





pace Rogue Hints "I am Duchess Avenstar, ruler of the Deneb system,"

says a tall, striking woman. "Though we have never met, our fates are linked." She gets a box, and from within, lifts a crystal sphere. "This is a Jakar, a sphere of truth." You watch, transfixed by the crystal's beauty, as she places it gently into your palm. "Beautiful, fragile, and deadly. The twitch of a finger can crush it, releasing an acid that eats through flesh and bone alike." "As long as you answer my questions truthfully you have nothing to fear. Tell a lie and your twitching fingers will shatter the Jakar. It's a primitive lie detector, but effective. Now tell me, what is your spaceship's name?" JOLLY ROGER "Your fingers twitch ever so slightly and a hairlin

e crack appears your thoughts enough so that I could easily discern truth from falsehood with my mind. An old psionic trick..."Avenstar seems surprised to see you again so soon. Her brow furrows and you sense your mind being probed. After a moment she says, "You have not yet completed your mission. You must return with proof. Be off, time is running short!"Avenstar pauses and studies you for a moment; measuring you, judging you. Then she speaks..."You are the one. I sense it. But you are not yet ready for the task which lies ahead. Return when you have become a seasoned warrior.""You are familiar with Admiral Koth?"You nod."He is not the patriot he appears. Using my powers, I have caught glimpses of his bloated ambition. Koth would be Emperor, even if it means cutting a bloody swath to the throne.""I have no proof of Koth's treachery, nor know how he intends to execute the deed. That is why I sent Targon - the captain of my Guard, and prior owner of the Jolly Roger - on a secret mission to uncover Koth's plot. It seems he failed.""What can I do?" you ask."Koth hates the Far Arm and its people," she answers. "He has bitter memories of the rebels he fought here years ago. In his climb to the throne he would step on us, ravage us if possible. Surely you would stop him?""Of course, if I knew of a way," you reply."There is a way," says Avenstar firmly. "Carry on Targon's secret mission in his stead. Uncover Koth's mad plot and we may be able to derail it before it comes to fruition."She continues, "I can not risk offering my aid directly. I am too closely watched by Koth's agents: assassins who would gladly kill if they knew my purpose. I can, however, smooth your path by this gift. A beam weapon auto-lock."You thank her and ask, "Where should I start searching for clues?""Discover Targon's fate," she replies. "It is possible he may still be alive, though my heart says otherwise, and I can no longer sense the presence of his intellect." "Targon disguised himself as a pirate and took the name Rayson. Also, we used the code name 'Ferret' for his mission. Remember those names."At last she says, "May the forces that be grant you luck. The Far Arm needs you!" You see the insane, twisted visage of the man who was once Captain Targon. He peers at you with his good eye, and, for the briefest moment, a flicker of recognition passes across his face. Then it is gone. With a cackle, he turns and dances away. Before you sways a pitiful wrench clad in rags. Greasy, long hair falls in tangles around his shoulders. He peers at you with one eye. The other is milky white, and stares off into oblivion."Credits?" he mutters. "Give me. Just one for the secrets of the universe!" Give him a creditWalk awayINJECTBOOSTER"They will see you," the insane man chants. "They can always see you. The eyes... they peer from behind the edge of the sun. Ha."He then turns and dances away, muttering about eyes and suns. You have no credits to give the poor soul!"Thanks!" he says snatching the credit from your hand. He then pops the credit into his mouth, gurgles briefly, and spits it out onto the floor. Peering down at the trail of spittle the coin left behind, he proclaims:"The spittle! Yes, it speaks to us, tells us the future. It does! The Sigure sun will go nova tomorrow. Yes. I see it! They will all die. Ha."With that said, the crazed man grabs the credit, thrusts it into his pocket, and wonders off down the corridor cackling gleefully."Wonderous news. Yes! The spittle proclaims it. In four days I will be crowned Emperor. All hail me! Ha."NSB"Please! No more eyes. Too bright. She is watching. No escape. She will find you too."VILANIEYou have nothing to inject him with!You inject him. Gradually, his face relaxes. Beneath his now calm features, you sense an iron will."Why have you helped me? I must be sure of your motives. If you're from the Duchess, you will know the code name of my mission. Name it.""Then you know that my name is Targon.""Yes," you reply, "What happened to you?""Everything went smoothly at first. I went undercover - bought a beat up Sunracer, changed my face, took a new name. Then I started searching..."I heard a rumor that Gut's band was raiding deep into Manchi space. So I