rounds of ammunition, and Marius Rochambeau will pay 50 credits for each Chittik gun brought to him.

## Ordinary Brightside Worker

---

HP: 4    AC: 9    Skill: +1    Morale: 7  
 Atk: +0/1d2 fists    Save: 15+

---

Most of Brightside's population are fairly skilled at their particular field from long practice, and all of them are very familiar with spacer life and exosuit use. They aren't usually much as combatants, however, and take a -2 hit penalty when using weapons.

## Pirate Scum

---

HP: 3    AC: 9    Skill: +1    Morale: 8  
 Atk: +2/1d6+1 pistol    Save: 15+

---

Pirates are a ruthless lot, and will wear woven armor (AC 5) if they have it to hand when they expect trouble.

## Security Staff

---

HP: 3    AC: 7/undersuit    Skill: +1    Morale: 9  
 Atk: +2/1d8 stun baton    Save: 15+

---

One of Roy's twelve security staffers, four of which are on duty at any given time. They prefer to use stun batons on brawlers and other unarmed trouble, but they have pistols (+2/1d6+1 damage) for armed assailants.

## Thug

---

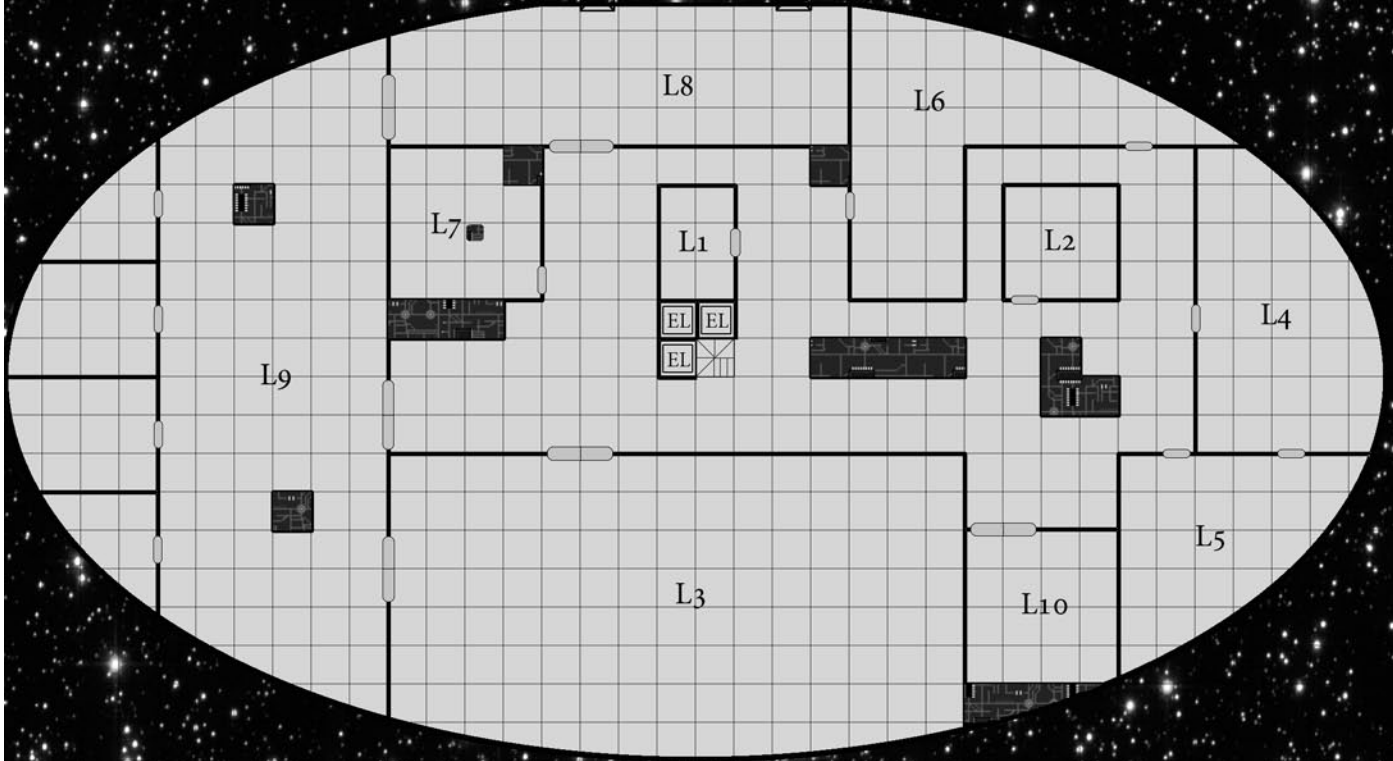
HP: 4    AC: 9    Skill: +1    Morale: 8  
 Atk: +2/1d2+2 fists    Save: 15+

