
TRAVELLER

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS

SECRETS OF SECRETS

This document is a guide to the *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign, and is intended for the Referee's eyes only. If you're a player in the campaign, or might be one in the future, then don't read any further – you'll spoil your enjoyment of the twists and turns of the game.

The new *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign is based on the Classic Traveller Adventure #12, *Secret of the Ancients*. Like that adventure, this campaign delves into the dark past of the *Official Traveller Universe*, and the legacy of a race of incredibly advanced and powerful aliens. Over the course of this campaign, the characters will see sights no human has ever dreamed of, meddle with powers beyond understanding, clash with secret factions within the Imperium, and ultimately help shape the destiny of all Charted Space.

The campaign consists of ten linked adventures. Each adventure should take two to four sessions of play to complete, so playing through all of *Secrets of the Ancients* will take up to a year of gaming. There are gaps between several of the adventures where the Referee can insert other plots or side treks, prolonging the campaign even further.

At the start of *Secrets of the Ancients*, it's assumed that the player characters know each other and have access to a ship of some sort – your typical band of heavily armed space traders and opportunistic rogues. The one requirement is that one of the player characters needs to be related to or connected to a key NPC – Uncle Vlen Backett. This player character is referred to as **Vlen's Inheritor** or simply **The Inheritor**.

Uncle Vlen Backett – What The Player Knows
Some people are only at home when travelling, and Vlen is one of these restless souls. He might visit his

homeworld of Alell (Regina/0106) for a few weeks or even a month or two, delighting friends and family with tales of distant planets and exotic cultures, but then the wanderlust would take hold once more and he'd be off again. He was a charming old rogue – more staid relatives might disapprove of him and his questionable, unreliable ways, but he was every child's favourite uncle.

No-one was ever sure what Uncle Vlen did, or if he was just a drifter amid the stars. Sometimes, he worked on tramp traders or signed on as a deckhand on freighters, yet he also dabbled in archaeology and journalism and... well, he never liked to talk about it, but Vlen had quite a collection of firearms and could handle himself in a fight. He also had a lot of strange friends – mostly other space travellers, but he also received irregular communications from scientists, naval officers, corporate oligarchs, even high nobility. On at least one occasion, Vargr from outside the Imperium travelled hundreds of parsecs to consult with Vlen Backett.

Still, a man is entitled to a few secrets. Vlen's example may have inspired the player character to start travelling – maybe he even travelled with Uncle Vlen for a while.

Variations: If none of the characters comes from Alell or a similar planet, then there are other ways to establish a connection to Uncle Vlen:

- o One of the character's parents moved from Alell to the character's homeworld, and Uncle Vlen sometimes visited between trips offworld.
- o 'Uncle' is an honorific – he's an old friend of the character (or the character's family), but not actually related.
- o Uncle Vlen saved the character's life in the past; the character now owes a debt to the eccentric old man.

Uncle Vlen – The Truth

According to the scholars and historians, a race termed the ‘Ancients’ dominated known space for tens of thousands of years. These Ancients accomplished great works – they moved whole planets, built titanic machines and wonders, and even transplanted Humanity from its original home of Sol to a hundred other worlds. They cared for the primitive Vilani; they uplifted the Vargr to sapience. Then, approximately 300,000 years ago, the Ancients vanished. It is speculated that they fled known space, or committed mass suicide, or were wiped out in a cosmic war – either a civil war between different factions, or in a clash with an equally super-advanced and even more mysterious species. Whatever the cause, the scholars all agree on one thing – the Ancients are dead and gone.

The scholars are wrong.

A few Ancients survived the final war – or, to be precise, the final war never ended. In the closing stages of that terrible conflict, whole stellar systems became casualties. The Ancients fought with weapons that could trigger supernovae and reduce planets to dust, that could corrode reality or self-replicate or warp causality in horrific ways. The survivors are those who learned to hide from their foes. One by one, the last Ancients withdrew to hiding places like pocket universes, or heat-shielded stations in the heart of stars, or fortresses buried hundreds of kilometres underground.

The war is fought slowly and quietly now, invisible to the lesser races who think that this region of space is theirs. The Ancients employ spies and agents who scour known space for clues to the location of a rival’s hiding place. Imperial intelligence is dimly aware of these alien conspiracies, but the tempo of the war is incredibly slow by human terms – a millennium is nothing to the Ancients.