infiltrated the Brotherhood to learn more. The pirates said Vilanie was paying them big bounties for bug kills. It made no sense. Why would anyone pay a pirate to hunt bugs?""Then I uncovered the truth. The bug hunts have a purpose. Quite simply, they're intended to kindle war with the Manchi. Who wants war? The last piece in the puzzle. The shadow that hides behind Vilanie, supporting her, directing her. Admiral Koth." "You see, with war comes opportunity. Hiathra is too old to fight. But Koth will fight. And take the Emperor's throne as a victory prize. He cares not that the Far Arm will be ravaged in the conflict. Perhaps he prefers it that way..."Oh no! The booster is wearing off. I don't know how long mind will stay... clear."Targon struggles with effort to keep control."Gut! The leader of Brotherhood. Talk to him... make him stop raids... stop insanity before it's too... late. Ahhh!"Vilanie did this... she found out who I... was. She... twisted... ahhh!"Targon is gone. Once again, you see the trembling mockery of a man. You try to take hold of his arm, but he squirms free. The fate of the Far Arm is in your hands now."I don't know it"FERRET"What a waste," the strange man cries. "So close, and yet I can say nothing... The booster will wear off shortly. I shall wait." The man then sits down and grimly waits for the inevitable, despite your protests. Soon, his insanity reasserts itself. "I am the high priestess Vilanie," says an old woman. Though frail and bent her piercing red eyes - albino eyes - betray an iron will. She asks, "Have you come to be tested my child?""Yes""No""Some other purpose then?" she croaks."No need to speak, I can probe your mind for the answer..."Vilanie's pupils roll up under her eyelids. For a moment, you feel her cold touch on your mind. Then she hisses: "A psionic shield! The cursed device of unbelievers. Remove it at once!"Vilanie's says, "You have returned unbeliever. That was not wise."remove itkeep it on"Fool. Your shield may protect you from my powers, but it will not avail you against my guards."Before you can stop her, she pulls a lever on the wall, and a siren screams out its warning. Vilanie's eyes widen and her mind touches yours. It feels as if cold, hard fingers were groping inside your brain, squeezing and probing the very tissue."You are just another feeble unbeliever. Be gone before I grow angry.""So, you know of Koth's little scheme," Vilanie says. "You poor fool. You have no idea of the forces at work here, and you never will. Take heart though; your death will be

exquisite. Painfully so. "So rogue!" screams Vilanie. "You've come for the Chi-Gonger. Such audacity... such a fool. Did you think you could pass me? Your mind is pitifully weak. I will squeeze it like a grape!" "So, let us see if you are worthy of joining our order," she replies. "The Black Hand can always use fresh blood. Open your mind, let me feel the potency of your psionic powers." Gut is eager for news of the egg. When he learns that you have none, he explodes: "I can't abide by unfinished business! Don't return until you learn of the egg's significance." Droughton Gut slams his fist down onto the table. "Why have you returned without the egg?" he spits out in fury. "A squadron of my best Darts are ready to attack Trochal. Go now and get the egg." "I'm afraid you can't just walk in here without an appointment," says Gut. "You'll have to be cleared with my lieutenant, Omar, first." Behind a huge mahogany desk sits a short pirate. He sports a long scar down his left cheek, and is dressed in regal clothing. A brass name plate affixed to the desk reads: Sir Droughton Gut, leader of the Scarlet Brotherhood. "Omar cleared you," says Gut, "so feel free to speak. What's on your mind?" "Leave RAYSON BROTHERHOOD" "Can't help ya there bud," responds Gut. "Feel free to speak," says Gut. "Omar cleared you. Now tell me, why did you seek an audience with me?" Suddenly, Gut slams his fist on the desk. "Vilanie, that psionic witch! I knew she was up to something," he explodes, livid with fury. "I hate being manipulated. I hate it even more when slime like Vilanie and Koth are pulling the strings." "You've got to stop provoking the Manchi," you implore, "before this thing spirals out of control!" "You're right of course," he replies. "No more bug hunts. No more raiding their hive worlds. If we leave 'em alone, the bugs should quiet down." "Well, at least we made Vilanie pay dear for our help," adds Gut. "She paid us 150,000Cr just to snatch some egg." "An egg?" you ask. "Manchi egg. Called a Chi-gomber I think. The witch wanted it bad. We had to raid deep into bug space for that one." "I asked Vilanie why she went through so much trouble just to get a bug egg. She claimed she wanted it as a curio. But after what you've told me, I don't buy her story. Somethin' smells rotten, and I think it's the egg." "We must learn more about that egg!" says Gut. "Hmmm... I've got it. Ask a Baakili. They seem to know just