

GRANDFATHER LIES

Gilgamesh spoke to Utanapishtim, the Faraway:

"I have been looking at you, but your appearance is not strange--you are like me! You yourself are not different--you are like me! My mind was resolved to fight with you, but instead my arm lies useless over you. Tell me, how is it that you stand in the Assembly of the Gods, and have found life!"

Utanapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:
"I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh, a thing that is hidden, a secret of the gods I will tell you!

- The Epic of Gilgamesh

Grandfather Lies is the tenth adventure in the Secrets of the Ancients campaign. If you are a player, stop reading now. If you are a Referee, then you should first read Section 0: Secrets of Secrets to get an overview of the campaign. In the previous Section, the characters travelled out of the Imperium into Vargr space, and identified Zoe in Gvurrdon sector as being the secret location of SEVEN's base. They also obtained several Ancient devices, including protective shimmersuits and a Star Trigger.

Adventure Synopsis

The characters dive into the oceans of Zoe and sink into the black depths, protected by their shimmersuits. Deep beneath the waves, they pass through a portal into a vast hidden fortress, located in the very heart of the planet. There, in a nightmare city lit by a dying star, they find SEVEN's new body being constructed by his Family Archive. Here, the servants of SEVEN live in the shadows of unimaginable technologies.

The characters are attacked by SEVEN's defences soon after they arrive, and must make their way across the alien city using stealth, subterfuge or strength of arms. They make to the Family Archive where Grandfather attempts to prevent SEVEN's resurrection – but he is stunned by a concealed psionic defence mechanism.

The characters are captured and interrogated by another instance of Vlen Backett. The inheritor's uncle puts the case for betraying Grandfather and helping SEVEN, and the characters must choose which Ancient they serve. If they choose to aid SEVEN, then Grandfather is executed. If they choose Grandfather, they must kill Vlen Backett before returning to the Archive.

Grandfather disables the Archive, ensuring that when the pocket universe collapses, SEVEN will be permanently erased. He also activates the Star Trigger to destroy the planet.

Grandfather

Grandfather remains able to take control of his host player character. Most of his mind is occupied with dealing with SEVEN's defences; there are psionic, hyperspatial, memetic and temporal aspects to this war that the player characters cannot perceive. While Grandfather is the driving force behind the player characters' attack on SEVEN's world, the players should remain in charge for most of the game, and all the important decisions are up to them.

Canon?

The ending of this adventure is in the hands of exactly who it should be – the players. It is up to the players to decide by their actions and their choices which faction triumphs and which Ancient falls. Future *OTU* products assume that the Ancients play no further active role in events – either both Ancients are killed, or Grandfather wins and then vanishes off to another pocket universe to pursue abstruse scientific research.

Referee Advice

Good luck. This is the big finale of the campaign. At least one Ancient will die today at the hands of your Player Characters.

The structure of this section is simple. The characters enter SEVEN's base and find their way to his Family Archive. Grandfather attempts to sabotage the Archive, but is knocked

unconscious by a hidden defence mechanism. Vlen Backett appears and attempts to persuade the characters to switch sides and join SEVEN, but he is interrupted by part two of Grandfather's plan. The Star Trigger is activated, causing the tiny artificial star in SEVEN's base to flare wildly. The characters fight their way through the ensuing apocalypse and help Grandfather destroy SEVEN once and for all before escaping.

At least, that is the plan. No adventure survives contact with the players, and this one is no different. Adapt to the players' decisions, keep raising the stakes, and run the game with more emphasis on drama than realism. This is the climax of the whole campaign – do not get bogged down in detail. Go for confrontation, for catharsis, for heroic sacrifices and last-minute betrayals.

1. DEEP DIVE

The entrance to SEVEN's domain is located in the depths of the ocean. The shimmersuits protect the characters from the crushing pressure. The characters sink down and down, far beyond the reach of sunlight, into the lightless regions. Down past the continental shelf, across the abyssal plain, and down further still. To avoid detection, the suits switch off all external lights, all radio emissions, all but the most basic life support. The characters sink for what seems like days.

Sometimes, they glimpse luminescent natives of Zoe's oceans. There are softly glowing pinkish cubes, shoals of glimmering green dots, and dim blue clusters of primordial sea-slugs, distant relatives of the semi-intelligent natives of the planet. At other times, they see the red glow of underwater volcanoes, as black smokers spew out soot. For most of the journey, though, the characters are alone with their thoughts as they sink, their only company the high-pitched creaking of the shimmersuit as it adjusts to cope with the pressure.

Eventually, the characters see lights flicker on below. They are no longer falling through empty ocean but have entered a deep shaft. The sides of the shaft are encrusted with barnacles and mud, but the characters can see that the walls are made of metal. There are more lights out in the darkness; it is almost impossible to estimate distances underwater, but the shaft appears big enough to admit a capital ship.

At the bottom of the shaft is a shimmering energy membrane. Passing through it, the characters are spun around in a confusing twist as they enter an artificial gravity field. They find themselves in a huge hangar. It looks quite similar to any other starport hangar, with hydrogen tubes and power lines snaking across the floor, and crates of cargo stacked high against the walls. There are two ships docked there, both 200 ton Vargr courier vessels belonging to the Church of the Chosen Ones.

The starport is empty when the characters land.

Exploring the starport, the characters find a large teleportal on one wall; the portal is currently inactive and does not respond to any controls or commands. It is remotely controlled from the city. There is also a gravitic levitation train station. It is shut down when the characters enter, but a moment later, the walls begin to gently glow, and a train glides into the station and lands. If the characters step on this train, it automatically whisks them to the city.

2. THE MISSION

Once the characters are out of the water, Grandfather takes possession of his host and explains his plan to them. The Ancient seems almost amused by the situation.

"Somewhere nearby is my errant Son's Family Archive – the machine that will resurrect him when he is destroyed by the

Interrogating the Church Vargr

If the characters failed to pick up shimmersuits in the previous adventure, then the best route into SEVEN's secret fortress is to highjack one of the Church of the Chosen One transports. The entry shaft can project a protective bubble of force to shield incoming ships from the pressure of the ocean. Alternatively, the characters can arrive in their own ship and bluff their way into the city.

The Church of the Chosen Ones have their own enclave of the city; it is the centre of their religion. They have no understanding of the advanced technologies or purpose of the city. They believe that one day, the chosen Vargr will dwell in these cities and their enemies will be enslaved by the gods.

