

The Last Apolitical Adventure

by Onno Meyer

If all works out well, this is the last adventure for a group of freelance trouble-shooters who travel from star to star, and the first adventure for the staff of a young noble.

This provides a change of pace. The party can no longer try to leave enemies, allies and their reputation behind as they jump from system to system. Instead, they will have to live with the outcome of their actions. The adventure should start somewhere in the Spinward Marches, at least two or three jumps from Byret (*Behind the Claw*, p. 111). It will be up to the party to find the evidence of a crime. This will prove much harder than merely solving it, and it is a first taste of things to come. Legitimacy and perceptions count, not just truth and justice, if the group ever cared about such things.

This article contains four characters, their history, a list of possible clues and courses of action and the manor house where most of the events will take place. To give the players their time in the limelight, the friendly NPCs will all be young, inexperienced and timid. The hostile NPCs are more capable, but they will only take action when they realize that the adventurers are on their trail.

Family History

Baron Sir Martin Yangila Zhao of Byret is dead. The medical reason was heart failure after a serious illness, but the death of his beloved wife Rebecca Jones McAllister a few years earlier probably contributed to the slowly declining health of Baron Martin. He left two adult children and something of a mess.

The Honorable George McAllister Zhao is the older son. He has all the vices of the rich and powerful and none of the virtues of a proper noble. George spends his nights in expensive bars, with expensive women, and his days recovering from the last party. The Honorable Gavin McAllister Zhao is the younger son, but considerably more mature. He has just finished his Bachelor in Imperial History and Administration on Rhyllanor. Gavin would have liked to study modern literature instead, but his duty came first. He plans to embark on a grand tour of the Imperium that will take him all the way to Vland before he returns home to assist his father.

Knowing his two sons, the late Baron designated Gavin as his heir in a codicil to his will. But to the day of his death, the Baron hoped that George would change his ways and show his fitness for his rightful place, so the decision was not made public. The Baron entrusted the codicil to his seneschal, Sir Agrol Kfen Olkang.

Unfortunately, Sir Agrol has a weakness for fast air/rafts and large bets on Kian races. The seneschal was heavily in debt to his bookmakers. During the late Baron's illness, Sir Agrol misappropriated family funds to pay his mounting debts. Even worse, George noticed how Sir Agrol repaid some of his debts and came to the right conclusions. George does not gamble himself, but he frequents the same bars. George acquired some of Sir

Agrol's IOUs just in case, and when his father died George tried to blackmail the seneschal. For his silence about the embezzlement, he demanded the codicil. Sir Agrol made the counterproposal to let the document disappear. That way, each of the co-conspirators would have a hold on the other.

Sir Agrol, Gavin and George are the only people alive who have seen the codicil. The butler and a few friends of the late Baron knew that he *planned* to disinherit George, but they cannot know if he followed through. And everybody who follows political affairs in the area knows that Baron Martin did *not* officially designate George as the heir to his title, which would have been the customary way to ensure a smooth succession.

As things stand at the start of the adventure, George is set to inherit the title by default. This has to be formally confirmed by the Archduke, speaking for the Emperor. Usually the confirmation is a mere technicality, but in this case the Archduke will send an assistant, Dame Naomi Rubin, with orders to report back if there is solid evidence of foul play.

Timeline

The GM should take a few moments to write down a timeline. The details depend on the location and travel speed of the party. If the travel times are much longer, the GM may have to adjust e.g. the age of the air/raft. For example, if the party travels in a jump-2 Far Trader and if they meet Gavin at Equus Starport (Spinward Marches 2417), it looks like this:

Landing minus 150 days: Sir Agrol has extremely bad luck at the races. His debts start to mount.

Landing minus 120: Baron Martin is seriously ill. A message is sent to Gavin on Rhylanor (on the next freighter to Capon, from there on the Xboat network).

Landing minus 110: Sir Agrol begins with his fraud.

Landing minus 100: George learns of the fraud.

Landing minus 90: The new air/raft is purchased by Sir Agrol.

Landing minus 80: The flame sculpture is sold on the black market.

Landing minus 55: Death of Baron Martin. Sir Agrol hides the codicil. Several messages are sent on the next freighter to Capon. Gavin receives the message of Baron Martin's illness, prepares to return home.