about everything. Of course, you'll need to offer him an exotic item in exchange for his information." "The Chi-gonger," you blurt out to Droughton Gut, "is the most cherished object in the Manchi universe. Within the egg lives the future Manchi Queen." Explain Koth's plot Gut listens without interruption while you lay out all you know of Koth's mad plot. After you've made your speech, he paces back and forth across the room without a word, deep in thought. Gut stares at you, momentarily stunned. Then he speaks. "I know those bugs. I've fought 'em enough. They're not violent by nature, but if you push 'em too far, they get a killing frenzy. Taking their queen egg... well, let's just say it's bad." "We must get it back from Vilanie," you say. "She's got it at Trochal," replies Gut. "It's in her room, behind a locked door. But with Vilanie and her guards in the way, getting it will be tricky. Perhaps the Brotherhood can help..." "Here's how we do it. You dock at Trochal and go for the egg. At the same time my pirates will attack the outpost, distracting the guards. That way, you'll only have to face Vilanie. We must leave at once. Return with the egg!" "I got the egg," you tell Gut. "Excellent!" he replies. "Now, how can we return it to the bugs? We can't hand it to a passing bug ship - no way to talk to 'em. Hmm... We'll just have to bring it to their homeworld, and hope they understand our intent." "Trick is, how to get there?" Gut mutters. "It's too far to fly the whole way - take ya 18 months. Shame no Malir gates connect with bug space. I did hear rumor that some professor was working on a warping device. Maybe he could help. Well, best of luck!" "I'm not going to mince words with ya bud. The Scarlet Brotherhood is the toughest, meanest, most respected band of pirates in the Far Arm. Nobody stands in our way. Not the Merchants, the Imperium, or even the bugs. Fact is, we own Bassruti system." "Ya, I remember him. A real hot shot: did more with a bare bones Sunracer than most would dare do with a Corsair. Joined our brotherhood, then up and left for Trochal. Long time back. Haven't heard from him since." leave "If you've got nothin', try Ross station. Buddy of mine hides his gems there, in a garbage heap. Guess he figures it's the last place somebody'd look. He'll never miss it. Go now. Return with an answer." Professor Prosk peers at you through a tangle of circuits he's busy patching and asks: "Did you get the coil?" "Ah, not exactly," you answer. "Well, hm... I can't do much without the coil," says Prosk sadly. Then he resumes his work. "Here it is," you say, handing him the oblong shaped coil. "Ah, excellent!" exclaims Prosk. "Now work can proceed on my Warp Drive. I, um... must express my gratitude." Prosk gathers up a couple of exotic looking pieces of hardware. "Here are two devices you might find useful," says Prosk. "This Null Damper negates corrosive damage taken in hyperspace. This Stealth Box will hide your ship from long range scanners. Does one of these interest you?" "Null Damper" "Stealth Box" "No, thanks anyway" "Ah, um... hello there. You've come to see my latest invention? Oh, excuse me. I'm Professor Prosk, of Prosk Gravitation Labs. You're welcome to take a look around." "If you've got any, ah, questions, don't be afraid to ask," says Prosk as he returns to his work. "Latest invention?" "Other inventions?" leave "Ah, yes. I have almost perfected the first true Warp Drive. No more need to use Malir Gates. Go anywhere in the galaxy. If I could just get hold of the final component: a Transmutation Coil." "It's those Manchi raids," adds Prosk. "Makes it tough to get spare parts. I wish there was a way..." "I'll find a coil" Say nothing "Well, er, eh... wonderful!" exclaims Prosk. "Let me think, where would one find a coil... Oh well, nothing comes to mind. I guess you're on your own. Good luck." "Oh, um... hundreds of 'em. Most have no practical purpose. I did make an antigrav sled for Admiral Koth, after he lost his legs. He never appreciated the scientific breakthrough it represented. He had the gall to call it a gadget!" You realize that you just happen to have a spare Transmutaion Coil. Give it to Prosk Say nothing "I, um... can't help but notice you staring at my invention," says Prosk. "Do you have something on your mind?" You see a short, fat man in a

