

Ghost Station

by David Pulver

This short adventure can be used just about anywhere in the Spinward Marches, or with minor modifications, elsewhere in the Imperium. The dates given below assume a campaign set some time during or after the end of the Fifth Frontier War. Ideally, the Referee should select a world with a type C starport, moderate population, and TL9 to TL 11.

Background -- Ghost Station

This is a suitable adventure for travelers with a reputation as troubleshooters. While visiting the selected world's downport, the party are met by a flamboyantly-dressed man who introduces himself as Eneri Banerjee. He is a producer for the long-running and increasingly popular holovid series *Haunted Imperium*, made by the megacorporation Makhidkarun's entertainment arm.

Banerjee explains his series explores unusual locations that have a reputation for being haunted or cursed. Computer-recreations simulating past historical events are followed by a visit from the *Haunted Imperium* Research Team, headlined by the vivacious "occult investigator" Tamara Tokamura and her geeky research assistant Lisa Lee. The team will poke about the site in the hope of collecting local color while commenting on various "weird things" and "presences" they observe. Occasionally they may discover the truth behind any legends, but, Banerjee admits, mostly the goal is a spooky atmosphere.

The program's most recent target is Skoffin Station, a small derelict station located in this star system. A few centuries ago it was the mainworld's high port, but the system outgrew it. It's been towed into a graveyard orbit and has gone through a string of owners. Many of them have suffered unusual bad luck -- in fact, there are numerous accidents and deaths associated with it, and some locals believe it to be haunted. The station, while still owned by a local firm, Orbital Development Associates, or ODA, has been abandoned since 1100. *Haunted Imperium* plan to record their next show there in two weeks time.

Naturally, exploring a "haunted" space station is dangerous. Who knows what might really be there? Banerjee in coordination with Orbital Development Associates, the station's current owner, wants to hire the band as an advance security team. They are to secure the station and make sure that they are no REAL dangers there before the highly paid Tamara and other actors making up the "investigators" set foot there.

(Optionally, the Referee may wish to change things so that the party are accompanied by or escorting some or all of the cast and crew, rather than going in as a "first-in" team. See the notes at the end of the scenario. If so, the Referee will need to stat up several NPCs. An alternative scenario, *Lost Kids*, is also briefly discussed below.)

A good compromise is to have one historian -- perhaps Lisa Lee -- go with the group, to point out various locations ("this is the airlock where Commander Ziz killed herself -- we

need to take photos" or "these staterooms were originally used as holding cells for Zho prisoners."

The group will be provided with wearable cameras and mikes, since any interesting encounters may provide useful fodder for the show. To that effect, the job includes an agreement that any footage or recordings of them can be used in the show. They are urged not to engage in any illegal activities during the sweep though of course as a hired security team they are authorized to defend themselves and protect their employer's property. They should also leave artifacts where they find them, so they can be "discovered" by the actors later on.

This is not expected to be a dangerous mission -- it's a precaution, and the most likely hazards (Banerjee says) would seem to falling through a hole or breathing in a toxic chemical (so wear vacc suits or filter masks). However, the place has a reputation for the mysterious disappearances, so who knows? That's why the party are being sent in.

Makhidkarun will pay Cr5,000 (or whatever seems appropriate) for the group in advance to secure the station. Afterward, they will be paid a further Cr 20,000 assuming the program goes off without a hitch (which, of course, will depend on how thoroughly they have secured it). An additional bonus determined by the company may be paid for media rights of up to Cr1,000/minute based on any video the group shoots that ends up the show. (Probably 2-12 minutes will survive cuts, he estimates, based on past experience, unless they find anything very interesting!).

The Referee should decide how much Library Data (see below) to reveal to players before the adventure begins. In theory, the entire story could be made available, as it will add atmosphere, or the Referee might only reveal it if the plays show enough initiative to research beforehand. Alternatively, the Referee could dribble this out through various NPCs, such as Lisa Lee, if one or more accompany them, or through occupants of the station like the crazy janitor or the squatters (see below.)