Uncle Vlen was one of these spies, working for an Ancient known as SEVEN. In this role, he travelled the galaxy, looking for clues to the location of another Ancient’s hiding place. He found a clue – and it got him killed.

Grandfather (Yaskoydray)

The semi-mythical ‘Grandfather’ is the one of these Ancient survivors. According to his account, he was a Droyne gifted with astounding intelligence and psionic potential, who lifted his species from primitive barbarism to the stars. He sired twenty children, and they each sired another twenty, and

each one of these four hundred Sons was almost the equal of Grandfather in intellect and power. For millennia, Grandfather developed new technologies and sought the meaning of existence, while his Sons pursued other projects.

Over time, Grandfather grew dissatisfied with his Sons, who proved to be less than reliable helpers in his work, and he resolved to wipe them out. The Sons resisted, triggering the apocalyptic war of the Ancients.

In the end, Grandfather withdrew from the war, creating a pocket universe to hide in. Most of his offspring were dead or had fled from this region of the galaxy; either way, his research could continue uninterrupted by petty concerns. The only potential threat was the return of one of errant Sons – and he resolved to take precautions against *that* eventuality.

The Surviving Ancients

Less than fifty of the Ancient Sons of Yaskoydray survived the war, and most of those travelled far beyond Charted Space. They have changed beyond recognition, as each followed a different path of scientific development. Some are still Droyne in body and mind; others have uploaded their personalities to computer systems, or integrated themselves with technology, or engineered new forms for themselves, or left behind the bonds of matter and now exist only as psionic entities. Each Son is a civilisation unto himself, with his own unique beliefs and technologies.

Some Ancients continue to research their own obsessions, hunting for a way to transcend reality or perfect some ultimate technology, hoping to make a breakthrough before they are found and destroyed by their siblings. Others focus their attention on constructing ever more perfect hiding places, believing that the best strategy is to wait out the war in isolation until the other Ancients have exhausted their resources. Still others have gone on the offensive, eschewing technological advancement in favour of firepower and hunters; if everyone else is wiped out, then the last Ancient survivor will rule the galaxy.

They continue to fight amongst themselves, using spies and agents to seek out their enemies, and manipulate events to suit their own incomprehensible schemes. A man suddenly butchers four total strangers... all important scientists researching new technology, and science is set back decades. A technician blanks whole sections of newly received

Encyclopaedia; the next day he cannot remember what he did, and the Imperial bureaucracy moves too slowly to notice that it now has no data on an interdicted system. A noble arbitrarily rejects an appeal by settlers for aid fighting an allergy plague, and within years, their world is again barren.

Some few agents of the Ancient Sons... sports with the ability to cloud men's minds roam the Imperium (and indeed, all of Charted Space) searching for clues of Yaskoydray's location. Yaskoydray himself depends on robots (and on artificial androids... indistinguishable from humans or Vargr or others) and on personalities roaming the nets searching out his sons' agents. Yaskoydray and his sons care little for other civilizations... they will not randomly hurt or help such societies, but they will elevate one if the result will help their efforts, and destroy it if it will hurt a rival. These agents must be discreet; if they make too much 'noise', they would attract the attention of a rival Ancient. The age of wonders is passed – now, the war of the Ancients is fought more with silenced pistols and knives in back alleyways than with disintegrators.

The Sons intervene only rarely – the vast course of galactic history is irrelevant to them. For the most part, they don't care about the Imperium or the Zhodani Consulate or any of the races of Charted Space, other than dispassionately nothing that Grandfather's experiments in uplifting lesser races have proved remarkably persistent.

But when one of their agents finds a clue that might lead to a rival's hiding place – why, then, that can stir even the most remote Son into action...

The Family Archives

Cheating death was one of the first tasks that Yaskoydray set himself. He and all of the surviving Sons have what are known as 'family archives' – methods for resurrecting the dead Ancient. Grandfather, for example, has cloning banks to produce new bodies for himself, and uses his psionic powers to jump his mind into a fresh body when his original form is destroyed. Other Ancients use different methods, but the result is the same – killing the Ancient is useless unless you also destroy his family archive.