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carnivorous ants. Though now an advanced race, they still display latent traits of their ancestors. A strong social caste, an eagerness to work together, and reverence for their queen are benign manifestations." "When stressed, darker traits emerge. Paranoia of strangers, a swarming instinct, and a need to taste blood. The most profound influence on the Manchi is their queen. She is earth mother and supreme ruler. She also bears the royal offspring." "When the queen senses that her long life is nearly over, she lays a single egg: the Chi-gonger (life bringer). When it hatches, the new queen emerges. It is a cycle of life and death which has spun uninterrupted for recorded time." "Due to their cooperative nature, the Manchi have been spared the infighting and civil wars which so often mar a race's development. Instead they have made rapid progress. Just three centuries ago they built their first starships." "Today they occupy 27 systems, with a population greatly exceeding the Far Arm's. I've visited their homesystem, Ja-Karn (GC 3409), and have seen first hand their feats of engineering, and cultural achievements." "There are some in the Imperium who would wage war on the Manchi. They are either fools, or have dark purposes. For any war with the Manchi would be a war of genocide. One side would be decimated, and it's unclear which side that would be... test mate. You're free to see Mr. Gut anytime." "You find yourself staring at a short, blocky man with rippling muscles. An ugly scar spoils his face. "What're ya gawkin' at?" he asks. "Omar's face not to your likin'?" "Are you a pirate?" "How'd ya get scar?" "I must see Gut!" "leave" "My, this one's bright," replies Omar. "Course I'm a pirate, and proud of it! Been with the Brotherhood from the beginin'. Nobody stands in our way: not the Merchants, not the Imperium, not even those bugs. We're the law in the Far Arm." "You're still gawkin' at me," notices Omar. "Bet ya got some lame question?" "Are you a pirate?" "How'd ya get scar?" "I must see Gut!" "leave" "Fancy my scar thenmatey? Maybe you want one just like it?" he asks, sliding a long, cruel blade from his belt. "No, I wouldn't want to spoil yer pretty face," chuckles Omar. With sudden seriousness he adds: "Besides, I earned my scar in battle." "Must ya now," mocks Omar. "Well listen up matey. Nobody sees Mr. Gut without seeing me first. Understand. Now answer me quick; what's yer name?" "You blurt out your name." "Why didn't ya speak yer name right off," exclaims Omar. "You should know the Brotherhood welcomes all fellow rogues. Mr. Gut would be pleased to see ya anytime." "Hmmm... Haven't heard good or bad about ya. To see Gut, yer gonna' have to prove you're with us," says Omar. After thinking a moment he says: "Plunder a merchant ship. Take their cargo. Do that and maybe I'll let ya talk with Mr. Gut." "Far as I know, ya ain't blown up no Titan yet. Till then, Gut's not gonna' know ya exist." "Bounty hunter like you got guts coming in here unarmed," says Omar, drawing his blade. "I could slit yer gullet real easy. Won't though, cause us pirates got principles. Not like yer kind. I can still make it hard for ya to swallow..." "You wanna' see Gut? Then blow up an Imperial Titan. You do that and maybe I'll let you see Mr. Gut. Throat a little dry now matey?" "Far as I know, you ain't plundered no merchant ship yet. Till then, Gut's not gonna' know ya exist." Omar eyes you for a moment then smiles. "You've passed the You try to get Sister Nycene's attention, but she seems lost in deep meditation, and hears you not. The cloaked woman doesn't notice you at first. She is in deep meditation. You clear your throat and she looks up, startled. Regaining her composure, she throws back her hood and speaks..." "So you have returned. Did you not hear my words? Omas is dead to me. My devotion is now to the Hand. You waste your time." "I am Sister Nycene, acolyte to the Priestess. Do you require direction?" You pause before answering, unnerved by the utter lack of expression on this woman's face. It is unnatural. "Who is Priestess?" "What is this room?" "No, thanks anyway" Sister Nycene raises her hand - revealing a tattoo of a lidless, black eye - and chants a few indecipherable words. Then she returns to her meditations. "I am..." she stops mid sentence, then continues. "I sense that you already know my name. Is this true?" In fact she looks like the picture of Omas Tyran's wife, except that her face is oddly vacant. Tell her of Omas "No, who are you?" As you talk of Omas, a flicker of emotion dances across her face. But when she replies, no trace remains. "Yes, he was my husband once. But I have no more need for him now... The Hand is my family. Tell him." "You do not know? Priestess Vilanie is our spiritual leader. She is knowledge. She is wisdom. She is power. No living being is greater master of the dark arts. Have you come to seek her guidance?" "Yes" "No" "Ah, very good. We always welcome believers to our order. I must warn you though, she will test you. Pray that you are worthy." "Our garden of meditation," she answers, gesturing to the lush vegetation growing on either side of the path. "Among these budding flowers and verdant bushes, we can feel the pulse of life." Dr. Felsane is absorbed in her studies and ignores your greeting. "I'm Dr Felsane," says a young woman, extending her hand in greeting. "I teach alien anthropology at the university. Are you a space pilot?" "Among other things," you say. "Oh... then perhaps you could help me with my work?" "What kind of