

SERENITY ROLE PLAYING GAME

LEGACY

OF

EVIL

**A CAUTIONARY TALE
OF BIG DAMN HEROES
IN THREE ACTS**

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LEGACY OF EVIL

A MING ZHOU PRODUCTION

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This is the story

What starts out as an opportunity to scavenge a gutted derelict found drifting in deep space turns into a hunt for clues with the opportunity to locate a legend lost for so long that it is largely considered to be a myth. Pursuing the unexpected opportunity soon proves that the myth is in fact real, but the crew unknowingly alerts a powerful Tong that has been duty bound to protect that legend for nearly two centuries and they will stop at nothing to fulfill their sacred duty.

GM's Notes

The premise of Legacy of Evil is simple – how far are the players willing to go to solve one of the greatest mysteries of the 'Verse? The PCs will have to lie, steal, place innocents at risk, and, in all likelihood, kill in order to find their way to the fabled inner sanctum of one of the most notorious figures in human history. This adventure will be tough even for seasoned Veteran or Big Damn Hero level Crews and there is a significant risk of character deaths. If the GM chooses to run this scenario for less experienced Crews, they will have to adjust skill roll difficulties and the number of opponents in the encounters accordingly.

Presented as a cautionary tale, Legacy of Evil consists of three acts of three scenes each. Act One will discover a *Dead Man's Tale*, and leads the players into *Followin' the Wind* and *If You Want It, Take It*. Act Two make the players face *No Time for the Weak*, before they can go *On the Trail of a Legend*, and have to decide *If You Really Want It, Fight For It*. The climatic Act Three requires the Crew to make the choice of *Enterin' the Dragon*, and then to *Peelin' the Onion*, and the penultimate encounter of *Shan Yu Rising*.

A Master of Evil

Shan Yu was a leader of unmitigated power and unquestioned authority. The repercussions of his reign are hotly debated in the halls of learning and are still whispered in the halls of the Alliance Government. He considered himself to be a noble warrior poet and philosopher destined to rule by the right of his iron will and the cult of personality that he built into legions of adoring followers. In the harsh light of history however, Shan Yu's role has been relegated to yet another of the 'Verse's and Earth-That-Was' long history of brutal dictators.

One of the unexpected downsides of absolute power is the never ending responsibility of having so much authority invested in only a single person. The relentless stress of protecting one's grip on power forces even the strongest willed leader to have a place to unwind, an inner sanctum sanctorum where they can keep the worlds at bay and relax, if only for awhile. The long lost, and now nearly mythical, sanctuary of Shan Yu was where he wrote his volumes on war, poetry, and where he refined his multi-volume treatise on torture. Guarded day and night by a phalanx of human and automated defenses, Shan Yu was able to concentrate on recording his thoughts for what he thought was ordained as a glorious posterity.

The most powerful of the defenses for his sanctuary was its mysterious location. Called his "Hidden City" and only known by a handful of the most carefully guarded pilots in the 'Verse. Each of these specially selected individuals, once chosen, served for life, as death was the only way their absolute loyalty could be ensured. All visitors to the sanctuary, regardless of rank, were kept in windowless compartments on ships and never

allowed access to computers or the bridge during the trip, so they would be unable to find their way back on their own. The only aide allowed to travel to his private domain unescorted was his viceroy Zhang Kaiping. This singular honor was not bestowed due to trust, as Shan Yu trusted no one, but due to Zhang's beloved children being held in the sanctuary as bonded hostages to ensure his viceroy's continued loyalty.

When Shan Yu died, his chosen heir proved to be unable to maintain his grip on power against the many enemies that had lain in wait for decades to strike before he could consolidate power. As fighting quickly spread from planet to planet, the regime crumbled, finding itself unable to stand against the inevitable winds of change. Many esteemed institutions fell during the wide spread anarchy and, for a time, there was much knowledge lost, among those pieces of information lost during the chaos was the location of Shan Yu's cherished Hidden City...

Act 1

Scene 1: Dead Man's Tale

"One thing that them as what chooses to live dirtside their wholes lives don't ken is just how big the Black is. Oh sure, somes got book schoolin' that gives 'em all these fancy answers, but they don't really know it, cause they ain't seen it. There are some what say that goin' to the edge and lookin' to what was beyond is what drove the Reavers into innard chawin' monsters, but if that's all it took, why ain't there more Reavers? Either way, the Black is big an' is holdin' more secrets than what any one man, or hell even a whole passel can understand, so next time a spacer tells

ya he seen it with his own peepers, don't be so quick to say he didn't."

– Gus Jacobsen, itinerant spacer during an interview by the author Jiang Hu Long for his popular series 'Verse Stories'

While on a trip in deep space and in a remote area, either with or without cargo, the pilot or whoever is manning the sensors must make an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Sensors* or Intelligence + *Piloting / Sensors* roll to notice an old wreck drifting lifeless in the Black. Exactly how the Crew got to be where they are isn't important, but one option is that the crew made contact with a go-between out on the Rim that needs a few ships for a quick cargo run. He didn't want any questions asked, but the pay is good and all the captains get half up front. It's a deal too good for most crews to pass up on. They plot their course and sit back for the weeks it'll take. Unfortunately, during the trip, the Nav Comp and Auto-pilot experience a glitch and throws them way off course, finishing with a moment of hard burn that brings their attention to the problem. It is while they are trying to figure out where the hell they are and looking for a navigation signal that they discover the wreck. This ensures they don't really know where the wreck was heading as they don't know where they are themselves and means they have no confirmed work ahead of them.

A closer scan of the wreck shows that it is very old and was clearly attacked with several rents in the shattered hull. One section of hull, while badly deformed by the damage has a distinctive crest visible as the ship tumbles. A HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Computer Operations* roll during a Cortex database search or a HEROIC (19) Intelligence + *Knowledge / History*

will reveal that the markings on the derelict indicates that the ship is the *Ever Victorious* the personal frigate of Zhang Kaiping, the viceroy of the infamous Shan Yu!

The wreck is largely gutted, but the center of the hulk is in reasonable condition and something worth salvaging might be found via a physical search. Any authentic artifacts relating to the most infamous dictator in the history of the 'Verse will certainly bring a high price, as despite his infamy, Shan Yu's legacy is so far reaching that collectors flock to snap up anything that becomes available. Thus while the Crew might hesitate to explore the wreck, an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge / History* or *Business* or Intelligence + *Knowledge / Appraisal* or Intelligence + *Artistry / Appraisal* roll or from hints by the GM, it is emphatically clear that the credits simply floating in front of them waiting to be taken are considerable, considerable enough to either extensively upgrade their ship, or possibly even buy a new one.

The Ever Victorious looks anything but, with huge rents and scoring from a myriad of hits all along the remaining portion of the hull, you figure that the forward quarter to a third of the ship is completely gone. The shattered remains of the aft section where the engines once were is completely open to space and even though the wreck is nearly two centuries old, the remnants of the power core is still venting elevated levels of radiation, making sensor readings difficult.

Due to the heavy damage to the wreck, the search will have to be in Vacuum Suits. Docking with the tumbling wreck is a HARD (11) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* roll and getting the airlock to open is either a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Covert / Disable*

Devices or Intelligence + *Mechanical or Technical Engineering* roll. Working their way through the wreck takes quite a bit of time, negotiating the twisted corridors partially blocked by shattered and buckled deck plating, doors that no longer have power to open and sealed bulkheads. The Crew discovers that most of the compartments have been opened to space and anything of value was sucked out during the explosive decompression. Eventually the PCs make their way to the center most and best protected section of the ship. The hatch is undamaged, but without power, it is a FORMIDABLE (15) Burst of Strength (Strength + Strength) roll to force the heavy hatch to open.

"This lump of gos se¹ better have something in it, or this whole trip has been a waste of time!" You growl just as the battered hatch opens. "Shen sheng de gao wan²!" You exclaim when your flashlight illuminates the darkness of centuries and you figure out exactly what is floating in the middle of the compartment.

Once the hatch opens, they find a desiccated body floating inside the fairly intact compartment. An AVERAGE (7) Alertness + *Perception* will notice a symbol on the left breast on the corpse's clothes matches that of the one on the ship, the body is that of Zhang himself! In addition to the body, the Crew finally finds some salvage of value. There is a large locker with four heavily armored stalls at the rear of the compartment; each has a small view port that reveals a robot of some kind is inside. The armor is heavy enough that the only thing that could breach the lockers would be explosives which would have to be so powerful that they would almost certainly destroy the contents of the locker.

¹ crap

² Holy testicles

Searching the rest of the compartment, the Crew finds the first computer on the ship that hasn't been blown apart and offers the possibility to reach the robots intact. The additional salvage consists of: Zhang's clothes (If the PCs are hard core enough to take them), his side arm, and his multi-band. Even a quick glance with a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Knowledge* or AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* roll will reveal that in addition to being very obsolete, three of the robots are some sort of security model, while the last one seems to be some sort of personal assistant.

Jump starting the computer terminal requires a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* roll and an external power source, which can be something as small as a flashlight's power cell. The badly scrambled terminal yields log entries from Zhang describing how the ship was hunted down as part of the purge after the fall of the regime while he made a frantic attempt to reach Shan Yu's hidden sanctuary to free his children from their bondage. Regardless of serving someone history has declared a monster, Zhang's desperation to save his children is clear even though the playback is garbled.

Once the computer is activated, it is an EASY (3) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* roll to get the stalls containing the robots to open. The robots do not have any power, but a quick AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge* or EASY (3) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* check shows that all they need to function is to be recharged. While no longer capable of competing with modern robots of the same type, their historical significance means they are worth several thousand credits each. The

un-powered robots are however, very heavy with the security model weighing 300 pounds each and the personal assistant 200 pounds.

However, unknown to the Crew, the activation of the terminal frees a logic loop caused by the damage and finally initiates a long stalled self-destruct sequence. The terminal emits a clearly audible buzzing then cuts off in the middle of Zhang's log to report nuclear self-destruct sequence activated and begins a five minute countdown that even pulling the power source from the terminal does not stop!

Read Aloud:

"With Yu dead, I must save my Yo Chr³ before his Chwen⁴ son thinks to use them as his father did. Merciful Buddha, I know I have served a monster, but even if only for the sake of my children let me zzzzzzzzzz Nuclear detonation sequence initiated, countdown T-minus five minutes."

The completion of the self-destruct sequence initiated a dedicated and self-contained power source that is buried so deep within the ship's circuitry that the Crew couldn't possibly hope to reach it before the five minute countdown completes. However, breaking the logic loop also causes the addled computer to eject a data disc, as the computer's command processes were badly scrambled by the damage, and the terminal is attempting to execute the last instructions from Zhang, but not doing so in the correct order.

What the disc contains is unknown, but it has to be an important clue, as well as being intrinsically valuable, and well worth looking at later. The PCs

³ Infants

⁴ retarded

do not have time to examine the disc right now, with the computer terminal locked out by the self-destruct sequence that is now underway.

Escaping through the twisted corridors to reach their ship in time to get far enough away so as to not be consumed by the impending nuclear explosion means that the Crew will have to make a difficult choice about salvaging the robots.

Escaping the wreck is a Complex Action of Strength + *Athletics* with the difficulty based on how much the PC is encumbered.

Each roll represents ten seconds of time, but the PCs only have two minutes to reach their ship in order to be able to use the remaining three minutes to get far enough away to avoid being consumed by the explosion from the nuclear bomb on Zhang's ship. In addition to the sheer distance, there are three sections of the path to their ship that are so badly twisted that they will take an additional round to safely negotiate leaving only nine rolls to escape if the PCs are being cautious. If a PC chooses to take a chance, they can save a roll at each choke point with an additional HARD (11) Agility + *Athletics* roll. If the additional roll fails, that character takes two rounds to get through that choke point. Finally, attempting to move the heavy inert robots is a one-step penalty to Agility for the Complex Action rolls and a two-step penalty for the roll to slip through the choke points quickly. Thus, in all likelihood, the Crew will have to abandon the robots in order to successfully flee the final moments of the last remnant of Shan Yu's fleet. It is however, crucial that the GM ensures that Zhang's data disc is saved during the Crew's escape.