This is why the original war of the Ancients was so destructive – the attacker had to be sure of destroying his foe's archive, so shattering whole planets was the most effective method. The Ancients scorched and salted much of Known Space in their conflict.

SEVEN

Grandfather indexed his Sons rather than name them; they still use the original Droyne numbers assigned to them thousands of years ago. Seven is one of the Ancients who survived the war, and he is still active near the Imperium. He has a special hatred for Grandfather, a hatred nursed and fed over three hundred thousand years of history. He has pursued the strategy of offence; his agents are everywhere, looking for signs of the other Ancients and especially for Grandfather. Seven believes that the galaxy must be united under a single will – his – in order to survive a hypothetical conflict with extragalactic invaders.

Imperial Intelligence

The Imperial scout service is responsible for gathering intelligence on threats to the Imperium, and they are dimly aware of certain... anomalies. They know there are conspiracies out there, mysterious organisations that might be crime syndicates or terrorist networks or weird cults or fifth columnists, but whose ultimate goals are still a mystery. These are too many unsolved crimes and strange events for it all to be co-incidence, but there is no discernable logic to the conspiracy's action. Of course, Imperial intelligence is unaware that there are *multiple* Ancient conspiracies out there.

Gand Holcless has made these conspiracies his life's work. He is obsessed with bringing the mysterious networks into the light, and he has the tacit backing of powerful factions within the Imperium. While most dismiss Holcless's wilder claims as pure fantasy, he is close to the truth. He has identified Vlen Backett as a member of this galactic conspiracy, and intends to capture Vlen and interrogate him. Holcless is aided by **Arisa**, his most promising field agent and a highly effective spy.

The University of Regina

There are an unusual number of Ancient sites in the Spinward Marches, especially in Regina subsector. The archaeology department at the University of Regina is recognised as one of the premier public authorities on the Ancients (the Imperial Navy and Imperial Intelligence pursue Ancient knowledge for their own ends, as functional artefacts such as Black Globes can tip the balance of power between the Imperium and its rivals). While the University must compete with private collectors and megacorporations, it has managed to secure several Ancient artefacts and sites, and continues to excavate the Ancient ruins on worlds like Beck's World or Yori.

Conflicts, Allies, Enemies, Rivals

To weave your player characters' into the campaign, use these recurring non-player characters as contacts or allies – or even rivals.

Vlen Backett: Ideally, he should be an Ally or Contact for the Inheritor player character; he can also be a Contact for any former Scout, Merchant, Agent, Entertainer or Drifter

Ven Yasha: A crime boss on Regina; he should be an Enemy or a Rival, but could also be a Contact for an ex-Criminal or ex-Drifter.

Professor Ujinka: She is a researcher and lecturer at the University of Regina; she can be a Contact for any Scientist or a character who comes from Regina or who studied archaeology.

Juni Volsang: Ujinka's research assistant; an expert in Ancient archaeology and something of a technical genius herself. She is a potential Contact or Ally for Scientists, Scouts or Drifters.

Gand Holcress: An agent of Imperial Intelligence, obsessed with conspiracies and threats to the Imperium. He's best used as a Rival for Scouts or Criminals.

1. Bodysnatchers

The Inheritor receives a message that Uncle Vlen has died on Regina; the Inheritor is obligated to travel to that world to collect the body for transport back to Alell, and to deal with Vlen's outstanding business. It soon becomes clear that Vlen died under mysterious circumstances – he may have been murdered, and the authorities are strangely unwilling to help. (The player characters don't know it yet, but Vlen was under observation by a secret branch of Imperial Intelligence.)

The characters discover that Vlen was in contact with a professor in the University of Regina. Professor Ujinka is an expert in archaeology, and has a theory that certain Ancient technology cause static in the G communications band, and that this could be used as a detection method for new sites. Apparently, Vlen was very interested in this research, and even offered to fund the professor's work on Beck's World, half-way across the subsector, where the professor's research assistant Juni is working.

While they visit the professor, the characters are attacked by a pair of assassins using a robot drone and have to chase the would-be murderers – only for one of the assassins to vanish into a police aircar. The other assassin is left for the characters to deal with. When captured, the other assassin claims to be working for a mysterious crime lord, Ven Yasha, who stole an artefact from Vlen.