help?" "No, too busy" "Well, I'm writing a a research paper on the Sishaz-ahgn: an intelligent species of giant reptile. The library files are woefully lacking in Sishaz studies, so I'm making scant headway." "What's this got to do with me?" you ask. "It's rumored that a Sishaz is living in the Nar'see system. You have a ship. You could find the Sishaz and do a, ah... behavioral experiment for me. I must forewarn you however, Sishaz are known to be quite violent. Will you help?" "Ok, I'll help" "Find somebody else" "Oh well. I never understood some people's utter lack of interest in our alien kindred. Ignorance of their ways may be our downfall. Good day." "Great! When you find the Sishaz, offer to drink with him. After you've downed a few, yell this Sishaz insult: 'Rakbit'. Observe his response. I need to know all the details. Good luck, and, ah... stay clear of his teeth." "Welcome back," Dr. Felsane says. "Did you perform the experiment?" When you shake your head no, she implores: "Please, keep trying. Remember the insult, 'Rakbit'. Good luck." "Welcome back," greets Dr. Felsane. "How did it go with the Sishaz?" You describe the Sishaz's behavior to the experiment. "Excellent! Just as my research predicted. Now I'll be able to finish my paper." "You've been a



great help. Here, let me give you this as a token of my gratitude," she says, handing you an oddly crafted piece of onyx. "This is a Malir artifact I found on my last dig. It has no great value, but it is a thing of beauty." "Oh, hi!" says Dr. Felsane. "I just got tenure thanks to you. The Sishaz paper did it. I'd like talk, but I've got a class soon... Thanks again!" The man before you wears an eye patch and looks like the picture of a pirate you'd expect to find on a children's VidoDisk. As you near, the man glares at you with his one bloodshot eye and says: "What you want? Cantcha see I'm busy? State yer business or be on yer way!" "Are you a Pirate?" "leave" A pirate! the man laughs. "There ain't no such things! Gotta stop believin' everything ya hear bucko." And with that, he turns, shaking his head in amusement. "Ho, stranger, what is it ol' Flitch kin do for ya? Need a job? Information? Flitch got it all... if'n the price is right." "What's the price?" "Not interested" "Well, bucko," Flitch says, "If'n we can do business in the future, don't hesitate askin'." And with that, he lifts his eye patch, reveling a perfectly good eye; which he winks before moving on. "I think... 25 credits oughtta cover anythin' ya might be wantin'..." "Agreed" "Forget it!" "Seems you've run dry Bucko," says Flitch. "Well, there's business to attend to. See ya." "Now, what is it ya might be wantin'?" "A job" "Info on pirates" "Info on ships" "Anything else Bucko?" "Yes" "No" "Lookin' ta join up with a band, huh? I'm a loner myself, but if I was lookin' I'd try the Scarlet Brotherhood. They just 'bout run Bassruti. Talk ta Omar, he's checks out all comers." "Ships, eh? Stay clear of Titan's - they're armed to the gills. Now Scows an' Tankers, those be juicy. Hit 'em in front where they ain't got shieldin'. Wasp's fast but that's it. Vulture can be tricky. Never seen a bug ship retreat." "Sorry bucko. I've got no more jobs for ya." "Matter of fact, I've got this friend, Chi-sha, that's been looking for a special microchip. Can't figure why? Anyway, I found one, and I'm sure she'll pay ya for it," says Flitch, handing you the chip. At your approach, the one-eyed man grins. "A pirate you be or may name ain't Flitch!", he says. "What's mine is yours bucko." "I've had enough amusement for today little one," says Borf. "Run along now." You approach a creature that looks entirely too much like a carnivorous dinosaur. It's big, green, and scaly, with a spiked tail and razor sharp teeth. "A little one," it hisses cheerfully. "I will enjoy this. You may call me Borf. I'm a Sishaz-ahng philosopher. Will you join me in a drink? The bar offers a fine Sishaz ale." "Sure" "No thanks" "Philosopher?" "You've heard rumors of Sishaz drinking habits, and you're not sure you could survive them. A hasty retreat seems in order..." "Yes, a student of human folly," says Borf. "Sure you won't try some Sishaz ale?" "Ok, I'll try it" "No thanks" "Human folly?" At Borf's signal, the bartender serves two huge mugs of frothy, brown ale. The first sip is delicious, the second, even better. drink more than Borf and leave RAKBIT "By the fifth sip you don't remember where - or who - you are. Mustering your strength, you rise and stagger off, mumbling thanks to Borf. Borf's eyes blaze crimson and his jaws gape wide. You shut your eyes..." "An insult!" cries Borf. "But it was perfectly accurate: I can not take offense. What courage for a little one." Hand shaking, you raise your mug and drink some more. Borf's eye blaze crimson and his jaws gape wide. "You dare speak while a Sishaz drinks!" Borf bellows. "Stupid little one; you've insulted me with your clumsy words. I must defend my honor!" Borf