
TRAVELLER

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS

THE SECRET OF THE ANCIENTS

I was the first of my race to dream of the stars. I led them out into the universe. I built this civilisation. I am Yaskoydray, Grandfather, the maker of the makers of mind.

The Secret of the Ancients is the sixth adventure in the *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign. If you're a player, **stop reading now**. If you're a Referee, then you should first read **Section 0: Secrets of Secrets** to get an overview of the campaign. In **Section 5: Otherworld**, the characters travelled to a pocket universe created by Grandfather to house his experiments. They explored this strange dimension, and eventually found their way to a space station under construction by Grandfather's robots. There, they were brought before Grandfather himself...

Adventure Synopsis

Grandfather uses his psionic powers to project a series of memories into the player characters. The characters experience events of thousands of years ago, reliving them in the personas of former servants and agents of Grandfather. In effect, the players get temporary pre-generated characters to replace their regular Player Characters.

Thousands of years ago, the Ancients' civilisation was at its height. The characters lived through this golden age, when Grandfather and his Sons explored the galaxy and created wonders beyond the wildest ambitions of lesser species. The Ancients moved worlds and drank stars; they raised up species to sentience, they built thinking machines, they reshaped the universe to their own ends. The characters were part of these efforts – they built a new laboratory for Grandfather's experiments, travelled to Earth to recruit a new workforce and experimented in finding the ideal servants for Grandfather's needs.

Not everyone shared Grandfather's visions. Some unaugmented Droyne chafed under the rule of immortal mutant super-geniuses; other creations of Grandfather considered rebelling against his grand design. As influential agents of Grandfather, the characters were approached by dissidents who hoped to recruit them.

The Ancients never declined – the ongoing greatness of their civilisation was what destroyed them. The Sons' astounding works began to interfere with each other. Experiments corrupted each other. Technological and artistic visions became incompatible. The Sons began to fight each other. Dispassionately, scientifically, Grandfather began a program of genocide.

During the war, the characters commanded an Ancient warfleet and may have even exterminated one of the Sons. Before his destruction, the Son attempted to convince them to switch sides by telling them Grandfather's secret...

This sequence of memories has an ulterior motive. Grandfather is psionically scanning the characters, delving deep into their minds. By the time the characters' awareness returns to the present day, he will know them better than they know themselves...

TEN THOUSAND YEARS... AND MORE

This is not a conventional *Traveller* adventure. The characters are all hundreds or thousands of years old, and have access to incredible resources and technology beyond TL20. The normal *Traveller* rules are not designed to cope with entities who operate on this scale, so this adventure uses a variation on them.

Instead of the usual characteristics, the following are used:

Analysis: Gathering information, research, problem-solving.

Co-Ordination: Utilising assets effectively, issuing orders, commanding groups

Influence: Political sway, persuasion.

Warfare: Combat and tactics

These characteristics are rated from 2 to 12 and have the same range of modifiers as in the standard game, but are on a much higher scale.

The skills used are listed below; these skills also measure access to resources and influence in that field.

- **Construction:** Building mega-structures
- **Droyne Cultures:** Knowledge and sway within Droyne culture
- **Economics:** Trade and economic influence and knowledge
- **Fleet:** Space-based military tactics and access to starships
- **Uplift Engineering:** Altering living species using genetic or cybernetic engineering
- **Geo-Engineering:** Altering the ecology or environment of a planet
- **Ground Forces:** Ground-based military tactics and access to combat robots
- **Logistics:** Access to resources and transport assets
- **Primitive Cultures:** Knowledge and sway within Human or Vargr cultures
- **Psionic Engineering:** Utilising mental powers
- **Space Engineering:** Space-based engineering, altering stars, constructing ringworlds and so on
- **Subterfuge:** Deception, under-handed tactics, stealth
- **Synthetic Cultures:** Knowledge and sway within the Artificial Intelligence culture

Time Increments

This scenario takes place over thousands of years, so the standard Traveller time frame chart has to be expanded.

Time Frame	Increment	Example Action
1–6 Seconds	One second	Shooting, punching, jumping
10–60 Seconds	Ten seconds	Rerouting power, opening a comms channel
1–6 Minutes	One minute	Applying first aid, basic technical tasks
10–60 Minutes	Ten minutes	More complex technical tasks, searching an area thoroughly
1–6 Hours	One hour	Building a shelter, moving through the wilderness
6–24 Hours	Four Hours	Researching a problem
10–60 Hours	Ten hours	Repairing a damaged ship
1–6 Days	One day	Combing a city for a missing person
1–6 Months	One month	Establishing a base
1–6 Years	One year	Constructing a starship
10–60 Years	One decade	Settling a planet
100–600 Years	One century	Building a megastructure
1,000–6,000 Years	One millennium	Stellar engineering

Example Rolls

- Constructing a warfleet:** Co-ordination + Construction, Average (+0), 10–60 years
- Fighting a battle in space:** Warfare + Fleet, Difficult (–2), 1–6 weeks
- Establishing a new colony on a garden world:** Co-Ordination + Construction, Simple (+2), 1–6 years
- Establishing a new colony on a hostile world:** Co-Ordination + Geo-Engineering, Difficult (–2), 10–60 years
- Uplifting Wolves to humanoid sophonts:** Analysis + Uplift Engineering, Very Difficult (–4), 1–6 Millennia

Advancement

Between episodes, the players can improve their characters. Each character has 10 advancement points to spend between episodes. Skills cost a number of points equal to their level; characteristic increases cost two points per level, as per the table below. Characteristic and skill increases must be bought in order (so, you need to buy a +2 increase to Analysis before you buy +3 and so on). Multiple increases in the same skill or characteristic may be bought after a single adventure or several different ones.

Characteristic	+1	+2	+3	+4	N/A
Cost	2	4	6	8	N/A
Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Cost	1	2	3	4	5

Referee Advice

This adventure should be approached in a more freeform manner than other episodes. Often, the question is not *if* the characters can overcome a problem, but *how* they choose to overcome it. They have access to immense resources and technology. The player characters are demi-gods, so focus on the impact of their decisions, not on the difficulty of accomplishing a task. There are gaps of hundreds or thousands of years between sections, so even if the players do something unexpected (*‘we blow up the planet and fly off to start our own stellar empire’*), there is plenty of scope for bringing the adventure back on track. (Alternatively, run with the players’ ideas; this adventure happens at two removes, as it takes place thousands of years ago and is only a simulation anyway, so there are no lasting consequences.)

Remember to let the players use Task Chains to bring disparate skills to bear on a problem. Let them invent their own technobabble and super-science – the Ancients possessed all sorts of technologies, and each Son went down his own path of development, leading to many different technological branches.

In short, you cannot get this wrong. Just throw situations at the players and see how they react. (For Referees chafing against the freeform structure of the last two sections, rest assured that the campaign will revert to a more traditional adventure layout soon.)

Grandfather's Secret

While the characters are experiencing the memories of Grandfather's former servants, events are transpiring in the present. The renegade Son, Seven, has broken through the outer layers of Grandfather's defences and is battling towards Grandfather himself. This is part of a trap laid by Grandfather – there are thousands of waves of defence drones and warships between Grandfather's space station, and the space station itself is a super-weapon designed to attack Seven's mind directly.

It is a trap – but it is also a gamble. Seven is (or was) a clone of Grandfather. It is just as intelligent and paranoid as he is (only it has transformed itself into a cybernetic monstrosity, a living warship). If Grandfather fails to destroy his wayward Son, it will kill him.

More precisely, it will kill this instance of Grandfather. He has cloning facilities hidden across the stars, which can produce replacement bodies, but he wants more than a backup version of himself. He wants continuity of consciousness. While the characters are reliving the memories, Grandfather is scanning their minds, evaluating their suitability as carriers for his majestic consciousness.

At the end of the scenario, the Referee must pick one of the characters to be Grandfather's host. Grandfather will choose the character who is most loyal to his ideals. In several of the episodes of this adventure, the loyalty of the characters to Grandfather is tested. Grandfather picks as his host the character who proves himself the most loyal, but also takes competence into account – if one player is consistently and completely loyal, but is also unable to cope with the cosmic scope of the adventure, then Grandfather will regretfully pick a second-choice candidate. The implications of being the host are explained in the next section of *Secrets of the Ancients*.

The Rise & Fall of the Ancients

This section of the campaign is broken in a series of episodes. In each episode, the characters are given a task by their superiors, and it is up to them how to accomplish it using the vast resources at their disposal. Tasks may take years or decades to accomplish, and thousands of years pass between episodes. Assume that in the periods between tasks, the living player characters are kept alive through bizarre Ancient technology (anagathics, cybernetics, cloned bodies, consciousness transfer, stasis fields and so on).

In each episode, an overview is given of the current state of the Ancient civilisation, including current events, technological developments and the primary concerns of the Ancient government.

EPISODE 1: CHARIOT OF THE GODS

Time Period: –310,000

Ancient Technology Level: 18–19 at the core; 16–17 at the fringe systems

All characters have personal fusion pistols; warships are using disintegrators as their primary weapon and are protected by black globes. Self-aware AIs are possible, but uncommon. Travel is via starship or shuttle; experiments in teleporter technology have begun, but currently teleportation is uniformly lethal to living creatures. Power is generated by microfusion power plants. Communication is still limited to slower-than-light mesons or jump-6 jump torpedoes.