The characters descend into the Regina underworld to find this Ven Yasha. They never encounter Ven Yasha directly, but they do manage to locate his secret headquarters. They manage to sneak into Ven Yasha's operation and recover Vlen's belongings – including a set of data tapes and a mysterious statuette.

(There's more going on here than the characters will initially realise. Ven Yasha was another of Vlen Backett's identities – he used the fictional crime lord as a front when operating on Regina. When Vlen realised he was being watched by Imperial Intelligence, he arranged for his own 'death' at the hands of his own men. He planned for the characters to ship his body back to Alell, and never thought they'd get involved in other matters.)

2. Homecoming

The character returns to Alell, right into the middle of an awkward feud. It appears that Uncle Vlen

THE SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS CAMPAIGN

The ten episodes of the campaign take the characters on a journey from Regina to Alell and on Boughene, all within Regina subsector. Vlen Backett's final request gives the characters the clues they need to find an Ancient base hidden deep in the atmosphere of Boughene's gas giant, Komesh. From there, they travel beyond the bounds of our universe, into the pocket dimension created by the fabled *Yaskaydray*, Grandfather himself. Within the pocket universe, they learn some of the history of the Ancients.

Long-time *Traveller* fans who are familiar with the original Adventure 12 module will recognise this outline – but the adventure doesn't end there.

Grandfather lied. There are other survivors.



wasn't popular with certain branches of the extended family, and there's a dispute over some legal matters. There is also an undercover Imperial Intelligence agent there, Arisa, posing as Vlen's young fiancé and digging for information.

The characters are sent to Vlen's hunting lodge in the middle of the wilderness to find a copy of Vlen's will that he kept there. After dealing with some surprisingly dangerous local fauna, the characters can explore the hunting lodge, where they find a secret room in the basement. There, the characters find proof that Vlen was Ven Yasha, along with references to the origin of the statuette, which comes from a crashed ship in the Boughene system. Vlen believes that by using Professor Ujinka's research, it would be possible to sweep Boughene for signs of Ancient bases.

An Imperial ship arrives in system to arrest the characters on charges of sedition and criminal conspiracy. They have to flee, taking Vlen's scoutship. They manage to escape Alell only by sheer chance

– the Imperial vessel is distracted by *something...* (Vlen's ancient master sent a ship to pick up Vlad's corpse and resurrect him.)

3. The Hunt

The characters are chased across the sector by the *Alahir*, an Imperial intelligence vessel captained by Gand Holcess. They have several possible destinations – they can head for Boughene and hope that they can find the ancient site there, or travel to Beck's World and get the professor's research assistant to help them. They also need to stay one step ahead of Holcess's vessel, which is considerably faster and more powerful than theirs.

At Beck's World, the characters discover that the researcher, Juni, is somewhere deep within the cave system; to contact her, they have to explore the Ancient ruins and navigate the automated defence systems and natural hazards. While exploring the ruins, they come across one Droyne carving of a strange demon descending from the skies.

With Juni's help, or with some excellent rolls from suitably skilled player characters, they can configure their ship's sensors to detect G-Band distortions and detect Ancient sites. This leads them to the gas giant in the Boughene system.

If they travel to Boughene without a working detector, they can still find the Ancient site, but it's considerably more hazardous and takes a lot longer. They need to sweep the entire system for G-Band distortions, and eliminate possible false positives.

Eventually, the characters discover something deep in the atmosphere of the gas giant...

4. Descent

The characters plunge into the atmosphere of the gas giant, braving gravity, intense pressure and high-speed winds, where they discover an Ancient structure (actually, a ship). Unable to return to orbit, the characters explore the Ancient ship. It appears to be abandoned, but has become infested by dangerous predators who live in the gas giant's atmosphere.

The characters eventually find the ship's control system; entering the bridge activates the ship, which rises out of the atmosphere. The control system is artificially intelligent, but needs instruction from its crew. Waiting for them in orbit is the *Alahir*; Captain Holcess demands they stand down.

Then a *thing* emerges from jump space, right on top of the *Alahir*. It's a ship, but not a ship that anyone has ever seen before – apart from some long-dead Droyne on Beck's World. It's an Ancient *warship*. The *Alahir* doesn't stand a chance – it's blasted to dust with a single shot from the warship's death rays.

