

ROGUE TRADER

Adventure Design Contest 2010

THE GLASS KEY

WRITTEN BY
James R. Burrows

ARTWORK
John Glock

LAYOUT AND FORMATTING
James R. Burrows, after designs by Fantasy Flight Games

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THE GLASS KEY

*“And on the pedestal these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains.
Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”*

- Ancient Terran Verse

PART ONE: SHANGHAIED!

The adventure begins with the Explorers waking up in a slavers' cell, having fallen victim to a press-gang plot. Fortunately for them, the actual parties cunning enough to capture a Rogue Trader and his entourage

GM GUIDANCE:

SELLING THE SOPORIFIC

Some players may (understandably) raise objections to the heavy handed framing of this opening scene; the following may be employed to allay such players as needed.

- If any of the Explorers have enemies capable of such subtle machinations, the plot to drug them may be easily attributed to such.
- If no such enemy readily presents itself, they may be the victims of an unseen and previously unknown foe. Although uncovering the identity of said foe is beyond the scope of this adventure, doing so might provide the basis for further sessions of play.
- If any of the players rigorously objects to being taken captive, offer them the option of having 'slipped the net' and beginning the adventure attempting to orchestrate the rescue of their companions.
- If all of the players raise objections to being taken captive, NPCs vital to the operation of the Explorer's ship can be substituted as the victims of the press gang instead, requiring the Explorers to undertake a daring rescue.
- If nothing else, Mitter Dorn and his tale of the Niveus Astrum could be introduced to the Explorers via some other situation.

have in turn sold them into the hands of the Crimpers Consortium. The Crimpers Consortium traffics in considerable numbers of conscripts, but their operation is ill equipped to detain captives as resourceful and capable as a Rogue Trader and his associates, and the PCs should be able to affect an escape in short order, despite being stripped of any obvious equipment and weapons. Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

Following a night of carousing in Port Wander's Bloodstone Tavern, you awake with a throbbing headache; Surely you did not consume so much amasec as to account for pain which splits your skull. As the room swims into focus, you realize something is greatly amiss - it is not your familiar quarters aboard ship which greets your sight but the bare flakboard walls of a holding cell.

Around you, your fellow explorers are also stirring and returning to consciousness. Besides your companions, the only other occupant is an elderly man who eyes you from where he crouches in a corner.

“Sleep well? Seems you've fallen prey to the press gangers, same as me. Slipped something in me drink, they did, an' 'ere I am. Mitter Dorn's me name. An' you'd be?”

ESCAPING THE CELL

The Crimper's Cell is small and a bit cramped, (perhaps 10' x 10', depending on the number of Explorers); a locked metal door with a small barred window is set in one wall; beyond the door is a narrow hallway lined with more cell doors. A single gaoler passes by at regular intervals, seemingly bored with his tedious task.

NPC: MITTER DORN

A voidfarer of rather advanced years and no great ambition, Mitter served as a scrivener aboard the frigate, *The Legacy of Cavorite*, until a recent night of shore leave landed him in the Crimpers' cells. He is gregarious enough, although none to enthused about his current situation, and willing to help the PCs to the best of his limited abilities.

The Crimpers' stockade is not particularly secure, and any number of means may be employed to escape the cell, including:

- **Medium Density Flackwall:** Although the door is quite sturdy, the walls are only flackboard. A PC may make an **Challenging (+0) Strength Test** to knock a hole in the wall. At the GMs discretion, Talents such as Bulging Biceps or The Flesh Is Weak may provide a bonus to the Test.
- **Hidden Assets:** Their captors will have failed to find any small, concealable, or disguised gear and weapons such as Compact Laspistols or Digital Weaponry the PCs may have on their persons.
- **Guard, He's Sick!** The gaoler is not particularly savvy nor astute. A PC may attempt to use social acumen to con or distract the guard and make a **Challenging (+0) Test** using **Charm, Deceive,** or **Blather** as appropriate.

In addition, the GM should allow any other reasonable plans a chance to succeed, and may call for a **Challenging (+0) Test** using an applicable Skill or Characteristic. Particularly clever plans might require passing only an **Ordinary (+10) Test**, whilst a **Difficult (-10) Test** might be justified for exceptionally credulous schemes. Should the PCs wish to overcome the gaoler by force, use the stat block for the **Mutant Outcast**, (from the Rouge

Trader Core Rulebook, pg 371). The Gaoler has no useful or relevant Mutations however.

In any event, when the Explorers have freed themselves from the cell, Mitter will beg to be allowed to accompany them in their escape, and will promise to reward them handsomely for helping him return to his post aboard *The Legacy of Cavorite*.

THE SCRIVENER'S TALE

Once Mitter and the Explorers are clear of the Crimpers Stockade, Mitter will make good on his promise of a reward and relate the following story: Armed with this information, the Explorers should be able to set about finding the Niveus Astrum and Beowulf's Treasure.

THE NIVEUS ASTRUM

Now little more than a legend among the voidfarers of the Kronus Expanse, the *Niveus Astrum* was one one of a handful of Olympic-class liners, some of the largest Imperial vessels ever constructed in the apocryphal Harlan & Wolfe Shipyards. Perhaps such a grand endeavor was marred by hubris from the start, for an ill fate claimed all of these great ships soon after they were launched.

In 359.M39, the *Niveus Astrum*, captained by the Free Trader Heu Beowulf, set out for what is now the Calixis Sector to aid in the Angevin Crusades. Besides bringing troops and supplies, it is said that Beowulf also bore with him a precious gift intended for General Angevin himself, locked safely away in the ship's most secure vault. However, Beowulf and the *Niveus Astrum* never arrived...

"Well, there we was, deep in th' Expanse, when sum'thin goes amiss in our drives, an' the Cap'n, he orders us to lay in for repairs. We drop outta th' Warp out in th' Crystal Cayes, you know 'em?"

"Now I'm a scrivener, see, an' that day I happened ta be assigned to attendin' the Astropath an' takin' down any communiqés. Easy work, right, what's gonna come in wit' us out that far, eh? But the blind-man, he goes all rigid-like, and starts speakin' an me, I'm takin' it down.

"Seems it's some kinda distress call, sounds kinda old-fashioned, but pretty standard protocol really, Mayday, Mayday... calling anyone... please help... This is an S.O.S. distress call from the Imperial Navy Liner Niveus Astrum..." You know the rest.

"So's I run this up'n to the Cap'n, but he waves me off. Must be some echo of the Warp, he sez. Turns out the Niveus Astrum's been lost for millennia. She set out for the Calixis Sector from Sol herself, laden with troops and treasure levied for the Angevin Crusade, and just... never turned up.