Encumbrance	Action	Difficulty Threshold	Weight Equivalents
Basic space suit and side arm	Average	35	Up to 20 pounds
As above, but adding Ballistic Mesh, and any long arm.	Hard	55	Up to 50 pounds
All the above and adding Plate Vest	Formidable	75	Up to 100 pounds
Plus carrying the Personal Assistant Robot	Incredible	115	Up to 300 pounds
Plus carrying a Security Robot	Ridiculous	135	Up to 400 pounds

The penalty for failing to escape the hulk in two minutes is very harsh. The Crew that makes it to the ship in time will either have to leave the others behind or the entire crew risks death from the explosion. They have only three minutes to get out of range. Only leaving with a minute or less before detonation means that the PCs and their ship are incinerated in the blast. Getting away between a minute and two minutes means they sustain an attack at INCREDIBLE (23) versus Ship's Agility + *Piloting* to determine Basic damage in addition to D12W weapon damage. If they were between two and three minutes the attack is at FORMIDABLE (15) with the same d12W weapon damage.

In addition to the damage to the ship, the proximity to the nuclear explosion will send out a shockwave powerful enough that anyone not fully strapped down will get thrown around by the blast. Being less than two minutes away from the blast requires each person to make an Agility + *Athletics*

roll versus a FORMIDABLE (15) attack inflicting d4W damage. If they were between two and three minutes, the attack is HARD (11) versus Agility + *Athletics* with the same d4W damage.

The Robots

In the unlikely event any of the robots are saved, the personal assistant robot is actually the most valuable, as the potential to obtain first hand insights from the highest level on the inner workings of Shan Yu's government makes this one robot almost priceless. The GM is free to allow the PCs to auction the robot or to use a fence if it is too hot for them to handle. Zhang heavily encrypted the robot's memory, so accessing the data will be a massive undertaking on the order of an IMPOSSIBLE Complex Action of Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* with each roll taking a day (8 hours) and the consequences of even a single Botch being the complete loss of the data.

The infamous nature of the security robots makes them valuable just for being what they are, but obviously they do not carry the data that the personal assistant robot holds. Reactivating the antique security robots is also a Complex Action of INCREDIBLE level with each roll taking one hour with the price of two Botches resulting in the robots attacking.

Unless the GM wants to game out the sale of the robots, if fenced, the personal assistant with the data untouched is worth one million Credits. If the data has been successfully recovered, the robot's value would jump to ten million Credits. If the data is lost, the robot's value drops to ten thousand credits, in any case, the PCs would get from five to ten percent. The security robots are worth a tidy fifty thousand Credits each. If the GM wishes to actually run the auction, that falls outside the purview of this adventure and is the perfect hook for the Crew's next adventure.

The value of these robots is so great that the money earned from their sale could be game unbalancing and GMs are encouraged to use any means they feel necessary to prevent the Crew from realizing any large profits, an example of which is the Alliance raiding any auction and seizing them as recovered government property.

Act 1

Scene 2: Followin' the Wind

"When faced with adversity, pain provides the most effective focus. Pain is man's most ancient of emotions and its effects far more visceral than any other stimuli. The rational application of the right kind of pain will instill alacrity of purpose for any mammal, thinking or not, to perform any task and in the face of any challenge, as the right application of pain can even supersede the fear of death."

– The annotated collected works of Shan Yu Volume Two, Chapter Nine, Celestial Publishing, Tenth Printing, Londinum, 2515

Assuming the PCs were smart enough to flee soon enough to avoid the effects of the self-destruction of the *Ever Victorious*, the Crew is now in possession of an obsolete data disc that may hold just about anything. Making an assessment on the chances to recover the information on the disc will be a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* roll. A failure means the Crew was unable to jury-rig an interface with the old data format and no information is learned, while a Botch will result in a one-step penalty to all further attempts to access the disc. A success reveals that the disc suffered a power surge and is both damaged and badly scrambled. Recovering the data is going to require either specialized equipment if the Crew has a competent computer savvy character or specialized skills if they do not. However, the down side is that the skills or the equipment required is so specialized that it will take a trip to a Border Planet to obtain.

The nearest Border Planet to the PC's current location is Boros and after a successful HARD (11)

Intelligence + *Piloting / Astrogation* roll to plot the course, will be an 752 hour trip for a speed class 1 ship. Once the PCs reach Boros, their next actions will be based on whether they need to buy equipment or have to hire a computer expert to access the disc.

If they need to hire a computer expert, they will have to quietly make inquiries into the computer hacker sub-culture that exists just below the surface of every planet in the 'Verse, hiding even on the high-class worlds of the Core. Finding someone that can access the data disc is easy, finding someone that can be reasonably trusted to remain silent about what's on the disc is much harder by far. If a PC has Friends in Low Places and expends three plot points, they can find a hacker named *Tapper* that can access the disc, but on making either a HARD (11) Alertness + *Perception* roll, or if they have either Trustworthy Gut or Nose for Trouble, they will realize that this contact will require some 'convincing' to be quiet about the disc's contents. Failing this roll means the hacker reveals the contents and the Crew will pick up competition later in the adventure. A FORMIDABLE (15) Willpower + *Discipline / Intimidation* or Willpower + *Influence / Intimidation* roll will provide the needed convincing. If the Crew uses actual violence, the difficulty becomes one-step easier. Another option to keep *Tapper* quiet is money. Doubling his fee and making a successful HARD (11) Intelligence + *Influence / Persuasion* roll will literally buy his silence.

There is always the possibility that the PCs may choose kill *Tapper* to ensure his silence. If they do choose this extreme method, every PC that visits the hacker will have to make a HARD (11) Agility +

Covert roll to successfully sweep the site of the murder of any clues. If *any* PC this roll fails, the PCs will face a serious complication later. The silence of the hacker can however, be comfortably assured if the PC with Friends in Low Places expends five plot points when they initially make the contact.

If no one in the Crew has Friends in Low Places or chose not to use it, they will have to make a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Covert / Streetwise* or Intelligence + *Influence / Streetwise* roll to find the less than honest hacker called *Tapper*, requiring the same 'convincing' options as above. However, on a FORMIDABLE (15) level roll the Crew will locate the trustworthy *Tapper*.

Regardless of the specifics of which *Tapper* they contact, he will take (d4 + 1) hours to access the contents of the disc and he will charge 100 credits. A successful Opposed Roll of Willpower + *Influence / Persuasion* versus *Tapper's* Willpower + *Discipline / Mental Resistance* will drop the cost to 75 credits with a Critical Success costing 50 credits. A Failure means he will only take 100 credits and a Botch angers *Tapper* and makes him charge 150 Credits.

Purchasing the required equipment to access the disc themselves will require an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* roll to know what parts are needed and a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Covert / Streetwise* or Intelligence + *Influence / Streetwise* roll to find the necessary components. Failing either roll wastes three hours of time. On successfully making both rolls, the parts will cost 100 credits. A successful Opposed Roll of Willpower + *Influence / Persuasion* versus the merchant's Willpower + *Discipline / Mental Resistance* will drop the cost to 75 credits with a Critical Success costing 50 credits. A Failure means

he will only take 100 credits and a Botch angers the merchant and makes him charge 150 Credits. After the components are assembled, it is a FORMIDABLE (75) Complex Action of Intelligence + *Technical Engineer / Hacking* with each roll taking twenty minutes.

Once they have accessed the disc, they find it is Zhang's personal log of sorts. Since it is a personal log, most of the commentary is about his all too infrequent visits with his children and very little about the events of the Shan Yu court. A HARD (11) Intelligence + *Knowledge / History* will know that this information is too incomplete to be worth much, but could form the basis of a decent biography about Zhang that could be sold for a few hundred credits. However, the disc does list conclusive proof that Shan Yu's sanctuary is real and once held directions to find the long lost Hidden City; unfortunately the coordinates are too damaged to read.

Before the Crew can get too discouraged, they learn Zhang was going to activate the self destruct to cover his escape via long range shuttle. He wasn't sure if he would make it, but hoped that his wife would find the clues in the map hidden in the Buddha of the central temple that would point the way if he failed. The disc however, doesn't indicate to which temple Zhang is referring.

Making an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge / History* or a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Perception / Investigation* or *Deduction* roll will realize that a Cortex inquiry referencing Shan Yu's era and temples in existence at the time should help to figure out which temple holds the map. An AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Computer Operations* roll will quickly pinpoint the

temple in question to the Xiuhua Temple located in Heming province on Sihnon. The birthplace of Shan Yu and once the center of his regime, but is now only a quiet backwater area.

Travel to Sihnon is restricted, but an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge* will know that since Sihnon is the center of Buddhism in the 'Verse and there is an almost constant flow of pilgrims to the many temples located all over the planet. An AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Influence / Streetwise* or a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Knowledge* will know that government issued passes for a 'pilgrimage' are neither hard to get or to forge.

A trip to the governmental offices on Boros is a quick trip via mule or maglev train. Obtaining the permit is a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Influence / Bureaucracy* roll and will cost 25 credits or anyone with *Friends in High Places* could call in a favor. If the PCs are reluctant or unable to go to a governmental office, they can make a reasonable forgery with a HARD (11) Agility + *Covert / Forgery* roll. Once in possession of a landing pass, the course to Sihnon is only an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Piloting / Astrogation* roll and a 324 hour trip for a speed class 1 ship.

Act 1

Scene 3: If You Want It, Take It

"One of the two founding worlds and capitol of the Federal Alliance of Planets, Sihnon can not be described with mere words or even in captures. The beauty of this world has to be seen first hand in order to fully appreciate the vision crafted by the terraforming crews when mankind arrived in the 'Verse from the Exodus. Sculpted to be a tribute to Earth-That-Was, Sihnon was engineered from the

beginning to take advantage of everything that humanity learned from the loss of our birthplace and to incorporate social engineering on an unprecedented scale. Sihnon is also the spiritual center of existence to all the followers of the Buddha's teachings and is home to a bewildering array of the oldest and most learned of temples to be found in the 'Verse..."

- Current Cortex travelogue entry on Sihnon.

En route to Sihnon, the PCs must make a very hard decision if they wish to locate Shan Yu's lost sanctuary. The disc gave them some priceless clues, but the data was incomplete. In order to complete the information they need, they will have to become thieves, and commit sacrilege in the process, by stealing a Buddha from a temple.

On arriving at Sihnon, the Crew must enter the crowded near space of one of the two capitols of the Federal Alliance of Planets. Being at the very heart of the government, the security is probably beyond anything any of the Crew has seen before. The Alliance navy maintains an ominous presence with large warships watching silently, while smaller patrol ships and fighters flit between specially cleared flight lanes that separate the staggering amount of traffic into some semblance of order as each ship waits its turn to land or depart.

Regardless of whether the Crew obtained an actual landing pass or forged their own, all 'pilgrimage' passes are inspected prior to landing due to the common misuse of such passes to smuggle or conduct other than the listed purpose and after a d2 + 1 hour delay, one of the Alliance patrol vessels waves their ship to prepare for boarding and inspection. The docking is executed with all the precision that is to be expected from a vessel

under constant observation by the highest levels of the military, and the resulting potential for advancement or banishment based on the success or failure of the smallest detail. As soon as the docking clamps are secure, Alliance military swarms onto the ship. Four soldiers in full armor take up overwatch positions, covering the PCs as two officers enter and stop exactly a meter in front of whoever seems most likely to be the captain.

"Greetings and welcome to Sihnon." The taller of the two officers speaks with all the boredom of someone that has gone through these words far too many times. "Please present your ship's papers and your landing permit for inspection."

Depending on whether the permit is real or a forgery, the crew will probably take different actions. If the pass is real, then they need only make an EASY (3) Willpower + *Performance / Acting* or an AVERAGE (7) Willpower + *Influence / Persuasion* to mollify the Fed's almost non-existent curiosity regarding their reasons for visiting Sihnon. If the roll is successful, the jaded officer asks to see the ship's papers and if these are in order, an EASY (3) Intelligence + *Influence / Persuasion* will avoid any fines and they are given clearance to land. If this roll fails, the officer becomes more interested and presses the PC with an Opposed Roll of Willpower + *Influence / Interrogation* versus the PC's Willpower + *Discipline / Mental Resistance*. Succeeding in this roll makes the papers inspection roll one-step harder, while failing results in automatic fines of 50 credits and a Botch with fines of 200 credits. As soon as the Feds depart the ship, the Crew has a five minute window to make their assigned landing. Due to the crowded space lanes, this is a HARD (11) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* roll.