The Ancient ship that the characters are on shields itself within a Black Globe and demands instruction – should it fight, flee or self-destruct? The characters are contacted by the other Ancient warship – and it's Vlen. At least, it's a copy of his personality. He begs the characters to destroy the control system of their ship and surrender to his master. They might be spared that way...

5. Otherworld

The Ancient ship creates a portal and slips through it into a strange new world. The characters disembark and explore their new surroundings. It appears as though this strange alien world is largely abandoned,

although the characters do encounter the legacies of ancient experiments – in one chamber, there's a colony of proto-Vargr living in caves; in another, a half-finished cloning machine; in a third, a tentacled thing and so on. Once, all the experiments were held in different compartments, but the custodians are gone and now all the different species and genetically engineered creatures are spilling from one environment to the next.

After some exploration, the characters find a transportation hub, but the door is sealed. They need to negotiate with the last custodian robot for access – it initially mistakes them for experiments, but soon realises that they're visitors from outside and lets them into the hub. There, the characters discover that they're inside a small pocket universe containing three entire star systems.

The robot transports them to the core world, for an audience with Grandfather himself. Grandfather is an ancient Droyne; he meets with the characters, but he doesn't have much time to chat – he's busy building a superweapon. The ship that wiped out the *Alahir* was one of his sons. It's another Ancient, who went down a very different development path to Grandfather. It's currently trying to break through the same portal the PCs came through...

6. Secret of the Ancients

To further enlighten the characters, Grandfather explains his side of the story by telepathic transfer. For this adventure, the players take on the roles of a coterie of Grandfather's advisors – lesser Droyne, superintelligent robots, uplifted Vargr and stranger things – and the adventure takes place over thousands of years of prehistory. The players have to respond to the growing tension between Grandfather and the other Droyne, the divergence of their technologies and the repercussions of Grandfather's plan to transcend existence.

The Ancient war begins, and the characters are given a series of tasks, such as protecting transplanted human cultures, defending against Ancient superweapons, and prosecuting some of Grandfather's attacks. As the war grinds on, the characters learn that it has become a total war, a war of annihilation, and that one by one the other Ancients are being wiped out.

In the end, Grandfather withdraws to his pocket universe, to wait out the devastation.

This whole adventure is played in a freeform manner; thousands of years pass between scenes, and the rules are largely ignored as the players are acting through minions.

Something more is going on in this adventure that the players are unaware of – Grandfather is using the telepathic contact to prepare one of the player characters as a carrier for a copy of his memories. The character is being transformed into a cyborg like Vlen Backett. Grandfather knows that there is every possibility that his current body will be destroyed by the Ancient attack, and has a backup plan.

7. The Death of Grandfather

The Ancient breaks into Grandfather's pocket universe. Grandfather unleashes his superweapon – which conspicuously fails to work. The other Ancient opens fire, annihilating Grandfather. The planet is overrun. Guided by one of Grandfather's robots, the player characters must flee through another teleportation portal, heading for the third system in the pocket universe.

The third system is home to a TL7 Droyne colony, used by Grandfather as pets and breeding stock. The characters are pursued through the portal by hunter machines. Their robot guardian is destroyed holding the hunters off.

The characters must escape the pocket universe. There's an escape system for the Droyne colony, but the robot who was supposed to help the primitive Droyne escape just got blown up. The characters need to find and reactivate the Ancient escape hatch, and then steal one of the Droyne's primitive spacecraft and head to the exit portal in orbit.

As the characters flee the pocket universe, it seals behind them. The Ancient is temporarily trapped.

The exit from the pocket universe returns the characters to Boughene. There, they are arrested by Arisa of Imperial Intelligence.

8. In The Emperor's Name

The characters are transported to a secret prison facility on the nearby world of Pixie, where they are interrogated. Arisa wants to understand what exactly happened on Boughene, and the fate of the *Arahir*. The player characters can either co-operate with her interrogations and ally themselves with Imperial Intelligence, or escape the prison on Pixie.