"Well'n, we finish our repairs an aweigh anchor an' the Cap'n, he don't give no more never-you-mind to th' matter. But me, I can't stop thinkin' the Niveus Astrum an' her precious cargo must be out there, somewhere, in th' Crystal Cayes."

PART TWO: IN SEARCH OF THE NIVEUS ASTRUM

THE JOURNEY TO THE CRYSTAL CAYES

Provided they suffer no Navigational mishaps, a few weeks of warp travel should find the Explorers at the edge of the Crystal Cayes (See Gazetteer), a dense and largely unexplored nebula strewn with numerous minor systems.

A VOICE IN THE VOID

Once they enter the nebula, an Astropath will begin to pick up snippets of a psychic transmission at regular intervals of twelve hours.

For each day spend in the nebula, an Astropath may attempt to actively scan the area. Passing a **Difficult (-10) Psyniscience Test** will allow the Astropath to intercept the transmission and locate its source.

CLOSING IN ON CALAMITUS

Tracking the distress call to its source will lead the Explorers to Calamitus, a planet deep within the nebula. Should the PCs transmit a message of their own, there will be no response, but they will continue to receive the strange distress broadcast every twelve hours.

Once they enter the planet's system, they may attempt to scan the surface using a **Standard (+10) Scrutiny +Detection Test**. Success will reveal a rather sizable number of (human) life signs in the vicinity of a very large metallic object (about the right size and shape to

be the Niveus Astrum). Further investigation from orbit is impaired by the planet's thick and murky atmosphere - the Explorers will have to go down to the planet with a Guncutter or other craft if they want a closer look.

Calimutus's aforementioned atmospheric conditions will make the approach difficult; the upper atmosphere is shrouded in dense cloud banks, limiting visibility and confusing auspex scans.

As the Explorers approach the planet, read or paraphrase the following:

Your craft descends through the milky fog until finally breaking thru the bottom. The planet below presents a dreary sight; it is storm-swept and dark, the system's sun shining but dimly thru the clouds above, little more than a bright star in the benighted sky.

In the distance, embedded upright in planets surface and extending spire-like up into the lower atmosphere stands an enormous structure, its entire surface studded with tiny points of light.

As you draw nearer, you can make these out to be windows, their glow illuminating innumerable smokestacks and chimneys that jut from the structure, belching waste into the night sky.

The profile of the structure seems somehow familiar... Then you realize it is that of the hull of a grand ship of the line, upended and set like a spike into the earth.

This is the wreck of the Niveus Astrum.

THE LITANY OF DISTRESS

Mayday, Mayday! Mayday, S-O-S Mayday!

*Hear our prayer, please come down,
we are lost and can't be found.*

*Distress call, distress call,
Throne have mercy on us all.*

*This is the I.N.S. Niveus Astrum,
help us, help us, anyone.*

Mayday, Mayday! Mayday, Es-Oh-ess Mayday!

PART THREE: THE CITY-SHIP

As the Explorers' craft approaches the wreck of the Niveus Astrum, their Vox-caster will spit out a burst of static, followed by the following transmission:

"This is Dr. Suffidus Arcpenny addressing the approaching, unknown flyer. On behalf of the people of Calamitus and the city of Niveus Astrum, I bid you welcome. Can you hear me? Is anyone there?"

Arcpenny will continue to repeat his transmission over different communications channels until the Explorers respond, at which point he will

enthusiastically welcome them (again), and offer to guide them towards a suitable spot to land their ship. Provided the PCs accept his offer, Arcpenny will direct them towards the upper levels of the city, in what was once the starship's tail. He will then explain that he must leave his 'televox station' in order to meet them at the landing pad and guide them into the landing.

The landing pad is ancient, ill-maintained, surrounded by instrument spires and chimneys and subject to a gusting crosswind. As the Explorers make their approach, read or paraphrase the following:

"Watch for my lantern!"

That is the last Arcpenny said before the Vox-caster fell silent. And now, flying thru the wind driven rain, a flash of lightning illuminates what must be Arcpenny and his lantern; on a platform surrounded by chimneys, lightning-rods and defunct instrument clusters stands a spindly figure waving a wildly strobing light.

Then a gust of wind catches your craft and the mass of metallic spires and spindles seems rush up towards your craft at an alarming rate.

A **Challenging (+0) Pilot Test** is required to safely land without damaging the Explorer's ship.

If their ship is damaged, it will need to be repaired before being taken aloft again. To affect these repairs will take 10 hours+a number of hours equal to the degrees of failure from the Piloting Test. A **Challenging (+0) Tech-Use Test** will reduce this time by a number of hours equal to the degrees of success on that test.

Regardless of how gracefully they make

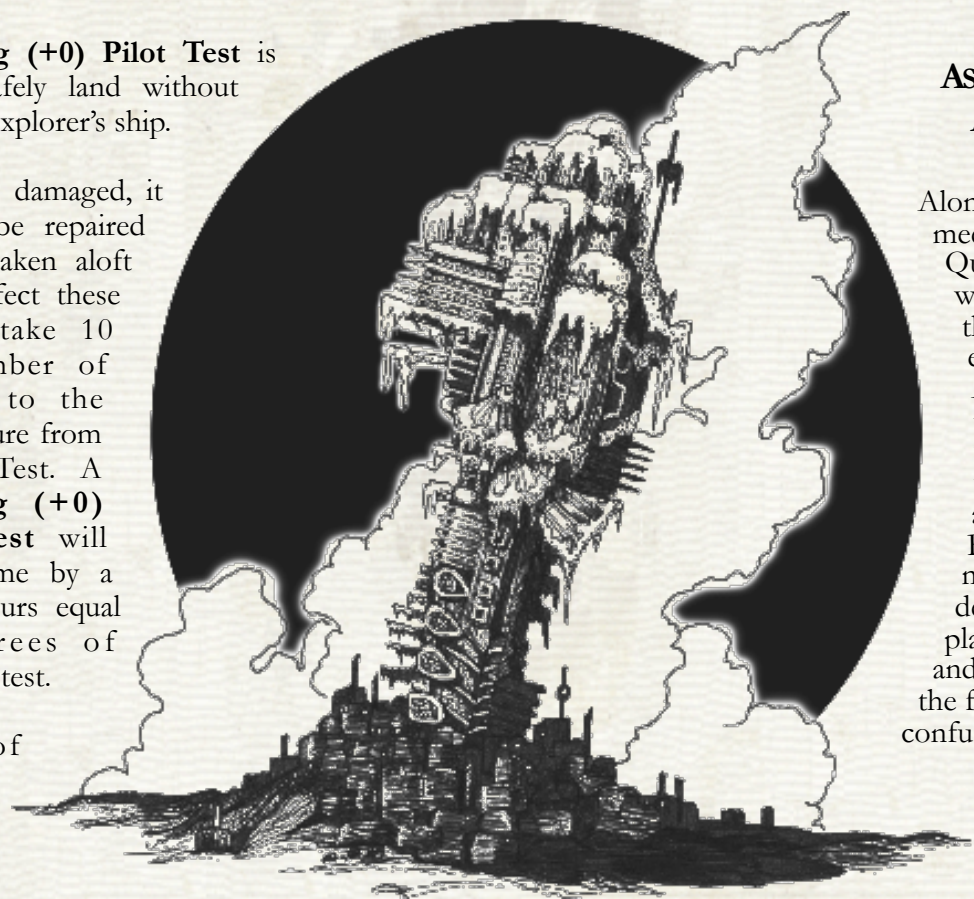
their landing, Arcpenny will greet them enthusiastically when they exit their craft. It is raining, gusty and generally miserable, and although Arcpenny has many questions for the Explorers, he will suggest that they continue their conversation within the city-ship.