Library Data -- Skoffin Station.

This 1,000-ton space station was constructed c. 764 in geostationary orbit above the world's downport. It gave two centuries of faithful service as a high port, but as traffic and planetary population increased it eventually proved too small to deal with the system's needs. In 950 the decision was made to replace it with the current larger and more modern high port. As the original station was still structurally sound, it was not scrapped but was instead towed by tugs into the world's L4 point, between the planet and its moon.

It was passed from the starport authority to the world's planetary navy and renamed Skoffin Station after Commodore Skoffin, a local dignitary who had founded the planetary navy. The modest facility was used for cadet training and basing revenue/rescue cutters and a small two-ship fighter squadron. However, after a few decades of heavy use, the age-related maintenance costs began to increase. Bureaucratic inertia and budget cuts prevented needed refurbishment. This contributed to a fueling accident in 1072 which resulted in an explosion that killed six people. Blaming herself

for the deaths, which included her best friend, station commander Anna Ziz chose to commit suicide by taking a space walk without a vacc suit.

The station was shut down in the 1080s. However, during the False War (1082-1084) it was lent to Subsector Navy authorities for conversion into a prison. Due to the brief length of the war, large numbers of prisoners never arrived, but it was used for 30 Ine Givar and Zhodani prisoners who were taken captive during border skirmishes. However, their mistreatment (due to anti-psionic prejudice) by some of the guards led to three prisoner deaths. This triggered a riot in 1084 which five guards and 13 prisoners were killed, mostly after a squad of Imperial Marines from the world's starport were dispatched to regain control of the station. Afterward the prison was shut down and surviving prisoners transferred outsystem and eventually repatriated. Some areas of the station were sealed off as a result of the damage.

But most of combat damage to the station was repaired and it was sold to a private owner Archangel Biochemical Corporation, a local chemical company, after new environmental and safety regulations forced them to move off world. ABC installed chemical synthesizers and laboratory equipment. Over the next decade ABC/Skoffin Laboratories produced a variety of drugs, primarily large quantities of Medical Slow for hospital use and Slow drug for military and paramilitary clients.

However, Skoffin Station was not a popular posting at ABC. Workers at the station complained of minor malfunctions and there were periodic complaints of health and safety issues, headaches, dizziness and depression. Some blamed on the ailing station's old life support system and others on leakage of psychoactive chemicals use in the laboratory facility. ABC was slow to fix the issue, and the stresses involved may have triggered what local media ended up referring to as the "Skoffin Station Massacre" in 1095, when a lab technician Jules Oka, after complaining of hallucinations, injected himself with slow drug, released several experimental animals from the lab units, and killed 11 coworkers with a knife, before locking himself and two hostages in a walk-in freezer. By the time reinforcements arrived the hostages had been dissected with medical precision and Oka had frozen to death. The words "Ziz Ziz Ziz" were written on the wall in blood according to some sources, though official reports omit this detail.

ABC management announced plans for a major refit of the station in 1098, but ironically word of this decision arrived just as partial life support failure in a four-stateroom unit led to a further tragic incident: three deaths and one case of brain damage due to carbon monoxide poisoning thanks to the perfect storm of a failed CO2 scrubber and a malfunctioning warning system. The resulting inquiry and lawsuit was managed by Hortelez et Cie, who insisted on major repairs to the station before it would consent to renew its insurance certification.

ABC hired contractors to begin a refit process but the work team found numerous other problems such as a virulent toxic mold infestation and contamination in the living quarters from precursor chemicals used in the Slow drug vats. (It was theorized this may have caused Julian Oka's insanity, though this was never proven.) The cost of refurbishment continued to mount, especially after two workers were also killed in a gruesome failure of the main elevator shaft's magnetic bearings. The bad publicity, a

further lawsuit, and escalating refit costs and insurance premiums led to ABC filing for bankruptcy.