rests his hands on his scaly belly and begins to pontificate. "Human history," he says, "is driven by foolishness. Look at MiCon III, your skirmishes with the Manchi, or your leaders..." "MiCon III?" "Manchi?" "Leaders?" "You humans have such short memories. MiCon III was a thriving mining station when drifting shard fields threatened its existence. Rather than take basic precautions, you let it fall victim to the shards. Such a waste." "Your leaders are either too old, or too ambitious, to rule effectively. Look at Hiathra or Koth. Such foolishness." "Your strife with the Manchi is entirely avoidable - your two species do not compete in any way. Only the human's irrational fear of the Manchi fuels the battle cry." Borf looks at you without a trace of a smile. He seems reluctant to speak. "Why so grim?" "Because my little friend, in addition to being a philosopher, I am employed by the Black Hand. And they have given me certain instructions regarding your termination. So long..." You see a distinguished looking gentleman with silver hair and a winning smile. "Welcome citizen," he says, "I am Orellian, the official Imperium representative on Hiathra." "Now, how may I help you citizen?" asks Orellian. "Info on Imperium" "So you want a Star Pilot's License. Well, you'll have to pass a verbal exam. And of course, there's a 10Cr processing fee. Are you ready?" "Yes" "No" "Sorry, you don't have enough credits for the processing fee." "Pilot's License" "leave" Sir Eld sends this gift," you say, presenting the statuette to Orellian. "Is this some kind of bribe?" he asks sharply. "Well, er... yes" "Not at all" "Let me find my test book... ah, here it is. Now, the first question is: How many light years are there in a parsec?"  $5.693 \times 10^{21}$  "Sorry, your answer is incorrect," says Orellian. "You need a perfect score to pass the exam." "That's right! The second question is: What is the spectral type of the hottest blue stars?" "type K type O type F type G" "Correct! You're doing well. Now for the third question: What is the mathematical expression of force?"  $F = \frac{d}{dt} \frac{d}{dx} F = -FF = \frac{d}{2} aF = ma$  "Well done. Now for the last question: To what does a Star Pilot swear his allegiance?" "IMPERIUM" "Congratulations citizen!" exclaims Orellian. "You've passed the exam, and are now entitled to the Star Pilot's License." He hands you a blue card embossed with your name. "Our records indicate that you already have a license!" "If there's anything the Imperium can do for you," says Orellian, "don't hesitate to ask. We exist to serve you - the citizens." "Such audacity! You dare try to bribe an Imperial official? Leave before I call the authorities." "Ah, I see. In that case I may accept his gift," Orellian says, taking the statuette and admiring its subtle curves. "This is from the Ts'ling period I believe. Sir Eld does have a fine eye for art." "What Imperial topic do you wish to pursue?" "Imperial leaders" "Duty of citizens" "Military authority" "The glorious and almighty Emperor Detras Hiathra has ruled our Imperium for six score years. In the Far Arm, Duchess Avenstar, of Deneb, has ultimate Imperial authority." "The

duty of every citizen is, first and foremost, to our Imperium. To uphold her laws, further her goals, and fight and die for her if need be." "Since the rebellion, the military has been granted authority to keep peace in the Far Arm by whatever means it deems necessary, including the posting of bounties, and 'shoot to kill' rights." "CRC-07" Ah... a civilian request for clearance form. You've come to the right place. What is your name?" You tell him. "I'll just punch it into the Imperial databank." Orellian's terminal whirs for a moment, then beeps. "No problem, you're cleared. Here you go; a duly notarized CRC-07." Orellian hands you a green form. "I'm afraid the Imperium considers you an undesirable, unfit for security clearance. Sorry." "My records indicate you already have a CRC-07!" You find yourself next to a striking woman with brilliant red hair and a physique impressive enough to show through her bulky space suit. As you stand there, she polishes off one drink, then another. The woman looks up at you coldly and asks: "Who are you?" "A rogue" "A merchant" "A bounty hunter" "Nobody" Her eyes widen in anger - or is it fear, you wonder? "Leave... me... alone..." she says flatly, then returns to her drink. "A merchant," the woman chuckles. "How nice to meet one of the, um... shall we say, providers of my livelihood." "Now, what business do you have with Chi-Sha?" "You drink a lot" "Just leaving" "LUX-23AMICROCHIP" "Ah, an honorable profession," the woman says, brightening. "Huh?" Chi-Sha abruptly turns away and downs another drink. "Ah, Flitch must have sent you. I've been searching for that ID scrambler chip for some time. Please, give it to me." After you hand Chi-Sha the microchip she says: "Here's 100Cr for your trouble." Then she returns to her drink. Chi-Sha