Arcpenny, chattering excitedly, will proceed to lead the Explorers across a series of narrow bridges, catwalks and ladders that criss-cross the ancient vessel's hull until they reach what was once an airlock leading into the ship. Here they are met by a contingent Chatelaines guard, consisting of four men armed with lasguns and led by Sergeant Talliford Bount. Bount is polite and courteous, and once introductions have been made, Bount will explain that he has been asked to provide an escort for Arcpenny and the Explorers to an audience with the 'Ruler of Niveus Astrum', Chatelaine Montess Quess, who is 'most keen to make the acquaintance of these visitors.'

If questioned about the armed escort, Bount will explain that he and his men have been sent to ensure the PCs safety, not their compliance, as "the rabble have been most restless of late."

ANTI-ASCENDANTIST AMBUSH

Along the way to meet Chatelaine Quess, the group will run afoul of the aforementioned rabble, the Anti-Ascendantists. Opposed to the rule of the Ascendancy and recognizing Bount and his men, they will detonate a quickly placed explosive and then attack in the following confusion.



Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

Bount leads you ever deeper into the depths of the city inside the great ship, your route weaving its way up and down and crossing from platform to platform.

After ascending a great span of spiral stairs, Bount calls the group to halt for a brief rest.

BOOOM!

The sudden explosion rocks the very platform upon which you stand. Thru the smoke and falling debris, you see a small band of armed men emerge from hiding.

"Down with the Ascendancy!" cries their leader as they raise their rifles to fire upon the group.

At this point the PCs may either take cover and observe the conflict, as does Arcpenny, or join the fray and assist Bount and his men.

If the players choose to watch, Bount and his company will exchange a few shots, perhaps loosing a man or two in the process and exacting a similar toll on their opponents.



ANTI-ASCENDENTIST MILITANTS

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
30	35	3 5	3 5	3 0	3 0	3 5	3 0	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 12

Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect)

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive)

Armour: Light Flack Coat (Arms 2, Body 2, Legs 2)

Weapons: Lasgun, Knife

NPC: DR. ARCPENNY

An intellectual and gregarious man of middle years, Arcpenny is knowledgeable about all manner of things and the PCs best source of information about Niveus Astrum.

Physically, Arcpenny is a spindly fellow taken to wearing a long brown coat.

Since his assistance is rather crucial to the adventure, he benefits from a kind of plot immunity, and cannot die until the last act.

If the PCs join the battle, they should face a number of opponents equal to their own number. To keep things moving, the GM may wish to dispense with rolling for all Bount's guardsmen and their opponents each and merely narrate the results of their actions, which should be generally inconsequential compared to those of the PCs and their opponents.

Should the GM wish to roll for Bount & his men, Bount's stats can be found later in this adventure. Bount's men can use the same profile as the Anti-Ascendentists.

Although this combat should not prove particularly difficult for the PCs, the GM is encouraged to make the battle more interesting by incorporating the environment. As the conflict takes place on a suspended platform:

- Combatants may fall from or be knocked off the platform. Whether this is immediately fatal or not is left to the GM.
- Extremely destructive attacks may compromise the integrity of the platform or the cables which suspend it, causing all kinds of complications for the combatants.

Following the fight, Bount will thank the PCs for their help if they intervened on his behalf, and escort them the rest of the way to the Chatelaine's Court.

THE COURT OF THE CHATELAINE

When the Explorers enter the chamber, it will be obvious that this was once the ship's bridge; the Chatelaine herself is seated on a throne which was once the Lord Captain's Command Cathedra, and the room's trappings are in fact the various bridge stations and displays, although few of them appear to be in any kind of working order.

The most notable of these ancient devices is an unusual console of filigreed brass and crystal, which

NPC: SGT. BOUNT

Sergeant Bount is a career military man and devoted Acendancy loyalist. He is polite and proper to the point of being a bit stiff, but he is a quite competent soldier and officer.

Physically, Bount is a uniform-clad man in his prime, with close cropped blonde hair.

NPC: CHATELAINE MONTESS QUASS

Chatelaine Quass is every inch an aristocrat, bred and born. As well as possessing a gracious and charming manner, she has a keen intellect which she wields to good advantage, and misses little, although she often affects an air of childishness or naivety to conceal her true thoughts and motives.

dwarfs the other artifacts in the room and whose original purpose can only be guessed at.

After introductions have been made, the Chatelaine will make small talk with the PCs and ask how they might be made welcome in her court. In the course of the conversation, she will politely question the Explorers about who they are and what brings them to Calamitus.

This is also the PCs first chance to learn more of the fate of the Niveus Astrum since its disappearance, although most of what the Chatelaine and Arcpenny know of this history is veiled in myth and legend.

If the PCs mention Captain Beowulf or his Treasure, or comment on the brass and crystal console, she will laugh:

"Oh, you must mean the Vault of Beowulf! 'Tis said to contain a great treasure, Angevin's Gift, though what that may be is known not, for it is said that it may n'er be open'd but to be given unto a great hero."

