

— POWERED BY —
LHNEK



CATHEDRAL OF THE DEADSTAR

Cathedral of the Deadstar

An introductory *Lancer* adventure

The player characters are members of Battlegroup Comet, a Union naval group stranded in a region of space known as Boundary Garden. While the battlegroup fights a desperate holdout action against the Aunic Ascendancy, Union's system-defense legion Lorenzo has tasked the PCs with recovering a NHP (non-human person) who has been captured by Aun special forces.

The NHP in question is Tassos, a DRAGONFLY-class data archivist abducted from Cornucopia City shortly before it was razed by the Aun. Lorenzo does not know why Tassos was abducted – but is concerned about the information the NHP might divulge. The NHP has finally been traced to the volcanic world Isolo, an uninhabited world notable for its high temperatures, choking atmosphere, and an ancient, ruined Aunic religious site known to early Union explorers as the Cathedral of the Deadstar.

Preparation

Cathedral of the Deadstar is a short *Lancer* mission, designed to be played on its own or as the introduction to a longer campaign. This mission will take most groups two sessions to complete (with each session consisting of a narrative beat and a combat).

Before players start, they should:

- Have at least the free version of the *Lancer* core book
- Create a LL0 character (Comp/Con is a fantastic free character creation tool)
- Familiarize themselves with the basics of play, including skill checks and the various actions they can take in combat
- **Stop reading here!**

Before you run this game, you should:

- Make sure you have the paid version of the *Lancer* core book. This contains the NPCs you'll need to run the session as well as rules for sitreps
- Read through the rules for running narrative and combat scenes
- Familiarize yourself with this adventure
- If you're playing online, set up a virtual tabletop of your choice – common options are Roll20, Foundry, or Owlbear Rodeo – with maps set up in advance for each of the two combat scenes

In Brief: The Boundary Garden Conflict

Boundary Garden is an area of space on the border between Union and the Aunic Ascendancy, now consumed by open warfare between the two powers. In response to Union constructing **Fansipan Station** above the world of Cornucopia and opening access to the region via the Blink network, Ascendancy forces attacked and destroyed the station – cutting off Boundary Garden and trapping the forces already in-system.

Union Naval Commander **Mayura Song**, commander of **Battlegroup Comet**, is mounting a desperate defense until reinforcements can arrive. The reinforcing fleet will take a full twelve years to arrive at nearlight, but Union forces have nowhere to retreat.

Helping her hold the Union forces together is **Lorenzo** – a fleet legion formed from the battlegroup's NHPs, amplifying their collective power in the form of a single gestalt intelligence. Lorenzo has been given system-wide command over Union's subaltern and drone forces, and regularly identifies targets of critical importance to the defense effort.

In Brief: The Aunic Ascendancy

The Aunic people are humans who left Earth before the Fall, in one of the Ten: generation ships fleeing a dying world. Aunic society is deeply religious, and central to it is their extant god: **Metat Aun**, the Harvest Star, a gigantic monolith that appeared hovering above their homeworld's capital city, and granted them strange technologies¹.

The Aun's first encounters with Union were overwhelmingly negative. Union's nearlight ships, much faster than any of the Ten, had arrived at the travelers' destination before them forcing the Aun to retake their promised land. Much later Union's First Committee launched an attack on the Aun known as PISTON-1. The kinetic strike would take centuries to arrive and served no purpose beyond annihilating the Aunic homeworld. PISTON-1 never arrived, but the Aun never forgave Union, and Boundary Garden remained a hotspot for conflict as the two powers each laid claim to the worlds therein.

The Aun are separate from Union both culturally and technologically. As such they have no access to blinkspace or its attendant technologies. Instead, they use a similar but distinct parallel space known as the **Firmament**, which can be manipulated through technology and techniques granted by Metat Aun – allowing for faster than light travel and communication, amongst other wondrous powers.

¹ For more details see *Field Guide: The Aunic Ascendancy* – at time of writing, available as a draft on the Pilot NET Discord server. It is not necessary to read the *Field Guide* to run this mission, but it may provide interesting context and background information.