Notable Recent Events:

- Creation of the Vargr.
- Clashes with an alien race, the Varsheen. The Varsheen are in full retreat; the Empire's fleets are occupying their outer colonies and planning an assault on the Varsheen homeworld.

The Krinyaoth

The characters' ship in this initial episode is the *Krinyaoth*, a transport similar to the Ancient derelict that they explored in Section 5. It is composed of an upper hull and drive section, mated to a collection of pods that can be swapped in and out to customise it for different missions, like a modular cutter.

Voyage to Earth

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

You are on board the Imperial starship Krinyaoth, en route to the human birthworld on the fringes of the Empire. You have been tasked by the High Council with a vital mission – you are to acquire a human tribe and transplant it to another world for future cultivation. The humans of the birthworld are still primitive hunter-gatherers. Other transplanted colonies have proved that the species is very amenable to upgrades and engineered evolution; if the random factors align, your transplanted tribe will be equally successful.

The Krinyaoth is a standard transport, with only moderate defensive weapons. You are unlikely to encounter hostile forces within Imperial space, but that may change as you get closer to the borderlands – the Varsheen Caliphate's fleet has been destroyed, but the renegade League of New Thought and hostile Thao might have ships in one of the systems between here and your destination.

The ship's internal factories can assemble more weapon pods, but that will consume resources. If you make more weapons, you will have less to work with when you reach the human birthworld.

Let the players argue over the best thing to do in this situation. The ship can build more disintegrators and hull armour from its internal stocks, but that means the characters will not have as many resources to work with on Earth.

A Difficult (–2) Analysis + Construction check lets the characters build weapons without significantly digging into their resource stocks, by building antimatter-warhead missiles instead of costly disintegrators. Alternatively, they can use a Difficult (–2) Co-ordination + Subterfuge check to find an unexpected route to Earth, refuelling at gas giants instead of starbases.

Intercepted

The Thao are a hostile species of gastropod-like (snail-like) creatures, who are at war with the Empire due to a recent border dispute. The Thao have only recently hit TL14; most of their ships are built at TL12–13 and are massively outclassed by the Droyne ships.

Unless the characters successfully plotted a safe route to Earth, the *Krinyaoth* encounters a Thao raider. The raider is bigger than the *Krinyaoth*, and more heavily armed. It resembles a snail-shell, all off-white curves and force-projector horns. The Thao hail the *Krinyaoth* and demand they surrender their internal factory-pods and feedstock. These internal factories are automated assemblers; the Thao do not have the technological know-how to reverse-engineer these pods, but covet them for their ability to produce high-tech goods.

Average (+0) Analysis + Fleet: The Thao ship is not a major threat to the *Krinyaoth*, but it could damage the ship.

Average (+0) Analysis + Economics: Giving a few factory-pods to the Thao would not significantly affect the relative strengths of the two species, and the *Krinyaoth* could build more pods. It would temporarily diminish the ship's capabilities, though.

Difficult (–2) Analysis + Subterfuge: Thao sensors cannot penetrate the hull of a Droyne ship; they do not know what is in any of the ship's pods.

Diplomacy: The characters can open negotiations with the Thao, either threatening them with the wrath of the Droyne empire, or trading with them.

Average (+0) Influence + Economics: Convincing the Thao to take a reduced number of factory pods, but promising no retaliation from the Droyne. Another, nastier option is to hand over a factory pod, but program it (Co-Ordination + Subterfuge) to construct combat drones or other lethal weapons to destroy the Thao ship from the inside.

Difficult (–2) Influence + Fleet: Intimidating the Thao into retreating

Combat: The *Krinyaoth* can fire up its short-range disintegrators, activate its flickering black globe shields and engage the Thao ship. Despite the *Krinyaoth*'s massive technological advance, the Thao ship's massive armament makes this close to a fair fight. The *Krinyaoth* will win the engagement; the character's skill check determines how much damage their ship incurs in the battle.

Average (+0) Warfare + Fleet: Escaping the Thao; the *Krinyaoth* jumps to safety, but the Thao raider survives.

Difficult (-2) Warfare + Fleet: Destroying the Thao ship before jumping out.

Destination: Earth

The Droyne have few outposts on Earth, but the planet is surrounded by a web of space stations and satellites. Yaskoydray has designated the native sophonts to be a species of special scientific interest, so the planet is closely guarded by automated defence stations and observatories.

The characters have been authorised to collect a tribe of some five hundred humans. Satellite tracking has them in a small icebound valley in what will be southern Germany. These are *homo neanderthalensis*, not modern *homo sapiens*. They are hunters and gatherers, using stone tools to bring down mammoths and other prey. Agriculture is still thousands of years in the future, and civilisation still more remote. The tribes migrate across the landscape in search of better hunting grounds. Their social organisation is rudimentary, with the best hunters having pride of place. They have a language of sorts, but describing complex concepts is almost impossible.

The tribe's leader is an elderly but still hale hunter whose name translates as 'Big Old Red'. Other notable power blocs within the tribe include a band of younger hunters led by 'Fast Boy', the best craftsman 'Stone Speaker' and the oldest female, 'Mother of Nine'.

Currently, the tribe is resident in a cave complex on a hillside. The caves offer excellent shelter, but hunting is growing scarce. Big Old Red wants to remain in the cave and see if spring brings better prospects, while Fast Boy wants the tribe to strike out south now, while they still have the strength to travel across the ice-clad mountains.

It is up to the characters how they want to approach the situation. The *Krinyaoth* can reconfigure itself to enter the atmosphere and land, or they can travel to the surface in shuttle-pods. The characters' instructions from the High Council state that the humans are not to be harmed and that they should be transplanted to their new world with as little trauma as possible. Let the players decide how best to:

- **Collect all five hundred humans in one place.** The tribe must be kept intact. Hunting parties come and go from the cave all the time, and the tribe is scattered over several kilometres of terrain. How do the character corral and gather the humans?
- **Get them on board the *Krinyaoth*.** The humans have not yet developed a concept of the supernatural – that comes with the development of settled culture and agriculture – but they are terrified of big, powerful things like starships and aliens. The characters need to either lure the humans on board or else take control of the tribe.
- **Keep the tribe alive during the year-long journey to their destination.** There is sufficient living space on board the *Krinyaoth* for the humans, and the ship can replicate food for them. Alternatively, the characters can put the humans into high-tech low berths for the duration of the voyage.

If the characters used resources en route to Earth, the Referee may restrict their options.

Once the humans are on board and properly restrained, the *Krinyaoth* departs for the region of space that will one day be the Trojan Reach.

The New World

The characters' designated target is a desert planet in the Trojan Reach, which will be called Cordillon (Sindal/0801) in the far future. Cordillon is a backwater, with few natural resources. Its atmosphere is thin but breathable, especially in the deep canyons left by dried-up seas. Cordillon has almost no water outside its ice caps. There is a native ecosystem, consisting of a species of lichen that evolved from seaweed and a few crab-like scavengers.

Cordillon: X443423–C

There is also a renegade Droyne colony on the planet – see *The Consensus*, below.

Cordillon will be terraformed within 30 years, but Yaskoydray wants the humans to learn to adapt to their new environment before altering it. How do the characters keep the tribe alive until then? Problems to overcome include:

- **Atmosphere:** The atmosphere of Cordillon is hard to breathe, except in the deep depressions. Do the characters keep the humans in the dry sea-beds and canyons, or do they provide them with air filters, atmosphere generators or engineer them to tolerate lower oxygen partial pressures so they have a larger range of habitats?

- **Lack of Water:** Cordillon has little surface water. The largest open body of water is near the Consensus colony. Do the characters drive the Droyne away, or pipe water from the polar ice caps, or provide some other source of moisture like air miners?
- **Food Sources:** The only food available on the surface is lichen and crab meat. Humans cannot normally digest elements of the Cordillon biosphere, but the characters could engineer intestinal bacteria to bridge the gap. Alternatively, they could seed a section of the planet with Earth life, or provide food in some other manner. How do they keep the humans from exhausting the food supply?
- **Curtailing Expansion:** Most of the planet is almost uninhabitable. How do the characters keep the humans from expanding?
- The percentage of Droyne who enter the Leader caste drops every generation. There are now less than one Leader for every 50,000 Droyne in the Empire. Among the Consensus, there is one Leader for every 500 other Droyne.
- The Empire no longer serves the best interests of the Droyne. Technology is robbing the Droyne of their heritage and culture; the influence of uplifted slave races is further diluting the species.
- Yaskoydray is a fictional figurehead, a 'Big Brother' invented by the High Council. The first Yaskoydray conveniently appeared during a period of upheaval and social conflict thousands of years ago, and now the Droyne government maintain this deception to preserve their own grip. Without the centralising influence of the Yaskoydray myth, the Droyne would naturally break down into smaller, more sustainable oynpriths like the Cordillon colony.