---

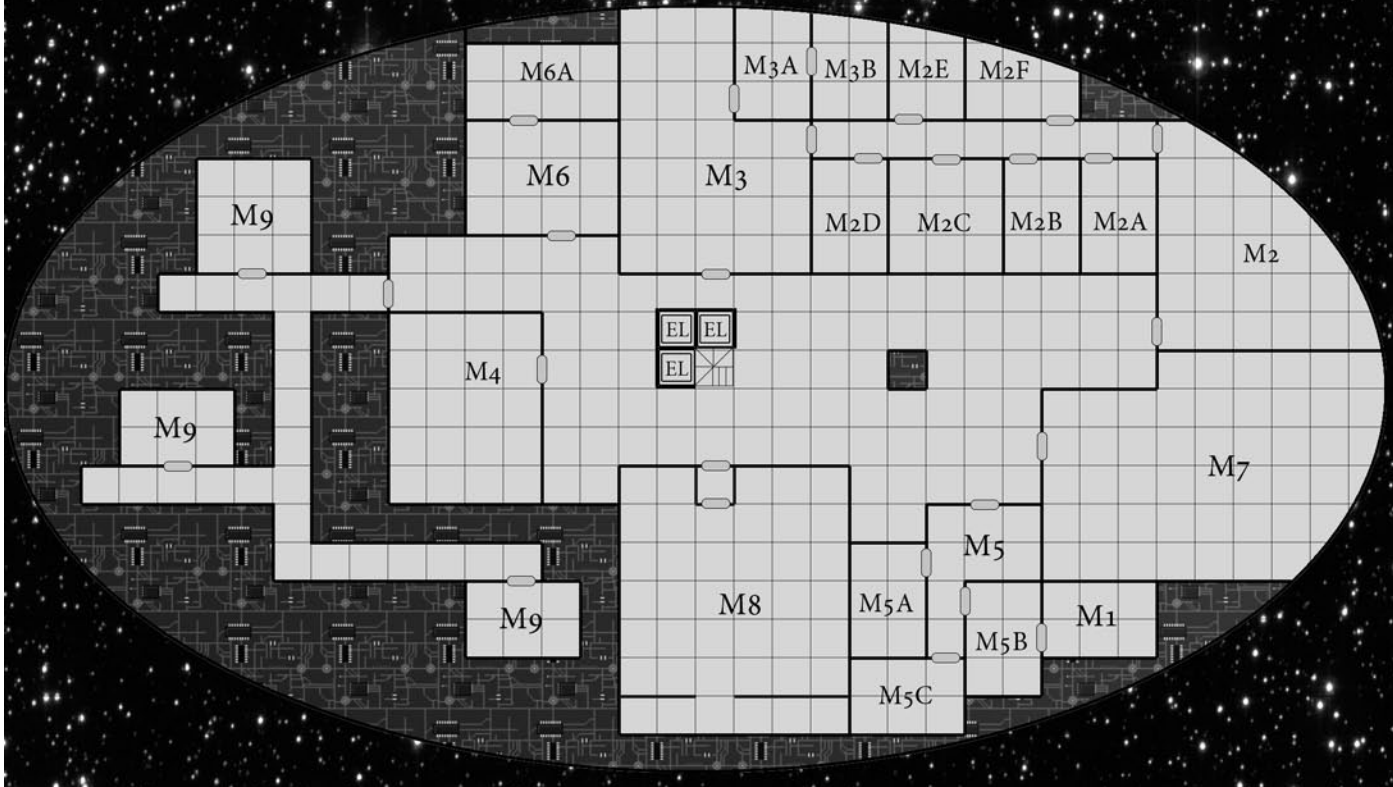
Some Brightsiders have more aptitude for violence than others. Roland Lomax is likely to enlist thugs like this one for his plans. While they have limited combat experience, they take no hit penalty when using weapons.