Once in Shan Yu's home town of Huayeng, the PCs soon find that the Core, even in a small town, is an expensive place with port fees triple normal (€3 per 100 tons), but at least fuel costs are normal (€5 per ton). Visiting the Xiuhua Temple is simple and allows the Crew to get a look at the layout of the place. Security seems limited and the Buddha is in plain sight, but the statue is 30' tall and obviously weighs tons! A discrete inquiry with an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Influence / Persuasion* roll will learn there is a side alcove with a 3' Buddha that was the test casting used prior to the creation of the main one in the center of the temple.

This smaller statue weighs roughly 100 pounds and an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + *Perception* will notice that there is a security system protecting the two century old relic. The Crew has many options on how to steal the statue and the GM is encouraged to allow players to come up with any plausible plan.

A couple options are to hide in the temple until nightfall. The temple has lots of nooks and crannies and it will take a HARD (11) Agility + *Covert / Stealth* roll to remain unseen. If the roll fails, as the monks are completely non-violent, anyone caught in the temple will be politely escorted from the grounds. If the same person is caught a second time, the monks will sadly call Federal Marshalls to remove the trespasser. Sneaking into the temple at night will require an AVERAGE (7) Agility + *Athletics / Climbing* roll to scale the outer wall and an AVERAGE (7) Agility + *Covert / Stealth* to reach the Buddha's alcove. The security on the Buddha is surprisingly good and will require a FORMIDABLE (15) Intelligence + *Covert / Disable Devices* or Intelligence +

Technical Engineering / Hacking or *Technical Security Systems* to defeat. Despite a thorough physical search of the statue, no hidden compartments can be located. The Crew has no choice but to take the Buddha with them if they want the clues to find the Hidden City.

Exiting the temple compound with a hundred pound statue is, obviously, going to be much more complicated than it was to enter compound empty-handed. It will take two HARD (11) Agility + *Covert / Stealth* rolls to reach to outer wall for each PC making the trip and the heavy statue will impose a two-step penalty to Agility if carried by one character or one-step if carried by two. If any PC fails a roll, they encounter a single monk. They only have two options at this point, either subdue the monk or drop the statue. If they choose to subdue the monk, they will have to do so in three rounds using hand weapons before being detected. If they drop the statue, they will get away, but they will lose their only opportunity to get the Buddha, as the temple will beef up security to the point that another attempt will certainly fail.

Getting the statue over the wall will present a challenge. It is still an AVERAGE (7) Agility + *Athletics / Climbing* roll to scale the wall, but will require at least two PCs to lift it over the wall. One PC will have to climb to the top of the wall, then a second PC will have to make a FORMIDABLE (15) Strength + *Athletics / Lifting* roll to dead lift the statue over their head for the one on the wall to hold with an AVERAGE (7) Strength + *Athletics / Lifting* roll, long enough for the second PC to climb the wall. The PC holding the statue can then either drop the statue over the wall or lower it to either a waiting PC or the first PC after they finish climbing down. If three PCs are involved with two lifting the

statue to a third waiting on the wall, the difficulty drops to HARD (11).

On obtaining this Buddha, the Crew will probably wish to depart as quickly as possible. They may wish to rush their departure, but the truth is that the missing Buddha will not be discovered until the following morning. If the PCs wish to expedite their departure, they will have to make a FORMIDABLE (15) Intelligence + *Influence / Bureaucracy* roll to obtain a d4 + 1 hour departure time. If the roll fails or they do not make the attempt, their departure window will be in 2d4 + 2 hours.

Figuring out the Chinese puzzle box-like Buddha is a FORMIDABLE (75) Complex Action of Intelligence + *Artistry or Knowledge or Mechanical Engineering* with each roll taking 30 minutes. Once the Buddha finally opens, inside they find a parchment map. However, the Chinese used on the map is in an ancient form unknown to anyone in the Crew and even the Cortex is unable to provide any specifics, though it does list that the ideograms were once used by the Lu-tsung a small Buddhist sect, that once lived in Heming province, but relocated to Bernadette due to the stigma of being associated with Shan Yu's education.

The Crew has no choice but to go to Bernadette if they wish to get the map deciphered. It is an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Piloting / Astrogation* roll to plot the course to the first planet to be terraformed after Sihnon and Londinum had been established. The trip takes 215 hours for a speed class 1 vessel and will be uneventful except for the person manning the sensors, if they can make a FORMIDABLE (15) Intelligence + *Piloting / sensors* or Intelligence + *Technical Engineer / Sensors* roll, they pick up a faint return in their wake, possibly

from another ship. However, if the pilot turns to take a closer look, the contact disappears. This quasi-encounter is to tweak the player's sense of paranoia, but the truth is, they *are* being followed and this event is just foreshadowing of events to come.

Depending on character actions, PCs should earn 3 Plot Points for their troubles to this point. It is however recommended that the characters be penalized one Plot Point for excessive violence in the temple (IE Gunplay) or murdered *Tapper*.

Act 2

Scene 1: No Time for the Weak

"Most people don't like to admit it, but the number two smuggled commodity in the 'Verse is folk. Sure'n I'm lookin' at ya wid both eyes, people gets traded no different from livestock. Even on the fancy Core Worlds. Rich folk like to call 'em 'servants' to be able to pretend they are all respectable and all, but those 'servants' no more have any control over their own lives than them poor hun dan what gets snatched up an put on a terraformin' crew agin their will. You ever plan on doin' any business on Bernadette, ya'll might be wise to remember that. What's the number one smuggled commodity? What else, guns!"

– Frankie 'Twice Pipe' Whitaker, Information Broker, Persephone

Arriving on Bernadette, the Crew sets down hoping that things will finally go smooth and let them find out if they actually are on the trail of a real fortune or have been spinning their wheels. Bernadette's main space port is a bustling place and it is hard to tell which generates the most noise, the phalanx of ship owners vying for cargo and passengers or the

seemingly endless sea of locals hawking their bewildering array of wares.

While Bernadette seems to have all the glitz and glamour that is to be expected of a Core World, it takes an EASY (3) Intelligence + *Influence* / *Streetwise*, *Covert* / *Streetwise*, or an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge* roll to know that this world has a dark side, namely slavers are known to quietly grab outsiders who find themselves on a terraforming crew against their will. Keeping to main streets or traveling in numbers is highly recommended. This open secret of Bernadette is mentioned for GMs to keep the paranoia factor high. It is not recommended that PCs actually encounter slavers except as the result of a Botched social skill roll and only if the GM desires such a side plot.

Regardless of the Crews actions, shortly after arriving, have any PCs moving about the streets roll a HARD (11) Alertness + *Perception* check to notice that they are being followed. If the PCs make the roll, their shadow melts into the crowd before they can give chase. The GM should play the slaver angle for all it is worth to keep the players off track, but ratcheting up the pressure as they hurry to solve the mystery of the map.

However, this incident is just the first indication that, unknowingly, the Crew has accidentally set an inevitable encounter into motion. Shan Yu's legacy in the 'Verse is considered so long and dark that there were precautions set in place after his downfall so that there could never be another that could induce mankind's new home into such madness again. A watchdog program was hidden into the very deepest levels of the source code of the Cortex to monitor for certain key words that

would alert a group of guardians. Specifically searches for the Xiuhua temple in conjunction with searches from the same source on the Lu-tsung were set up as a red flag event to alert the Shouren Tong that were specially selected and charged to prevent anyone from trying to use Shan Yu's name in a bid to rise to power. The ship that the PCs may have detected earlier belongs to the Tong and followed the Crew from Sihnon, as does their shadow.

Unable to follow up on being shadowed, the Crew will probably concentrate on finding the sect. If the PCs do go off track in a futile attempt to find who is bird-dogging them, the only faction they are likely to locate is a group of slavers. The GM is free to make this encounter as easy or as difficult as they like in an effort to get the PCs back on track.

Due to the large number of religious groups on Bernadette, the best way to track specific information is to access the visitor's bureau database at the visitor's center at the spaceport. Searching the main directory of the numerous temples registered on Bernadette does not locate a listing for the Lu-tsung. A more in depth secondary inquiry and a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* / *Hacking* or Intelligence + *Influence/Administration* roll or asking for assistance will find a limited access file that states that the Lu-tsung sect is located some 800 miles northwest of the landing port in a remote province. Reaching the reclusive sect will require the public maglev, a ship's shuttle, or the ship itself. The sect does not have a landing pad and the nearest point to their monastery is a three kilometer walk if the Crew uses the ship or a shuttle or a two kilometer walk from the nearest station if they take the

maglev train.

The Lu-tsung temple is exquisitely terraced and landscaped and above all a place for quiet solitude. When the Crew reaches the entrance, they are met by a monk that will only speak in an antiquated form of Chinese requiring an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge* or an EASY (3) Intelligence + *Linguist* roll to follow as he will not speak slower to make himself understood, but a character with Natural Linguist will not have to make a roll. If asked why they speak such an old form of Chinese, the monk will maintain his proper composure, but will all but sniff that all members of the order speak Chinese the way it was meant to be spoke, as it was in China on Earth-That-Was.

The monk politely listens to the request for a translation then frowns and tells the Crew to follow him to speak with the Ascetic of their order. Moving through the monastery, an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + *Perception* notes that there isn't a single piece of technology to be seen anywhere in the facility. Everything is hand made and beautifully embellished with carvings and decorations that obviously have taken decades of work to perfect, yet add to the dignity of the structures and the grounds.

The Ascetic of the monks is a wizened old man that looks to be well over a hundred years old, but his voice is clear and vibrant. *"You wish to learn of the old ways. Few of your generation bother to delve into such things and those that do, do so for the most unfortunate of reasons. Speak true of your reasons or be gone from this place."* He says in the same archaic form of Chinese that the younger monk greeted them with.

The Crew has a couple options at this point, but none will be easy. The old monk has led this sect for longer than most, if not all, of the PCs have been alive and his piercing gaze makes it obvious that he has a way of knowing things. If the PCs choose to tell the truth of what they seek and how they have found it, it is a FORMIDABLE (15) Willpower + *Influence / Persuasion* roll to impress the monk with their honesty. However, they have to tell everything, if they leave out the theft of the Buddha or any other major part of the story, the task becomes HEROIC (19). If the PCs try to lie, it is an Opposed Roll of Willpower + *Influence / Persuasion* versus the monk's Intelligence + *Perception / Intuition*.

In either case, if the character wins, the monk will ask a second question: *"Why do you wish to know this thing?"* Again, the PCs can tell the truth or lie.

The truth is the same roll as above, but at a HARD level, while a lie is another Opposed Roll as above. If the PCs make both rolls, the monk is satisfied, by what the Crew has no idea, but nods to the younger monk who escorts them to a library where another monk takes the map and proceeds to translate the almost forgotten ideograms. After an hour, the silent monk returns the map, hands over the translation, and then returns to whatever he was working on before the Crew arrived, ignoring their very existence. The Crew is then free to make their way out of the monastery on their own and to return to their ship or the maglev station.

If any of the rolls fails, the monk looks sternly at the PCs and replies: *"You have not proved worthy. What is the source of unhappiness?"* An AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge* roll (Task drops to EASY if a PC has the specialty of Buddhism) will

know the answer is *'desire'*.

The correct response will earn the following statement: *"You are not beyond help then, you will earn the information you seek if show proper balance by freeing yourself of the desire that has led you astray. The brother that brought you here will show you what you have to do."* The old monk nods to the younger and the Crew are escorted out of the chamber.

The younger monk shows the PCs to the monastery's rock garden, gives them hand tools, and withdraws. The players should be able to figure out they have to tend the garden, if not, call for an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge* roll (Task drops to EASY if a PC has the specialty of Buddhism). This is a HARD (55) Complex Action of Agility + *Artistry* or *Craft* with each roll taking an hour. If a PC does not have either skill, they may roll Agility + Agility with a one step penalty to their attribute. However, other PCs can use Indirect Assistance to help less agile characters. If, by chance, any PC Botches twice, all is not lost, but the Crew loses three hours of labor. The Crew will only be allowed to work for ten hours maximum per day and will be shown to the same austere quarters that the monks use. Only after every crewmember has completed the task, will the younger monk bring them before the Ascetic.