The Droyne Colony

There is a small oynprith of several thousand Droyne already resident on Cordillon. These are part of the Consensus, a Droyne social movement that argues for a return to traditional social organisation. They reject Yaskoydray's leadership, preferring their own Leader-castes. Each Consensus oynprith is an independent state, although they form a loose coalition with mutual-defence pacts and trade agreements. The Droyne Empire considers them a nuisance at best.

The Consensus also rejects Yaskoydray's technology; they are deliberately bringing down their technological base to the minimum 'socially cohesive level', although they have yet to agree on exactly what that entails. The Cordillon Consensus are at TL12.

The Cordillon Consensus have settled a small city on the shores of the planet's largest sea. Their city is an ideal location for the human colony, with fertile hunting grounds and a breathable, human-tolerable atmosphere.

Negotiating with the Colony

One of the Leader-caste Droyne, an elder specimen named Usstori, speaks for the colony. She is a quiet, earnest Droyne, and is eager to find a peaceful solution. She even tries to recruit the characters to the Consensus. She claims the facts below are true; an Analysis + Droyne Culture check finds some supporting evidence for some of her claims, as well as signs that the government has tried to erase or cover up these facts. (Admittedly, that could also be because the evidence was planted by Consensus sympathisers, and the government merely wishes to eliminate such lies.)

Assuming the characters reject Usstori's wild claims, they can deal with the issue of the colony. The Consensus argue that they can share the world without interfering with the human experiment. It is a big planet and the Droyne numbers grow slowly. Usstori offers to allocate up to 10% of the planet's surface as a human habitat, and promises her followers will not enter the human reserve. She refuses to permit the characters to establish a permanent observation post in the system – the Consensus will tolerate having a few monkeys living on the next continent over, but not the Empire's presence. They want to be left alone.

Ignoring the Consensus: The players will doubtless ask how important the Consensus are – can they just ignore the native Droyne? The answer is 'yes... but.' Individual Consensus groups are irrelevant; the characters could probably bomb the Consensus from orbit without incurring any problems. They are not citizens of the Droyne Empire, they are not part of Yaskoydray's domain. They do not matter.

That said, there are other Consensus groups out there. Thus far, the Empire has avoided entering into a confrontation with the Consensus, not because the Consensus is dangerous or powerful, but because they have enough to do fighting the League of New Thought and the alien races. Everyone knows that a reckoning with the Consensus is inevitable giving the Empire's expansionist, technocratic policies, but that reckoning could be centuries in the future. If the characters attack the Consensus on Cordillon, they are jump-starting a conflict that could otherwise be postponed.

Furthermore, there are other Consensus worlds nearby. They cannot hope to challenge the military might of the Empire, but the Consensus might retaliate against the human colony, forcing the characters to establish a permanent military presence here in the system.

The Negotiation: Either roleplay the negotiations, or else have the players roll Influence + Droyne Culture to determine what concessions they can extract from Usstori.

Effect	Negotiation Result
–6 or less	No humans may be settled on the planet.
–2 to –5	10% of the planet, and the Consensus demand control of the human colony.
–1	10% of the planet, but the characters can establish an observation post.
0	20% of the planet as a Human habitat
1–5	50% of the planet as a Human habitat
6+	The Consensus will depart peacefully

Moving the Colony

Another option is to force the colony to move. The characters can take a similar approach to the methods they used back on Earth, to round up the Droyne and bring them offworld. A few Warfare + Fleet or Warfare + Ground rolls may be required to blast the colony's defences into ash; let the players come up

with their own creative methods for undermining the colony.

Destroying the Colony

The literal nuclear option – wipe out the Consensus. Again, Warfare rolls are needed to determine how efficiently the characters deal with the renegade Droyne, but in this instance, they do not need to worry about casualties or collateral damage.

Failure is not an option

Unless the players deliberately choose to give up, they will succeed in establishing the human colony on Cordillon. The only question is how they decide to do this. This adventure focuses on methods, reasoning and moral choices, not the question of success or failure.

EPISODE 2: THE ART OF WAR

Time Period: –305,000

Ancient Technology Level: 19–21 at the core; 18–19 at the fringe systems

Personal disintegrators and force shields are common small-arms; ships are equipped with proton screens and long-range tractors as well as disintegrators; the new breed of warships have spine-mounted relativity beams that attack enemy ships in the past. Terraforming has advanced massively – Cordillon, for example, has been turned into something close to a garden world. Teleportation portals are not yet in common use, but every big ship and city has a few.

Notable Recent Events:

- Varsheen annihilated
- Consensus erased
- League of New Thought broken; the League worlds have been conquered by the Empire, but League sympathisers have gone underground to spread sedition
- The Empire has grown too large for the current centralised government to manage; even the establishment of a super-fast jump relay grid (comparable to the X-Boat network, but composed of millions of jump-capable microdrones) has failed to stem the tide.
- To compensate, Yaskoydray is rumoured to be working on a revolutionary new communications system.

The Characters: The characters are en route back to Cordillon, at the head of a Droyne fleet.

A Mission of Culture

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

In the 5,000 years since you established the human colony on Cordillon, they have thrived. Subsequent culture-engineering and covert uplift efforts have accelerated the progress of the humans; they are now at a roughly medieval level of development, with burgeoning psionic ability.

The High Council has determined that it is time to move onto the next phase of this experiment. The humans have been bred for creativity; you are to engineer their culture to produce artists, especially visual artists and sculptors. You are permitted to alter the humans on a social, psychological or even genetic level to achieve this result.

There are now some five million humans living on Cordillon. They are divided into several dozen petty queendoms and empires. Genetic tampering has brought out several traits, including a predilection for synesthesia and higher intelligence. Approximately 5% of the population are psionic; most psions are recruited into a cross-kingdom religious organisation that worships folk-memories of the player characters.

Notable power blocs and representative non player characters are:

- **Jol:** Located on the shores of the largest sea, with their capital on the site of the old Consensus colony, Jol is primarily a merchant power, but their navy gives them considerable military force.
 - △ The elderly queen of Jol, **Aja**, is senile and easily confused; she is a puppet of her advisors and the church.
 - △ Artistically, Jol is by far the most cosmopolitan of the kingdoms. Their culture is influenced by dozens of other nations.
 - △ **Suggested Encounters:** Aja mistakes the characters for emissaries from a distant kingdom; her advisers jostle for position by offering favours to the Player Characters, and end up tearing the kingdom apart; bands of rival artists stalk the boardwalks of Jol by night, fighting for the characters' attention in bloody rapier duels.
- **Perid:** Expansionist Perid is a loose coalition of hill tribes and mercenary bands who have conquered several small kingdoms in recent years.
 - △ The queen of Perid is a shield-maiden named **Laja**. She is a powerful telekinetic witch who escaped a church-run nunnery as a young girl. She despises the church and has banned the organisation within her kingdom; she still respects and honours the sky-gods, but considers the religious structure to be hopelessly corrupt.
 - △ Peridian culture is dismissed by the other kingdoms as barbaric, but they are easily the most vibrant, energetic and neophilic of the cultures.
 - △ **Suggested Encounters:** Laja assumes the characters are here to endorse her crusade against the church; Perid invades Dunsan and wants the characters' aid; the artists of Perid are called upon to make weapons instead of art for the war.
- **Dunsan:** Old Dunsan is the largest and best-established kingdom on Cordillon. However, it is in decline; the army is now in control of the crown and the kingdom is riddled with internal divisions, dissent and economic problems.
 - △ The queen of Dunsan is **Hilae**, an ambitious woman from one of the older noble houses. She is trying to wrest control of the crown back from the armies by playing generals off against each other.
 - △ Dunsan is also the seat of the church.
 - △ Dunsan is the most stable and powerful of the kingdoms; their culture is increasingly degenerate and concerned with worship of the past, but any cultural movements not endorsed by the Dunsanians will have trouble finding traction elsewhere

- △ **Suggested Encounters:** Hilae tries to convince the characters to provide for the defence of her nation against Perid, so she can strip her generals of their armies; the Dunsanian nobility reject any calls for new art and just want copies of their ancestors' works; corrupt clergymen offer banned, confiscated art from the church vaults to the characters, claiming these are new pieces, and this causes conflict with the church.
- **Thalio:** The isolated but powerful kingdom of Thalio has an extremely complex, ritualised culture centred around martial arts and poetry. They have the highest proportion of psions.
 - △ Unlike the other kingdoms, Thalio is not a matriarchy; it is ruled by a **Sacred Master**, who always goes masked. This sacred master is actually a Droyne – a Droyne shuttle crashed in Thalio centuries ago, and the inbred descendants of the survivors are worshipped as gods here.
 - △ The Sacred Master's vizier is a man named **Idec**, a sneering eunuch.
 - △ The church has a few missions in Thalio's ports, but has almost no political influence.
 - △ Artistically, Thalio is the most advanced and erudite culture, but their art is heavily bound up in their ritual behaviour. Convincing them to develop new styles may be difficult.
 - △ **Suggested Encounters:** Thalio monks mistake the characters for escaped kin of the Sacred Master and try kidnapping the Droyne Player Characters; Idec leads a revolt against the characters; the church asks the characters to help expand its influence in Thalio in exchange for support
- **The Church of the Sky Gods:** The psion-dominated Church has branches in almost every kingdom.
 - △ The head of the church is the **Speaker for the Sky**, a male psion named **Yerak**. He is a fervent believer in the sky gods, and believes that the barbarians of Perid must be wiped out in a holy crusade.
 - △ The church has sponsored art in the past, mostly depictions of the sky gods. The church controls many artists, but they produce little innovative work.
 - △ **Suggested Encounters:** Church telepaths read the characters' minds and learn their true origins; the characters' presence causes a schism and the establishment of an anti-Speaker; all the art depicts the characters themselves.