# BRIGHTSIDE LOWDECK AND MIDDECK

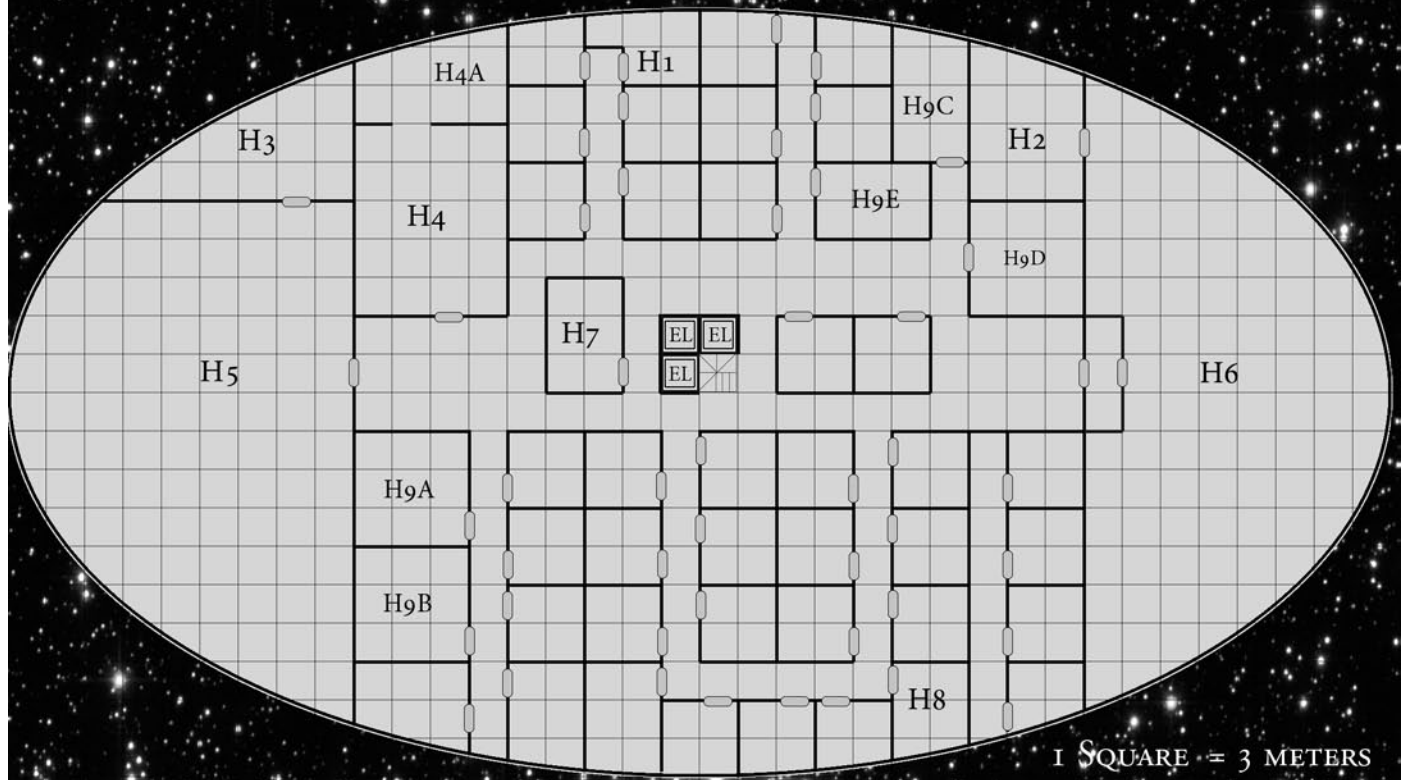
## BRIGHTSIDE LOWDECK



## BRIGHTSIDE MIDDECK



# BRIGHTSIDE HIGHDECK



## Map Key

### Lowdeck

- L1** Gear Locker
- L2** Prep Room
- L3** Pressure Dock
- L4** Processing Filter Bay
- L5** Refinery Intake
- L6** Smelter
- L7** Station Bridge
- L8** Umbilical Dock
- L9** Warehouse
- L10** Workshop
  
- EL** Elevators

### Middeck

- M1** Armory
- M2** Clouds and Rain
- M2A-F** Clouds and Rain Private Rooms
- M2C** Suyin Indrani's Quarters
- M3** Medical Clinic
- M3A** Intensive Care
- M3B** Cold Sleep Pods
- M4** Public Lavatories
- M5** Station Offices
- M5A** Yash Dutta's Office
- M5B** Livingston Roy's Office
- M5C** Mary Tomlinson's Office
- M6** The Locker
- M6A** The Locker Storage
- M7** The Midnight Sun
- M8** Theater
- M9** Maintenance Rooms