To defray legal costs, the now derelict station was resold in 1100 to a real estate speculator, Orbital Development Associates for MCr80.

Skoffin Station has been on the market for several years, and ODA have yet to find a buyer despite various attempts to publicize it. The station remains derelict. Given its history, a body of local folklore has grown up around it on the mainworld's startown, with various ghost stories or spacer's tales that claim the station is cursed or haunted.

Local Gossip and Rumors

This isn't in the library data but can be gleaned from talking to Haunted Imperium reps or other locals at the starport.

Derelict, the station has continued to deteriorate, although it remains inhabitable and core systems such as the fusion reactor, gravitic plates, and some avionics remain functional, as does 70% of its life support system. The estimated price of MCr 70, however, has failed to attract new developers, and there is a high chance that in the next few years Skoffin may right off their investment and have the station sold for scrap -- though given the possibility that portions are contaminated, that in itself may be costly.

Thanks to Skoffin Station's age and the various incidents that have occurred, it is unsurprising that a variety of spacer's tales, urban legends, and ghost stories have become associated with it. There are rumors that some ODA work teams sent to maintain the reactor or evaluate station conditions reported strange noises and odd lights or sounds. Apocryphal stories that float about the starport bars say curious locals, students, or travelers have sometimes visited the station in the last few years have either experienced similar phenomena, or not returned at all. Others say the station is haunted by a beast from a ABC experimental lab, or the ghosts of former Zhodani prisoners, the madman Jules Oka, or the suicidal Commander Anna Ziz . . .

The local Port Authority warns against visits to Skoffin Station, citing various safety hazards and the station's present status as the private property of ODA.

Getting There

Skoffin Station can be reached in about 75 minutes time (at 1G) from the planet's surface or 60 minutes from its high port.

Skoffin Station has a radar transponder that automatically warns away any ship ("You are approaching Skoffin Station. This station is private property of Orbital Development Associates. Trespassers will be prosecuted.") However, it's just an automated beacon and will not take any action. If the party are working for Haunted Imperium, they have permission in any event.

The local Port Authority Traffic Control monitors all flights around the world but as there are many small craft and larger vessels to keep track of they have better things to do than

warn off visitors from a derelict. If the party wishes to visit without any possibility of traffic control logging a possible infraction however, the easiest method is to simply fly by from several kilometers while crossing over with vacc suit thrusters.

Background and Events

The Referee will need to prepare a plan of Skoffin Station. Ambitious game masters may wish to create their own deck plans. However, a quicker fix is to re-purpose an existing starship plan as a space station. Given the size of Skoffin Station, the Type C Mercenary Cruiser, with its roughly spherical shape and large deck facilities makes a suitable "space station" especially if the players do not own their own Mercenary Cruiser and so are unfamiliar with its arrangement.

The Referee should prepare basic descriptions of Skoffin Station based on its history detailed in the library data above and any special surprises. The station's most recent utilization was as laboratory and manufacturing facility for Archangel Biochemical Corporation, and it was in the midst of a refit when it was shut down and evacuated for safety reasons. The Referee may wish to provide the party with a copy of a map of the station. The station will contain the following:

A central control room, only semi-functional. Some security view screens could show rooms; many other monitors might be dead.

Staterooms with living quarters for ABC scientists and technical staff.

Offices (re-purposed stations) for managers and scientists.

Laboratory and chemical manufacturing equipment (mostly semi-automated) some marked with biohazard symbols.

Cages where experimental animals were held.

Freezers that held stocks of drugs. One of these might be the freezer unit where the murder took place.

A well-equipped sickbay, possibly with expired medicines.

Machinery for power and life support, some of it functional.