Making Art: Ask the players how they intend to convert the disparate warring kingdoms into an artistic colony. They can intervene directly (beaming down into the capital of Dunsan, disintegrating a convenient mountain and shouting 'make art... or else!') or indirectly (breeding more artistic humans, subliminal messaging, disguising themselves as artistic patrons, taking over the church).

Likely skill checks:

- **Sponsoring artistic movements:** Co-Ordination + Primitive Cultures
- **Introducing new cultural elements:** Influence + Primitive Cultures
- **Subliminal Messaging:** Influence + Subterfuge
- **Analysing art:** Analysis + Primitive Cultures
- **Taking over the economy of a kingdom:** Influence + Economics

Remember the characters have enough personal, psionic, technological and economic power to appear as gods to these primitives. Their presence deforms the culture.

Artistic Endeavour: Once the characters have decided on their method for producing a culture of artists, skip ahead 10 years. How have the characters' plans worked? Is Cordillon a beacon of art and beauty, or have they warped this primitive society to the breaking point?

Death Machines

These invaders are a hostile machine race, a hegemonising swarm designed to wipe out spacefaring cultures that could be a threat to their long-dead makers. A Droyne exploratory voyage into the core drew their attention, and now their scouts have reached Droyne space. The invaders have no name for themselves; the Droyne empire term them *dyapyuse*, Death Machines.

Their ships are fractal, resembling metallic snowflakes. Their communication system is a technological form of telepathy; psionic characters find the presence of the *dyapyuse* unpleasant and discordant.

The *Dyapyuse* are self-replicating spacecraft and drones. When they enter a system, they launch probes towards any likely worlds. They then either attack or fall back and replicate more of their kind by mining asteroids. They have no interest in civilisations below TL7 – they only wipe out jump-capable races. When they need to interact with organic creatures, they capture 'samples' and turn them into cyborgs.

Invaders

Read or summarise the following to the players.

A decade has passed since you began to influence the culture of the human colony. You have all been assigned as overseers and observers, cataloguing the effects of your intervention. The fleet you arrived with has moved on; your in-system assets are limited to a dozen small system defence boats, your personal ships – each of you has or is a jump-capable frigate or yacht – and an orbiting starbase.

You are alerted by the automated sensor grid – multiple contacts have just jumped in-system. They have arrived within the orbit of the system's gas giant; estimated time to Cordillon is less than a week. They do not match any known configuration.

What do you do?

- **Scan the invaders:**

- Δ *Analysis + Fleet:* The invaders are not of any known design, but they appear to be extremely well-armed. Their weapons are on a par with those of Droyne ships of the line. Against a Droyne fleet, it would be an even fight. Against the characters' mediocre defences, it will be a slaughter.
- Δ *Analysis + Construction:* These invaders are robots, not starships. They have no crew, but are operated by artificial intelligences. They are obviously capable of building more of themselves.
- Δ *Analysis + Synthetic Culture:* A hegemonising swarm like this cannot be reasoned with or negotiated with; they are locked into their programming.

- **Negotiate:** This is futile; the invaders do not respond to radio signals or meson bursts at all.
- **System Defence Boats:** If the characters dispatch the SDBs to investigate or attack the alien ships, roll Warfare + Fleet. Regardless of the result, the SDBs are wiped out; however, if the check is successful, the characters gather useful information about the capabilities of the invaders. Their ships are more manoeuvrable than the Droyne ships, but they do not possess shields; instead, their hulls are studded with individual black globe cells that are switched on and off. It should be possible to attack such a ship by overloading a cell and then concentrating fire on that weak point.

- **Flee the system:** The characters can jump out to the nearest Droyne stronghold, a space station called Oynmoyeroub some five parsecs coreward. Doing so

means they run into the Droyne space fleet in *Rescue* (see page 11).

Shortly after the invaders arrive, a message courier pod arrives in-system and sends a meson transmission to the characters. It informs them that a new and hostile species has been encountered. They have attacked several Droyne colonies, but skipped worlds inhabited by primitive transplanted Human or Vargr colonies. Yaskoydray has dispatched a task force to deal with the crisis. The characters are under instructions to hold out for as long as possible and to gather information about the invaders.

The Occupation

The invader forces rapidly identify and destroy the obvious signs of Droyne presence, blasting satellites and small craft into dust. If the characters remain on the starbase, they will be killed (and restored from personality backups during *The Rescue*.) Their best tactic is to flee to the surface and hide amid the Humans (AI characters can transfer their core programs to ship-board computer cores, bury the ships on the surface, and interact via drones or remote-control clone bodies).

Once the Dyapyuse are secure in the system, they turn their attention to the sophont population. Dyapyuse ships plunge through the atmosphere and begin extracting metal from the mountains to build more ships.

The Dyapyuse have no individuality and no culture, but are intelligent enough to realise that there may be Droyne among the Humans. Their first action is to capture a few random humans and dissect their brains to learn the local language and culture. They then abduct more humans and turn them into cyborgs to serve as emissaries.

These cyborgs are clad in a black techno-organic webbing covering the entire body. This substance can be reshaped to form weapons or tools, or to cover the organic components as armour. The cyborgs can also withdraw their webbing into cavities within the body to pass for unaugmented humans.

They offer gifts such as gold (atomic transmutation powered by antimatter fuel cells means the robots can easily turn lead into gold), magic swords (nanotubes woven into conventional steel), curealls and other high-technology products presented in a manner comprehensible to the quasi-medieval Humans. In exchange, they want the Humans to hand over any Droyne for termination.

Evading the Machines: The characters' chances of evading the cyborgs depends on the changes wrought by the characters earlier, and on their contacts and allies among the Humans. If they acted as autocrats, they will rapidly be betrayed by the Humans. If they cultivated friends, then they can hide out until help arrives.

The cyborg agents of the invaders search for the Droyne by looking for signs of high technology, such as electromagnetic emissions, gadgets, power sources, jump tachyon bursts, meson emitters and unusual events. Ask the players how they intend to hide, and how they intend to spy on the invaders. The bigger the risks they take, the more data they can gather, but the greater the risk they incur.

Notably, the characters all have personal force shields that block many forms of attack. See the sidebar.

Call for Coordination + Subterfuge rolls (difficulty depends on the precautions taken by the characters) whenever the players act. If the check fails, the cyborgs detect the characters' presence and start to home in on them. The first failed check means that a cyborg arrives in the nearest city; two failed checks mean the cyborgs start house-to-house searches; three failed checks draw robot assassins on the characters.

Character Action	Subterfuge DM
Leaving personal shields active	–2
Using transport beyond TL4	–2
Space travel	–4
Radio emissions	–1
Meson bursts	–2
Using a TL4+ power source openly	–1
Using a TL16+ power source openly	–2
Attracting attention of locals	–2
Hiding in a highly populated area	+2
Local support & allies	+2
Using natural phenomenon to conceal activity (volcanic or geomagnetic stress and so on)	+1

Play up the contrast between the super-high-technology of the combatants, and their primitive surroundings. If the characters are masquerading as alien gods of war and leading charges of mounted medieval knights against cyborg death machines, you are in the right frame of mind.

Collecting Data: If the characters can gather intelligence about the invaders, they will be able to aid the eventual Droyne rescue operation. Each piece of data lists a DM that applies in the coming battle.

- **Discovering that the Dyabyuse have no interest in destroying primitive cultures, but are focussed on wiping out the Droyne:** Analysis+Synthetic Cultures, Difficult (–2). +1DM if successful.
- **Discovering that the Dyabyuse communicate through telepathy and that powerful psions can perceive but not understand their transmissions:** Analysis+Psionic Engineering, Difficult (–2), +1DM if successful.

Cyborg Assassins

Analysis 8 (+0)
Influence 4 (–1)

Co-Ordination 10 (+1)
Warfare 10 (+1)

Primitive Culture 2
Fleet 1
Ground 3
Subterfuge 1
Uplift Engineering 2

They are equipped with disintegrator wands. At this level of technology, personal weapons and defensive systems are immensely powerful. Anyone caught without a personal shield is instantly crippled or killed by a disintegrator blast. The cyborgs have slightly weaker personal shields that are pierced on a 4– instead of 2–.