Landing minus 53: Toshio Diaz is fired.

Landing minus 50: Gavin leaves Rhylanor on a scheduled liner. He sends an Xboat message with his rough travel plans to Byret. Burial of Baron Martin.

Landing minus 45: The TNS office on Capon starts to spread the obituary of Baron Martin.

Landing minus 40: Gavin arrives on Equus on a liner, hires a Far Trader while the liner follows the Xboat route.

Landing minus 30: Gavin arrives on Cogri, just missing the obituary.

Landing minus 20: Gavin arrives on Garrincski, reads the TNS report with the obituary of Baron Martin. Archduke Norris on Mora receives the Xboat message about the death.

Landing minus 15: On the suggestion of people who knew the late Baron, Archduke Norris dispatches Dame Naomi in a jump-4 courier to investigate.

Landing minus 10: Gavin arrives on Fosey.

Landing Day: Gavin arrives on Byret. His message, which was routed through Ivendo, arrives roughly at the same time.

Landing plus 4: Dame Naomi arrives in the system, sends a first message to George.

Landing plus 5: Dame Naomi arrives on Byret.

If the party does not own a ship, a few legs of the journey can be taken on high-jump liners and the plot can move faster. If the PCs meet Gavin on Biter (Spinward Marches 1526), the timeline looks like this:

Landing minus 180 days: Gavin graduates on Rhylanor, starts to travel towards the Border Worlds to "see the frontier."

Landing minus 100: Sir Agrol has extremely bad luck at the races. His debts start to mount.

Landing minus 90: Baron Martin is seriously ill. Press release on Byret regarding Baron Martin's failing health.

Landing minus 85: Sir Agrol begins with his fraud.

Landing minus 80: The flame sculpture is sold on the black market. George learns of the fraud.

Landing minus 75: The TNS office on Capon starts to spread the report of Baron Martin's health.

Landing minus 70: The new air/raft is purchased by Sir Agrol.

Landing minus 60: Death of Baron Martin. Sir Agrol hides the codicil. Several messages are sent on the next freighter to

Capon.

Landing minus 58: Toshio Diaz is fired.

Landing minus 50: Burial of Baron Martin. The TNS office on Capon starts to spread the obituary of Baron Martin.

Landing minus 40: Gavin arrives on Biter, reads the TNS report of Baron Martin's health and plans to come home. He hires the PCs and sends an Xboat message with his rough travel plans to Byret.

Landing minus 30: Gavin arrives on Adabicci.

Landing minus 25: Archduke Norris on Mora receives the Xboat message about the death.

Landing minus 20: Gavin arrives on Lunion, reads the TNS report with the obituary of Baron Martin.

Landing minus 15: On the suggestion of people who knew the late Baron, Archduke Norris dispatches Dame Naomi in a jump-4 courier to investigate.

Landing minus 10: Gavin arrives on Resten.

Landing minus 5: Gavin's message arrives on Byret.

Landing Day: Gavin arrives on Byret.

Landing plus 4: Dame Naomi arrives in the system, sends a first message to George.

Landing plus 5: Dame Naomi arrives on Byret.

Note that Byret is off the Xboat routes. Small inconsistencies in the message flow can be explained by the availability of ships to carry mail to Capon, Fosey or even directly to Carey.

Enter the Party

When Gavin gets word of his father's illness, he decides to abandon his plans for a grand tour and to return home as fast as he can. The Baron is already dead at this time, but Gavin cannot know this. If the party owns a starship, he will ask to charter it at the going rates for a direct flight to Byret. He has enough money to travel all the way to Vland in modest style, so he can afford to divert a Scout/Courier or a Far Trader for a few jumps. If the party has no ship, Gavin will hire them as escorts and general expeditors. He does not expect any trouble, he explains, but he wants to get the fastest possible passage. If

asked, Gavin will explain the family situation as he understands it at the time, but he will not go into detail why George was disinherited.