"You have found harmony and have found the path to enlightenment." He says without preamble.

"Part of enlightenment is knowledge and now you will receive the information you seek. The Buddha will either grace your path or he will not. You will have to live with the consequences of what you find, as will we all." The Ascetic nods again and the Crew is escorted to the library as above with the same results.

If the players resort to violence, the monks will point out that the Crew has been lead astray by desire, but will not resist. The PCs are taken immediately to the library and the old monk takes the map no different from above However, when the PCs return to their ship, the pilot will have to make a FORMIDABLE (15) Alertness + *Perception* roll to realize the there is something wrong with the coordinates. If the roll fails and the course taken, the Crew will find themselves en route to the Ares moon of Boros with a lot of very hard questions to answer when they are detained by the Alliance navy for getting too close to the shipyard there. If the PCs return to the monastery, they find the high walls closed and the monastery surrounded by throngs of the faithful guarding the grounds. The Crew is welcome to storm the compound, but they will have to commit mass murder to do so.

As the PCs make their way back to their ship, they are met by an oriental man of indeterminate age that politely asks for a moment of their time and will mention each PC by name unless they have the Cortex Specter asset. If the Crew tries to ignore him, he sadly makes a subtle gesture and the PCs find that the man has company, lots of company in the form of Shouren members equal to twice the number of characters. The man asks again to speak with the Crew in a more private setting and indicates a quiet alcove off of the street in which they are currently standing. If the PCs choose to fight, the Tong will use martial arts unless the Crew draws weapons, then they will respond in kind, knives for knives, guns for guns.

If the PCs agree to speak to the man, he says *"Greetings, I am Peng Chongde. You have,*

regardless of manner or intent, stumbled onto something far too dangerous to pursue. I ask that you cease this foolish course of action you have chosen and surrender what you have found to me, so that whatever it is you have found can be destroyed before you unleash a power you cannot control that could bring destruction down upon us all."

As it is unlikely the PCs will agree to this request, regardless of how nicely presented, the Crew will have a fight on their hands as Peng will call for his friends if he hasn't already done so.

The Tong are superlative fighters and it is quickly obvious, especially with an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge* roll, the PCs will probably lose this fight if something doesn't change their situation and do so quickly. An AVERAGE (7) Alertness + *Perception* (EASY with the specialty *Tactics*) will spot that the local pedestrian foot traffic that has paused to watch the fight and realize that there is a readily available screen waiting to be exploited.

Getting the Crew members from the fight and into a position to exploit the crowd will require one 'leader' PC to make an Intelligence + *Perception / Tactics* roll with the difficulty determined by how many PCs are involved. Every two PCs after the first (round down) adds one level of difficulty starting at EASY, thus five total PCs has a difficulty of HARD. Once the leader has figured out the plan, each of the other PCs have to make an AVERAGE (7) Agility + *Athletics* to get into position. When all of the Crew have succeeded in their rolls, which do not have to be in the same round, but all must succeed before they can execute their escape plan.

When everyone is ready, a HARD (11) Agility + *Athletics* roll will allow the leader to grab a small round vase from a potter's stand and throw it into the back of the crowd. It is a simple free action at this point to yell "Grenade" and start a stampede that rushes *toward* the PCs locked in desperate battle with the Tong. As the panicked mob envelopes the combatants, each character must make an AVERAGE (7) Agility + *Athletics / Dodge* or a "Get out of Harm's Way" roll to avoid the crowd and escape in the confusion.

If the players are reluctant to use such a tactic, the GM must play up how badly they are losing the fight and that there are not any other avenues of escape. If the GM doesn't like the idea of the players being directly responsible for the stampede, they can use the following methods to cause the crowd to panic. If a PC rolls a Botch during the fight, or the GM can contrive for one of the Tong to Botch, in either case, the result is that PC or Tong goes spinning into the crowd that has gathered to watch the fight and gotten too close.

The sudden insertion of fighters into the crowd causes a panic driven stampede, but this time the Crew is also caught by surprise by the wave of humanity. Each PC must make a HARD (11) Agility + *Athletics / Dodge* or a "Get out of Harm's Way" roll just to avoid the crowd. A fail requires that PC to make another HARD (11) Agility + *Athletics / Dodge* roll to determine Basic damage. If they succeed with either the first or second roll, it means they find a path through the crowd and escape. If the second roll fails, they have to repeat the two roll process again in order to avoid the mob and break free to safety.

Any use of gunfire by any of the combatants will

also cause the same panicked stampede that a person stumbling into the crowd will cause. The upshot is, once the Crew meets the Tong, there is going to be a stampede, whether the PCs start it to save themselves or events spiral out of their control, either way, the encounter ends with a stampede and the injury to innocents. Just another step on the Crew's road to corruption caused by their being, even remotely, associated with the legacy of Shan Yu.

Regardless of how the stampede begins, reaching the ship is an AVERAGE (35) Complex Action of Agility + Athletics with each roll taking a round. The stampede catches the Tong members by surprise and when they do recover, only half their original number are able to pursue the crew and it will take them six rounds to break free from the crowd. Once onboard their ship, the Crew now has all the information they need to follow up on the lead they discovered, what seems like weeks ago, on the remains of the *Ever Victorious*.

Buddhism

A set of teachings created in the 5th Century BCE by Siddhartha Gautama, also known as Gautama Buddha, it is considered by many of its followers to be a religion, but by other practitioners to be a collected set of philosophies that lead to enlightenment. The Lu-tsung sect of Buddhism, known as the Vinaya School, is believed to be founded in the 7th Century CE by a monk named Tao-hsuan. Built on a strict adherence to rigid monastic discipline and following a specific code of ethics describing what they may and may not do in their daily lives as laid out in a scripture called the Vinaya Pitaka (Sanskrit: Basket of Discipline), one of the three books known as the Tripitaka. The other two books being the Sutra Pitaka (Basket of Threads) which details 10,000 of Buddha's teachings and the Abhidharma Pitika (Basket of Further Doctrine) a series of seven books that brings a methodology to the explanation of various states of being and how they relate metaphysically.

Act 2

Scene 2: On the Trail of a Legend

"Travel throughout the 'Verse has become so common that it is has become routine. While there are always hazards to any travel in an environment as harsh as outer space, the basic ability of a citizen of the Alliance to move from one planet to another in safety, and for a fee, comfort. The Alliance has invested billions of Credits to establish an extensive network of navigation satellites and other aides to navigation. Designated traffic corridors allow the thousands of ships plying the 'Verse on any given day to approach and depart even the busiest planet in the Core with complete safety, as long as pilots follow the designated Alliance rules and regulations for spacers. It is this concern for safety that requires the Alliance to spend so much of the annual budget on the navy in order to ensure these rules are followed to the letter..."

– Member of Parliament remarks justifying the most recent military spending appropriation for FY 2518

Knowing they've got an unfriendly group pursuing them, the Crew is probably going to want to go to Hard Burn as soon as the break atmo. However, when the pilot gets a chance to compare the disc and map, they find that they really do combine to provide the much needed coordinates to reach the mythical Hidden City of Shan Yu. As soon as the pilot gets a look at them, he or she pales at the complexity. The trip is comprised of four legs. The first is from Sihnon to project Boros. The second leg is Project Boros to a celestial body labeled Project 19K. Leg three proceeds from Project 19K to Moon 14597R and the final leg is from Moon 14597R to the Hidden City, which the map shows is an irregular shaped 30 kilometer long asteroid.

The first challenge is to identify what the generic titles assigned in Shan Yu's day correlate to in modern times.

Accessing the Cortex with a FORMIDABLE (75) Complex Action of Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking*, or *Technical Engineering / Computer programming*, or Intelligence + *Influence / Administration* with each roll taking ten minutes, reveals that Project 19K is now known as Hera and that Moon 14597R became Highgate out on the Rim. While the Crew is figuring out which planet is which, they can choose to leave Bernadette without a specific course just to get some distance between them and the Tong without any significant addition to their travel time. The leg between Sihnon and Boros can be skipped and the Crew can go directly from Bernadette to Hera with an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Piloting / Astrogation* roll. The travel time is 192 hours for a speed class 1 ship. The leg between Hera and Highgate is a HARD (11) test of the same skills and an 867 hour trip for a speed class 1 vessel.

During the trip through the obvious waypoints, the Crew soon finds that due to the drift of nearly two centuries they can no longer be sure which asteroid holds the long lost sanctuary solely aided by the Cortex or any other form of indirect detection. The pilot is certain that once on the leg from Highgate to the Hidden City, he or she will be able to decipher the galactic and system drift to get them to their goal, but no sooner.

In addition to the obvious complication of not having the exact course for the last leg of the trip, the Crew faces an additional complication of which they may or may not be aware. Namely, the Shouren has not given up and they are giving

chase. The means by which the Tong is tracking the PCs will vary depending on whether they have the Sihnon Buddha with them or not. If they do, there is a beacon hidden inside the statue. If the Crew dumped the figurine, then the Tong had time to attach a beacon to their hull while the PCs were occupied with the monks on Bernadette.

The Tong's ship is as fast as the Crew's ship and since they can not overtake the PC's lead, this gives the pilot or sensor operator a chance to notice their pursuer. Once every eight hours, the Tong sends a pulse signal to the tracker and a FORMIDABLE (15) Ship's Alertness + *Piloting / Sensors* or *Technical Engineering / Sensors* roll will pick up the millisecond long burst transmission. If the PCs detect the signal, they will then have to find the tracker. The difficulty of the task will be greatly impacted on whether the tracker is in the Buddha or on the Ship's hull. In either case it is a Complex Action using Intelligence + *Covert / Surveillance* or Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Communications* with each roll taking ten minutes. The task is FORMIDABLE (75) if it is in the Buddha and HEROIC (95) if it is attached to the ship's hull.

If none of the players think of this on their own, each character can make a FORMIDABLE (15) Intelligence + *Covert / Surveillance* or Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Communications* roll, and they will realize that they can use the tracker against the Tong. If the Crew has or can make a cry baby or has a missile of any kind on board, they can place the tracker on the decoy and gain some distance on the Tong.

Constructing a cry baby is a FORMIDABLE (75) Complex Action requiring Intelligence + *Technical*

Engineering / Communication Systems with each roll taking fifteen minutes. Modifying a missile is also a Complex Action using the same skills, but is only an AVERAGE (35) task. When the PCs drop their decoy, they will gain a twelve hour lead on the Tong ship.

Depending on the Crew's specific ship and current fuel status, the PCs may or may not have to stop for fuel, but if they do, this will give the Tong a chance to catch up as they will be using Hard Burn to catch up after the decoy lures them off course and while their ship isn't any faster than the Crew's ship, it does have the fuel efficient advantage and will not have to refuel even considering their use of Hard Burn.

When the Crew arrives at Highgate, they will have to take several bearings checks based on the position of known stars in order to clarify their course. This verification can only be done at the start point of this leg due to an accidental mistranslation by the monk on Bernadette, which doesn't become apparent until physically present. Plotting the last leg of their journey is a HEROIC (95) Complex Action using Intelligence + *Piloting / Astrogation* with each roll taking twenty minutes. The use of plot points and/or Indirect Assistance is greatly encouraged to aid in succeeding with this task. If by chance, the PCs should roll two Botches, they will not lose the ability to plot the course, but they will lose *all* accumulated progress and will have to start over from scratch.

If the PCs are aware that they are being pursued, they will face the added pressure to succeed, as they know they may very well lose any lead they have gained on the Tong if plotting the course takes too long. Regardless of pursuit status, once

the Crew has reconstructed the final leg, they find that it is a 305 hour trip for a speed class 1 ship.

During the time it takes to reach the position of the sanctuary, the crew may make whatever preparations they feel necessary. As the possible list of preparations are so varied, it will be up to the GM to decide what reasonable actions each character may make en route.

When the PCs finally reach the designated coordinates, they find a large and very active asteroid field with thousands of objects varying in size from microscopic to dozens of kilometers. When the pilot gets a look at the field, stretching for thousands of kilometers in every direction, he or she goes even paler than they did when they saw the map. Finding the correct asteroid in a field of tens of thousands is a HEROIC Complex Action (95) versus Ship's Alertness + Pilot's *Technical Engineering / Sensors*. Each roll represents 15 minutes' work. Once the Crew has pinpointed Shan Yu's lost refuge, they will instantly realize that finding their target was the easy part. Actually getting to it is going to be a nightmare.