The referee may wish to mark certain areas as regions where "tragic" events were supposed to have occurred during the history of the station such as murders, explosions, and the like mentioned in the lengthy library data entry. These may be on the players map and they may be instructed to film footage at these locations. Note that in most cases there will be no obvious signs of events that took place many decades ago, as ABC has since refurbished the station -- perhaps just some sealed off areas or old patched damage. There will be plentiful ABC corporate logos, stationary, and so on, in places, biohazard symbols scattered about the station. However, since the station is derelict the Referee should pick several areas where things are in poor repair. This could include:

Areas without lighting.

Areas where the grav modules have been removed from floors, leading to sudden zero

gravity conditions in some rooms or corridor sections. This could also lead to a dangerous fall if gravity suddenly resumed . . .

Docking area (the cutter wells if adapting the Mercenary Cruiser plan). If the squatters (see below) are present this may contain a damaged and half-stripped cutter.

Areas showing some signs of old (painted over or patched) combat damage, thanks to the prison riot that took place long ago.

Sections between bulkheads that are in vacuum or have contaminated atmospheric conditions (equivalent to tainted atmosphere) due to toxic mould or high CO2 or carbon monoxide levels.

Assume the cutter wells are instead docking facilities, that the cargo area is a port warehouse, and j-drive and m-drive engineering areas are factory machinery left over from its usage as industrial part, and the bridge is the station control room. Fuel, galleys, etc. can be retained (the station had large fuel reserves from its original function as a port) .

The Referee should (secretly) locate any inhabitants as detailed below and decide where they can be encountered.

Toxic Mold and Other Contaminants

An atmosphere tester or similar device will reveal moderate levels of toxicity in some parts of the station (Referee's option). The result of a witches brew of precursor chemicals and spores that have grown in the poorly maintained air ducts, the party may spot various unpleasant grayish-green growths in certain areas, e.g., stateroom bedspreads, pantries, under tables, and in freshers. These can cause long-term lung damage (loss of Endurance (or GURPS Health) from lengthy exposure (weeks rather than hours) and also have a psychoactive effect, inducing paranoid schizophrenia over time. They are no immediate threat to the adventurers, but individuals who have been affected may be unstable. A filter mask or vacc suit will protect against them.

There are also several minor insects and pests in the station -- things like silverfish, rats, and possibly alien critters.

Various small experimental animals escaped at one point (the Skoffin Massacre). Most have died, but a few hardy vermin have bred and are scuttling about. The Referee may wish to make an encounter table listing various monkeys, rats, etc. However, they are unlikely to threaten adventures, but could spook the party . . .

Exploring the Station: Possible Encounters

The referee should decide or roll to determine what the party will find when they explore the station.

D6

1-2. There are no ghosts, but the derelict station has been illegally occupied by a group of

squatters. The group has 2d+2 adults and 1d6-2 children. They are an itinerant belter crew, the Malakar-Drummonds, composed of related families and a few hired hands, who have had a run of bad luck. They have a small cutter docked in the station, but it broke down and they ended up settling here two years ago. They keep planning on moving on, but haven't gotten around to it yet.

Instead, they are illegally stripping the station of useful parts and selling these parts to local smugglers in the hope of eventually earning enough to repair their ship. As a result, portions of the station are in very poor shape (e.g., with zero gravity) due to them having removed grav modules from its flooring. A launch from the main world periodically arrives (every four weeks or so) to purchase the stripped parts and sell supplies to the squatters; it's possible that this is being done in collusion with a corrupt or bribed official in Orbital Development Agency or the Port Authority.

The scavengers are lightly armed with a few snub pistols, clubs, accelerator rifles, shotguns, and a laser carbine, and have vacc suits. They will resist eviction, trying to frighten or drive off intruders, and will resist being filmed, possibly violently, especially if their kids are threatened. They are scattered about the station in small groups. The referee may find it interest to have the first encounter be with a young child, and then have later encounters involve a larger group.