Most of the worshippers are unaugmented, ordinary Vargr, not immortal super-Vargr like Nvor, the agent encountered in Aethgor's throne room. These true believers are fanatically convinced that SEVEN is a god and they are the chosen race who will inherit the stars. The actual servants of SEVEN know the religion is just a convenient social fiction used to manipulate the Vargr population.

If the characters interrogate one of the Vargr fanatics, they learn little about the environment within SEVEN's domain beyond the following:

- The Ancient rules over a great realm where, one day, all the chosen purebred Vargr will dwell.
- The realm is lit by the Tamed Star.
- Near the entry port, there is the First City where the Vargr were originally created by the Ancients.
- The faithful are permitted only to enter the outer precinct of the city, and they must travel along the Road of Stones by foot or by train. Flight is forbidden with the cavern.

collapse of my universe. The transition is mediated by, well, a scientific principle aeons beyond your comprehension, but the important point is that it is a virtually instantaneous transfer to ensure continuity of identity. SEVEN was always a jealous child, unable to cope with the concept of multiplicity of self. There will be a window between the destruction of his current body and the activation of his replacement when he is vulnerable.

All we need to do is find the Family Archive. Stealth would be preferable, yes? No need to draw SEVEN's servants on us.

Your shimmersuits are well equipped with weapons, should force be necessary."

Grandfather informs the players he will withdraw into the mind of his host, in case SEVEN has psionic security systems that could detect another Ancient. He will only emerge in an emergency. The Family Archive should be easy to find – just look for the machine near the dormant alien cybernetic monstrosity.

3. THE WORLD CITY

Outside the hangar, the characters find themselves inside an unimaginably vast cavern. The far walls of the cavern are lost in the distance; this one space must take up several percentage points of the whole volume of the *planet*. You could wrap the land area of a sizeable continent around the inner surface of the cavern. It is illuminated by a guttering, hazy red star that must be less than a thousand kilometres away. Any character with Space Science knows that such a star is impossible – either the effective mass of the star is being warped using some bizarre gravity manipulation, or the star is on the far side of a teleportal device. Either way, the star provides light and heat to this impossible hidden world, like a pocket Dyson sphere. As the characters are standing on the *inside* of the sphere, there must be more hidden gravity generators beneath them.

Glimmering all around the inside of the cavern are factories the size of cities and other incomprehensible machines. Automated mines gnaw the planet's bones for raw materials. The planet is being devoured from the inside out to build SEVEN's fleet of sentient warships.

Near the starport, the characters can see an incredible city, a place where building and machine and organic growth are all one. The living-machine structures grow like symmetrical trees, snaking around each other like tree branches. Whole buildings sway and move to catch the ruddy sunlight as the shadow of floating platforms falls upon them. The whole city, including the floating platforms overhead, is protected by a shimmering force shield.

Hanging far above the city is another, larger floating platform. Skeletal ribs sprout from this platform, surrounding a familiar shape. The characters last saw *that* shape as it incinerated

Grandfather's original body in the pocket universe. It is SEVEN's replacement ship/body being reconstructed. The Family Archive must be nearby.

A rough road leads to the city from the starport; alternatively, the characters can take the grav-train.

Overview

The City was constructed – or, more accurately, is constructing itself – using TL25 technology. The buildings are alive and intelligent. Within each structure, the rooms move and reconfigure themselves as necessary to meet the needs of their inhabitants. There are teleportals linking different locations in the city, and each structure is capable of providing life support for its inhabitants.

The City is mostly empty – it could hold millions, but the current population is only a few hundred thousand. SEVEN is a jealous and cruel god, who tolerates only a handful of agents like Vlen Backett. The City exists as a promise to the future. One day, when it rules the galaxy, SEVEN will need more agents, and they will dwell in the City that is to come. This whole base will become a capital of SEVEN's galactic empire.

The City is divided into five sections. The area closest to the road and grav-lev station is referred to as the **Quarter of the Chosen**, and is inhabited by the Vargr priests and fanatics of the Church of the Chosen Ones. These priests are permitted to visit the City to reinforce their faith. They see it as Heaven, and this is not a wholly inaccurate perception. The City is an incredible wonderland. There is no suffering here, no privation, no disease. Aged priests can be restored to youth here, sick priests can be healed, even the dead can be resurrected. The population of this quarter are almost entirely Vargr.

The central area of the City is the **public quarter**. There are large open squares and marketplaces here, parks and theatres and civic arenas. There are museums where the history of the Ancient race is depicted through media like hard-light holograms or direct memory engram transfer; zoos where there are genetic archives of billions of different species on file, and the

The Direct Approach

If the characters try flying to the city or the Family Archive (using grav belts, vehicles or by blasting a hole in the wall of the starport and stealing a ship), then they run into the city's automated defences. A disintegrator beam sweeps the skies over the city, blasting any flying targets into dust. There is no way to dodge the beam. If the characters are in a vehicle, it crashes near the city.

Skip onto Welcoming Committee on page XX to resolve the City's reactions to intruders.

machines can fast-grow clones of whatever animal or plant you desire; psionic zones where even non-psions gain the power of telepathy and can telepathically converse or even merge with other minds.

Most of the City is part of the **Droyne District**. Hundreds of thousands of Droyne live under SEVEN's aegis. These are the Ancient's followers who have remained loyal to him since the Wars of the Ancients. Most of these Droyne are virtually immortal and are heavily modified to better serve their leader. They no longer caste as they once did – the only Leader permitted is SEVEN, and the machines fulfil all the tasks of Workers, so all the rest are Technicians, Warriors and Sports. The characters may not even recognise some of these creatures as Droyne, because of their radical augmentation.

Near the public quarter on is the **Quarter of the Heroes**, as the Vargr priests call it. The immortal residents of the City just call it home. This is where SEVEN's servants like Nvor or Vlen Backett live. SEVEN has around a hundred such agents. Most of these agents are Human or Vargr, but representatives from every Major Race and many Minor Races can also be found here. Only a handful of these agents are abroad in the galaxy at any time. They go out and search for signs of other Ancients – SEVEN believes that the only threat to his ultimate victory comes from his siblings and nephews, so he is determined to scour the galaxy for any survivors of the Final Wars. To maintain secrecy and security, each agent travels the galaxy for only a few decades before returning to Zoe and lying low for a century or two.