Mission Overview

The Cathedral of the Deadstar² is a ruin no more. Once a destination for pilgrims seeking solitude and isolation, the site has been rebuilt and converted into a black site for Aunic special forces and a research team hoping to understand the secrets behind Union's use of NHPs in warfare – a technology that is as opaque to the Aun as the use of the Firmament and associated technologies is to Union.

Gaining access to the facility is no easy task – the PCs will have to first fight their way through the outer defenses, a task made perilous by a combination of lava flows and Aunic hardlight, along with security forces guarding the perimeter.

Once inside the facility, the PCs must locate Tassos who is being held in a central research laboratory, and then extract them along with the Aunic research data while fending off Ascendancy forces. These forces are exceedingly dangerous, and include the facility's commander – a legendary Ofanim³ pilot known as Aheron, Kavalerio de la Drako – alongside some of their best troops.

The mission consists of four scenes:

1. **[Narrative] A Moment of Reflection** – the PCs are briefed on their mission by Lorenzo as they arrive in orbit around Isolo, and have an opportunity to make last-minute changes to their mechs
2. **[Mech Combat] The Harrowing** – the PCs land and must fight Aunic forces as they attempt to enter the facility
3. **[Narrative] Seek And Ye Shall Find** – a narrative scene within the facility where the PCs attempt to locate Tassos while evading Aunic forces
4. **[Mech Combat] Nave of the Revelator** – the PCs must hold out against Aheron and their troops while securing Tassos for extraction

This mission is designed for LL0 characters, and by default uses Tier 1 NPCs. You can increase the LL to suit your group without causing problems; if you increase to LL5 or beyond, make sure you increase the tier of the NPCs to match.

² The site's name in Aunic more properly translates to "*Monastery of the Harvest Star*", a site of pilgrimage during the First Dawn period. Its designation in Union databases is based on an outdated understanding of Aunic language and culture, a mistake made by FirstComm-era explorers and forgotten until hostilities in the region broke out and the Aun reclaimed Isolo.

³ Ofanim are mechs only recently encountered by Union forces, and are said to be a tripartite fusion of a human pilot, their mech, and a paracausal entity known as a Soul: sometimes considered analogous to Union's NHPs. Ofanim are said to be specially blessed by Metat Aun, the god of the Aun.

Beat 1: A Moment of Reflection

The mission begins with the player characters in Legionspace, a strange virtual reality environment which they have entered for a mission briefing with Lorenzo. In this virtual space, Lorenzo takes a physical form the PCs can interact with, allowing him to more effectively give his briefing. Meanwhile, in realspace, their ship is on insertion into orbit around the volcanic world Isolo.

The Legionspace environment takes the form of a placid, sunny meadow surrounded by trees, with a small stream winding through its middle. The skies above are a strange contrast – black, foreboding, and filled by a huge projection of a volcanic world, as if the sky of this space was a window to it from above. In the midst of this scene, Lorenzo sits on a rock, intently staring at fish swimming in the stream.

Give each player a chance to introduce and describe their character. Once they have done so, Lorenzo looks up and greets the PCs before beginning the briefing. Throughout the scene Lorenzo seems distracted, as if he is not fully present. Only a small fraction of his vast intelligence is focused on this scene; the rest is preoccupied with conflict taking place across interplanetary space.

During the briefing, Lorenzo provides the following information:

- **Tassos** is a DRAGONFLY-class civilian NHP. They are not believed to have been privy to vital military secrets, but before their abduction they were an archivist and Lorenzo cannot afford to take a chance on what they may or may not know.
- Specialized intelligence indicates the transport of a casket to the ancient Aunic site of pilgrimage on **Isolo**, alongside the presence of Aunic special forces and research scientists. All signs indicate that this casket contains Tassos, and it is likely that they are being interrogated or experimented upon.
- Isolo (the volcanic world in the skies above) is a **dangerous world** – extremely hot, and incapable of natively supporting human life. People on the surface require hardsuits or similar environmental protection, and mech systems will likely overheat much more quickly than normal.
- The PCs are being sent to **extract Tassos' casket** and any data the Aun may have gathered. Their secondary missions are to discover what the Aun wanted with Tassos in the first place, and to neutralize the facility's commander (ideally capture them).
- The facility's commander is **Aheron, Kavalerio de la Drako**, an Ofanim pilot notorious for their incredible speed and lightning fast reflexes. In addition to their own mech, Aheron commands a combination of Aunic forces – including a

hardlight artillery battery, aerial support units, and mechs with hardlight shielding and other protective gear, deployed alongside infantry support. To deal with the latter, Lorenzo will suggest bringing weapons that use line, cone, burst, or blast.