3. As above, but the derelicts are actually connected with local organized crime. In addition to scavenging, they have also modified the surviving chemical lab facility to create illegal drugs (e.g., psi drugs or dangerous narcotics). They maintain the "ghost" legends to scare off visitors and are quite happy to murder anyone they come upon. They have also found or manufactured some doses of Slow drug, and some will use them if they get into combat. These doses are, however, contaminated, and have nasty side effects (e.g., 2d damage afterward, or a risk of berserker rage if a End or HT roll fails) .

A launch arrives to pick up the shipment of drugs each week and deliver payment; the launch is from the Skarrenvolk, a criminal syndicate. The Skarrenvolk have bribed starport authorities to look the other way. The launch crew are well armed and hardened criminals. If the deliveries or operation is interfered with there is a possibly of retaliation from the syndicate, but also of reward from the police. The Referee should decide when the next launch arrival is expected.

4. The station is occupied by the corpses of a group of squatters, who made the misfortune of choosing to settle there but were overcome by the toxic environment and/or ran afoul of an antique security robot. Left by ABC, this is system, with Combat Armor-level protection and armed with an automatic snub pistol with various ammo and a laser rifle, is still patrolling the station, periodically recharging itself.

5. As above, but the station is also occupied by Tom Gunnergi, an old janitor/engineer employed by ABC and then ODA to keep the station's power plant running who was supposed to have retired years ago . . . but never did. Familiar with the history of the station, he was happy to explore its mysteries while looking after it ... until Old Tom's filter mask developed a leak and he succumbed to the toxic mold without realizing it. He believes the mad ghosts of commander Anna Ziz is talking to him, urging him to protect

her station. He also sometimes believes escaped Zhodani prisoners are lurking in the shadows, who escaped from the riot and used their psionic powers to mask people's minds and hide themselves. They were the ones who sabotaged the ABC facility, and they're still there. Probably they're Zhodani commandos, in fact . . . along with the mutant animals that escaped from the ABC experiments. The animals that have Slow drug in their blood, and move like lightning . . . You have to be alert!

Now he is an axe-crazy lunatic and -- along with his security robot -- has disposed of several innocent or not so innocent visitors, storing their corpses in one of the freezers on the theory they were Zhos. He has also painted several pictures of Anna Ziz (naval officer in archaic uniform) in his stateroom. He can feign rationality for short periods, before striking. He has a variety of dangerous power tools (e.g., a plasma cutter equivalent to a PGMP-12 but limited to Close or Short ranges), a snub pistol, and a blade, and wears a vacc suit.

6. The characters are actually the entire reality show! The events of one of the scenes detailed above -- or perhaps several of them -- will occur, but they are just an act. The station has been stocked with traps, suspicious objects, robot animals, and medical simulated cadavers, and hidden cameras. Possibly PCs may be issued with non-lethal stun weapons or their bullets replaced with blanks! This is one way to bring in the actual past history, e.g., an actor or hologram of a zombie Julian Oka stalking the corridors or ghostly "Anna Ziz" spotted drifting outside a port hole or airlock.

Scenario Notes: Other Complications

Instead of the party being assigned to do a preliminary mission, the production company may have (recklessly, to save money) decided to forgo this step. In this case the party are assigned as bodyguards for the production team, Tamara, Lee and the other actors and crew, probably seven or eight personnel. The PCs must defer to them except in regard to critical security situations; their pay depends on protecting them. Naturally, some of the actors could prove to be prima donnas . . .

Given the hostility of the Imperium toward psionics, the stock figure of the "psychic" is less likely in Imperial ghost-hunting programs. However, obviously supernatural (rather than psionic) activities like performing a séance might be part of the show -- if so, adding a colorful con artist (or closet real psionic) the party must escort could be entertaining!

Lost Kids -- an Alternate Scenario

Some freshmen students from the main world's university have traveled to the station for a party or fraternity initiation. Now they have gone missing. Their friends -- or the local fraternity -- fear they will be in trouble if they go to the authorities, but have instead pooled money to hire some adventurers at a local starport. The kids will have run afoul of one of the threats detailed above (excluding the "reality show").