Finally, above the city are the **Floating Platforms**, accessible only via teleportal or flight. Flying is permitted within the city for the Droyne.

Navigating the City

The characters can initially move freely through the Quarter of the Chosen – the Vargr priests assume they are Heroes and treat them with the utmost deference. (If the characters reveal they are not servants of SEVEN or otherwise alert the Vargr to their presence, then they must roll as described below.) In other sections of the City, they have to be more circumspect – call for Social Standing + Deception or Intelligence + Stealth rolls, depending on whether the characters are trying to blend

Utopia in Chains

For the final confrontation with Vlen Backett to work, it is important that the Referee present the City as a genuinely wonderful place. This is not some hellish nightmare city ruled by an evil god. SEVEN may be a tyrant, but this City is the best gilded cage in the galaxy. This is a City where the residents have access to all the benefits of TL25+ technology. They are immortal, fulfilled, joyous. Perfected.

All they had to do was give up their freedom.

in or sneak. The difficulty for this roll varies depending on where they are.

Increase the difficulty by one step if the City is alerted to the threat of intruders by the characters' actions.

If a check is failed, see Welcoming Committee Reactions, below.

Encounters

Choose encounters from the list below as the characters explore the City.

QUARTER OF THE CHOSEN

- A pack of young priests follow one of the characters, trying to touch the hem of his garment and asking for his blessing and insight. They beg him to bestow his wisdom and charisma upon them.
- A Vargr noble that the Church wishes to recruit is brought into the City, so she may look upon Heaven with her own eyes and see the truth of the Church's teachings.
- The characters come upon a Vargr preaching about the genetic destiny of the Vargr race, how they will be exalted and given dominion over all other sophonts.
- A pair of Vargr talking about the other districts of the City, and how they are not permitted to go beyond the Chosen's Quarter until they are found worthy.

	Blending in (Deception)	Sneaking around (Stealth)	
Quarter of the Chosen	Difficult (-2)	Average (+0)	
Public Quarter	Average (+0)	Difficult (–2)	
Droyne Zone	Hard (-4)	Difficult (–2)	
Quarter of Heroes	Impossible (–6)	Average (+0)	
Floating Platforms	Impossible (–6)	Hard (-4)	

- A pilgrimage of Vargr are preparing to leave the City and return to the starport; as they leave, the building they were staying in reabsorbs their quarters and reconfigures itself for a new purpose.
- One of the buildings reconfigures itself to grow a teleportal; the portal shimmers open and a Droyne flies out. The portal shuts immediately afterwards. The characters overhear a pair of Vargr talking about the portals; they can only be used by residents of the City, who are implanted with control chips.

PUBLIC QUARTER

- A trio of Droyne discuss the lack of news about SEVEN. One is deeply troubled, and chirps that Yaskoydray may have defeated SEVEN. The other two chide him for his lack of faith, and point out that the master will be reborn from his Family Archive. Even if Yaskoydray managed to destroy SEVEN's physical form, the master will soon return.
- The characters pass through a psionic zone. All the characters need to make an Psionic Strength + Telepathy test to shield their thoughts. (Characters without Psionic Strength may use Intelligence instead, but suffer a -3DM due to their lack of Telepathy). If a character succeeds with an Effect of 2+, he can read the minds of the residents nearby. If a character fails, he broadcasts his current thoughts to everyone around.

Ask the players what their characters are thinking about right now – this may give the characters away to the City's residents.

- The characters find a glowing blue spire that is a monument to SEVEN's plans. It communicates a vision to the characters telepathically – the characters see a whole galaxy united under SEVEN's rule. Every world, every sophont united in a single purpose. No waste, no deviation, no weakness – an invincible monoculture that cannot be turned against itself and can annihilate its enemies with a total combined effort.
- A group of Droyne watch a presentation by one of SEVEN's agents, a human recently returned from Capital. This human agent has information about affairs at the Imperial Court, and obviously has access to the highest security clearances. SEVEN has influence at the very heart of the Imperium.
- The characters spot a Hiver debating with a Droyne about SEVEN's next action. The Hiver believes that Yaskoydray is the last remaining Ancient, and that with Grandfather's annihilation, the time has come for SEVEN to move openly. It proposes a series of subtle manipulations to set the Imperium, the Zhodani and the Aslan at each other's throats, to make them vulnerable in anticipation of the time when SEVEN

makes its move. The Droyne counsels caution – there were occasions in the past when it was believed that all the other Ancients were gone, until SEVEN's agents found signs that there were still other Sons out there. SEVEN cannot act openly until all the others are dead. If he revealed he was still alive, he would give the advantage to another hidden Ancient.

• The characters come upon a stasis field containing a dormant Dyapyuse (see Section 6: The Secret of the Ancients) — a trophy from the war against that hegemonising swarm. The alien is trapped in a stasis field that freezes it in time. If the players free it, it attacks everyone nearby, which can be a useful distraction.

Droyne Zone

- The characters pass a medical facility. There are clone-tanks where new Droyne bodies are grown to replace worn-out ones. In another section, a Droyne's brain is surgically removed from its body, scanned, and the Droyne's mind is uploaded to one of the warships under construction elsewhere in the base. A successful Intelligence + Recon check notices that the newly-cloned bodies are implanted with various cybernetic augmentations, including a control chip for the City's teleportals.
- One of the buildings grows a face (or extends a psionic field) and courteously points out that the characters are entering the Droyne Zone – as Humans rarely visit this section of the City, their presence is a curiosity. Can the building help them find a particular Droyne or otherwise be of assistance?
- A swarm of Droyne swoop down and interrogate the characters, assuming they are new recruits to SEVEN's cause. They ask about the characters' skills and backgrounds. If the characters fail to give convincing answers, the Droyne raise the alarm.
- The characters find a group of Droyne studying a map of the Ancient empire before it fell. Several major Ancient sites within the Charted Space, like Shinothy, Zdent and the rosette at Tireen are highlighted, as are several other previously unknown Ancient sites.

QUARTER OF HEROES

 Wandering down a narrow alleyway between two strangely swollen buildings, the characters find a 200-ton Vargr trader on a landing pad. There is no way for the ship to take off, as the buildings block any flight vector. The characters will need to convince the buildings to move if they plan to use the ship.