Piloting a ship of any size through the spinning asteroids is a HEROIC Complex Action (95) pitting Ship's *Agility* + the pilot's *Pilot / Appropriate Specialty* with each roll representing a time increment of one turn. The pilot may speed up the process by taking the risk of making multiple actions in a turn, but at the normal penalties for multiple actions. (i.e., if three Skill rolls are taken in one turn the penalty to each roll is at -2 Skill steps) The Crew will reach the Hidden City quickly if they move rapidly, but the downside of using speed is that once per turn, they must roll to avoid a collision with one of the asteroids.

Avoiding this fate is a free reaction using the Ship's *Agility* + the pilot's *Pilot / Appropriate Specialty* roll. The asteroid's size, speed, and course set the Difficulty for each Pilot Skill roll and the roll must take into account any and all other multiple action penalties in effect for that turn. Failing a roll to avoid a hazard means that the ship has collided with the asteroid and will take damage. Although avoiding an asteroid is a free action, players may choose to fly slower to reduce the Multiple Action penalty. If the Difficulty drops below EASY (3), no roll is required to avoid the asteroid. The Difficulty is treated as an attack roll while the Skill roll made to avoid the obstacle is treated as a defense roll. Damage type is Basic.

Roll a d10 to determine the asteroid's size and base Difficulty for the pilot's roll to avoid it.

d10 Roll	Size	Pilot Difficulty
1	Gigantic	INCREDIBLE (23)
2 – 3	Colossal	HEROIC (19)
4 – 5	Huge	FORMIDBLE (15)
6 – 7	Large	HARD (11)
8 – 9	Medium	AVERAGE (7)

Determine the asteroid's speed and modify the Difficulty accordingly.

d8 Roll	Speed	Difficulty Modifier
1	Very High	+8
2 – 3	High	+4
4 – 5	Medium	±0
6 – 7	Slow	-4
8	Stationary	-8

Determine final modifier based on the movement vectors of the asteroid and the PCs' ship.

d6 Roll	Direction	Difficulty Modifier
1 – 2	Moving Toward	+2
3 – 4	Moving Perpendicular	±0
5 – 6	Moving Away	-2

If the Difficulty drops below EASY (3), no roll is required to avoid the obstacle.

Failing a Pilot Skill roll to avoid an obstacle means that the pilot's vessel has collided with it. The Difficulty is treated as an attack roll, while the Skill roll made to avoid the obstacle is treated as a defense roll. Damage type is Basic.

Example:

To reach the threshold, the pilot has made two Skill rolls at -1 Skill step penalty. After that, an asteroid's size, speed, and course are determined randomly. After rolling a ten-sided, an eight-sided, and a six-sided die, the game master tells the players that a huge piece of debris is moving toward them the PCs' ship at medium speed. It is a near HEROIC (15 + 0 + 2 = 17) task to avoid it. The pilot's roll yields a 9. The ship collides with the asteroid and takes 8 points of Basic damage.

Once the pilot makes the final roll to complete the Complex Action of flying through the asteroid field, Zhang's data disc indicated a specific code sequence that has to be sent to signal the sanctuary of an approved visitor. The disc also revealed a second code that will cause the Hidden City to open, but before the pilot can send that signal, the proximity sensors emits a loud warning and a harsh message crackles over the comm.

"YOU FOOLS! Some things were meant to be left forgotten because they are too dangerous and the terror that was Shan Yu is the most dangerous of

*all. We will not allow you to let what was, return.
Prepare to die!"*

The crew has but a second to process this message before the Tong ship boils out of the asteroid field and the sensors indicate missiles launching. The pilot recovers long enough to scream one bone chilling word. "INCOMING!"

Act 2

Scene 3: If You Really Want It, Fight for It!

"Those that say that the source of unhappiness is desire have allowed themselves to be led astray. Desire fuels the strong to acquire that which they do not possess. Take the simple minded ox as an example. By far stronger than any man, but the man desires to make his life easier and bends the strength of the ox to his will to obtain what he wants, so too with the meek among men that a stronger man molds to his service. As with freedom, happiness is an illusion that requires only the right application of the scourge to bring back the reality that it is the strong that defines what the weak need to be happy."

– The annotated collected works of Shan Yu Volume One, Chapter One, Celestial Publishing, Tenth Printing, Londinum, 2515

The scene opens with the Crew learning the dual revelation that the Tong has somehow managed to follow them and with proximity alarms screaming that there are missiles inbound. The first discovery is a problem, but must be dealt with after the more immediate second discovery. Fortunately, the large asteroid field is nearby and offers a ray of hope, that is, so long as the pilot is up to the task.

Also in the Crew's favor, is that the overzealous Tong fired the instant they cleared the field, giving the PCs more time to react than they otherwise would have had. In addition, the Tong ship was modified with an add on missile package that is only capable of controlling one missile at a time, so despite the fact that two missiles were fired, one immediately fails to lock on and goes ballistic plowing into an asteroid with a brilliant flash.

The missile's unintended self destruction gives the pilot an idea. In order to make that idea work, the pilot has to make a HARD (11) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* roll to initiate Hard Burn, or accelerate to maximum speed if the PC's ship has Slow Throttle. Failing this roll will give the pilot a one-step penalty for the next roll and a Botch will yield a two-step penalty. Regardless of success, getting the ship moving quickly is only the first step to avoiding the missile. The pilot is going to have to execute some fancy maneuvering in order to dodge behind an asteroid close enough to trick the missile into hitting the asteroid and not the Crew's ship. The difficulty of this maneuver is dependent on the size of the PCs' ship. If the roll fails, the 100 pound missile does d6W damage.

Ship STR	Difficulty
d2	Easy (3)
d4	Average (7)
d6	Hard (11)
d8	Formidable (15)
d10	Heroic (19)
d12	Incredible (23)

Assuming the PC's ship is still functional, the Crew is now faced with dilemma of how to fight back

against the fanatical Shouren hell bent on their destruction. As soon as the missile attack is resolved, and the Crew has a chance to recover from the shock of the attack, observant PCs will, with an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + *Perception* roll, visually notice that the Tong ship is venting atmosphere from what has to have been caused by a collision with an asteroid from an overly rapid passage through the asteroid field. An EASY (3) Intelligence + *Piloting / Sensors* or *Technical Engineering / Sensors* roll will also spot the damage. Exactly how to exploit that fact is a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Piloting*, or an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Mechanical Engineering* or *Scientific Expertise* roll to realize that if the Crew can then trick the Tong into following them back over their own course quickly, they can rig up a surprise for their pursuers.

A FORMIDABLE (15) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* roll will allow the pilot to pivot the PC's ship through a random series of rapid maneuvers that leads the Tong back over the course they took when they exited the asteroid field. The Engineer will have to make a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Mechanical Engineering* roll to vent some of the ship's fuel. The Pilot can then hit hard burn and the combination of the Tong's oxygen leak, the Crew's hydrogen trail, and the intense heat of the ship's pulse drive create a lethal cocktail. The resulting explosion engulfs the Tong ship and hammers the Crew's ship causing the pilot to fight the controls for several heartrending seconds to ride out the shockwave.

When their ship comes about, the Crew look back triumphantly expecting to see the rapidly expanding cloud of plasma that is all that is left of the Tong ship, but, when the cockpit glass depolarizes, their hearts collectively sink as they

see that their trick failed in its attempt to destroy their pursuers. However, they do notice that the pursuing ship is no longer moving as quickly as it was. It lurches out of the asteroids, blast blackened and very much the worse for the experience.

As the Tong vessel recovers from the impromptu attack, this gives the players several rounds to plan for another means of resisting the Shouren. The GM is encouraged to allow players to be creative in their plans. Since there are so many possible options, any plausible plan should be allowed and it will be up to the GM to determine the difficulty of the tasks, and the required skills, but the typical difficulty should be between HARD and FORMIDABLE. The following options are offered as examples:

If the PC's ship happens to be armed by some chance, they are certainly welcome to open fire on the disoriented Tong ship. However, this will make the scene less dramatic, so the GM should rule that the Tong ship recovers faster and can immediately return fire. However, since most transports are unarmed, the Crew is going to have to be creative.

If the Crew happens to include a computer expert type, an INCREDIBLE (23) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* roll will allow the PCs to send a virus via the communications band of the Cortex that will temporarily lock up the Tong ship's flight controls. Normally, the interruption would be so short that it would not be an issue, but in an asteroid field, even a minimal loss of control will result in a fatal collision.

If the Crew's pilot is up to the task, using the asteroids to avoid the Tong and lure them into a

collision will make for a thrilling scene as the Pilot will have to roll to avoid a collision using the same rules above to determine the difficulty per turn used during their initial trip through the asteroids. At any point during the attempt, the Pilot will have to take a second action in a round, earning the standard one-step penalty for multiple actions, and with a HARD (11) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* roll, set up a subtle maneuver to trick the Tong pilot. The Crew will have to succeed in three such rolls, though not consecutively, but with no Botches to lure the Tong ship into an unavoidable collision with an asteroid.

Any member of the Crew can roll Intelligence + *Discipline* (especially if they have the specialty *Tactics*) to think of one of the two plans below. A HARD (11) test will yield the first option and a FORMIDABLE (15) roll will add the second. Venting the ship's water and waste system to create an ice barrier will require the Mechanic to make a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Mechanical Engineering* roll to rig the pumps on the ship to handle a higher than normal discharge rate and the Pilot to roll a FORMIDABLE (15) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* to lure the now suspicious Tong close enough to hit the obstacle. The Tong ship will sustain so much damage that it will be, for all intents and purposes, no longer a factor in the adventure.

Performing a perpendicular 'Crazy Ivan' will take an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Mechanical Engineering* roll to set up the engines, but since this maneuver is even more difficult than the standard Crazy Ivan, the Pilot has to make a HEROIC (19) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* to turn the ship sideways to its line of travel and using the modified engines to impart a spin. The Pilot will

then remotely detach one of the shuttles and launch it directly into the pursuing ship's path and completely destroy the Tong.

One final note, if the PCs should catastrophically fail in the attempt to defeat the Tong, the GM can allow the PCs to escape their doomed ship with an AVERAGE (7) Agility + *Survival* or HARD Agility + *Athletics* roll to reach an escape pod or shuttle. Generous GMs will then have the automated defenses of the sanctuary destroy the Tong ship and assuming the PCs survive Act Three, they will find an obsolete cutter in need of extensive repairs just to reach space lanes in order to be rescued by a passing freighter.

Regardless of the method used, with the Shouren ship destroyed, the Crew can finally relax. They have reached their prize and only have to send one more coded signal to enter the no longer mythical Hidden City of Shan Yu in order to claim their prize.

PCs should be awarded 5 Plot Points at the end of the scene, but if the PCs resorted to any violence at the Lu-tsung temple they should be penalized one Plot Point and three if they lost their ship to the Shouren.

Act 3

Scene 1: Enterin' the Dragon

"What's space combat like? Well, I guess you can call it a lot of things depending on what your job on board happens to be. If you're in the engine room, a fight is loud as the drives scream like some sort of living thing as the staff tries to wring out every possible erg of power. Gunners have it easy because they can actually think they have a

say so in what happens, which to a degree they do. Hell, at least they can feel good about being able to shoot back. Oddly enough it is the poor bastards on the bridge that have it the worse. Yeah, I know that sounds wrong seeing as how they have the best view of what is going on and give all the orders. The downside of having the best view is, you know when other ships get hit and what it looks like when they die, and worst of all, you know when, despite doing everything right, or doing everything to prevent it, you know when your ship is about to die."

– Jacob Masterson, Alliance Admiral (ret) in his post-Unification War autobiography.

The pilot deftly maneuvers away from the late, but not lamented, Tong ship to take up a position facing the sanctuary and sends the signal indicated by Zhang's data disc, but instead of the indicated single beep response and a camouflaged hanger bay door opening, the sensors pick up targeting radars coming on line! Unknown to the crew, the damage to the disc has corrupted the signal data and the PC's wave activated the sanctuary's automated defenses.