As the party comes closer to Byret, they get more and more recent information. (If none of the players remembers to check the TNS download, Gavin will, but it would be better if the PCs do it.) A TNS transmission indicates that Baron Zhao of Byret has died after a serious illness. This is not exactly headline news, but the passing of a noble is marked with a small obituary. Ominously, George McAllister Zhao has become Baron pro tempore of Byret. The confirmation of the title is expected to be a routine matter. If the adventurers have to inform Gavin, they will find that the young man is determined not to show his grief, but nevertheless shaken. Unless the TNS report simply got it wrong, Gavin's brother and his late father's seneschal must have conspired to deprive Gavin of his title.

On Byret, Gavin will ask the entire party to travel with him to Zhao Manor and call ahead to arrange transport. The players must decide if they all want join Gavin openly and if they will provide explanations of their presence other than being Gavin's friends. Any PC who poses as valet, bodyguard or lover will have an excuse to stay close to Gavin at all times, but he or she must then play the role, starch shirts or whatever.

On arrival at the Byret downport, Gavin Zhao is greeted by the new Baron pro tempore George and the seneschal Sir Agrol Kfen Olkang, an elderly Vargr. Unless the party discouraged it in advance, Gavin will ask Sir Agrol what happened to the codicil. Sir Agrol and George will claim that Baron Martin changed his mind just before his death. Gavin and his staff (that is, any PCs who care to join him) are transported to Zhao Manor. Sir Agrol escorts Gavin to the small family cemetery where the late Baron is buried. After some time, Gavin comes to the party to ask for advice. It is clear to him who the culprits are, but without solid evidence Gavin cannot hope to challenge his brother.

The Clues

The two conspirators do not like each other. If either one is confronted with evidence which cannot be dismissed out of hand, he will try to put all blame on the other. That is no factor if the PCs investigate in secret. If they do the classic "We invited you all here to tell you . . ." routine, things will get interesting. But if they make serious mistakes, like accusing the wrong person of hiding the codicil, they merely alert their enemies. Future covert moves will be nearly impossible.

The Money Trail

If asked, Gavin can provide a guided tour of Zhao Manor where he notices a few changes. The butler, **Linda Chatsworth**, has a few suspicions as well, but she feels duty-bound to serve the new Baron to the best of her abilities.

- Gavin points out several artworks. Nothing that would be a household name, but over the centuries there were several Counts Zhao who collected art and none who sold anything. At one empty corner, Gavin comments that there should have been a Darrian flame sculpture. If the party asks anyone, the first answer will be

that the sculpture was sent to Daryen for restoration. If they ask a second person, they will hear that the sculpture is on loan to a museum on Regina. If the party is suspicious enough to double-check their source, they have their first hint at financial improprieties. (Sir Agrol failed to keep his stories straight. To give the party a lucky break, assume that whoever they ask has heard different versions.)

- In the garage, Gavin points out fondly remembered vehicles. The late Count's air/raft, a Sharushid Velocity Model 1109. His own LSP Kami grav bike, with a few dents in the chrome but perfectly polished. George's Delgado Diamond, a smallish open-topped air/raft. A Third Frontier War vintage Zhodani APC, which an aunt means to restore once she retires from the IISS. The g-carrier used by the staff. Then he finds something new. A LSP Raptor, this year's model and worth at least Cr500,000.
- All vehicle keys are in a locked drawer, but Gavin's code is still valid. If the party calls up the maintenance record in the Raptor's computer, they will note that the air/raft was delivered three months ago and that it already had 253 flight hours, most logged in by Sir Agrol. In the glove compartment is a parking receipt from Sharik's Cafe, which leads them to the Kian connection.
- Carlos Kemp, the pilot and mechanic, will explain that one air/raft was not enough for Baron George and Sir Agrol. If the players are alert, they will notice that this explanation does not match the timeline.
- If the party gets a chance to go through George's coat pockets, they will find three Cr100 poker chips from Sharik's Cafe, another lead to the Kian connection.

If Gavin asks to see the financial records, he will be flat out refused. That is very suspicious, but not compelling evidence by itself.

The Mystery Girlfriend

All staff members are aware that George has a new girlfriend. They do not know her full name, Jennifer Milo. Following her, for whatever reason, will lead the party to the Kian connection.