Following this, the explorers may wish to examine the Vault more closely, which the Chatelaine will readily allow. The main things to be learned from this investigation are:

- The Vault is built into the room itself and quite large, measuring nearly 10' to a side; as such it cannot be moved.
- The Vault is roughly cubical in shape, and on three of the faces there is a fist sized receptacle at about shoulder height. Any character making a close study of these receptacles should be allowed to make a Challenging (+0) Scrutiny Test to notice that one of the ornaments on the Chatelaine's belt would fit the receptacle.
- An Explorator, or any character who passes a **Challenging (+0) Tech-Use or Forbidden Lore: Archaeotech Test** may identify The Vault as a *Crystalline Data-Archive*, a device of great antiquity used for storing records and information such as STCs.
- Any attempt to open the Vault by force would undoubtedly destroy whatever it contains.



When the players make the connection between the receptacles and the Chatelaine's ornament, she or one of her court will notice their interest in the ornament and question them about it.

If the PCs inquire about the ornament, the Quiss will explain that it is a Clavus, a symbol of her authority, and quite ancient, being passed down thru the generations, but she is not aware of it having any practical purpose.

If questioned about the existence of any other, similar objects, Quiss will relate that two other personages also possess a Clavus as a symbol of their authority: Reverent Laudius of the Basillica, and the Director of the Vexillum, Elihu Vaunt.

At this point it should be clear to what must be done: Assemble all three keys to open the Vault and claim the treasure.

Quess will explain that due to ancient law she cannot order that the other two Clavus be brought to her, and that because of the current political situation, the other Clavus Keepers would be unlikely to obey any such order anyway.

She will suggest that the Explorers, being outsiders and unassociated with any of the local factions, might be successful at convincing Reverent Laudius and Director Vaunt to bring the Clavus to the Court for the purposes of unlocking the Vault.

She will explain that again due to the delicate political situation, she cannot offer them any overt show of support or allegiance, but will send Arcpenny with them as a guide.

PART FOUR: ACQUIRING THE KEYS

Taking their leave of Chatelaine Quess, the Explorers set out to meet Reverent Laudius and Director Vaunt with the intention of claiming the other two keys.

Arcpenny will explain that they must pass by the Basilica on the way to the Vexillum and suggest they seek an audience with Laudius first. The order in which the two men are approached makes no difference to the adventure, but presentation of the encounters in the following section is based on the assumption that they follow Arcpenny's advice, so if the players do otherwise the GM will have to reorder the relevant sections accordingly.

ONE SMALL STEP

The Basilica lies some distance below the Chatelanie's Court, and will require several hours of general descent to get there. The actual route is not entirely downward, for at times the group must climb down and then back up again to actually progress deeper into the ship.

Box Text: Having spent the last few hours leading you down thru a maze of hanging platforms, Arcpenny comes to a halt ahead of you at what

GM GUIDANCE: THE SHIP'S INTERIOR

Originally a starship, the city retains many qualities the voidfarers will find familiar; dimly illuminated, cramped and often odorous, it is not, in many ways so different from the lower decks of many a vessel.

As the Niveus Astrum rests upright on its end rather than on its intended orientation however, the city possesses a peculiar vertical style, being built upon platforms suspended in the shafts formed by the original decks of the ship and connected by a network of causeways, ladders and the occasional staircase or lift. As such there are very few distinct 'levels', and most travel thru Niveus Astrum involves ascending and descending from platform to platform.

In addition, as much of the original technology and equipment of the ship has failed or has been repurposed, the inhabitants possess a level of technology roughly equivalent to, but not quite analogous to that found on many Imperial worlds. The exact details are left to the discretion of the GM, but certain rare devices may be commonplace here, whilst otherwise ubiquitous equipment may be lost or unknown.

appears to be a sheer drop off. He frowns, rubbing his chin before speaking.

"Well. There's supposed to be a stairwell here, but as you can see, there's not. Look down there. That wreckage? What's left of the stair, I suppose. Bloody troubles; either the Chancelics have destroyed it to confound the Basilicans, or the Basilicans have done it to keep the Chancelics out. It'll no doubt be repaired sooner or later, but for now, we're up here, we need to be down there, and I'm not inclined to wait for the menders. Any ideas?"

At this point the GM should allow the players to improvise a plan to reach the lower platform. The lower platform is about 15 meters (30') down, so jumping is likely to be unpleasant. (See Falling Damage, Rogue Trader Core Rulebook p 261.) If the Explorers possess certain equipment (Grav Chutes, etc), they may be able to bypass this obstacle fairly easily - lacking such they will probably come up with the idea to climb down using ropes, an improvised ladder, or the like.

For any attempt to reach the lower platform involving climbing or lowering someone, the GM should

NPC: REVERENT LAUDIUS

Reverent Laudius appears to be a rather soft-hearted old priest, but in truth he is a manipulative mastermind who rules the Basilican church.

Contrary what he tells the PCs, the Clavus was not *stolen* at all, but was given to Ratclip by Laudius himself with instructions to trade the relic for weapons to arm the Butchers and other Basilican Militant groups in conflict with the rival sect, the Chancelics.

require a Challenging (+0) Climbing or Strength Test. If the players devise a particularly ingenious or ill-conceived plan, the difficulty of the test may be modified up or down accordingly.

THE BASILICA

Having made their way past the destroyed stair, the Explorers may press on to the Basilica. Upon entering, they will recognize the place as being the ship's Temple-Shrine; what was once a great overhead observation dome adorned with colored glass tiles depicting various Imperial Saints is now a great window adorned with colored glass tiles depicting various Imperial Saints at the far end of the chamber.

The shrine is nearly deserted, and shortly after they enter, a minor clergyman will approach the Explorers and ask if they require assistance of some kind. Once they have identified themselves and their purpose, this servant will go to fetch the Reverent, returning with him after a short time.

Once the subject of the Clavus has been broached, Reverent Laudius will look regretful,

and then offer an apology to the Explorers.

"I am sorry, but I cannot help you. I am afraid the Clavus is no longer in my possession, having been recently... taken. It is now most likely in the hands of some criminal malcontent, and lost forever."

A **Routine (+20) Scrutiny Test** will reveal that Laudius knows more than he is saying, and if pressed on the issue, the Reverent will elaborate on the matter.

"I believe the Clavus is currently in the hands of a man called Ratclip, though for how much longer I cannot say. Ratclip is the leader of a violent band of ruffians known as The Butchers, who have staked out the platforms known as the Shank-Hill district as their territory. Finding Ratclip would be the first step towards recovering the Clavus."