- The characters encounter a pair of Aslan, a male named Ehyao and one female called Sariah, making preparations to leave the Quarter and return to the Hierate. Both these Aslan are heavily augmented and have been in SEVEN's service for hundreds of years. However, they are not familiar with all of SEVEN's agents, so the characters may be able to bluff their way past.
- The characters find a large hall containing holographic displays of local sectors. Touching a world brings up information about that planet; the user can even zoom in to view individual cities, or individual buildings, and again information pops up about those sites. Another control displays webs of contacts, trade routes, tactical data about a planet's defence systems and fleets, secrets about that planet's nobility and so on this hall is a treasure trove of data for any prospective invader.
- The characters spot a bizarre sight up ahead. In the midst of the living city there is a small patch of forest, and in the middle of the forest there is, unmistakably, Vlen Backett's hunting lodge on Alell (see *Section 2: Homecoming*). This structure is a perfect replica of the lodge, and will show up again in **Reunion** (see page XX). For now, the lodge is unoccupied.

Floating Platforms: See Getting To The Floating Platforms, below.

Welcoming Committee

While the characters may be able to conceal themselves for a while, they will almost certainly trip an alarm at some point during their exploration of the City. Either go through the following reactions on the part of the City in order, or skip to the most appropriate one depending on circumstances. If the characters start fighting back or otherwise fail to give satisfactory responses to allay suspicion, then move onto greater and greater threats.

Moving Buildings: The buildings around the characters move to block off any exits. Streets close and corridors vanish as the living structures exude new walls to contain the suspect characters. One of the buildings then constructs a face to speak with the characters, asking them to account for their suspicious actions.

The buildings are incapable of attacking directly, and the characters can use their Disintegrator Gauntlets to blow holes in the buildings.

Automated Security: The City keeps order when necessary using automated security drones. These robots are intended to deal with troublesome Vargr petitioners, and are not a significant

threat to the shimmersuit-armoured characters. (Those without shimmersuits are in a lot more trouble.)

Security Drones STR 12 DEX 14 Hull 4 Structure 4

Traits: Armour 20, Integral System (Floater) Skills: Gun Combat (energy rifle) 2, Recon 3 Weapons: Ancient Plasma Rifle (16d6)

Droyne Strike Team: If the drones are unable to deal with the problem, then the City automatically alerts a group of armed Droyne. These Droyne are equipped with TL25 equipment, consisting of light armour, fusion pistols and handheld mesonic rifles that can be set to stun or kill. The Droyne fly across the City and attack the characters from above. Initially, they threaten the characters with fusion pistols that are largely ineffective (1/16th damage) against the shimmersuits; once it becomes clear that these weapons are useless, they switch to the mesonic weapons.

Droyne Strike Team STR 9 DEX 11 END 8 INT 9 EDU 9 CHA 7

Gun Combat (energy pistol) 4

Fusion Pistol (16d6), Mesonic Rifle (4d6, special), Ancient Light Armour (18)

Lockdown: If the Droyne are unable to disable the characters, then the City attempts to restrain the characters until the heavy strike team can be mobilised. The buildings link with each other and try to encase the characters in a dome of solid material. The ground beneath the characters softens into a sticky morass of epoxy. The characters need to make Strength + Athletics or Dexterity + Athletics tests to keep moving; the difficulty for these tests starts at Average (+0) and increases by one step each round until the characters are trapped or they escape.

Heavy Strike Team: The City's ultimate recourse to a group of intruders like the player characters is to deploy a heavy strike team consisting of one Assassin Drone per player character, accompanied by a Scourge Machine (see Section 7: The Death of Grandfather). These drones are equipped with a mix of meson weapons and antimatter cannons, both of which the suits provide some protection against.

Getting to the Floating Platforms

The ultimate goal of the characters is to reach the floating platforms over the city. There are several ways to reach these platforms and the Family Archive.

- Teleportals: The easiest way to get up is via the teleportal network. The teleportals can only be activated by a resident of the City who possesses a control implant. The characters can bypass this security measure by:
 - Convincing a resident to activate the portal for them

- Θ Sneaking into a portal after a resident
- Θ Forcing a resident to activate the portal
- Obtaining a control implant via the medical facility in the Droyne quarter, or by killing a resident
- Flight: While flying is banned outside the City, the characters might be able to convince the Droyne to fly them up within the City, or fly up under their own power.
- Stealing a ship: There are various ships and vehicles in the City that can be highjacked. The best method of getting around the City is via teleporter, but there are vehicles for various purposes, like entertainment, construction or hauling cargo.
- Climbing Buildings: The Buildings are capable
 of extending themselves to a great height, or even
 extruding bridges or spires that connect to the floating
 platforms. The characters need to create a need for a
 Building to grow taller, or override its internal control
 systems.

Once the characters reach the Floating Platforms, they can jump from platform to platform. Some of the platforms contain gun emplacements, but most are automated factories and assemblers used to create parts for SEVEN's new body. The largest Floating Platform is contains the Family Archive. Grandfather's Host intuitively knows which Platform he should make for.

4. THE FAMILY ARCHIVE

SEVEN's archive is a spherical structure bisected by one of the floating platforms. There is a single entrance consisting of an iris hatch leading to a tunnel, and the tunnel leads to the centre of the Archive. Outside the iris hatch are a pair of Scourge Machines. The characters can either sneak past or attack the Machines. These Machines are under orders to attack any intruders. (If the characters are unable to defeat the Machines, then Grandfather can reveal himself at this point and defeat the robots with his psionic powers.)

Inside the Archive, Grandfather takes complete control of his host's body. 'This way!' he orders the Player Characters, leading them down into the heart of the Archive.

Here, the characters find a spinning armature of light and psionic energy covered in Droyne glyphs. Grandfather begins to operate the controls. 'Hold them off!' he snaps. 'I need to arrange that SEVEN's consciousness download into his new body happens at just the right time. Also, hmm, yes. Excellent.' His hands move over the controls with lightning speed, and then he is lifted into the spinning machine. He sits cross-legged, communing with the device.

From outside, the characters hear approaching enemies. SEVEN's followers cannot risk damaging the Archive, so they cannot deploy heavy weapons. The characters are attacked by waves of Assassin Drones and Droyne Strike Teams. All the while, Grandfather continues to operate the Family Archive.

One of the walls of the Archives opens, revealing a transparent cylinder. Floating in the cylinder is a newly-cloned Droyne body, identical to that worn by Grandfather when the characters first met him.