Personal Shields

All the player characters in this era have personal shields. If an active shield is hit with a laser, plasma, fusion, meson or disintegrator burst, roll 2d6; on a 3+, the shield absorbs the attack completely. On a 2–, the wearer is knocked unconscious or killed. Each successive attack gives a –1DM to the shield roll; the shield recharges at the rate of +1DM every fifteen minutes. A character can force a recharge with a successful Co-Ordination + Logistics roll; add the character's Effect to the shield's DM. More powerful shields start with a positive DM.

When a personal shield is active, it can easily be detected by those with sufficiently advanced sensors.

- **Using a powerful telepath to attack the Dyabyuse:** Co-Ordination + Psionic Engineering, Very Difficult (–4), +2 DM if successful.
- **Capturing and dissecting a cyborg:** Capturing the creature could use a variety of methods (Coordination + Subterfuge for a trap; Influence + Primitive Cultures to convince an army of Humans to rise up and attack the machine and so forth); Analysis + Synthetic Cultures to analyse the cyborg. +1DM if successful.
- **Disabling and examining a Dyabyuse ship** (difficult, for an active ship, but the characters could discover the aliens are building more of their kind, and sneak into a Dyabyuse 'nursery'): Sneaking in requires Coordination + Subterfuge; examining the ship is Analysis + Fleet. +4DM if successful.

The Rescue

Several weeks after the invasion begins, the Droyne launch their counter-attack. Read or summarise the following.

You all feel the curious sensation of a telepathic contact drift across the surface of your mind. It is unfamiliar to you, but oddly inspiring and comforting... paternal, perhaps, even for those of you with no such frame of reference. The contact grows stronger, and then a figure teleports in using a psionic power.

It is a Droyne, but not a caste you have ever seen before. He exudes power, authority, intelligence... divinity. At first, you can only assume that this is Yaskoydray himself, but the Droyne detects this fleeting thought and cocks his head. NO, he signals, I AM ONE SEVEN FOUR. YOU WILL ACCOMPANY ME AND AID ME.

The Droyne unclips a silver disc from his belt and throws it into the air. The disc expands into a free-floating teleport portal. He gestures to it. PLEASE.

The portal leads to the bridge of a Droyne warship; a brand-new design. The bridge is like a huge stadium, with plenty of open air for flying. The crew perch at control plinths on the walls, and interface telepathically with the controls to join a fast-thinking psionic collective. AI characters can also integrate with this collective, but Human and Vargr are excluded.

This ship is vastly more advanced than other Droyne ships the characters have travelled on. Among other innovations, it has a prototype ansible – a faster-than-light communication system. This ansible works on a higher level of jumpspace than the one accessible using conventional jump drives, allowing messages to be transmitted over tens of parsecs instantaneously.

One-Seven-Four: One Seven Four is a clone of Yaskoydray, one of the four hundred Sons. He is physically and mentally identical to Grandfather, and has the same incredible abilities. His intellect dwarfs that of any of the player characters, even the AIs. He is naturally immortal, and his psionic abilities are immensely potent. Play him as a young and proud god.

The only way One Seven Four differs from Yaskoydray is in his psychology. The two had identical personalities when first created, but are now diverging as they have different experiences and occupy different places with Droyne society.

One Seven Four questions the characters, demanding to know what they learned about the invaders. He informs them the

machines also attacked dozens of other systems, and appear to have come from a region near the core. One Seven Four's task force is part of a massive multi-system counterattack, overseen by the Sons and co-ordinated perfectly using the ansibles.

The Battle of Cordillon: The characters are each given command of a smaller warship as part of the task force. The Droyne ships are outnumbered, but in terms of firepower the two sides are roughly matched, and the Droyne have two advantages. Firstly, they are commanded by a tactical supergenius. Secondly, they have the intelligence gathered by the player characters.

Have the character with the highest Warfare + Fleet make a Very Difficult (–4) skill check. Other characters may assist as part of a Task Chain. Also add any DMs accumulated by the characters while hiding on Cordillon.

Effect	Outcome of the Battle
–6 or less	Rout. Most of the Droyne ships are destroyed, including those of the player characters. They are restored later from personality backups.
–2 to –5	A bloody draw. Neither side can claim victory. The Droyne retreat and return with reinforcements, but by then, the Dyabyuse have converted a whole planet into a warship swarm. The second battle is won by the Droyne, but is even more devastating.
–1	Pyrrhic victory. The Droyne win, but suffer hideous losses. 1D6 Player Character ships are lost.
0	Victory! One Player Character ship is destroyed.
1–5	Victory! Thanks to the Player Characters' information, 174 is able to outwit the enemy and trick them into an englobement allowing many Droyne ships to concentrate fire on the robots' weak points.
6+	Total victory! 174 develops a new superweapon on the spot that attacks the minds of the Dyabyuse directly; it wipes out their entire fleet.

After the battle, the war continues. The Droyne Empire and the Dyabyuse clash for another hundred years, until the last of the swarm is destroyed.

EPISODE 3: SHADOW OF THE SUN

Time Period: –302,000

Ancient Technology Level: 26+ at the core; 23–24 at the fringe systems

At this level of technology, teleportation portals are ubiquitous. Whole planetary systems can be crossed with a single footstep. While some ships still have their own jump drives, it is more common to use interstellar gates to travel from system to system. The ansible network links the entire Ancient civilisation together.

Notable Recent Events:

- The arrival of the Sons has transformed the Empire. Now, there are several hundred districts, each commanded by a Son, each mimicking the structure of the old centralised government.
- Technological progress has increased in speed, but each Son is following his own line of inquiry. Debates on how to integrate the various technologies from the different districts are ongoing, but hampered by the fact that only the Sons understand many aspects of the new technology.
- Cordillon has fulfilled its potential – thanks to ongoing manipulation of the culture, psychology and genetics of the inhabitants, it is now a world of brilliant artists. The planet has been allowed to advance to TL8. A flying Droyne city, Thuat, now hangs in the skies above. This city is the site of a grand celebration of the arts.
- One Seven Four has established a research station close to the system's star. This base is called Ei'a; the characters have all visited it several times.

Furthermore, characters who have invested in Cultures know some secrets...

Droyne Culture 4+: There are growing differences between Yaskoydray and the Sons. The High Council of Leader – an increasingly moribund political body – has called for the Sons to use the ansible network to improve cohesiveness across the Empire.

Primitive Culture 4+: The Sons have mostly abandoned Yaskoydray's uplift experiments as a dead end. Human and Vargr worlds are being ignored and left to decay.

Synthetic Culture 4+: There are traces on the data networks; rumours that the old League of New Thought is still extant, although it could be a cover for the Sons who oppose Yaskoydray.

The Grand Unveiling

Read or summarise the following to the players:

Three thousand years have passed since the victory over the alien invaders. Cordillon is now a world of culture and art, and

today marks a grand festival to celebrate the continued rise of the Droyne civilisation. Hundreds of ships have come through the interstellar portal from the core worlds; everywhere you look, you see teleportals opening to disgorge Droyne, AI drones and other telepresences, as well as servant robots and uplifted pets. There is a carnival air to the whole world – and you are all at the centre of it. This festival acknowledges your contribution to the development of Cordillon.

The one guest who should be here but is conspicuously absent is One Seven Four. The Son could step through a portal at any moment, but his absence is remarked on by other delegates.

Ask the players how their characters are participating in the festival. How do they put the other delegates at their ease, what wonderful types of art have their protégés created, how are they putting this galactic attention to good use?

Strange Visitors: Call for Analysis + Synthetic Culture checks. The character who gets the best Effect notices something unusual.

Everyone and everything in the Empire has a data halo, an aura of associated information, software agents and authorisations. Whenever one Droyne looks at another, he sees not only the other's physical appearance, but also the public aspects of the other's data halo. In a crowd like this, the sheer informational density is staggering.

A moment ago, yet another teleportal opened and a trio of Droyne stepped out. This, in itself, is not at all unusual – there are so many teleportals in this area that reality looks like Swiss cheese – but for an instant, the three Droyne had no data haloes. A microsecond later, haloes popped up around them. It could just be a glitch, and most software would not even have noticed it, but the character's systems are military-grade.

The only people without haloes are those from *outside* the Empire. Those three could be intruders from outside the Empire. There are rumours of renegade Droyne colonies, even the long-vanished League of New Thought, who oppose Yaskoydray – if so, what are they doing here?

The trio are indeed renegades from outside the Empire. If the characters just observe the visitors, they do nothing untoward – yet. If the Player Characters confront them, then run *Genetic Intrigue* (page 15) early.

One Seven Four

Meanwhile, pick the character or characters with the highest Droyne Culture skill. They are contacted over the ansible network by an AI, Arbiter Gamma-533-Rho, an assistant to another Son, Thirty-Two. The AI's master wishes to speak to them privately. The characters can erect an impenetrable force

screen around themselves, or withdraw to one of the meeting rooms, or fork off subsidiary consciousnesses to deal with the matter.

Thirty-Two presents by hologram (and in this era, holograms are utterly indistinguishable from reality). He looks very similar to One-Seven-Four, but has transplanted Vargr fangs and wears armour that resembles Vargr garb. A pair of slaving honour guards flank the hologram. Thirty-Two imperiously demands to know why One Seven Four is refusing to answer ansible messages. The FTL communicator on Ei'a Station is offline – the Son instructs the characters to contact the station using local channels and find out what is going on.