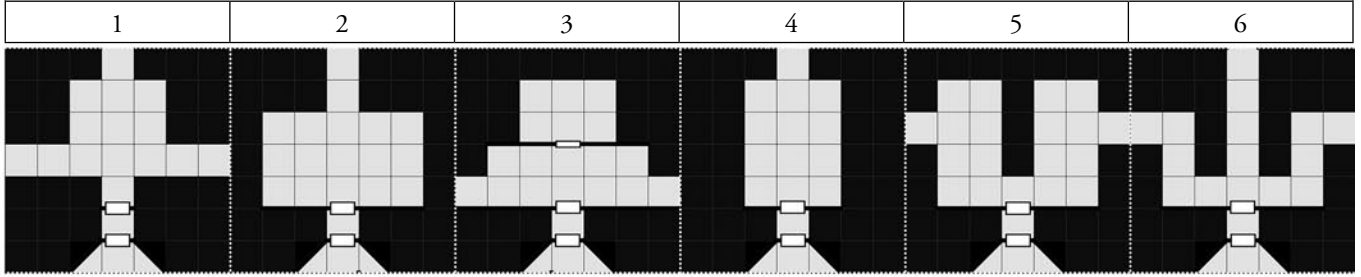
### Highdeck

- H1** Backup Bridge
- H2** Chapel
- H3** Fusion Plant
- H4** Heavenly Hash Cafeteria
- H4A** Kitchen Area
- H5** Hydroponic Bay
- H6** Park Plaza
- H7** Public Rest Rooms
- H8** Transient Housing
- H9A** Yash Dutta's Quarters
- H9B** Livingston Roy's Quarters
- H9C** Roland Lomax's Quarters
- H9D** Mary Tomlinson's Quarters
- H9E** Jaffa Okoye's Quarters

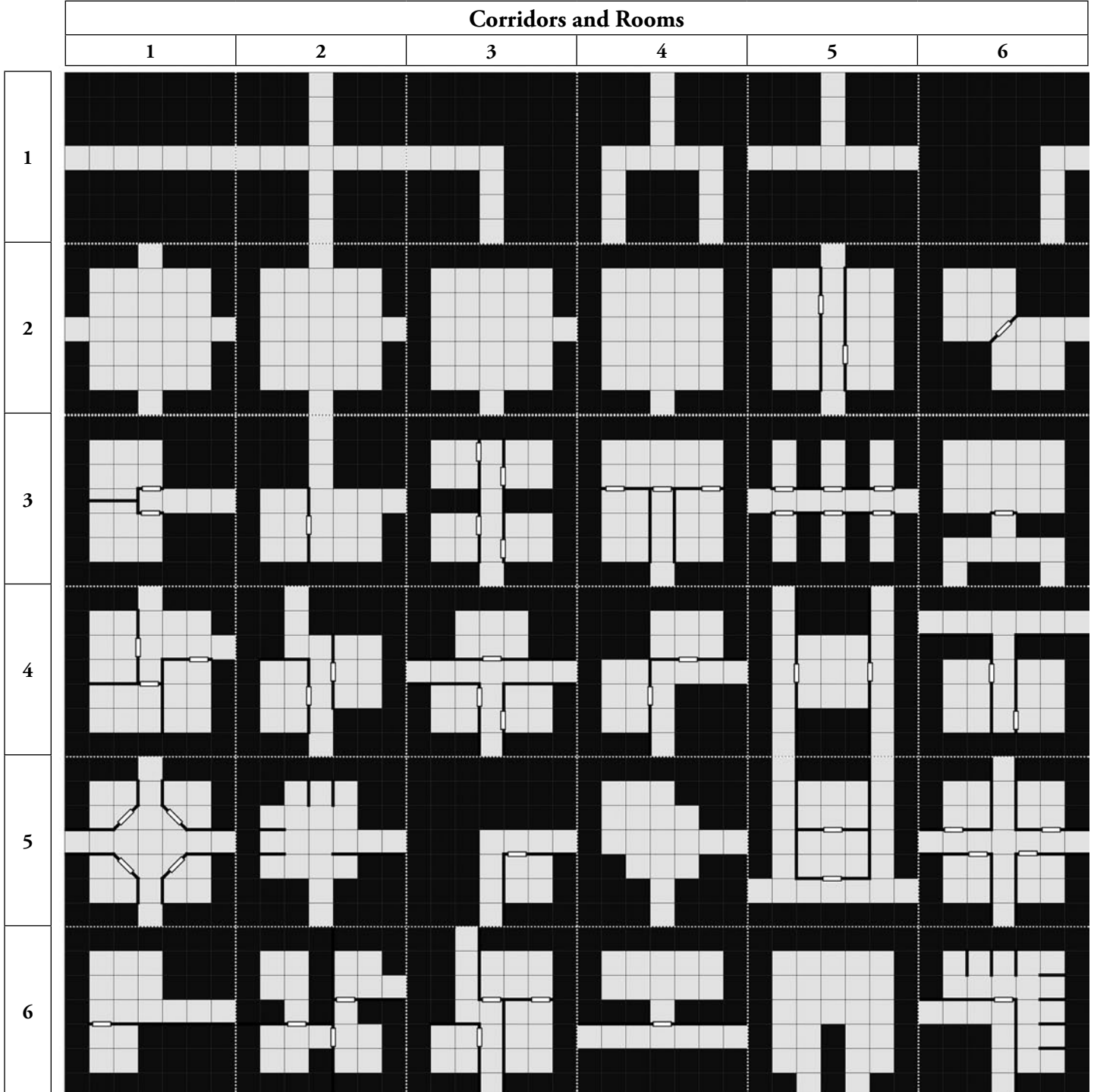
Unmarked rooms are residences.