Fortunately, the long dormant defenses take longer to spool up to fire than they were designed to do and that delay gives the pilot a chance to avoid the initial burst of fire. The turret guns come on-line quicker than the missile launchers, so the opening shots from the defenses are only from the 100 pound cannons. The irregularly shaped asteroid is equipped with three turrets per facing with overlapping fields of fire which allow no less than six turrets to fire on any given target. Each turret mounts one 100-pound cannon and one 200-pound long-range missile launcher. The first sluggish burst is only with d2 Agility and d4 Heavy Weapons

Skill. The gun targeting will improve by one-step every other round until reaching d8 Agility and d6 Skill, while the slower missile tracking arrays will take a full minute (20 rounds) to come on-line. The cannons are restricted to short range dealing d6W damage while the missiles inflict d8W.

While the Pilot frantically maneuvers to avoid the deadly crossfire, the rest of the Crew have several options on how to assist. A HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* roll can lock up the tracking system of one turret at a time. The turrets have independent systems, but the difficulty to fool the trackers is so low because the systems are so old and the PC's ship computer is far more powerful than those on the antique turrets.

If the Crew has decoy missiles, they can be reprogrammed with a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering* combined with a FORMIDABLE (15) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* roll in the same round to allow the decoy to trick one turret into firing on another.

Using a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Discipline / Tactics* roll will figure out that retreating out of the engagement envelop of the defensive zone will allow the Crew to use asteroids as weapons. The Pilot will have to make a total of three HARD (11) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* rolls, these rolls are cumulative, not consecutive to elude fire long enough to cause the turrets to cease fire.

Rigging up an asteroids as kinetic weapons large enough to guaranty destroying a turret starts with the Pilot landing on an asteroid with a HARD (11) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* roll. Someone in the Crew will have to use the ship's computer to calculate

the trajectory with a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Knowledge / Mathematics* or Intelligence + *Scientific Expertise* roll, and finally the Pilot will have to succeed in a FORMIDABLE (15) Ship's Agility + *Piloting* roll to break the asteroid's inertia and send it on course to smash the targeted turret.

Once six turrets have been knocked out, the sanctuary is essentially defenseless and the Crew can safely approach their goal. All that is needed, now that they are no longer actively under fire, is a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* or *Communications* roll to unscramble the proper code to order the perfectly camouflaged and as yet unseen doors to open.

Act 3

Scene 2: Peelin' the Onion

Built between 1406 and 1420 CE beginning in the middle of the Ming Dynasty, the Forbidden City was the Imperial Palace in Beijing, China on Earth-That-Was. The 720,000 square meter structure featuring more than 8,700 rooms required one million worked nearly fifteen years to complete. The proper Chinese name Zijin Cheng translates as Purple Forbidden City. Built of the finest wood and marble and paved with specially baked golden bricks from the city of Suzhou on the Yangtze River, the palace was literally the center of the Chinese Empire. The palace was the home of the Celestial Emperor, the Taoist ruler of heaven, and his terrestrial family and up until the Exodus, the Forbidden City was the largest surviving palace on Earth-That-Was.

– Cortex encyclopedia historical database entry

When the Crew sends the corrected access code, they hold their collective breath until a massive set

of cunningly concealed doors soundlessly retract and then slide open. The hanger bay is enormous and could easily accommodate a vessel many times the size of the Crew's ship. The pilot gingerly enters the yawning docking space and sets down. The huge doors close slowly and the unsaid word on everyone's mind is "trapped" as a docking arm automatically connects to the PC's ship and pressurizes. The ship's airlock sensors chimes to announce that the docking is now complete and the Crew is now free to investigate the long lost sanctuary.

There are several options available to the GM ranging from a pristine and perfectly preserved, brilliantly designed near paradise to the absolute chaos of a gutted wreck. The GM must weigh the game altering effects of what is available in finding something so mythical turning out to be true and what such finds could do to a campaign. This adventure will present one such option in detail and will proceed on the assumption that the following is the most likely course of action.

The Crew exits from the airlock and follows the heavily armored bulkheads along the only path open to them, which leads to a waiting room. Aside from the way they entered, there are double wooden doors that lead out of the thousand cubic meters, square chamber. These doors are locked and prove to have only a thin veneer of the finest wood covering armored doors that would do justice to a bank vault. There isn't even a keypad to enter an access code, just a small one inch square speaker to the right of the doors.

The Crew does not possess weapons heavy enough to damage the doors and must turn to the data disc of Zhang Kaiping once more. If the players get

stuck on how to proceed, an AVERAGE (7) Recall roll (Intelligence + Willpower) will remember the disc. If the contents of the disc have been copied to a DataBook, finding the code to open the door is an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* roll. If the PCs do not have a DataBook, they will have to go back to their ship to make the roll. On successfully retrieving the code, the Crew only has to say the code phrase aloud to make the heavy doors open. The corridor is ten meters long before the opposite end widens to reveal that half of the roughly 30 kilometer long asteroid has been hollowed out and an area 15 km long x 5 km wide x 2 km high has been fully terraformed and in the center of this huge open space is a massive walled palace. A HARD (11) Intelligence + *Knowledge / History* roll will recognize that the palace is not just any palace, but an exact recreation of the Forbidden City in Beijing, China on Earth-That-Was.

The exterior grounds of the palace were obviously meticulously contoured and terraced by the finest landscapers available and form a breathtaking frame and backdrop for the recreated palace. Even at this distance, the attention to detail is nothing short of phenomenal. Every possible facet of the palace has been faithfully reproduced in bringing the Forbidden City back to life. If the Crew has a DataBook, they will be able to pull up the following details: the palace is rectangular, measuring 961 meters on the north/south axis and 753 meters on the east/west axis. There are 980 buildings inside the wall which is 7.9-meters high and the entire compound is surrounded by a six-meter deep and 52-meter wide moat. Each of the massive rammed earth core walls is pierced by a gate and tapers to 6.66 meters from an 8.62 meter wide base. If the PCs do not have a DataBook, they can access their

ship's Cortex database with a ship-linked handset. Short of either of these items, they can see the palace is roughly a 1,000 by 750 meters with an eight meter high wall.

The dichotomy of the awe-inspiring beauty of the interior of the asteroid compared to the unforgiving harshness of the exterior gives the entire Crew pause to drink in the sights. However, when the Crew recovers from the shock of seeing the palace in the distance and its perfectly landscaped grounds, and they attempt to move forward, they find the way is blocked by an active barrier field.

As the Crew gives vent to their frustration at being allowed to see their goal, but being unable to reach it, they remember they passed a door marked 'authorized personnel only' in the corridor that led from the waiting room. Backtracking to that door, they find that it does have an access pad, but in a final twist of fate, Zhang's disc does not have the access code. The Crew has always known the disc was damaged and it seems they have wrung all the assistance they are going to get from it. Bypassing the security on the door will take a FORMIDABLE (15) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* or an Intelligence + *Covert / Disable Devices* roll. A failure will not cause any problems, while a Botch will set off an alarm, but there as there is no one to respond, this is not so much of a problem. The long term effect is to increase any further attempts to access security doors by one difficulty level. When the door opens, the Crew discovers that they have found the entrance for the maintenance access corridors and catwalks for the facility.

The Crew has two options to reach what has to be unlimited wealth of the Forbidden City, they can

look specifically for a control room in order to shut off the barrier field on the main entrance or they will have to attempt to find an entrance to the sanctuary proper in what has to be hundreds of kilometers of corridors.

Not having a schematic of the facility will make finding a control room difficult, but if they can override the security on the barrier field, they will have a direct path to their ship which will expedite loading any valuables. Finding a control room is a FORMIDABLE (75) Complex Action of Alertness + *Perception* with each roll taking twenty minutes and the PCs may use Indirect Assistance. Once the Crew finally finds the nearest control room, they can bypass security on the door with a FORMIDABLE (15) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* or an Intelligence + *Covert / Disable Devices* roll. Figuring out the controls and deactivating the barrier field is a second roll of the above skills at the same difficulty. Once the barrier field is down, the Crew faces the long walk back to where they entered, but finally, the way is open to untold wealth.

Finding an entrance to the sanctuary is easier, but will leave the Crew a long way from where they left their ship and with a very difficult path involving stairs and catwalks to bring any valuables back to their ship. Finding a maintenance access entrance is a HARD (55) Complex Action of Alertness + *Perception* with each attempt taking ten minutes with Indirect Assistance allowed. The GM has to keep track of how many rolls the PCs take as every roll will equal one kilometer of distance. In addition, how complicated the route back to the PCs ship becomes, is very important in the next scene. The GM must also divide the total rolls in half (round down) and that is how many flights of stairs and catwalks they had to traverse to find the

entrance (split evenly between stairs and catwalks with an odd number going to the stairs). Example: Using an average of d6 for each Alertness and Perception, each roll has an average roll of 7 with $55 \div 7$ equaling 7.857 rounded down to seven kilometers with four flights of stairs and three catwalks along the way. The simple security on the maintenance entrance is only an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* or an Intelligence + *Covert / Disable Devices* roll to open. Again, once the door is open, the only remaining obstacle to untold wealth is the long walk.

The Forbidden City sits in the center of the cleared space and is thus seven kilometers from the main entrance. This distance will be in addition to the path the Crew has to take to get to the maintenance access if they chose that route and this could easily make for 30 kilometer round trip to get from their ship to the palace.

Act 3

Scene 3: Shan Yu Rising

As the Crew walks along the recreated golden bricks to the palace, they come to realize in the foreboding silence that they are the first living people to tread this path in nearly two centuries. The palace dwarfs the Crew as they approach, but as they get within a kilometer of the wall, their eyes are drawn to irregular objects scattered on both sides of the road at glaringly obvious odds to the otherwise flawless layout of Shan Yu's sanctuary. When the PCs get within a hundred meters, the irregular objects begin to take form and the Crew immediately wishes the objects had remains unidentified, as the objects resolve into bodies, hundreds of them, long mummified in the

climate controlled air, lying where they fell two hundred years ago.

If the PCs choose to take a closer look, an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Medical Expertise / Forensics*, or with a HARD (11) Alertness + *Perception / Investigation* roll will quickly learn that every one of the bodies was clearly shot with military precision. An AVERAGE (7) Alertness + *Perception / Deduction* will realize that these are the bodies of the palace servants. However, an AVERAGE (7) Alertness + *Perception* will spot three smaller skeletons mixed in with the others and the remnants of their obviously finer clothes will quickly deduce that these are probably Zhang's children and that they were shot just as precisely as the servants.

Having a DataBook will be essential for details on the palace as the ship linked handsets no longer function, probably due to heavy shielding built into the asteroids structure. If the PCs can bring up a diagram of the palace, the most likely place to find anything belonging to Shan Yu himself, will probably be the in the Hall of Military Eminence (H), the Hall of Literary Glory (J), the Hall of Mental Cultivation (N), or the Palace of Tranquil Longevity (O). If the Crew is more interested in simple plunder, they will find priceless items in any part of the palace grounds. The only limitation to their greed is the time it takes to traverse the distance to their ship.

The double doors from the waiting room and the maintenance access corridors are too small for any vehicles thus the PCs will have to manually carry any plunder. This is where the number of stairs and catwalks the Crew has to traverse determined in the last scene becomes a factor. Large items

such as furniture will not fit on the narrow catwalks and steep stairs in the maintenance area forcing the Crew to limit their plunder to smaller items. This limitation still leaves more than enough priceless objects to loot. There are two major options at this point Greed and Knowledge and both are described below.

If the Crew chooses

Greed

During their search of the compound, they find that each of the buildings in the palace are sealed with cunningly hidden ship's hull quality armored doors and will require a HEROIC (19) Intelligence + *Covert / Disable Devices*, Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Security Systems*, or Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Hacking* roll to defeat for each building the PC's enter.