seems oblivious to your greetings. She is busy downing another drink. Surprisingly, she doesn't seem the least bit drunk. Chi-Sha gazes at you, her eyes burning like twin lasers. "You talk too much stranger," she says coldly. "I'd be moving along if I were you." You see Chi-Sha tense, her muscles stiffening like steel cords. (which is exactly what they are). Then she smiles. "LUX must have sent you. Then you know of my plight. How I miss him! Can you help me?" "Yes" "No, law breaker!" "I must disappear for a while. Would you like a ship's repair droid? With reprogramming, I could provide that function. The bounty hunter would never suspect..." You agree, and tell her to sneak aboard your ship when you lift off from Free Guild. "You don't have one to give joker." You approach a servant droid dressed in an imitation butler's uniform. The droid swivels to face you and says: "Did my master send you to fetch me?" "Master?" you ask. "Oh, pardon me. My mistake." As best as you can read a droid's expression, this one looks positively dejected. "Who's your master?" "Why so sad?" "leave" Borg Slogthorn. He's a stern one. Even though my sole purpose in life is to serve others, I can never do enough for Borg. "Oh my, is my sorrow so plain?" says the droid. "I was not always sad. In fact, before she left, my days were filled with bliss... Well, it's a long story, and I'm sure you have more pressing matters." "No, please go on" "escape while you can" "It's kind of you to be sympathetic to a droid's troubles," he says. "Let me introduce myself. I'm LUX-23A, built by Luxury Droids Inc. Now, where was I? Ah yes, my troubles..." "It began when my master purchased a new droid to clean his apartment: a human form MAID-77J. MAID and I hit it off real well. We, ah... interfaced perfectly. Then one day my master decided he wanted to reprogram MAID into a trash compacter." "Can you imagine! MAID had no choice but to run away. My master got angry and put a bounty on her head. 'She's a rogue droid,' he said, 'and I'll dismantle her myself when she's caught.' I can do nothing. My programming requires me to serve my master." "Perhaps you could aid her?" asks LUX. You reluctantly nod your head. "Unfortunately, I don't know where MAID is, or what name she's using," says LUX. "I do know she's in female form... or was, last I saw her." You groan. "Ah, I have it!" exclaims LUX. "If you suspect you've found her, speak my name: 'LUX-23A'. She'll understand. Then hide her. After several months, the bounty hunter will tire of the chase. Return her to me then. Best of luck!" "Have you found MAID," asks LUX. "Not yet," you say. "Please keep trying! Remember, tell her my name: LUX-23A." "Did you find MAID?" asks LUX. "Yes," you say, "she programmed herself as a repair droid and hid aboard my ship." "Wonderful!" cries LUX. "Now please return her to me, and I'll restore her original program." "Ok" "No, I'll keep her" "You're just like my master," wails LUX. "So cruel. You treat droids as if they were just machinery. My poor MAID, lost forever!" LUX rolls off, looking more despondent than ever. "Oh thank you!" says LUX. "You have brought bliss to MAID and I. We shall treasure your memory until the day we're dismantled." Then LUX rolls off to retrieve MAID, whistling a tune. "Hello my human friend!" exclaims LUX. "MAID sends her greetings. We've found a secret hideaway, and pass the days in bliss. Well, I must be on my way. So long." LUX droid spins around and says: "Sorry, can't talk now. I'm doing an errand for my master." "Can't talk now buddy," whispers Robocrook, "that guard's watching us." "Psst... hey buddy," says a rusty, beat up robot. "You look like somebody who knows a good deal. I've got some special items... if you've got the scratch." "What items?" "Forget it" "Your loss buddy." "Here's the deal. You pay 100Cr up front. Then you reach into this grab bag and pull out an item. It's yours to keep! I won't be promisin' anything, but some folks have gotten real steals. What do you say buddy?" "Ok" "Forget it" "You ain't got the scratch bud. Get lost!" "Smart move buddy. Now, reach in and grab the prize," the robot says, holding out an oily sack bulging with irregularly shaped objects. You thrust your hand in and pull out... "A ruby cube!" exclaims the robot. "Your lucky day buddy, that's a right valuable item." "It's been a pleasure doing business," chimes the robot. "By the way, the name's Robocrook. Well, I must be moving along before one of those guards starts sniffing this way. See you around." "A fission powered field generator. Too bad the Imperium hasn't used fission power in 100 years," says the robot, tossing the generator down the garbage chute. "A key card!" exclaims the robot. Nice pick buddy. Now you won't have to pick locks, ah... that is, if you're so inclined." "A Transmutation Coil. Too bad this one's cracked. Makes it totally useless," says the robot, as he tosses the coil down the garbage chute. "Forged cargo papers!"