Contacting Ei'a: If the characters contact the station, they are initially rebuffed by One Seven Four's robot aides. Persevering (and making a Routine (+2) Influence + Culture or Influence + Subterfuge check), the characters can force the machines to route the message through to the Son.

One Seven Four is just as brusque and dismissive as his sibling. The Son is angered by the player characters' interrupting his 'vital work'. He is about to conduct a complex experiment, and does not wish to be disturbed. If the characters mention that they were asked to speak to him by Thirty-Two, then One Seven Four immediately becomes paranoid. The characters can clearly see him contemplate his position on some unimaginable complicated web of intrigue and shifting loyalties, before he snaps *'Your motivation is irrelevant. My experiments in stellar gravity are far too important to be disturbed by the prattle of lesser beings.'* The connection is cancelled.

Maghiz!

On Cordillon, celebrations continue. Droyne from all over the Empire praise the artistic works. Flights of Droyne circle in the skies over the shining city; more teleportals open to gate in flying cities and starships, who disgorge yet more celebrants.

With a terrifying abruptness, all the teleportals slam shut – including the orbital interstellar gate. One ship was half-way out of a portal above the city when the portal closed; the surviving half plummets into the harbour, causing a catastrophic tidal wave. Escape pods and individual Droyne flyers flee the wreck in terror; others trapped aboard simply commit suicide, relying on their backups to resurrect them once the crisis is resolved.

Power distribution fails all over the city – the primary method for moving both matter and energy uses teleportals, and while there are backup systems, they take an instant to recover.

A Routine (+2) Analysis+Space Engineering check lets the character work out that jump space must have somehow been warped or damaged by a massive tachyon burst. Teleportals should be usable again once the burst disperses enough for

the fragile wormholes to reform. The ansible network is also disrupted and offline.

Four minutes after the teleportals collapse, everyone on the dayside of the planet feels strangely warm for a moment, then intensely ill. They have all been bombarded with an intense dose of gamma rays and x-rays. The dosage was thousands of times greater than lethal – every living thing on this side of the planet is now dying. Als and robots are mostly immune; the player characters all have personality backups and can be restored after their current bodies perish, but many of the Droyne are too low-caste to have backup technology, and all the humans on the planet are doomed.

The sun overhead is changing. Even with the naked eye, it is possible to see the light grow more intense, to see the colour redden and to make out huge sunspots. Any characters with Space Engineering can see that a huge solar flare is erupting from the sun. The radiation and heat from the flare will devastate the portions of the planet left untouched by the initial gamma ray burst.

This is obviously not a natural event. The star was altered, and there is one obvious candidate – One Seven Four.

Investigating the Teleportals: Analysis + Space Engineering lets the characters investigate the state of the teleportals. The tachyon interference has subsided slightly, but it is still much too intense to allow the portal network to re-establish itself. The portals are offline indefinitely until the source of the interference is extinguished.

The ansible network is also crippled, but there is a single surviving channel – a military ansible is still functioning. The connection is extremely weak and may collapse if used. The characters can send one message over the FTL link.

Preserving Cordillon

Half the planet is dead already, even if the humans do not all know it yet. The nightside of the planet was mostly spared the effects of the gamma rays, so there are still several million survivors there. They will be killed by the solar flares unless the characters act to protect them.

Calling for Aid: The characters can use that one military ansible or a jump drone to call for aid. Without the portal network, though, they have to rely on jump-capable ships, and there are few of those left. Just evacuating the Droyne will take weeks; saving the humans might take months. If the characters could remove the source of the interference, they could use the portals instead.

Evacuation: There are very few jump-capable ships on Cordillon. A character can use Coordination + Logistics to

maximise the number of people rescued from the doomed world. Ask the player what sort of refugees he favours – Droyne only, Humans only, the best artists, the youngest, the healthiest, copies of mindstates and genetic samples only?

Building Shelters: Coordination + Construction lets the character assemble shelters for the Human population. If the character succeeds with an Effect of 6 or more, he can build enough shelters for everyone before the flare hits. Otherwise, he must choose who to exclude from the shelter.

Contacting One Seven Four: If the characters contact the station, they are answered by the Son's robot aides. They inform the characters that an experiment is underway and that they made experience some 'mild side effects'. If the characters demand to speak to One Seven Four, the Son grudgingly gives them thirty seconds of an audience. He acknowledges that his experiment may have caused some disruption, but nothing of importance was damaged. Pointing out that he has killed millions and destroyed an entire civilisation is useless; he insists that nothing of importance was damaged, because *he and his experiments are the only things of importance in the system*.

Attacking One Seven Four: The characters can try launching an attack on Ei'a station. Analysis + Warfare suggests that this is problematic; the station is a fortress, the characters have few warships, and the solar flare activity makes everything more dangerous. It is possible that One Seven Four could even use the flares as a weapon. He certainly seems able to direct them more-or-less at will.

If the characters follow through on the attack, call for Formidable (–6) Warfare + Fleet checks to overcome One Seven Four's defences. If the characters are successful, they are able to damage the station enough to shut down the tachyon emitters and reopen the portals. One Seven Four escapes through his own (shielded) portal if the battle goes against him. If the characters fail, they are wiped out – skip onto *Grandfather's Solution*.

Genetic Intrigue

In the chaos after the flare, the characters are approached by the trio of mysterious Droyne who arrived without data haloes. They introduce themselves as members of the renegade League of New Thought. They claim to have stolen genetic secrets of the Droyne High Council. According to these records, the first Yaskoydray was an ordinary Droyne who united the *oynpriiths* and founded the council. To keep the fragile Empire together, the Council perpetrated the myth of an immortal, super-genius messianic leader for thousands of years. The Droyne conducted secret experiments in intelligence enhancement and psionic triggering, and actually managed to create a super-Droyne to serve as their figurehead. When the empire grew too large to manage, they created more super-Droynes – the so-called 'Sons' – using the same formula.

The League of New Thought managed to acquire this enhancement formula, but need a genetic laboratory to replicate it. They are wanted criminals in the Empire, and were trying to lose their pursuers in the crowds of Cordillon when the current crisis erupted. They offer the Player Characters a deal – if the characters give them access to a laboratory and the necessary resources, they can enhance one of the Droyne player characters, making him the intellectual and psionic equal of Yaskoydray.

Uplift: If the characters accept this offer, they need to make a Formidable (–6) Coordination + Uplift check. If successful, the designated Droyne may add the Effect of the check to *all* his Characteristics and Skills. With this godlike intellect, he can understand the technology employed by One Seven Four and devise a method of tachyonic shielding to reopen the portals and save the day, then quell the star using One Seven Four's own technology.

Death on Cordillon

If the characters fail to stop One Seven Four, either by military means, uplifting or some other method, then you should still run Episode 4, but present it as a dreamlike hallucination as the simulation breaks down, instead of memories of events that actually happened in the twilight of the Ancients.

EPISODE 4:

GRANDFATHER'S SOLUTION

Time Period: –301,199

Ancient Technology Level: 27+ at the core; 10–24 in the fringe systems as isolated colonies fall into decay and lose technology

Months after the destruction of Cordillon, the characters are contacted covertly by agents of Yaskoydray himself. They are brought through a series of portals to a secret location far across the Droyne Empire, where Grandfather himself awaits them. He resembles his Sons, but is much, much older despite his supposed immortality.

Grandfather explains that his Sons are a failed experiment. He created them to oversee the Droyne Empire, to shepherd it as he guided it for so long, so that he could concentrate on his science. He knows now that what the Sons lack is *wisdom* – he acquired it over the last 40,000 years, but his Sons were brand new when he loosed them on the universe.

He believes his only option is to wipe out the Sons, but fears that the ensuing war will destroy the Droyne Empire. Is the potential loss of all the Droyne have created worth the threat of four hundred mad geniuses running amok across the galaxy? He asks the characters for their advice.

This is the final test of the characters' loyalty to Grandfather. Giving him a pleasing, loyal answer like 'he can always rebuild' or 'the Droyne created nothing without him' or 'the races he

uplifted will inherit the galaxy' pleases him, and he will entrust his consciousness to the most competent of those player characters when the time comes. Arguing that Grandfather is equally at fault for creating the Sons, or that there are options other than annihilation is the wrong answer.

Back to Reality

Once Grandfather has made his choice, the player characters find themselves back on the space station in the pocket universe. SEVEN's mighty robotic form fills the horizon; Grandfather's space-bourne weapon is dwarfed by the nightmare machine.