- The facility itself is protected by hardlight shielding and surrounded by lava flows. Tassos is likely being held inside the **central building**, an ancient basalt monastery retrofitted for military use. Finding Tassos should not be particularly difficult – getting inside and extracting them before the Aun can mount an effective response may be harder.
- The safest way to conduct the mission is as a **smash-and-grab** raid. The Aun are likely unprepared for a direct assault on the facility by a small team, especially if the PCs can approach undetected until the last moment. Lorenzo will endeavor to keep the ship off the Aun's sensors, but can't do so forever.
- To aid the PCs, Lorenzo has authorized the use of experimental **Whitewash Canisters**. These canisters contain single-use nanite swarms specifically programmed to repair a particular mech with extreme swiftness – they require the mech to be temporarily shut down while they work, but will allow the PCs to take a Rest in only a few minutes so long as they are not actively under fire.
- The PCs will be deployed via **dropship**, which will immediately retreat off after getting the PCs as close to the facility as possible. The dropship will hang back ready for extraction on the PCs' signal.

What Lorenzo will not immediately clarify, unless specifically asked, is the reason *why* he wants Aheron neutralized: the Aunic commander has been making serious inroads into learning as much as they can about NHPs and Lorenzo in particular, which if left unchecked could significantly jeopardize his ability to defend Battlegroup Comet.

Once the briefing has concluded, the PCs have an opportunity to ask questions (both in and out of character!). This is also their last opportunity to make preparations for deployment, including changing their weapons or systems, or even choosing a different mech entirely – their engineering crews will make the necessary modifications before deployment.

As the scene ends, Lorenzo pulls the planet from the sky and into his hands, where he studies it intently, and loops a thin silvery filament of light into a circle around it. He then informs the PCs that their ship has arrived in orbit, and they must make their final preparations – they will be heading planetside shortly.

Combat 1: The Harrowing

The dropship comes in low, hugging the terrain, until making visual contact with the Cathedral – an imposing black stone structure atop a rocky rise, lit from below revealing hasty repairs and prefabricated buildings at its base. Surrounding it is an extensive curtain wall, mirrored to reflect the heat of the lava flows that envelop it. The distinctive blue-white shimmer of hardlight shielding can be seen along a structure on one side – a large stone bridge across the lava that serves as the entranceway to the facility.

The PCs are able to get a little closer in their mechs, masked by the landscape until they are able to get a read on the situation. The bridge is defended by Aunic troops, but appears to be the only practical access point to the facility. At the back of the bridge is a large hardlight shield blocking passage through what must have once been a large stone gatehouse; it can likely be disabled but the PCs will need to get close and buy themselves enough space to take it down.

This is a **Gauntlet** sitrep (see *Lancer*, p. 271). The objective is a zone immediately in front of the gatehouse shield; more PCs must occupy this zone at the end of the combat than NPCs.

Some spaces on the map are marked as **Dangerous Terrain** (see *Lancer*, p. 62). This terrain is lava, and deals burn damage. Additionally, the entire map is subject to the **Extreme Heat** environmental condition (see *Lancer*, p. 278). This condition causes characters to take additional heat when weapons and systems would inflict heat.

Enemy Forces - DIVIDO 6 Perimeter Defense

Players	NPC Type	Optional Systems	
3+	Aegis	Hardlight Cover System	
	Squad	-	
	Hornet	Umbral Interdiction	<i>reinforcements</i>
	Operator	Skirmisher	<i>reinforcements</i>
4+	Aegis	Hardlight Cover System	
	Hornet	Umbral Interdiction	<i>reinforcements</i>
5+	Squad	-	<i>reinforcements</i>
	Support	Remote Cloud	

Running the Combat

At the start of the combat, deploy all the NPCs not marked as reinforcements in the Enemy Deployment Zone (on the bridge). At the end of the first round, deploy the remaining mechs in the Ingress Zone (on top of the gatehouse).