'Nearly done' says Grandfather. 'Just a quick psionic transfer

The host suddenly finds himself back in control of his body, and falls out of the machine. Grandfather steps out of the cylinder. 'There we are, good as new. They were all clones of me, you know. Now, one last adjustment, and we can depart.'

The Droyne reaches out and touches the controls of the Family Archive again... and there is a flash of light as a previously undetected security system triggers. All the characters, including Grandfather, are knocked unconscious.

5. REUNION

The characters reawaken in weirdly familiar surroundings – they are in Vlen Backett's lodge back on Alell. More accurately, they are in an exact duplicate of it, created from Vlen's memories. The characters are still wearing their shimmersuits, but all Ancient technology in them has been deactivated. Similarly, the disintegrator gauntlets have shut down. Any standard technology possessed by the characters still functions.

Vlen Backett stands before the characters. He looks remarkably healthy for a man whose body the characters brought home for burial all those months ago. He has a gauss pistol at his belt, but he carries a handful of wine glasses and a bottle of spacer's rum. His eyes are tired and haunted.

In a corner of the room is Grandfather, now inhabiting the cloned body he constructed in the Family Archive. There is a device resembling a black metal spider clamped to his head; this device is obviously paralysing him and inhibiting his psionic abilities.

This room is an exact duplicate of the lodge on Alell – attentive players may remember important details like the closet full of weapons (one pair of gauss pistols, a plasma rifle, an ACR with underslung RAM grenade launcher, a FGMP (TL15), an aerosol injector with four doses of combat drug, and a TL14 Tailored Vacc Suit), the computer system, the collection of fake identity papers, and the secret passage that should lead to a cavern containing the *Star Hunter*.

Homecoming Redux

Vlen greets the characters, especially his nephew. 'They rebuilt this place from my memories. It makes the transition to a new body easier. Dving's not easy, not even for me.

'And it'll be a lot harder for you. The others wanted to kill you for helping Yaskoydray. I've convinced them to hold off until our master returns. He'll be reborn soon – your tampering wasn't enough to stop his rebirth. Which means we've got about fifteen minutes to save your lives.'

Vlen explains the following:

- For more than a thousand years, he has been a servant of the entity that the player characters call SEVEN.
 - By the way, Yaskoydray has been lying to the characters all along. Yaskoydray did not build their civilisation single-handedly or clone the Sons from his own genetic material. SEVEN was never a Droyne. For that matter, neither was Yaskoydray. The Droyne were just another experiment in creating a slave race, like the Vargr or Humans.
- All this time, his duty has been to watch for signs
 of Ancient tampering with Humaniti. He has lived
 hundreds of lives. Part of his role includes recruiting
 other agents for his master. He had his eye on the
 Inheritor player character for years, and intended to
 recruit him one day.
- He was killed back on Regina by his own servants to avoid Imperial investigation.
- Soon, the master will be reborn from the Family Archive.
- SEVEN's mind has survived the collapse of the pocket universe and will soon be reassembled in the Family Archive. Yaskoydray's tampering has been undone.
 - The characters were knocked unconscious by an emergency defence system that was keyed to detect advanced Droyne like Yaskoydray.

Do not monologue to the players; let them ask questions or argue with Vlen.

When playing Vlen, emphasise his humanity. He may be an immortal agent of a vengeful god, but he is also the beloved eccentric uncle of one of the Player Characters. Have him offer the characters a stiff drink; show them how tired and worried he is. He still genuinely cares about his nephew.

Once VIen explains how he is still alive, he moves on to the question of the characters' future.

'Our master will soon return, and when he does, this trickster is going to die slowly. You, though, you've got a choice. I can save your lives, but you have to trust me.'

The Choice

VIen outlines SEVEN's goals and his own beliefs.

- The Ancient is going to take over Charted Space. The only thing stopping him doing so was the threat of the other Ancients, and Yaskoydray should be the last of them. In the next two decades, the master will conquer every system from the coreward reaches of the Consulate to the borders of the Solomani Sphere. Soon after that, he will conquer the other Major Races.
 - None of the races have the technology to stop the Ancients.
 - This is right and proper. The Ancients are a higher form of life. Humans and the other races are like pets to them. We are made to serve them. There is no shame in bowing to them, like a child must obey its parents.
- There are other threats in the galaxy and beyond. The
 Dyabyuse, for instance, are still out there. The master's
 instruments have detected a slow-moving psionic
 wave emanating from the heart of the galaxy, which
 might be their doing, or the work of the Primordials, a
 race that preceded even the Ancients.
 - The only way to survive these threats is to serve the Ancients. Only a galactic empire united under the master's reign will be able to resist such alien forces.
 - O Life under the Ancients is not slavery. It is glorious! When Charted Space bows to the master, he will distribute his advanced technology. Those who serve him will be immortal. There will be no more suffering, no more poverty, no more war, no more injustice. The master will rule justly and kindly over his servants.
- Those who resist the master must be destroyed for the good of the galaxy. There can be no dissent, no doubt, no weakness. Any such hesitation would be a gift to the master's enemies.
 - Yaskoydray is no friend to the characters. He cares nothing for the other races; all he is interested in his own scientific research. He would sacrifice the player characters or the whole Imperium just to obtain another data point for his experiments.
 - The characters visited Grandfather's domain, with his abandoned experiments and civilisations in bell jars, and they have now seen how the master treats his followers. Which Ancient would they prefer to serve?

Now, the characters have a choice. If they completely and wholeheartedly agree to serve the master, then Vlen will arrange for them to join SEVEN's followers. There can be no deception on this matter – the master will probe their minds using psionic technology and lay bare their souls. If the characters try to deceive SEVEN, they will be destroyed along with Yaskoydray.

If they cannot bow to the master, then Vlen will have no choice to execute them here and now.

What do the characters say?

We Serve The Master

It is unlikely that any player characters will change sides and join with SEVEN, but if *all* the players do decide to take Vlen up on his offer, then you have a radically transformed *Traveller* game on your hands. When SEVEN returns, it can stablise the star and prevent the Star Trigger from causing any more chaos. The reborn Ancient will then kill Grandfather (again).

The Player Characters will become agents like Vlen. Their mission will be to destabilise the Imperium by whatever means possible, to weaken it in advance of SEVEN's conquest. Their first task is to engineer hostilities between the Imperium and the Zhodani. The characters will be equipped with advanced technology and provided with a ship, much like Vlen was. The player characters are now super-augmented spies working for an Ancient. Good luck!