- The pilot Carlos Kemp and his wife Susan Kemp know her first name and that she works as a dancer in Sharik's Cafe. George reminded Carlos to keep this secret, but he forgot that Carlos would tell his wife. Susan will use the name when she talks about Jennifer. The PCs only have to raise the topic with her.
- The cook Andrew Harris overheard how George called the girl Jenny. He will provide that information if he is asked what he knows about the mystery girl.
- The footman Shannash Dashkhur knows that she is an alcoholic and suspects that she is addicted to other drugs. He will say so in disapproving tones if the girl is mentioned out of George's hearing.
- On first evening in Zhao Manor, the party might notice how George tries to sneak

Jennifer into his rooms and then out again. It had been too late for George to cancel the date without a nasty spat with Jennifer, but neither does he want to introduce the girl to Gavin. Carlos will fly her to the back door of Sharik's Cafe. A look at the navigation system of the Sharushid Velocity will reveal this later. Carlos does not watch out for pursuit, either. (Why should he?)

If Jennifer is interrogated with any kind of pressure tactics, she will break down quickly and tell the story of the blackmail. Her testimony is only hearsay, but it will be enough to put the confirmation temporarily on hold. However, Jennifer can describe where George keeps a slip of paper with his safe combination. She has no idea what the safe contains, so she is unlikely to remember this information unless the players ask specific questions or make some really good rolls. She does know that Sir Agrol has kept the codicil rather than destroying it (George had complained about that at length).

The Loyal Retainer

Tracking Toshio Diaz down will take a bit of Streetwise. If he is found, the old bodyguard can give a few pointers, but no evidence.

- He is convinced that the late Baron did not revoke the codicil.
- He thinks the death had natural causes. The crime only started when the will was probated.
- He knows that Sir Agrol gambles, but not how serious his debt was.
- He knows that George frequents seedy bars, including Sharik's Cafe. He does not know Jennifer. George only brought her into the manor after his father's death.

The Kian Connection

George and Sir Agrol are both frequent guests in Sharik's Cafe and several similar establishments. The group can either follow them (on most evenings) or follow some of the clues listed above. The bar offers good drinks, gambling opportunities and attractive sophonts of negotiable affection. It is quite expensive, at least Cr50 per person per hour if the party wants to blend into the crowd.

- If the party followed Sir Agrol, they will be able to observe some high-stakes gambling on the races. The evening is a net loss for the seneschal, who manages to lose about Cr5,000 in a few hours.
- If the party followed George, they will be led to Jennifer.
- If the party followed Jennifer, they will find out that she works as a dancer. For a large tip, she will flirt with any PC whom she does not know yet, but she will not go beyond that.
- If the party went in on their own, they can question the other customers and the barkeepers. For a handful credits, most will spill what they know about Sir

Agrol's gambling habits and the debts (which is out of date, he paid them off) or George's love affair with Jennifer.

The Direct Approach

The party can go and look for the physical evidence. This is extremely risky. If they get caught before they actually have the evidence, Gavin's case is lost.

Gun Control

Usually, the Imperium is not concerned with violent conflicts between citizens. At best, the resolution is left to planetary governments, and at worst, nobody really cares. But things are different when it comes to Imperial nobles in an inheritance dispute. If anybody draws and fires a gun, the Imperium *will* care, it *will* investigate, and with TL10 or better forensics it *will* find out what happened unless even more advanced countermeasures are involved. The SPA can loan security experts to Dame Naomi Rubin. Simply put, if the party uses violence they have lost, unless they already have the evidence in their hands. Gavin knows this, commoners may need an IQ roll.

- The codicil to the will is in Sir Agrol's office. The document is hidden between the pages of a Gvegh edition of Twilight's Peak, one of hundreds of books in the room. Without specific clues, finding the codicil takes 2d man-hours of search time if the party doesn't mind leaving a mess, or 4d man-hours if they are careful.
- If the players drop subtle hints that they have the codicil or know where it is, Sir Agrol will go to his office and place the document in a massive Old High Vilani dictionary. Clever players will be prepared to watch where the seneschal went after their encounter. Otherwise, the maid Tracy Olafson will notice how Sir Agrol hurried to his office. If she is asked on the same day, she will remember the exact time (Tracy had just decided it was time for a tea).
- A printout of the financial records is kept in the safe of the late Baron's office, now used by George. George has changed the code to something nobody will ever guess, but the number can be found on a scrap of paper in his old bedroom. If the players try to pick the safe, assume that the difficulty (i.e. the quality and TL of the lock) is something which they can manage with proper planning and preparation.