When you deploy NPCs or bring them in as reinforcements, tell your players the NPC type and template of each one. Be open with information about their weapons and systems, with the exception of their Optional systems – to find those out, the PCs need to use the Scan action or encounter their effects directly.

The goal of the NPCs in this combat is to hold out for as long as they can, and harass the PCs as they are forced to move along the bridge. Aunic combat doctrine often uses mechs as close infantry support, so the Squad(s) will stick close to the Aegis(es) and Support (if present), to take advantage of their protective abilities. Meanwhile the Hornet(s) will fly in close and try to disrupt the PCs, while the Operator will fire at targets of opportunity.

If your players are new to the game, you might want to point out the support pillars which provide cover, as moving down the center of the bridge directly leaves the PCs very vulnerable to incoming weapons fire. You can also point out the biggest threats to the PCs; in terms of damage these are the Operator and the Squad(s), though the Hornets will cause issues if allowed to live for too long. The Operator is mobile but fragile and will fall to focused fire, while the Squads are short-ranged and most vulnerable to area-of-effect weapons. The Hornets are difficult to hit but extremely fragile and very vulnerable to hacking – they are best attacked using smart weapons and weapons with the reliable tag.

Consequences

If the PCs win the combat, they will have bought themselves enough time to bring down the shield, dispatch any remaining enemies, and push on into the facility. Their momentum has caught the Aun off guard and bought them enough time to focus as they hunt for Tassos – each PC gains **+1 Accuracy** on the skill challenge in the next narrative scene.

If the PCs do not win the combat, they are still able to bring down the shield but their efforts have given the Aun time to prepare their defenses. The PCs are pressed for time and face much more resistance as they push through the facility, facing the skill challenge in the next narrative scene without the additional accuracy.

In either case the PCs have just enough time to make emergency field repairs using their Whitewash Canisters before they move forward. Allow the PCs to take a Rest (see *Lancer*, p. 82), during which they can clear heat and any statuses or conditions, and spend repairs to fix their mechs.

Beat 2: Seek And Ye Shall Find

The PCs enter the facility compound and are surrounded by a mixture of architecture: ancient and new, enduring and temporary, monumental basalt stonework and prefabbed metal and plastic. They face relatively little resistance here; the facility has a military contingent but the majority of its staff appear to be scientists. Most of the Aunic forces appear to be falling back under the orders of the facility Commander, regrouping for a confrontation when the bulk of their forces can be brought to bear.

The PCs face a **skill challenge** (see *Lancer*, p. 47). Their aims are threefold: locating Tassos, getting to them quickly, and buying time by holding off the Aun. Each PC should make a skill check and describe how they help achieve these goals. If the PCs are struggling to think of ways their character could help, here are some ideas:

Act Unseen or Unheard	<i>Slip past Aun troops into a quieter area of the facility</i>
Assault	<i>Fend off responding guards to buy time for your team</i>
Get Somewhere Quickly	<i>Figure out the fastest way to get to where you're going</i>
Hack or Fix	<i>Access the facility's internal network and find information</i>
Investigate	<i>Put together contextual clues to find the casket</i>
Stay Cool	<i>Navigate and move through areas while under fire</i>
Take Someone Out	<i>Prevent someone trapping you or reporting your location</i>

Remember that these are only **examples**, and not the only ways to achieve the PCs' goals. Encourage your PCs to use their skill triggers creatively! Remind them that they can invoke their backgrounds and pilot gear for **Accuracy** if they are relevant, and additionally remind them that they all have an extra **Accuracy** on these checks if they won the previous combat. Take some time to roleplay the result of each check; make sure each PC gets a chance to shine.

If the skill challenge is a success, the PCs are able to find Tassos high up in the central monastery building, in a large open space that might once have been a grand dining hall or nave but has now been repurposed for scientific research. They manage to buy themselves with time – in the next combat, delay adding **reinforcements** by one round.

If the skill challenge is a failure, the PCs are still able to make their way to Tassos but they face resistance and dogged pursuit. In the next combat, **reinforcements** start showing up immediately.

Combat 2: Nave of the Revelator

This is a **Holdout** sitrep (see *Lancer*, p. 272). The objective is a central zone containing Tassos' casket, surrounded by scientific equipment and databanks; the PCs must keep this zone free of NPCs at the end of the combat.