While the PCs can bypass the security to open the doors, they are not aware of and do not possess the failsafe code required to safely enter any room in the palace. As soon as they enter a room, they hear an audible challenge asking for the station evacuation failsafe code. As the Crew does not have this code, after ten seconds a piercing alarm begins to sound and a public address system then intones: "*Intruder detected, initiating final installation defense protocols. Two hour self-destruct count down has started.*"

The PCs have 120 minutes to take off. It is an EASY Complex Action (15) versus Agility + *Athletics / Running* with a time increment of 30 minutes to reach the ship in time. During each time increment, the PCs may make as many Skill rolls as they like, as long as they take the according multiple actions penalties. Making one

skill roll per turn counts as walking, making two counts as hustling, and making three or more skill rolls counts as running. After 30 minutes of running or 60 minutes of hustling, the PCs must make an Endurance (Vitality + Willpower) roll or suffer a -1 step Skill penalty. A Botch increases the penalty to -2 steps. Each stairway increases the base difficulty by one point and each catwalk by two points, thus the average base difficulty with four stairways and three catwalks is $15 + 4 + 6$ for a total of 25. In addition, carrying any more than twenty pounds of weight is an additional -1 Skill step penalty. It is also an EASY Complex Action to go back into the crypt. If the PCs choose to pick up more valuables, they had better do so fast, because they'll have to run back to the ship, too. The Difficulty Threshold to do this is $15 + 15 = 30$ no including the penalties for stairs and catwalks.

The details of what the PCs grab are up to the GM, but will be jade figurines, china plates, vases, or any other similar smaller items. An AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + *Knowledge / Appraisal* will know that each item is worth, at the very least, tens of thousands of credits each, While PCs that succeed with a HARD (11) test will know that each item will have to be fenced or auctioned on the black market as announcing the source of these artifacts would result in seizure by the Alliance. The fencing or auctions would be the lead in for the Crew's next adventure.

Regardless of total plunder the PCs have obtained, once they reach their ship, they will find that Zhang's disc does still have one more use...the exit code!

With only moments to spare, the Crew pulls away to a safe distance, but rather than the cataclysmic

explosion they had expected, there is only a puff of accumulated dust emitted from the asteroid. A scan of the area only shows an increase in neutron radiation. The entire crew looks puzzled until the answer becomes obvious after a few moments of thought. The Hidden City probably sealed every opening beneath tons of rock, fusing every hatch with nuclear fire and flooding the entire compound with a lethal dose radiation from a weapon not seen since the Unification War called a neutron bomb. With or without plunder, the Crew is free to move on to their next adventure in the never ending saga of the 'Verse and face the consequences of their actions, including the theft of the Buddha, possibly encountering a bounty hunter, possible further meetings with the Shouren Tong, and the whatever happens should they try to fence anything that they managed to obtain.

The PCs will earn four Plot Points for completing the adventure, but will lose three points if their ship was destroyed.

If the Crew chooses

Knowledge

The omnipresent silence of the menacing structure presses down on the Crew with an almost unrelenting oppressiveness as they move through the long abandoned palace. Having a DataBook will be essential for details on the palace as the ship linked handsets no longer function, probably due to heavy shielding built into the asteroids structure. If the PCs can bring up a diagram of the palace, the most likely place to find anything belonging to Shan Yu himself, will probably be the in the Hall of Military Eminence (H), the Hall of Literary Glory (J), the Hall of Mental Cultivation (N), or the Palace of Tranquil Longevity (O).

Searching the grounds manually will eventually yield the same information.

The Hall of Military Eminence is the repository of Shan Yu's military records. A careful search of the building with a FORMIDABLE (15) Alertness + Perception will locate a false panel that will take a HEROIC (19) Intelligence + Covert / Disable Devices, Intelligence + Technical Expertise / Technical Security Systems, or Intelligence + Technical Expertise / Hacking roll to defeat the security and access a small elevator that leads to a, then state of the art, command and control bunker. Despite the advanced age of these systems, hacking into them is an IMPOSSIBLE (31) roll of Intelligence + Covert / Disable Devices, Intelligence + Technical Expertise / Technical Security Systems, or Intelligence + Technical Expertise / Hacking. If by some chance the Crew manages to access these systems, the GM can feel free to note hidden caches of weapons, ships, or other military equipment. Otherwise, the information is essentially useless as the military secrets they contain have been completely overtaken by the events of the last two hundred years.

The Hall of Literary Glory is probably the most valuable area in the palace if measured in terms other than money. Here are original copies of every one of Shan Yu's writings as well as dozens of ancient texts, some written on Earth-That-Was. The book cases are kept hermetically sealed and with a climate controlled xenon atmosphere to preserve the volumes stored here. Accessing the system to open individual cases requires a HARD (11) Intelligence + Technical Engineering / Technical Security Systems, or Intelligence + Technical Expertise / Hacking roll. Each of these

books is priceless, but the most valuable of all is a private journal and it can be found with an AVERAGE (7) Intelligence + Technical Expertise / Technical Security Systems or Intelligence + Technical Expertise / Hacking or a HARD (11) Alertness + Perception roll. The handwritten journal is dated 2114 belonging to a Doctor Emil Rothschild and chronicles the early years of the Exodus! How Shan Yu obtained this journal is unknown, but in it, Dr. Rothschild indicates that such a journal isn't supposed to exist, but his scientific drive for the preservation of the truth compels him to capture the facts before the truth of the Exodus is permanently altered as he has already seen several pertinent facts purged from the ship's historical database.

Rothschild then clinically proceeds to detail what happened in the years just prior to the launch of the Arks. The gist of the journal is that the long cherished story that the Exodus took everyone that wanted to go on the Arks is a lie. In reality, the Exodus abandoned millions of people, and not just randomly. The criteria for selection was not based on something as semi-legitimate as a breeding program to bring only the best humanity had to offer, but rather it was heavily slanted toward selecting what passed for the aristocracy of the major nation states of Earth-That-Was. In addition to the initial selection process, during the long trip to their new home, the scientists took that process to the next level by instituting a series of gene re-sequencing to further "improve" the human leadership stock with an eye toward tapping into and improving humanity's dormant psychic capabilities. The revelation of the truth of the Exodus would have far reaching implications in the Verse as the book also lists the primary family names chosen for their connections rather than

merit and the families selected for the gene re-sequencing experiments.

Whether Dr. Rothschild's comments are true or not are up to the GM, but the questions raised in this journal will certainly cause uproar if they were to become common knowledge.

However, the journal and every other item in this matchless library are tagged and attempting to remove anything from this building will activate an automated defense system. Any PC in the building gets a HARD (11) Alertness + *Perception* roll to hear the whirring of anti-gravity units charging before the two hover mounted lasers emerge from the ceiling and open fire. If the PCs were warned, they get an initiative roll. If they did not, they are unable to take any other action other than a "Get Out of Harm's Way" roll. The laser probes have the following stats: Agility d8, Vitality d2, Alertness d8, Intelligence d4, Willpower d2, Armor 6, Life Points 4, Initiative d8 + d8, Laser Damage: d10W, Skills: Guns d4, Perception d4. If the PCs can defeat the laser probes, they will then have unimpeded access to the rest of the library.

Entering the Hall of Mental Cultivation is to descend into madness. When the Crew sees the morbid frescoes and unmentionable devices neatly stacked they have to make an AVERAGE (7) Willpower + *Discipline* roll or stand stunned by the implications of what they have discovered.

Mercifully none of the holding cells or devices are occupied, but the miasma of raw terror is so pervasive that it doesn't matter. The suffering that took place here is so obvious that the entire building has become imbued with a coating of almost palpable fear. On a raised dais off to one side of the center most room is a pedestal holding

a book. The title "Limits of Endurance". A HARD (11) Intelligence + *Knowledge / History* or *Literature* will know that this book is not a known volume and is worth millions!

Reaching for the book without checking with a FORMIBABLE (15) Alertness + *Perception* will reveal that the beautiful hovering crystal chandelier is actually a laser defense probe. If the PCs failed the above roll, they are unable to take any other action other than a "Get Out of Harm's Way" roll. The laser probe have the following stats: Agility d8, Vitality d4, Alertness d8, Intelligence d4, Willpower d2, Armor 8 Life Points 6, Initiative d8 + d8, Laser Damage: d10W, Skills: Guns d4, Perception d4. If the PC made the roll, they realize the trap before it activates and will be able to react before it fires. Once the probe has been defeated, access to the torture chamber will be unimpeded.

The Palace of Tranquil Longevity is a storehouse of medical knowledge, consisting of tens of thousands of books and an extensive computer filing system. Accessing the system is a HARD (11) Intelligence + *Technical Engineering / Technical Security Systems*, or Intelligence + *Technical Expertise / Hacking* roll. If the PCs succeed, they find that the medical information stored here is mostly obsolete, but that the information on cloning replacement organs is more advanced than the current Blastomere technology and this discovery alone is worth millions. If the PCs access this file, have them roll a FORMIBABLE (15) Alertness + *Perception* will reveal that the beautiful hovering crystal chandelier is actually a laser defense probe. If the PCs failed the above roll, they are unable to take any other action other than a "Get Out of Harm's Way" roll. The laser probe have the following stats: Agility d8, Vitality d4, Alertness d8,

Intelligence d4, Willpower d2, Armor 8 Life Points 6, Initiative d8 + d8, Laser Damage: d10W, Skills: Guns d4, Perception d4. If the PC made the roll, they realize the trap before it activates and will be able to react before it fires. Once the probe has been defeated, access to the computer records will be unimpeded.

Searching the Hall of Supreme Harmony (G) the Palace of Heavenly Purity (L), and the Southern Three Places (K) finds the carefully mothballed Central governmental hall, Shan Yu's private residence, and the distinguished visitor's residence respectively. The items in these two building are again priceless, but attempting to move anything will require any PC in the building to roll a HARD (11) Alertness + *Perception* to hear the whirring of anti-grav units charging before four hover mounted lasers emerge from the ceiling and open fire. If the PCs were warned, they get an initiative roll. If they did not, they are unable to take any other action other than a "Get Out of Harm's Way" roll. The laser probes have the following stats: Agility d8, Vitality d2, Alertness d8, Intelligence d4, Willpower d2, Armor 6 Life Points 4, Initiative d8 + d8, Laser Damage: d10W, Skills: Guns d4, Perception d4. If the PCs can defeat the four probes, they will then have unimpeded access to the rest of the building.

If the Crew overcomes any one of these obstacles, there is a shimmering in the air in the center of the room and for just a moment, the Crew believes they have been joined by the spirit of the legendary warrior poet himself. Only when Shan Yu begins to speak, do they then realize that the image is that of an extremely high-quality hologram.

Read Aloud: *"To whoever it is that has initiated the events that triggered this message, I must congratulate your persistence and audacity. I am however appalled by your lack of respect to desecrate my home. I have to infer by your presence that my glorious empire has not fared as well as I had envisioned, but such things are beyond the control of even someone as gifted as myself. You vermin are now faced with a simple choice - which of you parasites is expendable?"*

At this point every room in every building in the palace is sealed by a massive armored door (Armor 20 Life Points 20) and a small panel opens in the room where the hologram activated.

At this point a glowing 60 second timer begins its countdown above Shan Yu's head. The GM is advised to start a stopwatch to force the players to make this decision quickly. Shan Yu is speaking the truth, if anyone squeezes his hand into the slightly too small opening and firmly grasps the large switch, the count down stops and all the doors in the palace unseal.

At which point, the Shan Yu hologram speaks again. *"A surprisingly noble gesture, as the way that switch is designed, no one can be compelled to sacrifice themselves. The rest of you sniveling mongrels can run knowing it was the best among you that gave everything to save your miserable hides. A couple final bits of information for you; do not presume to try and profit from your companion's forfeiting of their life. Now that the all too aptly named 'dead man's switch' is active, all the anti-theft tags on every piece of property on these grounds has been activated. Stealing anything will negate the dead man's switch; and if this is not enough incentive to be happy and flee*

with your lives, the switch is now fully charged with twenty amperes of current. If none of you understands what that means, the answer is that your noble friend will be electrocuted where he stands. I have spared you your pathetic scavenging lives and that is the only thing you will leave here with today. I suggest you not dawdle as you only have ninety minutes to escape. If the failsafe has not detected the docking bay doors open by that time, the self-destruct will detonate immediately. To the noble one that is staying behind; once the main doors cycle, the failsafe will fire special charges that will seal every entrance beyond hope of rescue, but the nuclear fire will not be released. There is sufficient food and water for you to live out a decent life inside my humble home. Perhaps you will have time to follow my teaching while you are here. Joo How Rin.⁵

The narrow 15" deep hole inside the small panel is only barely large enough for a human arm and, unknown to the person reaching in, their arm will pass through two constricting bands. Once the switch is grasped, the bands tighten and the person cannot release their arm. There are no circuits visible to access the system and there is no roll to defeat the dead man's switch. Shan Yu is completely serious that one PC will have to be sacrificed in order for anyone else to escape. However, if the sacrificed character chooses to betray the others by letting go of the switch before they exit the sanctuary, Shan Yu's hologram will speak one more time:

"I see there is truly no honor among thieves. At least your death will be quick."