If questioned about how he knows Ratclip possesses the Clavus, Laudius will explain that Ratclip, whatever else he may be, is a devout Basilican, often coming to pray at the Shrine, and offer the following explanation:

"We all have our moments of weakness. A relic like the Clavus is worth untold value, and I know Ratclip and his cohort are in dire need of funds. That is how Ratclip came to take the Clavus, I should think. Now, I have told you what I know, and if you wish to catch up with Ratclip before he divests himself of the Clavus, you had best be on your way."

THE SHANK HILL PLATFORMS

Whether or not the PCs believe the Reverent's story, they will have to find Ratclip if they want the second Clavus. The search begins in the Shank-Hill Platforms; Reverent



Laudius can provide them with a description of Ratclip, and with Arcpenny to guide them, the Explorers should have no trouble getting started.

Part slum and part war-zone, the Shank-Hill Platforms are marked by poverty, decay and the ongoing conflict between Niveus Astrum's militant factions. Ratclip and the Shank-Hill Butchers are quite well known among the local populace, who view them with an admixture of fear and admiration.

Shortly after the PCs reach the platforms, they will be approached by one Fastio Card, who is accompanied by several drabs. He will attempt to avail the Explorers of his services.

"Hoy there! What's your pleasure, Gov'nor? Maybe the company of Verbella 'ere? Or some abram-dust to take the Difficulties from your mind?"

If the Explorers ask Card about Ratclip, he will asses the group before replying.

"Th' Butchers, eh? You don't 'ave th' look of th' Constabulary about ya, an don't strike me as Chancelies... What's your truck with that lot? No, don't tell me, I'm better off not knownin'. Last I seen Ratclip, him an' the Butchers was drinkin' in The Sharp End."

The Sharp End

The PCs will be able to locate the Sharp End without much trouble. The open-air cantina is adorned with all manner of edged implements, from scalpels to cleavers; the rusty blades dangling from the blackened posts and beams which serve to define the boundaries of the establishment.

Ratclip is here, and has been attempting to negotiate a trade with Darrik Thanh, arms-dealer and gun-runner. When the Explorers arrive, the deal is on the verge of going bad...

Rusty blades clatter overhead as you enter The Sharp End, and you are greeted with surly and unwelcoming stares from the patrons, heavies and hooligans to a man. Seated at a central table is a man who must be Ratclip, engaged in heated discussion with another hard looking individual.

"Curse you then, and the Mortuus take you! I'll have the guns, whether they be bought in coin or blood!" With that exclamation, Ratclip makes to draw a weapon of some kind and the other man responds in kind...

Within moments, all of the patrons will proceed to produce weapons and do their best to exterminate one another, and the PCs will find themselves caught in the midst of a firefight between the Ratclip and the Butchers and Thanh and the heavies in his employ.

Once the fight is over, the PCs will likely wish to search Ratclip's body if he was slain. Upon doing so they will find the second Clavus.

THE END OF THE LINE

The Vexillum complex lies deep in in the lower levels of the city, and the Explorers will have several hours of further descent ahead of them to reach the place. Fortunately for them, the latter part of the journey can be accomplished via a crude if ingenious lift consisting of great metal cage which is lowered down the darkened shaft on a massive chain. During the course of the ride, Arcpenny will explain that the lift is the work of the Vexillum, and in fact most all of the goods available in Niveus Astrum are constructed in their factorium complexes, with a considerable portion of the lower classes engaged in such activity.

After plunging down into the dark for several minutes, you come to a halt at what seems to be the the bottom of the shaft.

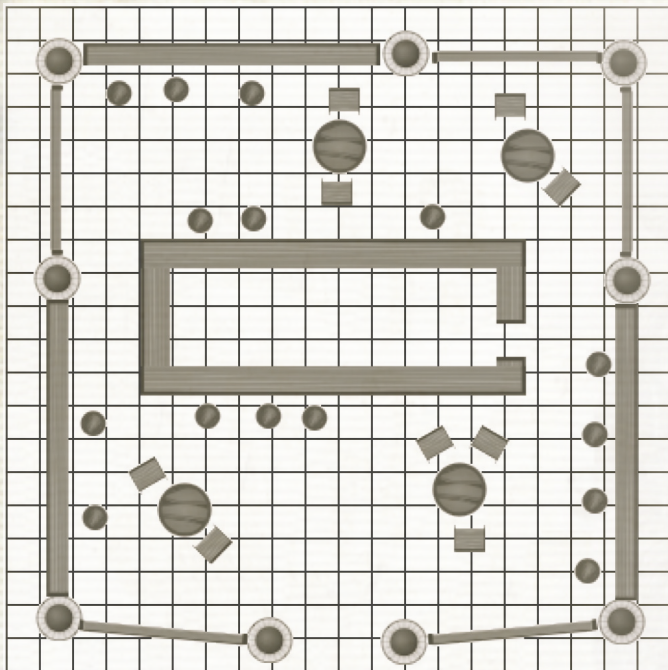
Leaving the cage to sway gently on the great creaking chain, Arcpenny leads you through a narrow tunnel and up a short flight of stairs.

Coming to the top of the stairs, you find yourselves in a vast and cavernous chamber which was once most likely one of the vast foreword holds of the Niveus Astrum, now filled with the manufacturing and assembly lines of the Vexillum.

At the center of the chamber, illuminated by pyres and arc-lights and pyres stands a great central tower, which rises, pillar like, up into the darkness above as if it supports the very weight of the city above it.

Surrounding the base of the tower, a large mob of people can be seen, apparently laying siege to the structure.

"Oh blast," says Arcpenny, "The Disorganized Labor Party's thrown up another of their picket lines."



THE SHARP END CANTINA

GM GUIDANCE: THE CANTINA SHOOTOUT

This combat should be nasty, brutal and short, most likely ending when all of the Butchers and the mercenaries have met their ends.

On the first Round of the combat, treat everyone save Ratclip, Thanh, and any PCs possessing relevant Talents (Rapid Reaction, etc...) as Surprised. During that Round, Ratclip and Thanh's actions will be to shoot one another.

During the second Round, the Butchers and Thanh's mercenaries' actions will be to draw their weapons. PCs with Quick Draw or another relevant Talent may be able to draw and fire this round; otherwise they will probably spend their actions likewise.

In the third and subsequent rounds, the Butchers and the mercenaries will each fire at the nearest available PC or NPCs target.

As to the number of combatants, a number of Butchers and Bodyguards each equal to the number of PCs should provide sufficient challenge without being overwhelming.