Nova Time

While all this is going on, the characters' ship is still in orbit of Zoe, and on board that ship is the Star Trigger device obtained in Section 9: The Dark Gate. Before leaving the ship, Grandfather activated the trigger. It targets the protostar in the middle of the huge cavern. Its initial effects are undetectable, but now huge flares are building within the artificial sun.

Grandfather intended to be long gone before the star became unstable, but he had not counted on the Family Archive's defences. Therefore, the first flare happens while the characters are in Vlen's lodge. The ground shakes, the lights flicker, and there is a ghastly groaning noise from the surrounding buildings. An eerie red light floods the windows.

Vlen is momentarily distracted; if the characters are going to act, this is the moment. They can either tackle Vlen, or grab a weapon and shoot him. If Vlen's 'nephew' attacks, then Vlen surrenders and lets the Player Characters kill him.

Vlen Backett

STR 10 DEX 12 END 12 INT 10 EDU 14 SOC 8

Advocate 1, Admin 1, Astrogation 2, Broker 2, Carouse 2, Comms 1, Computers 3, Deception 3, Diplomat 2, Drive 0, Engineering (all) 3, Flyer 1, Gambler 2, Gun Combat (energy pistol) 3, Investigate 2, Jack Of All Trades 2, Leadership 2, Mechanic 4, Medic 2, Navigation 1, Persuade 2, Pilot (starship) 4, Sensors 2, Stealth 4, Steward 2, Recon 3, Vacc Suit 2, Zero-G 3

Ancient Plasma Pistol (16d6), Shimmersuit

Freeing Grandfather

Once VIen is dead, the characters can remove the inhibitor device from Grandfather's head. The Ancient thanks the characters for their aid. 'We must return to the Archive! The Star Trigger will not nova for another few minutes, and we must ensure that SEVEN is not around to prevent it. Quickly!'

Again, the characters need to find a way back to the platforms. As this is a perfect copy of the Lodge, there is indeed a secret passage underneath it leading to a hangar. Instead of the *Star Hunter*, though, the hangar contains a TL25 scout ship that looks like a silver dart – see *The Dart* on page XX. The characters can hijack this ship and use it to get to the Family Archive. Alternatively, Grandfather can fly them there using psionically-augmented strength, or the characters can use Vlen's corpse to control the teleportals.

City in Chaos

Outside of the Lodge, the City is in chaos. The solar flares are intense enough to disrupt the internal systems of the living buildings, so they grow at random, metastasising like cancer and spawning impossible architectures and sloughing off walls like snakeskin. The residents of the City are in a panic, especially the Vargr fanatics. The Droyne flee to bunkers underneath the City; they have prepared for thousands of years for an attack by another Ancient. Overhead, Scourge Machines and other robots circle in confusion, their delicate sensors scrambled by the flares. The Floating Platforms smash into each other, sending debris falling like meteors.

The City is being spared the worst effects of the Star Trigger for the moment. It is protected by a force shield which, for as long as it stands, reduces the damage caused by the flares. Outside the field, the cave walls melt to magma and slag under the assault. Gravity generators in the cave floor explode, restoring conventional gravity and creating streams of molten rock that fall skywards.

This is the apocalyptic, everything-explodes scene of this adventure. Spend large chunks of your special-effects budget here. Make the players feel like the world is ending.

Cut Scenes & Boxed Text

Several parts of this adventure (especially *Judgement*) involve a lot of action on the part of non-player characters. The Referee has to describe Grandfather's struggle against the Family Archive, the slow reactivation of SEVEN, the chaos in the City and the impending supernova. In a computer game, some of these events might be depicted in a non-interactive cut scene. In a roleplaying game, the Referee might be given boxed text to read to the players.

Never read directly to the players. Instead, take the suggested text and put it in your own words. Describe things round-by-round, and always ask the players what they are doing. Their characters do not necessarily stand stock-still in mute witness to major events. Even if they have no obvious way to influence events, the Player Characters should still be the focus of the game.

For example, once the artificial sun is destabilised by the Star Trigger, the characters have no way to stop this happening or to avert the devastation of the city. However, the Referee should keep the players in the middle of the action by relating everything in terms of how it challenges them. Instead of reading a florid description of the solar flares and the damage to the City in a monologue to the players, the Referee should ask the players how they are taking shelter, ask for rolls to dodge falling debris, note down radiation exposure for characters not wearing shimmersuits and so on. Keep the players involved at all times.

7. JUDGEMENT

Once the characters return to the Family Archive, Grandfather flits ahead of the group. 'I must delay SEVEN's resurrection!' He enters the Archive.

While Grandfather is meddling with the Family Archive, the player characters can be occupied with:

- Stealing a vehicle to escape the City
- Fighting off Assassin Drones
- Looting Ancient technology
- Trying to flee the City

Again, the psionic defence system detects Grandfather's presence, but this time he is ready for it. Grandfather struggles against the onslaught of the Family Archive. Step by step, inch by inch, he drags his mutant form towards the control console. Any character who approaches the Archive feels an agonisingly painful psychic pressure.

Above, the armature surrounding SEVEN's robot body begins to fall away. The Archive is active, uploading a copy of SEVEN's mind to its new form. The robot body twitches and quivers. Lights flicker along its flanks. Gunports slide open and closed.

On board, reactors come to life, sending the energy of a star surging through the ship.

Grandfather reaches the control console and makes his final adjustments. The Archive's frenetic activity slows to a crawl. In effect, the upload speed of SEVEN's mind has been throttled; the Ancient is still being reborn, but at a much, much slower rate. SEVEN is trapped, half in the Archive and half in his new body, while the dying star wreaks havoc. Without Grandfather's tampering, SEVEN would have uploaded into its new body and escaped, but now it is dying on a rack of solar flares and crippled data transfers.

The Choice

Grandfather staggers out of the Archive. He is obviously utterly exhausted by his struggle with the Archive's defence mechanism. He reaches out a spindly claw towards the characters, begging them for help in this moment of weakness. Soon, Grandfather will recover. His mutant physiology, augmented by hundreds of thousands of years of technological, genetic and psionic manipulation, will swiftly restore his health. His unparalleled intellect will reassert itself; his psionic shields will be rebuilt. Soon, he will be a demigod again.

But right now, at this one instant of his triumph, he is uniquely vulnerable. Right now, he is just an exhausted and battered Droyne.