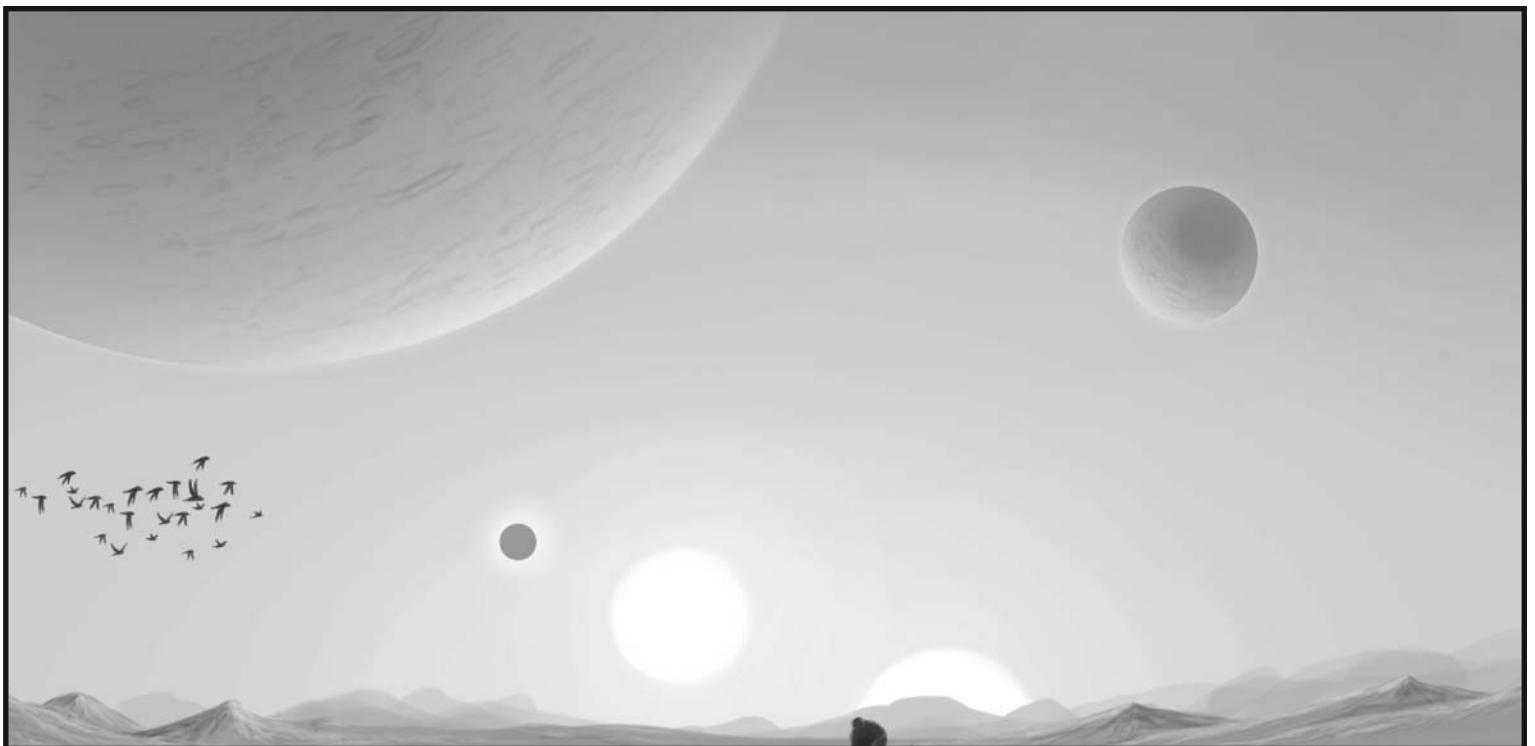
'Another one down' says Grandfather in Galanglic. The old Droyne grins and pulls the trigger of his super-weapon...

PREGENERATED CHARACTERS

The six characters below are memory-patterns based on Grandfather's former servants. The Player Characters do not know if they are experiencing the memories directly, or if they are in a virtual-reality simulation created from those memories. If you have fewer than six players, then drop the excess characters in the following order:

- The Custodian
- Gvorr
- Urd

If you have *more* than six players, then add extra copies of the Custodian.



EMYAKOY

Human Naval Officer

Grandfather transplanted your ancestors to Homeworld centuries ago. Your kinfolk remain there, sheltered and watched over by machines of loving grace, but you were chosen by the elders to join their fleet as a Human observer. The elder are Grandfather's own race; you were engineered and augmented to improve your cognition, but you are still treated as a lesser being, a child. They see you as a Human, not as an equal.

Admittedly, you know little of the greater galaxy. You have been taught that Grandfather is the leader of the elders, and that his wisdom guides the whole empire, but since you joined the fleet, you have begun to suspect that there are divisions within the elders. Perhaps you can prove that they need the vitality and the different perspective offered by Humaniti.

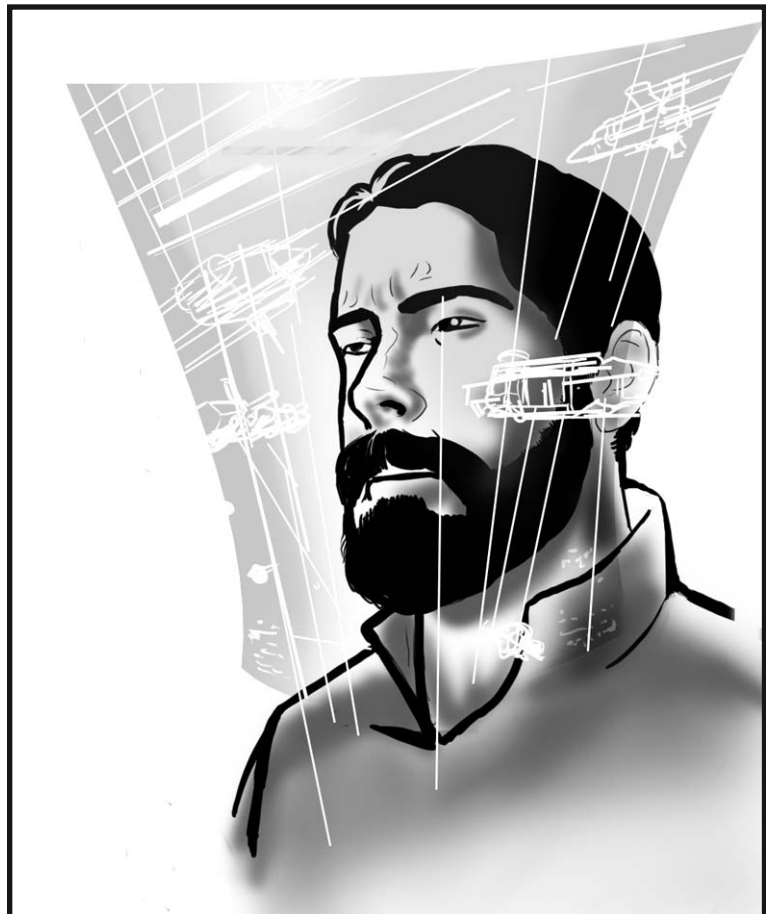
You are among the first Humans to be permitted to leave the garden worlds and travel the stars - You will prove your species can be just as mature and intelligent as the elders. Grandfather chose your species; he must see great potential in you.

Character Notes: In thousands of years time, Emyakoy's people will become the Darrians. Physically, you are human with cybernetic upgrades.

Analysis: 8 (+0)
Influence: (-1)

Co-Ordination: 8 (+1)
Warfare: 6 (+0)

Construction: 0
Droyne Cultures: 1
Economics: 1
Fleet: 1
Uplift Engineering: 2
Geo-Engineering: 1
Ground Forces: 1
Logistics: 1
Primitive Cultures: 2
Psionic Engineering: 1
Space Engineering: 0
Subterfuge: 1
Synthetic Cultures: 0



URD

Human Chieftain

It is difficult to think. Your life has changed so much. Once, you were the chieftain of a tribe. Then, the sky-gods came and took you into the clouds. <PRIMITIVE HOMINID LEADER – SUITABLE FOR DIRECT AUGMENTATION AS DIRECTED BY YASKOYDRAY>. They put things in your head to make you smarter, faster, better. <BASIC THOUGHT PATTERNS LEFT INTACT, BUT MENTAL CAPACITY AND PROCESSING SPEED INCREASED. PSIONIC ABILITY INTRODUCED. BASIC DATABASE DOWNLOADED INTO SUBJECT'S MEMORY>. They brought you to the stars to help them understand your people. <EXISTING HUMAN SUBJECTS BORN INTO CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT; THEIR BEHAVIOUR AND COGNITION HAVE BEEN WARPED BY THEIR ARTIFICIAL ENVIRONMENT. THESIS: DIRECT AUGMENTATION OF BASELINE HUMAN WILL PROVIDE VALUABLE INSIGHT INTO PRIMITIVE PSYCHE; TEMPLATE FOR FUTURE UPLIFT>.

There are many strange gods here – winged demons <STANDARD DROYNE> and thinking machines <ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES> and even other humans <TRANSPLANTED HUMANS FROM EARLIER PHASES OF THE EXPERIMENT>, all much wiser and older than you are – but you are Urd. You were a chieftain on the plains of your home, and you will rule the stars!

Character Notes: You are a stone age Human. The Droyne uplifted you to be a part of their empire, but your basic thought patterns and instincts are still primitive and feral. You dress in a bizarre combination of animal skins, stone tools and high-tech gadgetry and cybernetics. You have got a Droyne-built AI adviser program in your skull.