Countermeasures

If George or Sir Agrol think that Gavin and the party are on their trail, they will use their advance knowledge of Dame Naomi's arrival to try and put Gavin into a compromising position. The party cannot know why George does this, but hopefully they will be suspicious anyway. If not, they deserve what they get.

Earlier dinners in Zhao Manor had been brief and impersonal. But on the night before Dame Naomi's arrival, George orders up the good wine, and he starts the dinner with toasts to the Emperor, the Empress, the Grand Princess, the Archduke and any other noble or event he can think of. George can hold his liquor much better than Gavin, but Gavin feels honor-bound to keep up with the toasts. It will be up to the party to extract Gavin early enough to keep him presentable the next morning.

Panic Button

Sometimes, a GM fails to communicate subtle hints to the players. If that is the case, something more blatant is required.

A PC can overhear half of a phone conversation. Sir Agrol is getting agitated and loud, and perhaps a door is not properly closed. "Why do you call me here? I told you I'll come to the bar tonight." . . . "I can pay you back when George is sworn in, not earlier." . . . "Not a painting, Gavin is here, he'll notice." . . . "If that fool tries to sack me, he'll go down with me. Never mind why." . . . "So, is my credit still good?" . . . "Two grand on Ligagir in the third race. See you later."

If Gavin or a PC looks for Carlos, perhaps because they need a pilot or just an air/raft for a flight to the startown, they are told to ask Susan. "*He's bringing Jennifer to the bar,*" she says. If the players ask "*Jennifer who*" or "*which bar,*" they are on track of the Kian connection. To make things a bit more difficult, Susan won't know the name of the bar in this case. "*Somewhere in startown,*" she says.

If things go too fast, perhaps because there is a telepath in the party, assume that Sir Agrol placed the codicil in his office safe and that there are security systems which are switched on and off by biometric sensors (knowing the code isn't enough). Gavin has a rough idea what those systems are and knows which files must be hacked to find the details. The adventure becomes an elaborate high-tech burglary, if possible without any trace.

Aftermath

Dame Naomi will arrive a few days after the PCs. She will request interviews with George and Gavin. Hopefully, Gavin and the party will have evidence of foul play at this time. It will be up to Gavin to deliver the evidence, with the party as witnesses how the evidence was collected. The characters will have a few hours to prepare and rehearse an effective presentation (possibly with a bad hangover . . .). The Administration, Law and Writing skills will help to create the presentation and Teaching may help to keep Gavin on track. Ask the players to write a brief outline of the speech.

If the party has the codicil or a recorded confession by George or Sir Agrol, Dame Naomi will suggest to Archduke Norris that Gavin should become the next Baron Zhao. If the party has the confession by Jennifer, they will be granted 72 hours to find more evidence. If the party has only records of financial misconduct by Sir Agrol, that is no reason why George should not inherit and Dame Naomi will say so to the Archduke.

Hopefully, the rightful heir will be reinstated. If anybody does really well in the affair, there might even be a knighthood for him or her. Gavin will gain the family title, Status 3, and all the family wealth. He will fire his seneschal, his butler, his pilot and his gardener (a case of guilt by association). Gavin is now in need of reliable staff, and the party seems to fit the bill. If the party owns a ship, well, there is use for that, too (it is deliberately kept vague how much money the Zhao family earns). Baron Gavin must find his way into two new jobs, the administration of the baronial fief and the representation and oversight of Imperial interests on Byret. He will use the PCs as his agents, the same way the Archduke used Dame Naomi. Most missions will involve some sort of fact-finding. But when push comes to shove, Gavin represents the full might of the Imperium and the party represents Gavin.