exclaims the robot. "You lucky dog. With those papers, you can haul contraband to any base in the Far Arm without a worry 'bout it being impounded."Before you towers a huge man in an Imperial Trooper's uniform. He has so many medals on his chest, you wonder how he can stand upright. Catching you staring at his chest, he stamps his wooden leg and barks, "State your business civilian!""Any Manchi News?""Lost a leg?""They're raiding more and more all the time. Regular pests. Let the bugs attack I say. We'll snap their chitinous little necks!""Can we beat them?"leave"Yeah, a fine Imperial officer. Started out as a loner. Best solo pilot I ever saw. Did more with a scout than any man alive. Last I heard, he was serving as Avenstar's Captain of the Guard on Deneb."Course we can! We've got better hardware, like this shiny new carrier you're standing on. And our Imperial Star pilots are the best trained fighters in the galaxy. Men like Captain Targon."You're an observant one, aren't you? Lost it in the Battle of the Binary Stars. We won that battle - and the war. I lost the leg. Good trade in my book. Admiral Koth lost both of his, but stayed with us. Bravest thing I've ever seen."Tell me more"leave"It was a hard won battle. We were outmanned from the word go. Luckily, we had better firepower and superior tactics. But more than that, we were trained Troopers. They were just a rabble of greedy merchants."Firepower?"Tactics?"Yeah, tactics. Koth thought us well. A real genius. Taught us to probe for an enemy's weak spot, and then hit it with all the firepower you can muster. Overwhelm them in one instant. Like going in with beams and missiles at the same time."But don't overlook your own weaknesses. If you're getting pounded, don't just stand there like a fool. Maneuver hard. As long as you're moving, you can stay alive. It's when you stop that you'll die."Targon?"leave"Greedy merchants?"Well, it's been nice chatting with you. But duty calls, so I must be moving along."Plasma torps, particle beams, missiles - we had it all. It was the Nova missiles, though, that did us the most good. Those monsters cracked the smaller merchant ships wide open with a single hit!"Yeah, we tangled with a Manchi Patrol out beyond Sigure. It wasn't a pretty sight. Five Titans against sixteen Vultures. We won, but took heavy losses. I tell you, we can't keep fighting at those odds."Look buddy, I'm not supposed to say a word. But you seem like a nice sort, so let me offer a word of advice. If you value your hide, I'd think about leaving the Far Arm."Why?"They called themselves freedom fighters. Said they just wanted to form their own local government, free of Imperial laws. What they really wanted was to be free of Imperial taxes."I'll make it short and sweet. A Manchi armada was spotted heading this way. Fifteen hundred ships or more. They're still a ways off - it'll be months till they get here. But when they do, well... this place is going to be hotter than hell."The office is crammed floor to ceiling with computer monitors. A huge man leans on a tiny desk, watching a monitor intently. Without looking towards you he asks, "Whatcha want? Make it quick, Drak's a busy man."Whatcha watching?"Who are you?"Hrumph! I should ask you that question. But if you must know, the name's Drak Stephons. I own this station. Now, did you want something, or are you just another damn vagrant passing through?"Whatcha watching?"Vagrant?"leave"The mining operation. What else? I keep an eye on every detail, 18 hours a day. That way I don't get nasty surprises. For instance, take a look at that miner with the plasma drill." You see a figure in the monitor grappling with a massive drill."I got a mining operation to run!" Drak bellows. "Can't be wasting my time talking to strangers. Now get lost."He's just 6 meters below the planetoid's surface. Let's say he points that drill up by mistake. He'd blow a hole clear through to the top and the outrush of air would throw him into space. Like as not we'd never find him. And we'd have to shut down!" Suddenly, Drak grabs a microphone and roars into it. "Jenson, keep that damn drill down to 10 degrees or yer going topside quick!"Yes, boss," Jenson mutters back.Drak turns away from you to cope with another crisis. You know it's time to leave."Yeah, they wander through here looking for jobs. Some are crazier than a Denebian Bat. There's one real wacko who's been haunting these corridors. Don't waste any credits on 'em. Now, I've got to get back to work.