# TOMB GEOMORPHS

## Entrances



## Corridors and Rooms



## HARD LIGHT

Primary Star	Perdurabo, aka "The Beast"
Major Worlds	None
Main Starport	Brightside Station
Government	None

### System Overview

Hard Light is dominated by its primary, a late-stage red giant known locally as "The Beast". Most of the system interior has already been consumed by the star's expansion, leaving it with a thick penumbra of rocky debris. There are no habitable worlds in the system. The only registered settlement is the Brightside mining station, with approximately one hundred inhabitants and basic facilities for ship refueling and repair.

### Points of Interest

Brightside Station is the only registered settlement within Hard Light. The station is built along the familiar Bannerjee Twelve structural lines and is located in a stable orbital position on the dark side of the planetoid Aegis. Facilities are provided for refueling and minor repairs. Pressure bay capacity is available for most frigate-class ships or smaller, while larger ships can be served through a cargo umbilical. Brightside welcomes all traders, but recommends early notification of arrival by comm laser. The station is heavily armed and prepared to repel pirates and boarders.

Brightside Station's major industry is the export of novium, a rare particle emitted by late-stage red giants that has numerous uses in the maintenance of pretech manufactory equipment. The novium production is currently under long-term contract, but traders are welcome to make port for refueling, resupply, and relaxation. Work at good pay is available for experienced spacers and technicians.

Visitors may also be interested in exploring the recently-discovered "sky tombs" embedded in several large asteroids along the outer rim of the system. These alien excavations appear to have served as burial sites for important members of their species, and some contain valuable works of art or ancient xenotech. Buyers are present aboard the Brightside for quick and profitable disposal of interesting artifacts.

### Local Laws

No formal law enforcement exists outside of Brightside Station. Traders should look to their own security.

The wearing of armor or weaponry is forbidden aboard Brightside Station. Station rules are enforced by uniformed security personnel. Visitors are advised to obey their instructions and all posted regulations. We welcome traders in need of a good time and relaxation, but we expect you to behave while you are here. Troublemakers will be ejected from the station. Very bad troublemakers will be ejected from the airlock.

Director Yash Dutta is chief of Brightside Station. Visitors interested in finding work are advised to apply to him at the station offices on middeck.

### *Travel Warnings!*

***Radio communication in the system is severely degraded by stellar emissions and is infeasible at ranges of more than twelve meters.*** Comm lasers or spooled comm hardline are recommended for communication.

***Standard ship radiation shielding systems degrade rapidly in Hard Light.*** Seventy-two hours is the maximum recommended exposure period, after which most crews will begin to experience significant radiation poisoning. Full crew mortality can be anticipated within 24 hours. Sheltering aboard Brightside Station or in the shadow of a major asteroid is recommended to allow the shielding buffer time to regenerate.

***Crew are strongly advised not to perform extravehicular activities in open space.*** Without the shielding provided by a major asteroid, significant radiation poisoning requires only sixty seconds for onset, with death following within twenty minutes. In emergency situations, use of engine room-rated exosuits can delay significant damage for several hours.

***Visitors are advised to avoid exploration of the asteroid fields in unarmed starships.*** Some of the sky tombs have been repurposed as hermit settlements and pirate dens. Enlist a local guide to learn the locations of sky tombs known to be secure for exploration.

## *HARD LIGHT*

*THE FIRST ADVENTURE SETTING FOR THE STARS WITHOUT NUMBER ROLE-PLAYING GAME, HARD LIGHT PROVIDES STARFARERS WITH DETAILS OF THE BRIGHTSIDE MINING OUTPOST, A FRAGILE BASTION OF HUMANITY AMID THE RADIOACTIVE GLARE OF THE RED GIANT PERDURABO.*

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