- Contragravity combine harvesters on the fief are breaking down all the time. Is the technology simply too complicated for backward Byret or is somebody trying to discredit the young Baron and his new-fangled ideas?
- Traders complain that freight is being pilfered in the highport and that the SPA does nothing to stop it. Are the traders expecting miracles or is the Customs staff crooked?
- An Imperial Army veteran claims that his benefits are being unjustly denied. Fraud in the Pensions Office or just a trouble-maker who wants more money than he deserves?

The Characters

A brief rundown:

The Honorable Gavin McAllister Zhao (90 points)

Gavin tries to be a good noble and he is mostly succeeding. He lacks hands-on administrative experience, but he has both book learning and an uncanny ability to find the right textbook solution for a problem. When the adventurers are working for Gavin, they will have to work around his Honesty disadvantage for any irregular tactics, like breaking into an office and searching for documents . . .

Human (Mixed/Imperial) male; age 21; 5' 8", 145 lbs.; brown skin, black hair, blue eyes, wears a formal suit or a stylish shipboard coverall.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 10 [0].

Speed 5.25; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Intuition[15]; Imperturbable [10]; Status 2 [5]*; Wealthy [20].

* Includes one level of free Status from high Wealth.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Imperial) [-10]; Honesty [-10]; Enemy (George, 9 or less) [-10].

Quirks: Quotes Cleon II to justify his decisions (note to GM: make 'em up); Sings under the shower, loud and bad; Toasts the Emperor during every meal, even breakfast. [-3]

Skills: Accounting-12 [2]; Administration-15 [6]; Computer Operation/TL12-13 [1]; Economics-12 [2]; Dancing-10 [1]; History-15 [8]; Law-11 [1]; Leadership-12 [1]; Literature-13 [4]; Piloting/TL10 (Grav)-11 [2]; Politics-12 [1]; Research-15 [6]; savoir-Faire-16 [2]*; Speed Reading-13 [2]; Writing-13 [2].

* Default from IQ+2 due to high Status.

Languages: Galanglic (native)-13 [0]; Vilani-13 [2].

The Honorable George McAllister Zhao (150 points)

George always assumed that he would one day become Baron Zhao. Sure, the job takes some work and skill, but George thought that he would have a few decades for fun before it was time to start. When Baron Martin named Gavin as his heir, George was slightly concerned, but he still thought that there would be many years to regain 'his birthright'. The sudden illness and death of his father made him panic, with the results outlined above.

Human (Mixed/Imperial) male; age 27; 5' 9", 180 lbs.; brown skin, black hair, mustache, gray eyes, wears a formal suit.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [20]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 11 [10].

Speed 5.75; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance [5]; Daredevil [15]; Filthy Rich [50]; Heir [5]; Status 2 [5].*

* Includes one level of free Status from high Wealth.

Disadvantages: Jealousy [-10]; Laziness [-10]; Secret (disowned, and lied about it) [-20].

Quirks: Gourmand and borderline overweight; Has the family crest embroidered on all his jackets and shirts; Snaps with his fingers to order servants around (they are expected to guess his wishes at this prompt). [-3]

Skills: Acting-13 [2]; Area Knowledge (Byret)-14 [2]; Bard-13 [2]; Carousing-13 [8]; Computer Operation/TL10-13 [1]; Disguise-13 [2]; Fast-Talk-15 [6]; Forgery/TL10-12 [2]; Gambling-13 [2]; Guns/TL10 (Shotgun)-16 [4]*; Piloting/TL12 (Grav)-14 [8]; savoir-Faire-16 [2]**; Sex Appeal-11 [2]; Stealth-13 [4]; Streetwise-14 [4].

* Includes +2 from high IQ.

** Default from IQ+2 due to high Status.

Languages: Galanglic (native)-13 [0]; Vilani-13 [2].

Sir Agrol Kfen Olkang. (90 points)

Back during the Fourth Frontier War, Agrol Olkang was a junior shipyard supervisor on Regina. There he met then-Lieutenant Martin Zhao. Together they exceeded all their production goals, which resulted in a knighthood for Agrol and a promotion for Zhao. They kept in touch, and when Martin inherited the barony he called Sir Agrol in as his seneschal. Over the years, Sir Agrol decided that he had earned some of the fine things in life. He enjoyed good wines and what classic culture one could find on Byret with Baron Martin. The Baron was less interested in the races and grav vehicles, so Sir Agrol ceased to mention his growing interest in these areas.