The Pixie prison uses the hulk of a *Kirunir*-class starship, known as the Gash. The other inmates are all political prisoners. Escaping the ship takes immense ingenuity and good fortune. Co-operating with Imperial Intelligence is more fruitful, although the players will have to roleplay extremely well to win Arisa's trust after the events on Alell.

Over the course of this adventure, one of the player characters realises that something strange is happening to him. He intuitively understands technology, he's been surgically altered and bizarre memories are awakening in his brain. Some of Grandfather's mindstate has been imprinted onto the character's brain. He learns that the Ancient trapped in Grandfather's pocket dimension will soon be destroyed by the collapse of the pocket universe – but that won't put an end to it. The other Ancient has a backup, just like Grandfather. This backup must be destroyed before the pocket universe collapses, otherwise the Ancient will be reactivated from his backup.

There's one more revelation – the 'superweapon' it used on the rival Ancient was not designed to destroy his foe. It was a mind scanner, and now Grandfather knows where his rival's sanctum is. It's in Gvurrdon sector. Grandfather was only able to pick up a few scattered images, so the characters will have to travel to Gvurrdon and piece the clues together there.

9. The Dark Gate

On their own, or with the Imperium's backing, the characters travel to Gvurrdon, braving the threat of the Vargr. They must bargain with the Vargr leaders for access to their space, and then scour the planet for signs of the Ancient base that must be there. En route, Grandfather leads them to a cache of Ancient personal weapons and armour on Pixie.

The characters are not the only agents of the Ancients on the planet. Other servants of the rival Ancient, including a copy of Vlen Backett, are searching for the characters. As the player characters search ancient records and uncover the truth behind the Vargr myths, they have to defend themselves from assassins wielding Ancient weaponry.

The characters eventually discover that the Ancient base is located in the deep ocean. They travel into the depths and pass through another portal into another Ancient pocket dimension.

10. *Grandfather Lies*

The characters discover that the other Ancient pocket universe is a nightmare realm of murderous machines. The Ancient who built them believed that only a galaxy united could defend itself and conquer other hostile races, that war and conflict was the inevitable fate of all life. He believed the Primordials must still be out there, somewhere, and that the Ancients and their servants could survive only by forming into an army. His pocket universe is a training ground for his dreams of conquest.

Using the memories of Grandfather, the characters can disarm some of the defence systems, but they will have to fight their own way past the outer sentries. They must also choose which of the Ancient paradigms they support – the other Ancient’s call to eternal warfare, or Grandfather’s detached, manipulative science.

AFTER SECRETS

The events of *Secrets of the Ancients* may change your *Traveller* universe forever, or the Ancients may vanish without a trace once more. There are many ways to follow on from the campaign, whether you treat it as a setting-shattering event or a once-off brush with the Ancients.

Working For Imperial Intelligence

By the end of *Grandfather Lies*, the characters have learned more about the Ancients than anyone else in the Imperium. If they are still willing to work with Arisa, then they can become Imperial agents, searching for other Ancient networks and defending the Imperium against their manipulations. Proof that the Ancients are not only still extant, but

actively meddling in the galactic affairs would send shockwaves all the way from Zhodane to the Iridium Throne.

Ancient Technology

There are several opportunities for the characters to pick up Ancient artefacts over the course of the campaign, and in Episode 9 they’re given Ancient weapons and armour to give them a chance of surviving the conflict with SEVEN. Grandfather can remove or deactivate any troublesome artefacts as he leaves; alternatively, items can run out of power or mysteriously cease to function at some future point. Ancient technology is millennia beyond that of the Imperium, so repairing an artefact that has ceased to function is nigh-impossible.

Possession of a functional Ancient device is a crime in the Imperium, as all such artefacts are the property of the Emperor by law. The characters may be given a special exemption if they are working for Imperial Intelligence, or they can sell their items on the black market or go on the run. Often, Ancient relics are more trouble than they are worth.

Grandfather

And what of the elusive Yaskoydray himself? After the events in *Grandfather Lies*, he psionically transmits his mindstate to another hidden refuge, where he has another family archive. Grandfather’s grand experiment will continue, now that another impediment has been eliminated.

Alternatively, the characters could become agents of Grandfather, just like Vlen Backett served SEVEN. They would seek out signs of other Ancients and work to eliminate them lest they interfere with Grandfather’s experiments.