RATCLIP

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
30	35	3 5	3 5	3 0	3 0	3 5	3 0	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 12

Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect)

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive)

Armour: Light Flack Coat (Arms 2, Body 2, Legs 2)

Weapons: Lasgun, Knife



THANH

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
30	35	3 5	3 5	3 0	3 0	3 5	3 0	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 12

Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect)

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive)

Armour: Light Flack Coat (Arms 2, Body 2, Legs 2)

Weapons: Lasgun, Knife



SHANK-HILL BUTCHERS

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
30	35	3 5	3 5	3 0	3 0	3 5	3 0	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 12

Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect)

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive)

Armour: Light Flack Coat (Arms 2, Body 2, Legs 2)

Weapons: Lasgun, Knife



MERCENARIES

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
30	35	3 5	3 5	3 0	3 0	3 5	3 0	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 12

Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect)

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive)

Armour: Light Flack Coat (Arms 2, Body 2, Legs 2)

Weapons: Lasgun, Knife

NPC: DIRECTOR ELIHU VAUNT

Director Vaunt is one of the most powerful individuals in Niveus Astrum, and accustomed to giving orders and getting his way. He is a sharp negotiator and always on the lookout for how to turn a situation to his advantage.

In dealing with the PCs, he will be most interested in how they may help him further increase his already considerable influence.

The gist of the situation is simple; In order to enter the tower and gain an audience with Director Vaunt, the Explorers will have to get past the protesters.

Once again, the GM should allow the players some time to devise some plan to attain this end and then allow them to put it into action.

It should be obvious to the Explorers that this is not a problem that can be solved thru the direct application of violence, as the protesters are armed and outnumber the PCs by a considerable ratio.

Sneaking thru the mob is the most viable option, considering the disorderly nature of the siege. The GM is encouraged to call for Stealth or Disguise checks as appropriate to the Explorers actions; in addition, once they have made it thru the mob, they will have to convince someone in the tower to let them in.

Other solutions to the problem are possible, such as staging a distraction or disaster to disperse the protesters, in which case the GM will have to weigh the chances of such a scheme succeeding and determine the likely consequences of such actions.

THE VEXILLUM

After the Explorers have gained entry to the tower, they will be taken by a contingent of well armed guards to meet with Director Vaunt. Upon entering his office, they will see the third Clavus prominently displayed upon his desk, weighting down a stack of paper documents.

Vaunt is a busy, powerful man, and once introductions have been made, he will bluntly ask them what they want from him.

Once informed, Vaunt will ask them what they might have of equivalent value to offer him in exchange,

and it will fall to the Explorers to negotiate a suitable trade.

It is suggested that this be handled using the rules for Social Interaction Challenges from Into The Storm (pgs 204-206), if they are available.

In addition, should the players propose violence as an answer, the GM should point out that security within the Vexillum is quite tight, and although the Explorers could probably overpower Vaunt fairly easily, they would be unlikely to escape the complex alive.

PART FIVE: OPENING THE VAULT

Once the Explorers have acquired both of the Clavus keys, they may return to the Chatelaine's Court to open the Vault. The climb back up thru the ship is long and arduous, and as the characters are not doing much more than retracing their steps, there is really no need to play this out in any great detail.

Reaching the Court, they will be treated as triumphant heroes. As the Explorers are likely tired and weary after their travails, the Chatelaine will offer them the use of a luxurious suite of chambers and suggest that the attempt to unlock the Vault be made in the morning after they have rested and preparations have been made to conduct the opening of Beowulf's Vault with a degree of pomp and circumstance appropriate to the event.

The following day, when the Explorers arrive at the Court, a great number of the people gathered in attendance, including many of the personages they have met since first coming to Niveus Astrum. Along with the Chatelaine and her courtiers, these include:

- **Sgt. Bount** and a squad of Ascendacy guardsmen.
- **Dr. Arcpenny**
- **Reverent Laudius** along with a number of other Basillican clergy.
- **Vexillum Director Vaunt**, accompanied by an entourage of servants, secretaries and bodyguards.

After complimenting the Explorers for their bravery and fortitude, and congratulating them on behalf of the people of Niveus Astrum, the Chatelaine will present them with the final Clavus and usher them towards the great brass and crystal cube, indicating

that they should now attempt to unlock the Vault of Beowulf.

Unlocking the vault is not especially difficult after all the Explorers have been through: Each Clavus fits into to a corresponding receptacle on faces of the cube. Once all of these keys have been inserted, the device will begin to emit faint hum and glow faintly, and crystalline components will start to glow faintly. Then a panel on the remaining face will slide back, revealing a control panel, and a hololithic projector in the top of the cube will display the image of some long dead functionary, magnified to several times larger than life-sized, which then proceeds to deliver the following (extremely belated) speech:

“On behalf of the High Lords of Terra, I bid greetings unto you, Lord Militant Golgenna Angevin, and hope this missive finds you well and ever victorious in your conquest and liberation of the Calyx Expanse. Please accept this bestowal as a token of esteem for your heroism and sacrifice in this endeavor on behalf of the Imperium of Man. Glory be to the Emperor!”

The recording will then begin over again, and the functionary will continue repeating his message until someone touches the control panel.

Before anyone has a chance to do this, Director Vaunt will make some subtle signal to his contingent, who draw concealed weapons, which they proceed to direct at the Chatelaine and the PCs while Vaunt makes to deliver a little speech of his own.

Vaunt’s speech is in turn interrupted however, as the Basilican clerics produce firearms of their own from beneath their robes and point them the Vaunt and his entourage.

Finally, Bount and his men will take advantage of this distraction caused by this to take up their own arms, training them on the Basilican militants.

With the PCs caught in the middle of a three way stand-off, the GM should enjoy a few moments to allow the tension to mount before calling for Initiative and all hell breaks loose.

LAST MAN STANDING

Each of the factions involved in the fight is intent on slaughtering the other two and taking Angevin’s Gift, whatever it may be, to cement their own power.

Although they are not specifically opposed to the PCs, they have no compulsions against killing them

either if they stand in the way of that goal, and any of the factions by itself should be about as much as the Explorers can handle.

As it stands, the conflict is likely to become a bloodbath resulting in the death of the Explorers and a great number of the other combatants before one of the factions overcomes the others.

However, just because the three factions are opposed to one another, does not mean the Explorers must be; by allying themselves with one group against the other two, they should be able to tip the balance of power in their favor and escape with their lives intact, and perhaps even lay claim to the treasure after all. The real decision is who they wish to throw in with...