Any player characters present have a choice. A single shot from a fusion gauntlet or a gauss pistol could put an end to Yaskoydray. The characters could even just break his neck or throw him off the floating platform. He has no remaining Family Archive and lacks the strength to telepathically transfer his consciousness. The Player Characters can kill Grandfather.

In this one moment, the Player Characters control the fate of the galaxy.

Oh My God, You Killed Yaskoydray

Old-school *Traveller* players may be alarmed at the thought of Player Characters killing one of the most important figures in the entire *Traveller* universe; other may be positively gleeful at the idea. If you want to keep Grandfather alive despite the players' murderous intent, nothing could be easier – assume Grandfather has another secret Family Archive in another secret base. He only took refuge inside a human host to hide from SEVEN's agents – now SEVEN is dealt with, he can reincarnate as himself safely.

The Death of Seven

Meanwhile, a second Ancient dies. For SEVEN, there is no escape, no hope of mercy. A solar flare licks out lazily from the disrupted star, blasting into the still-paralysed robot body. It is a testament to the incredible science of the Ancients that SEVEN survives the first flare. The radiation scars his robot form, the heat leaves his hull glowing white-hot, the kinetic force smashes his drives, but he endures the first flare.

And the second. And the third. And the fourth.

The fifth flare drives SEVEN into the cave wall like a ship driven onto a reef by a typhoon. The sixth solar flare cracks the ship from stem to stern, shattering the super-dense hull. SEVEN claws at space-time with relativity beams, it tries to erect white globe shields and force screen and radiation dampers, but to no avail. The seventh flare catches it amidships and blasts the Ancient into cinders.

8. ESCAPE

While Ancients die, the characters still have to escape the City. The difficulty of this is up to the Referee; while it would normally be even harder to get out of SEVEN's base than it was to get in under these chaotic circumstances, the Referee may wish to bend plausibility to give the Player Characters an easy exit from the exploding fortress.

- The characters can flee back to the starport and steal a ship, then fly up the shaft. (Conveniently, the protective force bubble functions long enough to protect fleeing ships from the pressure of the ocean depths.)
- For that matter, the shimmersuits can adjust their buoyancy. The characters can just float to the surface the same way they came in.
- If Grandfather is still alive, and the characters protect him until he regains his strength, then he can teleport the characters to their ship in orbit.
- A merciful Referee might let the characters find a convenient teleportal to the surface in the midst of chaos.

Fortunately for the inhabitants of Zoe, the Star Trigger's chaos does not result in the micro-star exploding. One of the flares destroys the Ancient machinery that permits the star to exist in the first place, and it gutters out in a burst of expanding hydrogen. The devastation does send a plume of heat rising through the ocean, wiping out all life in a thousand-kilometre cone above the entry shaft. Earthquakes wrack the planet, and a tsunami surge drowns the Vargr shoreline factories (coincidentally liberating the enslaved sea-slugs).

Once the characters are back on the surface, they can obtain a ship or a shuttle to take them back to their own ship in orbit. Again, if Grandfather is still alive, the Ancient can temporarily act freely and resolve almost any problem with the application of super-science or psionic mastery.

A Return to the Imperium

The return voyage to the Imperium is uneventful (unless Grandfather is still aboard, in which case see *Inherit the Stars*, below).

If the characters agreed to report to Imperial intelligence for Arisa or Galen (see Section 8: In The Emperor's Name), then they are met by an Imperial scoutship at Triad and escorted back to the Imperium. If the characters were acting as free agents throughout their recent adventures, then they can go where they wish after leaving Zoe.

9. INHERIT THE STARS

The characters' choices over the course of this campaign have changed the galaxy. The future course of their *Traveller* adventures will inevitably be affected by the passage of the Ancients.

The Reign of SEVEN

If the players sided with SEVEN and VIen Backett against Grandfather, then your game has taken a turn for the apocalyptic. Without the threat of other Ancients to check him, SEVEN is virtually invincible. It may recruit the Player Characters as agents alongside VIen to prepare the galaxy for the invasion to come. Soon, its forces will emerge from Zoe and its other fortress worlds and overwhelm Charted Space. All sophonts will be forced to bow to the reborn Ancient Empire, ruled over by the immortal God-Emperor-Machine that was once called SEVEN, but is now referred to only as *Grandfather*.

Grandfather Dies

If both Ancients perished, then the war of the Ancients is finally over. A conflict that lasts 300,000 years has finally come to an end – assuming, of course, that SEVEN and Yaskoydray were the only remaining survivors. Certainly, there are no other Ancients operating near Charted Space, which means that for the foreseeable future, Humaniti and the other Major Races are on their own. They can determine their own destiny – and that may be more dangerous than it first seems.

Both Grandfather and SEVEN have their own spy networks throughout Charted Space. Up until now, these spy networks have primarily gathered information about other Ancients, but they have also tracked the development of new technologies. At times, they have even interceded to stop one race or another creating something dangerous. The Darrian *Maghiz*, for example, shows that the Imperium is on the verge of creating

technologies that threaten the stars themselves. Without the invisible hand of the Ancients guiding Humaniti's development, it is possible that some bizarre new threat could be created by the Imperium or another stellar nation.

The death of Grandfather also throws the future of the Droyne race into doubt. Yaskoydray reintroduced the *coyns* to the Droyne comparatively recently, allowing them to caste again. Without Grandfather, are the Droyne doomed to decline further, degenerating first into a species of Chirpers, and then into subsentient savages?

Agents of Yaskoydray

If Grandfather survived and is on good terms with the characters, he may offer them a place in his retinue. Defeating SEVEN was a huge risk for Yaskoydray; to entrap SEVEN, Grandfather had to give up his pocket universe and risked his own existence. He needs to rebuild immediately – he needs to establish a new base and a replacement Family Archive, as well as a whole new spy network, before he can restart his scientific research.

If the characters become Grandfather's agents, he gives them the same benefits as SEVEN gave VIen Backett. They will be augmented using Ancient technology, making them effectively immortal, and equipped with gear suitable to their various missions. Sometimes, they will need the Ancient equivalent of battle dress and heavy weapons, and Grandfather will provide such deadly firepower, but most of their missions will be covert ones. The characters' tasks will include:

- Finding a new secret base for Grandfather .
- Helping Grandfather with his experiments (especially when they go out of control).
- Scouring the galaxy for traces of surviving Ancients.
- Retrieving Ancient technology.
- Gathering information about the affairs of the Imperium, the Zhodani, and the other great powers.
- Manipulating galactic events.
- Helping other agents and spies working for Grandfather.