Despite his ripe old age, Agrol is not at peace with himself. The Vargr grew up in the Imperium (note that he is a native Galanglic speaker, having learned Gvegh only in his teens), and he has worked in human bureaucracies for all his life. Somewhere deep inside him is the 'real Vargr' who wants to break out, and his 'Sir Agrol' persona is not all that respected in the small Vargr community on Byret, either. In a way, his clothing is typical for him -- a conservative cut, but extreme colors. A psychiatrist (not that Agrol would ever talk to one) might conclude that his gambling is another way to channel his Vargr instincts.

Vargr (Gvegh) male; age 62; 5' 4", 120 lbs.; brown fur, turning silver in some places, green eyes.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 12 [20]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 10 [0].

Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Acute Taste and Smell 3 [6]; Acute Vision 1 [2]; Administrative Rank 2 [10]; Claws [15]; Comfortable [10]; Enhanced Move 1 (Fatigue begins after 5 seconds, -30%) [7]; Fur [4]; Patron (George Zhao, unwilling, provides some equipment, 12 or less) [20]; Status 2 [10]; Teeth [5].

Disadvantages: Cannot Kick [-5]; Chummy [-5]; Compulsive Gambling 2 [-10]; Curious [-5]; Duty (to George Zhao, non-hazardous, 15 or less) [10]; Easy to Read [-10]; Extravagance [-10]; Proud [-1]; Reduced Fatigue 1 [-3]; Reduced Hit Points 1 [-5]; Reputation -2 (Vargr) [-10]; Secret (has stolen money and the codicil) [-20].

Quirks: Asks people to call him 'Sir A' (those who can get away with it call him 'Aggie' instead); Paces around when he negotiates; Wears suits with a formal cut and outrageous colors, even for a Vargr. [-3]

Skills: Accounting-14 [6]; Acting-13 [2]; Administration-14 [4]; Area Knowledge (Byret)-16 [6]; Brawling-14 [4]; Carousing-11 [4]; Computer Operation/TL10-15 [4]; Detect Lies-13 [4]; Diplomacy-13 [4]; Economics-12 [2]; Gambling-13 [2]; Intimidation-12 [1]; Law-15 [8]; Leadership-12 [1]; Piloting/TL10 (Grav)-13 [4]; Politics-13 [2]; savoir-Faire-18 [6]*; Streetwise-12 [1].

* Default from IQ+2 due to high Status.

Languages: Galanglic (native)-13 [0]; Gvegh-13 [2]; Vilani-12 [1].

Dame Naomi Rubin (125 points)

Dame Naomi is one of several trouble-shooters for Archduke Norris. Her usual assignments are political problems, not criminal investigations, but she has learned quite a lot over the years. Dame Naomi will be sympathetic to Gavin, but that will not divert her from her duty to uphold the letter and spirit of the inheritance laws.

Human (Mixed/Imperial) female; age 74; 5' 6", 125 lbs.; pale skin, short silver hair, brown eyes, wears old-fashioned glasses, usually dressed in a formal suit.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 9 [-10].

Speed 5; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Administrative Rank 4 [20]; Comfortable [10]; Patron (Archduke Norris, 9 or less) [15]; Security Clearance 3 [15]; Status 2 [10].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (correctable) [-10]; Code of Honor (Imperial) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Imperium) [-10].

Quirks: Complains loudly about her age and failing health; Refers to the Archduke as 'the young Aledon'; Rises early and expects everyone else to follow suit (conferences at 0500, for example). [-3]

Skills: Administration-15 [6]; Area Knowledge (Marches)-15 [4]; Computer Operation/TL10-13 [1]; Criminology-13 [2]; Dancing-11 [2]; Detect Lies-13 [4]; Diplomacy-14 [6]; Fast-Talk-14 [4]; History-11 [1]; Interrogation-13 [2]; Law-14 [6]; Leadership-12 [1]; Piloting/TL12 (Grav)-11 [2]; Politics-15 [6]; Research-15 [6]; savoir-Faire-18 [6]; Speed Reading-13 [2]; Writing-14 [4].