⁵ Good Day.

At this point the capacitor charge that the dictator mentioned discharges with extreme lethality. The other characters are allowed to flee and as soon as they depart, the explosive charges fire and the Hidden City is sealed forever.

The Crew sought out and found the darkest of evil and along the way they found themselves tainted by the encounter. If they were wise enough to gather items from the palace before activating Shan Yu's final message, then they may walk away with some profit, assuming they survive the auctioning process. Otherwise, they have learned much about themselves and may wish to seek to find answers about the people they have become, which is of course the greatest quest that any person may undertake.

This ending of the adventure is worth six Plot Points with a three point penalty if their ship is destroyed.

THE END

Alternatives

The sanctuary of Shan Yu can unbalance a campaign based on the unlimited wealth and historical value of the items to be found. Below are some options for GMs that may wish to reduce the impact of the Hidden City on their game...

Generous GMs can allow the PCs to free range through the Sanctuary and loot everything in sight. This option should be limited to portable objects like china, furniture, silverware, and the books of Shan Yu's library, as well as selling the location of the Hidden City. These objects are priceless and will greatly unbalance any campaign. Of course the GM that giveth can taketh away by having the Alliance seize everything as National Treasures. The Crew could always resort to black market auctions, but items so rare will eventually come to the Fed's attention and the PC will find themselves in very hot water.

A GM can remain generous, but greatly complicate the recovery of objects by having the life support system fail and while the same objects above are available, they are much harder to recover and will be worth much less as many objects will be damaged or outright ruined during their two centuries of drifting.

Finally, a cruel GM can have the Crew find the fragments of the once priceless items floating free in a gutted hulk. The collapse of Shan Yu's regime in chaos in the sanctuary and the factional fighting resulted in the complete destruction of the facility.

Non-Player Characters

Tapper (Boros Hacker)

Agility d8, Strength d4, Vitality d6, Alertness d8, Intelligence d10, Willpower d6;
Life Points 12; Initiative d8 + d8.

Traits: Friends in Low Places (Minor Asset), Scrawny (Minor Complication).

Skills: Covert d6, Discipline d6 / Mental Resistance / d8, Guns d4, Influence d6 / Streetwise d8 / Persuasion d8, Knowledge d6, Perception d6, Technical Engineering d6 / Create/Alter Technical Devices d8 / Electronics d8 / Hacking d10 / Programming d10 / Technical Repair d8.

Description: A quiet unassuming mousy little man that has always been more at home with the Cortex than with others. He's up for any form of computer skullduggery imaginable and is skilled enough to be worth the money he charges for his skills.

Alliance Officer

Use *Disillusioned Veteran*, p.179

Alliance Soldiers

Use *Alliance Grunt*, p. 179

Lu-tsung Ascetic

Agility d4, Strength d4, Vitality d2, Alertness d8, Intelligence d10, Willpower d10;
Life Points 12; Initiative d4 + d8.

Traits: Religiosity (Major Asset), Trustworthy Gut (Minor Asset), Non-Fightin' Type (Minor Complication).

Skills: Craft d4, Discipline d6 / Concentration d8 / Mental Resistance d12, Influence d6 / Leadership d12 / Persuasion d10, Knowledge d6 / Buddhism d10, Medical Expertise d6, Perception d6 / Deduction d8 / Intuition d12.

Description: Only the third Ascetic to lead the Lu-tsung order since the relocation to Bernadette, he had kept to the ideals of the order and ensured that they remain as unassuming as they had been prior to being unfortunate to be brushed by association with Shan Yu.

Lu-tsung Monk

Use *Buddhist Monk*, p. 182

Peng Chongde

Agility d8, Strength d8, Vitality d8, Alertness d6, Intelligence d8, Willpower d10;
Life Points 18; Initiative d8 + d6.

Traits: Friends in Low Places (Minor Asset), Leadership (Major Asset), Mean Left Hook (Minor Asset), Credo: Keep Shan Yu's Secret Buried (Major Complication), Loyal (Minor Complication) Prejudice: Anyone greedy enough to seek out Shan Yu's Hidden City (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6 / Dodge d8, Covert d6, Discipline d6, Guns d6, Influence d6 / Leadership d8, knowledge d4, Influence d6, Melee Weapon Combat d6 / Quarterstaff d8, Perception d6, Unarmed Combat d6 / Aikido d10.

Description: A dedicated but fanatic member of a group that considers themselves to be no less than the defenders of the 'Verse. Regardless of what the Alliance military may think, it is the Shouren that are the guardians of peace and Peng will stop at nothing to ensure he and the others of the Tong perform what they see as a sacred duty.

Shouren Tong Fighter

Agility d8, Strength d8, Vitality d8, Alertness d6, Intelligence d6, Willpower d6;
Life Points 16; Initiative d8 + d6.

Traits: Tough as Nails (Minor Asset), Loyal (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6 / Dodge d8, Covert d6, Discipline d4, Guns d6, Influence d4,
Knowledge d4, Melee Weapon Combat d6 / Quarterstaff d8, Perception d6, Unarmed
Combat d6 / Aikido d10.

Description: Committed to their cause and each other, each member of the Shouren serves for life or until too injured to perform their duty. When it comes to protecting the secrets of Shan Yu, they are merciless; these fighters are the shock troops of the order.

Shouren Tong Pilot

Agility d8, Strength d6, Vitality d6, Alertness d8, Intelligence d8, Willpower d6;
Life Points 12; Initiative d8 + d6

Traits: Talented: Piloting (Minor Asset), Loyal (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6, Covert d4, Discipline d6, Guns d6, Knowledge d4, Melee Weapon
Combat d6, Perception d6 / Sight d8, Piloting d6 / Specialty d8, Technical Engineering d6
/ Sensors d8, Unarmed Combat d6.

Description: No less dedicated than the shock troops, the pilots of the Shouren are talented and are just as merciless at performing their sacred duty.

New Equipment

Gremlin Mk IV missile launcher (€500 / 2,000lbs / I)

This ad hoc weapon system was created as a means to give unarmed freighters a way to defend themselves against pirate activities out on the Rim. Designed to be as cheap as possible, the Gremlin uses the ship's own sensors and can only guide one missile at a time. The system is completely self contained and can not be reloaded outside of a repair shop.

Ships

Stingray-class Courier



Dimensions (LxBxH): 198 x 60 x 36 feet

Tonnage: 1,000 tons.

Speed Class: 6 cruise/7 hard-burn

Crew Quarters: Two single cabins.

Fuel Capacity: 24 tons (1,600 hours)

Cargo Capacity: 200 tons

Passenger Capacity: 4, in two double occupancy cabins

Gear: One 20-ton, Two three pack 100-pound Gremlin Mk IV short-ranged missile launchers

Price: €49,000 with the two missile packs

Agility d10, Strength d4, Vitality d6, Alertness d6, Intelligence d4, Willpower d6;
Initiative: d10+d4, Life Points: 12

Traits: Fuel Efficient (Minor Asset), Slow Throttle (Minor Complication)

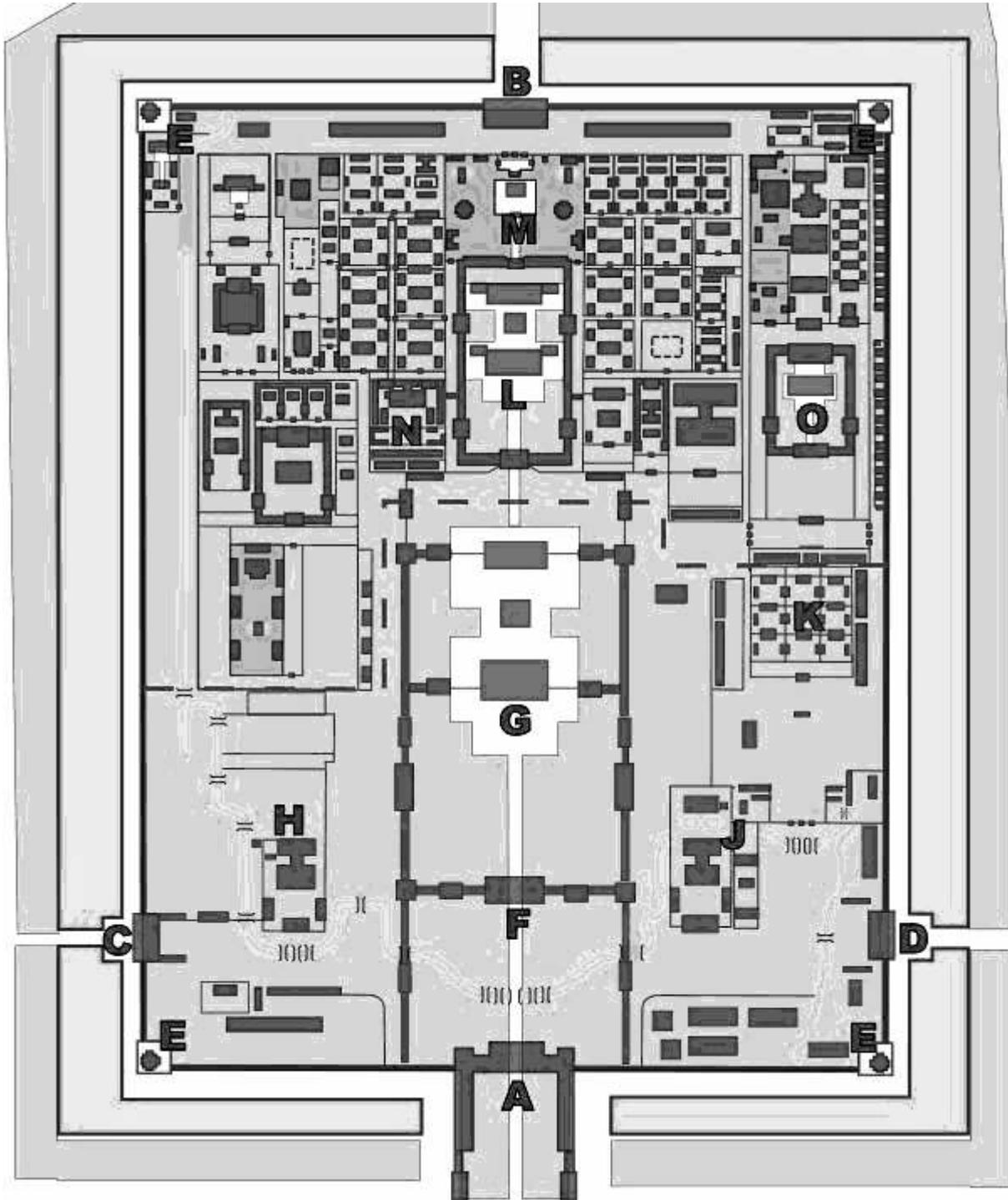
Skills: Pilot d4; Perception d4

Complexity: Average. Maintenance costs: €1,600 a year (€133 per month).

Description: Originally designed as a long range courier and light cargo ship, the Stingray comes from the same manufacturer as the ubiquitous Firefly. Created by the famous shipwright Jennifer Yamadera re-engineering the same drive systems of the Firefly for the smaller Stingray in an effort to keep costs down, but unlike her more successful design, the Stingray never caught on and was quietly dropped after only a three year run.

Purchased second hand, discretely armed with a pair of Gremlin Mk IV missile launchers in order to assist in their never ending quest to keep Shan Yu's legacy hidden, and renamed the *Yongcheng* (Eternal Bulwark) this vessel is the lead ship of the enforcement arm of the Shouren Tong.

Forbidden City Layout



- - - = Dividing line between Inner and Outer Courts

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| A. Meridian Gate | H. Hall of Military Eminence |
| B. Gate of Divine Might | J. Hall of Literary Glory |
| C. West Glorious Gate | K. Southern Three Places |
| D. East Glorious Gate | L. Palace of Heavenly Purity |
| E. Corner towers | M. Imperial garden |
| F. Gate of Supreme Harmony | N. Hall of Mental Cultivation |
| G. Hall of Supreme Harmony | O. Palace of Tranquil Longevity |

Map Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forbidden_City