Some spaces on the map are marked as **Difficult Terrain** (see *Lancer*, p. 62). This terrain represents a mix of hastily-arranged barricades, scattered scientific equipment, and temporary power cabling. Inside the building, the PCs are protected from the worst of the heat and they do not have to deal with any environmental conditions.

Enemy Forces - DIVIDO 6 Commander's Guard

Players	NPC Type	Optional Systems	
3+	<i>Aheron, Kavalerio de la Drako</i>		
	Elite Veteran Cataphract	Veterancy (AGI), Lightning Reflexes, Lance Shot, Charge	
	Bastion	Fearless Defender	
	Hornet	Umbral Interdiction	<i>reinforcements</i>
	Support	Remote Cloud	<i>reinforcements</i>
4+	Bastion	Fearless Defender	
	Squad	-	
	Hornet	Umbral Interdiction	<i>reinforcements</i>
5+	Support	Remote Cloud	
	Squad	-	<i>reinforcements</i>
	Operator	Skirmisher	<i>reinforcements</i>

Running the Combat

At the start of the combat, deploy all the NPCs not marked as reinforcements in the Enemy Deployment Zone (next to the door). At the start of each round beginning with round 2, deploy up to two of the remaining mechs in the Ingress Zone (the side entrances). If the PCs succeeded at the skill challenge in the previous beat, wait one additional round to start deploying reinforcements.

Like the previous combat, the Squads (if present) will tend to stay near to the defender/support mechs like the Bastion(s) and the Support(s), which will move up together and pressure the PCs, and the Hornet(s) will try to get close and harass the PCs earlier on.

Meanwhile, Aheron will use their high speed to dart in, make attacks, and then move away again – taking cover or moving back to allied mechs which can offer support. Aheron has two turns per round and can do a lot of damage this way, and worse is very resistant to damage (having three total structure, Point-Defense Shield to reduce incoming damage, and defensive mechs to take hits and repair them) so the PCs will need to coordinate a response quickly.

If your players are new to the game, you may wish to point out Aheron's vulnerabilities. Aheron is most vulnerable to being hacked, Slowed or Immobilized. A PC who can grapple them, or inflict Slowed via Fragment Signal, can disable a number of their abilities and keep them close. In addition, Aheron has a poor E-Defense and (unlike normal NPCs) have multiple stress so can melt down if they roll poorly on the stress damage table.

Make sure your PCs are aware of the precise requirements for winning the sitrep – they do not need to remain in their deployment zone to win, merely keep enemies out. They may want to avoid pushing up too far and isolating themselves, but neither do they need to confine themselves to the control zone.

Consequences

If the PCs win the combat, they buy themselves just enough time to safely disconnect Tassos's casket, and download and erase the Aun's research data. They will be able to fend off any remaining hostiles, and fight their way out onto the landing pad in time for pickup by the inbound dropship.

If the PCs lose the combat, they are forced to make a difficult choice – the dropship can't wait for them, so they must either disconnect Tassos safely, or retrieve and erase the data, *but not both*. The safest option is to carefully disconnect the casket and leave the data behind, but this may have longer term consequences for the war effort. If the PCs choose to erase the data, they will either have to leave Tassos behind or risk irreparable damage to the NHP by severing the hard lines and yanking it from its housing.

Wrapping Up

As the combat ends, the PCs are able to break out onto the upper landing pad where their dropship is attempting a hot pickup under fire from remaining Aunic forces. If you want to add some drama to the escape, you can ask the PCs to each make a skill check and describe how their characters manage to get away. On a success, a PC escapes with barely a scratch, while on a failure they are heavily injured, forced to leave their mech behind, or face some other consequence.

If Aheron is still alive and uncaptured at the end of the mission, the PCs will receive a message from them over open comms vowing to hunt the PCs down and seek revenge for their brazen attack on the facility and disrupting their plans.

The mission ends here! If you choose to expand the narrative into an ongoing story, the PCs will get to increase their license level after this mission – they might continue to receive missions from Lorenzo or Commander Song herself, come into further conflict with Aheron or other Aunic forces, and maybe even discover what secrets Tassos was really hiding...

Credits

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