GM GUIDANCE: MELEE A TROIS

- The Courtroom presents numerous opportunities for cover and maneuvering amidst the defunct bridge stations.
- Shooting the Vault itself a bad idea.
- If it will add a note of pathos and dramatic tragedy to the adventure’s climax, the GM should feel free to slaughter the erstwhile Dr. Arcpenny in this, the adventure’s climax.

NPCs

Note that the stats given are guidelines only. The individual GM is encouraged to modify or expand upon this information to better suit their players.

CHATELAINE QUISS

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
25	25	2 5	3 0	3 0	4 0	4 5	3 0	4 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 12

Skills: Awareness (Int), Charm (Fel), Command (Fel), Deceive (Fel), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect), others as appropriate.

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive), others as appropriate.

Armour: Mesh Reinforced Finery (Arms 2, Body 3, Legs 2)

Weapons: Compact Laspistol, Knife (Mono, Best Quality)



REVERENT LAUDIUS								
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
35	35	4 0	4 0	4 0	4 0	3 5	3 0	4 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18 **Wounds:** 15
Skills: Awareness (Int), Charm (Fel), Command (Fel), Deceive (Fel), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect), others as appropriate.
Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive), others as appropriate.
Armour: Mesh Vestments (Arms 4, Body 4, Legs 4)
Weapons: Hellgun, Shockmaul



BASILICAN MILITANTS								
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
35	35	3 0	4 0	3 0	2 7	3 5	3 0	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18 **Wounds:** 12
Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect)
Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive)
Armour: Mesh Vestments (Arms 2, Body 4, Legs 3)
Weapons: Lasgun, Hammer



SERGEANT BOUNT								
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
38	38	3 8	3 8	3 5	3 5	3 5	3 3	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18 **Wounds:** 15
Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect), others as appropriate.
Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Pistol Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive), others as appropriate.
Armour: Flack Armor (All 4)
Weapons: Lasgun, Laspistol, Sword



ASCENDANCY GUARDS								
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
30	35	3 5	3 5	3 0	3 0	3 5	3 0	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18 **Wounds:** 12
Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect)
Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive)
Armour: Flack Coat (Arms 3, Body 3, Legs 3)
Weapons: Lasgun, Knife



DIRECTOR VAUNT								
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
25	35	3 0	3 0	4 0	4 0	4 5	3 0	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18 **Wounds:** 12
Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect), others as appropriate.
Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive), others as appropriate.
Armour: Light Flack Coat (Arms 2, Body 2, Legs 2)
Weapons: Laspistol, Knife



VEXILLUM HEAVIES								
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
30	35	3 5	3 5	3 0	3 0	3 5	3 0	3 0

Movement: 3/6/9/18 **Wounds:** 14
Skills: Awareness (Int), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic Dialect)
Talents: Pistol Weapon Training (Las), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive)
Armour: Carapace Breasplate, Flack (Arms 2, Body 5, Legs 2)
Weapons: Laspistol, Truncheon

CONCLUSION AND REWARDS

In the aftermath of the battle, the balance of power in Niveus Astrum will likely have shifted - it is likely that some of the faction heads were killed, and if so, their factions will suffer from a loss of leadership and a host of other problems will arise from the resulting power vacuum.

Regardless of whether they end the battle in a strong enough position to force their claim or not, the players will want to know what is contained in Beowulf's Vault. And as the only ones present who may understand how to operate the device, they should get their wish.

Unfortunately for them, the legend of Avengin's Gift is perhaps greater than the gift itself; the data in the archive is nothing more than a large collection of literature, poetry, and treatises on politics and religion.

Astute players may recognize the true value of the archive however; to the people of Niveus Astrum, the archive is sacred relic and anything it contains is likely to be adopted likewise. Indeed, some of the works may contain the solutions to the Difficulties themselves, and depending on their morals and ambitions, the Explorers might wish to share this information with the populace for their betterment, or they might keep control of the archive, doling out its contents selectively or even distributing prevarications to support and promote their own interests.

EXPERIENCE REWARDS

- **Completing the Adventure:** 1000 XP
- **Clever plans and ideas for how to escape the cells, descending the ruined staircase and getting past the picket line are worth 25 XP each. If these plans *worked* and went off without mishap) they are worth 50 XP**
- **Working out how to open the Vault without GM assistance:** 100 XP
- **Driving a hard bargain with Vaunt:** 50 XP
- **Realizing the necessity of choosing a side in the final battle without GM prompting:** 100 XP

PROFIT FACTOR REWARDS

- **The contents of the Vault may be sold to a dealer of antiquarian texts, provided such may be found.** (+1 Profit Factor.)

Although this may seem to some like a meager margin of profit to be gained for their trouble, savvy players will observe that the Crystal Cayes in general, and Calamitus and Niveus Astrum in particular offer a wealth of opportunities for profit in the form of Endeavors and their component Achievements. These include but are not limited to:

- **Bringing Calamitus and its population back into the Imperial fold.**
- **Establishing a Cold Trade in the artifacts left by the Mortuus.**
- **Exploring and mapping the Cayes.**
- **Clearing out the pirates and smugglers who operate from the Cayes.**
- **Setting themselves up as arms-dealers on Calamitus and playing the factional conflicts to their advantage.**
- **Establishing a market for abram-dust in the sector, with themselves as the exclusive suppliers.**
- **Exploiting the resources of Calamitus and the Vexillum for trade goods.**

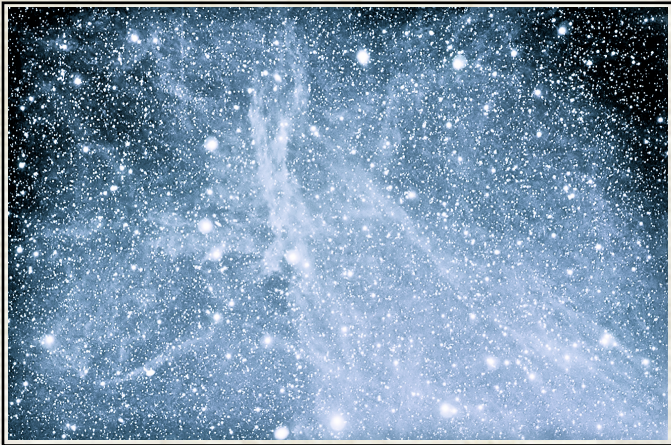
LOOSE ENDS

The Explorers may still have many as yet unanswered questions, regarding Calamitus, the Niveus Astrum and the strange society they have found here. Many of the answers to those questions may be gleaned from the Gazetteer which follows. The GM is invited to fill in any remaining blanks with details of their own devising.