This style of play is much more high-powered than normal *Traveller* play; the Player Characters may still look like a scruffy band of free traders and mercenaries, but they are the secret agents of a demi-god and hold the lives of trillions in the balance.

Grandfather's Farewell

If Grandfather survived, but does not recruit the players, then he vanishes from the campaign after SEVEN is defeated. The characters may simply never see Grandfather again if they were separated during the chaos on Zoe. Alternatively, if Grandfather escaped with the characters, then he leaves them in jumpspace between Zoe and another planet. The characters' ship is in transit when they detect a bizarre distortion in the jump

bubble. A bizarre ship pushes *through* the wall of jump bubble, defying everything Humaniti understands about how the jump drive works, and comes alongside the characters' ship.

Yaskoydray bids them farewell. As a parting 'gift', he remotely disables the characters' shimmersuits and any other troublesome pieces of Ancient technology that might be problematic in future adventures. Grandfather explains that working examples of such technology would draw too much attention to the characters and their association with him. He needs to vanish into legend once more.

A kind Referee may have Grandfather offer the characters a reward. He might tell them the location of an Ancient supply cache that is of no further use to him, awaken their psionic abilities, or give them another Ancient relic. Grandfather's gifts are always part of some greater scheme of his, so his gifts will inevitably lead to further adventures.

For colder Referees, and for a Grandfather more in keeping with his portrayal earlier in the campaign, just have Yaskoydray depart once the Ancient ship arrives. The characters have served their purpose as his tools, so now he discards them without a moment's regret.

The characters will never see Grandfather again. He may depart from Charted Space entirely, withdrawing into another pocket universe to continue his research, or he may take a more active – but still undetectable – role in shaping the fate of the galaxy. Either way, the Ancient is done with the Player Characters.

Unanswered Questions

- The player characters have been on the run since they delivered Vlen Backett's corpse to Alell all those months ago. What is left of their former lives?
- If the characters escaped the Gaesh prison hulk, then they are wanted fugitives. Do they return to the Imperium, or seek a new life in the Vargr Extents? If the characters want to buy the IISS off, they could trade some of their salvaged Ancient technology and the location of the Zoe base for a pardon.
- At this point, the characters know more secrets of the Ancients than anyone else – this would make them invaluable assets to the Imperial Scout Service, to the University of Regina or to anyone else with an interest in the Ancients. What will the characters do with these secrets?
- What becomes of the Zoe base? Most of SEVEN's technology has been reduced to molten slag, but there could still be something worth salvaging in the ruins.
 If both the Vargr and the Imperium learn of the base, then Zoe could be a flashpoint for war.

- What of the rest of SEVEN's servants? Will they want revenge on the characters? Will they go renegade, using their Ancient-granted power to carve out their own empires?
- What was SEVEN's intent? Was the Ancient thirsty for power, or was there some truth to his paranoid ramblings about the need to unite the galaxy? Are there unseen enemies out there that even the Ancients feared?
- How much of the history of the Ancients can the characters believe? Grandfather showed them one version of the rise and fall of the Ancient civilisation, but if there is one thing the characters should have learned by this point, it is that Grandfather lies. Even after all their adventures, do the characters really know the Secrets of the Ancients?

LIBRARY DATA

Ancient Augments

Those who serve the Ancients are given a suite of augmentations and upgrades that transform them from human into something much more powerful. Different agents are changed in different ways, but the 'standard package', if such a thing can be said to exist, is as follows:

Strength: +4 Intelligence: +2
Dexterity: +4 Education: +4
Endurance: +6 Psionic Strength: +4

- Natural Armour 5.
- Automatica healing at the rate of one point per hour.
- No natural ageing.
- Ability to produce slow or fast drug from augmented glands.
- All upgrades are concealed from detection; to most scans, the character appears normal.

Mesonic Rifle

Another Ancient weapon, designed to more precise and less devastating than a disintegrator, the mesonic rifle fires a small packet of quick-decaying mesons at the target. The mesons only interact with matter when they decay, and the gun automatically calibrates the mesons' energy so they decay within the target's armour. In effect, the meson gun bypasses all defences except meson screens and black globes.

The mesonic rifle can inflict 1d6 to 4d6 damage per shot, at the choice of the user. It ignores armour, applying damage directly to the target's Characteristics. When used on vehicles or robots, the mesonic rifle inflicts a maximum of 1d6 damage, but ignores both Armour and Hull.

Meson Guns use the Gun Combat (energy rifle) skill, have no Recoil, and use the Rifle range profile.

GRANDFATHER LIES

The Dart

The Dart looks like an ovoid of silver metal when at rest; it reconfigures itself into a sharp-nosed dart when in flight. It is the Ancient equivalent of a scoutship. It has a jump drive, but it draws both power and hydrogen fuel from an onboard supply teleportal, so most of the ship's hundred-ton mass is taken up with cargo space, staterooms and sensors. The ship is operated primarily using a psionic interface; it bonds with its primary pilot and responds to his thoughts while he is aboard.

			Tons
Hull	100 Tons	10 Hull	_
	Streamlined	10 Structure	_
Armour	_	15 Points	7.5
Jump Drive	C	Jump 6	10
	_	Fast Cycle, No Fuel	_
Manoeuvre Drive	С	Thrust 6	3
Power Plant	C	_	4
Bridge	_	Holographic Controls	10
Computer	Model/15	Rating 50	
Electronics	Very Advanced	Enhanced Signal Processing, Survey Sensors,	5
Weapons	Hardpoint #1	Double Turret	1
		Accurate, Variable Range High-Yield Particle Beam	_
		Accurate, Variable Range High-Yield Particle Beam	_
Fuel	0 Tons	Unlimited jump-6 and Indefinite operation	_
Cargo	9.5 Tons	_	
Ammunition	_	_	_
6 Staterooms		_	24
0 Low Berths	_	_	_
Extras	Luxuries	_	6
	Launch	_	20
Software	Manoeuvre/3	_	
	Library/0	_	_
	Jump/6	_	
	Evade/3	_	_
	Fire Control/3	_	
Maintenance Cost (monthly)		6,000 cr	_
Life Support Cost (monthly)		12,000 cr	
Total Tonnage			100