Languages: Galanglic (native)-13 [0]; Vilani-13 [2]; Zhodani-12 [1].

Almost a Castle

Most of the adventure will take place in Zhao Manor. The estate consists of the main building, a garage, stables (currently unused), a few sheds and several acres of well-tended lawns. From the outside, the main house looks a bit like a classic Greek temple, in a style which was briefly fashionable a few centuries ago. The balcony (a later addition) spoils the effect, but it is a nice place for breakfast in the summer.

The Staff of Zhao Manor

Sir Agrol Kfen Olkang is the seneschal. Linda Chatsworth is the butler. She is 53 years old, prim and rather humorless. Nobody knows how she feels about the two brothers, but Linda would never help to uncover a scandal.

Shannash Dashkhur was the valet of the late Baron. Now he has been demoted to something like a footman. He is 74 years old, gaunt and silver-haired. Shannash dislikes George, but he has resigned himself to the situation and plans to retire rather than fight.

Tracy Olafson is the maid. She is 21 years old, a petite blonde with something of a crush on Gavin. She would be willing to help with any plan to, say, search George's office, but Tracy has no spy skills at all.

Andrew Harris is the cook. He is 48 years old, overweight and apparently oblivious to the family feud.

Carlos Kemp is the pilot. He is 33 years old, almost 7' tall and completely bald. He shares a love for grav vehicles with Sir Agrol and George, which makes him loyal to the two.

Susan Kemp is the gardener. She is 38 years old and Carlos' wife. Susan has little interaction with the family and indoor staff, but her husband keeps her informed. Ten years ago, she thought Gavin was the nicer kid, but Carlos has swayed her towards George.

Gavin will notice that Toshio Diaz is no longer in the manor. The ex-Marine was Baron Martin's bodyguard and the sole member of his huscarles (household troops).

Inside, the house is old but well maintained, generally at TL10. In addition to the artwork mentioned above, there are a number of antiques on display or in everyday use. Unless the PCs are experts (or simply ask), they cannot know whether a tea service they are using is 5 or 500 years old. The really valuable stuff will be out of reach of clumsy hands, though. Most doors are powered sliding doors with a short-range proximity sensor where

one would expect the handle. The system takes a few moments to get used to, then it is really easy to use, especially carrying a serving tray or the like. A button will keep the doors open and most have a button on the inside to keep them closed, but of course there is an override in the house computer system. (On the floor plan, these doors are shown as gaps in the wall.) Each room has a small wall panel with light and heating controls and an intercom which links into the planetary telephone net. Ways to abuse this system are left to the imagination of the GM and sufficiently paranoid players. Please keep in mind that while both Sir Agrol and George have the Computer Operations skill, neither of them has Computer Hacking or Electronics Operation (Security).

From the front entrance, visitors enter a foyer which takes up the Greek column motif. Two flights of stairs lead up to the upper floor. Directly ahead is the great hall, which seats more than a hundred if all tables and chairs are brought up from the basement. To the right is the late Baron's office, now used by George. To the left is Sir Agrol's office. Enterprising players might notice that the doors to both can be observed from the holovid room in the upper floor if the door to the holovid room is keyed open. However, there is a spiral staircase from the Baron's office to the Baron's private study and a door from Sir Agrol's room to his office. Except for the library and dining room, the other rooms on the lower floor are used only by the staff. A family member or guest who sneaks around there will probably be remembered if he or she is noticed. There are stairs down to the basement and a lift to the upper floor and basement (but not to the attic). Zhao Manor has no secret dungeons, unless you count the laundry and the wine cellar.

The corridors on the upper floor form a figure eight around the open foyer and the walls enclosing the great hall. One flight of stairs leads to the attic, which houses more old furniture and a few smallish, unused staff rooms. George has moved into the late Baron's suite, but he has not completely vacated his old room yet. That leaves three guest rooms on the upper floor, each with two beds. If there are more visitors, the staff will be called in to clear out George's old room, which may be a first opportunity to meet them all. If a adventurer posed as Gavin's servant, he will be put into the room between Carlos and Tracy. The empty staff's rooms in the Baron's suite and in Sir Agrol's suite will not be offered to any PC.

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