Finally, some enterprising Explore may get the idea to restore power to one of the consoles found in the Chatelaines Court to access the ship's logs. Should they do so, they will find the captain's final entry:

"This is the Free Trader Beowulf..."

THE CRYSTAL CAYES



"Tis like a great diadem of jewels arrayed upon the brow of the heaven, and if it be the ornament of some fair and gracious lady, those n milky strands of nebula must surely be the hair of her powdered wig."

- Captain Alleard Losavio, well known Pirate and much less well known Poet.

Much of the Kronus expanse may be said to be 'known but undiscovered', that is, within the Expanse a many areas may be named and more or less placed upon a chart of the region, but not much more may be said of those areas. One such place is the area of space known colloquially to voidfarers as the Crystal Cayes. Lying just off one of the most trafficked warp routes to the Foundling Worlds, this dense nebula of gasses and lesser star systems is known to many but remains largely unexplored and uncharted, likely in large part due to the fact that even the most stable warp routes in that part of space have a reputation of being unreliable and difficult to navigate under the best of circumstances.

A HAVEN FOR PIRATES AND SMUGGLERS

With its proximity to a primary warp route, the large number of minor systems that are clustered within the nebula, and an ill omened if well deserved reputation due to the fickle twisting of the warp in the region, it should come as no surprise that the Crystal Cayes harbors more than its fair share of

pirates, smugglers and other spacer scum. A number of notorious vessels are suspected of operating from within the Crystal Cayes, including the infamous black frigate known as *The Legacy of Cavorite*.

THE MORTUUS

The Mortuus is the name given by the people of Niveus Astrum to the previous, and perhaps original, inhabitants of Calamitus. Undoubtedly a Xeno race of great antiquity, the fate of the Mortuus is unknown; although evidence of their civilization in the form of various artifacts of a peculiar and consistent design can be found on numerous planets throughout the Crysyal Cayes, the Mortuus themselves seem to have moved on or vanished from existence entirely. A few conspiratorially minded scholars have theorized that the Mortuus may be responsible for the intractable nature of the warp and the concentration of anomalies and strange phenomenon in the Foundling Worlds, but this is widely regarded as idle speculation at best.

THE MAYDAY CHORUS

It is known that at times an astropathic distress call of antiquated and archaic form, can be heard throughout the Crystal Cayes, although the source of this missive is unclear. This phenomenon is known to voidfarers as the Mayday Chorus.

During their long years of exile from the light of the Imperium, the people of Niveus Astrum had of course no way to replaces the losses to their original Astropathic Choir and so should have been left without any way to transmit an astropathic message. However, a distress call was still being transmitted from Calamitus over two thousand years later. Some say this is the result of some temporal echo in the warp, while others claim that the message is is trapped in some alien communications array left by the Mortuus or other Xenos,. A few hold that the people of Calamitus maintained the signal themselves, though how this could have been accomplished is unknown. Those few say it done through the use of unsanctioned psykers subjected to arcane training

rites and possibly employing some kind of amplification device of Xenos origin; however, these are most often one and the same as those who claim the terrible warp storms in the Founding Stars are the handiwork of the Mortuus, and such statements are met with similar derision by most.

CALAMITUS

Numerous planets may be found orbiting the many stars that occupy the Crystal Cayes, of which Calamitus is one. Although the gravity and lower atmosphere of Calamitus are well within acceptable ranges for human habitation, the planet is a dark and dismal place of perpetual night and rain, the monotony of which is only broken by the frequent lightning strikes which break from the overcast sky to blast further craters into the pocked and pitted surface. It is believed that this dense atmospheric layer and the electrical activity within is what so confounds sensors of those that would scan the world below.

Although it is a fairly rich in minerals and other resources, Calamitus would be of little more than a footnote in a survey of the region save for one thing; Calamitus is where the great starliner Niveus Astrum came to rest when it was lost to the Imperium millennia past, and the descendants of the survivors of that disaster live there still, within the wreck of the ship itself. This society is in many ways not dissimilar to those found on proper Imperial worlds throughout the galaxy, although thru the centuries that they have been lost to the Imperium and without contact with the rest of mankind, their manners and custom have changed and diverged in many ways, both overt and subtle, many harmless if banal, others insidious and profane.

Finally, Calamitus is the source of *Abram-Dust*, a narcotic powder which causes the user to experience vivid waking dreams along with feelings of euphoria and well being. Although viewed by most as a poor substitute for *Obscura*, *Abram-Dust* is still uncommon in the Kronus Expanse and largely unknown beyond it, meaning that it is not yet outlawed or prohibited on most worlds.

NIVEUS ASTRUM

The population of Calamitus posses but one settlement, constructed within the wreck of the Niveus Astrum and bearing the same name. The city of Niveus Astrum is ostensibly governed by an hereditary ruler bearing the title of Chatelaine and a ruling class known as The Ascendancy, but in truth

the city is divided into numerous opposing and squabbling factions, and the politics of the situation are a convoluted mess ranging from cold mistrust to open conflict to firm alliance, sometimes within the course of a few days. This confusing and ever shifting state of affairs is referred to by the locals as simply 'The Difficulties'.

Among the more notable and influential faction of Niveus Astrum are:

- **The Ascendancy and the Anti-Ascendents:** The aristocratic faction known as the Ascendancy is comprised of the nobility and certain professional classes of high standing such as physicians, torturers, and barbers. They are fervently opposed by the Anti-Ascendents, who espouse a classless society of equals and unregulated oral hygiene.
- **The Basilican Church and The Chancelic Reformers:** Practicing only slightly divergent variants of the Imperial Creed, The Basilican and the Chancelics sects are rift by a great schism, both arguing the dogmatic correctness of their respective positions; that a place of worship should be referred to using the traditional term, Basilica, or with the more modern word, Chancel.
- **The Vexillum and The Disorganized Labor Party:** Responsible for the production of goods and the employment of the unskilled classes to good end, the Vexillum is opposed by The Disorganized Labor Party, who assert that they should receive some compensation for their labor and that the goods they produce should have some functional or aesthetic use. Despite the speciousness of this argument and a displaying both extreme ignorance due no doubt to their severe lack of education and training and their apparent utter lack of ability in providing these things for themselves, the DLP has managed to gain quite a following, mostly because they are so numerous.

Fantasy Flight Rogue Trader 2010 Adventure Design Contest
Submission

1. (Full Legal Name) James Raphael Burrows
2. (email address) jim@savagebeastmusic.com
3. (My name as it should appear in attribution) James R. Burrows
4. (Scenario Title) The Glass Key
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