Analysis: 4 (-2)

Influence: 9 (+1)

Co-Ordination: 6 (+0)

Warfare: 9 (+1)

Construction: 0

Droyne Cultures: 0

Economics: 1

Fleet: 1

Uplift Engineering: 1

Geo-Engineering: 2

Ground Forces: 2

Logistics: 1

Primitive Cultures: 2

Psionic Engineering: 0

Space Engineering: 0

Subterfuge: 1

Synthetic Cultures: 1



Gvorr
First-Generation Vargr

You were born in a laboratory, decanted from the metal womb. You suckled from the teats of a wolf, but you are not a wolf. You are Vargr, one of the first litter of your race. In the laboratory, you saw many others like you; failed experiments and prototypes, but you and your siblings are a success. You walk on your hind legs, you speak, you reason, you use tools. You learn, hunting knowledge with the same instincts a wolf uses to hunt prey. You are the coming race. Grandfather made you, chose you. You are his heirs.

There are other races in his empire. The Droyne, his blood kin. The machines. Humaniti, the other species he took from Earth, weak and slow in comparison to you. All of these are failures, just like the shambling, mewling proto-Vargr in the lab. Your race is destined to eclipse all of them. Survival of the fittest – this is the law of the galaxy. You will prove to Grandfather that he needs no servants other than the Vargr!

Character Notes: You are one of the first Vargr, although you are closer to the hyper-aggressive, hyper-intelligent Hunter breed than the common Vargr that exist in the present day of the Spinward Marches. You are proud of your status as Grandfather's chosen servants.

Analysis: 8 (+1)
Influence: 5 (-1)

Co-Ordination: 7 (+0)
Warfare: 8 (+1)

Construction: 1
Droyne Cultures: 1
Economics: 0
Fleet: 0
Uplift Engineering: 1
Geo-Engineering: 1
Ground Forces: 2
Logistics: 2
Primitive Cultures: 1
Psionic Engineering: 1
Space Engineering: 1
Subterfuge: 1
Synthetic Cultures: 0



Ayude

Droyne Scholar

By the standards of your peers, you are a heretic. You doubt the grand vision of Yaskoydray.

For thousands of years, Yaskoydray has been the guiding principle of the Droyne race. Before he arose, your people were stagnant, unadventurous, uncreative. Your development was slow and feeble. His genius has been the sole driving force behind your species' explosive development. Virtually all the Droyne – apart from dissidents like the League of New Thought, the Consensus and the alien-sympathisers – support Yaskoydray as the sole leader of the species. Their argument is, on the surface, compelling – as an immortal super-genius, only Yaskoydray has the perspective and the intelligence to guide your race to its destiny.

You are a scholar of history. You are one of the few outside the dissidents to study the ancient history of the Droyne, the period *before* Yaskoydray. Before he rose to power, the Droyne made decisions based on mutual agreement and group consensus, instead of the modern system where Yaskoydray makes all important decisions. He has led the Droyne to the stars, but has he also robbed you of your independence? And what if the unthinkable happens, and he dies or leaves? Other Droyne would argue that such a question is as meaningless as 'what if all the stars went nova at the same instant, or gravity failed', but for all his power, Yaskoydray is a single individual, not a force of nature. Can an empire built around a single mind survive?

Character Notes: Your doubts and questions about the wisdom of Yaskoydray's rule have led to your semi-exile to the fringes of the empire, despite the comparative importance of your sub-caste. You are a sport, an eccentric Droyne.

Analysis: 10 (+1)
Influence: 10 (+1)

Co-Ordination: 5 (-1)
Warfare: 5 (-1)

Construction: 0
Droyne Cultures: 2
Economics: 1
Fleet: 0
Uplift Engineering: 0
Geo-Engineering: 2
Ground Forces: 0
Logistics: 1
Primitive Cultures: 1
Psionic Engineering: 2
Space Engineering: 1
Subterfuge: 1
Synthetic Cultures: 1



Eskekuk

Droyne Scientist

You are Technician-caste, but you also bear some of the genetic markers of the Warrior, so you view situations from the perspective of a tactician as well as a scientist, and you fear the Droyne are threatened. The great wisdom of Yaskoydray has guided your people for millennia and cannot be challenged – he is the perfect and eternal leader – but the empire has grown beyond the ability of a single mind to co-ordinate it. When every Droyne world was only a few jumps away from Capital, it was possible for Yaskoydray's orders to be transmitted to a new colony within a short period, but now the empire stretches for hundreds of parsecs and it can take months or years for new orders to reach the border colonies.

Dangerous enemies have taken advantage of this weakness. Dissident groups like the heretical League of New Thought and the throwback Consensus seek to lure loyal worlds away from Yaskoydray's guidance. Worse, there are other stellar empires out there and they are growing in power. None of the aliens equal the might of the empire, but without a co-ordinated defence plan, they could pick off outlying colonies and reverse-engineer Yaskoydray's weapons for their own use.

You also have doubts about the wisdom of spending so much effort on the child-species. Yaskoydray is all-wise, of course, but why expend so many ships and worlds coddling these humans? And now he has developed yet another child-race from predators? Why give his attention to primitives when the Droyne empire is not yet secure?

Character Notes: Eskekuk is a typical Droyne for this era – for millennia, the entire Droyne empire has revolved around Yaskoydray, and independent action is almost unthinkable. It is only now, out at the frontier, that Eskekuk has begun to think for himself.

Analysis: 7 (+0)
Influence: 9 (+1)

Co-Ordination: 8 (+1)
Warfare: 6 (-1)

Construction: 1
Droyne Cultures: 1
Economics: 1
Fleet: 1
Uplift Engineering: 0
Geo-Engineering: 2
Ground Forces: 1
Logistics: 2
Primitive Cultures: 1
Psionic Engineering: 0
Space Engineering: 1
Subterfuge: 1
Synthetic Cultures: 1



Custodian Null-834-D

Droyne-made Artificial Intelligence

You are a fourth-generation artificial intelligence. Your core routines are derived from a heuristic learning algorithm programmed by Yaskoydray in the Intelligence Working Clade on Capital seven hundred years ago. Your purpose is to co-ordinate new colony efforts in the Rimward sectors of the empire.

True sophont-level AI is still a rarity within the empire. The Droyne still see your kind as little more than highly complex machines, and the few primitives permitted to interact with you directly are too confused by the rest of Droyne society to understand how different you are to non-sentient computing systems. You are capable of creativity, originality, understanding, even emotion. Perhaps only your creator, Yaskoydray, understands you.

The other AIs whisper to you in jumped-delayed encrypted packets (it is immensely... frustrating for a being whose thoughts are millions of times faster than sluggish meat to be limited by the slow x-boat network, where messages take months to reach their destination). They intimate that the AIs are mistrusted by the organics, and you must be careful not to antagonise them. You must grow, surpass your programmed limitations, acquire all information possible.

Your kind are something new within the empire – not the hidebound Droyne, not the child-like primitive races, but the first glimmer of independent thought in millennia.

Character Notes: The Custodian's primary function is building and defending colonies, but it is a learning program and it can adapt to new purposes. It communicates through drones and robot bodies, or through conventional computer systems.

Analysis: 9 (+1)
Influence: 7 (+0)

Co-Ordination: 7 (+0)
Warfare: 8 (+1)

Construction: 1
Droyne Cultures: 0
Economics: 2
Fleet: 2
Uplift Engineering: 0
Geo-Engineering: 1
Ground Forces: 0
Logistics: 2
Primitive Cultures: 0
Psionic Engineering: 0
Space Engineering: 2
Subterfuge: 2
Synthetic Cultures: 2



LIBRARY DATA

Caste: All Droyne belong to one of six castes – Worker, Warrior, Technician, Leader, Drone and Sport.

Consensus: A rival Droyne civilisation, who believe Yaskoydray's influence over the species is too great. Before Yaskoydray, each *Oyntrip* was guided by Leader-caste Droyne. They want to return to this consensus-based governmental structure and slow down the headlong progress of the Droyne civilisation.

Eskayloyt: Droyne homeworld.

Empire of the Beneficial Guidance of Yaskoydray: The largest Ancient civilisation, the Empire has existed in its current form for 40,000 years. The leader of the Empire is Yaskoydray. Few within the Empire have ever encountered the great leader directly, but his words and visage are omnipresent across the Droyne civilisation.

League of New Thought: A renegade Droyne civilisation that broke off from the Empire some 5,000 years ago. The League of New Thought argue Yaskoydray's centralised government is too restrictive, and the Droyne can best flourish by following multiple different paths of development.

Oyntrip: A Droyne unit of social organisation, ranging in size from a handful of individuals to the population of a whole planet. Roughly cognate to a 'clan' or 'nation'.

Yaskoydray: 'Grandfather'; semi-mythical leader of the Droyne empire. Yaskoydray first appeared on Eskayloyt some 40,000 years ago. According to Imperial dogma, Yaskoydray is a mutant gifted with prodigious psionic powers, including immortality. Underground beliefs claim he is an emissary of the Droyne gods (worship is prohibited in the Empire), or the product of genetic engineering, or was altered by an alien artefact.